

Anqa

“Walk away from what could get you in trouble and celebrate the fact you’re far away from it. Heard that kid? That’s what it means”

“The old man warned you, you should have listened” the voice in the back of my head said as I put my shaky hand on the ground trying to force my knees off the ground, crimson red drop splashing on the ground was the first thing I saw once I opened my blurry eyes, the street was empty, everything was dead silence as if I’m was in a ghost town. Moments later I’m was able to push myself up and stand again, I’m was on the sidewalk of an intersection turn, I’m was too stunned to be aware of everything going on around me, I felt two hands across my chest shoving me backwards, but I’m was able to hold on to the gray school fence a second stronger shove followed knocking me backwards onto the street, a white car slammed the side of my body, luckily, the driver was able to slow it down enough to a level where the hit didn’t cause any bone breaking damage, the driver thought we were recklessly playing around and I ended up falling backwards based on the look of it. The driver was shouting, I can’t recall what were his words, but I assume he was furious because if he wasn’t aware of himself things could have easily went sideways. One of the kids stepped forward and kicked me around the kidney area, that was the moment the man in the car realized that nobody was playing around and things were serious, he rushed his way outside the car, I can’t remember his face my body was collapsed, but I remember the way his red shirt was about to explode because of his muscle mass the man was about 5’8 and a body that looks like a human tank, He threw a punch at the closest to his car, I didn’t clearly see it but I’ll never forget the sound of it, it sounded like he just swung a baseball bat towards that

kid. The guy helped me get back up and offered to take me to a hospital, “I’m fine, doubt anything is broken, however there is a grocery store two blocks away and I’d appreciate it if you drop me off there.”

“Why in the hell would you go to a store? That’s not where you need to be” the driver responded.

“I know the owner, I want to stay there until I feel good enough to go home”

“No problem, I’ll get you there”

Fall, 2012,

I was born in Damascus, Syria, it’s where I grew up and spent some of the greatest and worst moments of my life.

Some of my first memories growing up is stubbornness and curiosity I enjoyed being a hard-headed child, being that way taught me many valuable lessons that I’m grateful for, I just never thought it will keep putting me in trouble over and over for the next few years, my life in general was like a roller coaster. Friendship was something that everyone strongly valued, especially if you are a teenager in school you will need someone to have your back, just like wolves you need to form packs but if you decide that you want to be the lonely sheep around the school, GOOD LUCK.

I had a lot of friends, but I’m was blessed to have few friends that were just like family to me, we always looked out for each other and grew a great friendship going into high school, school days are over by 2:10, 20 minutes after the last school bell for the day rings the street would be empty and its dead silence because most kids rushed to hang out around fast food places, me and my buddies would hang out everyday after school, 2 blocks away from the school street was the place we go to, there was a lot of food

places and other stores, my friend's grandpa owned a grocery store there, we'd grab a drink and something to eat and sit around his store same time every day, he was an awesome old man who often chats with us and yell at us when we do something wrong. I always called him "Old Man" because it annoyed him, but the more he got to know me the more that word grew on him. One day we got to his store a later than he usually expects us, as soon we got there he said "Late today huh? Everything's good?"

"yeah, he's just being an idiot" my friend said as his pointing at me,

"Why, what happened?"

"He wants to stop, and act like a jackass every time someone says something to him"

"The dude was..." the old man interrupts me saying "Don't explain anything, you know how everyone behaves here, and you know you shouldn't be starting problems with everyone you run into"

"I don't know" I said while staring at the ground

"Listen kids, I'll say it again, don't get yourself involved in trouble, it will only drag you down a terrible rabbit hole, epically you" the old man responded as he looks at me

"Me?"

"Yes you, don't act stupid, you're the only one in that school with a different religion than others, most people don't mind it and respect your beliefs but in this neighborhood, there will always be people who don't accept that, these people mentally are still living in the 80s, so basically you're walking around with a bullseye on your back"

It took me few moments to take in and process what he said, "Yeah... you got a point, I just can't let people know that I will accept whatever they say without responding, that will only make things worse, I can't allow others to shove their beliefs down my throat"

“Right, and you shouldn’t. But you can always do it by walking away showing that you’re the better person, if you act like the people you’re talking about you’re not making a difference, you’re not fixing anything” few seconds of silence followed what he just said, a proverb people use in the middle east “stay away from evil, and sing about it” now that it’s translated to another language it makes zero sense, but in Arabic language it have a great meaning, that proverb was what the old man said following his last few words.

“It makes no sense”

“It does when you think about it”

“That’s the problem, he never thinks” my friend finally broke his silence

“Walk away from what could get you in trouble and celebrate the fact you’re far away from it. Heard that kid? That’s what it means” those were the old man’s last words to me that day as he walked back inside.

October, 2012,

Two months prior moving to the U.S I’m was attending school just for fun, I knew I’m was leaving the country, I didn’t take school serious at all I just wanted to spend every minute possible around my friends. It was tough thinking about the day where I will see them for the last time before moving on to a new chapter in my life because of what we’ve been through together, having them around was one of the reasons I made it safely from 6th to 9th grade. I came back to my original classroom one day, I’m was in religion class, it was a class everyone was forced to take, so the school brought me a teacher because I’m was a Christian, the rest of the school wasn’t so they had their own teacher. As soon as I walked in, a new kid who recently transferred to our school said “you hate us don’t you? You can’t stand our beliefs, so you left the room”, I ignored him,

I had eight more weeks, I had no reason to start anything with anyone, but he kept repeating it. "School's almost over, I'll be waiting you outside" the new kid said "Cool, have fun waiting" I said that because I knew there is some paper work I needed to take care of in school for my transfer. So I thought he'd get bored and leave as soon as the street clears out, my best friend came up to me "Hey, don't leave directly today, will wait few of my buddies and will get home together, that way this kid won't bother come close",

"No, we're good, he's alone, it's not that serious also I've got few things to do in school, I doubt he'll wait that long, go home and I'll see you later tonight"

"Are you sure you don't want me to stick around?"

"Yes, hundred percent, you know I'm just trying to make it through the next few weeks without any issues"

"alright, I'll see you later I guess"

The time passed by quick, I got my papers done got ready to leave, as soon as I stepped outside the school building the new kid and two of his friends were standing right across the building. I realized that things might not go well, I walked trying to ignore them, "take it off" said the new kid, he was referring to the cross around my neck, people always had issues with me wearing it. I kept walking without saying a thing, "You heard me, take it off" as he moved towards me

"How about you make me" I've realized there is no walking away at this point, my goal was to find a chance to run to my friend's house.

The new kid was across from me, "Take it off" he said as he's reaching with his hand towards it, I've got a hold of his hand, pulled two of his fingers backwards, I felt the

bones snapping “Whack” they sounded like a pool balls when you break the rack, I thought it was my chance to run away, one of his friends tripped me, the only thing I completely remember is punches raining right and left, it was about a bit over a minute later where it stopped, I felt weakness that I never experienced before, and that was when I had my hands on the ground trying to push myself back up while having a flashback of my conversation with my friend’s grandpa, I could have reported it what the kid said to me, that would have solved the issue but I did the opposite, and if it wasn’t for the man who’s car I’m was pushed on, maybe I wouldn’t have wrote this.

“This is it, thank you” I told the man who was dropping me off at the grocery store,

“Sure kid, just be careful next time”

“There won’t be a next time”

“Yeah... yeah... yeah... you told me so, save your speech for later,” I said as I walked into the store, the old man got up to check on me, “What happened to you? Should I call your parents?”

“No, I’m not attending school anymore, it’s not worth it for the next few weeks which means I don’t think I’ll be coming down to this neighborhood again, so I came to see you one last time. You were right, I could have dealt with things in different ways.

Lesson learned” it was clear that I felt pain in my jaw every time I said a word, so he kept it short

“Just be glad you’re ok, I’ll call my grandson to come walk you home”