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AMIR ' S STORY

Our emotions were stronger and stronger, we were so happy, but suddenly the atmosphere changed; "they realized we are foreigners, different... Do they judge us?" We decided to leave the train station and to take a coffee in a bar.

"what happened during your journey?" Dad asked us.

"It was very hard... We saw horrible things..." Mom said with a sad face.

I wanted to change the subject, to turn a new page because I didn't want to talk about that. But it was inevitable.

"But... Where is Grandma?" said Fatima.

A big silence settled down and dad looked away trying to hide the sadness in his eyes. Understanding what happened, we started crying...

After their emotional reunion, the little family and Dragomir (Ivan's cousin) started catching up on what had been going on for each of them.

After a few hours of animated discussions and a few hot chocolates, it seemed like they had gotten pretty much everything out. The war, the long and hard journey, the suffering and the tears were now just memories. Dragomir offered them hospitality until they could find a stable solution.

The children couldn't stop talking about what they were seeing:

"Wow! Paris is beautiful!"

"Yes? But there are lots of people, it's very complicated to breathe haha"

"Oh, I don't care! Please can we go and visit the Champs Elysées, and the Eiffel Tower!!"

"Not now. We'll do it later."

On the way to Dragomir's place, in the coziness of the car, despite its bad state, Amir and his family were dumbfounded at discovering the sullen tumult of Paris 'streets when all they heard about it were praises for its beauty. An unlimited wave of vehicles ran down the streets and the bypass. Malik then looked at his children, love noticeable in his eyes as he thought about his children's future. He wanted to offer them the best even if it meant working days and nights. From today on, he was going to fight for his loved ones so that they would always have a roof over their head and enough food to eat. Once they arrived at Dragomir's apartment, the children already asleep, they conversed about the close future of the little family around a last drink while also trying to get to know Dragomir and his girlfriend. Dragomir was going to let them stay for a few weeks so that they could find their

own place to live in, a job, schools for the kids and everything they needed to start a new life in France.

Dragomir knew what it felt like to come here for the first time. He had been in the same situation a few years ago when leaving Bourgas after finishing his studies and moving to France. It had been really hard. The cultural shock was enormous and to adapt was difficult even though he was able to speak French fluently. He was overwhelmed by the new culture, the people and the scenery. His world had drastically changed and with his family still in Bulgaria, the loneliness felt only more prominent and the fear also grew in him. He had to find a job, a place to live, something better than his little studio and make friends despite his shyness. He managed to do so thanks to his perseverance, his steadiness and even a little bit of boldness. Now he had a stable life as a certified public accountant and earned enough money to be at ease. His life also felt a lot better since he met his girlfriend and now fiancée, whose name was Kaia; she was of Norwegian origin. She was a small and pretty skinny girl with short brown hair and hazelnut eyes. She also had freckles and wore some big round glasses that made her look like a really pretty Harry Potter. She had been really sweet at the arriving of the little family. She welcomed them with a big smile on her face and a warm hug for each of them.

That is quite hard to have papers especially when you don't speak French, but there are associations to help us to get identity papers "La Cimade". After living for a month in Dragomir's house, he told my dad to go to a migrant center « Le CADA de l'Orge » because the house was too small for 4 more people to live in. We have been lucky to be accepted because we are asylum seekers and only asylum seekers can access to the CADA. Dragomir said he went there before getting French papers; this center really helped him to live and be integrated in France. But there are lots of drawbacks: we have to go to the Prefecture with my family to ask for a residence permit and the steps are long. My dad was nervous because he didn't want to disturb Dragomir any longer. He had to complete a file in French but it was difficult for him because he didn't speak French. We go back to Dragomir's house because we need his help. He has lived in France for 6 years he can help us. The next day, my dad went to the prefecture to give the papers and the person in charge told him he would receive an answer in 8 days. He really need those papers especially resident permit. Thanks to it he can work and earns money. As we need help, we went to "la Cimade" to take some information. In "la Cimade", an interpreter was present during the interview; "la Cimade" told us about the methods to get the papers to be

allowed to work. The volunteer of "la Cimade" told us that according to the convention signed in Dublin in 1990, the state has the obligation to examine the asylum application. They offer French classes to the migrants. But before, we need to go to the center "La CADA de l'Orge". We took bedrooms there, because we don't live at Dragomir's house anymore.... To find a house, the state has implemented measures for us. Two months later, on a Wednesday, we're going to look for a house, and my father's friend brings us back. The journey is long, there are a lot of traffic jams since Paris according to his friend is crowded. We finally arrive two hours later, I suddenly see through the car window two persons who are exchanging a little strange bag and leave immediately. Why? I don't know but I think it was illegal. We stop at the parking and we start to go to the flat. When I see the landscape, I found it's that weird because there are many vandalized cars.



Figure 1 : Le CADA, Centre d'accueil de demandeurs d'asile, de l'Orge, drawn by Anthonin.

At last, we are in our home, our apartment is located on the fifth floor. We begin to climb the stairs; I felt I was tired by this beginning of the day and anxious, but I didn't show it to my father who was very excited to have a new apartment. We arrive finally in the place and, we start to visit, first the living-room and then the two bedrooms; the house was bright but small for four people. Anyway, we can change when we earn more. For now, we're

settled in this house. It is 15:20 and we are going to visit Paris. Everything is beautiful, luxurious and very large, it changes compared to our previous life. Shortly after that we take our phone to look for a bar to enjoy our first moment in Paris.

A few days after our arrival, my sister and I went, for the first time, to a French public school. We were really stressed when we arrived in front of the school building but we gathered up our courage and went in. Everybody was watching us as if we were aliens due to our clothes, clearly not as expensive and fancy as theirs. This situation went on and on but along the way thanks to the French class, I improved quickly and I managed to speak with the others without any problems.

My father decided to go to an organization to get some help about our situation. He met an organization's member and talked with him. "France Terre d'Asile" is a French organization created for the migrants. Its aim is to help the migrants in a difficult situation. It gives food and help those who need a job. When we discovered this association, I was so happy because my family and I will not be in trouble anymore, and it was an asset for a better life.

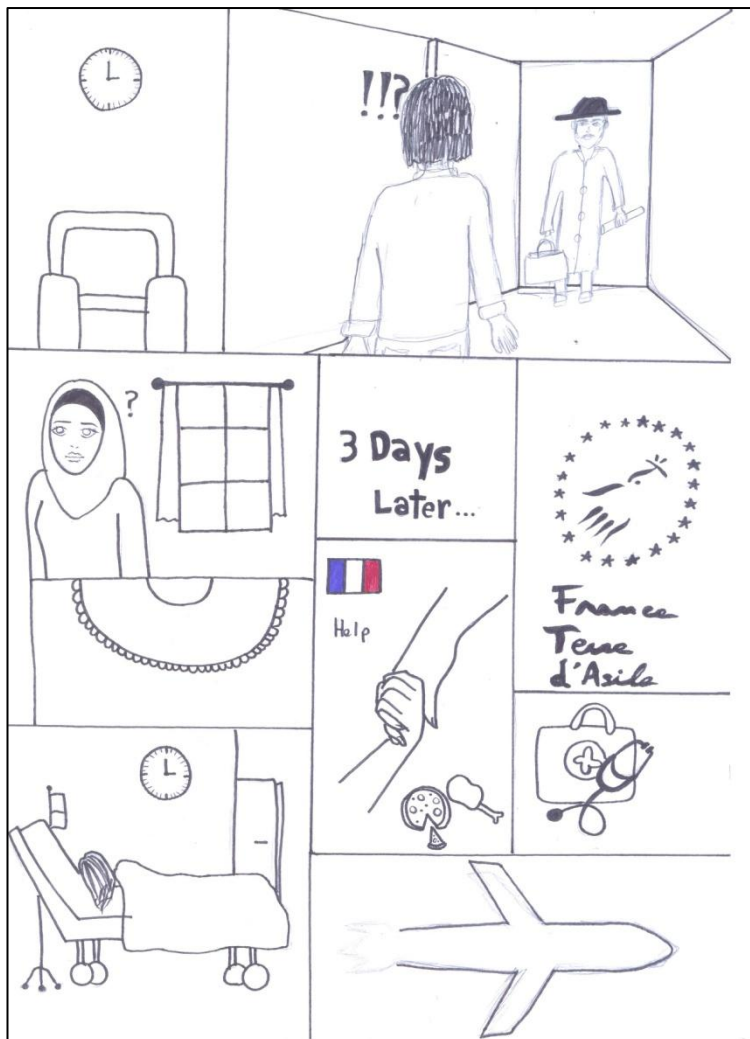


Figure 2 Amir's story drawn by Rania

There were doctors in this association, who helped us for the diseases, and the sicknesses. My mother was examined first, she was in good health. I had a small sprain due to the violence of the trip. When my sister entered the office to be examined, it took a long time. Suddenly, the doctor called my parents, and invited them to sit down. At that moment, we knew that it was something serious. He tried to reassure us. We wanted to know.

A few weeks later, we were received by the doctor in his office to speak about Leila's operation. It was soon. She was nearly treated and we were very worried about her situation. It was difficult to overcome it. Every day, Leila cried because she was worried, she knew it was serious. For several days, my parents asked the doctor to learn more things about the operation. The doctor was comforting. My mother was very preoccupied and took different drugs to calm down.

The last night before the surgery, I went to Leila's bedroom in the hospital. Before leaving, I decided to tell a story. Sitting next to Leila, on her bed, I began my story:

« Once upon a time, ... »

After this short story about the unicorns, princesses and knights, I left and let my little sister, alone, asleep, without knowing if I would see her alive.

The next day, at 4 pm, Leila got out of the theatre. The operation was a success and my sister was ready to begin a new life with a better health. I remembered that God was with me when I left my country, and that He's always been with me.

Dragomir's fiancée bragged about Norway and all its wonders. My father decided we could go there too.

"Children we will leave for Norway, we are sorry, but don't worry, we will have a better life."

"We have only 3 months to find a way to go there".

They had managed to put money aside thanks to the help they had. My parents had worked in a social grocery store during the first year they spent in France. But they didn't manage to fit in, to adapt. France is an open and accepting country but the society isn't. People are used to looking at us in the street, as if we were from another planet, or as if we had brought the war and evil from our country with us. "We are such a pain for these people», Amir thinks. His mother was thinking the same, but she doesn't want to hurt his little sister. Since the departure from Syria, she was very weak and all nights, when she

thinks everybody is sleeping, she cries. But I don't sleep either. Each time I close my eyes, I would see bombs falling and I could hear them exploding. Some things can't be forgotten. During classes, I keep asking my teacher if she can show me some pictures of Norway and I ask her a lot of questions about the life in this country.

“As you can see Norway is full of green spaces...”

“Oh yes that is beautiful!!”

“Take this example of Larvik, they have a great high school, Thor Heyerdahl, with a lot of activities, maybe you can register one day.”

“What about the activities?”

“They have sport, music, dance, restoration, and other things.”

After 4 months, the whole family got their residence papers in France, following that, Malik worked hard in food service to make money and feed his family while offering them a place to stay. During the day Leila, the mother, took French classes with the help of an association called FLA to help her kids later and make their integration easier. They have put money aside, to finance their travel. Now they could go to Norway, from Paris to Denmark. With a budget of 1500€, they left for Paris and took the train from "Montparnasse" to Hirtshals in Denmark. The whole travel in train would take about a day with multiple changes; they stopped at Hamburg to eat while changing station. They got out of the station to find cheap food and once they'd done it, they went to the next station to take the next train and finish the travel to Hirtshals arriving there around 3pm and waited till 2am they then boarded the ferry to Larvik.



This chapter was written by students from Première L1,
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