

Freedom Water

Mum locked the door. Following family protocol, we each kneeled down behind the stubborn brick wall, observing each and every movement of one another. Gun fire crackled in the background and the vision of the dead bodies littered throughout the street never left my mind. Never, never, never left my mind. My family lived in a paradise turned war zone, where no lone citizen was safe and we had no option but to flee - flee to a place that was safe, flee to a place where death was treated as a tragedy and not seen as a part of everyday life. As we continued crawling, we heard a bomb explode in the distance.

Extremists I thought. Looking up, over the shoulders of Mum and Dad, I saw freedom, a sight which was rare in this area. A khaki coloured army truck waited for us 4 refugees, in addition to the 92 that were already aboard it. The truck appeared to buckle under the weight but we had no option; it was either a chance of survival or no chance of survival whatsoever. We carefully boarded the truck, remaining low to the ground, and closed the tailgate doors. Claspng onto the metal bars like an inmate for a look outside of the truck, all that I could see was barren wasteland except for the odd missile shell in the distance.

‘Nothing unusual,’ I thought as I retreated back down to the floor. A pungent smell enveloped the area, probably from the lack of personal hygiene in the area, a consequence of limited resources. It felt strange looking around and recognising no one whilst knowing that these people would be my acquaintances for months on end, out on the open water. I could see the worried expression in Mum’s eyes as the truck bounced notoriously along the dirt road. Every pothole in the road seemed like the largest of Mars’ craters due to the lack of suspension that the truck possessed. The driver floored it, trying to avoid the sniper bullets aimed at the cab of the truck – ensuring we could go no further. Fortunately they missed, and we returned to ‘Mars’. I became an inmate again and moved back to the bars

on the side of the truck. A tower crane, perched upon a concrete block was positioned a good 25 kilometres away. That was only 5 minutes from where we currently are, considering the murderous speed we were moving at. No one else had noticed the crane yet and I felt special, perhaps the only time in my life I would get the opportunity to. 'Port,' I thought.

The bald tyres screeched to a halt, kicking dust loose from the surface forming a mushroom cloud, similar to that of an atomic bomb. The unused port became filled with happiness for once – a sure sign of success. The site was so unusual that even the steel bent over and listened to us, or was it from an explosive shockwave? Looking down at the ground I felt at home. Again, more bullets. Every grain of dust, every speck of sand came with complementary bullets – evidence of a conflict zone. A loud, screeching voice stopped everyone in their tracks. The voice yelled, "Come. Come to the boat where our dreams will be made." The happiness continued as everyone filed into the small hull, masking the scent of the 700 year old fish carcasses with the smell of starving humans. It smelt no better than the rotting fish that were originally there. The boat, appearing to be in a near capsized state, maintained its composure under the load. I noticed a small leak in the boat – a trickle of water penetrating the wood. Rather than blocking it, I savoured every moment. The water upon my dry, crusty hands, although stinging due to the contamination, felt marvellous. It almost felt as good as a reunion with a long-lost brother. "Ahh." If only life was this good. A bell chimed but except it did not ring war, it was departure. Forty minutes after my entry on this vessel, the ropes were being untied for the first time in many years. A quick push and I think we drifted backwards. I don't know as after all, I was lucky to see daylight let alone the water. I heard the diesel engine start up, spewing black smog into the hull but there was nothing we could do. Dad hated the smell of smoke as it reminded him of cremation. Uncontrolled cremation. We moved further away from the coast. I could see this time as

Dad could take it no longer and forced his way to the deck, bringing us with him. Sea breeze. I savoured it equally as much as the water. One unknown man handed us a net and simply said, "Go." We plunged our nets into the oil ridden ocean hoping for a catch. Unsurprisingly we caught nothing. We tugged the nets out of the water but there was no net. It had dissolved in the concentrated chemicals that dominated the ocean.

You may be wondering, who am I? Even I don't know. I have a name but no one calls me by it. I have a soul but no one knows what that is. I am known for what I do, only by my mother and father of course. They are the only ones that care about me. I remove land mines. A dangerous, yet necessary job that gets great pay in the form of survival. You don't turn up for a day's work – dead. You complain – dead. You whine – dead. Not a bad job though.

The land got smaller as it moved into the distance. The ramshackle, rickety boat barely made its way through wave break. It was literally bursting at the seams. After hours of this, open sea came into view. No chemicals. No waves. No bombs. No sea monsters. No threats. At least that is what I thought.

'Hand it over,' commanded the man with the blue shirt. 'What?' I responded arrogantly. 'Your shoes.' Why I thought. Why me? My shoes were my most valued possession, most likely because they were my ONLY possession. Being much larger than me and clutching a knife in his left hand, machete in his right I had no option but to sacrifice my shoes. My feet, usually being protected from the outside elements by the soft leather felt like baby skin. Soft, clean and good as new. It truly felt like there was nothing worth living for anymore. I had nothing but family and soon realised that this seemingly small contribution to my life was worth it. My mind changed key, like a piano keyboard and I soon began to realise that freedom was not far away. Not far at all.

We sailed on, and on, and on, and on, and on, and on, and on and on until finally new, safe land came into sight. Pushing my way up onto the deck (we moved into the hull during nightfall) I felt free. That was until I turned around and saw a 'bullet-shaped,' navy ship coming straight at us. 'Home,' I murmured, 'home.' It was pointless. Although it did remind me of home, an insignificant child like me could not stop a beast of a ship like this. 'AUS102,' it said on the side of the ship but somehow the letters blurred together and made a sad, yet truthful statement 'DESTROYING LIVES FOR YOU.' I knew we wouldn't make it. I knew it from the moment I stepped foot in that truck. A rubber dinghy pulled up alongside us and told us to stop. The captain of our ship gunned it. The navy ship soon became invisible under a sea of black smog from the diesel engine. Our improvised truck/boat engine outdid that of the dinghy. They couldn't catch up to us. We moved towards land, quicker, quicker and quicker still. Closing my eyes, waiting for the missile to hit us I heard laughter again. I turned around and the navy ship was long gone. It was only a speck of grey on the horizon. We jumped off the boat as a feeling of success washed over me as I felt the sand in my toes. I saw my parents happy. It was an amazing sight. I hoped that everyone left in my hometown were just as happy, but unfortunately this was definitely not the case.

People in blue outfits came running down onto the beach, took a hold of me along with the other 95 passengers and whisked us away into vans that said, 'POLICE,' on the side. I didn't know what that meant, but I still said, 'Oh well.' I was 'over the moon.' Green trees and shrubs that mimicked heaven flew past. We were driven into an unknown facility and then separated from one another, patted down and placed in a cell. I'm sure I would be freed in a few months from this place.

At least I hope I will.