

The Hopes and Dreams Series
A Family from Syria

Amala's Hope

A story based on history



Tana Reiff

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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.

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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.

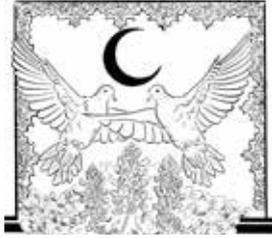
The United States
would not let them in
until they were cleared.
So they answered
all the questions.
And then they answered
more questions.
They had no secrets.
Nothing to hide.

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.