

AULIDI

(my dear son)

by

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(The stage is empty; there is only a lone chair in the center. Some Magrebi music, sung by a vigorous female voice, fills the space. A dark-skinned woman, tanned by many Magrebi suns, appears from one of the corners; her head is covered with a veil, and she is rocking a bundle, wrapped in white cloths, in her arms. She comes closer to the front edge of the stage looking at the audience, then she looks at the sound-cabin asking for silence to not wake the baby up.)

AISHA.- Shhhh!... *(Music fades until it disappears completely. Aisha looks at her son, and then talks to the audience.)* He could wake up. It was so hard to put him to sleep... So hard, yes. *(She walks around the chair while singing a lullaby.)* How he cried!... Poor thing. Aulidi... my dear son. He cried and cried inconsolably. *(She stops and smiles pleased.)* He was always a crying baby. Since he was born... Even before he was born... There was nothing and no one that could make him stop... Many sleepless nights. *(She picks the chair, and takes it to the front stage.)* I thought it would be different here. That is why we came. *(She observes the faces of the audience sitting on the front row. She chooses one of them and, bringing the chair close to him, she talks to him.)* Do you like stars, sidi?... Do you know that I know all of them by name?... *(She is watching them with her memory, naming them in silence.)* So many sleepless nights... We became friends. I talk to them, I tell them about my things, my problems *(She looks at the man again.)*, looking at each other, as we do now, you and me. *(She sits, flustered)* I... had never looked at a man so close. I had never seen such beautiful eyes... Are all men's eyes like that... as beautiful as yours? *(She evokes something, with her lost look.)* When I was living there... at the other side... at the other shore... I used to look at the stars' eyes only... *(She dives into the man's eyes looking for answers or deep-sea fishes or a moon reflect in a pond of her far-away*

south) I told them what now I am only... only to your eyes... only to you... going to confess. (*With nostalgia*) The stars were brighter there... Maybe because the desert was darker... like me. Everything is lighter here... So many lights on the streets... The stars were frightened. (*Looking at her baby.*) And he was too... Poor thing... (*She sings him a lullaby again.*) It seems like he wanted to wake up. Sleep, sweet baby; sleep, my love... Mommy is here to protect you from those who want to harm you... from those who don't want you. (*She questions the man.*) Sidi, you are a good man... your eyes say so... you can understand me... you can help me. I know you will help me. (*Sad.*) Ih Alyam!... What dark times!... (*Remembering with pain.*) I walked and walked... First it was the burning sand...then the cold water. We arrived at night... Nobody was waiting for us... only the moon, the Christian moon, the European moon... so white... so blinding... (*She addresses the man.*) That's the reason why they discovered us... It was her, the Christian moon, the one who betrayed us... My golden moon would never have done it... My moon is merciful with Ala's daughters. (*She looks at her baby with tender care.*) Sleep tight, my dear son... aulidi... today there is no moon... sleep tight since nobody will curse your dreams. (*She talks confidentially to the man.*) I didn't come alone... Apart from all those unknown men, there was somebody else... Yes, I came with someone... (*She caresses her precious bundle.*) He came with me... inside of me. (*With a big commotion, mix of distress and deep happiness.*) The pain started there... in that little boat... Aulidi! You were on your way... like me... both of us were starting a new life... (*To the man*) Do you know something, sidi?... He always cried... always... he already cried even inside my womb ... His tears flooded my insides like rain... (*Deeply sad.*) A barren rain... one that came at the wrong time, ruining the harvest. (*Silence filled with sorrow.*) It was a humid sea journey... It rained on my tunic... and under my skin... The old craft was my wet bed... But he didn't want to come into this world... not yet... (*With tenderness.*) He opened his eyes for the first time here... In Cha Al-lah! on this shore... under the Christian moon. He was born crying... Now his tears soaked the new sand... And my womb was moaning, empty...barren... How much forgotten pain! (*She looks terrified at the man.*) Suddenly they arrived... preceded by the sound of their gunshots... Sidis like you, dressed in uniforms... They all ran away... and I was left alone... alone under the white moon... the arrogant Christian moon... laughing at me from the middle of this enemy horizon... lal-la... the lady of the adverse Heaven... the whitest lal-la... the ferocious lady... (*She looks tenderly to the baby again, and she sings while rocking him.*) You wanted to be white too... my dear son... my

love... and attend the white school... like children from here... to mix with them... with their white laughs... with their white games... That is the reason why mommy incessantly prayed for you... so that Heaven would illuminate you... But Heaven doesn't speak our language (*Again to the man.*) Do you have kids, sidi? (*She waits for an answer.*) Ala Akbar! God is great! (*Confidentially.*) Then... you will probably understand me... you will probably judge me with benevolence (*She evokes something with sorrow.*) They grabbed me and my son... they carried us to a big house... filled with white suits... they made me lay on a white bed and they carried my baby off from me... my son! my dear son of my soul!... where are you? I called you in our mother tongue and your crying answered me from far away... far away from the white jungle of unknown voices... (*To the man.*) They gave me paperwork... white too... where it says that I will be sent back... and my son too... bitter paperwork... a slap that throws me back to the other shore... to the mud that I had already left behind... to the dark nothingness I had wished to pull my son out of. (*She looks for understanding.*) I was very scared and in pain... I love my country... But I love my son even more. Aulidi! I wanted him to be raised in a place where cows give milk and children attend school... (*With determination.*) That is the reason why I did what I did! (*She evokes the unbearable terror.*) The machine is white too... They say it is the last model in the white stores... They also say it on TV... The machine incessantly turns and turns in the big white hospital basement... It leaves clothes blinding white... My waiting was white... My hope of him being able to stay was white... my hope of him being accepted by the white judges... the ones who split up the destiny of both shores... Turns and turns... white... whiter... very white... really white... Aulidi! My son!... How he cries in there!... Poor thing... My love... Don't cry, mommy is taking you to the white paradise of happiness... (*Silence filled of hope.*) He cries no more... (*She caresses the bulk in her lap, and takes it closer to the man so he can caress it too.*) Look, sidi... Do you think they will let him stay?... Do you think that he is now as white as the other kids?... Do you think that the white God will have pity on this poor and innocent angel? Do you think He would like his immaculate whiteness? (*She waits anxiously his answer. Her tears try to remain in her eyes, proudly avoiding overflowing.*) In Cha Al-lah! Wouldn't you have done the same... sidi...? (*She addresses the question to the audience*) Wouldn't you all have done the same? (*She says goodbye with sweetness.*) Salam Aleikum, brothers and sisters... (*She leaves the stage, disappearing in the dark, in the anonymity. The chair remains alone again; its orphanhood is now even deeper, more painful.*)