Dragon Daughter - Reading Comprehension – extract from Chapter 1

 Milla was hiding in an orange tree on the day the dragons returned to Arcosi. She was busy ignoring anyone who called for her, just as stubbornly as she ignored the twigs that were poking into her back or scratching her arms or tangling her curly black hair. She was small enough to be completely hidden by the dense green foliage, making it the ideal hiding place right there in the middle of it all, between the main building of the Yellow House and its kitchen block.

If she turned her head she could gaze down over the garden wall to the city rooftops below, and count the ships approaching the harbour. She breathed in the hot busy smell of Arcosi, the city she loved: dusty stone, foul drains, rotting fish, salt, spice and blossom.

Being hidden brought Milla the first rest of the day. She felt the wobble in her legs and an airy, untethered feeling that told her she’d missed a meal. She reached out and picked a sun-warmed orange, peeling it with her dirty nails and sucking the juice from the flesh till it ran down her chin, before throwing the evidence over the garden wall.

She began to feel better. She was sure no one meant to give her too much work. It was just that the moment anyone saw the youngest servant, they’d say, ‘Milla! Job for you!’ – not realising half a dozen others had already said the same thing. It was a point of honour never to say no, never to say she was too tired. She made herself useful. Indispensable. She would never find herself out on the streets like a stray cat. For in these strange days, when the duke’s soldiers roamed the streets day and night, and rumour flew faster than a hawk sighting prey, the whole city felt like some great beast, waking hungry from a long sleep. At twelve years old, Milla already knew that everyone needed a place of safety. Somewhere to belong.

*Dragon Daughter*: Chapter 1

Retrieval

1. Where was Milla hiding?
2. What is the name of the city where Milla lives? Describe what it smells like.
3. How old is Milla?
4. What job does Milla have?

Using a thesaurus/dictionary

1. Find the meaning of these words:

* Indispensable
* Foliage
* Untethered

Inference and deduction

1. Why does Milla ‘never say no’ to doing jobs for people?
2. What kind of weather is it?
3. Why did Milla hide in the orange tree?

Author’s word choice

1. The author has used similes at the end of this extract to describe life in the city. What are they? What does this make you think about the city where Milla lives?

*Activity devised and created by Susan Williams, Windmill School, East Sussex, with thanks from the author.*