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packed street. "The sheikh, he lives in the mosque. *W'Allah!* Trust me, I know," I boasted as we approached our usual meeting spot outside.

"Ugh, no! You think you know everything, Bakr, but bet you he doesn't," insisted Amro.

"*W'Allah!* I swear! Fine, loser buys sodas!"

Our friend Ali sauntered up to us, hand out-stretched, and I clasped it firmly. "*Jum'ah mubarak*. Blessed Friday, my friend. Hey, settle this bet for me."

I was just pulling my hand away from Ali's when the blast hit us. Time expanded and stretched; I saw and felt everything in a disjointed way that seemed too slow to be real. As I fell back, I heard the low *whoosh* of the taxi full of explosives shooting straight up into the clear blue sky, blocking out the sunlight. In that moment, all I could think was, "Where did the sun go?" The car came crashing down, twice as fast. We were thrown to the ground and showered with gravel and sand. In action movies, the hero always has ringing ears after an explosion and all sound is muffled. That wasn't true for me. The world was muffled for only a split second and then screams filled my ears and Father's voice pierced through the mayhem. "Abu Bakr! Abu Bakr! Abu Bakr!"

That's the sound I still hear when I think about my first car bomb: Father screaming my name.

I dragged myself up and spun towards his shouts.

Father was weaving through the desperate crowds and when he reached me, he grabbed me by the shoulders and turned me this way and that, like a man inspecting a melon at the *souk*. Satisfied that I was okay, he steered me home.

Moments before, the street in front of our apartment had been filled with people laughing and chatting. Now there was only chaos. Feet running, voices shouting, arms gripping wounds, cellphones frantically trying to document the destruction. The flaming shell of the taxi was only steps from our apartment

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Get The Free Ebook

Homes: A Refugee Story

by Abu Bakr al Rabeeah & Winnie Yeung

In 2010, the al Rabeeah family left their home in Iraq in hope of a safer life. They moved to Homs, in Syria – just before the Syrian civil war broke out. Abu Bakr, one of eight children, was ten years old when the violence began on the streets around him: car bombings, attacks on his mosque and school, firebombs late at night. *Homes* tells of the strange juxtapositions of growing up in a war zone: horrific, unimaginable events punctuated by normalcy – soccer, cousins, video games, friends. *Homes* is the remarkable true story of how a young boy emerged from a war zone – and found safety in Canada – with a passion for sharing his story and telling the world what is truly happening in Syria. As told to her by Abu Bakr al Rabeeah, writer Winnie Yeung has crafted a heartbreaking, hopeful, and urgently necessary book that provides a window into understanding Syria.

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