

# MEET THE



Kim

**Age:** 22

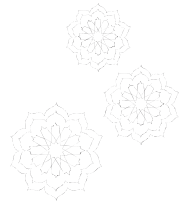
**Hobby:** playing in a rock band with her brothers

**Future Goal:** FBI agent

**Pet at Home:** black cat named Chip

**Best Quality:** fearlessness

# CHARACTERS



*Leyla*

**Age:** 11

**Hobby:** collecting wildflowers from the desert with her friends

**Future Goal:** to go to college in France

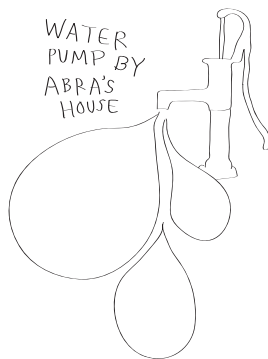
**Most Disliked Chore:** washing dishes

**Best Quality:** determination

# 1

## IRAQ, 2004

When I was a young girl, my village was in one piece. Now I am twelve. My village is broken. I walk to the water pump with my pail. I rush past the house where Abra lived. I spent much time there. Now only a pile of bricks remains.



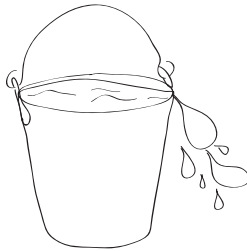
Abra and I played together. She was my best friend. Then a bomb went off. Her father died. So did her brother. Abra and her mother moved away. I don't know where they went. She didn't have time to say good-bye.



I stop in the alley between two buildings. I study the market. My father taught me to do this. Every day my mother reminds me. I need to see who is there. Make sure things are peaceful. As usual, there are three U.S. soldiers. GIs. They carry big guns. They walk calmly. They say “*al salaam a’alaykum*” to the men and women. They

give candy to the children. Hakim kicks a soccer ball to Mika. The ball gets away. A GI picks it up. He tosses it to them.

I take a big breath. Leave the alley. Walk to the water pump. Set the pail under the spout. Move the crank up and down. Water gushes out. The pail fills quickly. I lift it with both hands. It is heavy. I walk away as fast as I can. I am supposed to go right home.



“You are very strong,” a GI says to me in Arabic.

It is not good Arabic. Just good enough to understand. But that is not what makes me stop. It is the voice. A woman’s voice.