KRISH AND MIRIAM KANDIAH
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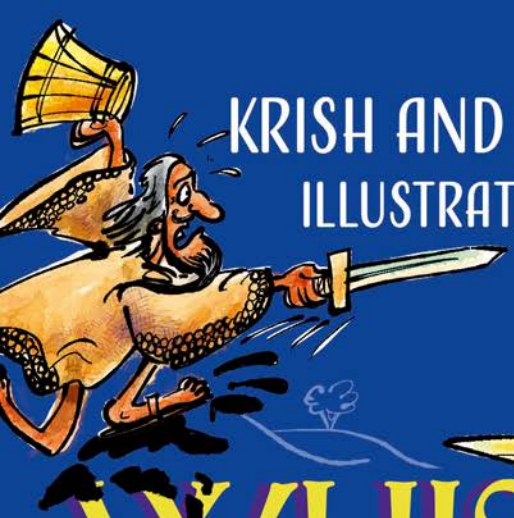
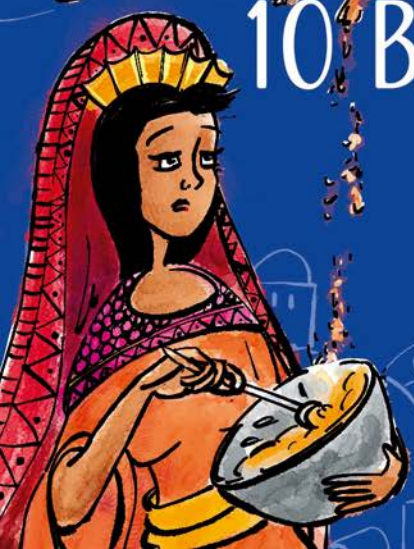


WHISTLESTOP TALES

AROUND THE WORLD IN 10 BIBLE STORIES



‘With a clever premise, fun and lively text, and a particularly brilliant story about Abram that I have never before seen retold, Krish and Miriam Kandiah have created a terrific book that celebrates the diversity of people and cultures found in the Bible.’

Bob Hartman, bestselling children’s author

‘Miriam and Krish take parents, carers and children on an exciting global adventure through the Bible.’

Tim and Rachel Hughes, Lead Pastors at Gas Street Church

‘When I was growing up, I thought the Bible consisted of white people, not people who looked like me. This much-needed book by Krish and Miriam will bring joy to so many children as they see themselves reflected in the most famous stories in history. Fun and accessible, yet filled with truth, I hope *Whistlestop Tales* helps to redress the balance for my son and children like him everywhere.’

Chine McDonald, writer, broadcaster and author of God Is Not a White Man

‘This book has been a long time coming. Celebrating the cultures in the Bible, placing the stories in their original setting, taking it back to the inclusive place, allows us to recognise that the Bible is full of people just like us.’

Carrie Grant MBE and David Grant MBE

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To our Niblings:
Leo, Zac, Roxy and James.

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THE TALE OF THE TURKISH TRUANT WHO RISKED EVERYTHING

Dear Reader,

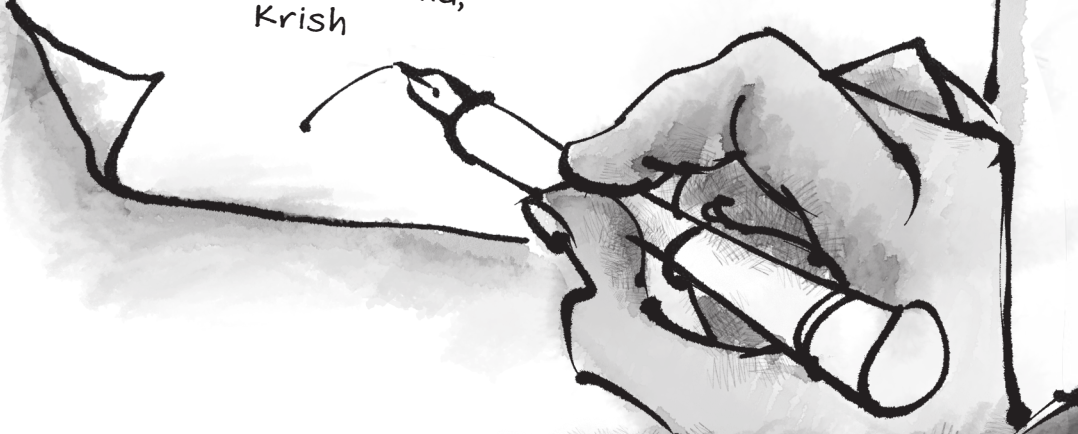
When I was young, I was the only boy in my class who wasn't white. My mum said it was because I was special, but my classmates didn't see it that way. They bullied me and called me names because I was different. Some of the things they said were really stupid. For example, they kept calling me black, even though my skin was clearly brown. They insisted on saying I was Pakistani even though I had told them hundreds of times that I wasn't. I was British, with an Indian mother and a Sri Lankan father. Perhaps that was too many words for them to turn into an insult. Some of them weren't that clever.

I often looked in books for characters who were not that different from me, but I didn't find any. It wasn't until I was much, much older that I realised the answer had been right under my nose all along. You see, when I was seven years old, I had been given a Bible. Little did I know then that it was full of people from all sorts of places with all sorts of skin shades who had to deal with all sorts of problems. It told stories of adventurers who were African and Middle Eastern and Asian as well as European.

Perhaps it was because the place names had all been different back then that I hadn't understood just how international the Bible was. But some of its characters came from countries I had actually visited, or seen on the news, or read about in other books. If only I had realised this when I was young – those Bible stories might have encouraged me to stand a little taller. If only my classmates had read them too – perhaps they would have been a little kinder.

That's why Miriam and I wrote this book together. We wanted children everywhere to know that inspiring people can come from anywhere. So we worked out where some of our favourite Bible characters would have lived on today's map, and we let them capture our imagination. The following stories may not quite be how the Bible tells them, but I hope they convey one really important, overarching and true message of the Bible: wherever you are from, whatever colour your skin is, whatever people say about you, you can be part of God's global adventure.

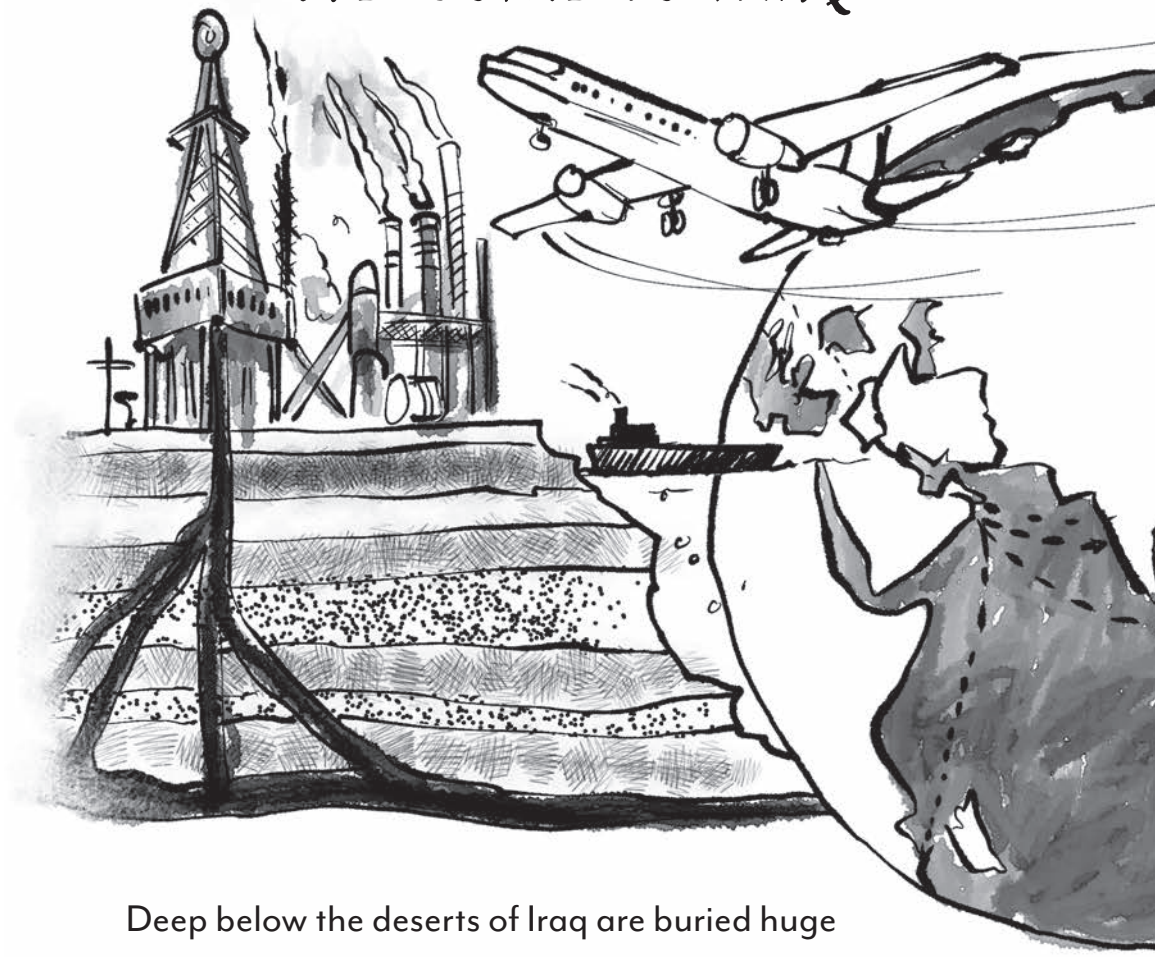
Your friend,
Krish



ABRAM

THE TALE OF THE INTREPID IRAQI WHO HAD A LOT TO LOSE

WELCOME TO IRAQ



Deep below the deserts of Iraq are buried huge lakes of oil. It might just seem like a lot of sticky black sludge, but it is, in fact, extremely valuable sticky black sludge. The Iraqi people extract the oil and then trade it with other countries in exchange for large amounts of money and food. Then the oil is turned into useful things like petrol, and plastics and soaps, although we use a little

too much of those things.

Sadly, the amount of oil we get through each day is beginning to destroy the beautiful world we live in.

In this tale, the oil fields are a place to be avoided and one intrepid Iraqi launches a daring raid to extract something that he believed was even more valuable than the sticky black sludge found in the ground.

The campsite was a lot quieter since old Abram's nephew had gone.

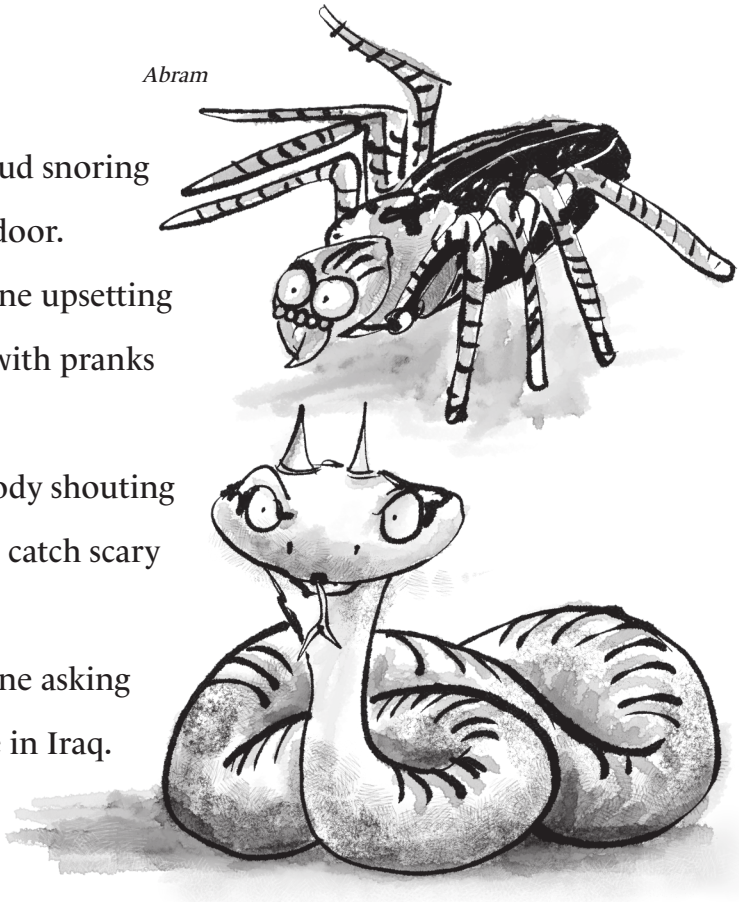
The boy's name was Lot, which was a good name for someone who made a lot of noise, got into a lot of trouble and asked a lot of questions.

'Where did I come from again?' Lot used to ask. 'What was Iraq like? Why did we leave? What happened to my parents? Where are we going to? Are we nearly there yet?'

Abram must have tried to answer those questions hundreds of times – usually late at night huddled under a blanket, sipping hot soup by a crackling campfire. Lot loved listening to all his uncle's stories.

But now Lot was gone.

Now there was nobody waking Abram up in the middle



of the night with loud snoring from the tent next door.

There was no one upsetting the other campers with pranks and mishaps.

There was nobody shouting for Uncle Abram to catch scary spiders and snakes.

There was no one asking questions about life in Iraq.

It was **very** quiet.

It was **too** quiet.

Abram sighed every time he found himself sitting in silence. He loved Lot like the son he had never had. Why had he let him move out? With half of the family fortunes? To the bad city?

Yes, life on Abram's campsite was worryingly quiet.

Every morning and every evening without fail, Abram would stand at the entrance of his tent with a tear in his eye and scan the dusty horizon in the hope that he would see his nephew coming home.

Weeks and months went by. Still Abram waited for Lot.

One morning, Abram was looking out for Lot as usual when he saw something most unusual racing up the hill towards the campsite.

It was a strange monstrous creature with crazed white eyes, flailing limbs and a terrible wheeze. It was covered in black squelchy goo and it stank. It stank like a million years' worth of rotting vegetables and decomposing sea creatures.

The monster lunged at Abram, but to his surprise it fell short, landing with a splat on Abram's feet. As a puddle of oil began to ooze out beneath it, Abram saw that it was not a monster after all, but a man.

'Sid? Is that you?' Abram gasped.

Now, Sid was from the valley of Siddim, which was right next door to the city of Sodom where Lot lived. That's how Abram knew Sid. Not a lot, but enough to recognise him even

when he was covered in sticky black sludge.

'What on earth happened, Sid?' Abram asked, pinching his wrinkled old nose.

'The King of Sodom started another fight,' Sid spluttered, spitting out mouthfuls of tar.

Globules of black sludge splattered over Abram's tent.

'Not again!' Abram said, rolling his eyes. 'Someone needs to teach that King to stop squabbling with his neighbours.'

'This time,' Sid groaned, 'he declared war on … King Kerdor!'

Abram's jaw dropped. Everybody knew that you didn't pick a fight with King Kerdor.

King Kerdor had the mightiest army in the whole land. It wasn't just one mighty army – it was a whole bunch of mighty armies all fighting together as one huge extra-mighty army. What had the King of Sodom been thinking?

Sid's tears drew streaks on his blackened face. 'The King of Sodom just about escaped with his life, but nearly all his soldiers perished in the Black Swamps.'

You should never, ever go anywhere near the Black Swamps of Siddim. Especially at night. They are made up of pools of oil that seep up from deep underground. They smell so bad that birds fall out of the sky if they fly over them, rats run in the opposite direction and dogs that get too close howl in pain because the dreadful stench hurts their sensitive noses. Anyone unlucky enough to accidentally step into the Black Swamps is immediately sucked under, never to be seen again.

Abram suddenly felt breathless; and it wasn't because he'd been pinching his nose the entire time. He had a bad feeling that there was worse news to come.

'While I was trying to rescue the poor soldiers of Sodom,' Sid continued, 'King Kerdor's army ransacked Sodom. They stole everything.'

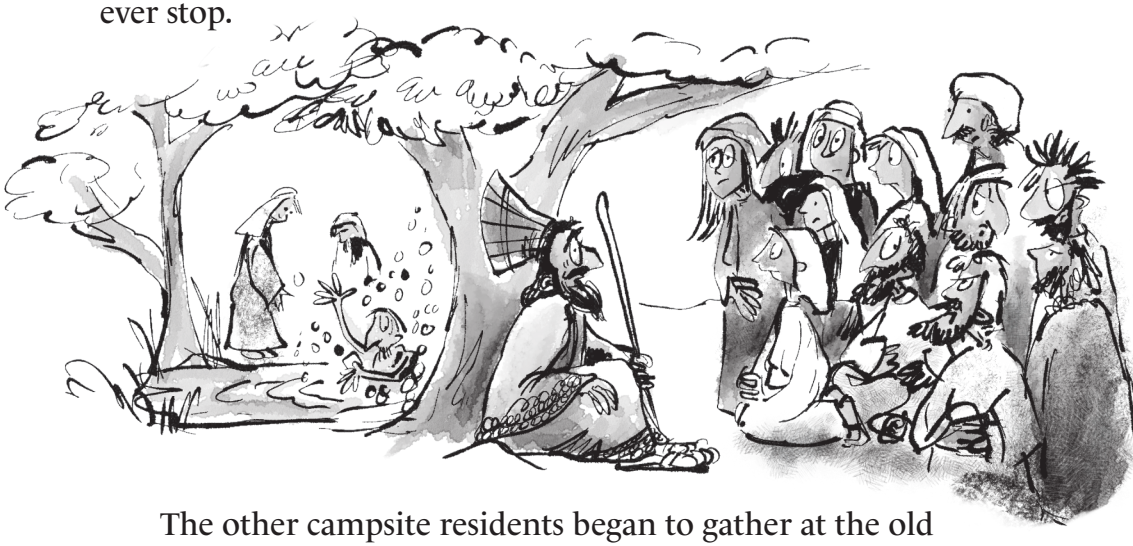
'Everything?' Abram asked.

'All their possessions. All their treasures. All their food supplies. Even all their people!'

'Everyone?'

Sid nodded sadly. 'Everyone. Including your nephew, Lot.'

If you have ever lost something, or someone, important to you, you might understand how Abram felt. Tears of grief poured down the old man's face as though they would never ever stop.



The other campsite residents began to gather at the old oak tree where Abram had slumped. Most of them didn't know what to say.

Some of them got the campfire going.

Others tried to help by making breakfast.

But a few of them stood around muttering. 'Serves the boy right! Lot should never have gone to Sodom in the first place. It was a bad choice. It is a bad city.'

Abram knew what they were saying was true. And this made him sadder than ever.

Meanwhile, with the help of a lot of soapy water and some tough scrubbing, Sid didn't look like a terrible bog monster any more. Good old clean Sid was back.

Abram watched the transformation and began to wonder if there might just be a way to get Lot back too.

'You'd **never** catch up with that marauding army now,' said Sid, blowing the last drops of tarry black oil out of his nostrils. 'It's impossible. You will **never** see your nephew again.'

'Never say never, Sid,' Abram said, getting to his feet. 'Nothing is impossible with God.'

A couple of days later and Sid was still trying to persuade Abram that his idea of rescuing Lot had zero chance of success. By then, they, and 317 men that Abram had paid to come too, had walked many miles on the trail of King Kerdor's army.

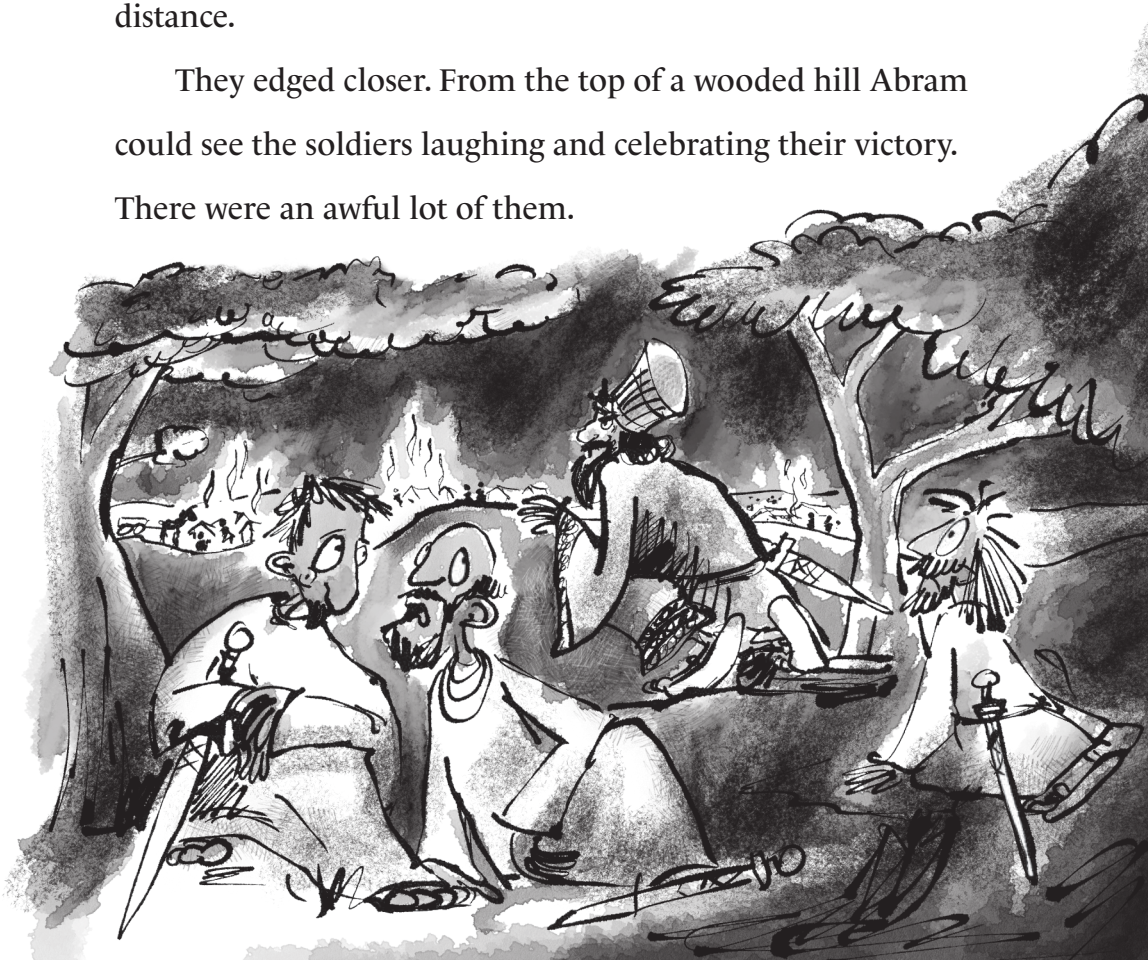
'Our feet are sore!' the men grumbled.

'Our sandwiches are stale!' they moaned.

'Our feet are so sore we put our stale sandwiches in our socks to cushion the blisters! AND NOW WE ARE STARVING!' they complained.

Everybody was ready to give up and go home when Abram suddenly spotted King Kerdor and his army of armies in the distance.

They edged closer. From the top of a wooded hill Abram could see the soldiers laughing and celebrating their victory. There were an awful lot of them.



'Right!' Abram announced. 'Operation Search-and-Find-a-Lot begins at midnight.'

'But Abram,' Sid piped up. 'Is Lot really worth the risk? We'll never get past that lot!'

'Never say never!' Abram said. But inside he was just as worried as Sid. Lot had made a terrible choice, and now 317 men plus Sid were risking their lives for him. But he loved Lot. And he trusted God. Abram would rescue his nephew – or die trying.

'On my first signal,' Abram said, 'you will creep silently down the hill.'

Everyone nodded.

'On my second signal you will split into groups and enter the camp from two directions at once.'

'Then what?' asked Sid.

'You'll see!' said Abram.

'You'll see?' grumbled the men. 'You'll see? In the middle of the night? We won't be able to see a thing. We'll be obliterated, pulverised, annihilated, done for.'

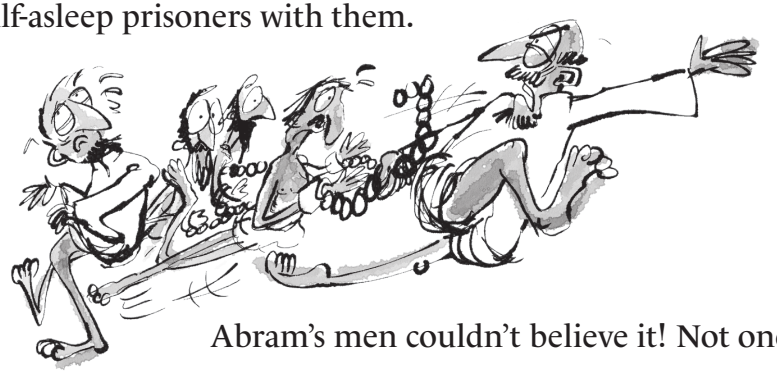
Everyone mumbled about this being the worst military plan ever in the history of bad military plans. But before they could think of an alternative, Abram gave the first signal.

And then he gave the second.

The reluctant men – all 318 of them – stormed King Kerdor's army camp with no idea what would happen next.

The desert creatures that had been enjoying a quiet night-time picnic on the soldier's leftovers saw Abram's men arrive and quickly scarpered – howling and squawking and hissing. The soldiers' horses jumped in fright – neighing and tugging at the carts laden with stolen goods from Sodom. The carts tipped onto their sides and smashed into one another like crashing dominos. All the stolen treasures clattered to the ground. That woke up the lookout soldiers, who shouted warnings, but they were far too late. Meanwhile, Abram's men were running around in circles in a panic not quite knowing what to do next.

There wasn't enough time for the sleepy villains to organise their own trousers, let alone a defence strategy. Tripping over each other in the confusion, they began running away down the road in fright, dragging half-asleep prisoners with them.



Abram's men couldn't believe it! Not one of them had been hurt. They seized the abandoned weapons and as much of the stolen treasure and food as they could carry and began the chase.

They chased them up the road, across the hills, over the river and across some more hills and still they couldn't catch them.

Every time they got close, King Kerdor's army sped up a little more.

Two miles later, Sid begged the old man to stop.

Two hundred miles later, Sid was still begging the old man to stop.

'Never!' Abram said.

'Never? What happened to **"never say never"?'** Sid looked round at the exhausted men behind him.

'I'm not going home without my nephew,' Abram said and picked up the pace.

The men were so tired their eyelids were drooping, their feet were dragging along through the dust and saliva was drooling down their chins. Occasionally one of them yawned, which made everyone else yawn. They were far too weary even to think about arguing with Abram. Nobody said a word.

Suddenly there was a noise in the leaves just ahead. Abram's old heart nearly missed a beat. Was this an ambush? Had he managed to chase King Kerdor's army for miles, only to be finished off by a bunch of robbers hiding in the

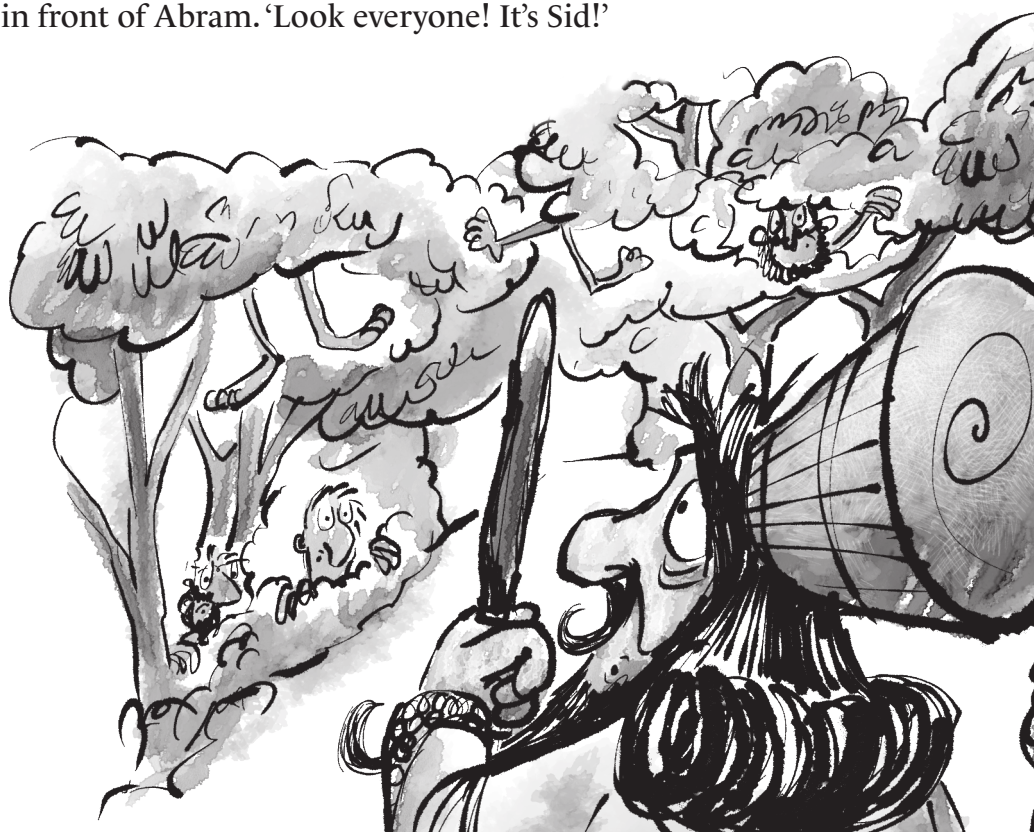
undergrowth? His hopes of finding Lot faded away once more.

Abram's men were now scared as well as exhausted. They dropped their treasures and food supplies onto the ground. But just as they were about to turn to run for their lives, they heard something which didn't sound at all like a robber.

'Isn't that my grandmother's silver chamber pot?' asked a surprised voice from up a tree.

'I recognise that gold plate!' called another from the other side of the road.

'And I recognise something else!' said a third, jumping out in front of Abram. 'Look everyone! It's Sid!'



To Abram's great surprise, he soon found himself surrounded by people he recognised from Sodom. After being captured by King Kerdor, dragged away for hundreds of miles and then dumped in a forest to be eaten by wild animals, they couldn't thank Abram enough for rescuing them, and reuniting them with all their stolen treasures.

But where was Lot?

Eventually the old man spotted one prisoner standing at a distance, looking embarrassed and ashamed. He couldn't even look up as Abram ran over to him.

'I'm sorry, Uncle,' Lot mumbled. 'This is all my fault. If it weren't for my bad choices, you wouldn't have had to risk your

life – and everyone else's. I don't deserve to go home with you.'

Abram smiled as he put his arms around Lot and squeezed him tight. This was the boy he loved like the son he had never had. All was forgiven.

If you have ever lost and then found something, or someone, important to you, you might understand how Abram felt. Tears of happiness poured down the old man's face as he ran around telling everyone the great news.

‘Let’s celebrate!’ Abram shouted at last. ‘Lot who was lost has now been found!!’

Right there by the side of the road, one old but intrepid Iraqi man, his favourite nephew, all the freed captives, 317 men – and Sid – enjoyed a party the likes of which they would never see again.

‘Never say never!’ Abram smiled, tucking into a kebab.

Abram

You can read the original story in Genesis 14. Read on in Genesis to discover more of Abram's adventures on his quest for the right city whose architect and builder was God. See for yourself how God kept on making the impossible possible.