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Edita Carrasco Daza

"Ahmed loves mermaids"

1ST PRIZE "VIRGINIA WOOLF" FOR SHORT NARARTIVE

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Edita **CARRASCO DAZA**
Ahmed loves mermaids

I wish they were real. The sirens. I just hear them in my head, they are just an illusion. Why do we call them sirens? On day at school, somebody told me that sirens and mermaids are almost homophones in other languages. Mermaids used to drive sailors crazy with their singing. Sirens are driving me crazy now. However, I cannot hear them. I dream about them, all the time, but I no longer hear them. It has been a long time since the last time an ambulance passed by my family house. We no longer have an actual house, we only have ruins. We are not even a family anymore. Mom died almost a year ago. There were no ambulances either when my mother was dying. She needed one, she needed sirens to sing. The only thing you could hear that day was people crying, shouting... It was just right after a huge explosion. It always begins like that. Boom. Then chaos. I cannot remember anything different from this, I do not know how much time it has been this way. We are desperate. We need help but no one helps us. We are invisible to the world. Sometimes, I just think I live in some kind of fantasy and one day, in the middle of the city, an immense sign with neon lights will claim: GAME OVER.

My father left home three days ago, I am not sure if he is still alive or not. I hope he is, but, for the moment, we are alone. Me and my sister. The two of us alone in the middle of the war. We were a really big family once. When terror and chaos came to our daily basis, my uncle and my aunt decided to leave, together with my three cousins, Amira, Rasha and

Elyas. They contacted someone near the coast. Then, they ran away. No news about them. Maybe they did not survive either. Not everyone gets to that other land so easily. The sea is dangerous. However, it seems it is not as dangerous as our country is now. I deeply wish they arrived safe. We should have gone with them. Perhaps mom would be alive right now and the four of us, my sister, my parents and me, would be together. Far away from here, not hearing 'boom' and shaking, not crying, not seeing people dying every day. Is that too much to ask for? Maybe we did something so wrong that God is punishing us. But why so hard? What are we responsible for? My name is Ahmed, I am ten years old and all my memories sound like pain, smell like terror and dream for freedom. I am caged although I do not even have wings. I am prisoner of the decisions others had made about my present and so my future is broken. It is more likely that I die tomorrow than I turn eleven next year. I know that and I am more than terrified about it because it means that there is no hope for me, nor for my country. We are already destroyed and I don't understand why they keep trying to bury us in dust and ruins. What is the purpose? It's been a long time since I don't see any on this. I am ten years old and I've lost all hope, not in me, not in my future, not in my life... In humanity.

Sometimes my sister tells me stories. She is older than me. She remembers happier times, which I don't. She talks about the summer holidays on the northern coast, in our grandparent's second home. All the family used to reunite there during the break. They were in peace, none of them thought life would change so drastically. My sister wanted to be a lawyer, that was her dream. Now, as the city, it has turned into dashes. We no longer have dreams. Our lives are so devastated that the only thing we know for sure is that we can die at any moment. Maybe daddy is dead already. We cannot know. Perhaps he went to the opposite side of the city where we are right now, there was an attack and his body is under the rubble of some houses. We cannot know. We will never know. If he is dead, we will never find his body. My sister, she won't be happy again as she seemed to be in her stories. She is sixteen, her name is Yara. She probably won't turn seventeen. She will never go to university, nor she will become a lawyer.

My mom was a nurse. This city needed my mom. I needed my mom. Not in the same way, but she was necessary. She is dead. It is impossible for Fatima Nasser to help anybody anymore. Even the hospital where she used to work is dead, turned to rubble. As the rubble under which my father might be resting, not in peace but in war. It is also impossible for Fatima Nasser to love me anymore. She is dead, my mother is dead.

I woke up this morning with a bad feeling. Something bad is going to happen. Bad things happen here every day, but we never get used to it. Far away from here, people have already got used to it. As they did, we became invisible. I am sat on the floor in the middle of the street with my sister. We are waiting for nothing. Just sat there. Hopeless. I am hearing a plane. My sister too, although she does not say it. She knows what that means. It is not flying very high. She grabs my hand. I am shaking again.

Boom.

I am trapped. I can't feel my legs. I want to cry but I am too shocked for that. It is my turn this time. My sister is still grabbing my hand. I can see her lying beneath me. She is bleeding, the left side of her face is covered in blood. "Do you hear them, Ahmed?", she asks me. I know what she is talking about. I hear them. The sirens. I always hear them. "I do, Yara, I do", I reply. I wish they were real.