Seawall

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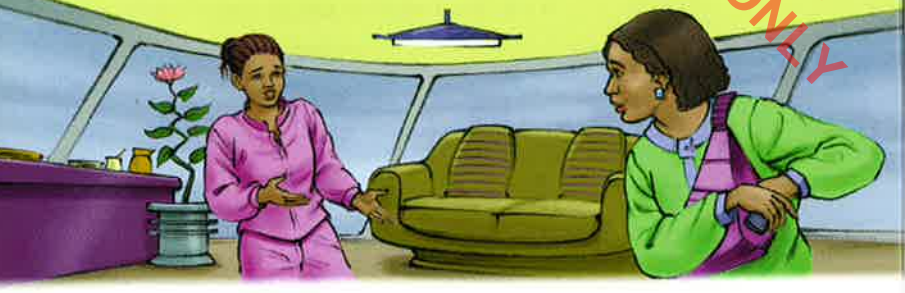


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Chapter 1

Market Day



It was a Tuesday in the year 2165. Dana's mother was getting ready to transport their vegetable crop to the district market. Dana usually went with her in their hover, but this time she wanted to stay home.

"Can't I stay here on my own?" she asked.

Her mother looked doubtful. "I won't be back until tomorrow morning. What if something goes wrong?"

"Then I'll call you on this." Dana tapped the viewcom strapped to her wrist. "Please, Mum, please."

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Her mother turned and looked out the window to a sky heavy with storm clouds. It was raining again. After what seemed like a long time she sighed. "Well, I suppose so ... but only if you keep Silas with you all the time, wherever you go."

Hearing his name, the old dog struggled to his feet.

"No, Mum, no," Dana cried. "He's too old. He'll only be a nuisance."

Mum's lips tightened. "One day you'll be old and a nuisance yourself."





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Dana knew better than to argue. Before her mother could change her mind, Dana turned on the waterproofing controls on her coverall and dashed out the door onto the hover landing.

Her mother's voice followed her outside. "If you have any trouble, call the Bennetts." Their closest neighbours, the Bennetts, lived ten kilometres away.

"Okay, okay," Dana yelled. "See you when you get back."

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The house stood on concrete poles, high above the treeless and swampy land. Dana made her way down to the muddy paddocks below. Silas followed. After a few minutes, she turned and waved. She half expected her mother to call her back with some last-minute instructions but, to her surprise and relief, her mother merely waved. Then Dana watched as the hover rose into the sky and disappeared behind clouds.



The old dog padded slowly after Dana. After about five minutes he collapsed onto his haunches.

"Come on Silas, come on," cried Dana.

Silas rose slowly and whined. Dana picked up a stick and threw it. "Fetch the stick, Silas. Good dog, fetch!"

Silas whimpered and sat down again.

"Oh, go home, you stupid old dog. Go home," Dana yelled impatiently. Then she turned and headed off at a run for the seawall and the sea.



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