

STUDENT VOICES FROM MOROCCO

Selections from the
2020 MLP Short Story
Competition

Student Voices from Morocco

*Selections from the 2020
MLP Short Story Competition*

Illustrations by Hajar Azizi



Morocco Library Project (MLP)

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**Student Voices from Morocco: Selections from the 2020
MLP Short Story Competition**

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PANEL OF JUDGES *Moulay Larbi Arbaoui, Barb Mackraz, Mohammed Hassim, Khadija Sekkal, Mouhcine Abdechchafi*



Moulay Larbi Arbaoui is the project manager of the MLP Short Story Writing Competition. He has been teaching English as a foreign language since 2006 and is the assistant editor of Morocco World News. In 2018, Larbi won the International School Award for introducing a global dimension to the curriculum.

Barb Mackraz is the founder and director of Morocco Library Project (MLP) and the education nonprofit OliveSeed. She worked for many years in software in Silicon Valley before starting MLP in 2014. She now devotes all her time to literacy and environmental causes that inspire and empower the next generation. Barb is a graduate of Stanford and the University of California.

Mohammed Hassim is a teacher trainer, supervisor, and member of the editorial board of the Moroccan Association of Teachers of English newsletter. He has published many articles on teaching and learning English, has co-authored textbooks, and has been involved in national and international educational projects. Mohammed is a validated trainer with the British Council for Connecting Classrooms and the International School Award, and in 2020

published the book *Teaching Materials, ICT and Professional Development: A Practitioner's Perspective*.

Khadija Sekkal is a senior professor at Sidi Mohamed Ben Abdellah University, Faculty of Letters and Humanities, Sais-Fes, Morocco. She has a PhD in gender construction through proverbs and folktales in Tazrwalt, south of Morocco. Khadija also taught at Ibn Tofail University, Faculty of Letters and Human Sciences, Kenitra, from 2007 to 2017. Her research interests include gender, Amazigh oral culture, and applied linguistics.

Mouhcine Abdechchafi is an 8-year experienced Moroccan ELT teacher and facilitator who was born in Tinghir, southeast of Morocco. He is currently teaching at Alwouroud High School in Kelaat M'gouna, Tinghir Directorate. Mouhcine plays the Loutar, an Amazigh stringed musical instrument; is interested in poetry, Amazigh music, and collective sports (especially football); and is passionate about encouraging others to read.

Hajar Azizi is a first-year student in English at the University of Cadi Ayyad, Marrakech. After watching her mother do embroidery for many years, she became interested in the arts. Since there were no art classes at her school, she watched YouTube videos, and after practicing and watching others, her skills improved. Hajar then

posted her drawings on social media channels, where others praised her for her work, and that exposure encouraged her to follow her passion of drawing. The illustrations like those you see in this book were a first for her, and she can't wait to continue doing more while honing her skills.

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FOREWORD

by Moulay Larbi Arbaoui

Storytelling is an art that connects the writer and the reader. When I was a little kid, my grandmother shared thousands of stories with me, my mom, and all of our friends. Kids my age would gather firewood before the sun set as we prepared to build fires while listening to the Elders share stories. The fires were built at the entrance of our village, and listening to these stories (ranging from adventures to comedies, even including monsters) became a nightly ritual we all looked forward to.

The rule was, if you can't feed our imagination with an entertaining story, you have to collect wood to feed the fire.

I remember those nights fondly, and as I've gotten older, I'm sad they weren't documented so I could easily share them with kids today. Now that I've become a teacher, I'm convinced in the power of writing and using it as a tool each and every day.

Barb Mackraz, founder of Morocco Library Project, felt equally passionate about providing books to the rural areas of Morocco, and with her contribution has made it easier to encourage reading among students.

The remarkable volunteer work she is doing to help our students does not go unnoticed. Together we are committed to providing students with more access to reading and education, and it's a project like this that helps us achieve our goals. Thank you for all the students who participated and members of MLP clubs, teachers, the judging panel, and other contributors for collecting and sharing these stories.



INTRODUCTION

by Barb Mackraz

Morocco has a rich storytelling tradition, and we're delighted to bring these young voices to the attention of the world. The writers in this volume are all from public high schools in Morocco, especially from the rural areas where we focus our work at Morocco Library Project (MLP). We offered this story competition to students in 2020 as a way for them to express themselves and have a creative outlet while at home during the pandemic, and it proved to be so popular that we're now making this an annual tradition. What better way to inspire young people? They deserve to have their voices heard and their creative spirit shared.

Thank you to all of these writers; to Larbi Arbaoui for organizing this project in Morocco; to our judges Mohammed Hassim, Khadija Sekkal, and Mouhcine Abdechchafi; and to the amazing young artist Hajar Azizi, who provided the illustrations you'll see on these pages.

We also send our warm thanks to our friends Judy Kramer, Jolene Hsu, and Kristen Harrison in the U.S. for their support on this project, and to Hachette Book Group for co-sponsoring the 2020 competition. With their support, we were able to give books and e-readers to participants and schools involved and to print this book to put on the shelves of the MLP libraries.

It's an honor to help launch a new generation of storytellers from the deserts and mountains of Morocco. We hope you'll enjoy this collection, and that these talented young writers will keep on writing!



Student Voices from Morocco

*Selections from the 2020
MLP Short Story Competition*

The prizewinning stories

Aiden, by Hiba Baqritit
The Humanitarian King, by Ikram Lekdaoui
Siren's Curse, by Fadwa Ellaik

AIDEN

BY HIBA BAQRTIT

Hey, my name's Hiba, I'm 17. I'm a high school student. I live in Taroudant, which is a quiet small town located in the very middle of Morocco. I'm a person of art, who loves to express what she feels, and how others feel in an artistic and beautiful way, through story telling, photography, script writing, playing music, and video editing.



“Hi! I'm Aiden and I'm creepy. That's what people usually say.”

Sometimes, I don't feel quite comfortable talking to others or even looking at their faces. Instead, I like other things: Blue whales. I can spend the whole day watching whale videos on YouTube or TV. I wish I had one, but I don't think it will fit in my room.

So, I begged my dad to buy me a smaller pet and that's why he brought me Robert, a white little rabbit.

My mother says that I have autism, which doesn't allow me to be as normal as other people, but I think I'm pretty normal just the way I am. It's not my fault if others don't get me; it's theirs. Why do we always like to blame others for our faults? It is super silly, isn't it? But despite all that, I tried several times to act like a "typical human being" to avoid people's curious looks and to please my parents, but I failed, because I've always felt that I live on the wrong side of the universe; that this world is not designed for me.



I liked a girl at school. Her name was Rebecca. But everyone used to call her Reb. She was as beautiful as an angel, and she had a very special pair of black shoes that I loved so much. Reb has never spoken to me; she hasn't even noticed my existence. But once, she found me staring at her face with a huge smile that showed clearly my teeth. I tried so hard to make eye contact with her, so I opened prominently my eyes and tried to focus on hers.



I said: “ Hi!” But she freaked out and screamed for help! She thought I was a psychopath and, in fact, I wasn't. I just wanted to show her what I've learned from a social website that helps people to get

partners. I thought she would like me back, but it seemed to me like she was suffering from some serious psychological issues that pushed her to react super weirdly to such a situation. I hope she feels better now.



People are strange, but their acts are even stranger. I really don't get how they can stand the feeling of bus seats on their backs. Either their skin is different from mine or they have developed harder and thicker skin from using the bus regularly. I always sit like a plank, my back never touches the seat because I simply hate germs. Sometimes, I can't stop thinking about them passing successfully to people's backs to mess around with their bodies, which made me laugh a lot of times in front of them inside the bus. So, everyone starts looking at me because of my loud chuckles. Then I tell them: "I was just thinking about tiny germs" to make them less curious and to shut their mind up.

I have the coolest sister of the whole planet: Sophia. She is a good cook and she used always to complain about forgetting things: her homework, her phone, and her friends' birthdays. I wish I were able to

overlook things like her; I usually feel that my head is crowded by thoughts and ideas, ideas that I could've never forgotten about.



One day, I tried to overlook my notebook and pretended to leave it at home by mistake, but once I closed my room's door, my legs started shaking so fast and my hands couldn't stop sweating.

I tried to breathe slowly, but I felt a heavy thing like a massive rock put on my chest, which stopped the

air from passing to my lungs. I felt exactly as if I was about to die.

I could not resist anymore so I just opened the door firmly and took the notebook from the bed. I know I cannot forget things, but that day, I got sure that I could not even pretend to forget things. Therefore, I just have to endure and deal with all the things I have in mind that would never go easily bear the noise.

When I start hearing more than one voice or more than one sound, my brain cells start collapsing, so a great headache begins to invade my head all of a sudden.

That is one of the reasons my mom is still afraid and worried about me, and she hardly ever leaves me to do things alone, even simple ones like crossing the street.

A few weeks ago, we were heading to the mall, because my mom needed to do her weekly groceries and, in a moment, we had to cross the street when the traffic lights said “walk!” We did, but when we got halfway to the other side, the sign changed into the red “Don’t walk!”, then I stopped walking while my mom didn’t.



A few seconds later, the cars started moving so fast around me making a lot of noise with their horns, and my mom, terrified, started calling my name aloud on the other side of the street. My head could not endure all that. So; I just sat on my knees and tried to cover my ears with my hands to protect them as much as I could in order to end my pain. That's all I had to do.

Normal, calm sounds can indeed be loud for me, and small tiny things matter for me as well. My brain cannot stop focusing on the details. All That can attract me in a beautiful car is its wheel movement, which can get all my attention for hours. The only place where I feel safe to talk about is my head. It might seem eccentric, but it is me, the autistic Aiden.

Every time I try to get closer to people I get further, because they reject me or they bully me all the time; they do not accept the differences. Communication is indeed a basic human need, but sorry Man; I am not good at it. I don't have to act like a "typical person" "to be called or treated normally. Autism doesn't define my humanity.

I tried to do better. I tried that many times, but it didn't work, because my character is stronger than any other thing in me. I'm not sure about a lot of things in my life, but what I'm really sure of is that I'm not bad; I'm not dumb; I'm not aggressive, and I'm not weird. I just live in a world that is not good enough for me, a world that was not made for a person as special as I am.





THE HUMANITARIAN KING

BY IKRAM LEKDAOUI

I am Ikram, 17 years, a student interested in writing in French and in English. I like to analyze the economy of poor and rich countries and try to understand why some are rich while the others are poor.



A century ago, there was a developed planet where everything was easy to accomplish and everything which was not possible to be reached became easily accessible.

There were two kingdoms, the first one named Karthage. Its people had a revolutionary mind as they had a great passion to create and improve their situation and reality. They also respected human rights and believed in coexistence and equality between people despite the difference and diversity of cultures and ethnicities.

More than that, they were intelligent in investing in human resources such as encouraging scientific research and allocating important budgets for that purpose. Moreover, they focused on youth's abilities and encouraged them to create and be good citizens who preferred the common good over their interests. This way of providing services with sincerity and without cheating, therefore, and automatically, contributed to the development of their kingdom.



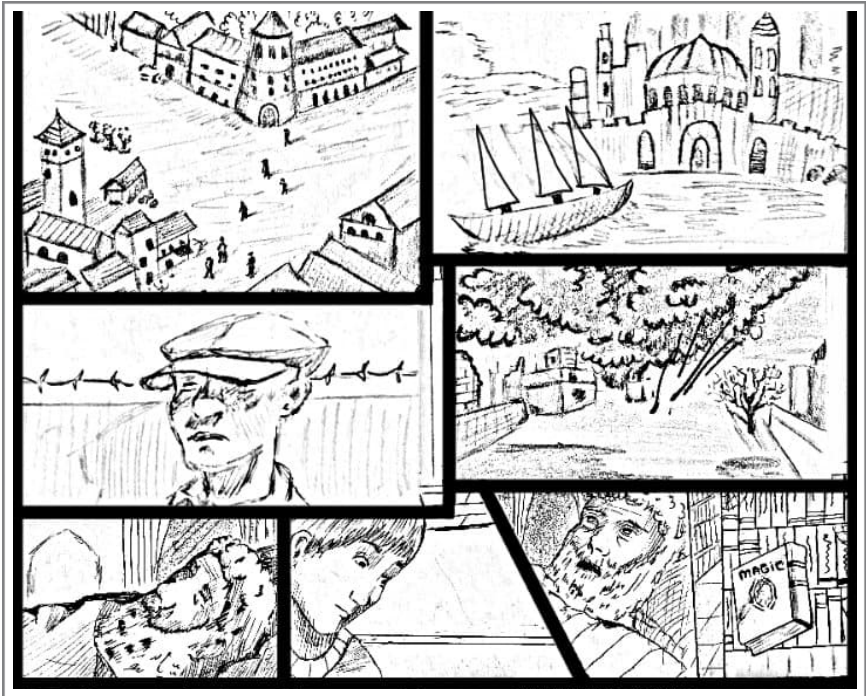
Karthage's people gave importance to the field of medicine and pharmacology; consequently, they became the best drug producers and they enjoyed a good reputation in providing medicinal substances in the whole planet in spite of the scarcity of their natural resources.

The second kingdom was named Numidia. This realm, however, was suffering severely from the lost war against Karthage. Even if its land is replete with natural resources and energy treasures, the defeat had affected and destabilized its feeling of safety like the shaking of an earthquake under feet.



So it was forced to export its wealth at low prices in return; and more than that, Karthage supplied them with expensive finished products that were made from the same raw materials imported from Numidia.

This is due to their insufficient financial capacity to transform and manufacture their basic substances into products ready to be marketed.



One day, Masinissa the monarch of this kingdom was ill because of the pressure and war's impact on him. His kingdom's immersion in misfortunes worsened his health; Masinissa confessed a secret that he kept in his heart of hearts to his son Yugurthen about a magic book in the royal library.

‘Dear son, as you know, I’m getting older and you’ll be the future king of our kingdom that’s why I shall tell you about the magic book that has helped me during all these years, and I’m pretty sure that it would be useful for you one day,’ confessed Masinissa while holding his son’s hand tightly.

‘But father, how can this book help me?’ asked Yugurthen.

‘H’m, well’ said Masinissa lying in his bed looking at his son, who felt startled at his voice sound, ‘I believe you’ll figure it out with time my dear boy.’ ‘Yes, certainly, my beloved father,’ replied Yugurthen exchanging glances with Masinissa and nodding to him.

Few days after the father’s confession, at one night in which the moon was full and shone brightly, the king died and sadness and sorrow filled his people’s hearts for his kindness, fairness, and altruistic character. He had always put his people’s interests first to his own.

Yugurthen, the son of Masinissa, was made the king of Numidia, he had a strong willingness to improve the situation of his kingdom and regain its autonomy.

As a result, his first step was to minimize imports from Karthage to be able to pay back his debts to the envious kingdom, but Karthage's king Syphax tried to foil Yugarthen's plans so that Numidia remains under his authority.

Despite the increasing pressure, Yugarthen stuck to his revolutionary plans. And because Masinissa died Syphax paid a visit to Yugarthen to express his condolences.

'Hi Yugarthen' said Syphax with a sorrowful tone, 'I am immeasurably sorry for your loss. Masinissa was a great king, we shall never have his like.'

'Hello Syphax' replied Yugarthen whilst looking at his visitor with the mistrustful eye, 'thank you for your coming over here in person.'

'In fact, I have come for two reasons. First, I wished to express my sympathy for your father's death. Secondly, I trust you will not refuse your help in a matter directly affecting your natural resources. I would like to increase the number of imports, and in return, I will increase the number of exports and I presume you'd like it,' suggested Syphax.

‘You have been wrong in relying on me’ replied Yugurthen. ‘and how can you say such a thing. Permit me to tell you that this is not the time for business,’ cried Yugurthen.

‘Sorry if I hurt your feelings’ muttered Syphax, lowering his eyes confusedly.

Yugurthen made no answer; he was probably in no state to do so, utterly exhausted, he turned around and walked away.

Not so long after this conversation took place somehow the planet became messy. A pandemic, suddenly broke out and a lot of people got infected and everything was stopped and got paralyzed: school, factories, roads, public services; in other words, everything was motionless.

As a matter of fact, both kingdoms had to know that it was not a question of what they owned from the resources, but rather about which one can save its people and the planet by finding a cure to fight the pandemic. All the planet’s inhabitants believed in the capabilities of Numidia’s scientists and doctors to find a solution to this unprecedented natural disaster.

Three months later, however, all the experiments and researches of the scientists sadly failed without any result, the mortality was incessantly on the rise especially among the elderly; while Yugurthen tried to fancy about the pandemic and its antidote, he suddenly remembered the magic book of which his father spoke before he passed away.



He hoped to find something helpful in that book and that exactly what happened, he opened the book and found a pen in it, but the book was blank. Yugurthen was smart to guess how things work; so, he wrote his problem in it, closed it, and waited for a moment.

Surprisingly, After he had opened it once again, he found the formula of the antidote in the magic book.

He quickly ordered all the laboratories throughout the kingdom to start producing the vaccine and distribute it for free to the infected people who were unable to buy it.

Yugurthen was altruistic like his father. He didn't take revenge on Syphax for what he did to him and to his kingdom Numidia. His goal was to save all humanity not only his people.

A few months later, the pandemic had thoroughly disappeared from the planet, the animosity which was between the two kingdoms had ended Syphax realized that they shouldn't have exploited the weaknesses of others and imposed their power on them because maybe one day they would be in great need to them.

That is why we have to be generous and not selfish.

As they say, 'birds eat ants, and when dead, ants eat birds', which means that time change and try as much as you can not hurt or underestimate the value of anyone in life. You might be powerful today, but remember, time is much more powerful than you.



SIREN'S CURSE

BY FADWA ELLAIK

I'm a 15 years old girl named Fadwa Ellaik. I enjoy reading stories and watching movies, especially fantasy themed ones. Though I wouldn't consider reading nor writing my fortes, I find both activities really entertaining! I'd spend most of my free time sketching and drawing whenever something grabs my attention.



What do we live for? To achieve happiness. Or success? Or are we just here to live our days and go by?

Well, it's hard to tell. But it seems enduring hardships and heartbreaks is just a condition of living. Or that's what I thought. Let me tell you a story about a girl finding her own way around her pains.

Emily was a smart beautiful young woman who lived alongside her adoptive grandma. They ran a flower shop, with the help of her childhood friend, Connor. Her grandma called her Lily for most of her life, inspired by the real flower. Lily lived a normal happy life. Or so did she think?



We live in a world full of magical creatures and spells, hidden from us humans. Little are the ones aware of their existence or who get the chance of meeting them. The most famous interactions between our worlds, are those with sirens, characterized by their astounding looks and mesmerizing voices. They lure the humans into following them to the sea, to trade the siren curse with them.

Well, you must have figured by now, that sirens were all humans once. When humans suffer unsupportable pain of heartbreaks, they are called by the sea, and they are to answer that call.

As I've said before, Lily used to live with her grandma, but ever since she has got a stroke, she moved to the hospital to be under constant care. It was a devastating time for Lily, though she was lucky to have Connor by her side. Little did she know "Nothing lasts forever."



Connor was excited to start a new chapter after moving away to another city; he even bought the boat of his dreams. Lily was happy for him but was broken inside by the thought of having only a few months before she's all alone.

That evening, while walking on the beach, Connor got a call and had to leave.

“Sorry!” he said quickly. “Do you want me to walk you home?” he added. “It’s alright! I want to enjoy the view a little bit more.” Lily said with a smiley face she could see that he was in a hurry. After he left, Lily wandered around for a while. She couldn’t contain herself anymore and started tearing down.

A honey-like voice started singing a captivating song. Lily leaned over and ended up falling into the ocean, following the dearly voice. She was cursed by a siren, which meant she would trade places with him, and lose all her memories.

Unlike the expected, the curse was split between the two, for unknown reasons. And thus, Lily’s journey to discover the siren world began.

The siren, now a human on land, explained all he knew about the curse and that he couldn’t remember

his past nor his name. Lily decided to call him Casper.

In the early morning, Lily returned home with Casper, only to find Connor waiting outside the shop.

“-Lily! Why are you still out? I was worried something happened to you,” he screamed. “And who’s that with you?”

“-Me? I’m a sir-” Casper was interrupted by Lily saying “A friend! He’s a friend who’s staying over for a few nights.”



Lily tried covering everything up, but she couldn't lie anymore, and decided to tell Connor the truth. He was frustrated but relieved since she was okay. They decided to get more information from other sirens in the sea.

The next day, Lily went to visit her grandma at the hospital. She told her she'd be going on a trip for a few days on Connor's boat.

Did you realize who I am yet? I'm the grandma!

"-Be safe my dear child! But before you go, there's something I need to tell you. You may find this confusing right now, but there are many mysterious things in this world."

"-When you say mysterious, do you mean sirens?" Lily replied.

"-What? So, you know about the curse?"

"-I figured."

"-I guess you're old enough to know, you see, I suffered from heartbreak as well, but it wasn't me

who took the curse. And so, I kept waiting and looking, but some people don't want to be found."

"-Granny?"

"-It was then when I found you, Lily. Turns out your mother was a siren, and the Poseidon nonetheless."

"-Poseidon?"

"-I know it's too much to take at once, dear. But I wanted to tell you. The Poseidon, like the Greek mythology, is the person who rules over the oceans and started the curse. That was your mother."

"-So that means..."

"-It means you possess all her powers; You are the next Poseidon. You can stop the curse for once and all."

"-But I don't own any powers..."

"-It's alright, dear. Don't stress it out, take your time, your powers are related to your emotions!"

"-Thanks, granny."

And so, Lily took onto her adventure in the ocean, she decided to lift the curse from the sirens without actually changing their forms, and so the sirens and humans lived together ever after.

Connor moved away as he was planning. He and Lily promised to keep in touch. She's not alone anymore; she made new friends from both worlds. I found the person I was looking for, but I guess it was too late as they lost their memory, I was happy to know they're okay, and even starting a new life.

I will always be proud of my Lily for having courage. As for her mother, I can't judge her, maybe she couldn't bear the pain and wished to help others from that. But I know her decisions weren't the wisest.

Life is all about learning and converting all our struggles into something positive.



THE BARRIER

BY SAIDA OUYOUS



Sofia is a small girl aged 9 years old. She studies in primary school. Her life will turn upside down. Would she be able to live a normal life?

She is a very active girl. She loves to play basketball, swimming, and riding her bike.

Today is Sofia's birthday and her family prepared her a big party. When Sofia went to school, she took off her uniform and wore her nice dress for the birthday.

At 8:00 pm the party started, Sofia and her friends started dancing and playing fun games. When the time to cut the cake arrived everyone was happy.

Everybody enjoyed eating the cake. A few minutes later Sofia felt so dizzy and hungry although she had

eaten the cake. She ran to her mom to tell her that something was wrong. Worse, she became so pale.

Her parents saw her miserable conditions and took her immediately to the hospital.

The doctor was able to save her life, but a few hours later, Sophia's blood glucose test results were ready at the doctor's office.



She was diagnosed with “diabetes” type 1. It means her body has stopped making enough insulin. As a medical treatment, a person with type 1 diabetes, like Sofia, had to get insulin through shots or an insulin pump. Sofia also needed to test her blood sugar level several times a day.

You can imagine how Sofia's life changed in an instant. Everything was upside down. The worst thing was being able to go to school and keep on normal life and usual practices as she used to. all her classmates could eat candies, sugar, cake, etc., but her.



After a terrible day, Sofia had to take care of her body now and pay attention to how much she eats. Luckily, Sofia had the greatest mom on the earth and she would never make her feel worthless.

The next day, Sofia put on her nice dress and went to school.

Everyone knew what happened to her. Her best friends, unlike a few mean bullies, received her with jubilant smiles and wished her a speedy recovery.

All of them are treating her nicely and trying to help her. Sofia, apparently, looked happy because her friends were by her side, but honestly, she hated to receive special care, just because she has diabetes.

The bell rang as usual. The students started eating all kinds of food, especially sweets and cakes. Sofia always has a sweet tooth, but now she has to be careful with all that she eats.

Leaving her friends in the refectory, Sofia heads to the school nurse's office to get her blood sugar tested. After that, she went back to find all her friends were gone. She took hastily her healthy meal as prescribed by her endocrinologist. Then after she's finished eating, she went back to the school nurse's office for her insulin shot.

In the beginning, Sofia had many problems, she felt dizzy and shaky, especially when she felt hungry.

Moreover, she has always to take her diabetes bag with her because she might need it in case of an emergency. There are times when she passes out. Her bag contains insulin and shots and some sugary food. She might need something sweet to eat when she felt weak after her insulin level dropped down.

Also, she woke up very night thirsty and has to go to the bathroom in the middle of the night, that's one of the biggest problems for her. Because of this, she couldn't sleep deeply.

After a long time Sofia started to fight her problems, she made new friends who also suffer from the same disease. Sofia loves sports very much. She joined a karate club. And now she's become a fierce fighter. Every weekend she hangs out with her friends and enjoyed her time.

Now Sofia is not afraid to try new things. She can still have fun and do things she wants to do and forgets this disease which seemed to be, at first, a stumbling block in front of her to have a normal life.





DEADLY BANANA

BY HASNA MOUSSAOUI



Said understood at that moment that destiny is destiny. You can hide or run, but you can't escape it, or change it.

Said is a teenager who lives with his small family in a small city as all people his age. And as his name means happiness, he was always smiling, and nothing made him sad. He was the second son in the family. He had an older brother whose name is Mohamed and a younger sister whose name is Rahma. She was two years younger.

Said was studying in a middle school near his place. He was in class 9, and he was a good student, especially in both physics and maths. On a school day, after coming back from school at 12:30, Said had his lunch with his parents and of course his brothers.



By the way, his mother was very proud of him and loved him very much. So, after lunch, Said prepared himself to go back to school. He took his schoolbag and decided to go but heard his mom calling him: ‘Said, Said...’ He returned to her with a big smile. She gave him a banana and kissed him. Said was very happy, but he did not know that this kiss will be the last one.

On his way back home in the evening, Said saw a group of people standing on the sidewalk. “It seems

that it's an accident or something like that." He said to himself.

Because he was curious, he started getting closer to know what happened. When he arrived, he saw a big blood pool. He got closer, and he saw the victims.

Said at that moment was shocked; it was his little sister who was submerged in the blood- she was certainly dead- and his mother, lying on the ground, but was still breathing. He sat on his knees and started crying with a very loud voice and saying: "What happened to them? Please, answer me, please."

A man said to him: "I was sitting in the cafe when this woman passed by when suddenly her daughter slipped on the floor because of a banana peel." Said stopped crying, he remembered something."

When the mother saw her daughter submerged in blood, she felt down". Said started feeling guilty, because he knew that he was the killer. He was the person who threw this banana peel. The ambulance arrived. Said called his father and his brother, and they went to the hospital. A few minutes later, the doctor came to them and said: "We lost her, sorry for

you.” And of course, you can imagine the effect of that sentence on them.

Said lost his mother and his sister, too. Said’s brother and father were very sad, but Said was living and drowning in a sea of grief and sorrow.

Later, Said was reading about traveling in time, when he thought of an idea. Why not travel back in time, and therefore change his current situation and reality. Right away, he started working on that.

After about two months of continuous hard work, he finally came up with a time-machine, and of course, physics helped him very much. He programmed it to go back in time and more specifically to the exact period he would like to go to. Indeed, he went back in time, and exactly on the day of the death of his mother and his sister.

Just a few minutes later, Said found himself exactly at the moment when his mother gave him the banana. Said was very happy because he saw his mother for another time. So, he took the banana, but this time he didn’t throw the peel down, he threw it into a trash bin. He returned to real-time with an amazing feeling of satisfaction and relief.

He found himself at home, he asked his father; “Where are my mother and my sister?” His father was just surprised by the question, he hugged him and said: “They are living happily in heaven with angels.” Said didn’t understand anything.

He returned to his room, reprogrammed his machine to return to that black day. He found himself again at the same moment. His mom gave him the banana; He didn’t throw the peel of course, but this time he waited to see what would happen.

He saw his mom with his sister walking; he checked if there is no banana peel, but the unreasonable thing is that there was a banana peel there. Said didn’t believe his eyes, he tried to save them, but he was unable to do that. He saw his sister falling and everything.

Said understood at that moment that destiny is destiny and we can’t escape it, or change it. When he returned to real-time, he was very sad. Every time he heard about the environment or natural disasters caused by pollution, he remembered how a little everyday reckless behavior had turned his life upside down.

He didn't want anyone in his shoes. So, he created a website from which he shared his story and encouraged people to preserve the environment and take care of it.

His website appealed to a big number of visitors and won a lot of money. Of course, that was not his goal, but that encouraged him to do something bigger. So, he decided to create an association for environmental protection, even he was minor to do that, but his father helped him to achieve his goal.

Also, his classmates helped him a lot. He named his association "Change the Environment, Change Your Destiny".

An association from which, he led a lot of awareness-raising campaigns about the environment and its importance for human beings, and did a lot of activities with his classmates and also other people.

Also, he made a lot of lectures, and he always repeated: "A peel of banana has changed my life; I lost the best persons in my life."



So, can you imagine how all these natural dangers can change humanity, change the earth? The earth is warming, the sea level is rising, summer is winter, and winter is summer, and that makes us lose our lives.

You have to know that if something big happens to the earth, we will not be able to change it anymore, because that will be our destiny, but now we can

change everything. We can change our future from this moment.

We have to change just our behavior. Maybe, you are here and you're participating in pollution, but other people are suffering because of you. And if you don't care about them, your sons will suffer because of you. The environment is our responsibility, and it's up to us to preserve it or destroyed it.

Said became a famous student and also his association, and he started to participate in international forums. He was partly happy because he saw that he made the change, but he never forgot about his mother and his sister.



BELIEVE

BY FATIMAZAHRAE KHALID

I'm Fatima Ezzahra Khalid, a 19 years old student. I'm an ambitious person who loves to be unique and creative. I belong to a social background that does not appreciate school or studying, so I was supposed to leave school at the age of 12, but I didn't.



Her family was not very happy when she was born, because people there still think that a male baby is better than a female one.

Once upon a time in a very remote village in Zagora, a small town in the southeast of Morocco, lives a clever girl. Her family was not very happy when she was born, because people there still think that a male baby is better than a female one. If you hear the yoyos coming from a house, it is definitely the beginning of a marriage or a baby boy sees the light.

In the case of baby girls, the ceremony goes unnoticed.

Worse a cloud of sadness would hover over the place for days. That's the case of the little girl here. At her birth, she was given no moment of festive or anything good, save for the name Zahra.



Her mother begged the family to name her Zahra, and prayed that this name, which means luck, would bring her joy and prosperity.

Zahra was the first baby of Ali and Fatima, and the last one.

While Zagora is not a big city, men have only two choices: to work in their families' fields or move to the big cities in the country and look for a suitable job.



After the birth of his daughter, Ali travelled to Casablanca in hope to find a decent job that will keep hunger away from his family. As an uneducated man with no skills except for all that his muscles can afford, he worked in gardening for several months.

Later, he worked in a famous restaurant as a waiter for three years. For the whole three years, Ali had visited his family in Zagora only three times. Every Eid Al Adha, Muslims big annual celebration. During the father's absence, the wife and daughter sometimes stayed hungry for days. If they are lucky, they get some food or leftover from their neighbors.

As time goes by, no news from the father and their situation was getting harder. the father disappeared all of a sudden and never visited them anymore since the last Eid Aladha. Fatima, the mother, was looking for a job every day so that she could feed her daughter. But there was no one who would keep the girl while she was working. So, she decided to go back to her parents'. At least, the little Zahra wouldn't die out of hunger there. She borrowed some money and went to the village where her parents lived.

Years passed by, and Ali wasn't in the picture yet. Fatima went back many times to Zagora and asked people about him, but no one heard of him since then. Zahra had grown up, she was now six and she had to go to school. Her grandparents didn't agree about that.

“Girls should not go to school, teach her to cook and work on the fields so she can get married as soon as possible.” The grandparents often said to Fatima. “Her father is not here, who will take charge of her school charges?” said the grandparents.

There were a lot of other disappointing talks that hurt her, but she buried that deep in her heart and the discouraging words never set her back to help her daughter.

The poor Fatima felt pain whenever she saw a written paper and couldn't read what was written on it. She couldn't even read or write her name because her parents didn't send her to school. She didn't want her daughter to feel the same painful feeling of illiteracy. She wanted her to study and have a bright future. She faced many problems while registering her daughter in the village's school, but finally she did it.

She had earned some money out of the wonderful coats she sewed and sold in the local market. She had used that money and bought a girly school bag with some pens and notebooks to send Zahra to school.

Zahra always got the best marks in her class. She was always on top of her class and teachers gave her prizes at the end of each semester. Those prizes even though they are humble encouraged Fatima to do her best and overcome all the financial struggles she faced.

Zahra lived in a conflict both against her society and culture and against her fears. Against the society because she always heard bad things from other students about her and her mother. They seized any chance to remind her that she was not loved and her father left her, and that she was poor and didn't deserve to study with them...

She was strong to fall prey for the bullying of her peers and stronger when her teachers commend her for her excellent grades. That was enough to give her some solace and shut the bullying mouths. Yet, It was not so easy to take in people's hurting words but that taught Zahra to be confident, hardworking, patient. As time goes by she learned how to turn

deaf ears to that kind of people who wanted to make her feel unloved.

The other conflict is inner and was against her fears. She was afraid to go out like all the children in the village and have fun with them. She had seen that most of them didn't show any respect for her because she was the unknown's daughter.

So, she spent her free time alone, watching cartoons on TV or trying to hunt birds in the garden of her grandparents' house. Being alone is not a lovely idea for anyone, but Zahra made the best of her loneliness.

Zahra had been alone for long time, living in her proper world and that made her calm, focused and very creative.

Her mother Fatima was always amazed at her daughter's drawings and her teachers liked the short stories she wrote. They always told Fatima that she was very lucky to have such a clever and very polite girl.

When she passed the primary school final exam with flying colours, she had to face another challenge. She had to go to a middle school now. But, there

was no middle school in the village, and the little heroine was afraid she wouldn't finish her studies.

It was another challenge for Zahra's mother who was ready to sacrifice her life for giving her daughter a better one. But how could she do something? She was feeding her and thinking about her problem, there was no one by her side.

Even her husband who should be responsible for his daughter disappeared at once, maybe he died or maybe he married another woman in Casablanca. A common practice among the youth of the village.

Most of them fall in love with the modern girls in cities as soon as they got a chance. I heard some women in my neighborhood saying that girls there are fascinating men with a magic they called make-up and strong uplifting perfumes.

She spent sleepless nights thinking of her gloomy future. Who would keep them safe if she and Zahra moved to any city where Zahra could continue her school? She was really afraid about that unclear future. Few days later she took the risk; she travelled back to Zagora with her daughter, rented a small house, and knocked on the doors asking

people if they needed a maid. That was not a good job but for Fatima it didn't matter.

She was always thinking about her genius daughter; she believed in her. She did everything she could to support her to finish her studies. Zahra excelled in her studies.

The school bell rung and the teacher stopped. OK kids, class is over. We will finish our story someday later.

Amid the noise of the students collecting their books and leaving the classroom, the teacher in her desk felt shy footstep approaching to her direction and a soft voice asked gently: "Teacher, you told us that Zahra completed her studies. What about her mother?"

The teacher replied with a big smile on her face: "She is living comfortably in a beautiful house with her daughter, who is now a famous teacher."



CHASING THE DREAM

BY HOUDA CHAOUQUI

My name is Houda Chaouqui. I was born on February 21st 2001, in a small village called Freita, which is located in Kalaa Sraghna city. During that time, I was an active kid who loved riding bikes, and listening to short stories told by her father and elder brothers.



Divorced women were looked down in Nora's community and were accused of bringing shame to their families.

Once upon a time, there was a smart girl called Nora. She was eighteen years old and was a baccalaureate student. Nora lived in a small town called Freita with her mother and elder brother.

In the day of the National exam results, Nora ranked first among her classmates and got her high school degree with a distinction.

Her mother was so proud of her. However their happiness has quickly turned into sorrow as her elder brother said: “You will not pursue your studies at university! These are the family customs and traditions; we do not let our girls leave the house and live in another city alone.”



She replied quickly, “Please brother I can’t imagine my life without school and studies! What am I going to do?”

He said: “You know that we do not let our girls leave the house and live in another city alone! That's why you will marry Hajj Mustapha; he is rich and will be happy with him.”

She replied (*trembling*): “I don't care if he is rich or handsome or whatever! I want to study.”

Her brother said, “There is no university! You will marry him!” (He left the room.)

Nora was so sad knowing that she couldn't discuss the topic again with her brother. With tears in her eyes, the poor girl laid on her bed by herself thinking about the dramatic change that has just occurred.

She remembered her childhood dream; she wanted to be a teacher. She used to play the role of a teacher when playing with her friends. Unfortunately, the forced marriage let that dream shuttered on the floor.

Nora gave up her dream to start another life with her husband who is forty years older than her.



Throughout the first year of marriage, he has never taken care of her or listened to her.

However, he was always hitting and slapping the poor Nora whenever she refused to sleep with him. Her life was a nightmare. Despite all of the troubles she had, she was patient and had never told her family.



One day, she decided to go home and tell her family about her suffering and she requested divorce. That day was so awful to her brother who felt guilty seeing the scars and bruises in Nora's body. He apologized to her and kissed her forehead.

Nora was crying and her mother too. The day after, He went with her to the court to request divorce from that monster. The procedure took about 3 months and it was so hard for her to meet people outside who always kept asking her about her situation.

Divorced women were looked down in Nora's community and were accused of bringing shame to their families. Later on, Nora joined university with

the help of her elder brother and she started the learning journey again to fulfill her dream of being a teacher.

After three years of studies and professional development, Nora got her Bachelor degree with a distinction and applied for a teacher position the next year.

Hopefully, she was appointed as a primary school teacher in her Douar and became an idol for her female students. Nora taught them with love, and they loved her too.

Thanks to her success story, many girls have pursued their studies and got higher positions. Nora lived a happy life serving her community with love.



BEHIND THE MOUNTAIN

BY OUHMIDA SOULAIMANE



I cannot describe my feeling there, a feeling of surprise mixed with fear, but it shifted to terror when they turned to me.

I have been living here, behind a mountain, for five weeks, always alone. I am always freezing. I always remember how my life used to be like. Previously, I was a human being like everyone else, but now I'm different. I don't drink, I don't eat, I don't feel. I'm a demon.

My name is Jack; I am seventeen years old, and I am in hell. I know you are surprised now, but this is the truth. Let me tell you how I got here.

The story started when I went with my friends to that damned mountain. I was studying in high school. I was smart but sometimes crazy. My friends

John and Mike always support me; they are crazy like me and we were studying in the same class as my girlfriend, Mary. She was pretty and smart, but she's not crazy like me.

Her voice still echoed in my ear: “Jack, please don’t go there!”



“It is so dangerous. I hear many frightening stories about people who never come back from that cursed place,” Mary told me with a low tone that kindled fear in my heart but my desire to explore and discover the place was much stronger.

I regret that I did not listen to her because she did not accept the idea to go on a trip to the mountain and she kept asking me not to go because of rumors about the mountain that there are human bodies, ghosts, and witches.

And this is what happened on the mountain.

Mike and John liked this idea. They love horror and suspense movies. So, we went the following day and we were excited about what we could find there. That afternoon, we were on the mountain, wandering and afraid because of the view.

We could not see in front of us because of thick fogs and, sometimes, we could hear steps coming close to us. But the big problem was that we didn't know the way out. We were very afraid.

While we were looking to get out as quickly as possible, Mike sat down to drink some water, but after a few minutes of looking around, we turned back and did not find Mike.

The night fell and we were screaming: "Miiiiike, Miiiiike!" But, there was no answer. We couldn't stay

a minute more on the scary mountain so we fled quickly without a precise destination.

After two minutes of running, I began to feel the movement was slowing down, and when I turned, I could not find John. I couldn't breathe because of the shock. Where are my friends? Where am I?

I quickly ran into a cave and took my mobile phone to call Mary, but the network was not working. I saw a light coming from inside the cave, and I followed it until I found my friends over there, but I was surprised by what I saw. Devil worshippers!

I found devil worshippers inside the cave.

I cannot describe my feeling there, a feeling of surprise mixed with fear, but it shifted to terror when they turned to me. I couldn't move, speak, or breathe. I saw everything: their rituals, sayings, and even faces, and now they will get rid of me. Yes, get rid of me because I know everything about them. I fainted before thinking about this. Now, I am sitting in the middle and they are reading in a loud voice. Then, I began to feel a deep feeling that my soul was pulling out of me.

So, it turned into a demon without love, without friends, without family!



THE LETHAL EPIDEMIC

BY ABDELGHAFOUR BAMOULA

I'm Abdelghafour Bamoula, I am 19 years old, I'm a student in the School of Technology in Essaouira this year, Business intelligence and data science section. Since my childhood, I like innovation and creativity. I like technology in general.



All people should stay at home and never go out, the TV anchor said, but it was too late.

Said was a normal child like others. He lived with his family in a poor neighborhood, but they were very happy all the time. Said's father, Brahim, had been a doctor before but now he retired. He made some money thanks to his retirement. Said's mother, Fatima, was a sensitive and very helpful woman.

She liked Said and his sister so much. Said's sister, Fatiha, was young and very funny. She played with her bike all time.

One day, as usual the family was in the living room. Said and his father were watching news on TV, and Fatiha was playing with her toys. Suddenly, the father became focused on the news of a dangerous virus in the city.



“All people should stay at home and never go out,” the news anchor said.

“Fatiha stop talking!” said the father angrily.

“... all people who are outside have a big possibility to be infected by the disease,” the news anchor continued.

“...elder people are the most likely to die because of the virus...”

There was a long silence in the family, even from Fatiha who was too young to understand the situation. Suddenly, they weren't aware that the mother wasn't at home.

“Where is your mom?” the father asked Said.

“She went to the market to do the shopping...”

“What?! To the market! Are you sure?” cried the father.

“Yes, dad. She told me that after she went out.” replied Said.

“Oh no!” Brahim said, in a very sad voice.

“Dad...” Said said after a long silence.

“What dear?”

“Are you scared of the epidemic?”

“What do you mean?”

“I mean, do you think mum will be infected because she went out?”

“I don’t know. But to be honest, I’m really scared.”

“Don’t worry dad,” Fatiha said.

“Our mum is a good woman. God will protect her.

My mum always tells me that God helps people who help others.” she added.

The father looked at her innocent eyes and said:
“You are totally right, darling.”

Then, the mother opened the door. All of them were looking at her as she came back from a long trip.

“What are you looking at?” she said.

“Are you fine, Fatima? All things are Ok?” asked Brahim.

“Yes. What’s wrong with you?” Fatima said.

“No, nothing Mum,” Said said.

“Ok, so let’s have dinner.”

After they had dinner in a complete silence, they went to bed except the father. He knew that his wife wouldn’t be able to resist the virus because her immunity was very weak. Also, at that night Said was very scared about his mother; he had never thought that she would die. But the situation of the mother the following day made them all stressed.

After two weeks, in a quiet morning, the mother’s temperature had suddenly increased. Not only that but she was also coughing strongly. As a result, they went to the hospital quickly. The doctor said that the mother was sick. It was the virus! She went out and she didn’t follow the orders of the ministry of health. That terrible news shocked Said and his father and made them helpless. They couldn’t do anything to help her.

Brahim looked at his wife from the window of the clinic and he bit his tongue, he was very disappointed.



“I have promised myself to help you darling by all means, but what could I do now?” Brahim thought.

He really couldn't do anything. That new virus had no cure. No one in the world could find one. He could just pray and ask God to heal her, that's all he did all the time.

Said regretted letting his mother to go out that black day. He knew that he couldn't do anything. However, he was optimistic that she would be fine one day. His sister, Fatiha, was crying every night because she was very close to her mother and she used to listening to her stories before sleeping.

Day after day the situation of the family was getting worse since the mother became sick. The mother was the light in the house. She was preparing healthy food, now they ate just fast food and the young girl started suffering from obesity. She was cleaning the house and now it became like garbage. She was arranging all things. In short, the situation of the family was in the rock bottom.

The following day, in the early morning someone knocked the door. All the family members were surprised. He was Brahim's old friend, Doctor Hassan, who came to visit him. He had been his best

friend since university days. They studied together in the Faculty of Medicine.

“Hassan!!” Shouted Brahim.

“Yes, Hassan, how are you Brahim?”

“Really, I am not fine.”

“What happened? Wouldn’t you let me in?”

“Sorry, come in.”

“Oh! I think there are serious things happening.”

“Forget that now. Have you been on holiday here?”

“No, I’m going to work here.”

“So, how long will you be staying?”

“I will be staying for two weeks.”

“Fine, you’re welcome my friend.”

“So, what happened here? I’m sure there are things you want to tell me.”

“Yes my friend, there are.”

“And what is there?”

“My wife!”

“Fatima? Where is she?”

“She suffers from a dangerous virus, and the doctor said that she would die in few days if they don’t find any solution.”

“Oh my God! Fatima is sick? Is she infected by the new virus?” Hassan asked.

“Yes, unfortunately.”

“What a coincidence?! The central hospital told me to come for that. And you know that I’m a specialist in epidemics. Fatima will be fine. I’m sure.”

Dr. Hassan treated Fatima, and she left the hospital because her health improved. The mother was recovering among her family. Joy and pleasure returned. Said cried because God healed his mother.

This experience taught him many lessons in life. He knew the importance of mothers in life, and that

God always listens and helps people. Also, he must be optimistic and patient in difficult situations.



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