

The Girl of Ink & Stars

A flashback is a technique authors use to take readers back to an earlier time in a story. The following extract is taken from the novel *The Girl of Ink & Stars* by Kiran Millwood Hargrave, which is about a girl named Isabella who lives on the island of Joya. Here, Isabella is walking to school and looks out at a ship moored in the harbour which belongs to the governor of the island.

It crouched over the fishing fleet like a mountain, huge and unmoving. Like everything the Governor had, it took up far more space than it ought to.

To the east, his house glinted in the sunrise. Built from black basalt and big as five ships, the mansion sat between the blue sea and the green forest, spreading out over the fields like a storm cloud. From here, though, it looked small enough to squash between my forefinger and thumb. Below it was the village, with the school halfway between.

The old school building had been small but bright, and we had painted the walls rainbow colours with whatever dyes Da could spare. But then the Governor had knocked it down — Lupe had decided she'd had enough of being taught alone at home and demanded to be sent to the local school like the rest of us.

Governor Adori had rebuilt it from stone, twice as big, because if his daughter was going, it had to look grander.

“Not for me, you understand,” said Lupe with a sad smile. She adopted an even posher voice to add, “To uphold the family honour.”

We weren't allowed to paint the walls of the new school. A lot of children were unkind to Lupe because of that, but I knew it wasn't her fault.



Behind the Governor's house, closest to the forest, were the orchards, where I had never been. I squinted at the ant-like specks of the labourers there and wondered which one was Pablo. To the west, the black sand of the beaches was almost covered by the incoming tide. We were not permitted to be on the beaches at high tide, and no one was allowed in the sea unless they were launching one of the Governor's boats. My toes itched. Da had described being in the sea, but it was not the same as trying it for myself.

Above the beaches were the clay mines, which I tried not to look at because it brought back one of the few clear memories I had of Ma — the day she took Gabo and me to the mines. She taught us how to tie ourselves with vines to a dragon tree — You knot like this, and then rub the sap into your hands for grip — and lowered us one by one into the gorge. Gabo got scared and wriggled so much the knot broke. When he landed on the soft mud at the bottom, it made a very rude noise, and he was filthy when Ma climbed up with him from the darkness.

I laughed so hard it hurt.

I remembered that, that ache in my belly. How it came back two months later, when Ma died. Only then it was sharper, and there was no one carrying anyone out of that darkness. Three years later, the same sweating sickness took Gabo. Three years after that, the clay mine memory still made my throat feel tight.



An extract from *The Girl of Ink & Stars* by Kiran Millwood Hargrave.

Consider

Think of a time when you had fun with your family or friends. What makes it such a memorable time? How would you describe it? Remember to include feelings and reactions as well as description of what happened.

