In this coming-of-age story, Landfill is a boy who’s spent his entire life as a scavenger. Old Babagoo looks after him, as long as he follows his rules and never goes beyond the wall. But Landfill longs to go Outside... how dangerous can it be?

Landfill lives a wild life, and his best friends are the dogs, squirrels, turtles, cats, goats and other animals in the Hinterland. The only other human he knows is Babagoo, who found him when he was just a seed. Babagoo provides for them both, with vegibbles and gulls, as well as whatever they can scavenge. He keeps Landfill safe from the Outsiders, with their terrible hunger, which rots them from the inside. But he also has a list of rules which Landfill must obey, and the most important rule of all is that he must never go beyond the wall.

One day, Landfill sees husky dog Woof producing little woolfings from a swelling in her belly, and he starts to question some of things that Babagoo has told him — even though one of Babagoo’s rules is that he always tells the truth. Did Landfill really come from a seed? As he learns more about the world around him, and realises that there are things Babagoo has been keeping from him, Landfill becomes determined to see the Outside for himself.

In this extract, Landfill asks Babagoo to tell him once again where he came from:

‘Tell me where I came from.’
‘Eh?’
‘Where I came from. Can you tell me?’
‘You know where you came from, my boy. Told you many times.’
‘I know!’ Landfill looked up and spied a sliver of string at the side of Babagoo’s neck. His eyes traced its course beneath the scavenger’s jumper, to where Babagoo’s key dangled out of sight. He realized his gaze was lingering, and quickly shifted it to Babagoo’s face. ‘But it’s been a while. Can you tell me again? Please?’

Babagoo pouted. He scratched his temples and scrutinized Landfill’s face. ‘Okay,’ he finally said. ‘Let me see... Well, you started as a seed — a seed spat into the Spit Pit by the Outsiders. They can’t have known what a precious thing they were wasting. But then again, they never do. That’s why they’ll always be infected by the hunger — why it eats them up and good thing. Only a forgotten place can be such a blind spot, such a sanctuary. But back then it was all decay, steel and silence.’

Babagoo sighed and stared at the flames in the stove. ‘It was only after you were brought in that it came alive. As you grew, Hinterland grew with you. Of course, I dealt with repairs, with the walls, boards and charms and the like. But the rest was Hinterland. I filled this Den and built the tunnel to the Pit, but Hinterland decked itself with flowers and vines. I locked the gates and put glass in the wall, but Hinterland hid the gates and netted its flanks. I smuggled in seeds for vegibbles, and bleaters for your milk, but all your other friends, all the other annimals... Well, Hinterland didn’t so much provide them; they came in response to your little baby calls.’

The scavenger chuckled to himself. ‘So that’s where you came from. You were saved from Outside, and I for one am glad you were. Not that it was easy. We had some close calls, believe me. You suffered the fire-flush many a time. But you refused to die. Rarely even cried. You’ve always been such a stubborn little fighter.’ He laughed again and beamed at the boy.

Landfill nodded stiffly and sucked in his lips...