

## Some Terrorists... Faloojah Exodus

Written by

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### Some Terrorists...

The sky has been overcast these last few days. It's a smoggy, grayish combination of dust, smoke and humidity. I guess it has matched the general mood in many ways- somewhat dark and heavy.

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I've been very worried about Faloojah. So worried, in fact, that I find it hard to sleep at night, wondering how the situation will unfold in that troubled area. Things are bad in Baghdad, but they are far worse in Faloojah. Refugees have been flowing out of the area for weeks now. They've been trying to find havens in Baghdad and the surrounding regions.

I met my first Faloojah refugees last week. One of my aunts was feeling a little bit under the weather and the phones in her area were down, so we decided to pay a brief visit after breaking the fast in the evening. As we pulled our car into her driveway, I discerned strange, childish voices in the garden. Since my aunt has only an eight-year-old daughter, S., I assumed the neighbors' children were over to play.

S. tripped over to the car and helped open the door. She was jumping with excitement and pleasure at so many guests. I glanced towards the garden, expecting to see children but besides a big palm and a couple of rose bushes, I couldn't see anything. "Where are your friends?" I asked, pulling out the Iraqi sweets we had brought for my aunt. She looked over her shoulder and smiled, pointing to the palm tree. I squinted at the tree in the dark garden and glimpsed a small head and a flashing pair of eyes, which quickly disappeared. I nodded sagely and called out, "Hello, palm tree!" S. giggled as the palm tree softly replied, "Hello."

"It's fine," S. called over her shoulder to the garden, "You can come out- it's only my cousin and her parents!" We walked towards the house and S. continued her prattling. "Mommy is feeling much better. We have guests today. Well, we had them from yesterday. They are my friends. They're daddy's relatives? they don't have to go to school but I do."

The living room was in commotion as we entered it. The television was turned on high to some soap opera and mixed with the shouts of an Egyptian soap star was an infant crying, a mother "shushing" it, and my aunt and her husband discussing the fate of telephone line which had been dead for the last four days. The woman with the infant suddenly rose as we entered the room and made way for the door leading to the hallway.

After the initial greetings and salams, my aunt rushed out of the room and came back in with the very reluctant woman and her baby. "This is Umm Ahmed." She introduced us and firmly sat the woman back down on the couch. "She's from Faloojah?" my aunt explained. "She's my husband's relative- but we never met before this." She turned to give an encouraging smile to Umm Ahmed, who was looking somewhat like a deer caught in headlights.

The woman was tall and graceful. She was wearing a longish traditional "dishdasha" (something like heavy, embroidered nightgown) and her head was covered with a light, black shawl that kept slipping back to reveal dark brown hair streaked with strands of silver. I tried guessing her age but it was nearly impossible- she had a youthful look about her and I guessed

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she was probably around 33 or 34. Her face, however, was pinched with strain and worry, and that, combined with the silver in her hair, made her seem like she was forty. She nodded at us nervously and held the infant tighter.

‘Umm Ahmed and her lovely children are here until things are better in Faloojah.’ My aunt declared. She turned to my little cousin with the words, ‘Go get Sama and Harith.’ I assumed Sama and Harith were the children hiding behind the palm tree. A moment later, Sama and Harith, led by S. entered the living room. Sama was a delicate girl of about ten, while Harith was a chubby little boy who looked to be six or seven. They avoided eye contact and quickly ran over to their mother.

‘Say hello,’ Umm Ahmed urged quietly. Sama came forward to shake hands but Harith tried to hide behind his mother.

‘What lovely children!’ My mother smiled and pulled Sama in for a kiss. ‘How old are you, Sama?’

‘Eleven.’ Came the soft answer, as she went back to sit next to her mother.

‘How is the situation in Faloojah?’ My father asked. We all knew the answer. It was terrible in Faloojah and getting worse by day. They were constantly being bombarded with missiles and bombs. The city was in ruins. Families were gathering what they could and leaving. Houses were being demolished by tanks and planes. But the question had to be asked.

Umm Ahmed swallowed nervously and her frown deepened. ‘It’s quite bad. We left two days ago. The Americans are surrounding the city and they wouldn’t let us out using the main road. We had to be smuggled out through another way.’ The baby began to whine softly and she tried to rock it to sleep. ‘We had to leave?’ she said apologetically, ‘I couldn’t stay there with the children.’

‘Of course you couldn’t.’ Came my aunt’s firm reply. ‘That’s crazy. It’s suicide- the bastards aren’t leaving anyone alive.’

‘I hope everyone is ok?’ I offered tentatively. Umm Ahmed focused for a moment on me and shook her head, ‘Well, last week we buried our neighbor Umm Najib and her two daughters. They were sleeping when a missile fell in the garden and the house collapsed.’

‘And my windows were broken?’ Harith suddenly added, excitedly, then disappeared again behind his mother.

‘The windows were broken and the front door was blown in. We were all ok because ever since the war we’ve all been sleeping in the living room.’ Umm Ahmed explained, automatically, like she had told the story a hundred times. As she spoke, the baby’s fists went up into the air and it gave out a little cry. It was a welcome sound- the agonizing subject could be changed. ‘And is this Ahmed?’ I asked, rising to look at the infant. My aunt was calling her ‘Umm Ahmed’ which means, ‘The Mother of Ahmed’. Usually, the name of the eldest child is used as an informal

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way to speak with the parents. 'Abu Ahmed' is 'The Father of Ahmed'. I didn't understand why she wasn't, Umm Harith or Umm Sama, but since this was the last child, it must be 'Ahmed'.

'No- this is Majid.' Sama answered my question softly. The baby looked about four months old and had a shock of dark hair, covered with what seemed at first sight to be a little white cap. His eyes were the same hazel color as his mother's. I smiled down at Majid and noticed that the white thing on his head wasn't a cap- it was a white gauze bandage. 'What's the bandage for?' I asked, hoping it was just to keep his head warm.

'When we were fleeing the city, we had to come in a pickup truck with two other families. His head got hit with something and there was a scratch. The doctor said that he has to keep the bandage on so that there won't be an infection.' Her eyes filled as she looked down at the infant and rocked him a bit harder.

'Well, at least everyone is safe? you were very wise to come here.' My mother offered. 'Your children are fine- and that's what's important.'

This phrase didn't have quite the effect we expected. Umm Ahmed's eyes suddenly flowed over and in a moment, she was crying freely. Sama frowned and gently took the baby from her mother's arms, rising to walk him around in the hallway. My aunt quickly poured a glass of water out for Umm Ahmed and handed it to her, explaining to us, 'Ahmed, her fourteen-year-old son, is with his father, still in Falloojeh.'

'I didn't want to leave him?' The glass of water shook in her hands. 'But he refused to leave without his father and we got separated last minute as the cars were leaving the city?' My aunt rushed to pat her back and hand her some tissues.

'Umm Ahmed's husband, God protect him, is working with one of the mosques to help get some of the families out.' My aunt explained, sitting down next to Umm Ahmed and reaching to pull a teary Harith onto her lap. 'I'm sure they'll both be fine- maybe they're already in Baghdad?' My aunt added with more confidence than any of us felt. Umm Ahmed nodded her head mechanically and stared vaguely at the rug on the ground. Harith rubbed at his eyes and clung to a corner of his mother's shawl. 'I promised her,' my aunt explained, 'That if we don't hear from them in two more days, Abu S. will drive out to Falloojeh, and he can and look for them. We've already left word with that mosque where all the refugees go in Baghdad.'

As I sat staring at the woman, the horror of the war came back to me- the days upon days of bombing and shooting- the tanks blasting away down the streets, and helicopters hovering above menacingly. I wondered how she would spend the next couple of agonizing days, waiting for word from her son and husband. The worst part of it is being separated from the people you care about and wondering about their fates. It's a feeling of restlessness that gnaws away inside of you, leaving you feeling exhausted and agitated all at once. It's a thousand pessimistic voices whispering stories of death and destruction in your head. It's a terrible feeling of helplessness in the face of such powerful devastation.

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So Umm Ahmed is o-ne of the terrorists who were driven from the city. Should her husband and son die, they will be leaders from Al-Qaeda or even relatives of Abu Mussab Al-Zarqawi himself? that?s the way they tell the story in America.

It makes me crazy to see Bush and Allawi talking about the casualties in Falloojeh like every single person there is a terrorist lurking not in a home, but in some sort of lair, making plans to annihilate America. Allawi was recently talking about how the ?peace talks? weren?t going very well and a major military operation was the o-nly option available. That garbage and the rest about Abu Mussab Al-Zarqawi is for Americans, Brits and Iraqis living in comfortable exile.

Allawi is vile and the frightening thing is that he will \*never\* be safe in Iraq without American military support. As long as he is in power, there will be American tanks and bases all over the country. How does he expect to win any support by threatening to unleash the occupation forces against Falloojeh? People are greeting refugees from Falloojeh like heroes. They are emptying rooms in houses to accommodate them and donating food, money and first-aid supplies.

Everyone here knows Abu Mussab Al-Zarqawi isn?t in Falloojeh. He isn?t anywhere, as far as anyone can tell. He?s like the WMD: surrender your weapons or else we?ll attack. Now that the damage is done, it is discovered that there were no weapons. It will be the same with Zarqawi. We laugh here when we hear o-ne of our new politicians discuss him. He?s even better than the WMD- he has legs. As soon as the debacle in Falloojeh is over, Zarqawi will just move conveniently to Iran, Syria or even North Korea.

As for the ?peace talks? with Falloojeh- they never existed. They?ve been bombing Falloojeh for several weeks now. They usually do the bombing during the night, and no o-ne is there to cover the damage and all the deaths. It?s o-nly later we hear about complete families being buried alive or shot to death by snipers o-n the street.

By the way, Americans- [100,000 deaths in a year and a half, and the number is rising](#) . Keep Bush another four years and we just might hit the half-million mark?