

"My family..." I say. "Have you told my family?"

"What? No. I was going to, but I wanted to speak to you first. What's this about? What happened?"

"They want me to steal for them," I say, straightening up, and the words or the movement make me feel queasy.

"They want you to..." Rochy's voice trails off as he looks at the piece of paper. "They want you to steal from the factory?" he whispers.

"They want a pair of boots with rubber soles by Tuesday," I say, shaking my head.

"In this size?" Rochy asks, but he doesn't wait for my reply. "Budi, you're not going to do it, are you?"

"What choice do I have?"

"But if you get caught you'll never work again! Think about what the foreman would do to you. You can't do it! You've got to go back and beg the Dragon. There must be another way."

"He said if I don't do it he'll use somebody else and frame me. It's no good."

I can tell Rochy knows it's true. We stand together for a few moments, listening to the noises we hear every day: the hum of generators, the clank of pots and pans, the chatter of families, the drone of scooters, the barking of dogs and the shrieking of cats. Only tonight they seem

different, like I'm listening to them through a thick wall. Like if I followed one sound in particular I'd never be able to find the source.

"Come on," Rochy says. "Your family are waiting. We've got to try and pretend this never happened."

We both look at the piece of paper and then Rochy rips it into tiny pieces and lets them flutter to the ground.

"Forget about that," he says, smiling. "It's your birthday! Let's eat some *rendang* and watch the greatest team on earth take Sevilla apart!"

I smile, but underneath it there's that feeling like the Dragon's hand is on the knife. Like a spurt of blood just jumped from my heart, and the thick drops are trickling down through me. I try to ignore it.

As we enter the apartment the smell of spices makes my mouth water. I smile. I help Grandma with her tablets and Mum brings the meal over from the kitchen. I keep smiling.

"I don't know if Budi told you," Mum says to Rochy, "but this *rendang* is extra spicy. I hope you don't mind."

"Of course not, *Ibu* – the spicier the better."

"That's what I always say," Grandma says. "It's impossible to have a dish that's *too* spicy. Spice is good for you – the hotter the better."