

## To Be The End

Kelsey Stevens

As I watched her climb onto the bus, I could see  
Two things. I could see the little girl that used to pick flowers  
Right out of my garden, put them in her hair  
And say "Look Mommy, I'm a princess!"  
But then I saw the weeping mothers standing in  
The shadow of two towers that no longer stood  
And I hoped my little girl was doing the right thing.

As I watched my son walk over that hill to the truck I knew was waiting for him  
I remembered the little boy who played in the mud outside  
Until the tanks came, and I told him to come in  
Where it was safe, or so I thought.  
But then I saw his father as he lay dying  
On his own step when the soldiers came and  
Shot him. And I hoped that he would make his father proud.

And she would write me letters, so full of hope about her  
Training, how she felt that she could make a  
Difference, sure that she would get to help someone. She said,  
"Don't worry Mom, they'll keep me in training for months, I'll be  
Home before I even leave Canada. Before I get to go to the war." And her  
Brother, who was only 14, told everyone how his big sister was going to be a  
Medic, sewing legs back on people. She laughed when she heard that.

And we would get messages from him, sent by the trucks  
That blew through town and picked up the new  
Boys. Notes, telling us how important their work is. How  
Allah would bless their work. How much they were needed.  
And his sister, who was 26 and married, would listen  
Mournfully as her husband read them.  
As if she could see his face while the messages were read.

Months passed. I watched the news every night, hoping to hear that  
My baby could come home. 26 years old. She should be home. Six months passed, but  
More troops kept going over. I tried to remember the faces of the weeping  
Mothers as I wondered why six months pledged soon became  
A year, then two. I watched as soldiers were wounded and  
The people there died and I hoped that it would end soon. When elections came,  
I voted for the ones that would let my girl stay safe. They lost anyway.

One day a message came, from the trucks. It was  
Time for them to move, to go into Kandahar, where they were needed the most.

He said not to worry; they were only letting him be a cook. And anyway,  
Soon they would drive the Westerners out.

And I heard news from people who came in, heard that people  
Died every day. And I hoped that my son, who was only 14, would come  
Home soon. Even as the bodies fell around him.

And then one day the news came. She was going  
Over! "Finally," she said, "a chance to show of my training. I know it will be  
Hard, there's less troops than before and more work to do. I  
Know that the days will be long." And she said that she  
Missed us, missed seeing her brother as he whipped the puck in to the net for the  
Winning goal, missed her dad's argyle sweaters and the cats meowing.  
And that she missed the way I smiled.

The messages did not come often enough. The days  
Stretched on as I waited for a word, any word. I wished for my  
Son to come home. I heard news that these Westerners were trying to  
Save us. I know they drove the Taliban away, out into  
Hiding, and that because of that now my daughter could go outside alone. But...  
If they just went home, let us be, let us live in  
Peace in our own country, then my son could come home.

I watched the news every night. Tidbits of my daughter's new life  
Flashed across the screen. Sometimes it was good news: troops came home, fights  
Were won. Sometimes people were hurt. Sometimes people  
Died. Each time I heard that, I wished my baby would come home.  
Then one day someone's baby died. Goddard, Nichola Goddard. She was only  
26. Proud in her uniform, she looked a little like my girl. In my mind, her face replaced  
That of the 9/11 mothers. That's when I knew we shouldn't be there anymore

It didn't seem to matter what we did. The troops never went  
Away. Couldn't they see they weren't wanted? Boys strapped  
Bombs to themselves and blew themselves up so often it began to seem almost  
Natural. Almost. A boy, a child who had sat on my step and  
Played with my son became one of them. I heard his mother was  
Proud of him. I wondered if I would be. I wondered if the martyr status was  
Worth it. Then I remembered his father and I knew it wasn't.

I told her I was worried. I pleaded for her to come home. She said she would be  
Home in a few months. I told her that wasn't soon enough. You'll be  
Shot, killed, mutilated, I screamed. She told me not to worry. "They won't  
Shoot a medic, Mom. That's why we wear the symbol on our helmet. So  
They know. I'll be all right." I no longer believed her. I began to  
Count the days until she was home. I waited, as I did when she used to  
Stay out after curfew, vigilant until I knew she was safe.



And then one day the trucks came with new messages, horrible messages. My  
Son, my life, had been "chosen." He said it was like a  
Gift. To me it was a nightmare. He had been chosen to commit suicide for  
His God and his father. I wept for the loss of my  
Family. First his father, then him? "You'll receive money," a man told  
Me. What use would money be? All I could hope for is to the westerners to  
Leave before the end of his time.

And then one day, the knock came. As soon as I opened the door I knew what it was.

**And then one day I was given a box. I knew what was in it.**

My little girl was had been killed. How will I ever be the same? How could I live?

**A ring, a few pieces of hair, and a wad of money. No remains, there were none.**

Killed in a suicide bombing. The only victim. On her way back to her camp.

**The messenger said he had killed one. A woman. He said it serves her right.**

The bomber was only a boy. 14 years old. The same age as her brother.

**She was Canadian, a medic. She had never killed anyone. It was a bitter revenge.**

I remembered when I thought we'd leave Afghanistan before she got to go.

**I wailed, I mourned. I wished to see times where my son would have lived.**

Now I wondered if we'd ever leave. And how many mothers would feel this pain.

**I wondered how other mothers could be proud. I was just devastated.**

Now I just want it to be over. For it to be The End.

**Now I just want it to be over. For it to be The End.**