

ROAD TO NOWHERE

JOHN MILNE



HEINEMANN

HEINEMANN GUIDED READERS

ELEMENTARY LEVEL

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Series Editor: John Milne

The Heinemann Guided Readers provide a choice of enjoyable reading material for learners of English. The series is published at five levels — Starter, Beginner, Elementary, Intermediate and Upper. At **Elementary Level**, the control of content and language has the following main features:

Information Control

Stories have straightforward plots and a restricted number of main characters. Information which is vital to the understanding of the story is clearly presented and repeated when necessary. Difficult allusion and metaphor are avoided and cultural backgrounds are made explicit.

Structure Control

Students will meet those grammatical features which they have already been taught in their elementary course of studies. Other grammatical features occasionally occur with which the students may not be so familiar, but their use is made clear through context and reinforcement. This ensures that the reading as well as being enjoyable provides a continual learning situation for the students. Sentences are kept short - a maximum of two clauses in nearly all cases — and within sentences there is a balanced use of simple adverbial and adjectival phrases. Great care is taken with pronoun reference.

Vocabulary Control

At **Elementary Level** there is a limited use of a carefully controlled vocabulary of approximately 1,100 basic words. At the same time, students are given some opportunity to meet new or unfamiliar words in contexts where their meaning is obvious. The meaning of words introduced in this way is reinforced by repetition. Help is also given to the students in the form of vivid illustrations which are closely related to the text.

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The trouble at Um Khalid began with the workmen. When they built the new road, they forgot about the rains. They made a small passage for men and animals. But they forgot about the water in the rainy season. That year, the rains began earlier than usual. And it rained heavily. Only one man saw the danger . . . and he was too late.

On the Way to Market

Five o'clock on a Friday morning and I was going to market. I was walking because my donkey was carrying a tin of cheese and a large bag of vegetables.

The sun was not up yet, but the sky was becoming lighter. I wanted to be at the market before seven o'clock. It was twelve kilometres from my village to the market in Nabur. There was no road. There was only a narrow path. We could not go to the market at all in the rainy season.

Luckily, the rainy season lasts only two months, July and August. It doesn't rain during the rest of the year.

There were twenty houses in my village, Um Khalid. The biggest house belonged to Abdel Rahman El Soussi, and I was in love with his daughter, Hanim. She was a beautiful girl. I had often seen Hanim at weddings in the village. But I had never spoken to her.

I sometimes dreamed about her at night. I was eighteen years old, strong and healthy. But I was afraid to look at her. Her father didn't like me. In fact, I was his chief enemy.

Abdel Rahman was the richest man in the village. He was the chief and everyone obeyed him. But I didn't. Let me tell you why.

All the other boys in Um Khalid had fathers and they obeyed their fathers. I didn't have a father because he died years ago. I was only three years old at the time. I don't remember him. I was my mother's only child - I had no brothers or sisters. And when I grew older, I was the man in the house.

I had seven uncles and they all tried to be my father. But



It was twelve kilometres from my village to the market in Nabur. There was no road.

I didn't like any of them. I was 'father' in my own house.

Abdel Rahman, the village chief, was an old man. He was more than forty years old. He was not my uncle, but he tried to be my father. He did not like me. We often quarrelled because I did not always obey him.

On my way to market, I thought about Abdel Rahman and about his daughter, Hanim.

'What can I do?' I asked myself. 'I am the enemy of Hanim's father and I love her.'

But I was also thinking about other things. Everybody in Um Khalid was poor. Even Abdel Rahman wasn't very rich. Each family had one or two cows, some goats and some sheep. And we all owned some land beside the river.

We could not sell things in the market at Nabur every day. We lived too far away. We went to the market every Friday and sold our vegetables and cheese cheaply. We could not sell milk because the road was too long and bumpy. We made our milk into cheese and sold it cheaply.

Everyone in the market knew that we came from Um Khalid. They didn't buy from us in the morning. They knew that we had a long journey home. So we had to sell cheaply in the afternoon. We didn't want to carry things back to the village.

'How can we become richer?' I often asked myself. 'How can we make things better?'

The Things We Wanted

I want to tell you more about myself and my village. My name is Faisal and I lived in Um Khalid. My story happened many years ago. The British had just left our country and we were independent.

Things were changing quickly. The biggest changes were in the city and in the large towns. But nothing had changed in Um Khalid. We wanted to be like the people in the towns. We wanted new things, but the government wasn't interested in us. The government was too busy with the problems of the towns. We had always been poor and we were still poor.

The older people, like Abdel Rahman, did not want changes. They were afraid of anything new. But young people, like me, wanted changes. We weren't afraid.

In our village we wanted many things. At that time, I did not read or write. There was no school in Um Khalid. And there was no hospital or doctor. Anyone who was ill had to go twelve kilometres on a donkey to Nabur. Many people died because there was no doctor in the village. My own father died for this reason.

Also there were other problems. The river floods every year in early summer - before the rainy season. The water floods over the land and makes the soil rich. The houses of Um Khalid weren't built beside the river, because of these floods. They were built on the side of the hill about a kilometre away. The houses of Um Khalid were built on each side of a dry river bed. This river bed was dry most of the year, but it filled with rushing water in the rainy season.



The houses of Um Khalid were built on the side of a hill.

After the floods went down, the land became dry. Then we had to use simple machines to bring water from the river to the fields. But this was not easy. These machines didn't work very well. We needed a pump.

We also needed electricity. But we didn't have enough money for a pump or for electricity. We asked the government officials to help us. They were too busy. And we needed many other things which we didn't have.

And I wanted to marry Hanim. But the government wasn't able to help me in this. I was poor and her father didn't like me.

I was thinking of these problems on my way to the market. Suddenly, I heard a noise on the path behind me. It was Abdel Rahman. He had two donkeys. He was riding on one and the other was carrying his goods. He was going much faster than me - I was walking.

Abdel Rahman said good morning to me, but he didn't stop. He wanted to go to the market as early as possible. He sat up straight on his donkey - a tall, handsome man. He did not look old. In fact, he looked younger than forty.

'He's a fine man,' I thought secretly to myself. 'It's a pity he doesn't like me.'

I got to the market at seven. I sat down with my vegetables and cheese on a mat in front of me. There were already many people in the market. I was going to have a long day before I sold my goods.

A Letter from the Government

I ate some bread and cheese for breakfast. Later, I drank a cup of tea. People came up and looked at my cheese and vegetables. They pointed at the tomatoes or at the cheese and asked: 'How much?' I told them and they walked away. I sat waiting.

'Hello, Faisal,' someone shouted.

It was Abbas, a friend from Um Khalid. Abbas was a tall, good-looking young man. He was always happy and full of news. He had two younger brothers. They were selling vegetables while he talked to his friends. Abbas sat down beside me.

'Have you heard about the meeting?' he asked.

'What meeting?' I replied.

'There's a meeting in the village tonight,' he said. 'It's at Abdel Rahman's house. Abdel Rahman has had a letter from the government. We're meeting tonight.'

'Abdel Rahman met me on the way to market,' I said. 'He didn't tell me about this meeting.'

'He doesn't want you at the meeting,' replied Abbas. 'He says that you're too young.'

This was true. I had often quarrelled with Abdel Rahman. My father was dead and I was the man in our house. When I was a young boy, my oldest uncle spoke for our family at village meetings. But when I became eighteen, I wanted to speak for our family.

Abdel Rahman had tried to stop me. He said that I was too young. I told him that I was eighteen and I wanted to go to the meetings. The other men agreed with me. After that

I went to all the meetings.

'Thanks for telling me about the meeting tonight,' I said to Abbas. 'I'll be there.'

'Hanim's in the market,' continued Abbas.

When he spoke about Hanim, I stopped thinking about the meeting.

'She's with her mother,' Abbas said. 'She's going to the cinema tonight.'

I had only been to the cinema in Nabur two or three times. It cost a lot of money. Also, it was a long walk back to Um Khalid at night.

Sometimes a cinema van came to Um Khalid. They showed films about keeping healthy and we didn't have a doctor in the village. They showed films about pumping water and we didn't have a pump. I didn't go to these films. They were a waste of time.

I tried to stop thinking about Hanim. I asked Abbas about the letter from the government.

'The government wants to build a new road,' he replied immediately.

Nothing is ever secret in Um Khalid. You tell someone a secret and he tells another person. Soon everybody knows. Sometimes you don't tell anybody and still people know.

'What about a new road?' I asked.

'The government wants to build a new boarding school north of Um Khalid,' replied Abbas. 'They are going to make a new road from the school to Nabur. The road will go between our village and the river. And the government wants to buy our land.'

A new road — money from the government - change at last,' I thought excitedly.

I began to ask more questions, but Abbas hurried away.

He wanted to have a look at his girl friend who was in the market, too. I saw Hanim later. She was walking with her mother, but they didn't come near me. They grew their own vegetables at Um Khalid.

By four o'clock, I had sold everything. I sold my vegetables and cheese cheaply because I wanted to get back to Um Khalid. I wanted to go to this meeting. I wanted to hear more about the letter from the government.

The Meeting

The meeting began at eight o'clock. We listened to the letter from the government.

Ministry of
Development
Hammar

Dear Sirs,

The Ministry of Development and the Ministry of Education want to build a new boarding school. They want to build it five kilometres north of your village, Um Khalid. It will be a secondary school for boys.

A new road is needed between the school and Nabur. This road will go between Um Khalid and the river. This land belongs to the villagers of Um Khalid. We want to buy this land from you and we will pay you a good price.

The land between Um Khalid and the river is very low. The road

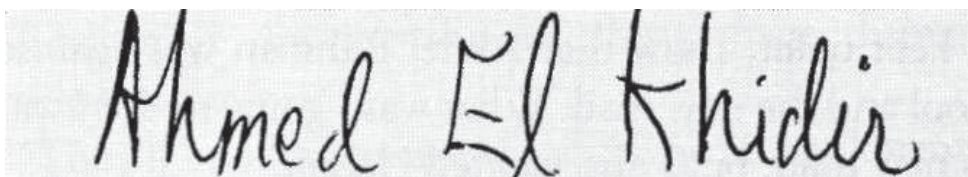
will be built up on an embankment
You will be able to go to your
fields and to take your animals to
the river.

This new road will bring many
advantages to your village. You
will be able to get to market much
more easily. You will have
electricity and telephones.

We are ready to send officials
from the Ministries to your
village. We hope that you are
ready to meet them as soon as
possible.

We attach drawings. These
drawings show the new road and the
passage through the embankment.

I am,
Yours faithfully,

A rectangular box containing a handwritten signature in black ink. The signature reads "Ahmed El Khidir" in a cursive, slightly slanted script.

Ahmed El Khidir
Under Secretary
MINISTRY OF DEVELOPMENT

At the age of eighteen, I was the youngest person at the meeting. The next youngest, Hassan Obeid, was sitting beside me. He was twenty-five years old. He was my best friend. Abbas talked too much. I didn't trust him because he talked to everybody. But I trusted Hassan.

'This is great news,' I said quietly to Hassan. 'They'll all agree to this new road.'

'Don't be too sure,' was his reply. 'Many of the older men will be against it.'

There were about twenty men at the meeting. There was one man from each family in the village.

'Why will they be against the new road?' I asked Hassan.

'Wait and see,' he replied.

Hassan was right. Everyone wanted to say something, but not about the new road.

'This school will bring trouble to our village,' said Mohammed, one of my uncles. 'Schoolboys aren't well behaved. They'll come here and look at our girls. They'll steal things from us.'

I didn't believe him.

'Schoolboys are kept in school,' I said. 'They won't come here.'

'You don't know,' said Abdel Rahman. 'You have never been to school.'

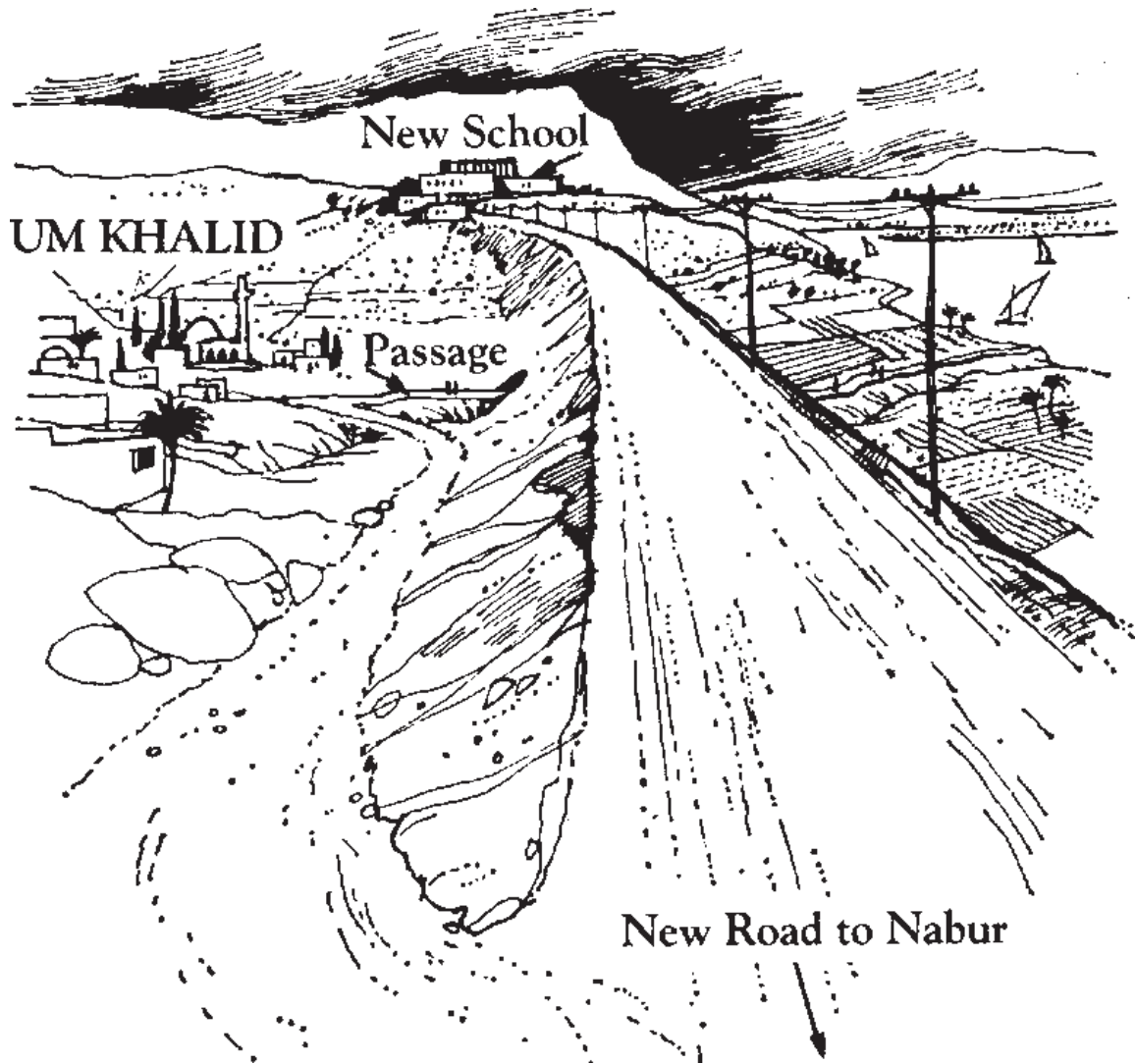
I kept quiet. I saw that Abdel Rahman was against the school and the new road. What was I going to do? I wanted this new road, but I also wanted Hanim.

'We'll be able to sell milk and eggs in the school,' someone said.

'No, we won't,' said someone else. 'The government will send everything to the school from Nabur. They won't want anything from us.'

'How will we get to our fields beside the river?' asked my uncle, Mohammed.

Abdel Rahman held up the drawings. One drawing showed the position of the road and the embankment.

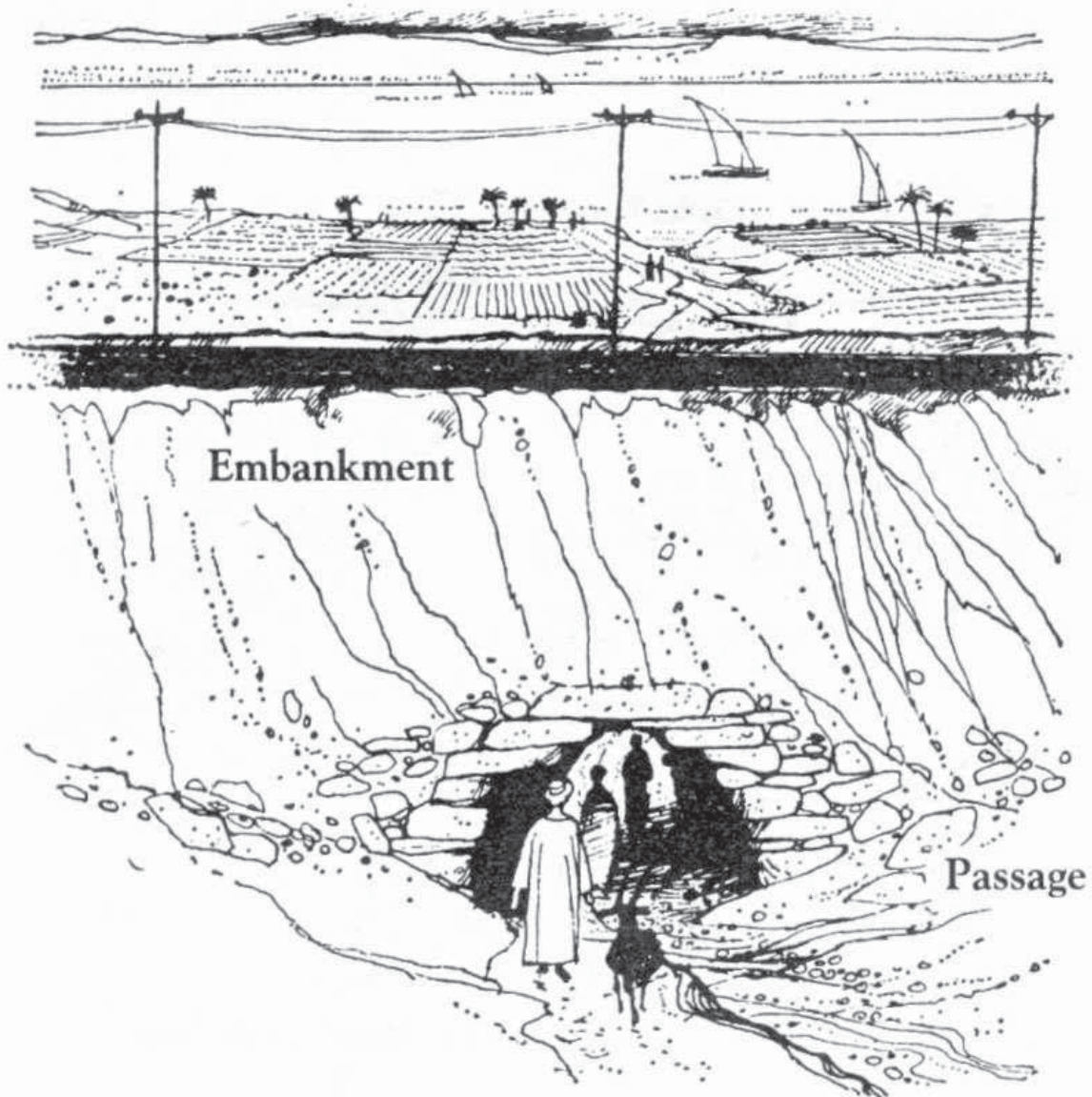


The other drawing showed the passage through the embankment.

'They'll build a passage through the embankment,' said Abdel Rahman. 'We can go through this passage with our animals.'

'What about the rainy season?' asked someone else.

'We don't go to the river in the rainy season,' was the reply. 'The rain-water can run through the passage.'



Many other people asked questions. Many of them didn't want the school or the road. Finally, the meeting came to an end. We agreed to meet the officials from the Ministry. There was one sentence in the letter that interested everybody. 'We want to buy this land from you and we will pay you a good price.'

Everybody was asking the same question: 'How much will the government pay us?'

I Speak With My Mother

'How much will they pay us?'

The women were asking this question, too.

The next day at lunch, my mother spoke to me about the meeting. Like all the other women she had heard about the meeting and the new road. The women know about everything. Often they know more than the men.

I haven't spoken about my mother yet. She was very important to me. I didn't have a father, but my mother was always advising me.



My mother didn't eat her meals with me. That wasn't the custom. But she often sat beside me when I was eating.

I usually ate my breakfast in the fields. Breakfast was a

simple meal of bread and cheese. I went to the fields at sunrise and had breakfast at nine o'clock. Then I came back home at about one and sat in our courtyard. I ate my lunch under a lime tree.

That day, as usual, mother brought me lunch on a tray. She put it down on the carpet under the lime tree. I sat down and ate the meal. Mother sat down with me on the edge of the carpet.

When she was younger, mother had been a beautiful woman. Now she was getting old, but she was still good-looking. She wore black clothes because her husband was dead. She had worn black clothes for about seventeen years. She wore them until she died.

'So, the government wants to build a boarding school,' she said. 'That will be terrible. We don't want schoolboys near our village. They'll behave badly.'

'And the government wants to buy our land,' I replied. 'We'll get a lot of money. We can buy more animals. Perhaps, I can buy a small van. Then I can go to the market every day.'

Mother sat quietly and thought about this.

'Yes,' she said, 'you'll have more money than other people. They'll have to divide the money among many sons. You're the only one in this family.'

'I don't want the money for myself,' I replied. 'A van will make more money for both of us.'

'And what about your wife?' asked my mother immediately. 'Do you want me to speak to your uncle, Mohammed?'

She had asked me this question many times. Mother wanted me to marry my cousin, Fatima. Fatima was one of Uncle Mohammed's daughters. I had seen her and

she was a beautiful girl. But I didn't want to marry her. I wanted to marry Hanim. I gave mother my usual answer.

'No,' I said. 'Don't speak to Uncle Mohammed.'

Then I spoke to mother about Hanim for the first time.

'Abdel Rahman's daughter is a fine girl,' I said.

'Of course she is,' replied mother laughing. 'But Abdel Rahman is rich. He'll never want you as a son-in-law. And you've never been polite to him. He doesn't like you.'

'I know that,' I replied. 'But you can speak to his wife.'

'So you want to marry Hanim,' said mother. 'What a fool you are. Fatima's waiting for you, but you don't want her. You're a strange boy. You always want the thing that you can't get.'

'I'm not a boy, I'm a man,' I replied. 'And I want to marry Hanim.'

'I'll speak to Hanim's mother,' said my mother. 'But there's no hope. Well. . . there's a little hope. . . .'

'What do you mean?' I asked. 'What are you talking about? Tell me what you mean.'

'Abdel Rahman,' she replied, 'is very worried about the school and the road. He doesn't want them. He thinks that they'll be bad for our village.'

'What are you telling me?' I said. 'I know this already.'

'All right,' replied mother. 'I won't speak about it.'

About what? About what?' I asked angrily.

'Be quiet and I'll tell you,' said mother quietly.

I was impatient and angry, but I had to sit quietly and listen.

'I was speaking to Abdel Rahman's wife this morning,' mother said. 'Abdel Rahman is afraid. The villagers want the money and they'll sell the land. Abdel Rahman believes

that it will be the end of Um Khalid. He needs help against the other villagers.'

'So, that's my hope,' I said. 'I must help Abdel Rahman. Then I can marry Hanim. But there will be no road, no doctor, no school, no pump. I have to choose between Hanim and all these things.'

And this was my hope.

6

The Visit of the Officials

The following Thursday, two officials came to Um Khalid. We all met them at Abdel Rahman's house. There were many questions. But no one spoke about money at first. That wasn't polite.

Some villagers asked questions about the schoolboys.

'The boys are not allowed out of the school,' replied the official from the Ministry of Education.

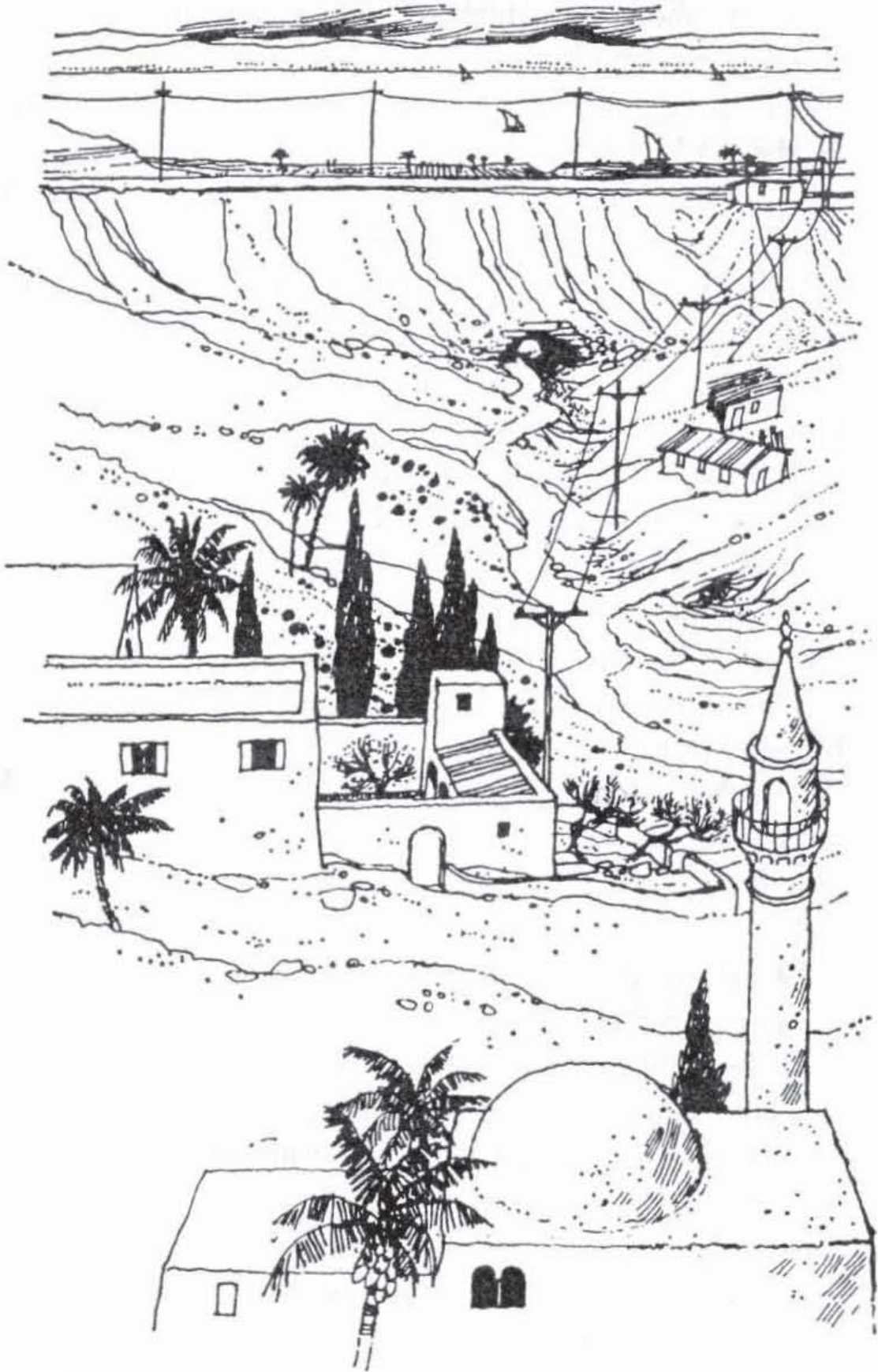
'Perhaps they'll escape,' said one villager.

'The schoolboys must wear a uniform,' was the reply. 'You'll know them by this uniform. They'll be punished if they come near your village.'

'What about this embankment?' asked another villager. 'How will we go to our fields beside the river?'

'There will be a passage through the embankment,' replied another official. 'The passage will be big enough for you and your animals. You'll be able to get to the fields beside the river.'

And he held up a large drawing of the road and the embankment.



'There will be a passage through the embankment,' said the official.

'What about our animals?' asked Hassan. 'They'll be killed by cars and lorries.'

'The government will pay for any animals which are killed on the road,' was the reply.

'And our children?' asked another villager. 'They're more important than the animals.'

'We'll put a police post beside the road,' was the reply. 'The police will keep your children away from the road.'

'We don't want strange policemen near Um Khalid,' said Uncle Mohammed.

'We'll get young men from your village,' said the official. 'They'll work as policemen. The new road will bring plenty of work to Um Khalid.'

'A secondary school won't help our children,' said someone else. 'We need a primary school.'

This question was answered by the official from the Ministry of Education.

'A primary school for boys will be built beside the secondary school,' he replied. 'And, later, there will be a school for girls. The children from Um Khalid and villages near here will go to these schools.'

'What about a doctor?' was the next question. 'We have no doctor in the village.'

'There will be a clinic in the school,' the same official replied. 'Sick people can go to this clinic.'

Someone else asked a question. 'Will we be able to sell our milk and vegetables at the school?'

'The government will send food for the boys,' was the reply. 'But the school will bring many other people. There will be teachers and workers. They'll want to buy your milk and vegetables.'

'And you'll get many other things,' said the official from

the Ministry of Development. 'You'll get electricity and a pump. You'll have a post office at the school. And there'll be a telephone in the village.'

And there will be a cinema at the school,' added the other official. 'It will show a film once a week.'

I hadn't spoken yet. But I wanted to know more about the cinema.

'Will the cinema show real films?' I asked.

'Yes. Like the cinemas in Nabur,' was the reply.

Abdel Rahman was looking at me angrily. I knew what he was thinking. 'Faisal is still a boy. He asks questions about foolish things like cinemas.'

Then someone asked the most important question.

'How much money will we get for our land?'

The answer was surprising. The land beside the river had always been valuable. But the land away from the river was cheap. No one wanted it. It needed a lot of water. The government was giving us more money for this land than for the best land beside the river.

'Have you any more questions?' asked Abdel Rahman.

No one spoke.

'Then I'll thank the officials for answering our questions' said Abdel Rahman. 'We'll give them our answer in ten days.'

'Why not now?' asked someone in a loud voice.

'We must think about these things carefully,' replied Abdel Rahman. 'We've heard the good things about the road. But there are bad things, too. We must talk about them.'

Everyone was silent. They were afraid of Abdel Rahman.

'You'll get your reply after ten days,' he said to the officials. 'Thank you for coming to our village.'

Dreams and Visitors

My strange dreams began at this time. Before this, I hadn't dreamed much. Now I had a dream almost every night. Hanim was in every dream and she was always in trouble. Let me tell you about one dream. But it's only an example. I had many others.

In this dream, I was standing in front of a strange house. Something was wrong inside the house. Suddenly I heard a woman's voice. She was shouting: 'Help! Help!' I had never spoken to Hanim. But I knew her voice. That often happens in dreams.

In my dream, I ran to the door of the house. Hanim was still shouting loudly for help. I pushed the door and tried to go in. But Abdel Rahman was standing in the doorway. He held me by the arms and I wasn't able to pass him. I tried to escape, but he held me tightly. Then I woke up.

One day I spoke to my mother about the dreams. She was afraid.

'They're strange dreams,' she said. 'Something bad is going to happen to you or Hanim. These dreams warn of danger.'

But I didn't agree with her.

'Women always say things like that,' I told her. 'I know the reason for my dreams. I have to make a decision between Hanim and the new road. And I want to have both. I can't sleep at night.'

This was true. I wasn't sleeping well. I worked hard in the fields all day and I went to bed tired. But I wasn't able to

sleep. I lay on my bed and thought about Hanim and about the new road.

Hassan visited me one evening.

'There's another meeting on Friday evening,' he told me. 'It's at Abdel Rahman's house again. We have to decide about the new road.'

'Are we going to sell the land?' I asked him.

'It's not certain,' he replied. 'Some villagers want the money. They are ready to sell. Others are afraid of the new road, but they want the money. And others don't want to sell the land at all.'

The land between the village and the river belonged to all the villagers. It wasn't possible for one villager to sell and for another villager not to sell. It belonged to us together.

'I want to sell, but not because of the money,' continued Hassan. 'I won't get much money. It will be divided among myself and my four brothers.'

'Why do you want to sell, then?' I asked him.

'Look at all the advantages,' replied Hassan. 'Primary schools, electricity, a pump, a telephone. . . .'

I stopped him.

'I know all that,' I said. 'But what about the disadvantages? Abdel Rahman said the road will be bad for the village.'

'Abdel Rahman is going to every house in the village,' replied Hassan. 'He's asking people not to sell. He says that the new road will destroy the village.'

'Well, he won't come to see me,' I said to Hassan.

But I was wrong. Abdel Rahman came to see me two nights later. It was strange to see him. I had seen him now so many

times in my dreams. He sat down on the carpet.

I brought him coffee and we talked politely for some time. He asked about my health and about my mother. Then he began to talk about the road.

'You're still a young man,' he began.

This made me angry. Perhaps I was young. But what difference did that make? I was a man and I was able to make decisions. I didn't say anything.

'I have seen life outside the village,' continued Abdel Rahman.

This was true. When he was a young man, he had lived in Nabur for two years.

'We are poor,' he said. And we have to work hard. But we are happy. You have seen the people in the market at Nabur. Do they look happy?'

I had to agree with him. The people in the market did not look happy.

'You're right,' I replied. 'But they have doctors and schools and

'And cinemas,' said Abdel Rahman with a smile.

I was silent.

'I know about your father,' he continued. 'But people die in towns, too. Doctors cannot change the will of God. We all die.'

I knew that he was right. I said nothing.

We talked for some time and Abdel Rahman told me his fears.

'This new road will bring new people,' he said. 'Houses in Nabur are expensive. Land is cheaper here. People will follow the road. They'll build houses beside the road. Houses will come nearer ever day. One day this village will be part of Nabur. That will be the end of Um Khalid.'

'But the government will build the school,' I said. 'We can't stop it.'

'You're wrong,' replied Abdel Rahman. 'They can't build the school without the road. They've told me that. The government will build the school in another place.'

We did not say much more and we didn't talk about Hanim. But I knew that he was asking me for help.

'I haven't decided yet,' I told him. 'I'll decide before the meeting.'

'I'll see you at the meeting, then,' he said.

He turned to go. Then he spoke again.

'Think about everything carefully,' he said. 'This road will bring great danger to Um Khalid. In the end, it will destroy our village. One day, you will remember my words.'

I Make My Decision

That night, I did not get to sleep easily. I thought about Hanim and about the new road. I wasn't able to decide anything. At last I fell asleep, but I didn't sleep for long. I had another frightening dream.

In this dream, I was working in the fields near the river. It was the time of the flood and the waters were rushing quickly past. Again I heard a woman's voice. It was Hanim and she was shouting: 'Help! Help!'

I ran to the edge of the river. Hanim had fallen in the water and she was drowning. I wanted to jump into the water. I wanted to save her. Suddenly Abdel Rahman was standing beside me. Again he held me by the arms. I wasn't able to move. I cried out loudly.

'Let me go. Let me go. I want to save her.'

In the dream I heard his answer.

'Stop the new road,' he said. 'Then you will save her.'

I woke up and I felt afraid.

'What's the meaning of these strange dreams?' I asked myself. 'Perhaps my mother is right. Perhaps they are a warning of danger. But what danger?'

I did not sleep again for a few hours. When I woke up in the morning, the sun was shining brightly. The dream did not seem so frightening. I didn't feel afraid any more and I went off to work in the fields.

It was Thursday. The meeting was on Friday. Now I was alone and able to think quietly.

At nine o'clock, I sat down and ate my bread and cheese. Now I had to make my decision. But, perhaps, I had made

it already. I don't know. I was not able to think about the advantages of the new road. I didn't think about the pump and the electricity and the schools. I thought about the van.

'When we sell the land,' I thought, 'I'll have money. I'll buy a van with the money. I'll go into Nabur every day and sell eggs and milk and vegetables. I'll soon become rich. When I'm rich, I'll be able to marry Hanim.'

My decision was soon made. I wanted to sell the land.

At lunch under the lime tree, mother sat down beside me. She had spoken to Hanim's mother.

'Don't agree to sell the land,' she said. 'Abdel Rahman will never forgive you. You will never marry Hanim.'

'I can do both,' I replied. 'When I get a van, I'll become rich. Abdel Rahman will not refuse me when I'm rich.'

'You are dreaming,' said my mother. 'You must choose between Hanim and the road. You cannot have both.'

But I didn't believe her.

There were twenty-one men at the meeting on Friday evening. The oldest men spoke first. Because I was the youngest, I spoke last. All the older men did not want to sell the land. They believed the warning of Abdel Rahman.

But the young men wanted to sell. They were not afraid. At last I spoke. Ten men wanted to sell the land and ten didn't. Everyone was waiting for my decision. I felt afraid. I suddenly remembered the words of Abdel Rahman in the dream.

'Stop the new road,' he had said. 'Then you will save Hanim.'

Then I remembered the van.

'I want to sell the land,' I said quietly.



Abdel Rahman was looking at me. He was not angry, but he looked sad.

'Have I made the wrong decision?' I asked myself.

When I got back home, I told my mother about the meeting.

'I'll speak to your Uncle Mohammed, tomorrow,' she said. 'You'll never marry Hanim now. You must marry Fatima.'

'No,' I replied. 'We must wait. The van will make me rich. Then we will see.'

'You'll still be waiting when you die,' she replied. 'And Fatima may not wait so long. There are many other young men who want to marry her.'

But I was hopeful. I told mother not to speak to Uncle Mohammed. I wanted to wait for Hanim.

The Trouble Begins

After the meeting, Abdel Rahman sent a letter to the Ministry of Development. He told them our decision. We had agreed to sell the land. The work soon began on the school and on the road.

The trouble began with the workmen. They lived in camps. Most of the camps were far from Um Khalid. But there was one camp about half a kilometre away. This was for the workmen who were making the high embankment. It was a big job. They worked for many months. These workmen gave us a lot of trouble.

'Did you hear the noise last night?' my mother asked me one day.



I told her that I hadn't heard anything. I was sleeping better since I had made my decision. But I sometimes still dreamed about Hanim. And she was always in trouble.

'The workmen were singing and shouting all night,' mother continued. 'I was afraid. Perhaps they'll come here.'

'Why will they come here?' I asked her.

'These men have no wives or children,' she replied. 'Men without families don't behave well. They drink alcohol and play cards. Perhaps they'll come here looking for alcohol.'

This was possible. In some villages, they make a strong drink from dates or from corn. But in Um Khalid we did not make this alcohol. We kept to the laws of our religion. No one drank alcohol in the village. And that was how the trouble began.

One evening, Abbas and a friend went to the workmen's camp. They wanted to sell eggs and cheese. The workmen were pleased to see them and gave them alcohol. The two of them came back to Um Khalid singing and shouting. They were drunk.

They were beaten by their fathers. They had to stay in bed for two days. After that, no one went to the camp. And we were not able to sell anything to the workmen.

But things became worse. The workmen were paid on the last day of every month. The next day, they had a holiday. Some of them went home to their families. But some workmen didn't have families. These workmen stayed in the camp and drank alcohol all day.

In the evening, they finished all the alcohol and they wanted more. In Um Khalid we always went to bed early. At ten o'clock that night, everyone was in bed. Most people were already asleep. Suddenly there was a loud noise. Men

were shouting and knocking on the doors.

I jumped from my bed and quickly put on some clothes. I took my father's old gun and went to the door. We had a small mosque at Um Khalid. There was a courtyard in front of it. A group of workmen were standing there with Abdel Rahman. They were arguing.

'Why are you here so late at night?' Abdel Rahman was asking.

'Alcohol,' shouted one of the workmen. 'We want some drink.'

I went and stood beside Abdel Rahman. Some of the other villagers came and stood with us. The moon was small and it was quite dark. We were carrying sticks and some of us had old guns. When the workmen saw this, they picked up stones.

'There's no alcohol in this village,' Abdel Rahman replied quietly.

'Every village has some alcohol,' one of the workmen argued.

'Not here,' replied Abdel Rahman.

'We'll give you money,' said another workman. 'We'll pay for the drink.'

'We haven't got any,' said Abdel Rahman. 'No one in this village drinks alcohol.'

The workmen didn't believe Abdel Rahman. They began to talk and argue. Some of the villagers started to shout at the workmen. They were telling them to go back to their camp. Abdel Rahman quickly stopped them.

'Keep quiet,' he told us. 'These men are drunk and dangerous. They want to fight. We must keep quiet. Don't get angry. Perhaps they'll go away.'

He was right. The men were big and strong. They were



We were carrying sticks and some of us had old guns.

dangerous. But at last they got tired and slowly walked away. Some of them were going to walk to Nabur. They probably never got there but fell asleep on the way.

When they had gone, Abdel Rahman turned and looked at us. I thought that he was looking at me.

'I warned you,' he said. 'But you didn't listen.'

Then he walked off to his house.

The Village Changes

Two years later, many things had changed. The workmen had gone. The school and the road were finished. We now had a police post, electricity and a telephone in the village. And we had a pump near the river. We also had the money from the sale of the land. But most of this money was spent already.

The work had been finished quickly. For two years it had not rained much in the rainy season. This happened sometimes. It didn't rain for two or three years. Then the next year, it rained every day for two months.

I now had a small van and went to Nabur every morning. I sold milk, eggs and vegetables. But it was hard work. I went to the market in the morning, and worked in the fields in the afternoon. Mother helped me. We had more animals than before and mother fed them. We both got up very early every morning. Life was not as easy as before.

I remembered Abdel Rahman's words about the people in Nabur. The townspeople didn't look happy. Now we weren't happy either. I had spent my money on the van. I got money for the milk and eggs and vegetables. But I needed more money than before. I needed to buy petrol and repair the van. It wasn't a new van and things often went wrong.

I wasn't any richer. But I still dreamed of Hanim and I still wanted to marry her. Mother wanted to speak to Uncle Mohammed about Fatima. I always said no.

We sold some things in the school, but not very much. Many vans and buses came along the new road from Nabur.



I now had a small van and went to Nabur every morning.

Strangers came to the school and to our village. They all wanted to sell things. We had electricity now. The women wanted radios and refrigerators. Everyone wanted more money.

The new pump brought water to more land. We grew more vegetables and we had more animals. We worked harder than before. But we were not richer. A proverb says: 'The more you have, the more you want.' I know now that this proverb is true.

I no longer had time for lunch under the lime tree. Often I didn't get back home until after dark. But I still had time to talk to my mother. One evening mother had some news about Abdel Rahman.

'Have you heard about Abdel Rahman?' she asked me.

'What about him?' I asked. I hadn't spoken to him for about two years.

'He's going to leave Um Khalid,' mother said. 'He's going to live in a small village in the north.'

'What about Hanim?' I asked immediately.

'He's taking all his family with him,' my mother replied. 'This village will soon be destroyed. Look at those new houses beside the road. They're coming nearer every day.'

Abdel Rahman had been right. Land was expensive in Nabur and the people were moving out. But land was still cheap near Um Khalid. The people from Nabur were buying it. They were building houses all the way along the new road.

But I didn't want to speak about the houses and the new road. I was thinking about Hanim. My plan had failed. I wasn't rich and I hadn't married Hanim. The new road had brought me nothing. And now Hanim was leaving Um Khalid.

'Perhaps I will never see her again,' I thought. 'What can I do?'

'Land is getting more expensive here,' I said to my mother. 'We can sell this house and the land beside the river for a good price. Let's forget Um Khalid and go to the north.'

'And forget about the new road and the electricity and the cinema,' replied my mother. She was laughing at me. 'Why didn't you forget them two years ago? It's too late now. Abdel Rahman will never trust you again. He'll never let you marry Hanim.'

'I'll speak to him about it,' I said hopefully. 'When is he leaving?'

'Before the rainy season begins,' was her reply.

I didn't have much time. It was already near the end of May. The rainy season usually began at the beginning of July. I had to speak to Abdel Rahman soon.

Um Khalid is in Danger

It wasn't easy to speak to Abdel Rahman. I wanted to meet him by chance. I was too afraid to go to his house. During the day, I was never in the village. I was busy working in the fields.

And Abdel Rahman was busy, too. He went to Nabur every day. He was selling his house and land. And he was buying a house and some land in a village in the north. He wanted to leave before the rains began.

But he was too late. That year, the rains began earlier than usual. And it rained heavily. It hadn't rained heavily for two years. Now it rained heavily every day. I still drove to the market, but I had little to sell. There were no vegetables in the rainy season. Things were as bad as before.

No one went to the fields beside the river. The land between the village and the new embankment became muddy. Most of the rain-water went through the passage under the embankment. But some water formed a small lake beside the embankment.

A week passed. I still hadn't spoken to Abdel Rahman. I was getting more and more worried. Then, one day, we had a special religious feast. Usually we said our prayers at home. We only went to the small village mosque on special feasts.

We walked to the mosque through the heavy rain. Abdel Rahman was there, of course. He spoke to everyone after prayers. He asked us to his house that evening. He wanted another meeting.

When we got outside it was still raining heavily. Abdel Rahman hurried quickly to his house. I wasn't able to speak to him.

'What's this meeting about?' my mother asked me.

I told her that I didn't know.

'Perhaps it's about the new road,' she said.

'The road's finished,' I replied. 'We can't stop now.'

But I was wrong. The meeting was about the new road.

'You all know that I'm leaving Um Khalid,' Abdel Rahman began. And I have many reasons for leaving. But there is one reason that I haven't told you about.'

Hassan was sitting beside me, as usual.

'What can this reason be?' he asked me quietly.

'I don't know,' I replied. 'Let's listen!'

'We can no longer see the river from the village,' said Abdel Rahman. 'You must have noticed this. But do you know the reason? Let me explain.'

'The top of the embankment,' he continued, 'is now higher than some of our houses. If the water cannot go through the passage, there will be a flood. Many of our houses will be covered by the water. I went down to the passage early this morning. It is filling up with mud and stones.'

We were all surprised. No one had thought about this.

'This is terrible,' said Uncle Mohammed. 'What can we do?'

'We must go to the embankment every day,' replied Abdel Rahman. 'We must clear the mud and stones from the passage.'

'But we have our own work,' someone said. 'We must repair our houses.'

This was true. The rainy season had started early and we

still had a lot of work. But Abdel Rahman was becoming angry.

'I warned you many times about this road,' he replied. 'But some of you didn't listen to me. Now you must listen. The rain will come into your houses, but you won't drown. If the rain doesn't get through the passage, we will all drown. And the village will be destroyed.'

We all sat in silence.

'I wanted to leave Um Khalid before the rain began,' said Abdel Rahman. 'That's the reason. I'm afraid of the embankment. That passage isn't big enough. But we must keep the passage clear.'

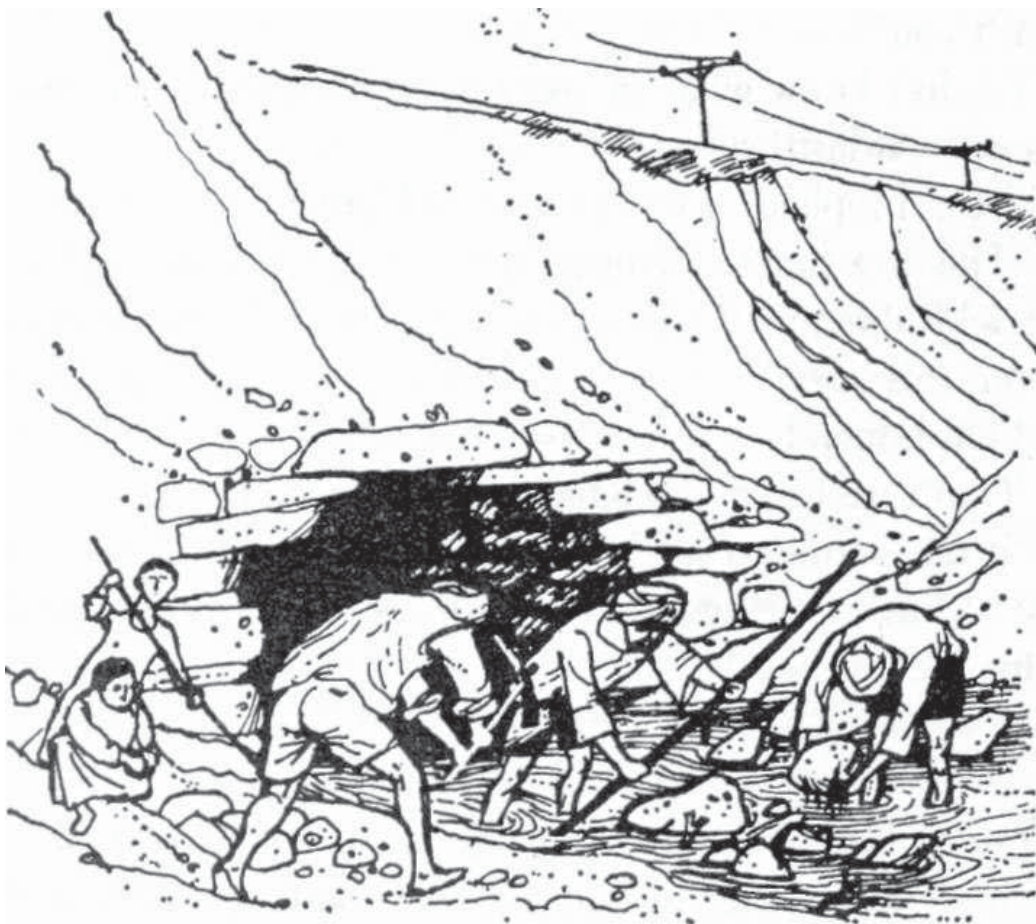
I suddenly remembered my dream. I had dreamed about Hanim drowning in the river. I felt afraid. I had to speak to Abdel Rahman. We all had to escape from Um Khalid.



I Speak to Abdel Rahman

None of us liked the work, but we did it. Different families worked at the embankment on different days. I had no brothers and I worked with someone else. Luckily, this was Abdel Rahman.

At last I was able to speak to him. We worked hard for three hours. We cleaned all the mud and stones from the passage and the water ran away.



'The men who made this passage knew nothing about the rains,' said Abdel Rahman. 'They made a passage for men and animals. But they forgot about the water in the rainy

season. The water will destroy the passage. The stones will fall from the top. Then no water will get through and the village will be flooded.'

'I agree with you,' I replied. 'I was wrong two years ago. Oh, why didn't I believe you then?'

'You were young,' Abdel Rahman said kindly. 'Now you are older and wiser. When I was young, I was foolish, too.'

'I've spoken to my mother,' I told him. 'We both want to leave Um Khalid. We'll sell the van and the house and the land. We'll come with you to the north.'

'You don't really want to come because of me or the road,' replied Abdel Rahman. 'You want something else, don't you?'

I didn't know what to say. I stood for a few moments in silence. At last I spoke.

'Yes,' I replied. 'I want to marry Hanim.'

'This is a time of danger, not a time for marriage,' said Abdel Rahman. 'We have a lot of work to do. We can talk about this later.'

I felt hopeful.

'Can't we leave Um Khalid now?' I asked.

'It takes time to sell land,' was his reply. 'And the roads are bad in the rainy season. We have to stay here until the rains are finished.'

It rained heavily for three weeks. Every day, men went and cleared the passage through the embankment. Then the weather changed. It stopped raining for a few days and the sun shone brightly. This often happened in the rainy season.

There was no need to go to the embankment. And we had

a lot of other work to do. But Abdel Rahman and I walked to the embankment every day.

'I'm not happy about this passage,' said Abdel Rahman one day. 'The rains haven't finished, but the villagers have forgotten the danger already.'

'When the rain starts, we can speak to them all again,' I replied.

'But will they listen?' Abdel Rahman asked sadly.

As usual, he was right. One Thursday evening, clouds began to appear in the sky. It didn't rain, but I was worried. I went with Abdel Rahman to Abbas's house. Abbas's family had to work in the passage the next day.

'There are thick clouds in the sky,' I said to Abbas. 'Perhaps it will rain in the night.' <

'I've seen the clouds,' he replied. 'I'll go to the embankment with my brothers.'

I wasn't happy about his reply. Abbas was lazy. He liked to talk but he didn't like to work. But I wasn't able to do anything. I was busy. I had to go to Nabur with Abdel Rahman in the morning. I wanted to sell our house and sell our van.

In the morning, I left Um Khalid with Abdel Rahman. We drove in the van. There were very large, grey clouds in the sky, but it wasn't raining.

'Those clouds will bring rain later,' said Abdel Rahman. 'I hope Abbas and his brothers will go to the embankment.'

The rain started on our way to Nabur. It became heavier. Abdel Rahman looked more and more worried. We had some business first in the market in Nabur. Abdel Rahman wanted to speak to the man who was buying his land. We stopped the van and got out.

On our way through the market, we met Abbas.

'What are you doing here?' asked Abdel Rahman angrily. 'Who's working at the embankment?'

'It didn't rain last night,' replied Abbas. And it wasn't raining this morning. I came to the market as usual. My brothers will do the work at the passage.'

We didn't believe him. We left the market in Nabur and hurried to the van. We were soon driving back through the heavy rain to Um Khalid.

13

The Flood

A strong wind blew the rain against the van. The road in front of me was covered with water. It was difficult to drive. Abdel Rahman said something, but I didn't hear him. There was a noise of thunder in the sky. He spoke again. This time he shouted.

'Can't you go any faster?' he was saying.

'The road's too wet,' I shouted. 'It's dangerous. I hope the water doesn't get into the engine.'

We drove for about eight kilometres. The turn-off to Um Khalid was about two kilometres away. The rain was still falling. In some places, the water was running over the road like a river.

'We'll leave the car beside the road,' I shouted to Abdel Rahman. 'It's too muddy. We can't drive to the village. We'll walk.'

But we had to leave the van before that. The engine began

to go slower and after a few moments it stopped. The engine was flooded with water. We got out and walked. In a few moments, the rain came right through our clothes. I felt that I was swimming, not walking.

'We must hurry,' said Abdel Rahman. Abbas's brothers will need help. Every man in the village will have to help.'

We reached the beginning of the embankment. Soon we were at the turn-off for Um Khalid. But we were too late. A large lake had formed behind the embankment. Rain-water was rushing down from the hills behind the village. A river was running through Um Khalid.

We hurried towards the village. On the way, we met the men of the village. They were carrying spades and mattocks.

'We weren't able to clear the passage,' Uncle Mohammed told us. Abbas didn't go to the embankment and he didn't warn us.'

'What happened?' asked Abdel Rahman. He didn't say that we had met Abbas in Nabur.

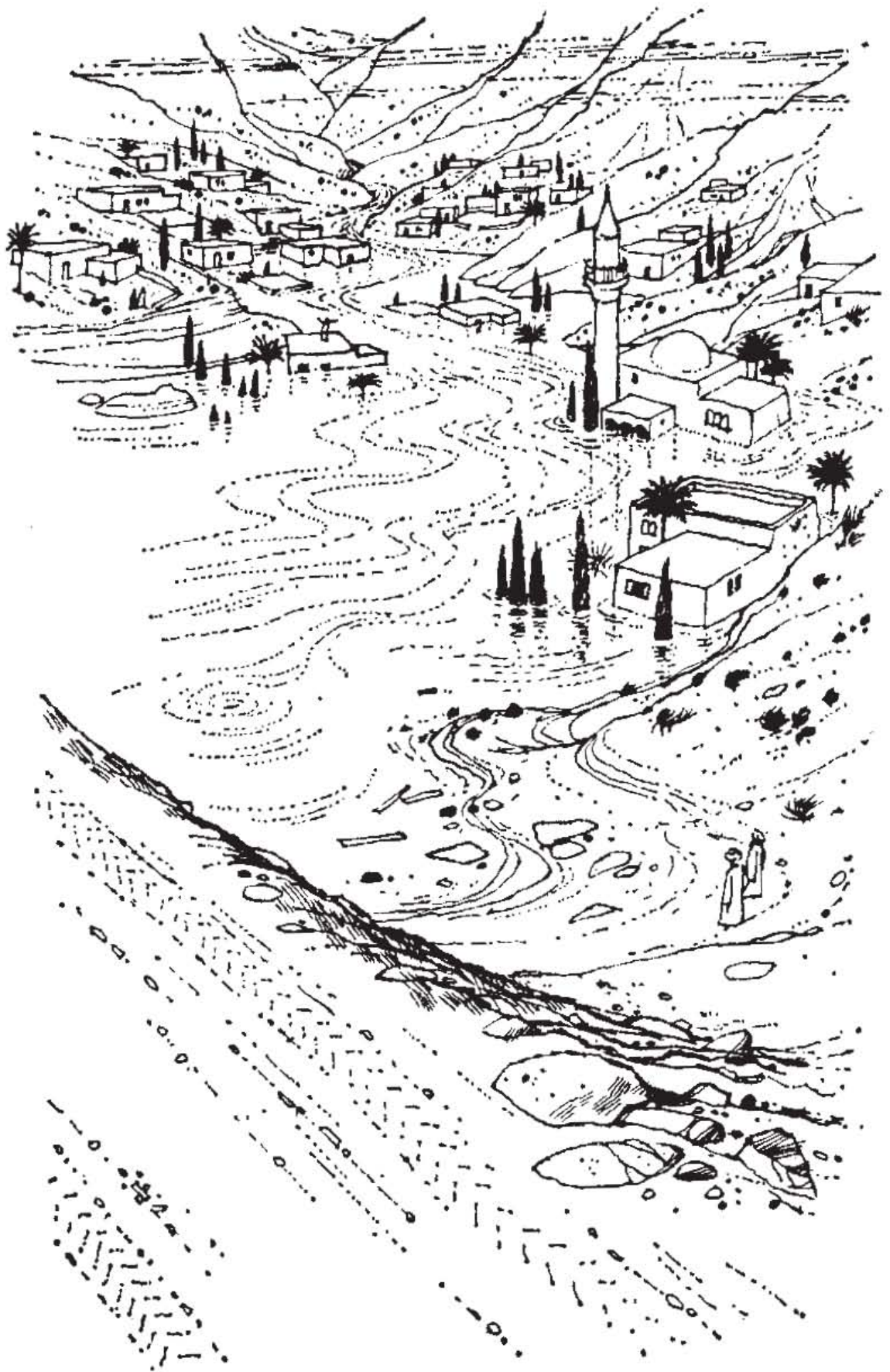
'The flood washed down a large tree,' replied Mohammed. And it has blocked the passage. The water can't get past the embankment.'

'What are you going to do with the spades and mattocks?' asked Abdel Rahman.

'We're going to break the top of the road and open the embankment.'

'That's a good idea,' Abdel Rahman replied. 'We'll come and help you.'

We pushed our way through the falling rain back to the road. We walked along the road until we were standing above the passage. The water was already higher than the passage. But we were able to see the branches from a large



A river was running through Um Khalid.

tree. The tree was blocking the passage. The water wasn't able to get through.

We all took a spade or a mattock. The men with spades dug at the embankment. Those with mattocks tried to break the top of the road. The road surface was hard and it wasn't easy work. The rain still poured down and the thunder roared.

A great lake had formed between the embankment and the village. I looked across the water to the village. The flood was rising. It was coming up near the houses.

'Where are the women and children?' Abdel Rahman suddenly asked.

'In their houses,' someone shouted back to him.

Abdel Rahman turned to Uncle Mohammed.

'Didn't you move all the families to the houses higher up the hill?'

'No,' Mohammed replied.

'I must go back to the village at once,' Abdel Rahman shouted. And he ran back along the road. I ran after him.

Abdel Rahman's house was the biggest house in the village. It was strong and well built. But it was lower down the hillside than any other house.

'The flood will reach my house first,' he shouted to me. I understood his fear but I did not reply.

We came to the turn-off to the village. The flood-water had already covered the path. We had to go further along the road before we were able to leave it.

It was still raining.

'We must hurry,' I shouted to him. 'The water will soon cover your house.'

The End of Um Khalid

We were not able to hurry at first. The mud was thick and deep. At each step, our feet stuck in the mud. At last we reached higher and harder ground and we ran towards the village.

Abdel Rahman's house was below us. It was surrounded by water. Hanim and her mother had climbed up on to the roof. They waved their arms when they saw us. The water was rising every minute and we ran quickly down the hill.

'I hope that the embankment doesn't break now,' Abdel Rahman shouted at me.

'Why not?' I shouted back.

'Because all this water will rush towards the river,' he replied. 'It will break down the walls of my house. It will take everything away with it.'

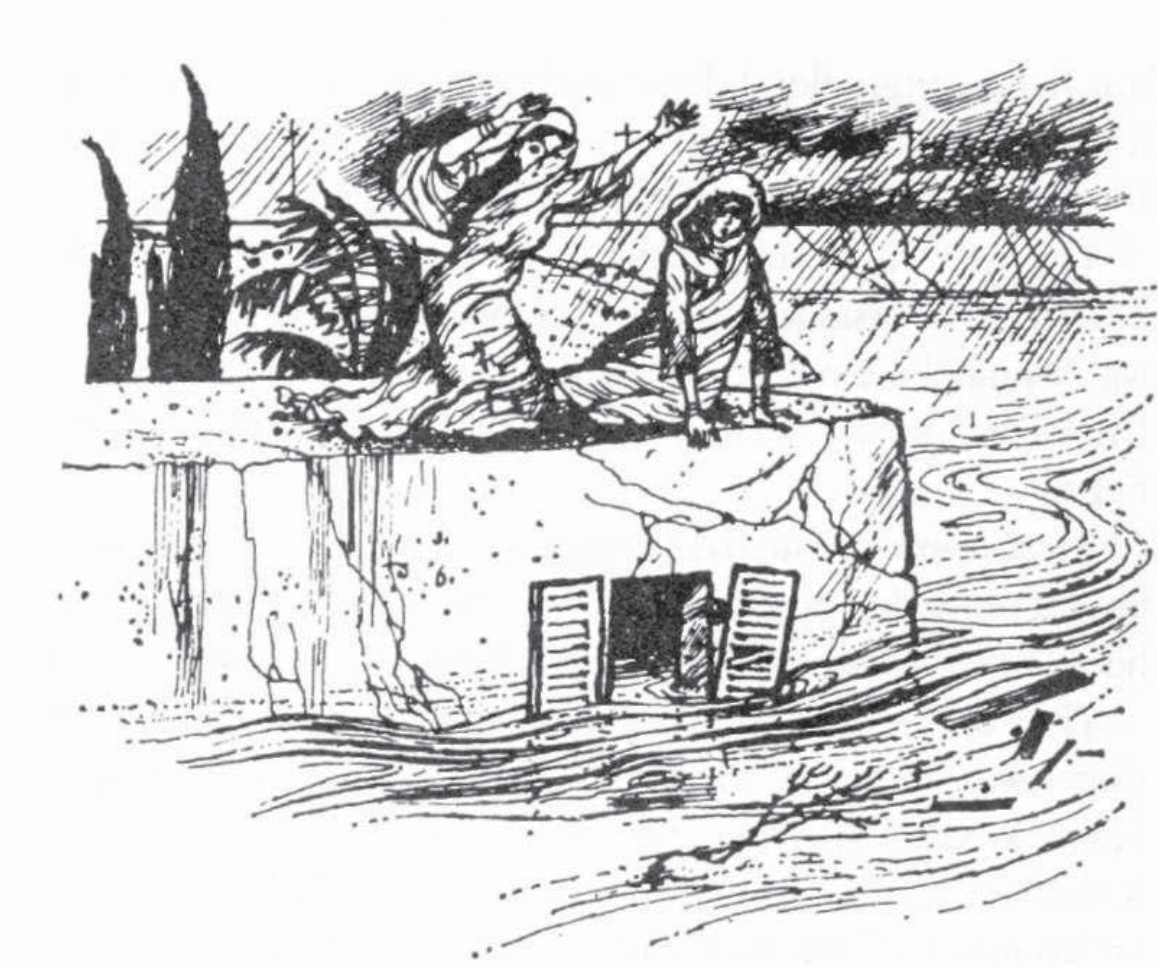
I saw the danger. We had to hurry as quickly as possible. We reached the edge of the water. It was about thirty metres to the roof of Abdel Rahman's house.

'I'm a good swimmer,' I shouted. 'I'll bring them back.'

Suddenly I heard a loud noise. It was like thunder, but louder and nearer. I looked across towards the embankment. Abdel Rahman held me in his arms.

'Stop,' he shouted. 'It's too late. The embankment has broken.'

I tried to get free. Already, the water at my feet was moving away. It was rushing round and round. The water was moving fiercely and angrily. I saw Hanim on the roof. The walls of the house were beginning to break. I heard Hanim's voice.



'Help!' she was shouting, 'Help!'

I remembered my dream. I had to get free and save her. I pushed Abdel Rahman backwards and he fell to the ground. Then I jumped into the water. Behind me, I heard his voice.

'Come back! Come back!' Abdel Rahman was shouting. 'It's too late.'

I swam towards the house. But the water was pulling me away. I heard a crash and looked up. One of the walls had broken and the roof had fallen into the water. Hanim and her mother had disappeared.

The water was now rushing like a river. I was pulled along. The water was rushing to the hole in the embankment. It was taking everything with it. The men on the road had broken the embankment. But they had done it at the wrong time.

I was a strong swimmer, but I was not able to swim against

this fierce, angry flood. I was pulled along towards the large hole in the embankment. I tried to keep above the water, but I was becoming weaker. I was going to drown.

The tree which started the trouble saved me. It was still blocking the passage and the water was pouring over it. The water pulled me near the tree and I stretched out my hand. I held on to a branch. I pulled myself towards it and held tightly.

After a few moments, I pulled myself onto the tree and lay there for some time. Then I heard voices. The villagers had come back and they climbed down to help me.

They carried me back to the village. My mother thought that I was drowned. She cried with joy when she saw me. Later, Abdel Rahman came to our house. I wanted to ask him about Hanim. But I didn't need to ask. The terrible look on his face told me everything.

Hanim and her mother had been carried through the hole in the embankment. They had been drowned and were gone for ever.

Some Years Later

All this happened many years ago. My mother is dead now and so is Abdel Rahman. I live with my wife in a village in the north. Fatima and I are happy and we have five children.

The flood was the end of Um Khalid. No one wanted to live there after that terrible day. I moved to the north with my mother and Abdel Rahman. He lived with us until he died. He never forgot the death of his wife and daughter. He never smiled again.

Uncle Mohammed came to the village after a few months. Everyone else left Um Khalid. There's no village there now. I've heard that they've built a new embankment. And they have a very large, strong passage under the road. But it was too late. The new road had destroyed Um Khalid.

I didn't hear any more about Hassan or Abbas. They're probably living in Nabur.

After a year, I married Fatima. I still thought of Hanim from time to time, but a man needs a wife. And Fatima had always loved me. We are both happy here in our village.

I'm afraid of one thing. There's a young man in the village. His name is El Kheir and he wants to marry my eldest daughter. He's a good man, but his father is dead. He doesn't take advice from me or from anyone.

Perhaps you are asking why I am afraid. It's quite simple. One day the government will want to make a new road to this village. Will El Kheir take my advice? Or will he want the new road?

Points for Understanding

1

- 1 How far was Um Khalid from Nabur?
- 2 Who was Abdel Rahman and who was Hanim?
- 3 Why did the village people not get a good price for their goods?

2

- 1 Why did Faisal's father die?
- 2 Why were the houses in the village built on the side of a hill?
- 3 Why did the people of Um Khalid want a pump?
- 4 Why were the people not able to get a pump?

3

- 1 Where was the meeting going to be?
- 2 Why did Abdel Rahman not tell Faisal about the meeting?
- 3 What did the government want to do?

4

- 1 The new road will bring many advantages to your village. What were those advantages?
- 2 Why were they going to build a passage through the embankment?
- 3 What did the men at the meeting decide?
- 4 What question did they all ask one another?

5

- 1 What was Faisal hoping to buy?
- 2 Why will Faisal get more money than other men in the village?
- 3 Who did Faisal's mother want him to marry?
- 4 What was Faisal's only hope?

6

- 1 What advantages will the new road bring to the villagers
(a) in the village?
(b) at the school?
- 2 'How much money will we get for our land?' asked a man from the village. Why was the official's answer surprising?
- 3 Why did Abdel Rahman not give them an answer immediately?

7

- 1 What happened to Faisal in his dream?
- 2 Why was Faisal not sleeping well?
- 3 Why did the villagers have to agree together before they sold the land?
- 4 How could Um Khalid become part of Nabur?
- 5 What was Abdel Rahman's final warning?

8

- 1 What was happening to Hanim in Faisal's dream?
- 2 Why did Faisal want a van?
- 3 What was Faisal's decision?
- 4 Why did Faisal's mother want to speak to his Uncle Mohammed?

9

- 1 Why was there a workman's camp near Um Khalid?
- 2 Why did the villagers stop selling things at the camp?
- 3 Why did the workmen come to Um Khalid late at night?
- 4 How did Abdel Rahman show that he was wise?

10

- 1 Why did Faisal have to work harder?
- 2 Were the villagers of Um Khalid happier?
- 3 What was happening along the new road?
- 4 When did the rainy season usually begin?
- 5 Why did Faisal have to speak to Abdel Rahman soon?

11

- 1 Why did no one go to the fields beside the river?
- 2 Why were the villagers no longer able to see the river?
- 3 Why did the passage under the embankment have to be kept clear?
- 4 Why did Faisal remember his dream?

12

- 1 What was dangerous about the passage?
- 2 Why did Faisal want to leave Um Khalid?
- 3 Why did the villagers stop working at the embankment?
- 4 Why did Faisal and Abdel Rahman hurry back to Um Khalid?

13

- 1 What had happened to the passage through the embankment?
- 2 Why were the villagers carrying spades and mattocks?
- 3 Why did Abdel Rahman start running back to Um Khalid?

14

- 1 Why did Abdel Rahman try to stop Faisal?
- 2 How was Faisal saved?
- 3 What happened to Hanim and her mother?

15

- 1 Who did Faisal marry?
- 2 Why was Faisal afraid?

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ROAD TO NOWHERE

The trouble at Um Khalid began with the workmen. When they built the new road, they forgot about the rains. They made a small passage for men and animals. But they forgot about the water in the rainy season.

That year, the rains began earlier than usual. And it rained heavily. Only one man saw the danger... but he was too late.

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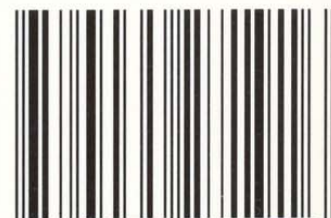
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