

Refugee Boy: Summary

Life is not safe for Alem. His father is Ethiopian, and his mother Eritrean – and with both countries at war, he is welcome in neither place. So his father does an astonishing thing, which at first appears callous, but is in fact the ultimate gift of love from a parent to their child...

This section gives a chapter-by-chapter summary of Benjamin Zephaniah's novel. This summary is designed to help you remember what happened when, so you can go back to the book and refer to what you have read. If you read this before you have read the book your enjoyment may be spoiled as it gives away some of the twists in the plot.

Ethiopia Soldiers kick down the door of a house and tell Alem and his family they must leave Ethiopia or die. **Eritrea** Soldiers kick down the door of a house and tell Alem and his family they must leave Eritrea or die.

Chapter 1: Welcome to the Weather Alem and his father, Mr Kelo, arrive at Heathrow and go to a hotel in the village of Datchet near Reading. They spend the next day seeing the sights in London.

Chapter 2: Alone in the Country Alem wakes up the following morning alone in the hotel room. The hotel manager gives him a letter from Mr Kelo. It says that his father has gone back to Ethiopia but that it is best that Alem stays in Britain for now where he will be safe. Two women from the Refugee Council called Mariam and Pamela come to visit Alem and ask to hear his story.

Chapter 3: This is War Alem tells about the difficulties he and his family faced because of the conflict between Ethiopia and Eritrea. They were not welcome in either country.

Chapter 4: Asylum Seeking Alem leaves the hotel with Mariam and Pamela and is taken to their office where they fill in his application form for asylum. They have arranged for him to stay at a children's home.

Chapter 5: Welcome Home Alem arrives at the home and meets some of the staff and children. He is threatened by a tough boy. Another boy, called Mustafa, tells him that the bully is called Sweeney. Alem shares a room with a boy called Stanley who has a nightmare during the night.

Chapter 6: Meet the Lads At breakfast Mustafa gives Alem more advice. Alem gets into a fight with Sweeney.

Chapter 7: The Road to Nowhere That night, Alem runs away from the home. The next morning he finds he has been walking in circles and is back near the home again. He goes inside. Mariam comes to see him. She has a social worker called Sheila with her. They have arranged for Alem to visit a foster family. On the way to see the family, Alem is taken to the Home Office for a screening as part of the asylum application process.

Chapter 8: The Family's Fine Alem meets Mr and Mrs Fitzgerald and their daughter Ruth and decides he would like to stay with them. He spends a couple of weeks settling in then asks if he can go to school.

Chapter 9: First Class Alem starts school and makes friends with a boy called Robert. That evening Mariam comes to see Alem, bringing a letter from his father. It contains bad news: Alem's mother is missing.

- Chapter 10: *What the Papers Say*** Alem goes back to school. He makes another friend, called Buck. Mariam comes to see him again. She says that the Home Office is not happy with his application for asylum. They will have to go to appeal. She gives him a folder full of newspaper cuttings complaining about asylum seekers.
- Chapter 11: *A Way with Words*** Alem is told the date of his appeal hearing. It will be early in the New Year. He continues to work hard at school the rest of the term. He spends his Christmas money on a bike.
- Chapter 12: *Court in Action*** Alem explores the local area on his bike. He goes to court for his appeal hearing and meets Nicholas Morgan, his barrister. The hearing is adjourned until February to allow time for further reports to be prepared.
- Chapter 13: *Loved and Lost*** Mariam comes to the house with another letter from Mr Kelo. Alem's mother has been murdered.
- Chapter 14: *Life After Death*** Sheila and Nicholas visit Alem to discuss his appeal. After a few days off, he goes back to school. He brings Robert home to meet the Fitzgeralds.
- Chapter 15: *The Africans*** The next day, after school, Alem and Robert go to see Buck's band rehearse then visit a friend of Robert's called Asher, a Rastafarian. Alem and Robert plan to go on a bike ride.
- Chapter 16: *Guess Who's Coming to Dinner*** Alem and Robert enjoy their ride but Alem's bike is stolen on his way home. Unexpectedly, Mr Kelo comes to see him. He and Alem go out to dinner together.
- Chapter 17: *Campsfield*** The next day Mr Kelo is supposed to be coming to dinner at the Fitzgeralds' house but he has been arrested and taken to a detention centre. Nicholas will be appearing in court with Mr Kelo and will ask for bail.
- Chapter 18: *Real Men Cry*** Mr Kelo is given bail and moves into a shabby hotel used for asylum seekers. Alem visits him. After a trip to see the Millennium Dome, Mr Kelo takes Alem to the offices of the East African Solidarity Trust.
- Chapter 19: *Court Again*** Alem goes to his hearing. His application for asylum is turned down. He and Mr Kelo must go back to Ethiopia. They are allowed to put in another appeal.
- Chapter 20: *This is Politics*** Robert wants to organise a protest about the treatment of Alem and his father. Sheila comes to say that Alem must leave the Fitzgeralds and live in the hotel with Mr Kelo. Alem and Mr Kelo go to a meeting of the protest group and are amazed by the support they have.
- Chapter 21: *The Freedom Dance*** Alem moves into the hotel. The protest group has a campaign meeting. There is a benefit gig at the school.
- Chapter 22: *The Word on the Street*** Hundreds of people attend a rally in support of Alem and Mr Kelo and present a petition to the local MP.
- Chapter 23: *This is War Too*** Alem is awarded a Positive Pupil Certificate at school. Alem goes back to the hotel to show his father his certificate. He is not there. Sheila and Mariam arrive to say that Mr Kelo has been shot dead in the street. Alem goes back to live with the Fitzgeralds. He has a date for his new appeal.
- Chapter 24: *The News*** There is a news report about Mr Kelo's death. The police think the killing was political.
- Chapter 25: *Judgement Day*** Alem is granted leave to stay in Britain.
- Chapter 26: *The End?*** Ethiopia and Eritrea sign a peace treaty.
- Chapter 27: *Let Me Speak*** Alem makes a personal statement.