

There is War in my Country

The sky is on fire. It crackles orange and red as night begins to fall over the village. My mother, holding tightly to Yasmina's hand, drags her along as she takes the lead. My father is beside her carrying all we could grab: photos, clothes, the jar with nana's ashes, three generations of life reduced to a single pack. I take up the rear, completing the triangle. The triangle shape has the strongest foundation, and I can only hope we can withstand the chaos that awaits at the docks. A few houses have already been reduced to dust, while others look like Ancient Roman ruins: a collapsed roof, a missing wall. Dark black smoke emits from the shattered windows, forming a dense fog that stings our eyes. Everywhere there are survivors running alongside us, faces black with dirt and grime as if they just crawled their way out of the wreckage. Screams and cries of help echo as if they were yelled off a mountaintop.

My neighborhood. My home. Everything I've known, gone. My mind is spinning. I focus on putting one foot in front of the other. That's all I can do. The docks come into view up ahead, and I can already see the crowd, a mass of bodies, too close to be separate beings. We charge into the fray and let the crowd swallow us. There are four massive U.S navy ships lined up in the harbor. Soldiers in polished uniforms are waving people on board, and the crowd inches forward like a herd of impatient sheep.

"Everyone stay close," my father shouts over all the noise. I hold on to the strap of my father's backpack to keep us from getting separated. Yasmina drops the teddy bear she was clutching in her arms and tugs on my mother's sleeve.

"Snuggles," she whines, pointing at the bear that has been kicked aside by shuffling feet.

"Leave it," my mother replies sternly. Yasmina pouts, arm outstretched for the bear as my mother guides her away.

A soldier signals that the first ship is full as we near the front. A cry of anguish rises up from the crowd, and that's when the first missile hits.

Everyone ducks in unison as it tears through the body of the first ship. A sharp *boom* follows and the ship erupts in flames. People are screaming, but it's only a faint buzz beneath the ringing in my ears. There is a terrible pause as we watch chunks of wood and steel break off into the water. Then, the crowd lurches forward like a dog who slipped its leash. Someone shoves a lady out of the way, and she falls face-first into the dirt. No one seems to care. Their fear is carrying them now. She cries out as people step on her hands, back, and ankles. She curls into a little ball on the ground and doesn't get up. I want to help her, but out of the corner of my eye, I see Yasmina ducking between a stranger's legs. She has slipped out of my mother's grasp and is running back for her teddy bear.

"YASMINA!" My mother screams in terror. I take off after her, pushing against the tide of people. She is faster and I lose sight of her in seconds. I stand on my tiptoes to look over the sea of heads, but it's like looking for a needle in a haystack. I spot a red ribbon bobbing between people. My mother tied it in Yasmina's hair before school this morning. I follow it and find her bending down to pick up Snuggles. She presses him to her chest, relieved.

The next missile hits. I lunge for Yasmina, knocking her to the ground and covering her body with mine. This time I feel the pressure of the blast against my back, and I brace myself against it. There is a *crack* and the sound of splintering wood. When it's over, I pull Yasmina and myself up from the ground. The world tilts. The bodies are just blurs of color rushing by. I blink, trying to clear my vision.