

“Where is everyone?” She asked, stepping out into the sunlight for the first time in weeks. The air had been stale in the tiny room, the cracks in the walls doing nothing to rid the air of the sour smell of human sweat. It wasn’t something anyone grew accustomed to.

“I don’t know, Haniah. I just- I don’t know.” Her companion answered, turning in a complete circle on the cracked pavement. Aydin carried forward, into the road on to the sidewalk. He found himself checking the road, left then right, to see if cars were rushing to make contact with him. The absurdity of it hit him in seconds. The streets looked nothing as they had a month— two? — ago.

Where great fountains once stood now were rubble, rubble embedded with people. Haniah quickly averted her eyes, searching for some other sign of life, for something that could show her hope. Everywhere she looked was littered with bodies. It took a few minutes for the stench to reach her nose, but once the contact was made, there was nothing she could do to get rid of the smell. She knew that she would remember that smell, for however long her life would last.

The siblings started forward, down the streets in which they had played as a child. Their inquisitive minds doing the opposite of what their Baba had told them to, running to instead of hiding from. At the end of the short street the flag of their country, trampled into the dirt, fluttered in the constant breeze. It was this she would dream about in the night, not the broken bodies, or the smells, but her flag, standing proud, and then on the ground.

Together still they turned into the Bazaar, an idea worse than coming out of their hiding spot. Here lay children, their mothers curled around them. Blood sprayed on the stalls, vases smashed. “Aydin, we should go back. We need to be there when Baba returns.” She whispered, tugging on her brother sleeve, an action that went ignored. He continued on despite the protests of his sister.

“A few more feet, stop being a baby. It’s not the time for that. We have to act, Haniah, I don’t think Baba will ever be back for us.” His words always sounded wiser than his fifteen years, his eyes much the same. It scared her, the fact that he could speak so firmly about their situation. That he knew, without a doubt, their father was gone.

There was a sound in the distance, loud and abrupt. Haniah jumped, grabbing once more onto the sleeve of his shirt. He shook her off and burst forward, running through the carnage, past the man strung up outside of his home. The girl had no choice but to follow him, towards the danger, just as quickly as she wished to run in the other direction. They rounded corner after corner. Haniah knew where they were going, to the lake, the biggest clearing, the direction of the noise.

As suddenly as he had started, Aydin stopped, peering around a partially fallen wall before venturing out into the clearing. Knowing they must stick together, Haniah pushed herself into the clearing. At first she could only focus on the water, the sun glinting on the waves in brilliant contrast to her mood. It saddened her, the fact that the earth just kept going when her whole world had stopped.

It was the wind that distracted her, whipping her clothes around her, pushing her braid into her face. Her brother had come back and gripped her hand, the fear evident in his eyes. A black machine stood in front of them, giant arms spinning like fans on top. They were slowing, the wind dying. A door she hadn’t noticed slide open and green figures popped out— aliens? She didn’t know. She tried to get her feet to move, to back away but they wouldn’t.

One of the aliens approached her and said words she couldn’t understand, she began to cry and the figure motioned another forward, this one took his head off to reveal that he was just a man. The tears stopped as he knelt in front of the pair, reaching out for her hand. The words that came out of his mouth were in a language she knew. Pashtun.

“My name is Darab. I am with the Canadian Army, I’m here to help you.”