



# ITALIAN STORIES

IMAGINE 2018-2020

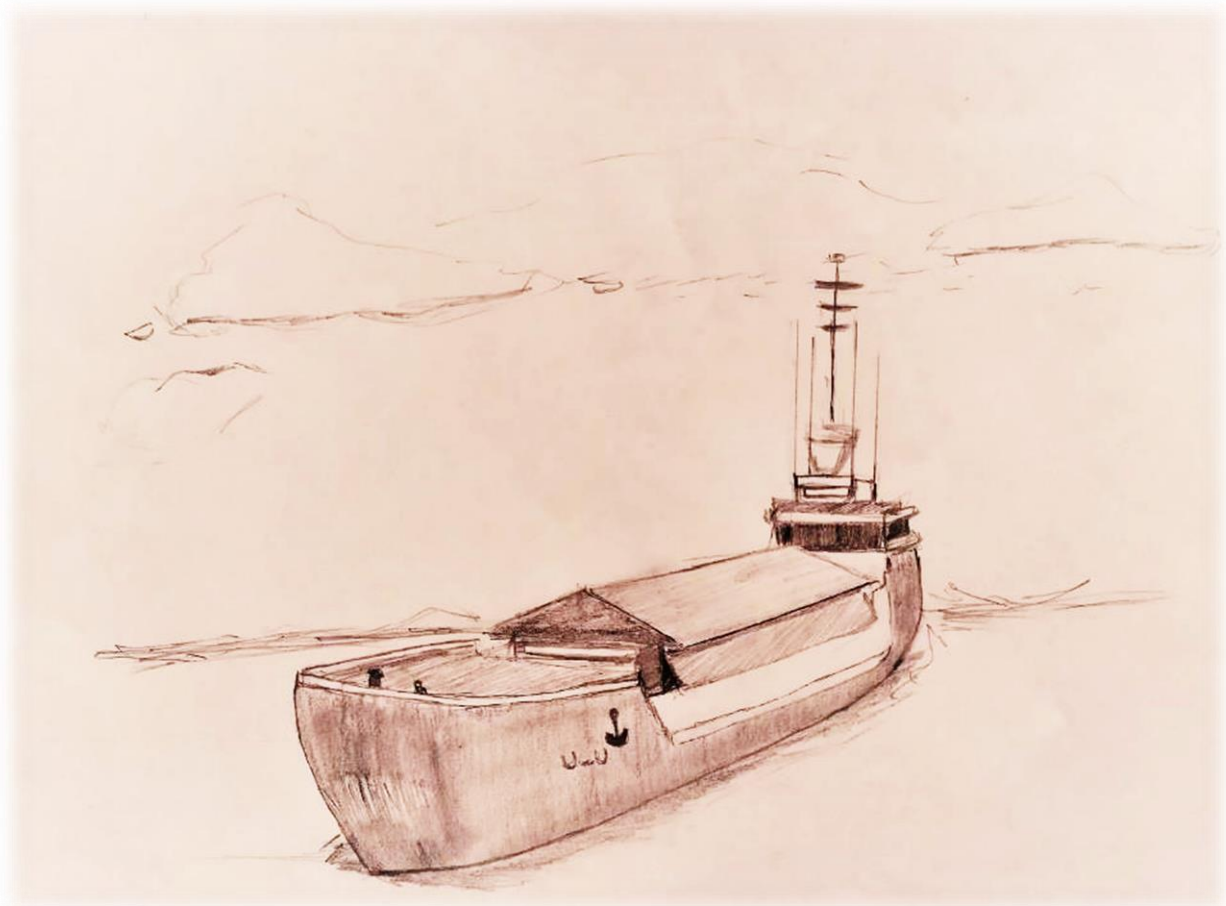
# 1

## The boy with Messi's jersey

So many people, every day, are forced to leave everything they have, because someone thinks they are masters of the world and can do anything they want. Do you see that dot in the middle of the sea? That is a barge; can you see that boy among all that people, the one with Messi's jersey? Well, that is Brahim. Today I want to tell you his story.

Brahim is not an assassin, a thief or a cheat, he is not running away for some crime; he is only a boy, like many other boys, with the same dreams and hopes, and a passion: soccer. For Brahim, soccer is not only a game, a pastime, a n excuse for trouble, beating or insulting; for him it is life, it is salvation. He played in a team, in his country, Turkey, and he was very good, before the violence and the fighting began. His parents have always supported him and, even if they didn't have much money, they have always bought him the best cleats and the best shorts they could afford to.

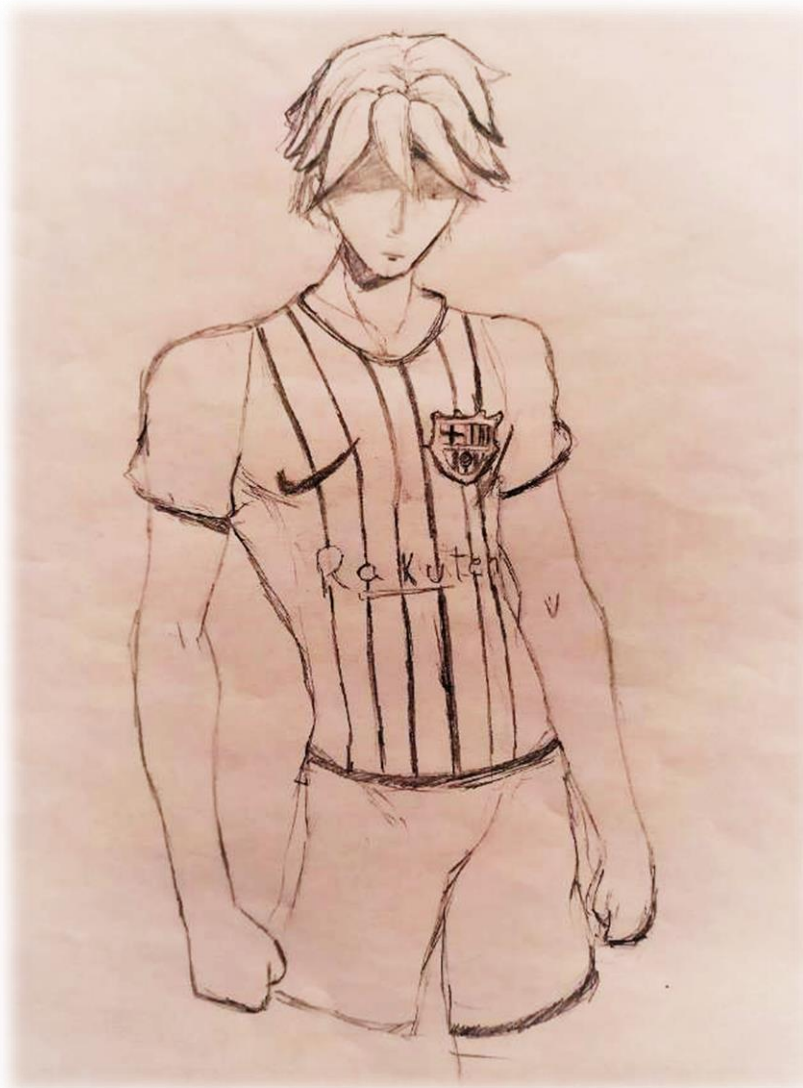
His father, then, lover of the game, gave him the Messi's jersey and had Brahim taken the tests for the youth soccer team where he began then to play. Thanks to that, he earned some money to pay the trip to Italy, but it was only enough for himself, so his parents remained in Turkey. Brahim left with heavy heart, thinking about having to abandon his father and his mother, but with a dream: arrive in Europe, become a soccer player and take away his parents from that beloved but also dangerous country.



You now see him there, in that crowded barge, in the middle of it, huddled up on himself, in a moment of apparent calm. It almost seems lethargic now, but for the last five days, since the trip began, the wind has been howling and shaking the barge; by now Brahim is fed up and he can only curl up, hoping that everything ends soon. He is fed up with all of this: cries, suffering complaints of women and children, weepings, curses and hits.

You may find yourself asking “How can such a young boy bear so much?”. Well, when you find yourself stranded, not knowing if the day after you will still lift yourself from the bed, when everything seems to be another unbearable, you can only close your eyes, hide your head between the legs and go on. Brahim, when he closes his eyes, he thinks about his family, about his parents, his country and soccer. Yes, because soccer is indeed his salvation, it has not only allowed him to run away, it is also the only thought that makes him feel good and calm.

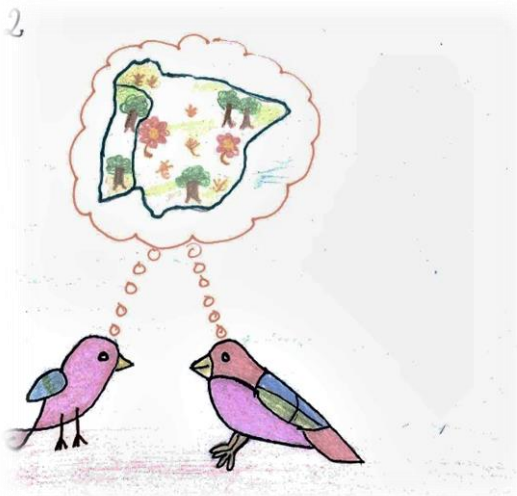
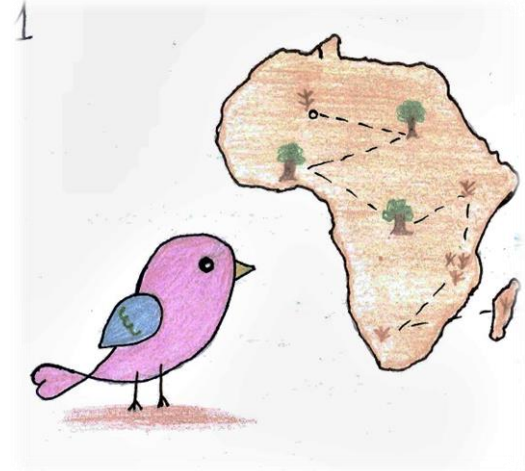
When he thinks about soccer and the name ‘Messi’ comes up to his mind, he dreams of meeting him one day, and telling his story; he would like to show him the jersey he so jealously watch like a treasure, his father’s gift! Brahim dreams of playing with Messi one day, but he’s sure that if ever this may happen, if he really became a famous soccer player, he would never forget his family or this dreadful story, he would never forget his origins.



# 2

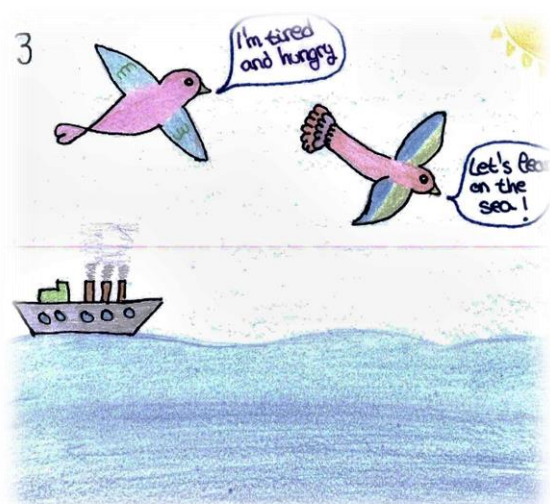
## The little bird

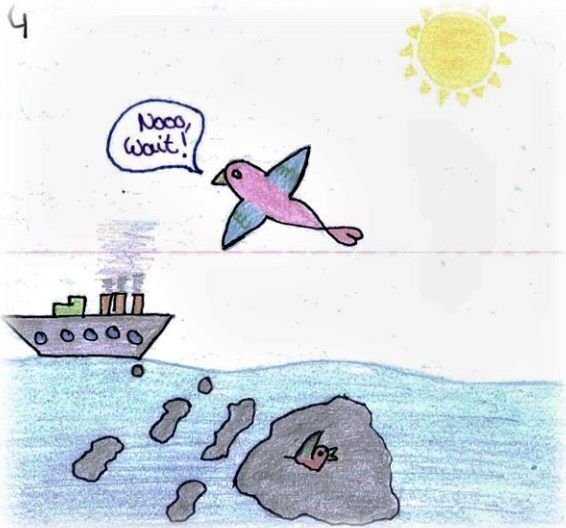
Once upon a time there was a little bird who lived in a far land called Africa. Since he was a baby he always had to get food by himself, trying to live at his best notwithstanding the hard condition of his country. Our story starts when he met a beautiful bird and they became friends.



They grew up together with a common dream: travel to find another place to live to escape from their beautiful but insidious country. And that's what they did: they took wing and they flew away full of energy and hope, they would have never thought that it would be such a difficult and hard journey.

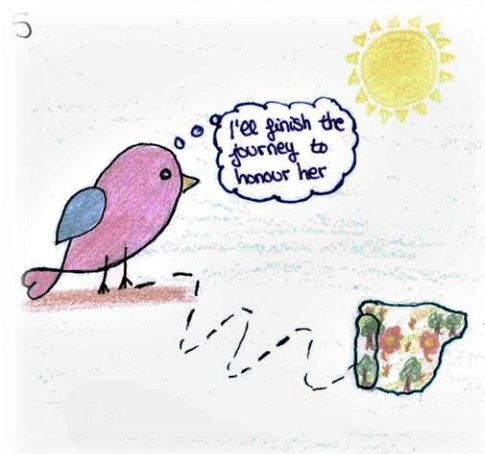
On the third day they were already tired and sleepy, hungry and thirsty and their wings couldn't flap anymore. That's the reason why the two birds decided to lean on the sea, letting themselves carry by the waves.



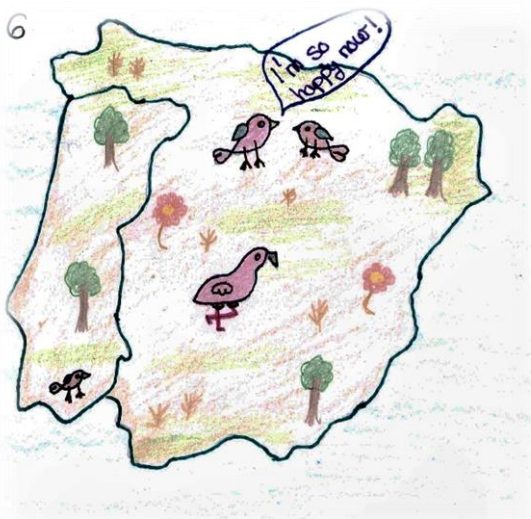


But they didn't see the danger, they didn't feel it until it was too late: a giant oil slick was near them. They tried to escape but just one made it through and the beautiful bird died.

He was so sad for the death of his friend but he decided to honour her by finishing the journey, their dream. That thought gave him strength to continue and, after a week, he finally arrived in the enchanted land.



Here he found other like him and although they were birds from different countries, different species and had different stories, they all shared the same difficult journey. He became a part of this team, of this flock and of course, he lived happily ever after.



# 3

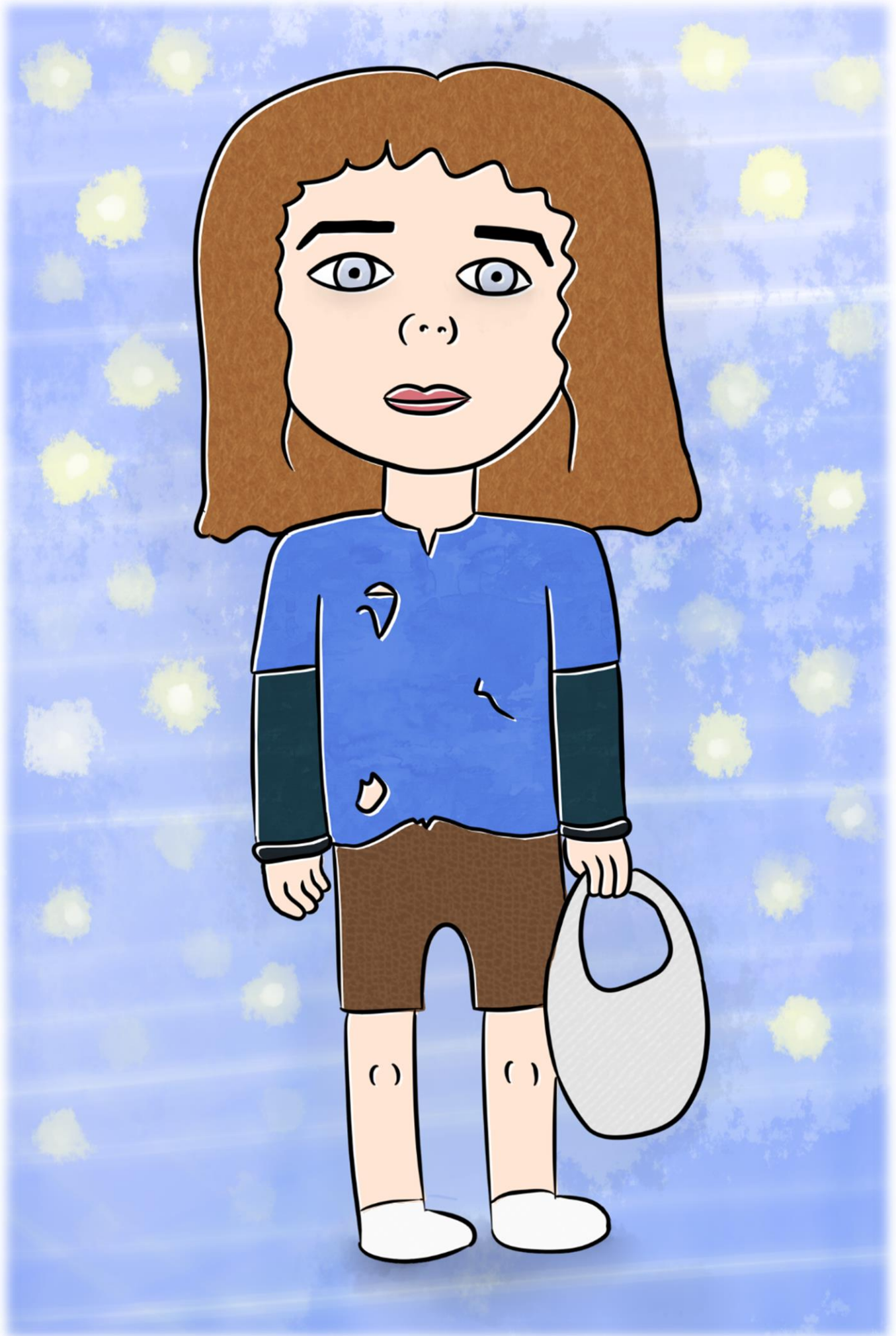
## The girl with big eyes

### Part one - Firefly

Once upon a time  
there was a young girl  
with big eyes,  
and skinny legs,  
a weary face  
and a broken heart.  
She walked bent down,  
with an old worn bag  
and looked around  
without knowing where to go,  
lost, alone,  
without a road to follow.  
She was just a child,  
full of fears  
and wounds;  
fled from pain  
and unaware of  
what awaited for her.  
But the desire to start over  
overcomes everything,  
even the deadly evils  
that corrupt you.  
And hope!  
it makes you longing  
for a better world,  
and blinds you  
like the sun  
on a summer day.  
Mesi,  
like a firefly,  
she struggled  
locked in a jar  
too tight,  
and struggled in vain  
to break free  
and fly away.

### Part Two - The journey

She followed two men  
big and tall,  
two cold ogres.  
They had been walking for days  
without stopping,  
to get quickly  
to the seaside,  
to never see again  
war, hunger,  
and their brothers  
burnt to ashes.  
And it didn't matter  
the danger  
of those old boats  
half blessed  
half cursed,  
because, a little,  
they were too.  
And when you have nothing,  
but you dream of something,  
the darkness of the abyss  
it's not so scary, not anymore.  
She was hiding  
between an old man and a girl,  
and hoped in vain  
not to be noticed.  
She was exhausted,  
she suffered step by step,  
and prayed a God  
who didn't listen to her.  
Worn out soles  
against the hot sand  
of that desert  
without a way out,  
a maze of lost souls.  
Mesi,  
little star in the darkness,  
she took courage  
even if she had none.  
Thirsty,  
she drank water and tears,  
tried to fulfill  
an unfeasible thirst:  
freedom.



### Part Three - Soulless

She had always been beautiful,  
a little shy,  
but her eyes  
seized all men  
even the worst ones.  
They were two shadows  
unable to love,  
heartless,  
and pitiless,  
they couldn't resist  
those big eyes,  
too innocent  
to survive  
in this cruel world.  
They woke her up one night  
while she was resting  
totally helpless,  
too tired even  
to realise what  
was about to happen.  
Two monsters  
with the mask of men,  
they dragged her away  
to push her into  
the darkness of a cold evening  
in the Sahara desert,  
in the desert  
of their souls.  
Mesi was a little lamb  
between two wolves,  
shattered for the travel  
she hoped it would have taken her  
to a better place.  
Too scared  
to react,  
or to cry.

### Part Four - Pain

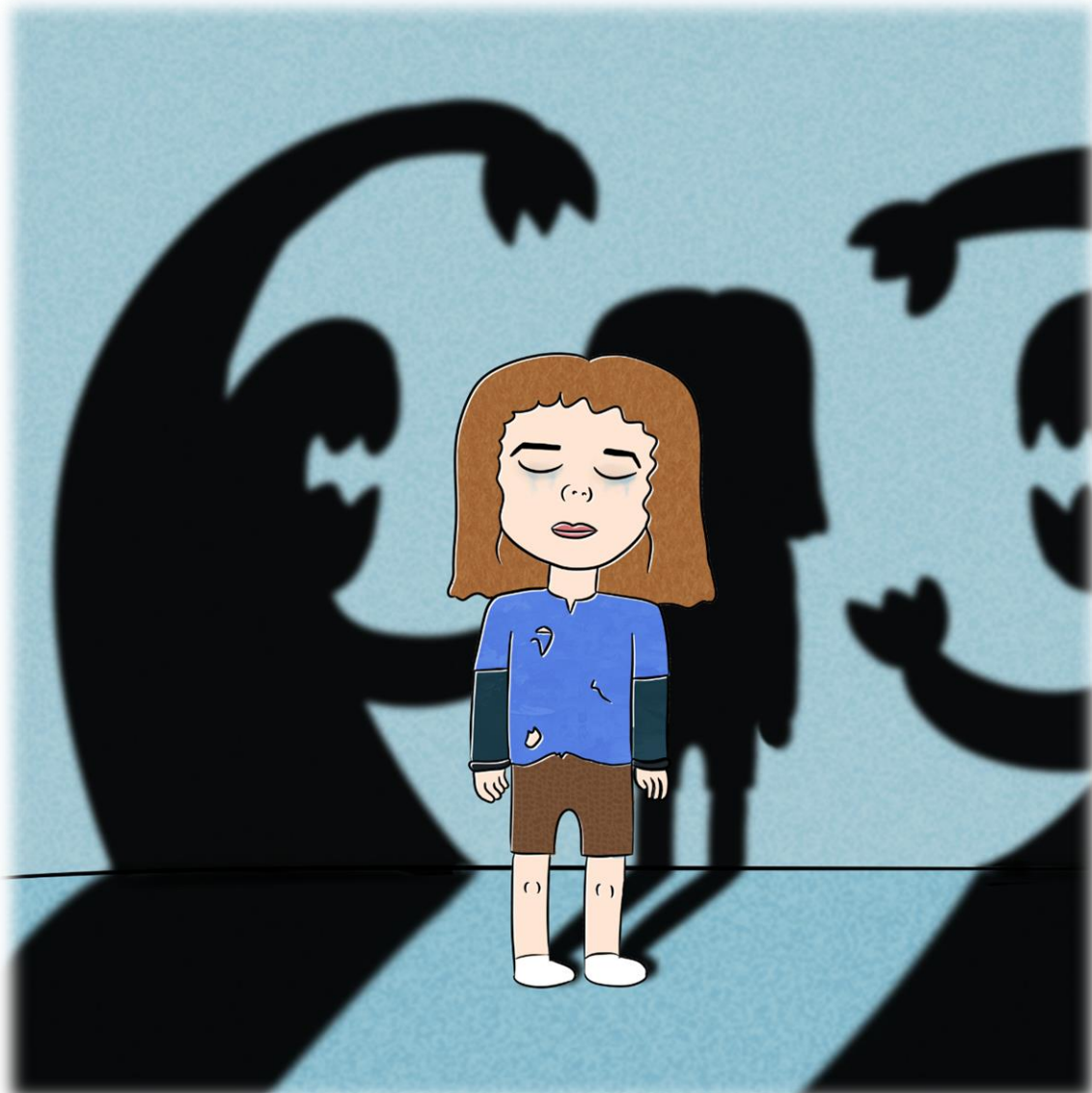
Already marching  
at sunrise,  
and Mesi  
didn't even have the time  
to think  
about the night before,  
about that  
unspeakable pain.  
The legs burned,  
struggled to walk  
she was like crawling, slowly,  
sighing and praying  
that agony  
would end soon.  
Her fellows looked at her:  
there was pity  
and compassion  
in their eyes,  
And she hated them  
for their silence,  
which hurt  
as much as the stabs  
of a traitor.  
She was slowing down the group,  
and it got worse and worse,  
with trembling legs  
and that heavy heart  
in her chest  
breaking her into two.  
The two ogres saw her  
and they beat her,  
but she couldn't make it,  
she bent,  
torn to pieces  
for what they had done to her.  
So they took her,  
lifting her from the ground,  
and they carried her  
a few meters backwards  
giving her some kicks  
in the stomach.  
They returned with the others  
continuing their journey,  
leaving her there,  
without water and without love,  
and nobody  
ever turned back.



## Last part - Dark

She was lost,  
abandoned in the sand,  
suffocated by  
the wickedness of the strongest.  
She was just a child,  
still innocent,  
and full of confidence  
in that same world  
which was killing her.  
Breathless,  
no beating in her heart,  
with a watery look  
like Ophelia,  
drowned by the love  
that took her life.  
Mesi, young girl  
with big eyes,

so beautiful,  
full of hope;  
now you are in the place you dreamt of,  
a sky without war,  
and nobody  
will touch you anymore.  
Look at your  
beautiful eyes now,  
fixed and empty,  
mirror of a soul  
that no longer exists.  
Oh little firefly,  
sometimes things seem just unfair,  
but who are we to understand them?  
Only small ants  
in a huge universe.  
Fly now,  
along with all other fireflies,  
'cause to carry out your dreams  
you first have to close your eyes



# 4

## Syria

Syria, 23 april 2018

Dear diary,

as always I woke up at dawn after a loud noise caused by the shooting of the military.

Here in Syria the situation is increasingly tragic every day, I no longer have the possibility of going to school or going out to play with other children because the risk of not going home is always higher.

At 11 I left home to go to the market in town to buy food for lunch.

Just out of the street I met a group of soldiers who started asking me questions about my identity.

In fact more and more often the controls increase and the soldiers are forced to make an appearance in the houses.

Every night I have a nightmare, fear increases and it's been a while since I've been thinking of running away from my country.

However, as my parents often tell me, we do not have enough money to leave all together and I have lost hope.

Aisha



Syria, 27 april 2018

Dear diary,

today I turn 15 years old and like every year my mother has prepared all my favorite dishes.

While we were still at the table all together a bomb shook all the walls of the house and we got very scared.

After lunch my parents left me speechless: I found an envelope with the money needed to leave and go to Italy.

Initially the fear of leaving my parents took over, but the desire for a better life and having a family led me to make the decision to leave.

I leave with so many expectations, I'll write to you as soon as I arrive.

With love, Aisha



# 5

## Youssef

Youssef left his parents, a brother and three sisters in Afghanistan, only to leave for Iran, to find an opportunity to escape. Youssef thought it was a safe idea heading to Europe travelling by sea, but unforeseen events did not lack. He met a man and embarked on a boat; it was something like a raft, so unsafe and insecure. Most of the passengers couldn't swim and he prepared himself to face the trip with absolute recklessness, only knowing that was the only way to save himself and to be able to finally get freedom.



On that boat, he was the youngest, there was only another boy of his age. He soon discovered that his name was Mohamed and they immediately bonded, talking of their doubts and fears. For the first time Youssef, in the middle of the sea and with his new friend, had a feeling of certainty. A feeling destined not to last long: in fact, the night of the third day of trip, the calm sea was shaken by a sudden storm. The boat began to swing; at that point Youssef understood what makes people panic: they seemed like crazy ants trapped on that boat, and he didn't know what to do: shouting, screaming, waiting lifeless. He hardly succeeded in seeing Mohamed washed away by the waves. That fear was to remain printed in his eyes for the rest of his life. His only support had been brutally taken away and now he was alone again.



The lights of the dawn, over that calm sea, brought help, only a point over the horizon slowly becoming bigger and bigger, closer and closer, and it meant salvation for all those people. In the blink of the eye they reached the shore and he finally landed on mainland. The weeks passed lazy and step by step the boy started to get used to the warm air of Lampedusa. The welcoming centre was full of people with the same stories, but he wanted to escape, he wanted to get free. He soon find kind of an employment, even if not honest. His life was boring, but he knew that was not worthy to be called life. Perhaps it was for this that, when the other gang came to the park that night and shot lil Achraf, a 12 years old boy recruited for selling drugs just like him, Youssef with a jump got in the way of the bullet. Youssef slowly felt to slip out life and finally thought "I am free."



# 6

## Survivor

Hello everyone! My name is Ayo and I am a Nigerian girl. Today I want to tell you my story and how I became what I am thanks to my strength.

I was born in the small town of Bida, Nigeria, and I am the last of 5 brothers, I am 27 years old, and I am mother of two children. My mother and my grandmother have always been my source of inspiration, since I was a child; in fact, I wanted to be like them. They were enterprising women who, despite the adversities of life, fought with dignity and found strength in adversities.

Unfortunately, my childhood has never been a happy childhood. Coming home from school I heard the sound of gunshots and explosives being thrown into the street by militiamen who wanted a more fundamentalist country. One day, on the way home, my father was hit by a grenade that wounded him in the left side of the face, forcing him to stay in bed for three months and which took away his eye.

Later, attacks by militiamen intensified and, shortly afterwards, my brother Babatunde was killed in a shooting in a bar in the city centre. He was 19 and I, 18. He was struck in the heart, therefore, only one bullet was enough to take away the breath of life forever, his joy of life and his stubbornness that had always distinguished him from his peers. On the day of his funeral his companions sang typical songs of the Yoruba tradition and told moving words to praise him. For my mother it was a bad blow, she could not understand how her son had told her before going out: "Hi mommy! I love you, see you later" and now he was no longer there beside her, why he had never returned home, how come a very small piece of red-hot iron could end his life.

From the day of his funeral, my mother no longer spoke, for three months she was shut up in a noisy silence that could be felt throughout the house. Until she decided that situation had become unbearable for her. We were all in a circle at the table, when she told us: "I heard our friend ... who ... who takes people away from here ... in a place of peace and democracy, and even if it were not, in a better place than this city, in which our poor forgotten souls live lost and in fear. Look at us, we are just poor wandering souls who cling desperately to a glimmer of hope to continue to live and not make up for it. We leave tomorrow, at nine in the evening. The militiamen are usually not on guard at that time and it will be easier for us to escape. "So she got up from the table and went to sleep.

The next day we left, we had brought nothing with us, because we knew that everything would have been lost anyway. It took us 5 long months to arrive in this much hoped for "country of peace and democracy". I was welcomed by adult men, it was me and my brothers and when they asked us who we came from I burst into tears. My father couldn't make the trip, and we had to leave him at home, mom got sick of haemorrhage during the journey and died two weeks before we landed. I saw a lot of suffering and hope during the Path, often tortuous and above all painful, which helped me grow and believe in my dreams.

Today I am a woman, wife and mother, but also an entrepreneur; one year after my arrival I enrolled in school and then high school, I graduated from Bocconi with Economics and Management Innovation and Technology with 110 cum laude. I founded a clothing company and a non-profit organization to support children in countries with poor education, the development of drinking water and the exploitation of renewable energy.

This is my story, this is my life, this is my journey,  
I wait to know yours,  
With love, Ayo.



**SURVIVOR**



# 7

## Ismael Kamir

Now I tell you my story:

I'm Ismael Kamir, I'm 20 years old and I come from Syria, more precisely from Damasco, the capital. Despite my young age I already have a family of five people: Jamira is four, Osama is five, Mohammed is two and my wife Fatima is 24 years old.



Because of economic problems I decided to come to Italy to save my family and my own life. I worked as a mechanic, but money was not enough for a decent life, so I decided to face this long journey of four days with other fifty people, including lots of women; it was the most traumatic experience of my life. The hygienic conditions were awful and there were no restrooms. Some of my companions died because of cold, and hunger, which caused diseases and led them to die. For more than one night we came across storms with the risk of sinking. We used our hands to remove the water, which was so cold that our hands froze. I was scared. I had one foot in the water because there was not enough space for everybody.



The worst day was the third one because I witnessed a rape: I heard the desperate cry and I felt the cold in the air. I shivered when I saw the desperation on that girl's face. I still remember the silence from that day. After that, I saw many other people die but finally we spotted a land: Palermo. I had heard a lot about that city. It was a dream come true having come so far. I could not believe it. I already felt safe, only seeing a thread of earth, for a moment I forgot everything I had passed. They left us on the beach for two nights and three days and they gave us some blankets.



Now I work as a mechanic, but life is not as easy as they say. I've changed jobs, because I've been discriminated for the colour of my skin and for my nationality. Lots of places I went to, they didn't pay me, sometimes they hit me and I even had to sleep on the dirty floor of a factory, because I didn't have the money to go home and I couldn't afford to leave my job or my family wouldn't eat. I finally found this job that allows me to live modestly and to send my son to school. I was lucky enough to find a boss who does not take into account where I come from, but how I work. At first I found some difficulties to relate to my colleagues, because I didn't know the language. So I decided to attend a language course to learn Italian and thanks to that I met some new friends. Another difficulty that I had was the different approach that clients had with me: they talked to me as if I were not good at my job. Now I'm working for my family but I can't wait to come back home!



1

## **The boy with Messi's jersey**

Story: Illarieti

Illustration: Denilson Hualpa Vásquez

2

## **The little bird**

Story: Cristina Bergamini y Allesia Motta

Illustration: Patricia Trenza López

3

## **The girl with big eyes**

Story: Francesca Gerosa and Chiara Percantini

Illustration: Lorena García Guijarro and Víctor Castilla Rodríguez

4

## **Syria**

Story: Lucrezia Bonaiti and Anna Spreafico

Illustration: Paula Marín Sirvent and Raquel Lario Lôèz

5

## **Youssef**

Story: Greta Spreafico, Laura Giudici and Lucia Prandoni

Illustration: Carla Margot Sarango Eras and Joselyn Ariana Tocto Noriega

6

## **Survivor**

Story: Myriam Soumahoro and Rita Cavallo

Illustration: Eva Garzón del Valle and Anabel García Simón

7

## **Ismael Kamir**

Story: Lucrezia Turco

Illustration: Meixi Periago Jiménez and Sandra Guerrero Terrones