

Cambridge English Readers

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Level 5

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# *Better Late Than Never*

J. M. Newsome



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# Characters

**Anika Hakim:** a sixteen-year-old schoolgirl living in Alexandria, Egypt

**Zaphira Bakkal:** Anika's basketball team mate, also sixteen

**Gamal Hakim:** Anika's twenty-one-year-old brother

**Ahmed Bakkal:** Zafira's twenty-three-year-old cousin

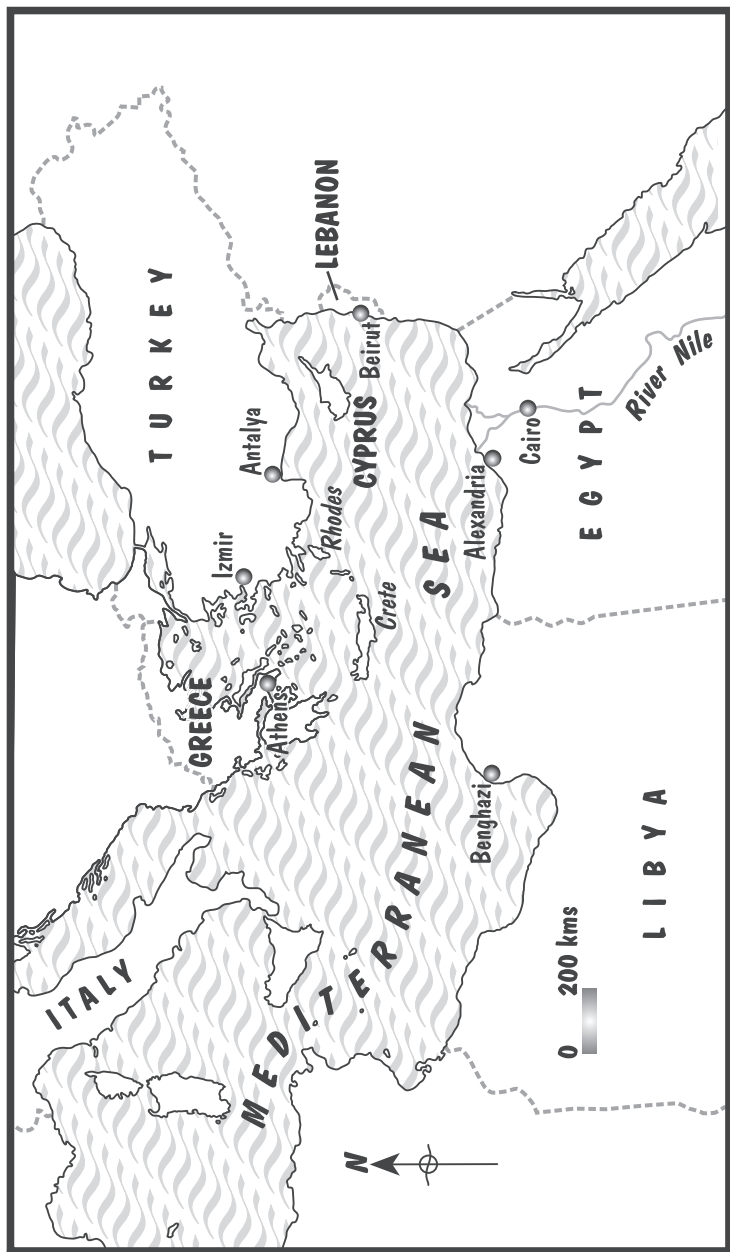
**Malcolm Maritz:** a South African yacht owner

**Sayid El-Karimi:** Maritz's business partner

**Musaid Diab:** works for Maritz

**Nikos Drakopoulos:** a Greek police officer

**Netta Savaki:** a Greek police officer



## Chapter 1 *Explosion*

Anika could see that Zaphira was angry. ‘What’s wrong?’ she asked.

‘Your brother’s late,’ said Zaphira. She was looking round impatiently. Her wild brown hair was escaping from the knot she had tied it in for basketball training.

They were on the narrow finger of land in Alexandria that leads to Qaitbay Castle between the open sea and the East Harbour. They sat at a café table with glasses of orange juice and water on it. Even here by the sea, the evening was hot and still.

‘I didn’t know what time to say,’ said Anika cheerfully. ‘Our coach is never clear about what time we’ll finish training, so ...’ The look Zaphira gave her made her stop speaking.

The sea was very calm, and the sinking sun laid a fiery path across the dark water towards them.

Anika loosened her hijab a little and picked up her glass of juice. She looked around. Local people and foreign tourists were walking slowly up and down the open pedestrian area near the castle. Some, like Anika and Zaphira, sat at café tables which were set out here and there.

One couple were examining seashells laid out for sale on the pavement nearby. ‘Look at this one, honey!’ said the man in English. ‘Look at the rainbow colours inside.’

Zaphira said in Arabic, ‘Those shells don’t even come from here.’

‘Why don’t you tell them?’ Anika suggested with a smile.

‘No point,’ said Zaphira.

Anika wondered if Zaphira could speak English. The two girls had only met a few days before. Anika had recently moved up to the under-18s basketball team, and quite a few of the team-members were new to her.

Zaphira was tall. She played basketball aggressively and well, but she never seemed to smile. Anika, who always wanted everyone to be happy, had offered Zaphira a lift home. It was the day that Anika’s youngest brother, Gamal, usually came for her in his car. On other days Anika’s father sent his driver, which she found embarrassing.

She said, ‘Hey, lighten up, Zaphira! I thought you’d like sitting here, near the castle, by the sea.’

‘Your brother will never see us here.’ Zaphira threw her arm out towards where the cars had to stop. ‘We’re a long way from where he can park.’

The few parked cars they could see were in front of a line of buildings which looked away from the open sea, onto Alexandria’s East Harbour. Between the buildings Anika could see small boats and a few yachts in the harbour.

‘I’ve met him here before,’ said Anika. ‘And he’s not blind.’ She took her cell phone out of her sports bag.

‘Hmm!’ Zaphira said, and drank some more orange juice.

Anika sent a text to Gamal. It said, ‘Anything wrong? I’m at the usual table. Don’t be long!’

Zaphira banged her glass down hard on the table and looked across the road, towards the buildings.

Anika thought, ‘Maybe this was a mistake.’

She noticed a group of three men some distance away, in front of the large, solid building which was the Greek Maritime Club. One had a large moustache and the other two had their backs to her. One wore a backpack. Anika took a photo of them with her new phone. It was so easy. She took another and another.

‘They’ll see you,’ warned Zaphira sharply. ‘They’ll think you’re inviting them over. When your father is Umar Hakim, one of the richest men in Egypt, you need to be careful who your boyfriends are.’

‘What?’ Anika laughed. ‘Don’t be ridiculous!’

The smaller of the two men with their backs to the girls turned and stepped away from the others. He started to take off his backpack as he walked towards some parked cars.

Anika grinned, but quickly covered her mouth with her hand. She turned to Zaphira, her eyes shining. ‘That’s your cousin Ahmed, isn’t it? I was wondering why he didn’t come to watch us at training today, like he did last time. Who’s he with?’

‘Goodness knows,’ said Zaphira. ‘Friends, I suppose.’

Anika took some more photos. She hoped Ahmed would notice her, although she knew she didn’t look her best straight after training. But he kept walking towards the cars.

She looked at the pictures she’d taken. The phone was expensive, a birthday gift from her father, and the photos were brilliant. Ahmed looked so handsome and fierce.

‘Want to see?’ she asked Zaphira.

Zaphira hardly looked. She sighed and said, ‘If your brother’s going to be any longer, I’ll just have to get a bus.’

Anika put the phone away and went back to searching Qaitbay Road for her brother’s car.



The man with the moustache was shouting at Ahmed. But Ahmed took no notice as he walked fast across the pedestrian area towards the girls. The other man had disappeared. Ahmed no longer had his backpack.

Anika hoped Ahmed was coming over to chat while they waited, but he kept looking over his shoulder, not at them.

A tall man with a large stomach came out of the Greek Maritime Club and walked towards a silver Mercedes. He was with a smaller man. They opened the doors of the car. Ahmed began to run. But he suddenly saw the girls in front of him and stopped dead with his mouth open in horror.

Then he raced up to them and grabbed Zaphira by the arm. 'Come with me. Now!' he shouted. 'It's not safe!' He caught Anika's hand as well, and pulled them both along beside the sea wall.

Zaphira actually smiled a little as she grabbed her purple sports bag and allowed Ahmed to pull her away.

'Hey! What are you doing?' she said. 'What's not safe?'

'Stop, Ahmed!' Anika laughed, picking up her own bag as she felt herself forced to run. 'Where are we going?'

Suddenly they were knocked to the ground as if they had been kicked from behind.

*BOOOOOM-BOOOOOM!* A long, deafening roar filled the air.

Pieces of pavement, car and café furniture fell around them, crashing onto the ground and into the sea. The noise echoed on and on. They could hear people screaming and shouting.

Ahmed jumped up and grabbed hold of them again.

'Come ON!' he shouted. Something hit Anika on her shoulder. She cried out, but Ahmed did not let go.

‘Get UP!’ he shouted. ‘We can’t stay here!’ He dragged the two girls with him over a low wall and round behind a large, run-down building. There was a wide empty space beyond. Ahmed ran across it very fast, holding their arms so tightly that the girls could not escape from him.

They came to a fence. Ahmed pulled the girls through a broken gate into an open space with a small hut in it.

He paused for a moment. ‘What in heaven’s name am I going to do with you?’ he cried with a worried frown.

They could hear police cars and ambulances arriving, their sirens going. Scared and injured people were shouting.

Ahmed looked around like a wild animal in a trap. He pushed them into the hut. ‘Stay here!’ he shouted at them. There was a pistol on a shelf by the door. Ahmed grabbed it. ‘I have to get my mother,’ he said desperately. ‘Then I’ll come back and get you.’ He looked at Anika as if he wanted to say something else. Then he ran out with the pistol in his hand.

Zaphira jumped towards the door, but it shut in her face. ‘Wait!’ she shouted. ‘What’s going on?’ They heard a wooden bar forced into place across the door.

Zaphira beat hard on the door, but it didn’t move. The girls heard a loud cry of pain nearby, and then a shot. Zaphira shook the door uselessly again. Then she turned to Anika, her worried face full of anger and confusion.

Anika was sitting on the floor of the hut. Blood was spreading from her shoulder all down her white blouse.