

The Week

In my small family, the week has a different meaning. It is not just a period of seven days, as seen by everyone. When my dear father told us that the fires of war are nearing our city, and that we have to leave quickly and go to a safer place for one week only, I collected few of my belongings, those that are close to my heart. Then I looked at my mother who was packing, not knowing what to choose and what to leave; she was bewildered. I approached her and asked: “why are you this confused mom? We will leave for a week only.” “Inshallah (hopefully), one week”, she said, looking out the window.

We started to board the bus with our neighbors later on. I sat next to a girl who is a little bit older than I am. We spoke a lot about our city, school and friends, and then she asked me if we have relatives in the city we are travelling to. “We have no one there. And I don’t think we will need anyone anyway; we are staying for one week only”, I answered. She looked at me, surprised, then smiled sarcastically and said: “one week? Hopefully” I did not understand what she means, but something deep inside me told me that this week has a different meaning. The travel was long. I was hearing the passengers’ discussions about what is happening and how serious the situation is. I haven’t heard anyone mentioning the date of return to our city... I left my seat, went to my father and asked him: “are we returning in one week?” “Yes my love, we are returning in one week”, he said. I asked him the same question again and again, and the answer remained the same. However, I was never convinced; I am not used to this strange tone of his voice.

It was almost dawn when we reached our destination. We started moving towards the refugees’ reception centers, and it was the first time I hear the word “refugee”. My father started filling up documents while I was fighting sleepiness.

I woke up to surprisingly find my family in a tent. I looked at my mother and asked her why we are here. She said that this is where we will be living until we go back. I didn’t believe what I heard. I didn’t believe that this tent will be the place where we will live. I started crying, holding my little bag close in the arms. As usual, my father didn’t try to wipe my tears and relieve my fear. He just looked at my mother instead. I realized then that it was beyond his power.

Days passed while I wrote on my little notebook. Saturday, Sunday, Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday then Thursday, and finally Friday, the day of return! I ran to my father and mother that day, excited to wake them up to pack the bags, but they paid my joy no importance. I thought that my father forgot that it is the day 7, so I brought my notebook, sat next to him and said: “look, I was counting the days. Today is the seventh. Come on dad, let’s leave, the week has gone!! My father took the notebook. He brought a key from his blue bag and sat next to me. “I will give you this key”, he said, “the key to our house, keep it with you to the day you will return to our city and to our house.” I looked at him and remembered the girl who was sitting next to me in the bus. I remembered how she looked at me when I told her that we will return in a week. I then realized that the week has a different meaning for refugees. And here I am, dear granddaughter, giving you this key so that you go home one day. This one day may come soon, inshallah.

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Sharjah – short story translated