



December 17, 2012

A day of raining mortar bombs, and an unfinished cup of coffee



By Walid, a resident of Homs, married with a one-year-old child

It is morning in the first week of March 2012. Mortars and artillery shells are raining down. Bullets whistle near the window of my room, where I am stealing several hours of sleep.

I'm shaken by the sounds of explosions. I pull myself out of bed and tried to make a cup of coffee for myself to help my head bear the sounds of the explosions that are shaking everything around me.

I turn on the water faucet. Not a single drop comes out. I go into the apartment of my neighbors, who have left because of the bombardment. I find no water there. Nor do I find water in the apartments above us or below us.

I comb the building from top to bottom. I then go out into the street and enter our neighbor's vacant house. After searching, I find a bottle of wa-

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<http://www.syriastories.org/2012/12/mortar-rainy-day>

ter in the refrigerator. Yes, its old, but it has the “scent” of the neighbors and is a memento of their son, who was killed a few months ago.

I return to my home for the sake of a cup of coffee as the bombardment places me in mortal danger. I wash my face and then pour a bit of the water into the coffee pot, which brings back images of my mother as she picked up the pot and invited me to join her for coffee. I roam freely in my imagination for a few moments, before my wanderings are cut short by the thunderous sound of a projectile that has landed nearby.

I sadly discover there is no gas to make my coffee. I return to the neighbors’ apartment to search for a cylinder of gas, knowing that the residents of the neighborhood that remain have consumed most of it. I find nothing.

At the beginning of the stairs, in a place exposed to sniper fire, there is a small cylinder of gas. The young people of the neighborhood and I frequently used it in our meetings on the pavement. I try to go up calmly, bending every part of my body. I bend down to get it. How overwhelming is my happiness when I actually succeed in reaching it.

I try to return. I knock over some things that have been stacked. A nearby sniper starts firing. But I save myself... and the small bottle of gas. I then go back to my apartment, happy and whole.

I light the gas. The water in the small pot quickly boils. But what is this? Oh my God! The coffee container is empty, not a single ground. I pour some sugar into the pot filled with boiling water. I set down a large cup and then pour the boiling water into it. I take a sip. I surrender in silence and great grief over the memories that still warm my heart and give me the strength to go on.



May 5, 2012

My friend died before I could apologize to him



By Walid, a resident of Homs, married with a one-year-old child

I had a disagreement with a friend of mine over some issues. Whenever we met, we quarreled sharply without reaching an understanding on the matters that divided us. Today, our angry argument drove me to scream in his face. The matter would have devolved into a fist fight had it not been for the intervention of several friends who were present.

I left our meeting, hoping that if I could strike him, it would be with the intensity of the anger I felt. I promised myself not to meet with him, at least for the next few days.

Only two days later, a friend contacted me and informed me that our friend, with whom I had quarreled, had been hit by shrapnel from a shell that had fallen near him. He said that he was in serious condition and might die.

I found myself running quickly toward the field hospital, tears streaming from my eyes. The anguish I felt overcame the bad situation that had

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<http://www.syriastories.org/2012/05/losing-loved-ones-can-happen-anyday>

developed between us. I promised myself that I would never quarrel with him again – if he survived.

In response to my question, the physician attending him informed me that my friend's condition was critical and that he needed 24 hours to stabilize.

I preferred to remain by the door for a period of time. I began to reminisce about the good times I had experienced with my friend, who was lying motionless in the hospital bed. I remembered staying up late with him and having long discussions. But the details of my recent quarrel with him were strongly assailing those memories. I promised myself not to quarrel with him or with any other friend. I felt that death was very near to us.

After standing for 15 minutes at the door, the physician's voice interrupted my stream of thoughts. He said, "May he rest in peace."

Yes, my friend died without me being able to apologize to him for our recent quarrel. He died without hearing my words of remorse. He died without knowing how much I would long for him, our talks, or staying up late together. My friend died and left behind heavy grief, which stilled my heart for a long time and made me decide not to quarrel with any other friend, at a time when death summons us unannounced.



August 25, 2012

An unhappy divorce is the price I paid for supporting the revolution



By Louise, a well-known actress from Damascus

I had a strong feeling of impotence as I watched my sister being beaten and was unable to help her, solely out of respect for the wishes of my husband, with whom my relationship did not last long, having ended in divorce because of the revolution.

My sister had resolved to demonstrate with the other young people in front of the Libyan embassy to express solidarity with the revolution in Libya. As was their custom, the Syrian authorities began to beat and disperse them.

I was watching the situation from inside my car. I could not help my sister, first because I was unable to, and second, because I could not reveal identity because people would recognize me as a well-known actress.

In the first days of the revolution, I began to openly declare my solidarity with the revolution to my husband. But he opposed the revolution, arguing that it would only bring him hardships. Although I respected

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<http://www.syriastories.org/2011/08/politics-behind-bitter-divorce/>

his wishes that I should not declare my position publicly, I nonetheless spoke of my support for the popular rage privately and with close friends.

I would visit the families of persons killed in the demonstrations by the security forces to console them and express my solidarity with them. I also visited persons who were freed after being detained for participating in demonstrations.

My husband classified himself among those who consider themselves unconcerned with what is happening. He asked that I not become involved in what is going on. However, his “suspicious” relations with men in the government and his negative attitude toward the revolution were a cause of constant, heated debate between us.

Job Pressure

I was pressured not only by my husband, but also by the authorities, who prohibited artists who support the revolution like myself from working in government institutions and strongly restricted them and their activities before deciding to completely prohibit them from working.

After the military campaign which the authorities waged against Der’aa in March 2011, the artists signed the “Milk Declaration,” which demanded that the authorities loosen the siege on the city and allow aid and milk to be brought in immediately for the children there. The authorities then circulated a prohibition banning our employment in the Damascus Artists and Broadcast Union.

After that, I continued my work in private companies. However, I was assaulted by an employee of one those companies when I presented to them a scene of an assault by security forces against citizens who participated in the Syrian opposition conference at the Semiramis Hotel.

The employee attempted to beat me. I left the company – sore and certain that my positions had resulted in me being completely denied work, as had happened with other artists.

Not being able to work and getting divorced were a source of deep psychological frustration that compelled me to think about traveling abroad for ten days to recuperate and get out of the depressing atmosphere I had faced in the previous weeks.

I did not know at the time I left that I would remain abroad for such a long time. When I received word that the authorities were pursuing me, I decided to remain outside the country. Sleeplessness and apprehension made me extremely miserable. The only thing that eases my misery is recollecting the details of my life in Syria, even though I actually reside in Cairo.