

STORIES OF CHANGE

The one that **got away**



The Vanguard Series

The Vanguard Series: Paving innovative ways to combat trafficking and unsafe migration

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Written by Ian Pugh, based on true stories.

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Taem watched carefully as his float began to twitch on the surface of the water. At exactly the right moment, he gave his rod a flick and felt he had something.

‘About time!’ he muttered, as he reeled the fish in. He heard someone chuckling behind him. A man was sitting, watching him from the shade of a nearby tree.

‘I can see you’ve done this before,’ the man said with a grin.

Taem took the fish off the hook and prepared to cast again.



After he had caught a few more, Taem decided to rest beneath the tree.

‘You’ve done well,’ the man said.


‘I need to catch a lot more,’ said Taem. ‘I’m the oldest of 10 children. I’m 19 years old and I want to be working. But there are no jobs around here, so fishing is the best I can do.’

‘You should get a job on a fishing boat in Thailand,’ the man said. ‘They pay over 100,000 baht a year.’

‘100,000!’ Taem gasped.

The man introduced himself as Sovann and told Taem that he would be happy to help him get on a boat.



The background of the page is a stylized illustration of a bus interior. It features several passengers: a man with dark hair and a mustache on the left, a young boy with dark hair in the center, and a woman with yellow skin and dark hair on the right. The bus has green and white striped seats. The overall color palette is warm, with various shades of brown and tan.

Taem discussed the job with his family. As usual, his mother started to worry, but Taem just smiled and squeezed her hand. 'Don't worry, Mother,' he said. 'Everything is going to be fine. I promise.'

Sovann organised everything and a few days later, Taem crossed from Cambodia into Thailand and was travelling to Pattani Province with 18 other migrants.

Sitting on the bus, Taem felt his excitement growing. 'This is the beginning of a new chapter,' he thought. 'Now I'll really be able to provide for my family!'



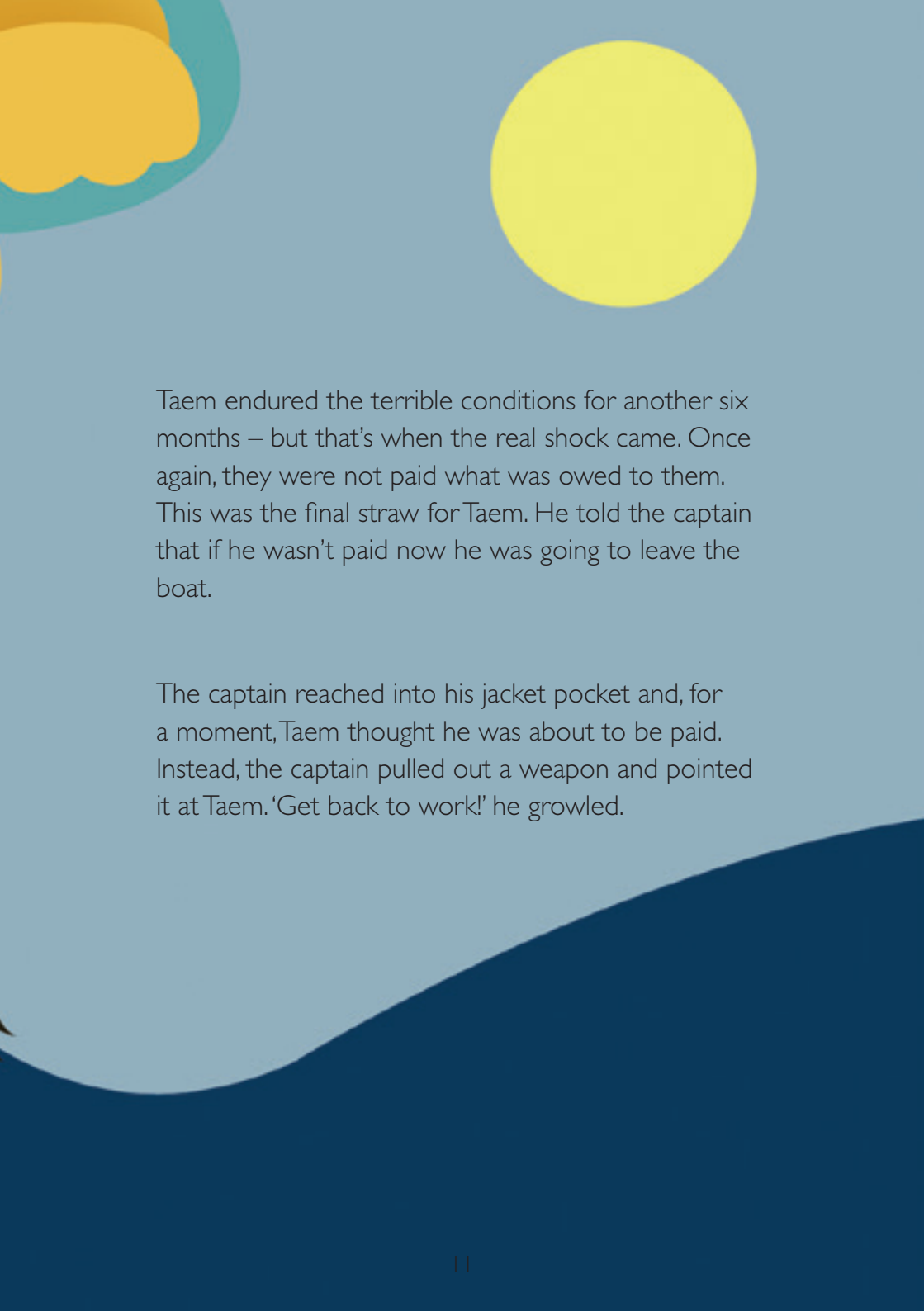
As soon as they arrived in Pattani, they were put to work on fishing boats. The work was hard and conditions were tough. The boats were out on the water for weeks at a time, only returning to shore for repairs. Taem and the other crew were forced to work from dawn until late at night with no time to rest.

After a month of hard work, Taem was surprised at how little he was paid. He asked the captain about the money and was told that he would receive the full amount only after seven months of work.









Taem endured the terrible conditions for another six months – but that's when the real shock came. Once again, they were not paid what was owed to them. This was the final straw for Taem. He told the captain that if he wasn't paid now he was going to leave the boat.

The captain reached into his jacket pocket and, for a moment, Taem thought he was about to be paid. Instead, the captain pulled out a weapon and pointed it at Taem. 'Get back to work!' he growled.



Over the following months, Taem became more and more desperate. He was not eating or sleeping well. The food was disgusting, and the sleeping quarters were filthy and cramped. When he started to get sick, he realised that his only chance of survival was to escape.







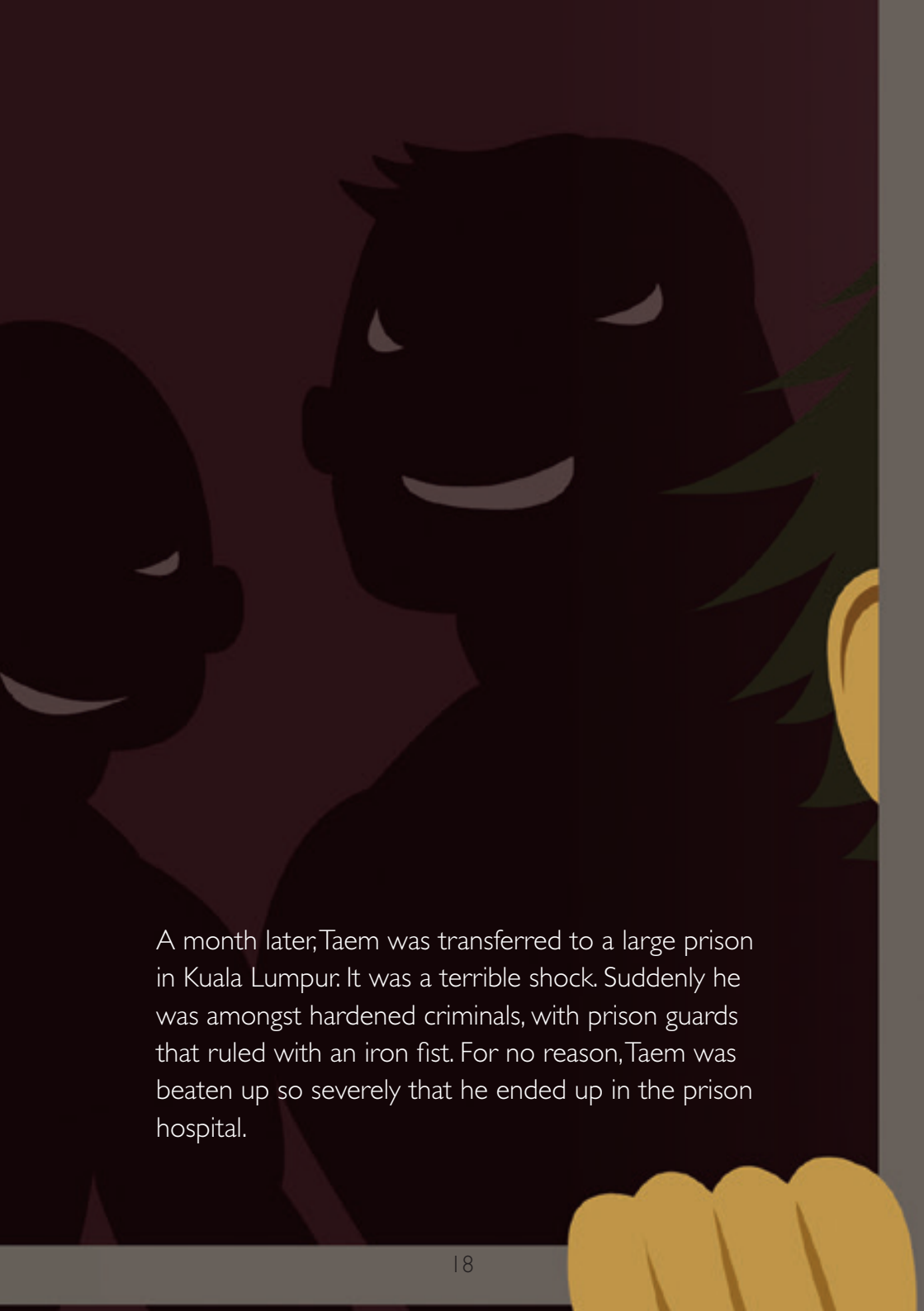
One dark and rainy night, the boat pulled into a Malaysian port for supplies. As usual, none of the crew members were allowed to go ashore. But Taem decided that it was now or never. He crept out onto the deck and dove overboard. The captain fired shots into the water but Taem kept swimming through the oily darkness until his lungs were about to burst.

In the shadow of another fishing boat, Taem pulled himself quietly out of the water and ran off into the night.



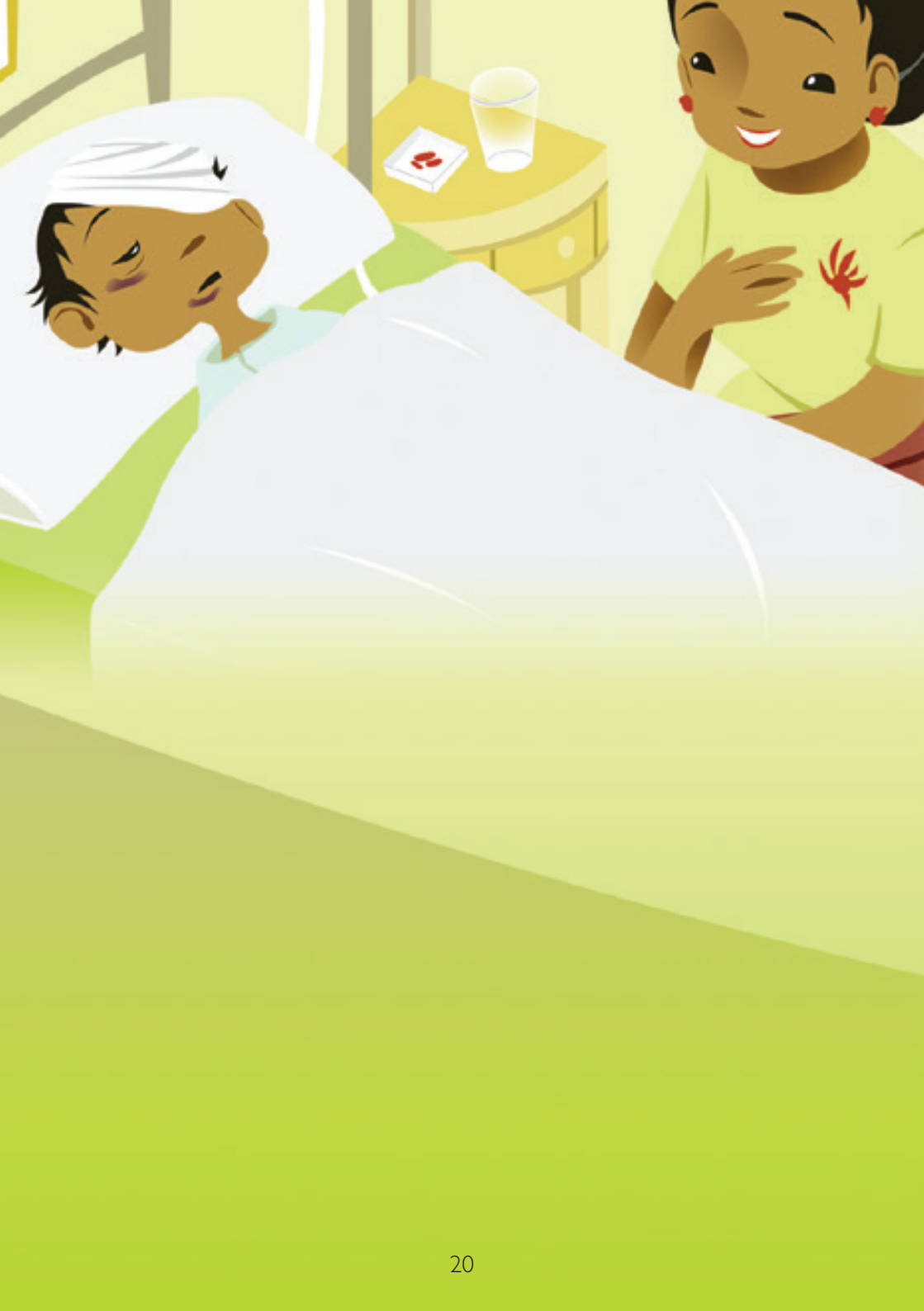
Taem wandered the streets of the strange town. His only possessions were the drenched clothes he was wearing. By morning, he was so cold and hungry that he had no choice but to beg people for food or money. Someone must have been suspicious of him because the Malaysian police suddenly arrived and locked him up in a detention centre.






A month later, Taem was transferred to a large prison in Kuala Lumpur. It was a terrible shock. Suddenly he was amongst hardened criminals, with prison guards that ruled with an iron fist. For no reason, Taem was beaten up so severely that he ended up in the prison hospital.







Lying in his hospital bed, Taem had all but given up hope when a smartly dressed woman entered the ward and approached his bed. The words she spoke were the best Taem had ever heard.

'I'm from the Cambodian embassy,' she said.

A few weeks later, Taem was flown home. He had wondered whether he would ever see his family again. Now they were all there to greet him. When he saw their smiles and outstretched arms, he could not hold back the tears.

Once he settled back in, Taem was visited by a staff member from World Vision and a government social worker. They asked him what kind of work he was interested in and helped him enroll in a vocational training school, which involved working in a barber salon. He loved being able to earn money while he was learning.









When he finished his course, World Vision helped Taem buy salon materials so he could start his own business. He is now a well-known and respected barber in his community and earns between US\$2.50 and \$5 per day. He hopes to expand the business soon so he can afford to send his two young brothers to university.

Whenever he can, Taem likes to tell people what happened to him. 'People need to be aware of the dangers,' he says. 'No one should ever have to go through what I went through.'

A stylized landscape illustration featuring a light green background with two large, white, rounded shapes resembling clouds or hills. In the bottom left corner, there is a dark green silhouette of a tree. In the bottom right corner, a dark blue line representing a fishing rod extends from the edge into a green area representing water, with three concentric circles indicating ripples.

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