

## FROM ALEPPO TO EUROPE: THE STORY OF AAMIR, FATIMA AND THEIR MOM

It is night, a boat overloaded with people painfully breaks the waves, filling the darkness with a scratchy and opaque noise that a veiled moon cannot illuminate.

Aamir, seated on the edge of the boat, squirms in his blue jacket to drive away the bitter cold and the humidity of the water; thoughts darker than the night crowd in mind, vanish and reappear. Suddenly, an old woman's voice rises plaintively in the dark and revives, in the boy, the memory of where he flees from.

Grandmother, what happened to grandmother, Aamir wonders in anguish. He feels a bit guilty for having accepted that solution, he is here, on this boat that will perhaps lead him to safety, and dad and grandmother are in that hell and ... what will happen to them? However, mom, Munira, and Fatima, (the tender little sister a few years younger than him), are with him.

Suddenly, a subdued and weeping song distracts him from his gloomy thoughts: it is Fatima, who, next to him, sobs tormentedly. The little girl does not understand the situation and feels sadness and bewilderment, because she finds herself with her brother and mother on a boat that has slowly removed the outlines of her land and the image of her mom and grandmother, until they disappear.

Now Fatima has stopped crying, looks at Aamir and in the pale light of the moon, sees his eyes veiled by sadness and anger, and something that she cannot define. Aamir looks at the innocent and frightened face of his little sister and, crouching beside her, takes her right hand and lays it on his chest, on the side of his heart, just like mom did when they were little, to reassure them that everything would be fine. Munira heard Fatima crying and saw the affectionate gesture of Aamir then, with a heart full of pain and emotion, caresses the boy's hair and holds the child.

Years later, when his life, his mother's and Fatima's lives find a safe harbor, Amir will still remember this night, will write in his diary that time passed by but the night seemed endless ... it was cold and the sea was scary from time to time. Next to them, these were only scared and totally lost people. They went to meet their destiny, but what fate ... The moon had disappeared behind the clouds again and the darkness had returned to master the world. The sea was scary and seemed to want to swallow them and the miserable boat they were traveling on. Every now and then, someone was talking, someone else was crying, but often, too often, silence reigned, the silence of a death that seemed to approach. None of the people on the boat believed they would be able to live anywhere in that better world they had dreamed of so much.

But now Aamir does not know what his destiny will be, nor that of his sister and his mother and all the others who are on this boat, so he feels the need to speak, and talks, talks, talks to his mother, talks to his sister and talks to himself.

Suddenly, the noise of a more powerful engine, which overlaps that of their boat, silences him: a boat approaches them, other lighthouses rummage through the night, the men who, at the time of boarding demanded money with a ferocious face and who drove them on board with screams and shoves, (but promised to take them to the other side of the sea) those men have now abandoned the boat and have climbed into the other, while the people on board cry and curse them and then go silent.

Now the dinghy is without a guide and remains at the mercy of the waves in the middle of the night, which fortunately pass without causing major dangers, although the hearts of the men, women and children on the boat beat fearfully. Someone takes the wheel, trying to keep the course.

It is daylight, the light illuminates a sea that is getting bigger and that throws the first violent waves against the rubber boat. A murmur of prayers runs first slowly and then quickly from mouth to mouth, while the boat rises now from the bow and then seems to sink, and everyone screams in despair as the water covers the bottom of the boat. Fortunately, the fury of the sea is gradually subsiding and the terror gives way to an intense happiness even if temporary and everyone hugs warmly with tears in their eyes.

Towards midday, on a sea that was flat again and made gray by the clouds that cover the sky, someone sighted the white outline of a ship in the distance, and with screams and rags stirred in the air drew his attention. As the boat approaches, its features can be seen: it is a patrol boat of the Italian Navy, with the tricolor flag flying over the bridge. The children on board are frightened when they see men in armed uniforms protruding from the parapets of the ship, even Fatima begins to cry, but her mom and Aamir reassure her: those men will save them, they cannot harm them, yes they will save them. In fact, among the Italian sailors there was a man with an unshaven dark beard who wore an orange jacket and who spoke to them in Arabic: he told them to stay calm, not to worry and wait for the rescue operations.

Now the patrol boat arrived to the port of Lampedusa. Aamir, Fatima, mum and all their other companions are exhausted but calm, smile happily, say hello in Italian and they look around and it does not seem real to be saved. Aamir thinks of his friends left in Aleppo, he thinks with pain to Aisha, who he may not be able to see again. If he could just talk to her, he would tell her what is happening to him now, he would tell her "look, we have just arrived in the port of Lampedusa, there are the soldiers, many, who will help us get off the boat". We are happy, but at the same time we are afraid of what will happen. I hold Fatima tightly, I do not want to lose sight of her; I also take my mother's hand, and together we go to the place that the military directs us for the medical examination, where I am separated from my mother and Fatima; here there are some doctors and nurses who welcome us with kindness and start visiting us. Fortunately Fatima, Mama and I are fine, we're just a little dehydrated and hungry, but they say we'll soon be going to the hotspot, where we can eat and drink; after they identify us, asking for documents, personal data and taking pictures.

Some days have passed, Aamir has applied for international protection for himself, for his mother and for Fatima: for this reason they were taken to Sicily, in a place that he was told would be near the city of Catania, which they had never heard about, and where they will have to wait some time before this request can be accepted. Here, they are not comfortable, there is a large number of people of many nationalities and sometimes there are problems of understanding between them. Aamir continues to think of his father and

grandmother, he would like to get in touch with them, but he cannot, and is very worried about what might have happened to his loved ones.

After a few weeks, finally Aamir, his mother and Fatima are placed in a shelter house run by volunteers in the area: they will learn the language and take training courses to find a job. There are some guys who follow them and help them to adapt to this new environment, giving them Italian classes and putting them in touch with people interested in hanging out with foreigners. Fatima is happy, she has met a local girl, Silvia, and with her she spends part of her free time. It's funny to see them talking: they communicate mostly with gestures and laugh often when they realize that one has misunderstood or has not understood at all what the other has said.

Aamir has also made new friends with some Italian boys, it's going well with them, when it is possible he speaks in English, but he has already begun to say a few words in Italian and also in Sicilian.

The mother, however, is always sad, does not talk to anyone, she is alone and often cries; Aamir is worried, he does not know how to help her get out of her condition.

Then one afternoon when Amir had just returned from Italian class, he saw his mother coming to him: she received news from his father, who let her know that her grandmother died, that he managed to escape from that hell and that he arrived in France, so they will now be able to rejoin each other. Aamir is happy and, even if he is sorry to leave Italy and his new friends, the idea of being able to hug his father and to be all together again motivates him not to waste time. After giving the news to Fatima, they prepare their little luggage and, on a late spring morning, they leave Sicily to go by train to France.

The story was written by the students of CLASSE V C ITE DELL'IISS DI  
RIPOSTO:

**VITA ANSALDO, CARMEN CARDILLO, CHIARA CERRA, GIULIA CUSCINÀ,  
MARTINA D'ANGELO, FABIOLA FERRARO, CLAUDIA MESSINA, ELENA  
NINFA, LUANA QUATTROPANI, CLELIA RAITI, ELENA SIPALA, GAIA  
SARAH TESTA, GIULIA VECCHIO, ALESSANDRA VECCHIO RUGGERI**

The coordinator was: **PROF. CONCETTO TOMASELLO**