

NOUR

Written by

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Inspired by true events

EXT. THE DOCKS - MERSIN, TURKEY - AFTERNOON

It is midday in a busy middle-eastern port. Fishing boats are selling their catch, while a docked cruise ship is off-loading its passengers.

Nearby, a wary middle-aged middle-eastern man wearing a threadbare jacket and faded jeans walks with a limp towards the benches. He looks at his watch, sighs and scratches his unruly peppered beard. He takes a sip of his coffee as he continues to walk. This is MOHSIN (52).

A young man bumps into him, spilling coffee all over Mohsin's jacket and pants.

MOHSIN

SHIT.

He looks at the young man angrily.

MOHSIN (CONT'D)

Watch where you're going, ya kalb
(you dog).

The young man, ADNAN (28), who is also middle-eastern, wearing a polo shirt with jeans and worn-out trainers, steps back startled from the shout. He takes out several tissues and starts wiping coffee stains off Mohsin's jacket. Mohsin takes it from Adnan and continues walking towards the benches.

Adnan trails behind him.

ADNAN

I'm sorry sir!

MOHSIN

Look at me. Sorry won't fix this.

EXT. BENCH AREA - THE DOCKS - MERSIN, TURKEY - AFTERNOON

Mohsin winces in pain as he sits down on a bench. He wipes the stains off his clothes, while muttering about reckless young men. Adnan, after following Mohsin, stands nearby, looking at him awkwardly.

ADNAN

Uhh.. Let me get you another cup of
coffee to make up for it.

Adnan gets coffee. Mohsin looks up as Adnan returns.

Mohsin takes the cup, all the while Adnan stands there awkwardly. Eventually he sits down.

Mohsin looks at the docks in front of him. A ship is making its way to the port.

They sit in SILENCE for a while.

Adnan turns towards Mohsin.

ADNAN (CONT'D)
Sorry, again about...

Adnan points at Mohsin's clothes. He smiles sheepishly and rubs the back of his head.

ADNAN (CONT'D)
My mind was somewhere else.

They sit in SILENCE as they gaze at a newly docked ship as it off-loads its passengers. Among them is a young child dragging his older teenage sister by her hand down the stairs towards an elderly couple who are waiting near the ship. The family of four finally get off the ship and are greeted warmly by the elderly couple. It's a happy reunion.

Mohsin sits gazing at the happy family. His face grimaces. He closes his eyes. He turns and looks at Adnan.

Adnan is smiling. He gazes at the family. His smile widens.

ADNAN (CONT'D)
She reminds me of my sister Houda.
It will be good to see her and my
family after so long.

Mohsin stays quiet, just staring at the family. Adnan turns to Mohsin, still smiling.

ADNAN (CONT'D)
Who are you waiting for?

Mohsin remains SILENT. Adnan continues, not minding Mohsin's silence. His gaze still fixed on the passengers.

ADNAN (CONT'D)
We're going to travel soon, maybe
to England or Greece. We'll settle
there and I'll get a job. A real
one. Something that I can support
my family with. I hear they treat
us well there.

Mohsin looks down at his hands. He stares at his wedding band, touching it with his fingertips, he turns it around once. Sighing, he gets up and throws his empty coffee cup in the bin next to him.

MOHSIN
Don't be so naive.

Mohsin walks away, never gazing back. Adnan stares at Mohsin's back. He turns to the docks. He smiles, but then frowns as his gaze turns to those around the family.

There is an elderly woman hugging a younger man, crying as they hug.

A couple is crying as a ship crew member talks to them.

Others are waiting nearby. They look tired and afraid.

Adnan frowns and looks down at his hands. He clenches them and looks back at the people.

ADNAN

I know you're safe. Please be safe.

He sits alone in SILENCE, watching the docks.

EXT. THE DOCKS - MERSIN, TURKEY - LATE AFTERNOON

Adnan pushes his way through the heavy crowd as he makes his way towards a newly docked ship. He stops as he faces the landing area. He cranes his neck to see the passengers that are making their way down.

Suddenly, a MAN pushes him back as he raises his hand up high, waving it sideways. The Man calls out in Turkish, signaling to one of the passengers who turns her head towards him, and waves back. Adnan looks at the FEMALE PASSENGER and the MAN, annoyed. He turns and walks away back to the benches.

EXT. BENCH AREA - THE DOCKS - MERSIN, TURKEY - LATE AFTERNOON

Adnan walks back to a bench and sits down. He stares at the crowd in front of the ship. His eyes look at each person, focusing on the elderly and younger girls and men. He frowns.

Adnan looks at his watch. It reads 4:50pm. He reaches into his pants' pocket, taking out a piece of paper. He opens it.

ADNAN

Ship WS203. 4:15pm. Tuesday.

He looks at the crowd, some are leaving.

Anxiously, his eyes look around, trying to spot his family. Not finding them, he looks at his watch again. It reads 4:55pm.

Sighing, he stands up, puts the paper back in his pocket and walks towards the crowd.

EXT. THE DOCKS - MERSIN, TURKEY - LATE AFTERNOON

Adnan walks through the crowd, towards the ship. As he approaches the ship's landing, he sees a MALE PASSENGER talking to one of the ship's crew, while his family stands nearby with their luggage.

Adnan walks over to them. We hear the conversation between the CREW MEMBER and the Male Passenger.

CREW MEMBER

You can't leave it with me.

MALE PASSENGER

Please, I need to go. I can't wait.

CREW MEMBER

Sorry but it's protocol.

MALE PASSENGER

What am I supposed to do then?

The Crew Member shrugs his shoulders and turns back to his clipboard. The Male Passenger looks to his wife, defeated.

Adnan ignores the Male Passenger and walks up to the Crew Member.

ADNAN

Excuse me. I'm looking for my family. They were on the ship.

CREW MEMBER

What's the name?

ADNAN

Al-Hasmi.

The Crew Member flips through his clipboard.

CREW MEMBER

Sorry, they're not on the list.

ADNAN

Are you sure? Please double check.

CREW MEMBER

They're not on here.

ADNAN

But...

The Crew Member is called back to the ship. Adnan stands there looking at his retreating back.

ADNAN (CONT'D)

(whispers)

It said they'd be here.

He suddenly feels a tap on his shoulder. Adnan turns and looks at the Male Passenger.

MALE PASSENGER

Sorry, but did you say you're waiting for someone from the Al-Hasmi family?

ADNAN

Yes.

MALE PASSENGER

Are you Adnan Al-Hasmi?

ADNAN

Yes, I am. Why?

MALE PASSENGER

Oh, thank Allah (God)! I was waiting for you. Here. From your brother.

The Male Passenger hands him a letter and leaves. Adnan looks at him, confused.

ADNAN

Ayman?

Hurriedly, he opens the letter and reads it.

ADNAN (CONT'D)

Adnan. I'm sorry that I'm not there, I know how long we've waited. But, what I'm about to say is difficult. I don't know how you'll react. I hope you'll understand. It happened 2 years ago...

(FLASHBACK)

EXT. STREET - DAEL, SYRIA 2013 - NIGHT

A young pixie looking girl walks down the street at night. This is HOUDA (15). She passes an alleyway. Someone grabs her, pulling her in.

EXT. ALLEY - DAEL, SYRIA 2013 - NIGHT

Houda is thrown on the ground and held down tightly. Around her are a gang of men of different ages between 17 to 25, leering at her. She struggles against them and tries to scream but is silenced by a hand. One of the men stands in front of her. He pulls down his zipper. Houda looks at him, terrified. He kneels down. Houda screams.

EXT. STREET - DAEL, SYRIA 2013 - NIGHT

Dark haired, well built, Ayman (20) runs around, frantically down the street. He turns a corner and passes an alleyway. He stops and backtracks to the alley's entrance. He stares in horror and rushes in.

EXT. ALLEY - DAEL, SYRIA 2013 - NIGHT

Ayman runs and kneels down next to Houda. She is lying on a pool of blood, her clothes tattered. Ayman holds her against his chest and lifts her in his arms. He rushes out of the alley.

INT. AL-HASMI HOUSE - DAEL, SYRIA 2013 - AFTERNOON

Houda, wearing a white gown, sits on her bed gazing at the wall. She is pale and sickly. Her MOTHER (62) comes in holding a tray of food. Closing the door, she walks to the bedside table and places the tray on it. She sits on the edge of the bed, looking at Houda.

MOTHER

I brought you some food.

She takes the plate of food and places it on her lap. She takes a spoonful of it and lifts it towards Houda's mouth.

MOTHER (CONT'D)

Here have some, its your favorite.

Houda continues to gaze at the wall, not responding.

MOTHER (CONT'D)

Please, habibti (sweetheart), just one bite. Please, for me.

Houda remains silent. Mother sheds a tear, staring at her daughter.

MOTHER (CONT'D)

Eat something, please. Think of the baby.

Houda looks down and touches her stomach. She turns to her Mother, and opens her mouth. Mother starts feeding her slowly, looking sad.

INT. MATERNITY UNIT - HOSPITAL - DAEL, SYRIA 2013 - DAWN

Houda screams as she pushes. Her hair matted against her sweaty brow. Mother stands behind her, while a NURSE is kneeling between her legs.

NURSE

One more push, Houda! Just one more.

She pushes again with all her strength. We hear a baby's WAIL. Houda falls back on the bed, exhausted. The Nurse comes back with the baby wrapped in a pink blanket. Mother takes the baby.

MOTHER

She's so beautiful. She looks just like you and Adnan. What are you going to name her?

No response.

MOTHER (CONT'D)

Houda?

Mother turns to look at Houda. She is passed out.

MOTHER (CONT'D)

Nurse!

The Nurse rushes to check on Houda and calls the others.

NURSE

We have to get her to the emergency room quick!

The nurses wheel Houda out of the room, all the while her Mother looks at the door, crying holding the newborn tightly to her.

INT. LIVING ROOM - AL-HASMI HOUSE - DAEL, SYRIA 2013 - AFTERNOON

Mourners give their condolences to the family. Mother stands silently holding newborn baby NOUR, her eyes bloodshed, her skin pale. Nour cries. Mother rocks her gently back to sleep as she sings.

MOTHER

(Dialogue in Arabic)

Yalla tnam Nour, yalla yjeeha el nawm. Yalla et'heb essala, yalla et'heb essawm. Yalla tjeeha el awafi kel yawm eb yawm. Yalla tnam yalla tnam, ladbahla tayr el hamam. Rooh ya hamam la etsade'e, bid'hak a Nour la tnam. Nour Nour elhenda'a, sharek ash'ar w mna'a. Welli habbek bibousek, welli baghadek shu bietra'a. (Oh Lord! Help Nour sleep, May she become sleepy. May she grow loving to pray and to fast.

(MORE)

MOTHER (CONT'D)

Oh God Make her healthier each day.
 May she go to sleep and I will cook
 a delicious pigeon. Go pigeon,
 don't believe what I say, I just
 say it so that Nour will sleep.
 Nour, Nour, beautiful rose of the
 prairies, you have shining blond
 hair. The one who loves you shall
 kiss you, and the one who hates you
 will go away)

Ayman and FATHER (67) stand nearby, both of them quiet and expressionless.

EXT. STREET - DAEL, SYRIA 2014 - MORNING

Ayman holds Nour (8 months) as he walks to the hospital.

AYMAN

We're going to see jeedo (grandpa)
 and teeta (grandma) today, Nourina,
 you excited?

Nour giggles and talks back in gibberish while moving her arms around as Ayman swings her up and down in his arms. Suddenly, an EXPLOSION throws both of them against the wall, hard. He sits up coughing and quickly checks Nour for injuries. Finding none, he looks at the hospital.

The hospital is in chaos. The upper floors blown up and lit on fire. People running around, some screaming, some injured, some coughing covered in dust, and others lying underneath the rubble, dead.

Ayman runs to the nearest NURSE. He grabs her arm, stopping her.

AYMAN (CONT'D)

What happened?

NURSE

Someone bombed the 3rd floor.

Ayman, shocked, hands Nour to the Nurse and runs in the building, ignoring the Nurse's shout.

INT. 2ND FLOOR - HOSPITAL - DAEL, SYRIA 2014 - AFTERNOON

Ayman runs into a room and looks through the rubble of what was left of it, frantically. He finds both his parents laying on the floor underneath the debris. He tries to move it from their bodies as tears run down his face. Someone grabs him and holds him back. It's one of the hospital's Doctors and two nurses.

DOCTOR
Stop, its too late. They're already gone.

AYMAN
No, let me go! I need to help them.
Mama! Baba(dad)! Answer me!

Ayman struggles hysterically against the nurses. He turns towards the Doctor.

AYMAN (CONT'D)
Save them please!

DOCTOR
I'm sorry but there is nothing we can do. Nurse, take him somewhere quiet to calm down.

The Doctor EXITS the room. Ayman stares at his parents as tears continue to run down his face.

He is pulled out of the room by the nurses, his gaze never leaving his parents as they EXIT the room.

EXT. M5 MOTORWAY - DAEL, SYRIA 2014 - MORNING

Ayman walks down the long desert M5 motorway heading to Homs, carrying Nour (1) in a ring sling on his front and a backpack on his back. He is sweaty and tired.

A car is heading towards them. Ayman takes out his hand and motions it to stop. It stops and the passenger seat window comes down. The MALE DRIVER looks at Ayman and Nour.

AYMAN
Can you give us a lift to Damascus please?

The Male Driver nods and opens the passenger door. Ayman ENTERS the car and they drive off.

EXT. DAMASCUS BUS STATION - DAMASCUS, SYRIA 2014 - AFTERNOON

Ayman waits his turns to step in the bus. In his hands are two tickets to Homs. Nour is sleeping in his arms peacefully. Ayman wipes some sweat from his brow and walks forward. He steps into the bus.

INT. BUS TO HOMS - M5 MOTORWAY NEAR AL NABK - SYRIA 2014 - LATE AFTERNOON

The driver stops the bus abruptly, jarring Ayman awake from his sleep. He tightens his hold on Nour, who's still asleep. The bus door opens and several armed men come on board.

They go to every row and check people's papers. Ayman sitting next to the window, tries to calm his breathing. One of the armed men stands next to him.

ARMED MAN
Show me your papers.

Ayman lifts an arm and fiddles through his pockets. He takes out some documents and hands them to the Armed Man. The Armed Man ruffles through them, His eyes scanning the papers. He lifts his gaze to Ayman and then looks at Nour.

ARMED MAN (CONT'D)
Where is your wife?

AYMAN
Dead.

ARMED MAN
And the child?

AYMAN
Mine.

The Armed Man looks at Ayman, his stare unwavering. Ayman remains calm, staring back. He tightens his arms around Nour. The Armed Man notices. He looks at Nour and turns his gaze back to Ayman. He gives him back his papers. He turns and moves to next row. Ayman lets go of his breath, relieved.

A shout is heard from the back as a couple of young men are dragged out of the bus, the younger one screaming and resisting. The Armed Man from earlier yells and slams his gun's handle against the younger's head. A woman screams. The leader of the Armed men shouts at the bus driver and gets off. The driver slams the door shut and presses on the gas.

Ayman looks out the window. We see the men being executed.

EXT. HOMS TRAIN STATION - HOMS, SYRIA 2014 - NIGHT

Ayman looks around scared, he holds Nour to him closely. People around him huddle together with their luggage. Ayman looks at his ticket. It's a one way ticket to Tartus. He looks to Nour who's gaze is fixed on the trains. Ayman smiles nervously.

AYMAN
Almost there Nourina.

Ayman walks to the platform and waits for the train.

EXT. TARTUS PORT - TARTUS, SYRIA 2014 - MORNING

Ayman looks defeated as he stands next to the WS203 ship's landing next to its captain.

AYMAN

Please, is there any way to get two tickets abroad that ship?

CAPTAIN

Sorry, you've just got enough for one.

AYMAN

Is there any other way? We need to be on that ship.

The Captain shrugs and moves away. Ayman looks around him. A lot of people are gathering their luggage for the long journey. He looks at Nour sleeping peacefully in his arms wrapped in a blanket. He fists clench around the blanket.

Kissing her head, Ayman tightens his hold around her. He looks at the crowd determinedly and walks to them.

(END FLASHBACK)

EXT. THE DOCKS - MERSIN, TURKEY - LATE AFTERNOON

Adnan looks at the last page. His hands shake, tears fall down his face as he continues to read.

ADNAN

... I managed to find someone to bring Nour to you. Please akhi(brother) take care of her. She's all we've got. I pray I'll see you two again one day. Ayman.

Adnan clenches his eyes shut. His grip on the pages hardens, making it crease. His breathing quickens becoming laboured.

ADNAN (CONT'D)

(whispers)

Why? My family. All gone. And for what? A bastard child.

His eyes open, angrily searching for the Male Passenger, who left after giving him the letter. We hear a NOISE near his feet. He looks down and sees Nour sleeping in a carrier.

He jams the letter into his pant's pocket and kneels down to look at her. Nour looks peaceful. Adnan's eyes narrow as they continue to stare at her face.

ADNAN (CONT'D)

Nour ha? How ironic.

His right index finger traces the counter of her face. He turns his head left and right, noticing all the people standing with their families. Adnan turns back to stare at Nour.

ADNAN (CONT'D)
 (whispers hungrily)
 My family would've been here if not
 for you.

He stands up and takes a hold of the carrier. He lifts it up and looks around again. Spotting the Red Crescent stand nearby, he heads towards them.

ADNAN (CONT'D)
 I'm going do what they should've
 done the moment you were born.

His grip tightens around the carrier's handle as his feet moves faster towards the Red Crescent stand.

Not paying attention, Adnan trips over a small rock and YELLS out in pain. He places the carrier on the floor and kneels down on one knee as he rubs his twisted ankle.

He angrily turns to look at a still sleeping Nour.

ADNAN (CONT'D)
 (Dialogue in Arabic)
 Ya bent el kalb weshek nahs aleena!
 (You damn dog's daughter you're
 such a jinx!)

He is still rubbing his ankle, getting frustrated with every rub. His eyes start to tear up as he gazes at his ankle.

ADNAN (CONT'D)
 (through clenched teeth)
 Damn it.

A shadow falls over him. Adnan looks up and sees Mohsin standing in front of him. Next to him is a woman in her mid forties, wearing a conservative dress. This is JUMANA, Mohsin's wife.

MOHSIN
 Adnan? What are you doing down
 there?

Adnan looks at Mohsin, tears falling down his face.

MOHSIN (CONT'D)
 What happened?

Adnan stands up and hugs Mohsin tightly. He sobs into Mohsin's shoulder.

ADNAN
 My family.

Mohsin pats Adnan's back as he looks at his wife. She nods and lifts the carrier off the ground.

MOHSIN
Let's go sit down.

Mohsin walks with Adnan towards a cafe near the docks. Jumana follows with Nour in the carrier.

EXT. CAFE - THE DOCKS - MERSIN, TURKEY - LATE AFTERNOON

Mohsin and Adnan sit at a table in a semi-busy small cafe. Nour's carrier sits empty on the floor.

Mohsin stares at Adnan, a frown on his face. Adnan is staring at his hands, a piece of used tissue in his grip.

MOHSIN
What happened is horrible, I know.
But what you were about to do
would've been worse.

ADNAN
How can anything be worse than
this?

He takes out the crumbled pages of the letter and throws it on the table, angrily.

Mohsin's gaze doesn't waver.

MOHSIN
Getting rid of her won't fix
anything.

ADNAN
Getting rid of it would solve
everything.

MOHSIN
How? You can't blame the child for
what happened.

Adnan looks away from Mohsin. Mohsin leans closer.

MOHSIN (CONT'D)
She's your family.

Adnan's head turns towards Mohsin angrily.

ADNAN
(seething)
She is nothing to me.

MOHSIN
She's your niece. An innocent child
born in horrible times. Don't
condemn her for other people's
actions.

ADNAN

I-

JUMANA

We're back. And look who woke up.

Jumana walks to the table, carrying a now awake Nour on her hip. Nour looks around her, curiously.

Adnan turns away from Jumana who sits down between the two men, placing Nour on her lap. Mohsin smiles at his wife.

JUMANA (CONT'D)

She woke up while I changed her.
Didn't make a fuss at all. You're
lucky to have such a beautiful
daughter, sir.

ADNAN

She's not mine.

Jumana looks at Mohsin, concerned. Mohsin shakes his head.

Nour hearing Adnan's voice turns towards him. Seeing him, Nour smiles broadly and lifts her arms towards him.

NOUR

Dada!

All of them look at Nour surprised, Adnan is the most shocked.

NOUR (CONT'D)

Dada. Dadaaa.

Adnan flickers his gaze towards Mohsin, nervous about what to do. Jumana seeing this lifts Nour off her lap and moves her closer to Adnan's reach.

JUMANA

I think she wants you to hold her.

Adnan shakes his head and pushes himself away in his chair. Nour still looking at Adnan, starts to cry as her hands try to grab him. Adnan sits paralyzed.

Frustrated, Jumana places a crying Nour on Adnan's lap. Adnan instinctively holds her as Nour was about to fall off his lap.

Adnan stares at Nour. Her face blotched with tears falling down her chubby cheeks. Adnan looks at Mohsin and Jumana, silently asking for help. Mohsin shakes his head.

Adnan looks at Nour again. He tries to shush her. Nour continues to cry.

ADNAN

Quiet down. Please?

Nour continues to cry.

Adnan closes his eyes, taking a deep breath. He looks at Nour again, tightening his hold on her, he hugs her to his chest and starts to rock her gently back and forth. Adnan starts to sing. His eyes close as he gets into the song.

ADNAN (CONT'D)

(Dialogue in Arabic)

Wiltstshi eltshtshi wil khoukh
taht elmishmisha. O kil ma hab
elhawa la'atof lk mishmisha. Hay o
hay o hay line distik lakink
a'ayrina. Tan'asl tyab Houda o
ninshrhun a'al yasmeena. (I will
take you on a little trip, to place
where there are prunes under the
apricot tree. And each time the
wind blows, I will pick an apricot
for you. Hey Lina, lend us your
kettle and your bowl. So that we
wash the clothes of Houda, and hang
them up on the jasmine tree.)

Nour, calming down, snuggles against Adnan's chest, holding his shirt in her fist while sucking on her thumb. Her eyes close as she falls asleep in Adnan's arms.

ADNAN (CONT'D)

That's my good girl. Right Houd-

Adnan opens his eyes and looks down at Nour, realizing his mistake. Mohsin and Jumana smile at them. They sit quietly for a bit. Adnan still gazing at Nour, sadly. His eyes tear up.

ADNAN (CONT'D)

She looks so much like her. I only
wish...

Adnan hugs Nour closer to him. He sobs.

ADNAN (CONT'D)

I'm so sorry.

MOHSIN

I know it's hard, but this child is
a gift. Don't abandon her.

Jumana reaches over and grabs Mohsin's hand. Squeezing it, she smiles at him softly. She turns to look at Adnan.

JUMANA

And if you need any help or advice,
I'm more than happy to lend a hand.

(MORE)

JUMANA (CONT'D)
I've never had a daughter, but I
loved raising my sons.

Adnan looks at her, surprised.

ADNAN
You're willing to help me?

MOHSIN
Of course. We're all family here
now. If we don't help our own who
will.

Jumana nods, agreeing with her husband. Adnan, touched by
their kindnesses, smiles shakily.

ADNAN
Thank you.

He looks down at Nour, who's sleeping peacefully in his arms.

Smiling gently, he brushes her fringe back and kisses her
head.

ADNAN (CONT'D)
I'll take care of you. You'll grow
up happy and free.

He looks up in the sky. Smiling, he closes his eyes.

ADNAN (CONT'D)
(whispers)
I promise.

Mohsin places a piece of paper on the table as he and Jumana
stand up to leave. Mohsin grabs hold of his wife's hand and
leave.

Adnan opens his eyes and looks at the paper. He grabs it and
reads it. Smiling, he puts it in his pocket and turns to
stare at the sea. A crowd stands waiting nearby as a new ship
nears the docks.