

STORIES

FOR
BOYS



Who
DARE
-TO BE-
DIFFERENT?

EVEN MORE TRUE TALES OF AMAZING
BOYS WHO CHANGED THE WORLD

Ben Brooks

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ILLUSTRATED BY QUINTON WINTER



RP KIDS
PHILADELPHIA

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CARLOS ACOSTA

(BORN 1973)

Carlos grew up in a poor neighborhood in Cuba. He was kicked out of school when he was young, and his dad ended up in prison. Carlos was sent to the National Ballet School of Cuba simply because it was a place that could afford to feed him.

But his natural talent soon became apparent.

In 1990, Carlos won the Prix de Lausanne, a competition that pits hundreds of dancers from across the world against each other.

Carlos then traveled to Russia and became the first foreign person to become a guest artist for the Bolshoi Ballet. At twenty-five, he became the first black person to become a principal dancer at the Royal Ballet in the United Kingdom, as well as the first black person to play Romeo in a ballet.

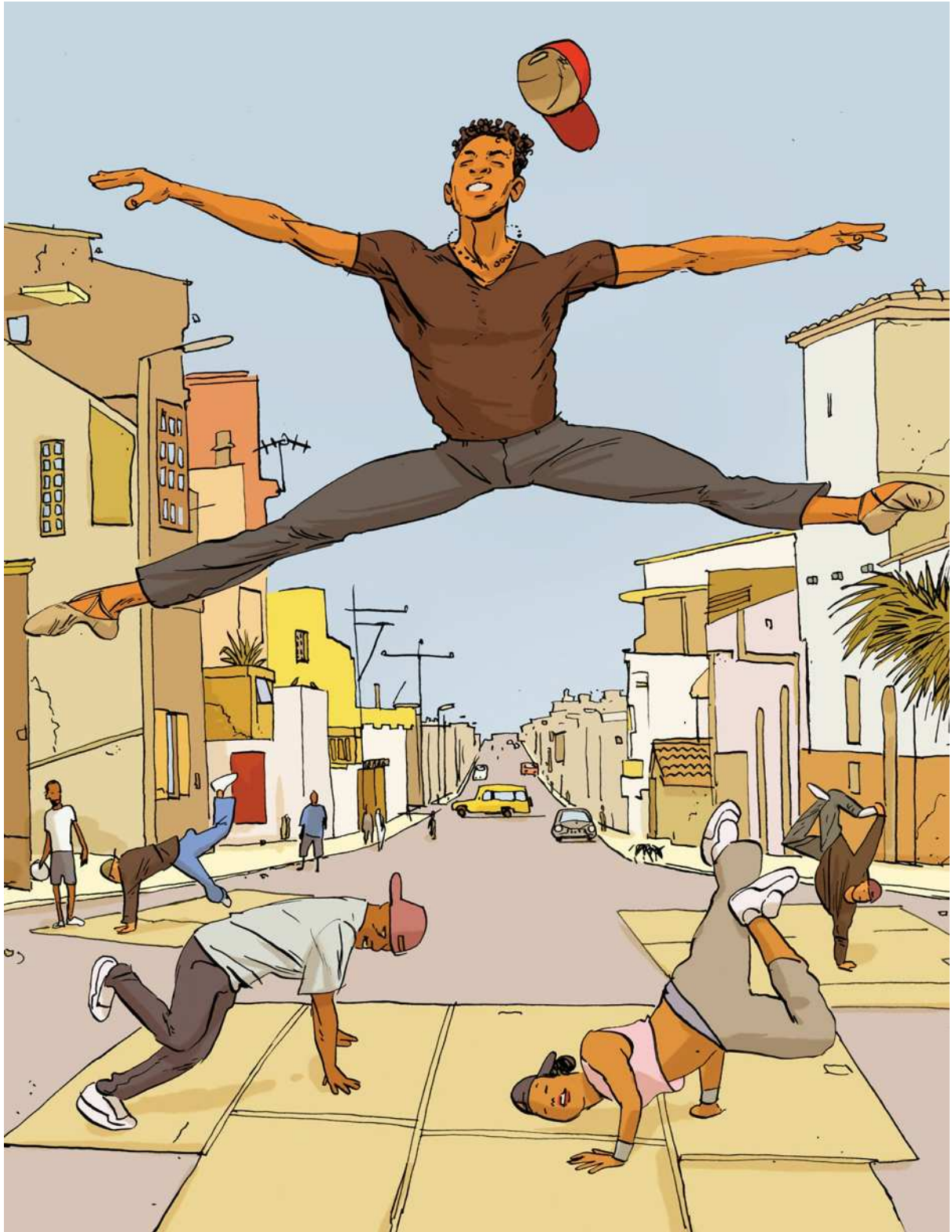
“Nobody who looks like me has ever played the roles I dance,” said Carlos. “When I first appeared in *Swan Lake* at the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York, the auditorium was packed with black people.”

He blew spectators away with his speed, precision, grace, and power. His otherworldly, flowing, electrified way of moving brought new life to many old ballets.

But ballet is famously tough on the body. Joints creak, feet bleed, and blisters form and burst. At forty-two, Carlos embarked on a farewell tour to mark his retirement from ballet. Five thousand people a night would turn up to cheer and cry as the dancer who’d lit up their lives whirled across the stage for the final time. After his last performance, the audience

hurled roses onto the stage and gave him a standing ovation that lasted an entire twenty minutes.

Carlos is now creating an academy in Cuba where people can study dance for free, hoping to nurture the beloved dancers of the future.





NOUSHAD AFRIDI & KHITTABSHAH SHINWARI

In 2002, a British reporter named Amardeep Bassey traveled to Afghanistan to chronicle the impact that the American invasion was having on its people. It was a dangerous place and, for safety, he hired two local guides, Noushad and Khittabshah.

Both Noushad and Khittabshah belonged to Pashtun tribes who dwell in the Khyber Pass, a dangerous, mountainous route that is the main connection between Afghanistan and Pakistan. Together they helped Amardeep successfully cross from Pakistan to Afghanistan. In the capital city of Kabul, the reporter interviewed ordinary people about how the war had affected their daily lives. Then he headed back into Pakistan with Noushad and Khittabshah.

They were stopped at the border. Amardeep was told he didn't have the correct visa to pass through.

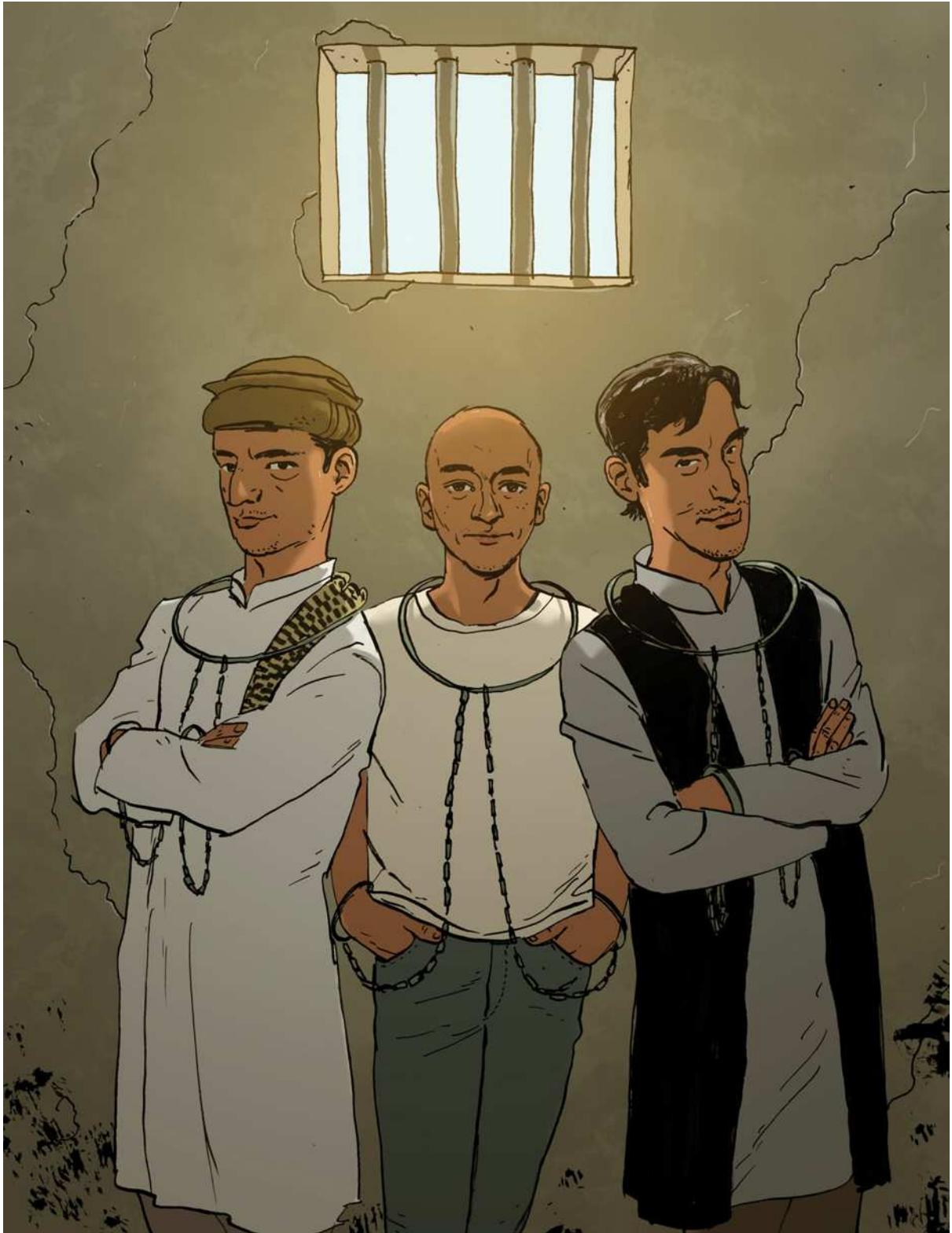
"You two may go," the border guard told the Pashtun tribesmen. "But we are taking him."

The guards were convinced that Amardeep was an Indian spy. They hauled him off to jail, where he was locked in a small cell filled with robbers, murderers, and terrorists. Coming from the West meant he would have very likely been a huge target for violence inside the prison. However, he was not alone. Noushad and Khittabshah had volunteered to be arrested alongside him. They were not going to abandon a man they'd promised to protect.

"Without them, I would have crumbled," said Amardeep.

The two men looked after him for twenty-eight days. When Amardeep was finally released, they were made to stay inside the jail until he'd left Pakistan.

The three of them kept in touch. Some years later, Amardeep returned to Pakistan to thank the men who went through prison to help a stranger from a distant land.





IBRAHIM AL HUSSEIN

(BORN 1988)

Ibrahim grew up with thirteen siblings in Deir ez-Zor in Syria. They would spend their days playing basketball, practicing Judo, and swimming in the blue waters of the Euphrates River. Then civil war broke out.

One day, Ibrahim was in the street when rockets crashed down around him. He threw himself into the nearest building for cover. That was when he started hearing cries for help. His friend had been hurt and was lying in the open.

Sprinting out to help him, Ibrahim was struck by a rocket.

He managed to haul himself to safety, but the damage to his leg was irreparable. It had to be amputated. Medical services and supplies were so limited that Ibrahim woke up twice during the harrowing operation and was sent home the next day without any pain relief.

Seeking better medical care, Ibrahim traveled to Turkey and made the dangerous crossing to Greece on a rubber dingy. He was granted asylum and settled in Athens. Initially, Ibrahim used a wheelchair for transport but was eventually fitted for a prosthetic leg. He used it as a chance to get back into swimming.

Two years later, Ibrahim competed in the Paralympics in Brazil, as part of the Independent Paralympic Athletes Team, a group made of refugees and asylum seekers. He was also chosen by Greece to carry their Olympic torch. Proudly, Ibrahim raised the lit beacon as he walked through a refugee camp in the center of Athens.

“I am carrying the flame for myself,” Ibrahim said. “But also for Syrians, for refugees everywhere.”

There are now an estimated sixty-five million displaced people around the world. Ibrahim hopes he can act as proof they can rebuild their lives.





BISI ALIMI

(BORN 1975)

It is unthinkable dangerous to be gay in Nigeria. You can be sent to prison for years or even be sentenced to death. As a result, almost no Nigerians are openly gay. In 2004, Bisi became the first person ever to come out on Nigerian television.

Bisi was an actor on a popular show, and various people who knew about his sexuality had been threatening to use that information against him. Bisi decided to take control before the declaration took him by surprise.

It cost him everything.

His character was immediately killed off, the live element of the show he'd come out on was canceled, no one would give him any other work, and he was subjected to years of cruel discrimination. Leaving the house became a huge risk. Bisi found ways to become involved with outreach work, trying to educate gay men about the dangers of HIV. But Nigeria was no longer safe for him.

One night, a group of men broke into Bisi's house. They tortured him and his boyfriend. The only way the couple could survive was to flee the country.

Bisi was given asylum in Britain in 2009 and has been living there since. He's earned a university degree in global governance, has worked for various charities, and has now set up his own organization: the Bisi Alimi Foundation. They aim to tell the stories of lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender (LGBT) people in Nigeria, put pressure on employers and politicians to open their hearts to them, and draw the world's attention to

how painful life is for gay people there. Bisi hasn't given up hope of making a difference.

"I am a prisoner of hope," he says. "I believe that we do move as human beings and we do change. I strongly believe that Nigeria is going to change."





AMROU AL-KADHI

(BORN 1990)

Amrou prefers not to be called “he” or “him.” At first, it can be slightly confusing for those who aren’t used to it, but avoiding these pronouns can help people who don’t feel comfortable being gender-defined.

Amrou prefers “them” and “their.” “It feels like a warm bath,” they say. “It makes me feel like I’m being heard and that someone sees me, not for being a ‘man,’ but for being Amrou.”

And Amrou often didn’t feel seen. Growing up, their parents would tell them that their walk wasn’t like a proper man’s and that their voice wasn’t how a man’s should be. Amrou’s parents’ religion made them fear their child’s differences. They banned Amrou from anything remotely bright or exciting and became furious if they caught them looking at anything related to being gay.

Amrou found escape in two different places. The first was on the stage, where they could bury themselves in a role and become someone else. The second was with their face pressed up to an aquarium, where they could glimpse another world of fantastical, beautiful creatures who seemed somehow both alien and wise.

Amrou worked as hard as possible to get a scholarship which meant they could leave home and finally have some freedom. That was when they started performing in drag, under the name of Glamrou and also as part of a troupe called Denim. Drag meant dressing up in flowing wigs, extravagant makeup, and flamboyant outfits. It also meant being able to take control of how you’re seen and break free from traditional ideas of