



***“ A ceasefire has been agreed upon, and the displaced can return to their homes.”***

After months of war and its darkness, which had become unimaginable even in my own mind! What will I do when I hear this news? Will I truly feel ecstasy? Will my anxieties overflow into joyful tears? Will I prostrate in prayer, calling upon God? Will I chant and repeat the word victory? Many scenarios ran through my mind, yet I did not commit to any of them.

Now, after it has truly been announced, all that fills me is the shattering of my heart, my spirit broken, stripped of its pulse, wrapped in my tears, searing my ribs. One foot steps forward, pleading for the longing it holds, while the other stands, stricken, mourning its grief.

At around five o'clock, as I carried my father's plate of food, we heard the men of the camp screaming: "The tanks have entered! Everyone, run!" I couldn't believe my ears. My mother and I rushed to the entrance of the tent, only to see men running, their voices breathless with panic. Instinctively, without a moment's thought, I told my mother, "You get the little ones and the important papers, and I'll pull Dad."

The voices grew louder as gunfire rained down like torrents, my heart hollowing in terror. Everyone was rushing out of the tents, fleeing, without looking at anyone, without even blinking back. I bent down and moved my father's outstretched legs from the chair to the footrests of his wheelchair. For a moment, my courage failed me, and fear's foolish grip tightened around my mind. I crouched beside him on the ground for seconds, terrified of his heavy body, stretched out, unable to bear the weight of my hope for survival. I sobbed in gasps, trying not to let my father hear and frighten him. I don't want those bloody bullets to reach us. So come on, sun, stand firm—there is no time for fear and tears.

The tanks had entered from Mud Street, forcing us to head toward Death Street, which ran parallel to it on the other side. As soon as I dragged my father to the camp's entrance, I felt my legs failing me—they seized up in terror! But I insisted on continuing, barely able to gather my stolen strength.

In the middle of the street leading to Death Street, one of the camp's men grabbed the back of the wheelchair, pushing it. I held onto one side while he held the other, both of us trying to help as everyone else ran with strained gazes fixed on the horizon ahead. Is there salvation?

As soon as we reached the beginning of Death Street, we began racing against the showers of bullets. The wailing of the wounded rose above the screams of fear. The man called out to his sons for help, and two of them rushed in, pushing the wheelchair from behind instead of us. Without pausing for breath, I threw myself to the front of the wheelchair, my panicked, vacant gaze locking onto my father's still face.

The roughness of the sand was exhausting, the difficulty of pushing drained your breath, and terror seeped into your soul. You do not understand how your energy is depleted so quickly, nor do you know where this sudden alternative strength comes from. You do not know how you are still moving when you feel that you simply cannot.

But what matters is that you do not surrender. That you do not let go.

What matters is that I save my father

me to rest—"Rest, that's enough."

I pant between my breaths, then stop for a few seconds, leaning on my knees before pushing forward again. I don't know where my mother is, nor my siblings. I do not plead with my eyes to snatch a glance at those around me—my heart only repeats, "May God protect them, may He preserve them. O Allah, do not show me their suffering or a tragedy."

My tongue utters nothing but the remembrance of God until we reach the remoteness of that hill—That cursed spot. The Bermuda of death and the slaughter of dreams.

The gunfire intensifies in front of the exposed bodies. They delight in hunting human souls like birds, laughing at our demise. I catch sight of a little girl thrown to my left, screaming for help—"Mama! Mammaaa!"—while behind me is the owner of the camp where we had been staying, inside his car with his family. He had stopped close to me due to the intensity of the gunfire.

Everyone has vanished! Each one searching for a corner that might save them.

I can no longer see the young men.

I take cover beside the car, on the side opposite the direction of the bullets, over four people. Beside me, that little girl keeps screaming, "There's a bullet in my back!" The man who helped me is in front of me, holding her, while my wide brown pupils stare at my father— Sitting alone in the middle of the road in his wheelchair.

He has surrendered his body to death. Without a single glance of despair veiled in fear, nor even a tilt of his head in defeat.

He does not attempt to lift his hand, burdened by paralysis, to protect himself. He sits upright—the throne of his soul unwavering—his head raised high, looking at me with farewell and love.

As if death whispers to him of comfort and peace, where no peace exists. I look at him, and the words are trapped in my chest. I can only scream, unaware of my own voice, slapping my hands against the bag before me — "Baba... BAAABAAA!" Panicked. Terrified.

I wished time would stop.

I wished I could embrace him then, protect him from all this terror.

I want to run to him, but I cannot.

"Stop! Please, stop... isn't this enough?!"

I want to protect him. I want this moment erased from my memory.

For some truths, in their sheer cruelty, resemble a disturbing nightmare, causing a pain I do not know how it seeped through my ribs. Yet that scar will not fade, except with my death.

The gunfire slows. The car moves. I run toward my father, whispering every prayer, certain of their answer. I keep pulling him with all my strength.

With eyes lost, filled with the tears of despair, I see nothing but— A young man lying dead, a bullet having pierced his brain. A woman struck in her thigh. That little girl—martyred. No one remains but my father and me.

And I do not know how my little brother, Zaman, only eleven years old, appeared out of nowhere. I do not know how he ended up beside me, trying to pull Baba with me.

Then— A massive transport truck speeds toward us! I struggle to move aside, to escape its crushing wheels, but our steps are heavy, defeated. My father screams, afraid only of the truck— Not the bullets. Not the horror. Only the truck. "No! Nooo!" But, Baba...

What ear will hear you now? No voice rises above the sound of a soul escaping death. The wheels graze my father's feet, shattering the wheelchair beneath him.

And my brother—oh, my heart!—his eyes widen with a look I cannot describe, his voice trembling,

"Wait! Stop... BABA!" Do those innocent eyes expand wide enough to bear this sight? I keep crushing my shattered heart as I look at my brother, yet I keep trying to pull my father away.

Has a human life truly become so cheap in the face of another's survival?

The situation escalated again, and we were trapped by a barrage of bullets. We sat, exhausted, taking shelter behind my father's wheelchair, and I was still trying to pull him while kneeling on my feet. My father kept repeating to me, "Go, my dear, leave me, leave me, I am a martyr," and I screamed, "No, I won't leave you, I won't leave you!" Please don't say this, I want to silence your mouth, please, don't say anything. I looked at my brother, his eyes pleading with me, "Run quickly, don't look back, understand, run, time!" And he said, "No, I won't leave you, I won't leave Dad." What kind of pain is this? What heart can shoot at a man who is paralyzed, while his daughter struggles to save him? Doesn't he have any blood flowing in his veins?

Then, the tragedy became a nightmare when a bullet pierced my father's body. I heard it. I heard the whistle of the bullet and felt the quiet shudder in his body, passing through my eyes as my soul shattered when my father was hit, and I remained untouched.

My mother's voice came from behind, in a hidden corner, calling my name. My brother ran to her, and we all wore the faces of separation. There was no longer any virtue in our souls. Either we die together, or we survive together. I gathered my courage and stood tall, taking a deep breath, using all my strength to drag my father to the furthest point on the black hill amidst the bursts of bullets. After a short distance, as we passed the hill and the major part of the death street ended, the gunfire stopped. A young man came from behind to help me drag my father. I looked at him and said, "Are you crazy? You might die. You need to leave." Then the camp owner and some men came to help after reaching the end of the road, but when a woman arrived and told them that the paralyzed man had been injured and martyred, it seemed like their minds had finally absorbed the gravity of the situation. Each of them managed to leave that cursed street, safe with their families, by a miracle. They took my father to a corner of a hidden road, while my arms were wrapped behind him, holding him tightly, pressing his head to my chest. I tried to swallow my soul back into my body, pitying my own eyes. My mother rushed toward us to reassure herself, and I told her that a bullet had pierced his insides. Everyone turned to check on his injury. It was a bullet to his left side, in his stomach, with a small patch of blood around it. My father moved his lost eyes, his body growing colder. I looked beside me at a woman who had been shot in her thigh, unable to survive any longer.

I thought that was the end of the scene, but to my shock, we were still stuck in the same tragedy. We reached the horizontal sea street, the end of the vertical death street, and you didn't know which direction to take. Those who turned right came back signaling danger, and those who turned left returned carrying death. The only escape was towards the sea. Everyone rushed to the beach, and we took my father to a café overlooking the sea. My mother stopped me, asking me to go to the tent that my brother-in-law had set up earlier that morning after my father had told him, as if he had sensed an alarm for some danger. I went to search for my siblings and was told by my mother that she had sent them with the camp men and would stay with my father until the ambulance arrived.

I rushed to the beach, looking left and right among the crowd, until I found them with the camp families. I felt a sense of relief and entrusted my siblings to them before I went back to check on my father. The camp men opposed my return, but I insisted until one of them accompanied me. They had moved my father to a couch because his heavy, injured body had worn him out. He lay on his side, pale and cold. I looked at the small circle around him where there was no blood. Everyone around him kept telling him that it was nothing and that he was fine. I sat beside him, not holding back my tears, trying to stay calm so I wouldn't scare him, offering him a forced smile to ease his pain, holding his hand. He looked at me and said, "My hand, my hand," so I let go. My father had his hand pressed against his stomach, holding his phone when the bullet passed through, grazing his hand and piercing his phone, then his stomach. He asked me, "Did you find a Hulm, and Yaman, and Kawn?" I reassured him, and then my mother insisted that I go to them without leaving them, and that she would stay with my father.

I wished I could stay with him, but it was enough that my soul embraced him in my prayers. I entrusted them to God and left. On the way to the ambulance, a nearby bombing forced the driver to turn the vehicle away from us, leaving my father behind. The camp owner stopped a car on the road, and they carried my father inside. I sat on the beach with my siblings, wanting someone to soothe my heart and quiet the noise in my mind.

My pregnant sister and her husband, who had left the camp an hour before the incident to visit her husband's family after being away for a month, came running, exhausted, from Deir to Khan Yunis, walking nonstop when they heard the news. Her condition was bad, and she began vomiting, so I sat her down and took care of her. We then called my mother, who told us that my father had entered surgery, and all my uncles had gone to him. Two hours later, as night fell, my mother arrived, because it was hard for her to leave us alone while my uncles remained by my father's side, who was still in surgery for four hours. When they brought him out, they told us he was okay now, and his condition was stable, but he would remain under observation since the bullet had pierced his spleen and colon. They inserted a catheter to drain his stool alongside a urine bag attached to his paralysis

It was sharp, more than what my father was enduring. Before midnight, my uncle called, asking for clothes for my father for the next day, and my mother had to go to the tent in the morning and then to the hospital. Of course, I would stay with her to see him. After a while, the men from the camp began to spread out on the side of our tent, lying on the beach sand, covering themselves with the sky, while I sat there, unable to find sleep. Almost everyone had drifted off, but my eyes refused to close. Fear overtook me. How could I let my eyes shut safely? How would my mind erase what it had witnessed, and how could my heart bear the agony of that fear that enveloped us? What if I fell asleep and the tanks came back? Would they crush us like they did with some of the others? Is the man who ran over my father with his truck still alive? Was his soul really so cheap that he killed another to survive? I stayed awake, consumed by anxiety, my body trembling in the cold with no cover, save for the painful memory that clung to me until dawn. At 4 a.m., I heard one of the men waking up and calling out, waking others up. I forced my eyes to close and my soul to calm for a few hours, so I could accompany my mother to the tent, ensuring she wouldn't go alone. We all decided to return to the tent once the tanks had pulled out during the night. Only a Hulm and Yaman—my youngest sibling—remained safe with a family from the camp. We returned to find our tent riddled with bullets, the mattress, the pots, and the cans pierced. It was heartbreaking to see everything I had painstakingly gathered during the war, now hollowed out by the scorching wounds of the bullets. It was as though everything we loved had been marked in black ink. Each of us began taking the small things we needed. My mother started collecting my father's clothes, and I sat on the bed, smiling as I answered my brother-in-law when he asked, "Is Uncle okay?" "Dad has seven lives, don't worry." My mother's phone rang, and I answered, "Hello, Uncle, how are you?" "Praise be to God, how are you, and how is Dad?" "Where is your mother? Did she leave?" "No, she's here, we just need to get the clothes and come back." "No need to bring clothes; it's fine." His words struck me like a thunderbolt, stripping me of my guard and my peace. I froze when he spoke those words. I felt as though my soul had separated from my body, and my body went limp. "Why?" I asked, not wanting to hear the answer. "Don't answer, please." And then, his words shattered me: "Your father has been martyred!"

Sorrow gnawed at my heart relentlessly. My mind scrambled for words to express what I was feeling, but they eluded me, lost in meaning. How could the world continue when I was living my death so slowly? I sank into the darkness inside, where nothing seemed real. That silence overwhelmed me with noise, and my grip loosened, dropping the things from my hands, still wide-eyed, struggling to absorb the shock. My mother looked at me with eyes that seemed to ask, "Did your father die?" I woke from the trance and screamed, "Nooo!" I couldn't see anything after that, not even myself. I ran out of the tent, screaming with all my might, hitting my chest in agony, trying to bury the pain deep within me. Everyone tried to calm me down, but there was no peace.

I had never left him the entire way. How could he leave me? I stayed for him—how could he go without me? How could a soul leave another when it was so deeply attached? I never saw his last moments. I didn't get to say goodbye. I wasn't by his side when he left. I turned to my mother, who was sitting on the ground, too exhausted to stand from the weight of the pain. "I want to go see him. Please, let's go."

My pregnant sister was shaken from the shock, and we helped each other to the hospital in a car.

In a hospital with a ceiling made only of death, I saw him wrapped in a shroud among the bodies in an isolated room. Should I say goodbye now? What kind of farewell is this? What kind of end is this, Dad? Your "yellow deer" has come. You should look at me and call me like you always did, whispering those sweet words in my ear.

His face was so sad. Was he crying before his final rest, or was he dreaming? "I was told that he recited the shahada eleven times, calling each of our names and praying for us. 'Zaman, I burdened you early, Baba, Shams, Rania...'" My body had no more tears or breaths to offer in grief. My features were no longer visible. Everything inside me spoke, without words. They moved him to the washing room, and when they brought him out, it was as though the light of the universe shone from his face. They called me, "Come, say goodbye for the last time." But I didn't listen to them. I pulled away from him, refusing to accept what was happening.

My uncle's wife insisted that I see him, telling me I would regret it if I didn't. But what regret could surpass this moment? Oh, how beautiful your face is, like light. Look at me; I want to embrace you, but how can I, when there's no warmth from your love? I stand with trembling legs, my body drained. I don't want anything to move—only for time to return.



They took him from me and carried my heart with him, buried under the darkness of the earth.

They say that beneath the sea is fire and that the earth's core is filled with torment. There, beneath the ashes, fragments hide. And here, beneath your daughter's skin, which seems cold to the eyes of others, blood boils and a heart burns. The suffocating scent of death closes the airway, replacing a scream that would soothe the noise of the soul, turning your chest into a grave.

We are certain that this is God's promise. To Him we belong, and to Him we will return. I will continue whispering to you in prayers, my father, for the whispers of prayers and our stories that wound us, hidden in the arrows of the night, precede what we live and write! There will always be something missing from you inside me, but you are dearer to me than any trace you leave behind.

Tell the one who was the soul that he will never be erased... Tell him that he is the legacy, and though he has departed, he will never leave me. Oh, dearest of hearts... You are still somewhere inside me, never apart from me.

Oh God, I entrust him to You, awaken him in the light of Your paradise. Let heaven be your consolation, my father.

"To a soul, fragrance, and a garden of bliss."