

The Hopes and Dreams Series  
A Family from Syria

# Amala's Hope

A story based on history



Tana Reiff

Illustrations by Tyler Stiene

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# Pro Lingua Associates, Publishers

P.O. Box 1348

Brattleboro, Vermont 05302-1348 USA

Office: 802 257 7779

Orders: 800 366 4775

E-mail: [orders@ProLinguaAssociates.com](mailto:orders@ProLinguaAssociates.com)

SAN: 216-0579

Webstore: [www.ProLinguaAssociates.com](http://www.ProLinguaAssociates.com)

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Text ISBN 978-0-86647-471-9

Audio CD ISBN 978-0-86647-472-6; Text/CD set ISBN 978-0-86647-473-3

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The cover and illustrations are by Tyler Stiene. The book was set and designed by Tana Reiff, consulting with A.A. Burrows, using the Adobe *Century Schoolbook* typeface for the text. This is a digital adaptation of one of the most popular faces of the twentieth century. Century's distinctive roman and italic fonts and its clear, dark strokes and serifs were designed, as the name suggests, to make schoolbooks easy to read. The display font used on the cover and titles is a 21st-century digital invention titled Telugu. It is designed to work on all digital platforms and with Indic scripts. Telugu is named for the Telugu people in southern India and their widely spoken language. This is a simple, strong, and interesting sans serif display font.

This book was printed and bound by KC Book Manufacturing in North Kansas City, Missouri. Printed in the United States. First edition 2018

## The Hopes and Dreams Series

by Tana Reiff

The Magic Paper (Mexican-Americans)

For Gold and Blood (Chinese-Americans)

Nobody Knows (African-Americans)

Little Italy (Italian-Americans)

Hungry No More (Irish-Americans)

Sent Away (Japanese-Americans)

Two Hearts (Greek-Americans)

A Different Home (Cuban-Americans)

The Family from Vietnam (Vietnamese-Americans)

Old Ways, New Ways (Jewish-Americans)

Amala's Hope (A Family from Syria)

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# 1 Leaving Syria

Aleppo, Syria, 2011

So much noise!  
Birds and bombs  
at the same time!  
Young Amala Najjar  
was trying to read.  
She laid down the book  
and put her hands  
over her ears.  
Her pet birds  
were outside,  
in a cage.  
But they sounded like  
they were right next  
to her ears.  
The bombing  
got very loud.  
Boom! Crack! Bang!  
Like 10,000 guns,  
only louder.  
This was not the first time.  
It would not be the last.

Amala's Mama and Baba  
came into the room.  
Her three little brothers  
walked behind their parents.

"It is time to talk,"  
said Jamal, her father.

"The civil war  
is coming too close.  
The bombing  
gets worse every day.  
We don't want to die.  
We must leave our home.

"We only want  
to live in peace,"  
said Farah, her mother.  
"We want to be safe."

"We have had  
a good life here,"  
said Baba.  
"Good schools.  
Weekend trips.

The business  
we have worked  
so hard to build.  
Maybe someday our life  
will be good again.  
But now, we must go.  
We will go to Jordan.  
We will wait there.  
We will hope  
things will cool down.  
Then we can come back.  
Your grandparents  
want to stay here.  
Your grandmother  
is not in good health.  
They will run  
the fruit and nuts business  
while we are away.”

The three little boys  
wrapped their arms  
around their parents' legs.  
Their eyes  
were full of fear.  
Amala was afraid too.  
But not surprised.

“When?”  
was all she said.

“Tonight,”  
Mama answered.

Their bags were packed.  
The van was ready.  
When night came,  
the bombing stopped.  
They loaded the van.

“What about my birds?”  
Amala asked.  
“We can’t leave them behind!”

“We must set them free,”  
said Baba.  
“If we take them along  
they will just fly home.”

Amala and her father  
went outside.  
Baba opened the cage.



“Good-bye, Altair!  
Good-bye, Amira!”  
She blew a kiss  
as the birds  
flew up into the air.

The Najjars drove  
all through the night.  
As the sun came up  
Mama said,  
“Wake up!  
We’re in Jordan!”



## 2 Five Years

The Najjar family  
stayed with Baba's uncle  
in Jordan.

The house was crowded.  
They knew  
they could not stay there  
for very long.

Weeks went by.  
The Najjars wished  
they could go home.  
But the war in Syria  
went on and on.  
Aleppo was destroyed.  
They never saw  
that their house  
had become rubble,  
a pile of concrete.

Instead of going home  
they went  
to a refugee camp.

Their good life  
in Syria  
was gone forever.

The refugee camp  
was hot and dirty.  
People got sick.  
Some people died there.  
No one knew  
what would happen next.  
They lived  
one day at a time.

Then one day someone  
from a resettlement agency  
called them.  
“We can help you  
go to the United States,”  
said the woman.  
“Would you like to go?”

For a year  
the Najjars met  
with the agency.  
They met five times.  
They waited.

The United States  
would not let them in  
until they were cleared.  
So they answered  
all the questions.  
And then they answered  
more questions.  
They had no secrets.  
Nothing to hide.

The Najjar family  
was Muslim.  
This was their religion  
and their way of life.  
No matter  
what was happening,  
they prayed  
five times a day.

At last,  
on a sunny day  
after morning prayers,  
they left the camp.  
They had the clothes  
they were wearing.

They had a phone.  
They had their Quran,  
the book of Islam.  
They had love  
for each other  
and hope for the future.

Five long years  
after leaving Syria,  
after all they had been  
through,  
they arrived  
in America.



### 3 A New Home

Eastern Texas, 2016

Amala did not talk much  
during the trip to America.  
*What was there to say?*  
she thought to herself.  
*This is a new life.*  
*Amala means hope.*  
*We will carry on.*

The big plane  
came to a stop.  
At the airport,  
the sun was warm.  
*A good sign,*  
thought Amala.

The whole family  
got into a van.  
It was bigger  
than their van back home.  
The van driver  
was friendly.

“Welcome to Texas!”  
he said.  
“I am part of a church group.  
We’re going to help you  
get on your feet.”

Baba and Mama  
did not understand.  
They knew  
very little English.  
Amala knew some English.  
She turned  
to her parents.  
“Nice people  
will help us  
start our new life,”  
she said in Arabic.

The van  
went to a small city  
in Texas.  
It pulled up  
in front of a little house  
on a back street.  
Baba, Mama, Amala,  
and the three boys  
got out of the van.

The driver  
opened the front door  
of the house.

Amala put her hands  
over her mouth.  
She couldn't believe her eyes!  
The house had furniture  
in every room.  
A kitchen table  
with six chairs.  
Flowers on the table.  
Food in the fridge.  
Beds in the bedrooms.  
Even a flat-screen TV  
in the living room.  
The boys asked  
if they could watch a game.

“It's all for you,”  
said the man  
from the church group.  
“And we will pay the rent  
for the first six months.”

“Thank you!”  
cried Amala.



“Thank you!”  
said Mama.

“Thank you!”  
said Baba.

“Thank you”  
were the first two words  
of English  
Jamal and Farah spoke.  
They would use  
those two words  
very often  
in the months to come.

Every day  
someone came by  
to check on the Najjars.  
An older woman named Marisol  
was their special helper.  
She lived  
across the street.  
She took them  
to the store.  
She paid  
for the food.  
She drove them

to the doctor  
and anywhere else  
they needed to go.

Amala always listened closely  
to Marisol speaking English.  
Then, in Arabic,  
she would tell her parents  
what Marisol had said.  
They all said “Thank you”  
again and again.  
There was so much  
to be thankful for.

## Glossary

Definitions and examples of certain words and terms used in the story

### Chapter 1 — Leaving Syria (page 1)

**Aleppo** — The second largest city in Syria, located in the north, near Turkey.

**(to) cool down** — To become quieter, calmer, less intense.

*We hope things will cool down.*

**(to) come back** — To return.

*Then we can come back.*

**wrapped (to wrap)** — To hold or enclose something.

*The three little boys wrapped their arms around their parents' legs.*

**loaded (to load)** — To put things into or on something.

*They loaded the van.*

**cage** — A wire container for keeping animals.

*Baba opened the cage.*

**blew (to blow) a kiss** — To breathe against a hand to show the idea of a kiss.

*She blew a kiss as the birds flew up into the air.*

**Chapter 2 — Five years (page 6)**

**destroyed** — Broken into pieces.

*Aleppo was destroyed.*

**rubble** — Destroyed buildings.

*They never saw that their house had become rubble.*

**pile** — A small mound or heap of things. One thing on top of another.

**concrete** — Material that is used for the walls and floor of a building.

*A pile of concrete.*

**resettlement agency** — An organization that finds new homes for refugees.

*Then one day someone from a resettlement agency called them.*

**cleared (to clear)** — To give permission to do something or go somewhere.

*The United States would not let them in until they were cleared.*

**way of life** — Customs and traditions.

*This was their religion and their way of life.*

**no matter** — **Not important.**

*No matter what was happening . .*

**Quran** — The holy book of the Muslim religion.

**Islam** — The lands and religion of the Moslem world.

*They had their Quran, the book, of Islam.*

**Chapter 3 — A New Home** (page 10)

**fridge** — An informal name for a refrigerator, a machine that keeps things cold.

*Food in the fridge.*

**to check on** — To visit and see how things are.

*Every day someone came by to check on the Najjars.*

**drove (to drive)** — To take someone someplace by car.

*She drove them to the doctor.*

**closely** — Carefully.

*Amala always listened closely to Marisol speaking English.*

**Chapter 4 — Going to School** (page 15)

**keep her away from** — To stop someone from being close to others.

*He wanted to keep her away from the American boys.*

**burned (to burn) up** — To be destroyed by fire.

*Perhaps these papers had burned up in the war.*

**even so** — in spite of (that), despite (that), however.

*She knew some English. Even so, they placed her a grade behind the other students her age.*