**Asmman**

 I grew up in a home full of love. My childhood was beautiful. I remember it as a time full of light and happiness.

 I remember the beautiful smell coming out of our

kitchen. My mother loved to cook for us, she always said that food brought people together. For us, as a family, the time we had together around the table every night, was a really special time. Some of my favorite memories are us sitting together around that table at dinner. My mother, my father, my two older brothers and me. How much do I miss this time of my life.

 My father passed his love of books on to my brothers. Around the table the conversations were related to books and new knowledge we would gain. Being only a little girl, I didn’t understand a lot back then. But listening to them was one of my favorite things. You could see how their faces lit up when they talked about book characters that touched them and felt connected with them. I was

always asking questions about things I didn’t understand. I remember how patiently they tried to help me understand. My father\_ being a teacher- believed that everyone had the right to education. Later in life I did I find out that not everyone shared his beliefs.

 First off, my brothers left. My parents saved as much money as they could and gave it to them for their

journey. The plan was that after a few months that we would have saved more, we would go and find them. Of course the plan didn’t work out. After all, when do plans work out?

 I remember them leaving at night. My older brother Amin, hugged me for goodbye and told me that when I felt that they are not close to me, I should look at the sky. Then I should think that wherever they are they are looking at the same sky as I am. I have loved the sky ever since, the sky has been my only friend for a long time now.

 Days and months went by. The situation in my country was getting worse and worse. We couldn’t leave. My father had been threatened a lot of times with his life. They were coming for him and nothing could be done. The last minute my mother and father put me in a boat. They gave me a photograph of my brothers and told me that I had to find them. I tried to look back at my homeland, but my mother didn’t let me, she begged me not to look back, she didn’t want my last image of my country, my home to be like this.

 I was crying so much, I couldn’t let them go. I begged them and I begged them to come with me. After 5 days on the sea and after an ocean of tears, I stopped crying. I just stopped. I couldn’t laugh and I couldn’t smile, but I couldn’t cry either. What a weird feeling. It was like I felt everything and nothing, all at the same time.

 But I survived. I survived the journey. I reached the shore alive. Other families took care of me. I will

never forget what these people did for me - The sky helped me as well, looking at the moon and the stars, or the beautiful sunsets, or the blue sky, or even looking at a sky full of clouds helped. They idea that somewhere else my brothers looked at the same sky, helped me. The idea that somewhere else there was a home for me, helped me get out of this journey alive.

 But when we reached the shore, when we were stuck inside a land surrounded by a fence, when we were stuck between two stages of life, my hope was gone. I stopped hoping all at once. The thought of seeing my brothers again was slipping further and further away from me. I didn’t know where to turn to ask for help. I just kept quiet. I saw people deciding what to do for me. I saw people feel pity for me. I saw people feel the burden of my existence. And I was hurt. I was hurting and every day that went by it was harder for me to speak. I just kept quiet.

 People approached me, people cared and people tried to help me. They asked who I was. I told them that I am

Asmman and I continued to keep quiet. But they asked me who I really was as a person. What my story was, how I was feeling. People gave me love. Love that I so much needed. Love that helped to get my hope back for the world, for my brothers, for me and for my life. The love that these people gave me, the love that my family gave me when I was growing up, it all made me realize that I deserve to be taken care of. We all deserve to be cared for. We all deserve to feel heard, understood, loved.

 And I have kept quiet for too long. For too long I thought that no one cared about what I had to say. For too long I thought that I didn’t have anything important to say. For too long I thought that my story wasn’t

important. For too long I thought I was invisible. For too long I thought I was just a young refugee girl. But I am much more than that. I am much more than the label you put on me. I am Asmman. I feel, I think, I have ideas, I have my past, my potential for the future. But most

 importantly I have my story, my story of being me, of being Asmman. We all have our stories. Our stories of

 being ourselves. Each one is so different. Each one is so important.

-Asmman means the sky in Afghan-