

It's time you pick your battle and I promise you this is mine

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by [angi190](#)

Summary

Tyler Joseph is a soldier, sent on a dangerous mission to Iraq in attempt to regain back control over the occupied city of Mosul.

Josh Dun is a young reporter, who ends up in the heat of a battle, after his attempt to get an inside glimpse of the city currently under seige.

The two meet and form a bond that goes way beyond friendship. They try to stick together but is that possible in a world devided by war?

Notes

I don't know why I started this new fic, but here I am writing it. I hope there aren't too many mistakes.

There will be a lot of roughness which shouldn't be surprising to people familiar with my work. I hope I won't scare you away from the start though :)

See the end of the work for more [notes](#)

Chapter 1

It took Tyler good 30 seconds to realize what was going on or where he was. The concrete dug into his ribs, turning his body into a big mess of sore limbs and stiff bones. Someone was shaking him awake, saying something probably to speed up the waking process, but to Tyler it all sounded too far away. Upon opening his eyes, he noticed how dark the sky was above him. The sun was yet to rise.

“What the hell, Scot?” Tyler mumbled, hugging his body tight against the not so warm wind that blew sand in his face.

“Time to get up sunshine. We’re due to move in 10 minutes. You better get your ass up and get moving” his commander grumbled and patted him one more time on the shoulder. Tyler didn’t want to get up or move, but he knew he had to.

He sensed the movement around him, as his entire platoon was being woken in the same fashion. Everyone was tired and sleep deprived. The lack of sleep, proper food and rest was taking its toll on everyone. Nobody ever complained or whined about being tired or sick, but it was all written on their exhausted and sunken faces. Tyler was no exception.

His entire body was aching from sleeping on the ground for God knows how many nights. They’ve been advancing towards the city of Mosul for almost three weeks now, the process slowed down by the harsh environment and never seizing fire that tore through the dry, hot air. They’ve walked the last 100km on foot, through the scorching desert heat, hiding from the terrorists guarding every single path that lead to the occupied city. Being quiet and stealth was their highest priority at the moment. They couldn’t afford being seen or heard. If anyone even as much as suspected an upcoming attack, all hell would get loose and their mission would be compromised.

The group slowly rose from the ground and 10 minutes later everyone was lined up with their gear ready and weapons loaded. Despite the exhaustion and the little sleep they got, everyone looked as determined as ever to continue their march towards the occupied town. There were still civilians behind those walls, innocent bystanders that got bombarded virtually every day. Tyler and the soldiers in his unit knew that if they didn’t come to those people’s aid, the terrorists will wipe out every last person until the town is officially under their control.

“Alright, ladies “ Major Collins called out so everyone would hear him over the furious desert wind that would not stop fucking blowing. “It’s time to move. We have another 20 miles to hike until we reach Mosul from North. Luckily for us, the wind has picked up so we’ll be out of enemy’s sight, at least until we reach the Air base that’s about 3 miles from the city. When we get there, we’ll need to be extra careful. They have patrols on each side of the city, but the air base is abandoned, so we have a real chance to sneak inside if we’re quick and quiet enough.” Everyone was quiet, listening intently to every single word the Major had to say. Tyler knew the plan to the very last detail, but the thought of sneaking into the occupied City still gave him a rush of adrenaline and a twinge of fear. “We have to get to

Mosul before dawn or we'll lose any chances of finding the damn place in the dark. So no snooping around, understood? “

Everyone barked “Yes, sir” in unison. The plan was plain and simple. Get to the air base without getting killed.

“Do you have any questions? “ The Major asked, looking around at the group of 25 fearless men in front of him. Nobody made a sound. Everyone knew the plan well enough to recite it in their sleep.

„Good. Let's move”

Tyler stretched his stiff body one more time in attempt to somewhat prepare it for the long and difficult hike ahead. Walking through the desert was a tough job. The sand was deep and difficult to maneuver through, but it wasn't the worst thing by far. Tyler didn't know what was worse – the strong wind that blew sand into their mouths and eyes or the unbearable heat that boiled them underneath their heavy gear. He wasn't one to complain though. Whatever they had coming, he would face it head-on. Tyler was tired of running from everything which was one of the main reasons he joined the army 3 years ago. At 21 his life was spiraling out of control and the only way to put himself back together at the time was to do something drastic. Joining the army and going on a mission to Iraq with barely any experience on the field was pretty much as drastic as it could get. It's been three years since then and he had plenty of experience now, but the thrill was still there.

The wind picked up when they walked out from underneath their shelter and marched down the seemingly endless sand. There was nothing on the horizon. Just the lonely white ocean of sand that stretched as far as their eyes could see. Tyler put his hand over his mouth in attempt to stop the sand from invading his and pushed ahead. They had a long day in front of them.

Chapter 2

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

Josh woke up without an alarm. With how nervous and on edge he was, he didn't really need one. The dream he just had must've been unpleasant, because when he shot up in his bed, he was covered in sweat and his heart was beating too fast.

Today was the day. Josh took a deep breath and looked at his phone lying near his pillow. It was 4:30 am. It was still dark outside, but the hints of light were already appearing on the horizon. Josh looked to his right where his friend and crew member Dallan was sleeping soundly. How could he stay so calm, Josh wondered while trying to slow down his own heartbeat? How could he sleep peacefully when in merely 10 hours from now they were about to enter the lion's den? Probably risk their lives and very likely get hurt in the process? Josh shook his head. This was going to be no doubt the most bold and reckless cover story in the history of journalism. Josh and Joe were due to enter enemy's territory and film what nobody else has dared to film before. ISIS, or Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant – a terrorist net that caused havoc, death and destruction in its wake, has taken over the second largest city in Iraq – Mosul. The town was in ruins and its residents were trapped for months on end without any medical or other humanitarian aid whatsoever. There was crisis in Iraq – that was for sure. People died every day; from explosions, air bombings, suicide attacks and the list went on. Some cities, like Mosul were under the ruthless control of ISIS and the people who lived there had no other choice but to face their fate which was very often cruel. Torture, rape and death were rather normal occurrences in the torn up country. People lived in constant state of terror. It was their everyday life.

Josh sighed and ran his hand through his mop of brown curls. If he had to be completely honest with himself, he was afraid too. Any sane person would be in his position. But there was something stronger inside, something overpowering the initial fear. It was the weird combination of curiosity mixed with a strong sense of justice. He wanted to see the war from up close. As crazy as it sounded, he wanted to submerge in these people's everyday life and find out first hand what was their life like, living in a war zone. At the same time, Josh couldn't stand knowing about all the horrors these people had to go through every day of their lives and be quiet about it. It was one of his strongest qualities and the one that always brought on trouble – he just couldn't keep his mouth shut when it came to right and wrong. He couldn't close his eyes and look the other way, not when it came to injustice. And what was happening in Iraq was very far from just. It was horrifying. And what angered Josh most was the fact that the West pretended that nothing was happening. The news never showed the bombed schools, the dead and wounded children, the grieving and terrified parents. They never broadcasted the ugly side of the war; the real side of the war. The Western media kept things short and void of any details. *There was a suicide bombing in Iraq. 100 people were killed. ISIS took the blame.* That's it. End of story.

Josh puffed out breath of air and kept rubbing his face with both hands. There was still a small voice of doubt that was nagging at the back of his head. It wasn't too late to call it

quits. They could pack their stuff in the morning and be gone by noon with the first flight to the States. It was tempting thought, but Josh pushed it down as far as it could go. That was the easy and safe thing to do. Probably the smart thing to do as well. The problem with Josh was though, that he never took the easy road.

He and Dallan have been working on this for over 3 months. It took them a lot of time to earn the trust of local people and even more time to persuade them to help. Mosul was currently under siege and getting inside the city was nearly impossible without getting killed or seriously injured. There was another, much scarier option that Josh tried not to think about. Being kidnapped by these sadists was the worst case scenario and both men tried to avoid pondering too much about it.

It was 5 am when the sun slowly crawled from underneath the horizon. It lazily made its way out, bathing the morning sky in color. Josh stood up and made his way towards the tiny kitchen of their crumpled apartment. It was a small place with the very basic things needed for survival. A room with two beds practically glued together, a wooden beaten up table with two no less beaten up chairs, a very old sofa and a small wardrobe with one door hanging opened. That room served as a living room and a bedroom and was connected to the small kitchen that only contained one person at a time.

Josh rubbed his eyes and looked out of the window while his coffee was still brewing. There was a column of black smoke climbing up to the sky like a snake, reminding everyone that the war was raging on. There were times when things looked almost normal, almost peaceful, but those times never lasted longer than an hour or so. Explosions could be heard in the distance and the smoke never really stopped poisoning the air. The fear was always present, especially during the quiet hours, when people were hiding in their homes hoping to live another day.

Josh sighed. His chest was feeling heavy and tight with worry. He felt responsible for Dallan, because this trip was essentially his idea. His friend and trusted camera man went along with it, not lacking enthusiasm, but Josh felt the weight of his decision to drag the other man along with him on this dangerous trip. If something happened today, Josh knew he would feel guilty for the rest of his life.

Shuffling behind him pulled Josh out of his heavy thoughts. Dallan was blinking with his huge dark eyes at him, confusion written all over his face.

“Dude why are you up so early?” he mumbled and rubbed his eyes.

“Couldn’t sleep” Josh answered honestly and wondered how could his friend do it. “There’s too much on my mind”

“Yeah I know” Dallan said, his expression turning from sleepy to serious in a very short moment” We can still call this thing off you know. If you have any doubts ... we don’t have to do it.” Josh searched for a hint of fear in his friend’s voice, something that would tell him that the other man was saying this out of concern for his own wellbeing, but detected none. Dallan was a good friend and that’s exactly why Josh was so damn worried. He didn’t want to put him in harm’s way. Unfortunately though, he couldn’t do it alone.

“No, I definitely want to do it. I’m just hyperactive at the moment. My mind won’t stop fucking working” Josh said and flashed Dallan a reassuring smile” I’m all ready to go. As long as you are though”

“Oh I’m ready” Dallan’s eyes were filled with determination and quiet courage that Josh always admired. His friend was only 2 years older than him, but he was wise beyond his age. His boyish looking face and playful grin have always made him look like a teenager.

“Me too” Josh smiled back and offered Dallan a cup of coffee, barely concealing the tremble in his hands.

“So when is our transport arriving?” the older man asked, propping himself against one of the counters.

“Around 7:30 am. He said he’ll message me when he’s on his way. There will be 4 people with him that I don’t know, but he says we can trust them”

“Salvation army?” Dallan raised his brow

“Something like that” Salvation army was a division of Iraq’s army that separated itself from the main structure and functioned on its own, mostly providing war ravaged regions with food, water and ammunition. They were probably the only ones who could make it through the heavily guarded cities like Mosul without being shot at. Or at least that was what Josh hoped for.

“I’ll hop in the shower and then we can go through our plan again” Dallan said and left Josh alone in the kitchen to wonder how in the hell he landed in this situation. Just a few years ago he was a normal kid, graduated from University with aspirations to become sports journalist. He only now realized how messed up his life must’ve become to push him to do what he was about to do today. Once they went out the door there was no turning back. A big part of Josh didn’t want to go back, so he narrowed his eyes, straightened his back and prepared for the long day ahead.

Chapter End Notes

I know that it's kind of confusing in the beginning, but it will get better , I promise.
As long as epilepsy doesn't stop me from writing I will update pretty often.
Your opinions matter a WHOLE lot, so don't hesitate to leave a message :))

Chapter 3

Chapter Summary

Dude I love writing about war and suffering

Chapter Notes

Okay, let me just say this real quick - this fic is based on real events. If you google battle for Mosul you will find plenty of material about it. So this story is based on this battle, but of course it's a work of fiction and I added a lot of stuff from my own imagination, so don't take it literally. There could be mistakes or inaccuracies, so I apologize for those.

I doubt many people will find this topic interesting, but hell I love writing about it. Also there will be a lot of Joshler, just wait a couple of chapters :))

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

They marched through the sandy dunes with sweat soaking their clothes and gear while the hot wind did nothing to cool them down. It actually did the opposite – blew dry burning air into their eyes and noses and filled the folds of their clothes with sand. Their tempo wasn't slow, but it wasn't very fast either. In normal circumstances and without the sand slowing them down they would've been almost there already, but the conditions were harsh and they had to be very careful so the progress was slow.

Tyler could feel sweat ticking down his temples underneath his helmet and it took all of his willpower not to take it off and wipe the wetness off his skin. His training stopped him from doing that though, because he knew that the moment the helmet was off, he was very vulnerable. Their armor was made of bulletproof material that protected their bodies and the helmets did the same for their heads. They couldn't take risks, not in an environment as dangerous as the Iraqi desert.

The sweat was getting into Tyler's eyes making them sting. His vision was blurred by the bright sun so the salty water only made it worse. Someone could run right into him and Tyler probably wouldn't see him coming. That wasn't good.

They stayed in a tight formation, only breaking it in the middle of the short stops that happened every couple of hours. Everyone kept the pace their commanding officer has set. Nobody complained. This was no summer camp.

Tyler kept his mouth shut as well even though he could feel the fatigue creep up on him like a silent predator. His legs were heavy and his lungs burned with every breath of hot air. His helmet was so hot it almost felt like it was roasting his brain alive. His eyes blurred and his speech would probably slur if he tried to talk, but he didn't.

During his military training it was beaten into him to shut his mouth and suck it up. There's no point in wasting your precious energy with whining and moaning. You swallow your self-pity and shove it down as far as it can go and move on. That's what Tyler has been told hundreds upon hundreds of times until it got drilled into his brain. If you wanted to join the elite forces you had to endure a lot of pain and discomfort and learn to keep it to yourself.

Tyler assumed he wasn't the only one struggling so he looked around to see if any of his comrades showed any signs of exhaustion. Everyone marched in the same rhythm, but some of them dragged their feet with a little bit more effort than the others. The average age among the soldiers was 32 and Tyler was the youngest one on the field in his division. That meant less experience and less experience often lead to mistakes.

"How are you holding up, Joseph?" Tyler didn't notice the lieutenant who was now marching next to him with concern written on his angular face.

"Okay, sir" Tyler answered and realized how dry his mouth was. They walked in silence for a while, dragging their tired feet through the unforgiving sand.

"Is this your third tour in Iraq son?" the question made Tyler look at the other man and nod. After his first mission in the country he thought he will never come back to fight there again. It took him three months to realize that he was actually itching to get back on the field and fight the sadistic fucks that killed hundreds of innocent people every day.

Since then he was volunteering to fight the battle nobody wanted to know about. It was all happening thousands of miles away from the civilized world that pretended nothing was wrong. It didn't concern the big powers as long as it didn't happen in their backyard. Tyler wasn't as hypocritical as the rest of the people who sat peacefully in their homes and pretended everything was peachy. Because it wasn't.

„If this was me 25 years ago when I was your age, I would've probably shat my pants three times already" the lieutenant joked with a lopsided grin. He was at least 20+years older than Tyler who doubted his senior's words were true. Lt. Colman was one of the toughest men Tyler had ever met.

"I'd say I'm pretty nervous myself" Tyler admitted with a small smile

"I'd be worried if you weren't" Coleman said and patted him on the back with a firm hand "There are another 10 miles until we reach the air base. I need you to keep your eyes opened and focus sharp, understood? The closer we get, the more dangerous this shit is going to get" Tyler nodded. He knew the last 5 miles will be like walking on a mine field.

" Roger that" Tyler answered out of habit and added" I'm tired, but I'm ready to fight these fuckers with all I've got, sir."

“That’s what I want to hear” another reassuring slap on Tyler’s back and the lieutenant was gone.

They marched on. Nobody spoke unless necessary; yapping was considered a waste of precious energy. Time slowed down and it felt like they weren’t moving despite the long hours of walking through the sand. The landscape never changed. It was all white and vast and fucking endless. Tyler knew that this was the most dangerous part of their mission – the enemy could be lurking from every direction and they couldn’t let the dullness of their trip lessen their focus.

And just like that, out of nowhere Tyler heard the whistle of bullets and the undeniable roar of a machinegun going off somewhere close.

“Down, GET DOWN” their commanding officer screamed and everyone dropped to the sand without a second thought. Tyler tried to take a quick look around and scan his surroundings, but all he could see was sand and more sand. The wind has picked up and it created a sandstorm that swirled around them and limited their vision to only a couple of feet. That was an extremely vulnerable position to be in, so Tyler pressed his chest and stomach to the ground, extended both hands in front of himself and gripped his rifle as hard as he could. They didn’t know who was shooting at them or where the shots came from or even if they were directed at them.

“Where the hell are they shooting from?” someone screamed next to Tyler who tried to spit sand out of his mouth

“Who the fuck knows” Collins barked back “Just stay down and move on my mark”

Everyone lay still and listened to the sounds of combat thundering around them. Now that Tyler’s heart has stopped racing like crazy he could stop and analyze the situation. The sounds, even though pretty loud were echoing through the desert which meant the battle wasn’t as close to them as he first thought. No bullets could be heard hitting the sand around them or whistle close to where they have taken cover. Something didn’t seem right though, but Tyler couldn’t put his finger on it. The direction of the noise was strange, he couldn’t tell where exactly it was coming from.

And then it hit him.

“Sarge, I think the shots are coming from above” Tyler said and as if on cue, the thundering of a helicopter pierced their ears, making everyone cover their them with both hands.

“Who the fuck is flying in this goddamn storm?!” the sergeant yelled and motioned for them to start moving” Come on boys, let’s move before this thing lands on our heads”

Everyone started crawling through the hot sand, following their commander’s lead. It was difficult to see anything and Tyler honestly wondered who would choose to fly as a mean of transportation in this terrible weather. His first guess was the Iraqi’s elite army, because those guys were one crazy and extremely bold bunch. They were currently on the front line of the fight for occupied Mosul.

“Stop, stop!” the sergeant yelled and motioned for them to stop moving. Everyone halted and held their breath” The air base is at 3 pm south, about 500 meters away from our location” the man said and everyone squinted through the sandstorm, trying to make out the hangars. It was difficult to see anything, not only because of the sand but because the sun was already setting down. They needed to get there before dawn or they will find themselves trapped in the open at night which was one of the worst case scenarios.

“We will move in pairs. Joseph, you’re with Barakat” the officer said and moved on to the next pair and so on, until everyone was sorted in pairs.

Being paired with Jack Barakat was both a blessing and a curse of sorts. He man was a ticking bomb ready to explode any minute which on the field was a good thing. The man was reckless and borderline crazy when it came to taking risks, but he was also incredibly loyal and supportive. Tyler smiled at Jack who put his fist up for a freaking fist pump. This dude, Tyler thought.

„Let’s go kill some terrorist trash” Jack said with a lot more enthusiasm than it would be healthy in this type of situation. Tyler hated these fuckers in his guts too, but he wasn’t overly enthusiastic to walk into their den. Mosul was literally crawling with terrorists at the moment and they were about to enter their territory.

Swinging his heavy M249 light machine gun over his shoulder, Tyler rose from his crouched position and slowly started down the sand with Jack right by his side. He could now see the fence or at least the remains of it and assumed they’ve reached the air base from its north side. The helicopter that was above them a minute ago was now showering one of the watching towers with heavy ammo. Everyone from the other side of the fence was trying to take the steel bird down and this is exactly the kind of distraction they needed.

They never broke formation while running in pairs towards the abandoned base. Everyone knew their position painfully well. In their line of work one mistake could cost someone’s life. Bullets whistled around them, hitting the near buildings and sand with brutal force. The helicopter kept shooting for another good 5 minutes and then, just as suddenly as it all began, the fire seized and quiet fell upon the desert.

Tyler held his breath, taking shelter behind a ruin that used to be a wall until something heavy and no doubt lethal hit it. Jack was by his side, taking quick glances at the ruins that lie in front of them. Tyler realized why their commander chose this route to enter the city. A massive part of what seemed to be a neighborhood was completely destroyed, leaving a gaping hole where buildings once were. Ruins provided shelter and a good environment to create diversion.

The sun was below the horizon when the 3rd Battalion of the US Army’s 7th Special Forces Group entered Mosul and a rain of bullets greeted them the moment they set their feet on the burned soil.

So what do you think?

Chapter 4

Chapter Notes

A longer chapter I wrote after a series of seizures that literally melted my brain into jelly so I couldn't write for a while.

Hope this made sense

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

Chapter 4

The car crept slowly through the dusty road, lulling Josh into sleep. He hasn't slept much last night due to anxiety so his mind was drifting off. It wasn't a good idea to fall asleep while traveling through Iraq's dangerous roads, so he tried to stay alert. Dallan was sitting next to him, in the backseat of a beat up and dirty truck and stared out the window. The wind has picked up, creating a very unpleasant sandstorm they could barely see through. The windows were drawn all the way up because of the flying sand and it was already incredibly hot inside the car, even though it was barely an hour since sunrise.

They rode in silence. The truck had 8 seats, most of them occupied by Salvation Army soldiers that weren't very talkative. Arkam, the Iraqi who was supposed to help them get into Mosul didn't come.

When the truck halted to a stop in front of Josh's hotel earlier this morning, an unfamiliar and hostile face greeted them instead of Arkam.

"My name is Josh" he introduced himself in Arabic while his eyes wondered inside the truck. Dark eyes full of suspicion stared back at him. "I was supposed to meet with Arkam. Did he not come?"

"Arkam couldn't make it" the man, who looked around 50 and slightly overweight said with a flat tone "My name is Muhammad" the man didn't offer his hand and Josh didn't offer his. This wasn't good. They didn't even get into Mosul yet and things already didn't seem to be going according to plan.

"Uhhh... well he didn't warn me that he can't come" Josh said with a sinking feeling in his stomach. Muhammad was looking at him with his piercing eyes, as if he was trying to read right through Josh's soul. Doubt crept into his mind and he wondered if they should just abort their mission and get back into the hotel. Tell the guy they changed their minds and run as far and as fast as possible.

That was a tempting thought, but Josh pushed it aside. They've come too far to lose their chance. Not many outside people, let alone Americans have gotten inside the occupied city

since the siege began. They've slept in a cheap motel occupied by rats and cockroaches for months and ate one meal a day to get here.

One look at Dallan's determined face told Josh what he needed to know. His friend was on board and so was he.

"I do not know about Arkam's business. He asked me to come here, so here I am. If you don't want my help, I will leave. I'm doing him a favor." The older man stated and folded his hands across his chest. Josh still didn't like the whole situation, but what could they do? If Arkam couldn't make it, they would have to take their chances with this guy.

"No, we'll come with you"

The passenger's door at the back opened, as an invitation for them to get in. Josh and Dallan shared a look that said "Are you sure?" and both nodded to themselves. The doors were shut behind them and the engine roared to life two seconds later.

Nobody said anything for the next couple of hours. Josh didn't fly all the way from the States to make small talk with locals, but it was still a bit unsettling. He and Dallan shared a look every once in a while but neither said anything. All Josh wanted was to get to Mosul safely and start writing his material. Once there, they would figure it all out, but until then he was on high alert.

Mosul was roughly four hours away from the town they were picked up from but it seemed to last forever. The landscape didn't change once. It was all sand and sun and almost white clear sky. No clouds, no signs of life, no other vehicles on the dusty road. That wasn't surprising though. Where war was raging life could not last for too long.

With every mile the weather got worse, until they got caught in a full blown sand storm. The wind was spraying them with tons of sand, blocking their view and making it difficult to see anything. Josh was wondering how in the hell were they even going to find the town in this horrible weather. The driver's must've been driving blindly on the road, having absolutely zero view of what lies ahead.

Josh had no idea what to expect either. How were they going to get smuggled into Mosul without rising suspicion? He was anxious and a little scared of what might happen when they finally arrived. At the same time though, he couldn't wait to finally get out of the smelly and boiling hot truck.

A thunder sliced the hot air and Josh ducked his head out of reflex, bewildered by the very thought that a thunder could strike in the middle of the desert. Another one followed, then another that sounded even louder and more devastating. Despite the fact that they were all crumpled in a moving vehicle, Josh could feel the ground vibrate with every looming sound.

Explosion. The word echoed in his mind while they neared the blood freezing sounds. Those were either bombs or grenades, but it was hard to tell. Josh was no expert on weapons, but there was no doubt in his head that those were explosives going off. His heart began racing with both anticipation and fear. He knew what was waiting for them behind those walls, or at

least he did and the desire to walk in there and photograph every single inhuman act was stronger than the fear of being killed.

They halted to a stop and Josh squinted outside the window. Silhouettes of ruined buildings and burned cars were barely visible through the sand. They must've reached Mosul. Josh was about to open the car door, but he found it locked. His anxiety flared up and he tried to open it again, but the result was the same. Feeling trapped, Josh cleared his throat and asked with the calmest voice he could muster

“ Umm.. the doors are locked” nobody paid any attention to him. Everyone seemed too occupied with what was happening outside. There seemed to be some kind of a fight close to them and Josh's curiosity flared up. He needed to be out there, filming and documenting it, instead of sitting in the car.

“ Could you open the doors? “ he asked this time and one of the people riding in the front seat turned to face him.

“We cannot let you out” he stated and turned back around. Josh blinked.

“Why not? “

“It is not safe” the man answered, not bothering to turn around this time.

“ Can you tell us what's happening?” Josh asked with more force this time, but no answer followed. He looked over to Dallan who was looking outside the window with his hands gripping each other so hard they were turning white.

Just as he was taking a breath to ask them to let him out, the engine roared back to life and they started moving again. Now that they weren't in the desert anymore, the view became clearer and Josh gasped at what he saw.

There wasn't a single building that stood unscarred by the attacks. Everything was in ruins. The houses, the schools, everything in sight was ravaged. Some buildings were missing entire sections, others had no windows and doors or rooftops were completely gone. It was the very picture of devastation. Josh could feel his heart hurt in his chest at the sight of the utter destruction. He had done a very thorough research about the battle for Mosul so far and the statistics said there were over 80,000 people still living among the ruins. There was no way to safely evacuate them or even help them with food or medicine. Most of them died during attacks, others survived for months only to die from hunger or diseases. If there was hell on Earth, it was right here, all around Josh.

Their agreement with Arkam was to help them to the eastern side of the river, where ISIS forces weren't as present. That was actually the part that worried Josh the most, because making your way through the city was as dangerous as dancing tango in a mine field. He'd been to Mosul before, a few years ago while still in Uni, but everything he saw back then was now a scorched pile of rubble. There were a couple of landmarks he couldn't confuse with anything else and one of them was Al-Nauri Mosque that stood tall in the center of Mosul.

It was one of the oldest and most important monuments in Iraq and was currently used as a headquarter for ISIS leaders. When they took control over the city, the terrorists beheaded 100 people on the main square right in front of the mosque. Josh had that scene imprinted in his brain, having seen it on one of the local ISIS sponsored television channels. This is why the sight of it made his heart lurch with fear. They should not be in this part of the city, not if they wanted to survive the day.

The car stopped again, but this time the driver went out to talk to people gathered outside. Josh looked outside the window and saw the reason why they had to stop moving – the entire street ahead was covered in chunks of cement and stone. There was no getting through. Nervously, Josh waited for someone to let them out, to tell them what the hell was going on, but nobody paid them any attention.

Sounds of shots being fired and men screaming echoed down the street where their car was stuck. A loud bang rang and shattered the windows of the truck, spraying Josh with glass and dust. Everyone inside coughed and heaved by the wave of dust and sand, forcing the men in front to open their doors and windows. Josh pretended to cough, but instead leaned close to Dallon and with a voice barely above whisper said “Get out of the car through the window. I don’t trust these people, we need to move. Now.” He tried to sound as firm as possible, but the truth was that his heart was about to jump out of his throat. Dallon gave him a wary look and swallowed hard.

Another explosion shook the ground underneath them, followed by a series of gunshots and people screaming and moaning in agony. They were right in the middle of a vicious fight. Josh felt a rush of excitement and adrenaline course through him, mixing with fear. All they had to do is get out of the car and move somewhere safer. They were a very easy target stuck there in the middle of the fire exchange.

Three people have left the car and joined the fight outside while another two stayed inside with their rifles drawn out. Josh wasn’t entirely sure if the Arabic men were there to protect them or keep them from running away. He felt like the latter was more likely, because so far none of them showed any friendliness or cooperation. The two Americans were literally locked inside the car with two heavily armed men who could possibly be terrorists.

When a car exploded 100 feet away from them, Josh yelled NOW and threw himself out of the broken window, feeling Dallon move on the other side of the passenger’s seat. The diversion worked, people fleeing to every direction and taking cover behind larger objects. Josh couldn’t see what Dallon was doing on the other side of the truck, so he tried to circle it around to get a better look. “Crap” he muttered, seeing a group of people across the street aiming right at him. Dallon met him halfway and they both took cover behind the car while bullets whistled and pounded all around them.

“Fuck what do we do? How do we get out of this shit?” Dallon asked, his breath quickened and face covered in dust and sweat. Josh tried to quiet down his own panic and think.

“We need to get the hell away from here, Dall. Okay? We’re just gonna have to make a run for it” Josh whispered and felt the doors of the truck behind then being opened and then shut. “Crap. We need to get far from this truck..”

“ But the people inside ? “ Dallan asked confused

“ They were definitely not here to help us okay? Now let’s go” Josh peeked to the driver’s side of the car and saw the two men who were inside minutes ago, now standing out with their weapons drawn out. They seemed to look torn up between joining the furious fight that was going on the street or go looking for Josh and Dallan.

“See that blown up car over there?” Josh whispered, leaning in close to his friend and pointing towards the car. It was roughly 15 meters away and was a good spot to take shelter.” We’ll just have to make run for it. I’ll count to three and we’ll run as fast as we can over there without looking back. Okay?” he knew the plan wasn’t great and they were easy targets while running on the street like that but they didn’t really have much choice. If they sat behind the truck sooner or later someone would see them and Josh definitely didn’t want that. The people who took them were most likely terrorists, because they fought against Iraqi army forces on the other side of the street.

“One” Josh said, focusing on the leftovers of a car he was about to run towards “ Two “ adrenalin was pumping in his veins, a loud static noise filling his ears. He took one last deep breath, looked over at Dallan and nodded “Three”

Both men bolted up at the same time and ran down the street towards the car that still let out steam of smoke. It took their captors a couple of seconds to notice them running away and that gave them some time to gain distance. Not so long after though, bullets started whistling next to them and Josh was overwhelmed with the feeling of despair. His lungs burned and legs ached from effort, but he kept running, not looking behind. He could hear Dallan’s labored breathing somewhere close behind and kept pushing until the car was within a few steps.

And then, a sickening sound - a mix between a gasp and a scream, made him stop in his tracks and drop to the ground. Josh looked back and watched with horror as Dallan fell to the ground, clutching his leg and moaning in pain. He was shot.

In a terrifying moment, Josh was faced the decision whether to try and help his injured friend or crawl towards the car where he would be safe. His brain was in overload, still grasping with what happened and his body ran on basic instinct. His eyes saw the men wearing masks running towards them, heard more bullets being fired, more explosions going off somewhere close.

His survival instinct kicked in and without much of a thought, he got back on all fours and scrambled to get behind the burned vehicle. From there, Josh took his chances and ran towards another car further away from the battle, until the sounds of it became more distanced. Only when he felt somewhat more safe, huddled behind a column of a destroyed building the reality of what just happened hit him like a freight train. Dallan got shot. And Josh left him behind. God knows what those terrorists will do to him? “Fuck fuck fuck” Josh cursed and buried his head in both hands. His best friend was shot and he ran away like some coward. How could he just leave him there? How?

A more rational part of his brain was telling him that he couldn’t do anything for Dallan, that if he stayed a second longer he would get killed or worse – captured. And then how could he

help his friend? “Fucking coward” Josh muttered to himself and felt the wetness of tears on his cheeks. He didn’t remember crying.

All of a sudden it was too much to handle and he doubled over, throwing up and coughing fiercely. More explosions shook the ground beneath him and forced him to the ground as he lost balance. His stomach too empty to throw up anymore, Josh curled up on himself and tried not to drown in the sea of desperation that sucked him whole.

Chapter End Notes

Was it confusing? Did you guys enjoy it? Should I keep going? I'm paranoid and I constantly need reassurance that I'm not doing a terrible job, sorry :\

Chapter 5

Chapter Summary

There's a little bit more conversation in this chapter, but it was necessary for the story

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

When darkness came, it brought along a terrifyingly fragile silence. Explosions have died down, weapons seized their fire, heavy artillery stopped crawling down the devastated streets. Tyler knew better than to feel hopeful. He knew that their enemy was regrouping and reloading for tonight's battle which was probably going to be even more blood shedding. He felt a shiver run up his spine at the thought of the enemy's snipers lurking in the shadows of abandoned buildings. Those bastards were everywhere, especially in areas controlled by ISIS. And this neighborhood was literally crawling with them. They were equipped with night vision scopes that made American and Iraqi soldiers easy targets. Tyler sighed. He was tired.

They were all sitting on the warm ground, backs against a wall that somehow survived the mayhem and waited for their commander to give orders. He was currently in contact with their base in Bagdad where strategies were made and decisions taken. Tyler didn't like those people, hiding behind high walls with barbed wire, hundreds of miles away from any real battle. What did *they* know?

Tyler scoffed and shook his head. Jack, leaning on the wall next to him turned his head to him and raised an eyebrow.

"You talking to yourself Joseph?" his voice was light and there was a smile playing on his lips. If it wasn't for the week old stubble on his face, he could pass for a teenager.

"I can't stand the fact that those pricks back in the Capital are deciding our fate right now. I mean how many of them have ever been in battle?" Tyler grumbled and held on to his M249 tighter when distant explosions ripped the air.

"I don't know dude. I don't give a fuck as long as we get to kill these radical bastards." Jack answered, his eyes gleaming dangerously. "You know the old saying – it's easier to ask for forgiveness than permission. When we're out here they can't do shit to control us. They can bitch all they want, but at the end of the day it's us who put our asses on the line every day."

Tyler couldn't agree more. They were in Mosul to fight until those bastards retreat into the hole they crawled out from. The city has been under siege for almost 4 months and statistic couldn't even cover all the civilian deaths during this period. Isis leaders thought of themselves as If they were Gods. In Tyler's eyes, they were nothing but cowards, hiding behind their twisted version of Islam

“We’re going on court-martial one of these days, I can feel it” Tyler said and heard Jack chuckle.

“Calm your ass down and stop complaining” was Jack’s answer, but there was no malice in his voice. The Lebanon native often used crude jokes and sometimes sounded insensitive, but it was a coping mechanism of sort, Tyler has learned. Jack had a rough past, filled with physical abuse and other things the man never talked about. The softness underneath his tough demeanor was revealed on very rare occasions, but the truth was that Jack had a very emotional side to him. Tyler smiled and shook his head again.

Nobody spoke for a while, waiting for major Collins to come back with news from his conversation with Base. When he returned, his face was a mask of worry and anger.

“ These fuckers” he said, taking a seat in front of the wall where everyone was leaning on. “ They’ve captured a US citizen” all eyes turned to the major. Everyone was thinking the same thing.

“Soldier?” Tyler asked, fearing the worst.

“No. I wasn’t told many details, but it’s believed he’s a reporter. “

“ Shit” Tyler swore and heard another dozen of swearwords fill the air.

“It gets even worse. The information is not solid, but there might be another reporter stuck in the zone of fire. Also American citizen”

The evening was getting worse by the second. They were in a vulnerable position in the middle of a neighborhood on the brink to succumb to ISIS’s terror, the terrorists kidnapped a US civilian and another one was probably on his way to be captured or killed. They’ve only been here for a couple of hours and everything was already going to shit.

“ What were those dumbasses even doing here? Did they not *notice* there’s *war* happening here?” Tyler asked, wondering what kind of idiots would land in this kind of situation.

“ It appears they were brought in with a nonmilitary truck. It wasn’t marked as ISIS, so we suppose they didn’t know they were being kidnapped.”

It sounded funny “*didn’t know they were being kidnapped* “ and Tyler almost laughed, but stopped himself. One of those guys was probably being tortured at this very moment.

“They were supposedly being taken to the Al-Nauri mosque, but the road was blocked by a collapsed building. That’s when the truck stopped and the two of them ran” Major Collins said, repeating the Intel he got from their Iraqi allies who witnessed the whole thing.

“I thought you said only one of them got away?” Tyler asked and Collings nodded.

“The other one was shot while running for cover”

Tyler still couldn’t figure out for the life of him why would anyone put themselves in this life threatening situation. It was different for Tyler, because it was his job and he was trained to

do it. A reporter though ... did he want to write the biggest headline of the fucking year? Win a Pulitzer?

“Either way we will keep our eyes and ears opened. Ask around civilians and allies about our guy. If we receive any info, any clues that might help us locate and retrieve him, we will proceed to a rescue mission. Until then our orders clear : make our way to Al-Nahaar hospital and guard it from all and any attacks. We are not to move from our post at any circumstance until further notice”

“Why the hospital?” Jack asked, already having a bad feeling about the whole thing.

“ It’s packed with explosives. One shot, even one stray bullet and the whole thing will go off. There are hundreds of wounded soldiers and civilians inside. The hospital is one of the many buildings those crazy fucks have wired, so be extremely cocious. Do not shoot at buildings, or if you have to, only shoot at higher floors. The explosives are usually placed in basements/foundations. “

Tyler listened to Collins’s briefing, but his mind was elsewhere. For some reason he couldn’t stop thinking about the reporter who escaped captivity only to end up on the deadly streets of Mosul. How long would he survive? Would he make it through the night? Would he die a quick death from a bullet or explosion or will he starve to death or catch infection? Tyler cringed. It shouldn’t matter to him, but it did.

When the plan was repeated a couple of times and memorized by everyone, they moved again. It was dark and quiet and neither was in their advantage. The horrible smell of decomposing bodies was so strong everyone had to put rags over their noses and mouths to stop it from suffocating them.

They walked for a couple of blocks, not seeing a single soul outside. Bodies lie everywhere, piled on top of each other or torn in pieces and scattered across the dusty street. Most of them were civilians, caught in the crossfire. Fires burned in the distance, where explosions ripped buildings and vehicles earlier. Tyler hoped that there would be no more of those tonight.

It was quiet. Too quiet.

Until someone behind Tyler sneezed and all hell broke loose a second later.

Chapter End Notes

Sorry for the cliffhanger, but this chapter got too long so I had to cut it.

I'm sorry I'm so detailed in everything but my brain won't have it any other way.

Chapter 6

Chapter Notes

Oookay so things are about to get messy. I mean this whole fic is going to be messy, so prepare for plenty of fighting/dying/bleeding/suffering *wink*

I know there is a lot of terminology/weapons/slangs that I use that many people are probably not familiar with, so if you want me to, I can make a post explaining/showing pictures of different machine guns, snipers and stuff like that.

I'll use to word "tango" a lot. In military slang it means target, so you'll probably see it often.

I hope you enjoy this fic. It's inspired by real life events and even though probably not entirely accurate, it's not too far from the truth. Let me know if you have any questions :))I didn't beta read this, because I'm too tired and I cringe a lot while reading my own stuff woops

Enjoy!

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

The explosion threw Tyler in the air, instantly filling his mouth and nose with debris and sending him flying to the nearest building across the street. His ears were ringing and he couldn't take a breath, but his instincts were working full force. His body folded in on itself, protecting his vital organs and head while big chunks of concrete were raining down on him from all sides. Tyler screamed for his comrades, his friends, but all he could hear was ringing and whistling. His hearing was nonexistent.

With adrenaline pumping in his veins, he sat up and felt his way up the wall until he was standing, leaning against it. Shadows of people were running on the other side of the street, but without his night vision, Tyler could not see a damn thing. It could be the enemy taking advantage of their confusion, attacking while they were still in shock from the explosion. That thought made Tyler fall to a crouch, feeling the ground for his M249 machine gun while taking cover at the nearby fallen debris.

Still confused, Tyler kept searching for the weapon until his brain kicked in, reminding him that he had a backup gun, tucked behind his vest. Mentally slapping himself on the forehead, Tyler pushed his hand underneath his jacket, shirt and finally vest, finding his skin wet and slippery. *Blood* was the first thing that came to his mind and fear crawled up his spine, but Tyler pushed it down with a deep breath. He needed to focus. There was no time for panic or fear. People depended on him and his abilities to stay focused and stable when times called for it.

Tyler found the handle of his PM-84 submachine gun and drew it out, checking the magazine for bullets. It was full, all 25 bullets in place, which gave him enough fire force for a small battle. Shoving the panic down, Tyler stood up and ran across the street where he and his platoon were standing before the explosion hit. His ears were still ringing and his body was more sluggish than usual, but he had to move. He had to find the others and help the wounded if there were any.

Someone grabbed him by the hand and Tyler pointed his weapon at the threat, only to find Jack's bloodied face staring back at him. His mouth was moving, but the younger man couldn't hear absolutely anything, so he shook his head and pointed to his ear with his free hand. Jack seemed to understand and held up his palm, signaling for Tyler to stop and stay quiet. The palm turned into a single finger pointing up and moving in circle. That meant they were surrounded. Tyler nodded. They both held their ground, looking around and assessing the situation.

Chaos was taking over the night. People were running around them, some fleeing, others regrouping for an attack. Tyler's hearing came back so suddenly it threw him back a bit, making him stumble over a body on the ground. Jack's hand on his shoulder steadied him, but the ear piercing sound of battle was drilling a hole in his head. It felt like suddenly someone unmuted the world and the thundering sounds exploded in Tyler's quiet mind.

"Where's Alex? Where the hell is Alex?" Jack's voice made Tyler wince and flinch. Alex was their sniper and one of the best marksmen Tyler has ever met in his life. He and Jack were close, sharing a friendship that started way before they joined the army.

"He went inside the building!" It was their commanding officer's voice this time that made Tyler's head hurt.

"Tyler! Hey, are you okay?" Jack shook him gently while still gripping his shoulder. "We need to move, okay? Can you hear me?"

"I'm fine, let's move" Tyler said a bit too loud and felt a strong headache creep up his brain.

"There are five tangos in the building where we got hit. Gaskarth and Urie went after the one who fired RPG at us. They are sweeping the roof and we-" Lt. Collins pointed at the group in front of him "are going to sweep the floors. When the roof is clear Gaskarth is taking station there to keep the street clear while the rest of you secure the building and wait for further instructions. Understood?" Everyone barked their understanding and Tyler followed them, even though his eyes were still unfocused and mind too foggy to process everything that has just been said.

"Joseph, give me your status" the Lieutenant said and everyone turned to the youngest man who tried his best to look as normal as possible.

"I'm good to go, sir" he said and wiped his face from the sweat that formed there. Remembering the slippery skin underneath his shirt he thought he probably was not good at all, but there was time for injury assessment and it wasn't now. Right now they needed to secure the building, eliminate the threat and mostly stay alive. The rest could wait.

“Good. I need all of you right now. We lose our nerve and we’re dead, so stay sharp. Understood?” Another round of “Yes sir” and “Yes, Lieutenant” filled the cold night air.

If Tyler had to be honest with himself all he wanted right now was a warm bed and a couple of hours of undisturbed sleep, but that wasn’t going to happen. He was exhausted, hungry and in pain, a dangerous mix of things that were not handy when you’re in the middle of a battle with jihadists.

“Jack, you lead the way. I lost my night vision in the explosion.”

“Roger that. Just hold on tight, this will be a hell of a ride” Jack said, making Tyler shake his head and smile a little. He’s never seen anyone so ready for a fight the way the Lebanese was and Tyler fed off that energy. It was going to be a hell of a ride indeed.

The info about 5 tangos in the building turned out to be a huge understatement. When the group split and rushed inside the half-destroyed building they were met with furious defensive fire that made everyone jump for cover. Bullets flew from every direction, making it difficult to move around. Tyler shot the first guy, seeing him trying to climb the stairs up. The second one fell a couple of moments later when Jack fired his 750 rpm (round per minute) M249 at the target and literally tore him apart. There was no light inside the building besides their flashlights, mounted at the top of their machine guns that helped them see their targets.

More terrorists fell, all of them firing thousands of bullets before death caught up on them, making Tyler’s heart beat erratically. He could hear more gunfight upstairs, more screaming, more bodies thumping down on the concrete floor. His hearing still wasn’t 100% back so he couldn’t make out most of the screaming or who it came from, so he relied on Jack to guide him and feed him information. When they swept the first floor they moved to the next one, killing more enemy soldiers and turning the building into a bloodbath. There was blood everywhere – on the walls, splashed on doors and window sills, spilled all over the white floors.

Tyler and Jack didn’t stop for a minute. They kept going until they reached the roof where the scene wasn’t much different than downstairs. One particular fact made Tyler’s blood freeze though – there were at least 5 enemy snipers lying bloodied and lifeless on the ground. Those were extremely well trained and extremely dangerous, especially at night. If they hadn’t swept this building, things would probably get very very ugly for them.

Only when their sergeant give the order to regroup and take defensive positions on the roof did Tyler finally allow himself to feel the whole physical toll of what happened. The pain spread from his chest down to his stomach, twisting its way into his lungs and ribs. He knew that the initial blow threw him pretty hard, but he didn’t know if he had anything broken or cracked. His head hurt so bad he sat down and leaned on the nearest wall, closing his eyes battling the feeling of nausea. Something was wetting his neck and when Tyler raised his hand to his ear and wiped the wetness he saw blood staining his fingers. “Fuck” he said to himself and tried the other ear, finding it bleeding as well.

“Tyler, dude are you okay?” Brendon was kneeling next to him, joined by Jack and a few others.

“My head hurts like hell” Tyler said, holding on to his forehead. The headache was splitting his head in half.

“You’re bleeding. We need to get to that hospital fast, because this doesn’t look good” Jack said and shook his head. “Where the hell is your helmet?”

“I don’t know, I lost it during the explosion”

“Can you open your eyes for me?” Ryan, their on-field medic gently said, cupping Tyler’s cheek. Nodding, Tyler cracked his eyes opened and felt the headache worsen even more.

“Okay. Can you see my fingers?” if Tyler had to be honest all he could see was the scene 15 minutes ago playing out in his head and blood. So much fucking blood.

“I think so?” he asked more than answered, not entirely sure what he was seeing.

“How many Ty?” Ryan pushed, still holding his head for support

“I don’t know” Tyler closed his eyes and felt the nausea reach its boiling point “I’m gonna be sick” was all the warning he could give before his throat contracted and he violently threw up.

He kept vomiting, feeling hands on his chest supporting him which hurt like hell. His head, his ribs, his stomach, everything was on fire. Tyler has been injured during battle before, but this was something else. It felt like someone lit up a fire inside of him and there was no getting away from it. Despite having his hearing partially lost he could still hear his own voice, screaming and cursing, followed by the sound of 50mm sniper firing. Before he could realize what was happening it all became too much and he lost consciousness.

Chapter End Notes

Yep, I keep throwing new characters into the thing, I'll probably keep doing it, so let me know if you want to see someone else featuring in this story :)

Your comments seriously give me life. Like seriously. You have no idea how much a couple of words mean to me. I could cry (pathetic I know)

Next chapter will follow Josh's journey through the dangerous city and the one after will probably be the one where he and Tyler meet *cue the drama*

Chapter 7

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

When Josh was preparing for his trip to Iraq he was absolutely aware of the fact that it's going to be the most dangerous thing he has ever done and will ever do in his life. That fact didn't scare him too much, at least not to the point of making him change his mind. He knew he would probably end up being shot at and witness other people being killed. It wasn't his first conflict to document after all. He's been to Somalia and Beirut, both countries torn apart by civil war where people died in big numbers, most of them innocent civilians. That seemed to be a tendency for almost every war in history – the army was fighting, but it was always civilians who suffered the most.

So initially Josh knew he'd have to face all of that suffering head on, but God, he was not prepared for what waited for him in Mosul. He'd never seen, heard or even smelled anything like this in his life. The air reeked of rotting bodies, sewage, burned materials and garbage. It was all combined into one suffocating smell that turned Josh's insides upside down as soon as his heart stopped beating erratically enough to cause a heart attack. That's when he became more aware of his surroundings and the horror of the situation hit him.

That's when Josh decided to do what he originally came here to do. If he was going to die here, he might as well leave something behind for other people to see. So he took off his small backpack, containing a bottle of water, a small amount of food, a wallet and a small camera with two sets of additional batteries. He held the camera in his hand, wondering if anyone will ever find it if he died in Mosul. It was small enough and light enough to be held in one hand, so Josh put the elastic strap over his palm, turned it on and pressed "record".

People lie dead on the streets in half decomposed state while other people stumbled over those bodies like they were nothing more than rocks. Death was so normal here; nobody noticed when it happened anymore. At least not the soldiers. It was different with civilians though.

As soon as silence fell over the ruins of the city, Josh could hear men and women cry, slumped over their dead children, brothers, sisters and parents, uncaring about the bullets that flew around them. A woman was holding her heavily bleeding child in her arms, clinging to the boy as if it would stop him from leaving this world. She rocked back and forth, mumbling something under her breath and let out an occasional sob. The boy was obviously dead, Josh couldn't see his face, but the amount of blood underneath his little body could only mean one thing. The woman wailed again, lifting up from her son's body and that's when her eyes stopped at Josh and her face froze.

"Help him!!" "She screamed in agony, looking at Josh with wild eyes" "My boy is bleeding, please help him. Oh Allah please help my son!!"

Josh looked away, terrified that she will draw attention to him and someone will shoot him, but she didn't let up.

“You can help my son!” she cried, holding the dead child pressed to her chest “ Please don’t let my son die”

Josh rose of from his sitting position and kneeled on the ground. He shook his head at the woman and tried to let her know that nothing can be done. She only started crying harder, rocking her son back and forth. Josh gestured her to move away, to hide somewhere, because staying like this in the open was dangerous, but she was too consumed in her sadness to notice.

A man dressed in all black and wearing a black headscarf appeared in Josh’s peripheral vision and the American ducked down on instinct, hiding behind the piece of concrete that served as a shelter. He rose up an inch higher, only high enough to see what’s happening on the street and fix the camera so it recorded everything that happened, just in time to hear the loud BANG of a rifle and the sick *thump!* of a body hitting the ground. The woman was dead.

Josh slid back down on the ground and squeezed his eyes shut, both terrified that the armed man will notice him and kill him too and sickened by the whole thing. This soldier, this *terrorist* just killed a woman, an unarmed grieving woman who could do absolutely no harm to him. It was unnecessary and cruel, just like everything about this war. Josh stopped recording and brushed the tears away from his eyes with the back of his sleeve. He was in Mosul for about an hour and already witnessed two deaths.

Josh leaned back against the warm concrete and tried to take deep breaths and not have a panic attack. The thought of Dallan sent a jolt of pain and fear through his gut. He felt so guilty it ate him inside and drove him insane. He couldn’t do anything to help Dallan and had no one to turn to for help. Did they kill him? Josh doubted it. He knew about Islamic State’s financial problems. They’ve been losing territory and losing territory meant losing control over oil refineries and mines.

Capturing an American alive was like a golden mine. The thought of his friend ending up captive at the hands of these radical sadists made Josh shake with fear and guilt. He could be the one captured, not Dallan. Hell he *should’ve* been the one captured, because after all it was all his idea. He lead them to the most dangerous place in Iraq and it was his plan that failed so miserably.

Arkam was a solid connection. He was supposed to guide Josh and Dallan into one of the safer parts of Mosul and lead them through the city to one of the still functioning hospitals where they’d stay. The people who picked them up obviously knew about their plan, because they showed up at the appointed time and knew Arkam’s name. So where did things go wrong? Did Arkam set them up? Josh doubted it. The man wasn’t picked up randomly; he was someone who could be trusted. So what happened to him?

Josh’s heart clenched painfully at the thought that yet another person could’ve ended up being hurt because of him. The image of the grieving mother being shot heartlessly over her dead son’s body was still engraved into his eyelids. He knew that this scene was one of the thousands crimes against humanity that happened here on daily basis. Statistics said that for the past four months 30,000 kids found their death during the conflict.

Josh opened his eyes and found them wet with tears, his vision blurry. He needed to stay professional though; if he gave into emotions and mostly fear he would not walk out of there alive for sure. An explosion ripped the air somewhere close to him and made him duck his head again, guarding it with both hands. Debris flew from every side, small pieces of concrete, dust, rocks. Then Josh heard screaming, incoherent and wild. This madness had no end.

It only got worse by the time the night fell. Josh ducked behind the piece of rubble for hours, until the gun fire around him seized and he dared to move. He was hungry and exhausted, but all that could wait until he found a safer place to rest. At first it was absolutely terrifying; hearing the shots, the explosions, the buildings falling apart. As Josh ran from one hiding place to another, the reality of the situation downed on him – there was no safe place for him. He was stuck in the occupied part of the city, where the fight between Iraqi army and terrorists was the most violent and persistent. If he survived the night he'd consider himself a lucky guy.

Josh used the opportunity of witnessing the fight for Mosul first handed as much as he could – his camera was on through the worst of the attacks, capturing things no one has ever recorded before. By sunset, the city was a smoking, smoldering pile of rubble. It seemed like the sun was in a hurry to hide behind the horizon to escape the horrifying scene. It wasn't a beautiful sunset; the sky was barely visible among the dust and smoke and the light was fading faster than Josh could ever remember.

The only shelter he could find was a wrecked car, with the frame and some of the furniture still intact. It wasn't great, he felt vulnerable and awfully unshielded, but there wasn't anywhere else to go. Buildings were too dangerous to wonder into, because they crawled with ISIS soldiers and the risk of being shot and killed was too high. That didn't leave too many opportunities to find shelter and with darkness fast approaching Josh took the first opportunity he saw and crawled inside the charred remains of the car.

His thoughts went back to Dallan and all the things that went wrong today. Was it suicide mission from the start? Were they doomed to fail and get themselves killed? Did Josh literally doom one of his best friends to die? That thought was unbearable. A part of his brain was living in denial that all of this was real. It was too horrifying, too unthinkable to comprehend. He had to stay sane, because if he lost his mind he'd surely be dead before the sun rose.

Curling up into a ball and using his backpack as a pillow, Josh closed his eyes and prayed to Lord that Dallan was still in one piece.

Chapter End Notes

Everyone is suffering and everything is falling apart. Yey!

I'd love to know what you think so far! I'm writing a bit too slow for my liking, but illness and exhaustion are fucking me up. Also why am I writing so many fics at once?

ahh the world will never know

End Notes

Should I post more? Is this topic interesting to anyone but me? I haven't seen many fics focused around it, but I really enjoy writing it. I hope you enjoy reading as well. Let me know in the comments

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