



TWIST

BY CHINO ODIMBA

Twist by Chino Odimba – Synopsis

Nancy is running from the police. Again. She has snatched a bag from a café – a bag that she’s wanted for ages. She’s on the run.

It is 2019. Abdo, a small boy from Syria, is escorted into an interrogation room by two police officers. They grill him. He begins to tell his story.

New Year’s Day, 2003. Syria. The Dabool family are celebrating the birth of their son Abdo. Lena, a scientist, and Amir, a journalist, are beside themselves with happiness. Lena is the picture of maternal love. Amir, heads into the garden to plant a pomegranate tree, marking the birth of Abdo – a tree that will grow as Abdo grows.

2013. Abdo’s Mother Lena is on the phone to Yasmin, a family friend who lives in the UK. Lena doesn’t know where Amir is. She is frantic with worry and knows they will come for her soon, but can’t bear the thought of leaving without her husband. Yasmin suggests sending Abdo to the UK, but Lena will not leave him. Lena tells Abdo that his Father has had to go away; that she doesn’t know when he will be back. She tells him they will have to leave their home. Lena tells him to take some seeds to plant in their new home – his Father would have liked that.

Back in the interrogation room, the officers press Abdo about what happened in Aleppo. He explains they left for Turkey in the back of a lorry and went to a camp in Kahramanmaras.

It is 2016 in the refugee camp in Kahramanmaras. A nurse explains to Abdo that his Mother is sick and will not get better. Abdo has to say goodbye. The nurse hands him a plastic bag of all of his Mother’s belongings. Abdo takes the seeds.

2016. Nancy is staring into a mobile phone. She explains that she received two bad phone calls the day before. One from a friend of Skinner’s offering “goods from Turkey.” The other from her Auntie Pat to let her know her Mum had died. They weren’t close – but Nancy regrets the fact that she never had the chance to make her Mum proud.

Back in the interrogation room, the police officers press Abdo for further details. They can’t find Yasmin in their database and they think he’s trying to fool them.

After a while in the refugee camp, Abdo is picked up by Mr Bossman who invites him to work in a factory where there will be football and food. In the factory, Abdo is being tormented by a group of boys who convince him to ask Mr Bossman for more food, in front of the “men from Europe” – the factory inspectors. Abdo does so, asking “Please Sir, can I have some more?” Mr Bossman is furious and slaps Abdo. The boys laugh and taunt Abdo for having no family. Abdo fights back and then runs away.

Abdo awakens in a park where a woman, Rasha, is feeding the birds. She sees that he is hungry and desperate and invites Abdo to her home. There, Abdo meets Luka. Luka is suspicious of him at first but then offers to tell Abdo a story of adventure; he says he will help Abdo get to the UK where his Auntie Yasmin lives. Luka is a trafficker.

Abdo embarks on his dangerous journey, first by boat to Italy (they are lucky to survive the crossing), then by car to Dunkirk (Abdo becomes unwell, a young lady offers him food), finally by Lorry to the UK (he is told not to move or breathe).

Nancy is reading the newspaper. She wants to find out more about the refugee crisis now that Fabian says there's one of them on the way. What she's read is horrible. She knows it's something they shouldn't get involved in.

In the interrogation room the officers have begun to realise this is a case of trafficking and that they'll need to get immigration involved. They urge Abdo to tell them who he met in the UK. Abdo begins to tell them about the gang.

Dodger is a proper Londoner, talking at a million miles an hour about how easily she gets boys. She's taking Abdo to Fabian's house and tells Abdo that Fabian will look after him and keep him fed, as long as Abdo doesn't wind him up. She's not so favourable about Skinner, the leader of the gang.

At the house Fabian introduces himself to Abdo and explains that it's taken a lot of hard work and money to get Abdo this far. Abdo, still naïve, is eager to know where his Auntie Yasmin is. Fabian's temper is short and he snaps at Abdo that he will need to make some of the money back that it took to get him here, by working for Fabian; only then will see his Auntie Yasmin.

It is New Year's Day 2018; Abdo is singing Happy Birthday to himself when Nancy enters. She's full of swagger, but shocked to see how young and small Abdo is. She asks him about the plant he is growing in the window when Skinner walks in; he ignores Abdo and barks at Nancy to hurry up.

The police officers know Nancy Gold all too well and know she's involved in Skinner's gang. The officers explain to Abdo that they're thugs and operating a huge criminal gang. Abdo is distracted, thinking of Nancy who he has grown hugely affectionate toward.

Nancy grows increasingly distressed at Abdo's arrival in London. He's so small and he's come such a long way all on his own. She wonders whether the protection of the gang will be good for him. Nancy tries to hide a bag of clothes from Skinner that she's taking to Abdo but he catches her. She's grown affectionate towards him, but Skinner is having none of it. He's angry Nancy thinks Abdo deserves anything more than them, especially 'some foreign scrounger'.

Fabian and Skinner enter the flat. Fabian's fists are bloody. He yells at the gang for making too much noise. Skinner tells Fabian he wants Abdo. He's got no criminal record and no fingerprints – clean as a whistle. Fabian is reluctant, he offers the other boys but Skinner isn't having any of it. Abdo is playing with his phone. Skinner spots it and demands Abdo gives him the phone. Abdo doesn't move. Fabian wrestles it from him. Abdo pleads with Fabian – he has to call his Auntie Yasmin. Fabian hits him.

Nancy explains the big plan Skinner has for Abdo and the gang. They're going to the Winter Fair where Abdo has been told to distract crowds with a sob story about him coming from Syria whilst they swipe wallets and cards from the crowds. Skinner enters, thrilled with his plan to put Abdo to use. He tells Nancy it doesn't matter if Abdo is caught – he's no one and he's selling him on after the Winter fair anyway. He wants to 'get proper rid'.

It is night time. Abdo lays bruised alone in the flat. Nancy creeps in quietly, putting a finger to Abdo's lips for him to be quiet and helps care for him. Abdo collects a small pomegranate tree from the window sill and offers it to Nancy. She is clearly moved. Abdo tells Nancy she reminds him of his Mum. Fabian enters and catches their tender exchange. He challenges Nancy, asking if Skinner knows where she is, knowing he won't. They argue and Fabian threatens Nancy to watch her back – he's never known anyone who betrays Skinner to survive.

Back in the interrogation room the officers are wary of how deeply Abdo has been involved in the gang. They think he could be as deep in it as they are.

It's the day of the big job at the Winter Fair. Abdo is told to distract people with his "sob story" whilst the gang move in and lift wallets from pockets. Nancy runs them through a card machine – they're making money! Then, there is a commotion. Someone has caught one of the boys and has him by the

neck. They all run except for Abdo, who can't leave his friend and helps him escape. Nancy is watching ahead, they're all running, but Abdo isn't going fast enough. He's been caught.

Skinner is furious, pacing up and down the room. Nancy tries to calm him but Dodger is making matters worse, asking how long they'll go to prison for. Fabian snaps at Dodger. The atmosphere is tense until Skinner remembers Abdo's phone. He's got a plan. Skinner calls Yasmin and pretends to be a refugee charity, putting on a kind voice. He asks Yasmin's address, who gives it up freely thinking she'll be reunited with Abdo.

Abdo is alone with just one of the officers. Abdo explains that he knows he has been involved in terrible things – that his Mother would be ashamed of him. He tells the officer he doesn't ever leave the house because the gang have told him everyone hates foreigners, that he'll be skinned alive.

The officer reassures Abdo, realising just how much he has had to overcome. The other officer enters and asks the officer outside.

Nancy is waiting in another interrogation room. She explains that Abdo is innocent and just trying to find his Aunty Yasmin. He's been trafficked specifically because he's dispensable to the gang – no fingerprints. She tells them that Skinner and Fabian have gone to Yasmin's house, that if they go quickly they'll be able to catch them there together, before they do something terrible to Yasmin.

The officers ask Nancy if she knows what this means for her – that she's incriminating herself. Nancy doesn't care, she only wants Abdo free and safe. She's glad she's finally being someone her Mum can be proud of, no matter what happens to her.

Abdo and Nancy are reunited. Nancy tells Abdo she's told them everything, that they've found his Aunty Yasmin and he will be safe now. The officers warn that there will be more interviews to come, but for now, they won't lock him up.

Abdo gives Nancy the last of the seeds he's been carrying in his pocket. He tells Nancy she can grow her own flowers now.