



## Things are never as bad as they seem

by Lesley Dawson

Having heard from Amti Maria that she was not the only rebel in the family, Amal began to enjoy life in Italy. Both her aunt and uncle were very hospitable and she realized that many of the cultural aspects of Middle Eastern life were similar in Italian culture. The emphasis on family was equally important and Amal became the daughter that Maria and Paulo had never had. In fact, she found that they felt very protective and even as oppressive as her father in monitoring her relationships with young men she met at the university.

Father Petros had been able to arrange for Amal's transcript to be considered at Milan University. Because her grade point average was so good it was assumed that the level of study was equivalent in the two countries. This enabled her to gain a place on the degree programme in fisioterapia although she had to repeat year one.

Amal had a few problems learning Italian, although her uncle registered her on a language course, and they all spoke Italian to each other in the house. Academic Italian was, however, a different matter, despite many of the words being like the same words in English. All students at Bethlehem University had to take three courses in English in Years One and Two, so Amal was quite fluent in English. In addition, the professional words used in most health care programmes were based on Latin making it relatively easy to understand their meaning.

For the first two semesters Amal didn't lift up her head from her notebook as she tried to write down every word that her teachers said. This is how she had excelled at BU but it didn't seem to have the same value here. Eventually she began to look around her at her fellow students as she saw that they were not writing everything down.

A handsome Italian boy with a sparkling white smile whispered to her “Don’t waste your time doing all that work. The teacher publishes all his notes on the uni intranet and you can find lots of useful stuff on YouTube”

She smiled nervously but didn’t really believe him until she started to socialize with her classmates and heard them discussing theories of human movement and motivational techniques for persuading patients to move when they didn’t want to. Nothing like this happened at BU as most of the lecturers stood at the front of the class or walked up and down, almost talking to themselves and not making eye contact with their students. Getting good grade just involved regurgitating the notes she had made in the exams.

She dragged from the back of her mind the fact that the foreign teachers had encouraged discussion in class but most of the girls were too shy to join in. In Italy the girls were more active and were expected to hold their own in arguments against the boys and male teachers. It was quite a shock to the system.

As she sat in the study bedroom her relatives had made for her, she sighed deeply and thought to herself, ‘well, I am beginning to get used to things here and things are never as bad as they seem.’