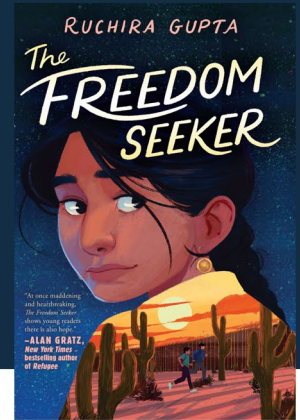


Ruchira Gupta

AUTHOR ARTIST ACTIVIST

Authors Note The Freedom Seeker



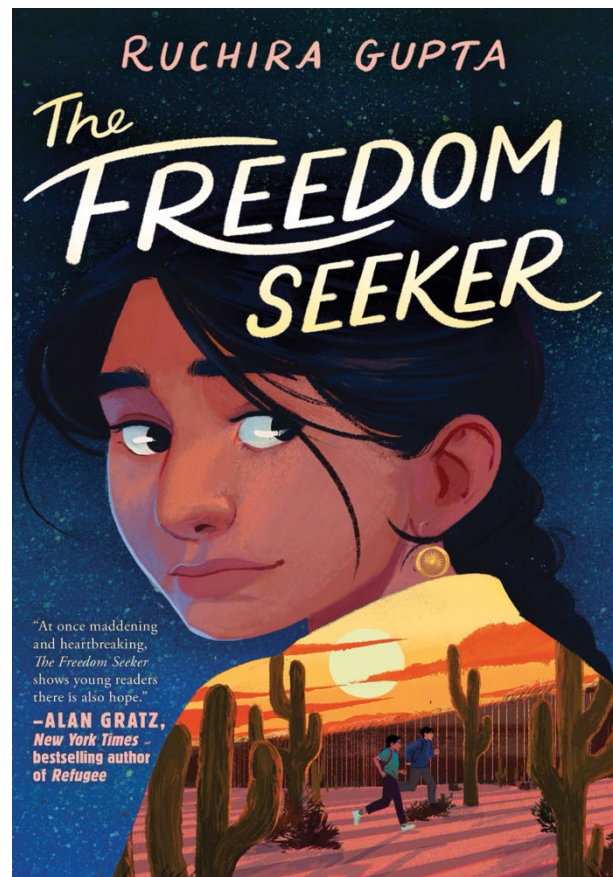
Dear Reader,

Thank you for picking up *The Freedom Seeker*! This book is really special to me, and I hope that as you read it, you'll connect with Simi's story and the challenges she faces. At its heart, this is a story about courage, love, and the power of hope—even when life feels really tough.

Simi's journey starts in India, but soon, she and her mother have to leave home and make a dangerous trip to the United States. You see, Simi's family faces religious intolerance—meaning people don't like that her parents come from different faiths. They are targeted by a group that tries to hurt them just because they believe in something different. Sadly, there are many families in the world who are forced to flee their homes for similar reasons, whether it's because of their religion, ethnicity, or political views.

When Simi and her mom decide to leave India and travel to the U.S., their journey isn't easy. Crossing the desert is dangerous. They have to trust people called *coyotes*, or human smugglers, who promise to guide them safely across the border. But many times, these smugglers lie or take advantage of people. Simi and her mother face harsh conditions like extreme heat and exhaustion, making their journey even more difficult.

After they cross the border into the U.S., things don't get easier. Simi and her mother are caught by border patrol and separated. Simi ends up in a detention center, which is cold and unfriendly. These places are sometimes called *hieleras* (which means “freezers” in Spanish) because they are so cold. Simi struggles with being separated from her mom and doesn't know what's going to happen next. This part of Simi's journey is similar to what many real-life children go through when their families try to cross into the U.S. in search of safety.



You might have heard about things like this on the news—about families being separated at the border or about children waiting in detention centers for months. It's important to understand that these aren't just stories; this is something happening to real people, just like Simi, right now.

But even though Simi faces these challenges, *The Freedom Seeker* is also about how, even in hard times, there are people who care. In the story, volunteers help Simi and other kids. There are people who work hard to reunite families and give them hope. Simi's mom gets help from strangers, who shelter her and guide her safely back to her daughter. Their kindness shows that even when things seem unfair, there's always room for love and good people willing to help.

When I wrote *The Freedom Seeker*, I thought a lot about the families who come to the U.S. looking for safety. Some of them are escaping dangerous situations in their home countries, just like Simi. They leave behind everything they know, hoping for a better future. But sometimes, when they arrive, they face new challenges and have to figure out how to make a new life in a place that can feel cold and unwelcoming. Simi's story is about holding onto hope, even when life feels unfair, and finding the courage to keep going.

I wanted to share this story with readers like you because I believe young people are powerful. You have the ability to understand and care about others, no matter how different their experiences might be. Maybe you've seen stories about immigrants on the news or heard about families separated at the border. I hope this book helps you understand what it feels like to be in their shoes. It's important to remember that even the smallest acts of kindness can make a big difference in someone's life.

Simi's story is about finding home—not just a place, but also in the people we love. It's about standing up to bullies, believing in yourself, and understanding that love and kindness are more powerful than hate. Through all of her challenges, Simi never gives up hope. She learns that there's always strength in community and in the people who care about us.

For those of you who have experienced immigration yourselves, I hope this story helps you feel proud of your journey and the bravery it takes. And for those of you who haven't, I hope *The Freedom Seeker* helps you see how important it is to be kind, to stand up for what's right, and to understand that everyone deserves to feel safe and accepted.

Thank you for joining Simi on her journey. I hope her story inspires you to think about how you can be a force for good in your own community—whether by helping a friend, standing up to a bully, or learning more about people who may have different experiences than you. Even small acts of kindness can make a big difference.

With love and hope,
Ruchira Gupta

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