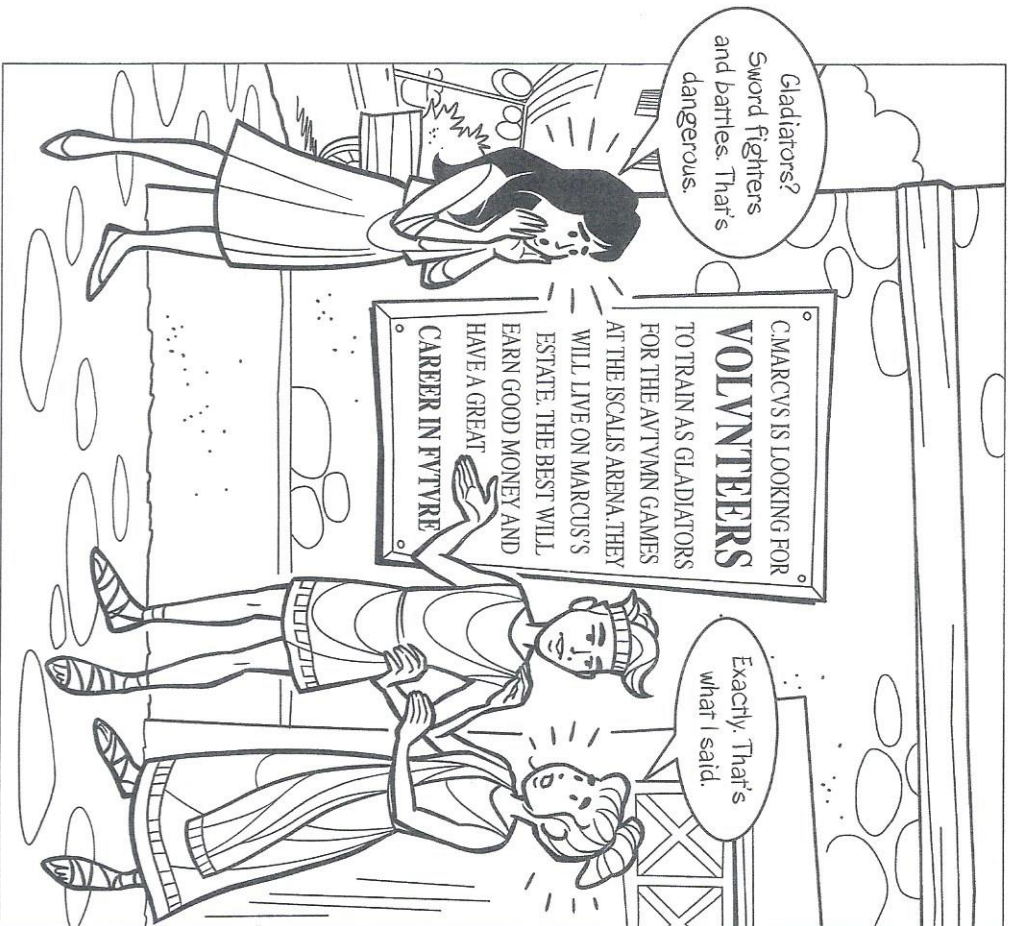


Later, they stopped outside the town hall.  
"Look at this," Philo said, and pointed at a notice.



"But you aren't going to become a gladiator, Philo, right?" said Maya.  
"Yes, I am, Maya," Philo said. "I start next week. It's a great chance for me. I can earn a lot of money and help our family."  
"Isn't there anything else you can do?" Maya asked.  
"Not really. Our father is dead. Our mother works hard for little money, and we can't make much from our small piece of land."



"Anyway," Philo went on, "it's time to go home now."  
"Where are you living while you're here?" Martia asked Maya.  
"Er... oh, I'm not sure."  
"Are you here on your own?" Philo wanted to know.  
"No, my mother... my mother just went somewhere. She'll be back soon, I think."  
Martia and Philo looked at each other.  
"Well, you can come home with us for now," Martia said.  
"Yes," Philo agreed. "We'll adopt you."  
"What? No," Maya said. "My mother really is coming back soon."  
"Only a joke, Maya. I just mean that you can stay with us until your mother comes back."  
Maya took a deep breath.  
"OK," she said and they walked off together through the town. After some minutes they arrived at a small house with just one floor.  
"This is where we live, Maya," said Philo as he opened the door. "Welcome to our home."  
"You look thirsty," said Martia. "Would you like something to drink?"  
"I'm very hot," said Maya. "Maybe I could have an iced tea?"  
"Sorry?" said Martia. "What's that?"  
"It's OK," Maya answered. "I'll just have a glass of water."



### Chapter 3 What's happened to Philo?

Maya sat in the grass and looked down at the bridge that went into Iscalis. The late summer sun was hot on her back. Martia was kneeling in front of her next to a big basket of berries.

"Collecting berries is hard work. And my hands are so sticky from the juice," Maya said.

"Yes," Martia nodded, "and it's so hot, I'm melting."

Maya came closer to Martia. "Do you know?" she said. "This is where we first met."

"Yes," Martia said, and suddenly her eyes filled with tears. "Philo found you here."



On their way back home through town, the two girls stopped at the fountain outside the baths for a drink of water – and to wash their sticky hands.

"Maybe we should go and look for Philo,"

Maya said.

"Look for him? Where?"

"On Marcus's estate, of course."

"But that's in the middle of the forest. It's dangerous there. Haven't you heard those reports about the monster, Maya?"

"Monster?"

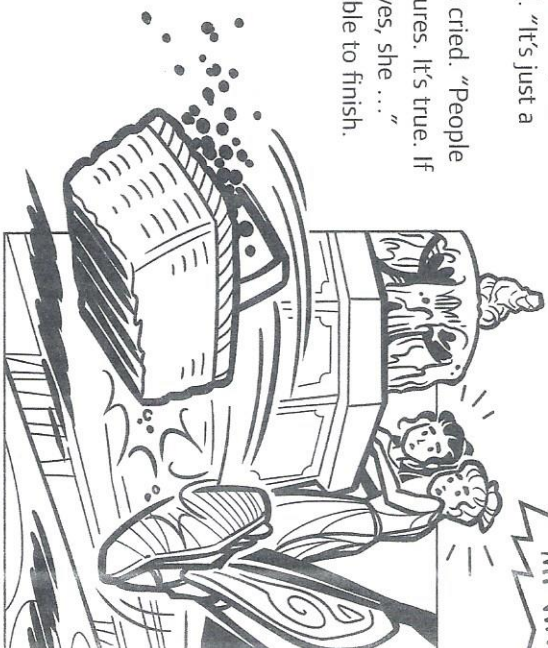
"Yes. Everyone in Iscalis is talking about her. She wanders around the forest at night and, if someone looks at her, she turns them into stone."



"That's sound like Medusa, the Gorgon," Maya said. "It's just a story."

"No, Maya!" Martia cried. "People have seen stone figures. It's true. If you look into her eyes, she ..."

But Martia wasn't able to finish.





Martia knelt down and carefully picked up each berry, but Maya ran after the man and his guards and shouted, "Who do you think you are? We've just collected all those berries!"

The man stopped and turned to Maya. His mouth opened in a terrible grin and she could see his horrible, yellow teeth.

"I am Caius Marcus. And who, may I ask, are you?"

"Caius Marcus?" Maya's mouth opened in surprise. "I ... er ... my name is Maya ... er, ... I ... I, er ..."

"Speak up, girl!" Marcus went on. "Have you lost your tongue?"

"What's happened to Philo?" Maya suddenly shouted. "He's a gladiator at your estate, but no one has heard from him for months. Where is he?"

Marcus's grin disappeared and his face went dark.



Then Marcus licked his lips, tapped his stomach, and walked away behind his guards.

They picked up the berries and put them back in the basket.

"Now you've seen what a horrible man Marcus is," said Martia. "Don't make an enemy of him, Maya. We'll all be in danger if you do."

Maya nodded. "Yes, I can believe that. But he knows something about Philo, Martia. I'm telling you, it's the truth. I saw it in his eyes."

"Do you really think so?" Martia asked.

"Yes, I do," Maya answered. "You know, Martia – if we went out to Marcus's estate, I'm sure we could find out what has happened."

"But what about the monster?" cried Martia. "Aren't you afraid?"

"Martia," said Maya. "If we want to look for Philo, we have to do this."

The two girls set off. It was late afternoon when they arrived at Marcus's country estate.

"Look!" said Maya, as they came out of the forest. "That must be the villa where Marcus lives."

"Do you think that's where the gladiators live too?" asked Martia.

"We'll soon find out," Maya answered.

