



## **The Unexpected Friend**

In the midst of a sprawling refugee camp in Bangladesh, Faisal, a young Rohingya boy, finds an injured bird and decides to take care of it with his sisters. Life in the camp is not always easy and the children are thrilled to have a pet to look after. But as the bird's wing slowly heals, they face the dilemma of holding on to or losing something they dearly love.



The Unexpected Friend  
Raya Rahman

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# Let's Read

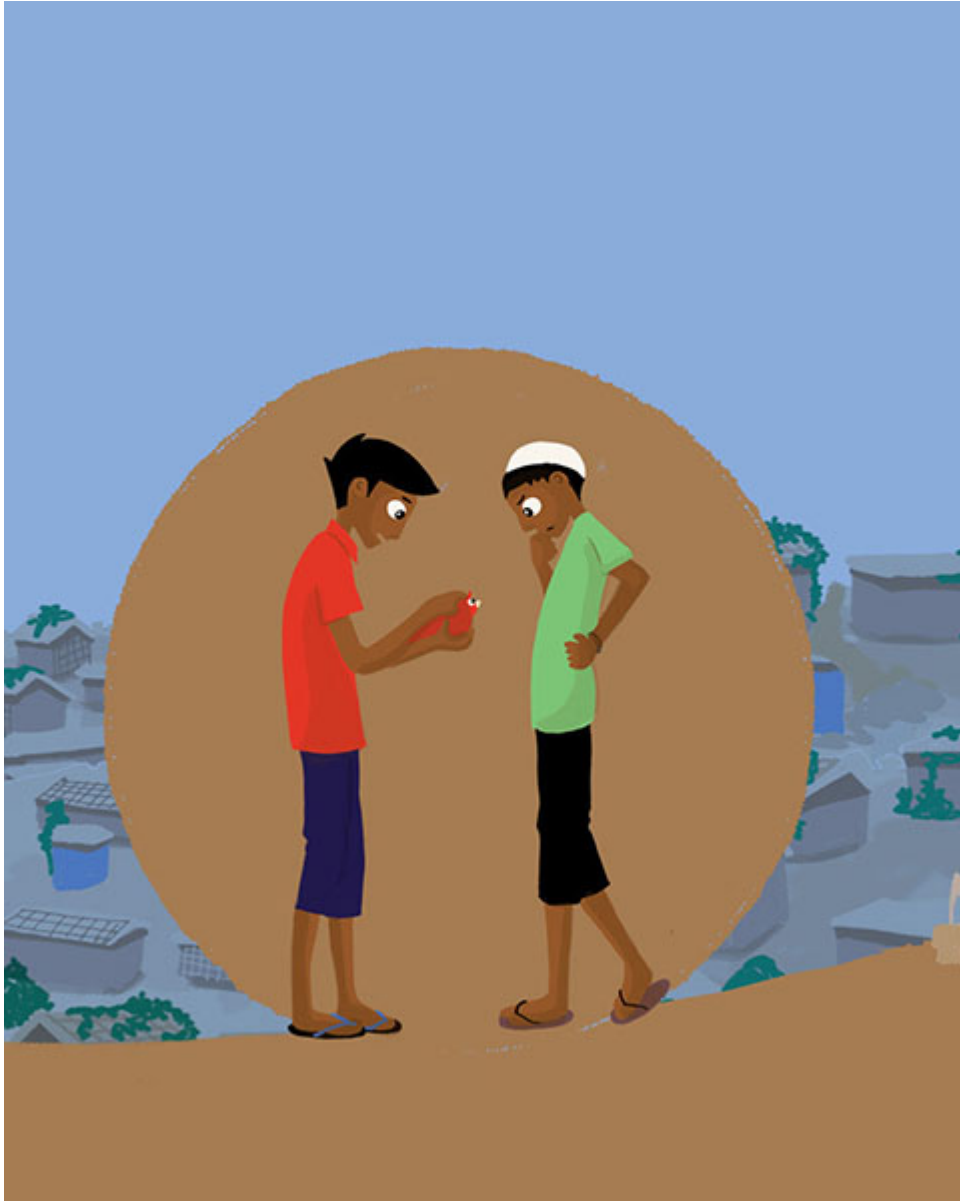
 **The Asia Foundation**



It was the end of afternoon prayers. Faisal had just left the mosque and was waiting for his friend Rahim. Suddenly, he heard a faint chirping noise in the bushes.



He bent down and moved the leaves aside. A small bird lay on the ground. Its wing looked broken. Gently, Faisal picked it up. "Are you hurt?" he asked. "Cheep!" said the bird.



"It needs help," he told Rahim. They had planned to go to the forest to get firewood after prayers. But Faisal didn't want to leave the injured bird behind. He asked Rahim to wait for him. "I'll take it to my sisters," he explained. "They will keep it safe."



Faisal and Rahim lived in a refugee camp in Bangladesh along with many other Rohingya people. They were forced to leave their homes in Myanmar as it was no longer safe there. Faisal had walked for miles with his mother and his sisters, Rehana and Aziza, to find shelter. They arrived in this camp a while ago and stayed ever since.



Holding the bird in his cupped hands, Faisal made his way through the camp. He passed food lines where people waited to receive bags of rice and cooking oil. And he passed by the busy medical clinic where many others lined up for treatment. No doctor would have time to fix a bird there!





He reached the learning center where his sisters and other children were drawing pictures and playing board games. "Aziza! Rehana!" he called them. "I need your help!" The girls gasped when they looked inside the box. "I heard it chirping by the mosque," said Faisal. "The poor thing is hurt and can't fly."



His sisters promised to take care of it. "I'll be back soon with firewood!" Faisal told them. The forest could be scary as it was home to many wild animals. But people from the camp needed to go there to gather wood for cooking.



The boys searched for fallen twigs and branches until their arms were full. Faisal thought about the bird. Would it ever fly again? They were about to head back when all of a sudden.....there was a rustling noise.



It was so big! They didn't dare go any closer. Crossing paths with an elephant could be dangerous. Not too long ago, one had wandered into the crowded camp and frightened everybody.



But Faisal knew that it was not the elephant's fault. After all, the forest was getting smaller as more and more trees were cut to make space for the refugee camp. He was sad that the elephant was losing its home. "Shh," whispered Rahim. "Let's leave quietly."



Lost in thought on the way back, Faisal tripped over a big rock and fell. "Aah, my arm!" he cried. He tried to pick up the scattered branches but couldn't. It hurt too much. "How will Ma cook without any firewood?"



Rahim put a hand on his shoulder. "You can share with me," he said.



Back in the camp, Faisal was glad to see that his mother and sisters had bandaged the bird's wing. "What happened?" his mother asked him. "I fell, Ma," he said. "My arm really hurts!"





She took him inside the tent and wrapped his arm in a cotton sling.  
"Let's go to the clinic to make sure nothing is broken," she said softly.



Over the next few weeks, Faisal started to feel better. The bird's wing was also healing. They spent every minute together. One day, the bird spread its wings to show that it was ready to fly.



But Faisal didn't want to let it go. He couldn't sleep that night. He wished they didn't have to say goodbye. Then he remembered his sister's giggles, Rahim's friendly hand on his shoulder, and his mother's soft voice. He had them to hold on to.



"It's time," he told his sisters the next morning.



Aziza cried the hardest. Rehana held her close. "The bird needs its family too." Faisal comforted them. "Like us," he said.



They walked to the place near the mosque where Faisal had first found the bird. Together, they let it go. As it flew away, they heard the call to prayer.





"Go in peace, little friend," whispered Faisal. "I will never forget you."





Over one million Rohingya people have fled the violence in Myanmar's Rakhine State, seeking refuge in the Cox's Bazar district of Bangladesh since early 1990. The largest exodus began on 25 August 2017, making this one of the largest humanitarian refugee crises in the world. Most refugees in Cox's Bazar are women and children, living in uncertain and difficult conditions. Linda Steinbock and Eline Severijnen authored the report 'Childhood Interrupted: Children's Voices from the Rohingya Refugee Crisis' which inspired the creation of this book. As a child-focused organization, Save the Children believes in listening to children's experiences, needs, and hopes. The report authors were moved by the resilience in the children's stories and wanted to excite the children in the camps with a personal story about them. Children have powerful voices. Together with you, we want to hear their message, share their stories, and raise awareness of the hopes of Rohingya children. If you would like more information, or would like to make a contribution, please visit: <https://www.savethechildren.org.uk/where-we-work/asia/rohingya-crisis>

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