

Homecoming

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I could feel the tears filling my eyes. I felt like this was never going to be over. That I would never find a place where people didn't look at me as an undesirable thing. Not a person, but just a dirty, abhorrent, little thing, destroying their illusion of a calm life. Not for me doing something inhuman, but for simply existing. For my heart beating. For me breathing the air of their country, while they were absolutely unaware of the fact that for the last few months I had felt like I was living in a world with no air. They had no idea. People would never know what we were going through until they tried to walk miles and miles every day, praying that they would see the sun coming out from behind the horizon the next day. Little did they know that the only reference to the sun shining in our lives were the drops of the sweat glinting on our foreheads whilst we were giving ourselves false hopes that the next day would be better than the current, wandering the lands that we were strangers to.

We knew that the chapter of our lives when we were living serenely and tranquilly in the Syrian countryside had come to its end, when a piercing sound of a bomb exploding had reached our ears in the middle of the night. Daunted, we had left the house. It was a moment of uncertainty and fear, but the idea of having to travel through half of Europe to find a new home hadn't even crossed our minds.

So, here we were. On a tour across the states that found us prejudicial, crossing borders of countries that made us feel like unwelcome parasites. We had given up waiting in the refugee camp long ago. Tired of constantly being promised that aid was on its way and going to bed disappointed every night, we had left. When we had set off on that journey, my mother had told me that we were just coming home - to another home that Allah had predestined for us. Our mission was to find it then. However, with locals burning holes in our backs while we were passing their houses, the hope in our hearts to ever find a new home was slowly whittling away...

Meandering the sparse Serbian forest, looking into the distance, I was wondering if I had gotten any closer to my new home. Birds were tweeting, making me feel better. My muscles hurt from the unceasing sauntering and sweat was practically burning my skin, not remembering the last time I had taken a shower. But I kept on going, hoping that what I would see when I was finished was worth it.

All of sudden, the birds stopped making a sound, a few of them flying away. It was then that I noticed another stone hurtling in their direction.

“What the hell?!” I shrieked, turning to Adnan. I had to go through this with the guy that I had hated since I could remember. With all his smug smiles, sarcastic remarks and just him being himself, I couldn’t stand him.

“I can’t listen to that anymore,” he snapped.

I exhaled loudly. “You’re just trying to annoy me.”

“Me? You’re the one acting like this situation doesn’t bother you!”

My mouth dropped. “You must be kidding me! Where the hell have you been and what has made you think I’m having a fabulous time?!”

“Maybe the fact that you’re so damn calm!” He raised an eyebrow at me. “Your dad died in the war and your mother and siblings’ have disappeared out of the blue.” We had woken up three days ago to find them gone without a trace, their things as they had left them before we had fallen asleep. After searching for them, we realized that we had been separated from the rest of our group, forcing us to finish our journey as a pair. “How can you be so freaking calm under the circumstances?!”

“God! You complain when I’m in a bad mood and then you complain even when I’m in a good mood?!”

“I don’t like you in ANY mood.”

“Why do you have to be such a bully?!”

“Well, maybe if you weren’t so self-confident about your ability to do this on your own, not needing anyone, I wouldn’t be!”

I wasn’t going to admit it, but he had a point. Neither of us was going to make it without the help of the other. Sometimes, only a companion talking to you from time to time could save your life. Not to mention, that if someone wanted to hurt me, I would be probably helpless on my own. His strength could always come in handy...

After a few hours of walking through the forest and then a meadow, I finally saw the progress I had made towards my redemption. There was a curled silver barbed wire shimmering in the distance. It must have meant only one thing – a border! I quickened my pace and could hear Adnan following me. When we got to the fence, I looked around. It sprawled from the western horizon to the eastern. It seemed endless.

“What are we going to do?” Adnan asked me.

“Now who needs whose help?” I asked. It was more of a rhetorical question than the actual one, so I didn’t find it weird that Adnan was silent. “I have no idea,” I said after a while of awkward silence, finally answering his question. I was looking around, trying to come up with an idea. “Give me this.” I pointed to the wooden stick he had been using to support himself. I threw the stick against the fence and when nothing happened, I gave it back to him. “Good thing is, there’s no electric current in it. So, there’s only one way of getting to the other side. One of us will hold the wire with a blanket at a certain height, so the other one can crawl under.”

He didn’t respond, again. I took my rucksack off and pulled the blanket out of it.

“I’ll be the first to crawl,” he stated and I wasn’t too happy about that because I couldn’t trust that he wouldn’t flee once he was on the other side, but he would have probably said the same about me.

I covered my hands with the blanket and took hold of a bottom sequence of the wire. I tried to lift it up, but it was difficult. As the wire was curled, it was heavy and at first it wouldn’t move. I put all my strength and lifted it up a few centimeters. I could feel the wire perforating the blanket, digging into my palm. Nonetheless, I continued. Eventually, I managed to lift it to the twenty-centimeter height needed for someone to crawl under.

“Go,” I told Adnan. He crawled under the wire easily, a few spikes where my blanket didn’t reach, punching holes in his t-shirt, but he didn’t get injured.

“It’s your turn,” I said and he smirked. That typical smirk of his that had always driven me insane.

“I could just leave you here for how you’ve behaved to me.”

“But you’re not gonna do it, right?” I piped out, my stomach twisting.

He took a hold of the blanket and said, “You owe me.”

With that, I fell on the ground and tried to crawl under the wire. I could feel my t-shirt tearing on the back as I was doing so.

Suddenly, I heard the sound of the car engine. I thought it was just a hallucination caused by the exhaustion, but when Adnan looked to his right and I saw the horror in his eyes, I knew it was real.

“Damn!” he exclaimed, letting go of the blanket and the wire fell on me, trapping me underneath.

He was running away and I knew I had to do the same. With all my remaining strength, I moved forward, feeling the wire sinking into my flesh, making me cry out loud. I didn’t know how, but I managed to get out of the wire jail and followed Adnan, running, the torn t-shirt moving synchronically with my strides.

When I saw the bullet land in his skull, I knew it was a horrible mistake. However, before I could think of a plan B, I heard the sound of another bullet being shot and horrendous pain in my back ensued. I fell to the ground, not feeling my legs. Despite the pain that overtook me, I could see the men, who had abandoned their car, running towards us.

I touched my back and felt a warm liquid spreading through my fingers. Blood. One way or another, I knew, I was coming home...