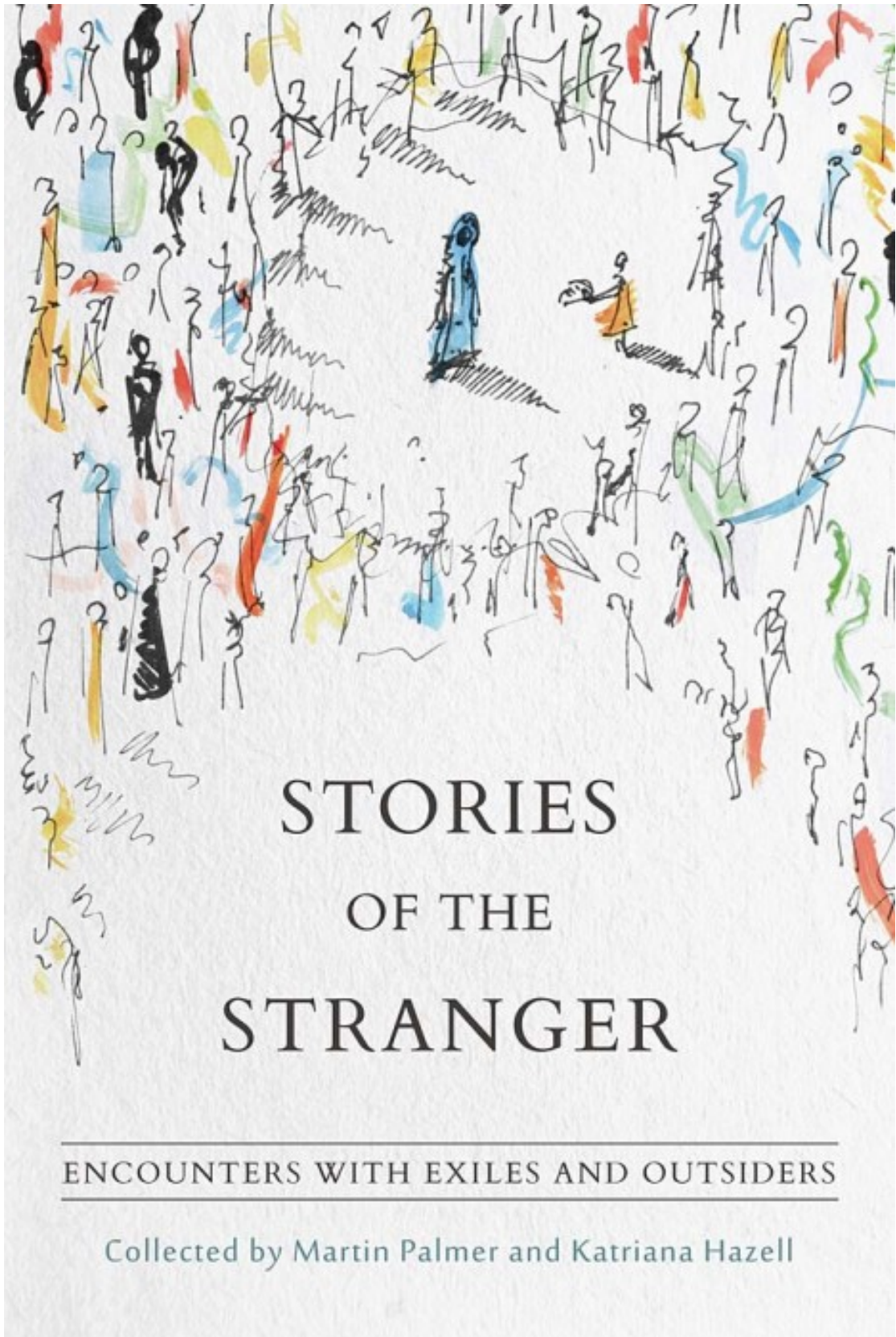


**STORIES FROM  
STORIES OF THE STRANGER**



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OF THE  
STRANGER**

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ENCOUNTERS WITH EXILES AND OUTSIDERS

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Collected by Martin Palmer and Katriana Hazell

**The first part of the book takes stories in the Holy Books of different faiths that capture the experience of being the stranger, the immigrant or the exile and captive. One of the most famous of these comes from the period in the 6<sup>th</sup> century BC when the Jews were exiles in Babylon and were slaves. It is found in Psalm 137 and the following is a retelling of that psalm as story.**

### **Psalm 137**

The air of exile should not taste so sweet. From the shores where we sit I can see the lush heads of trees, sparkling waterways and thick fields of barley lit gold beneath the saccharine sky. Watching over all this is the sandy crest of the heathens' ziggurat, an omnipresent reminder that this is but a parody of home. The devil's paradise, Isaiah says. Amongst all this beauty we are as naked as Adam in Eden.

About me, what is left of the daughter of Zion huddles together to merge tears in the yellow dust, our faces downcast, like the branches of the trees we sit beneath that trail in the river.

"Remember the temple—"

"Such beauty—"

"Watching the sunset over Zion—"

A thin wail bursts from the murmurs to stab the heavens. It is Esther, the only one of her family to escape the slaughter. It was better in the desert where the air throbbed with our anger and the burnt dust tasted of the ashes of our homes. Sometimes I'd rather we had died than had the heart torn from our chests. For even as Yahweh forgets us we shall never forget Jerusalem. I let my head bow to my lap. In the dark our sighs merge with that of the rushing water. At least the river weeps.

The memories become dimmer and more urgent with every passing day, and so I strive to play them across the back of my eyelids like old Noam would make the shadows of beasts and birds from his hands by the fire. I clench my eyes until I find the throngs of uplifted faces that shone with the light of the Lord as my fellow Levites and I filled the sky with song.

*Yahweh said to me, "You are my son.*

*Today I have become your father.*

*Ask of me, and I will give the nations for your inheritance,*

*The uttermost parts of the earth for your possession.*

*You shall break them with a rod of iron.*

*You shall dash them in pieces like a potter's vessel."*

Yet in the end it was the promise that shattered. Now Noam's hands are pecked at by the birds they once gave life. Not just him. Elijah. Freda. Ephraim. Jeremiah. Marni. Too many names to hold on one tongue alone and so we whisper them together. These are our only songs now.

At a rattle of breath I lift my head. It is Ezekiel, the skin of his hollowed face like stretched parchment. I wave away the fly that cleans itself atop his cracked lip. The Dayan doesn't even notice. He will not last the day unless he drinks yet he refuses these foreign waters. I gaze into the dark hole of his slack mouth. Where once sprung praises to god lies only a tongue shrivelled as a riverbed in drought. Light catches in my eye and for a second I see myself as a boy that relentless summer when the Jordan shrunk and I slipped my father's hand to race to the writhing sun. I had thought it the fire of Yahweh but instead I stumbled across silvered fish, flailing and gasping at the air they could not breathe. Did they feel the same fist as that around my chest? Did they carry the same stone in their hearts?

I look to my harp at my feet. The sun glistens from the ridges of its black horns curving into the gleaming wood yet it too is as stone, the strings but dried sheep guts. For what praises can be sung in foreign lands? What god is there to hear? Instead the laughter of our gaolers fills the air.

I glare up at the closest, a short ugly man, the alien's thick hair curling over his hide like a pig. Seeing me look, he approaches, booming between blackened teeth.

"Play for us."

I glare at the spread of his thick hands and give him heat of my eyes. He tugs me up by the shoulders.

"Sing."

His breath is sour with the sweat of alcohol. I curl my lip. The only song I would sing for you is praise of your head shattered across a rock.

He leers and stoops to grab my harp. My hands smart as he shoves it into them.

"Sing for us. Sing a song of Zion."

As if beasts could understand the language of the Lord. There is no song in my heart, even should I wish to find it. I stand numb, staring at my chafed hands wrapped around the sounding chamber. Dead fingers to dead wood. I see it clearly now. So let tree return to tree. I walk past the man to the nearest poplar and reach up to hook the strap over the lowest branch.

The shadow of the pig's hand falls across my face but before he can hit me the brilliance of my expression turns his head. My brothers are stood about him as one. Harps in hand, they step forwards and hang them in the trees.

The merriment has burnt from his charcoal eyes. The hand he thought to land against my cheek has closed into a fist. I wonder then if they will kill us and my chest heaves, not for fear of death but at the idea that my blood should soak into this alien soil, so far from Zion and the graves of my ancestors. I ready Yahweh's name on my lips, chest thrust forwards for the blade but then the man throws his head back and howls.

"They think they are birds." He turns to his friends, snorting the words between bellyfuls of laughter. "Birds that sing in trees."

The beasts bark their merriment, clutching each other and slapping hands to thighs. Two spread their arms and swoop in circles round me, chuckling like the bulbul bird. Then the first grabs my nose so hard that I know there will be a bruise there in the morning.

"You have a beak but where are your wings? How do you think to fly home to Jerusalem without?" He bows his forehead to mine like a brother giving advice, though the hiss is anything but. "You are not a bird but the worm that eats the dirt." And throws me to the ground.

I lie there, mouth dry with dust and hatred, watching his sandals move away. The toes between the leather straps are fleshy but I know in truth they are cloven.

When he is gone Dara rushes to me but I shirk from her touch and stride down to the bank, fists so tight that the nails cut into my palms. Let my hands wither before I forget Jerusalem. Let my tongue cleave to the roof of my mouth if I do not count it greatest of my joys.

I step into the river until it laps around my calves. The quiet is filled by the weeping river and the lilted sigh of breeze fingering a hundred strings - a hollow abandoned sound. I clench my eyes against the rising tears. Ezekiel will not take from the waters of this land I shall not give to them. Yet in that moment a memory of the Gihon spring fills my ears and a tear squeezes from the corner of my eye. I remember its waters chuckling down into the Kidron Valley, the crops that supped from them, the harsh eye of the sun that lapped them up. The tear runs into the hollow of my cheek. I remember the fresh rainfalls that swept across Judah, the thick clouds that billowed on towards the Dead Sea. All waters join in the end. I let the tears fall freely and watch the river carry them away.

**The following story is a half way house between Scriptural and folk story.**

### **The First Hijra**

*Often when people hear about the hijra or emigration of the early Muslims they think of when Prophet Mohammed (p) and the new Muslim community left Makka for Medina. This hijra to Medina marks the beginning of the Islamic calendar and is a very significant event in*

*Islamic history. However there was an earlier hijra, the first hijra, and this is the story of what happened. . . .*

***Bismillah arahman araheem – with the name of God, All Compassionate, All Merciful***

This is a story from the early days of Islam, from the days of Prophet Mohammed, upon him be peace, when the new Muslim community was very small. You may have heard something of the clan of the Qureish; a powerful, rich clan who ruled and controlled Makka and the surrounding areas. The Qureish were not pleased with the new ideas the Prophet (p) spoke about and taught – they did not like the challenge to their power or the threat to their control over the city. So as with many powerful people when they fear they may lose their power, the Qureish began to pursue and persecute those early Muslims. At first it was name calling, excluding them, hurling abuse at them – bullying really. Then gradually this increased to throwing rubbish and stones at them, until people were injured. It was not long after that some Muslims were killed by the Qureish and the risks to the new Muslims were very grave, particularly for those who were not from well known or well connected families and so had little protection.

Mohammed (p) knew that these people needed safety, it was too dangerous for them to stay in Makka. He also knew that across the Red Sea, in Abyssinia, there lived a king with a great reputation for being just and wise. He was a Christian king, who the people called al Najashi – the Negus. So the decision was made to send the most vulnerable group of Muslims to Abyssinia, to the Negus, to seek asylum.

The small group, comprised of men, women and children, slipped away from Makka under the cover of night, for fear of being seen. They travelled by foot, heading west across the desert, towards the coast and they made good progress. But when the Qureish discovered they were gone, they set off after them, riding fine, fast Arabian horses whose hooves almost flew over the ground, muscles and manes rippling and with such speed that the men of the Qureish easily began to catch up with the fleeing Muslims. The Muslims heard the horses and the men approaching and looked around for somewhere to hide. Seeing a large sand dune they crouched down behind it, though as they looked back they saw to their horror that they had left a trail of footprints that led right to their hiding place.

So the people cupped their upturned hands in prayer and they prayed for protection and as they did so the desert winds lifted and the desert sands shifted and swirled and then settled – right into their fresh footprints, completely covering their tracks. The Qureish lost the trail and had no choice but to return back to Makka.

The Muslims pressed on, always to the west, until finally they reached the Red Sea port of Shu'ayba where they boarded a boat bound for Abyssinia. And I wonder how it was for them as they stood on the deck and watched their homeland grow smaller and more distant as the boat sailed away from the shore. And I wonder what each of one of them thought about: perhaps they thought of the people they loved and feared they would not see again; the places where they had been happy that they would not return to; sounds and smells of their country which they may now only have the memories of; the tastes of food they had grown up with; the taste of home.

Soon the boat had pulled out to sea and Shu'ayba and the Arabian shore faded out of sight and a new shore, the coast of Abyssinia, came into view from the west. Once they had

landed the Muslims were received by the court of the Negus and were given what they needed and made very welcome.

For a little while all was well, until the Qureish heard that the Muslims were in Abyssinia and sent two emissaries with gifts of gold for the king, to convince him to send the refugees back to Makka. The Negus, never one to rush into a decision, said that he could not send the Muslims back without hearing from them and so a man named Ja'afar spoke and explained something of the new religion to the Negus and the court. He spoke of the teachings of caring for the needy, fairness, respect and kindness in dealings with others. He spoke of the teachings of offering regular prayers and observing fasting, of the teaching of belief in the Unity of God. When the Negus asked him about the Qur'an, Ja'far recited part of Surat Maryam, the Chapter of Mary, and how it tells of the miraculous birth of her son 'Isa, Jesus. He spoke so beautifully, with such devotion and such clarity that the Negus and his bishops wept until the tears rolled down their faces. *"These words and the words of Jesus are as rays of light radiating from the same source"* exclaimed the Negus. He continued to say that he would not allow the emissaries of the Qureish to take the Muslims back to Makka.

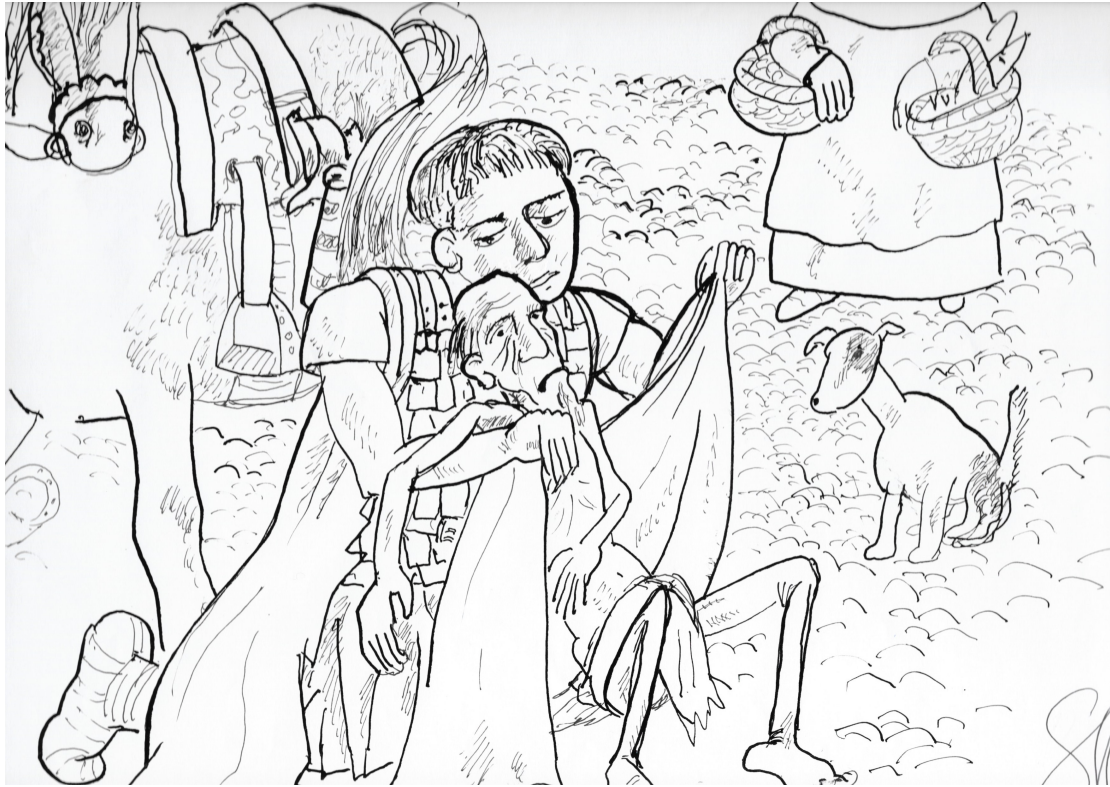
Displeased with this the men told the Negus that the Muslims spoke badly of Jesus, insulting him. The Negus, troubled, called Ja'far back to him and asked him to explain this. Ja'far spoke once again, saying that Jesus or 'Isa in Arabic, was regarded as a Messenger of God, His Prophet, and was much respected and esteemed in Islam - there was nothing but love felt by the Muslims for 'Isa, upon him be peace.

At this the Negus took his sceptre and drew a thin, straight line on the earth floor of his court. He then raised the sceptre from the ground and declared to the whole court *"There is nothing more than this line between our two religions. I will not send these people back to Makka; not for a mountain of gold."*

So with all the gold and gifts they had come with, but no refugees, the men of the Qureish returned to Makka. The Muslims lived on in Abyssinia and found under the protection of the Negus the security, peace and tranquility they sought. The Muslims lived side by side with their Abyssinian neighbours; lived as the loyal and contented subjects of a wise and just king and his most hospitable people.

**The second part of the book covers folk stories, legends and lives of famous saints within the different traditions who overcame or challenged the cultural norms of their time. In particular these stories make it clear that you are more likely to encounter the Divine – Jesus, angels, God, the Buddha etc – in the stranger than in the official religious representatives. It echoes in particular the Good Samaritan in the Bible.**

## Saint Martin, Bishop of Tours (316–397)



The old beggar sunk to his knees, certain that this would be his last night. Icy winds had left him numb: he had no feeling left in any of his limbs; his eye-lids were heavy with exhaustion and his half-naked, shivering body had turned blue from the bitter cold. Around him passers-by watched the poor, miserable heap with disgust.

‘Move out of the way!’

‘Oh mummy, what is that?’

The man closed his eyes and fell forwards.

All at once, he felt a hand; someone’s arm lifting him up. It was a soldier! With a sword! And a beautiful Roman military coat! The coat was bright red and made of the warmest wool; it had a shimmering gold brooch encrusted with jewels fastened around the neck. The soldier drew his sword; he held it high up in the air. The beggar winced as he watched the sword being brought down with force, but instead of chopping off his head, the soldier chopped clean through his beautiful red coat!

And then, stranger still, he picked up one half of the coat (the better half) and placed it over the head and shoulders of the beggar, fastening it carefully around him with the gold clasp, while he took the remaining piece of fabric and threw it over his own bare shoulders. The young man then placed his sword back in his belt, smiled at the poor man, frowned at the shame-faced crowd that had gathered and walked on.

Who was he? Where had he come from? Where was he going? Well, I’ll tell you his story.

His name was Martin, a name given to him by his father because it means 'warrior'. His father was a Roman officer and his greatest dream was that his son would follow in his carefully laid out footsteps and also become an esteemed member of the Roman military.

But Martin had a very different dream, a secret dream that he did not dare reveal to his pagan parents. As a young child, Martin had once overheard a bishop telling wonderful stories about a holy man called Jesus Christ who showed love to everyone, especially to the poor, the sick and the needy. Jesus worked miracles and taught people to be kind and peace-loving.

Since that day, Martin had felt a burning desire to follow his example and be baptised as a Christian! His parents, as you can imagine, had other plans. When Martin reached the tender age of fifteen, he was sent to Amiens, in Gaul, to join the army of Emperor Julian. Aloft on his noble steed and clad in a beautiful red coat Martin sallied forth one very cold and windy night.

This is exactly where we met him at the start of this story when he shared his coat with the dying beggar. He had to admit that half his body nearly froze solid through exposure to the treacherously cold wind. It was with a grateful heart that he sank beneath his bed clothes when he finally reached the soldiers' camp. There, as he lay, his thoughts turned to the beggar whom he had left on the icy streets, and he felt very guilty. He didn't even know the poor man's name... but then sleep overtook him. All of a sudden, Martin became aware of a bright light next to his bed; he opened his eyes and saw the strangest sight: It was a man, right there in front of him, wearing a very familiar red cloak around his shoulders fastened with a golden clasp!

'Oh, it's so good to see you,' Martin began. 'Are you all right?'

'Martin, you have performed a great deed of love for me. I was cold and you gave me half your cloak.'

'How do you know my name? Who are you?'

'I am Jesus Christ.'

'I thought you were a ... wait!' But the man had already disappeared and the tent was once more plunged into darkness. And then Martin remembered Christ's words from the Bible: 'Whatever you do to the poorest of your brothers, you do to me.'

Of course after his vision Martin could not sleep a wink. He could still feel inside him the delicious warmth from the radiant light of Christ. Before the break of dawn he crept out of the campsite and, still wrapped in only half a cloak, he found his way to the nearest church. Rousing the priest, he insisted on being baptised that very day, that very minute in fact. From then on, he longed to serve Christ in every way possible.

Not long after Martin's baptism, a barbarian army invaded Gaul and every soldier had to appear before the Emperor to receive arms in order to fight off the intruding army. 'How could I lift a finger against any human creature?' thought Martin. 'But then how can I avoid doing so?'

Just as his turn came to be called up, he stood before all of his comrades, hundreds of them. He took a deep breath and turned to the Emperor Julian.

'I can't do it!' His voice echoed in the silent courtyard.

'I beg your pardon?'

'I... I can't fight for you anymore. I have served you as a soldier these past five years, now let me serve Christ. Give these weapons to those who are prepared to fight; they are wasted on me.'

Everyone began to roar with laughter.

'You coward!' they shouted, 'You're just scared!'

'Soldier for Christ, eh? You only want to see us all killed and save your own face.'

Martin felt himself going red. His resolve was weakening, but then he remembered the beggar in the street who had been scorned by all the passers-by and the vision of Christ by his bed-side, bathed in light. He took another deep breath and cried, 'That's not true, and I'll prove it to you. Tomorrow I'll stand in the front line of battle, completely unarmed except in the armour of Christ.'

Silence. The Emperor pursed his lips.

'Quite the hero then. Well, since you seem so keen to sacrifice yourself, why should we stand in your way? So be it! Lock him up!'

And Martin was carried off to be held in a cell where he would spend the night before being taken to the battlefield on the following day.

But by some miracle, the very next morning, the barbarian army regretted its action and asked for peace! So there was no war and Martin had to be released – much to the disappointment of some of his colleagues who had been looking forward to a touch of blood.

Martin, now free, went straight to the Bishop who wasted no time and promptly made him a deacon. Martin longed for a quiet and secluded life away from the hustle and bustle of busy crowds and noisy streets, so he decided to build a small monastery for himself, the first monastery ever to be founded in Gaul ... but he was not left alone for long. Word began to spread that there was a Christian monk who healed lepers, who could revive those on the brink of death, who could perform miracles.

People came from far and wide to seek his help and Martin turned no one away. In fact, on one occasion, a certain man was brought to him by villagers nearby. This man was red in the face, his hair dishevelled, his clothes torn, his eyes wild and frantic. The villagers dragged him to Martin crying out, 'They said you can help, we had no one else to turn to, the man is mad; be careful, he bites.' The madman gnashed his teeth at Martin but the latter looked at him kindly, stroked his hair, spoke to him and then pronounced healing on him in the name of Christ. From that day on, the madman never bared his teeth again.

In time, the Bishop of the great town of Tours died. Martin had, of course, become so popular that everyone wanted him to be the new Bishop! So they went to find him, but he was nowhere to be seen; he had heard the rumours and had run off to find a hiding place. But people everywhere knew him. In desperation Martin spied some geese in a nearby shed and ran inside to hide. The geese, in turn, got the shock of their lives and began to cackle and hiss and run in all directions flapping their wings.



They caused such a commotion that they of course betrayed Martin's awkward hiding place immediately and so, resigning himself to God's will, Martin allowed himself to be taken to Tours and be ordained Bishop.

He proceeded to build a new monastery just outside the town and, despite his new position, he insisted on living humbly and simply, making sure that the buildings were spacious enough to accommodate any passer-by. Thanks to Martin's shining example and missionary activity, eighty monks joined his new community in no time at all and his fame spread day by day even reaching the ears of high ranking officials and governors of the empire.

One day the Emperor himself invited Martin to feast with him in his own home. That very same day, Martin had passed by the prison in Tours and remembered his own time behind bars as a young man so many years earlier. He pitied the prisoners who begged for help and when he presented himself before the Emperor he had an unusual request – but this time he felt no fear, no hesitation: 'Your Excellency, I shall not sit down to feast with you before you have granted me one wish: that you free the innocent men who are suffering in your prison in Tours.'

Impressed by his courage, the Emperor ordered that they be released immediately and from that day on he became a great supporter of Martin's work and his monastic community. Years passed, and at the age of eighty Martin gathered his monks around him and warned them that he would not be with them for much longer. He finally reposed on 8 November 397.

His popularity has survived over the centuries: pilgrimages to Tours, churches named in his honour and crosses with sculpted images of his life and story. People the world over have been named after him, preserving the memory of this holy Saint and his shining example of love, care and hospitality.

**The third part of the book explores contemporary stories from refugees and immigrants of our own time and the wisdom stories that they tell.**

### **The Shadow of Shame**

This story is about a young man who escaped from North Korea to the South. The journey is a treacherous one, many attempt it and many fail, so when he succeeded, the young man seized hold of his new life with eagerness.

'I'm going to fit in.' He told himself. 'Even though people speak differently here and I sometimes struggle with what they say, I will try my very best. If I am good and hard-working, surely people will warm to me.'

Yet, for all this good-will, it was not to be. Like many in his situation, most people in the South treated him with scorn. To their eyes and ears the he spoke differently, he looked different, he *was* different. However, the young man had not come so far only to give up, and so all through that first sultry summer, he travelled from village to village in search of a new home.

One day, entering such a village, the young man saw a huge chestnut tree. The day was practically hot and he was weary from his walking, so he settled himself into its shade and found it so deliciously cool that before he knew it he was asleep.

“Hey!”

A brusque voice startled him awake.

“Hey!” The voice demanded again as the young man blinked into the sun’s glare.  
“Get out of my shade!”

‘Did he really say get out of my shade?’ The young man thought. ‘Perhaps I have misunderstood.’

So he sat up and raised a hand to his eyes so that he could peer at the harsh silhouette of the man standing over him.

“Excuse me, sir. Please, could you say that again?”

“Stupid foreigner.” The man spat. “I said get out of my shade!”

Now that the young man’s eyes had adapted, he could make out the supercilious sneer of the man’s face and knew that he had understood him perfectly the first time. Yet he was still puzzled.

“But, sir, doesn’t shade belong to everyone?”

“My grandfather planted this tree and if he planted this tree it’s *my* tree, and it’s *my* shade.” And with every ‘my’, the man stabbed a digit into the palm of his hand. “SO GET OUT OF MY SHADE!”

Knowing a lost cause when he saw one, the young man hauled himself to his feet. He stuck his hands into his pockets and prepared to slouch away, but as he did so he felt the smooth shape of coins and, as he really was loathe to leave the shade, he was struck by an idea.

“Sir,” he said, “perhaps I could buy this shade from you?”

The man threw his head back in laughter and when he finally choked it back he had to squeeze his words out between tears of mirth.

“50 riang.” He laughed. “It will cost you 50 riang.”

Of course, the young man knew that this was an extortionate amount, but as he traced the shape of the coins in his pocket, he found he had five big 10 riang coins and one little one riang coin - just enough. He cupped them in his palm and felt their weight as he studied the man in front of him, who was obviously well dressed and had had a lot of good meals. The young man could not afford such expense, and the rich man could easily spare it, yet he found himself handing the money over.

The rich man’s eyes went wide as he took the money, perhaps in delight, perhaps in disbelief, but he didn’t question the young man’s decision, after all, he had just made a tidy sum out of nothing.

“OK, sit in the shade then!” He said, and returned to his house still laughing.

So the man settled back beneath the tree and returned to his doze, but - as you know - when the midday sun moves one way, the shade moves in the other, and so the shade moved across the road and into the beautiful garden of the rich man. Well, the young man didn’t want to trespass but as he was now the owner of the shade he went into the garden, lay back on the lush grass, and fell asleep. But not for long because -

“GET OUT OF MY GARDEN!”

The young man rubbed the sleep from his eyes. “But, sir, you sold me this shade.”

At this, the rich man clenched his fists, but what the young man said was true, so he stamped back inside his house and slammed the door.

But still the sun moved, still the shade moved, off the grass and onto the generous balcony just outside the house where there were plush cushions and comfortable chairs. So the young man hopped up, took a chair and cushion, and returned to his nap.

“GET OFF MY VERANDAH!”

“But, sir.” The young man lifted the pillow that had been shielding his eyes. “I’m just enjoying the shade that you *sold* me”.

And so the rich man retreated inside his house, his face the colour of blood.

And so on the sun moved, and on the shade moved, and on the young man with it, through the sliding doors of the balcony and into the lounge.

Now the rich man broke.

“GET OUT OF MY HOUSE!” He bellowed in a spray of spittle. “YOU ARE TRESPASSING! POLICE!”

And before long the police were there.

“What’s going on here?” The officer asked.

“He’s trespassing in my house.” The rich man grabbed the young man by his shirt but the policeman kept his calm and turned to the young man.

“Sir, would you like to explain what’s going on?”

“I’m in his house, yes.” The young man said. “But only to stay inside the shade that he sold to me.”

The police took off his cap and rubbed his bald head. “I’m sorry- could you explain again?”

“He sold me the shade.” The young man said. “Under normal circumstances, I would never dream of entering this house, but my shade is here.”

“Is it true that you sold this young man the shade?” The policeman asked the rich man.

The rich man fidgeted with his fine clothes but could not look the policeman in the eye. He’d been found out and in Korea shame is a big deal.

“Would you mind telling me, sir,” said the policeman, “how much you charged him?”

“Uh, uh, well, um, 50 ri...”

“50 Riag!?” The policeman shouted, loud enough that the neighbors could hear.

“Horrible old man,” they cried over the fence, “selling shade! Always doing horrible things!”

The rich man was so embarrassed, so ashamed. He held his head down and walked out of his house, across the verandah, across the lush grass, past the chestnut tree, and on round the corner out of the village. After all, he had many other houses.

Well, with the commotion finished, all the onlookers went home and the police returned to their station, leaving only the young man.

I'd better stay here and make sure that no burglars take over the house, he thought. Because even though the rich man had treated him badly he felt guilty to have caused him shame. So he stayed there the night. But in the morning the rich man still hadn't returned.

The young man walked about the house looking for signs of him and, as he did, he noticed some torn paper in a window – you see, windows in old Korean houses were made of paper – and he patched it up. When he had finished, he cast around and, seeing that the house was in poor repair, he might as well keep going. So he swept the floors, tidied the kitchen and replaced some broken roof tiles.

But at the end of the day there was still no sign of the rich man, nor after two days, three, four, five, six, seven... So the young man thought he might as well see to the garden and planted some seeds.

A month went by, and still the rich man had not returned.

Two months, still no sign.

On the third month the first radishes and lettuce were ready for harvest but as the young man was picking them, he looked up and saw the hollow cheeks of the poor people of the village.

"Here." He told them. "Have some radishes, have some lettuce." And he started handing out the goods from the garden. "While you're here why don't you come and help me? If we all dig we can produce more and share."

The villagers thought it was a good idea and so they did just that. The villagers dug, the villagers cleaned, harvested, planted, watered - it was a hive of activity.

Then autumn came, and still the rich man had not returned. Looking down the road for a sign of him one day, the young man's eyes fell on the tree that had started it all and saw that its chestnuts were ripe.

"Let's go and pick the chestnuts." He said to the villagers.

"Oh no, we can't do that." Came the reply.

"What do you mean?"

"He never allows us to pick chestnuts."

"But where is he?" The young man said. "He's not here. What harm can it do?"

And so all the people climbed the tree, plucking chestnuts to toss into their baskets and singing to make light of the work. Amongst all this festivity no one noticed a man slinking up the street, his head held low, only looking shiftily from the corner of his eyes. So it wasn't until he was right beneath them that a lad up the tree cried out.

"Uncle! Hey! Welcome back."

The rich man looked up at the smile of the lad and saw that it was genuine, he listened to the people's singing and heard that it was joyful, then he saw the young man to whom he had sold the shade all those months ago, his arms spread.

"Welcome, sir. We've been looking after your house while you've been away. Come in".

The rich man followed him in a daze. The garden buzzed with the happy sounds of the people tending to the vegetables but when they saw him, instead of breaking into frowns, they called out greetings.

"Uncle! Welcome back."

"As you can see," the young man said, "we've been looking after the garden for you, sir. We've been keeping the house together too. So, now, welcome back to your home!"

But at the threshold the rich man stopped and stared long and hard into the far distance until people began to think something wrong. But at the young man's query, the rich man held up a hand, and when he finally spoke his voice was weak.

"I can't possibly take this house back. You, in six months, have done more than I have done in my whole life. I've never seen my people smiling or laughing like this. Never once has anyone welcomed me. But you transformed this place. Please stay and look after it in my name. It would make me very happy".

And that's the story of the Shadow of Shame.

#### *Footnote*

This is a traditional Korean Story reworked by Sef Townsend and Sharon Jacksties. Sef tells stories in refugee centres working with refugees from all over the world including asylum detainees who are held in Campsfield Immigration Removal Centre, a long-term centre where detainees are accommodated, pending their case resolutions and subsequent removal from the United Kingdom, often to countries where they may well have an extremely unpleasant reception and could even be killed. Sef says refugees respond very well to this story – they say "This is our story." "We come here to make a good life. Not just for ourselves, but to share with the people we live amongst".

Ends