

## The Blind Side

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Gun shots. I hear gunshots off in the distance jolting me from my sleep. I say distance but they are fairly close, yet farther than normal. I would imagine about seven blocks away. I live in Jableh, it is a city located in Syria which has been taken over by a group by the name of Isis. I lay back down on my mattress, pulling my ragged quilt over myself and face the wall. I sing softly in case Sami awakens and becomes frightened. For the most part, he has adapted to our new environment very well considering the circumstances. Sami lets out a soft moan and I continue to sing softly but a little louder. He continues to sleep. I eventually fall back to sleep as well despite the continuous noise going on across the street.

The next morning, I wake to the sun hitting against my face. The sun shines through the window where there once were curtains in perfect condition, there now hangs a ripped up sheet that is too short for the windows. We were forced to cut it due to the lack of blankets in our house. I remember when my mother would rock my brother, Jack to sleep as she stood looking out that window. Jack was not even five years old when Sami was born. He was very jealous when Sami arrived because he always had the spotlight. He was then pushed into the shadows because a newborn baby needed tender loving care, unlike a spoiled five-year-old.

I go down the hall and grab a favorable piece of bread. I take a little for myself and wrap the rest in a tissue to save for Sami, Jack and Father when they awake. I go back to the room I walk in and notice my father was not sleeping in his normal spot.

"Father?" I call out in confusion.

"Yes, Fathi! I am glad you are awake. "My Father says coming around the corner from outside. "Begin packing. We must go now."

"But Father where are we going?" I question.

"Do not question me. We must go now or we might not make it in time"

Lately, my Father has been very quiet about things and stingy about our money. I do not question him again, though. I grab a small bag that can fit on my back and put 2 blankets and as much food as I can fit into it. I then take a pack for Jack and fill it with another blanket, water and a small amount of food. I wake up Jack and Sami then pass Jack both packs. I tell the two of them to wait inside by the door while I get father. They do as I instructed.

I go to the back of the house and look for father. I find him and a younger man standing just outside the back door. The man my father stands with is younger than father but at least five years older than me. He has a slight shadow of a beard and dark hair that is put up in a low bun. The man is tall and fairly handsome but very mysterious and dark. My father passes him a large thick yellow envelope and the man puts it in his coat pocket. Although I cannot pick out what

the man is saying due to an odd heavy accent, I can tell he is given strict instructions. The man hurries off and my father comes back inside.

"Shall we go now?" I ask.

My father nods and he leads the way to my brothers. I pick up Sami, put him on my back and wrap a cloth around him so he hangs from my back and shoulders. My father opens the door and we walk out casually.

My father leads the way down the streets that were filled with gun shots last night but are now filled with strangers who I once called neighbors and friends. With Jack and myself following closely behind him, my father walks at a normal speed but with his head down and his bags looking natural.

We continue walking the same for what seems like days but were actually about three hours. My feet burn with every step and Sami is getting impatient. Jack complains for a while but father gives him a stern glare and he stops immediately. All I want is to have a place to sit and maybe even sleep for a few hours. I feel dirty. The sweat continuously rolls down my face and my back is soaked from Sami and I being pushed together so long. I feel weak and quickly becoming dehydrated. I see the water not far from the distance. I remember when mother would take family trips there. All my aunts, uncles, cousins and grandparents would join us and we would dance and play all day. We would not leave until I could not dance anymore and my mother would have to carry me home. Father always hated it there. He did not like to socialize very much. He preferred to have a small group in our backyard and have supper. Then everyone would help clean up, say their goodbyes and leave. It was short and boring for us kids since we could not play together. Once, we got to play before supper but father got very unimpressed when Cousin Jean got covered in dirt. Father would not even let him sit with us. Now, father is even dirtier then Jean ever was.

With the water quickly approaching I begin to get confused. Why would father want us to go there?

"Father, are we going to play there?" Jack asks.

"No son, now hush up and walk faster," He demands.

We walk faster towards the water. Suddenly, my father stops, looks left and starts walking in that direction. We are now walking beside the water. I do not understand. Sami moves around on my back and I have to shift him so he does not slip off. I see a small shack not far from us that I never noticed before. The shack is old, dirty and barely standing up on its own. My father begins to walk up to it.

"Quickly, go inside," My father says opening the door. We rush into the tiny wooden shack. Inside, there are a ton of boxes and one window. My father closes the door and locks it, he moves one set of boxes which reveals a metal door leading into the ground. He opens it and

instructs us to climb down. He climbs down behind us and closes the metal door cutting off all light entering the room. We crouch down into a sitting position and my father locks that door as well.

"Father, why are we here", Jack asks.

"We are only here until night fall son. I am planning a better life for us. A life your mother would be proud of." That was the first time my father has spoke of her since she died.

Hours later we hear rustling from above, followed by seven knocks and then three more. My father opens the metal door and climbs out.

"Come, children, we are leaving now." My father says.

We climb out to be greeted by the strange man I had seen outside our house that morning. The man opens the door to the wooden shack and my brothers, father and I follow him out. Sami, unable to keep up reaches out to me to pick him up. I swoop him up quickly and continue walking.

We get down to the water that we walked by earlier and there is a small boat at the end of the dock. We walk across the dock as it creaks at every step we take and there are many boards missing, luckily it is a short walk. The man climbs onto the deck of the boat and helps my father onto it. They both help Sami and I onto it and my father helps Jack. The man opens a door on the boat which leads to the bottom of the boat. I hear a lot of rustling down there but we proceed any ways.

When we reach the bottom there are at least one hundred people crammed into the tiny space. The man climbs back up to the top and shuts the door. I step off the steps and I notice the floor has a thin layer of water. I look up and see a crack in the boat towards the back. The motor of the boat starts and we manage to sit. Most people do not have room to sit but because I have Sami they allow us to but my father and Jack are forced to stand. I notice a lady sitting beside me alone. She looked old enough to be my mother. Her brown eyes stare deeply into mine. "Hello", She says shocking me back to reality.

"Hi," I respond shyly.

"How old is he?" She says referring to Sami.

"Three. He will be four in a few months."

"My boy was four. My baby girl was just two." She says looking into her hands hiding the single tear that trickled down her face. "They took them away from me," She responds referring to Isis.

"I'm sorry for your loss." She tucks her hair behind her ear.

"I will find a better life for myself and start a new family. One where my family does not live in fear", she says. "Rest up now child, you've got a long journey," She adds before turning her head the other way and resting it on the wall. I eventually fall asleep with my arms wrapped around Sami.

I awaken to a series of loud noises and I hear Jack screaming. I stand up and push through to him. "Jack, what is the matter?" Jack, unable to get a word out points at the wall of the boat. I glance over and my heart stops for a minute. I quickly turn back around before Sami sees our now dead father with a nail sticking out of his head. His cold black hair soaked from blood and water. I see the man come down the stairs followed by three others. I go back to my spot, sit down and sob quietly while they carry my father's lifeless body over the stairs.

Unable to sleep I comfort Jack and try to keep Sami dry. The water level continues to increase as the night continues on to day. I imagine my father used almost all of our saving to get on this boat. I heard a lady saying to her oldest son that we are travelling to Europe.

My hips and below are soaked. I keep Sami on my back but I know he is still getting wet. I share the food we have with my brothers but we are quickly running low and our blankets are useless as they are covered in the freezing water. My legs are numb and I know that Sami cannot take much longer. Jack remains physically strong but emotionally torn apart. He continues to sob all the time and only stops for short periods of time.

The man once again comes down stairs, he is followed by the same three men that carried my father's body upstairs and I would imagine pushed his lifeless body into the water. "Give up all your bags, we must throw them over the boat or you will be thrown over yourself," one man says.

One woman refuses to give up her bag and the tallest man grabs her oldest son and lifts him by his throat. She almost instantly gives it up for her son's life. Another man argues as well and the dark man beats him unconscious then takes the bags. Once they get to me I have already stuffed all the bread and our money into Jack's bag. Jack tucks it under him but I am forced to give up mine.

The night falls once again. The water has risen to just below my ribs but I do not feel a thing. My fingers are wrinkled and the bread that was in Jack's pack is ruined. We are wet, cold and hungry. Sami stops moving around as much while I rest my head on the wall and manage to fall asleep once again.

I wake up to loud coughing. The water has risen to my chest. Sami, I think. I stand up quickly and check on him. He continues to cough but once he catches his breath he just cries. I look over to see Jack missing. I frantically begin to look around for him. The smell of the all the lifeless bodies turns my stomach. They might not all be dead yet, but the look in their eyes show they have given up and the only thing left for them is time. Twelve children have drowned and the long nails sticking out of the boat has injured and even killed many people including my

father. Unlike the rest of the deaths caused by the nails, I can tell my father's was no accident. Perhaps my father's death will remain a mystery.

"Faithi" I hear a whisper. I swing my head in the direction of the voice. "Is that you?" The voice speaks again.

"Who is speaking?" I ask shifting Sami to my back. I see Jack in a corner, he is weak. I walk to him quickly.

"Faithi..." He begins. "...I will be with Father and Mother soon" He says softly. I hold him tightly knowing there is nothing I can do but comfort him. The water all around him lingers with blood, his face is colourless and his breaths are weak. His skin is cold and pruned. His pack is missing. I notice bruises on his arms and come to realize that somebody has done this to him.

I sit there with my brother; he is only twelve years old. He gasps for air repeatedly but he then gives up. He lets out a long breath.

The door upstairs opens and the man yells. "We have made it" Everyone weakly starts running towards the stairs, trampling over bodies and pushing others aside. I throw my body over Sami to keep him from getting stepped on. I get kicked in the ribs. I scream in pain. Someone steps on my shoulders and pushes me down farther. I cry out for my father's help, I cry out for Jack. I cry out for my mother. There is nobody to help me. People continue to run over my body. They step on my head, smashing it into the crates. Everything and everyone becomes blurry. They stomp on my spine and I lose feeling. They kick me and push me around but I have to keep Sami alive. I cannot lose him. The people get out, dragging their loved ones with them.

My body is now weak and useless. I flop over into the water and I sink to the bottom of the boat. I stare up at the ceiling unable to move.

I think of my mother and her death. I remember her last day on Earth as if it were yesterday. She was so weak and yet she got out of bed to play with Sami one last time before he went to bed that night. She was prepared for her death. She never let her illness consume her. She would make sure everyone in our family was fed before she would accept any food.

I see a lady look at me, and then Sami. She is so beautiful, she is slim, tanned, and her hair is put together perfectly. Her eyes are the deepest colour of brown. She takes Sami up the stairs with her. It was the lady who lost her children. She will be good a mother.

I let out one last breath and close my eyes in peace knowing Sami would be okay and so would I.