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The Kick

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It ended with a kick. A single kick, and the entire world collapsed in on itself. From her crouched position up against the crumbling brick wall of a dilapidated hospital building, a woman reeled with shock. Disbelief etched its way onto a face riddled with hardened blood and silver scars, as scenes of unimaginable pain seared through her eyes, leaving them hollow. They were scenes that she would carry to her deathbed. The man she lived for, torn from the stronghold. Warning shots fired into a blood red sky, as the iron grip of the militiamen hauled him to the bridge. Silent cries for mercy, visible only in the contortion of an otherwise steadfast face. Boot connected with back, his body thrust over the edge. Gunpowder exploded, and in a single instant of pure horror, the man she breathed for — once full to bursting with an abounding spirit and an enormous heart — was morphed into a disfigured array of flesh and limbs, hurtling headlong toward the merciless depths below.

This was the price of freedom. It was embodied in the incessant rattle of artillery shells, the pounding roar of air raids and the blood-curdling cries of the injured, echoing over the slums of Benghazi. A town that was once a rebel haven was now a most hellish warzone, the sounds of which tormented the very souls of those left alive.

Yet none of this reached the ears of Eladari. Still crouched against that brick wall, her world went silent. Torturous nothingness deafened her, as her nimble frame ... so detached,

so alone ... rocked back and forth on the spot. Coarse bricks pierced through her already torn thobe, drawing blood from the exposed skin. She did not feel its hot sting leak down her back, but rather a desperate and all-consuming tide of abhorrence swell within her, broiling and silently seeking out the faceless monsters that had cold-heartedly murdered her husband. For more than three months, government military officials had sucked the strength and spirit out of Libya. Day after god-forsaken day, they stole hopes and dreams; now they had stolen her one reason to live. To fight.

To survive.

A guttering nausea overtook her, and before she knew it, Eladari was retching up her insides onto the dusty street, grimacing at the vile acidity of her own bile. Not even the anger that had consumed her only seconds ago could compel her to fight the emptiness that ensued. The campaigns, the protests, the futility of the rebellion itself ... it was all for nothing. In the end, every last one of them would be met with their own kick. In the end, every last one of them would die.

Why wait for fate? Eladari had no food, no home, and now no-one. How easy it would be to raise that white flag, to launch herself into the crossfire. It would hurt. Oh, it would hurt. But to be with him again? Surely it warranted that instant of fatal pain.

On trembling legs, Eladari rose. With a trembling heart, she zeroed in on death. But above her, a zeroing in of a different kind was taking place. A flying mass of winged metal wailed; seconds later, the bridge before her exploded into a million pieces. The very earth lurched and a horrifying sight painted itself into Eladari's peripheral vision. A lone figure was stumbling, arms outstretched, directly into the path of the falling bombshells. A path she had intended to take, only moments ago. In the rapidly retreating light of dusk, Eladari saw tears falling from white, clouded eyes and a mouth uttering

cries that were immediately swallowed up in the apocalyptic chaos. The boy could be no older than eight.

Some primal maternal instinct kicked in at that moment, with a ferocity that propelled her into action. Amidst the anarchic bloodbath, Eladari took flight and scooped the boy into her arms. She did not say a thing; her touch, gentle but urgent, spoke all that needed to be said. Bare feet pounding the dust and the boy held tight to her chest, Eladari fled the carnage.

On and on she ran, every fibre of her being in agony as she sought out some distant horizon where the atrocities of this oppressive regime could be fathomed and forgotten. Eladari gazed down at the boy's disfigured eyes and closed her own. No one had eyesight that stretched that far.

Legs spent, and the sounds of the air raid fading, the pair came to a stop. As darkness enveloped Benghazi, they sank to the bare ground and cradled one another, sobs and tears fusing into a single story of heartbroken despondence. For woman and boy, time no longer existed.

Hours passed before it happened. But when it did, it was as if every corner of this charred and blackened world exploded into colour. The images of that haunted bridge were temporarily assuaged, and tears of joy overflowed from Eladari's eyes. The young boy stirred, momentarily startled. She reached for him, placing his hand, with hers, on her abdomen. Together, they felt it. The kick.



Tessa Calder wrote this in 2011 when she was in Year 12 at St Andrew's Catholic College in Queensland.