

"Free to Serve"

By

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Haneen, a young Christian Iraqi woman narrowly escapes as the ISIS troop overruns the Christian enclave at Qaraqosh by fleeing to the rugged Sinjar Mountains. She reaches safety only to forgo the comforts of her new found freedom to return and aid others' escape through the waterless mountain terrain.

FADE IN:

EXT. STORE STREET WINDOW (SUMMER, 2014 QARAQOSH,IRAQ) - DAY

It is summer 2014 in Qaraqosh, the largest Christian majority city in Iraq. A TV is playing in a store window as people gather to watch from the street.

MONTAGE - TV SCREEN - NEWS CHANNELS

A) Iraqi language news - images of ISIS militants in trucks with guns appear on the screen with a black ISIS flag flying in one.

B) Channel changing past more news channels of ISIS invasion images and then stops on a map.

C) A map of Iraq appears with red areas of ISIS control.

D) The map zooms to northern Iraq - Bagdad and above. A large red ring is around Mosul with arrows outward toward Qaraqosh some 30 kilometers away.

E) The channel is changed again to a BBC channel. Thousands flee to the mountains. Relief planes are loaded.

F) Again the channel is changed to a CNN channel - beheading

END MONTAGE

An EXPLOSION echoes in the street. The store window shatters. The room lights go off. The TV goes black. The people panic and scatter. Without traffic lights, cars speed recklessly down the streets stopping for no one or nothing.

EXT. DIRT ROAD - DAY

HANEEN, 28, an Iraqi Christian school teacher is walking in a near run along a dirt road. The city is in flames behind her. Others push and shove past each other in the panic. Haneen's brisk determined walk reveals she is strong and athletic. She is dressed in a blue jilbab with hiking boots, a backpack, and carries a bag. Cars speed past leaving her to walk in dense dust. Occasionally some cars brush the walkers but continue on without stopping. Some run past her only to end up out of breath beside the road later as she continues on.

EXT. PICKUP TRUCK - DAY

An old pickup truck zooms past Haneen. It has DALA, female, 12, and Makhdoom, male, 10, in the back along with a jumble of bags and items. Dala is pounding on the cab of the truck. Makhdoom joins in.

DALA	MAKHDOOM
Stop, stop. That's our teacher.	Stop, Daddy ... Stop

JALAL, male, 35, the father of the children slows the truck and stops. His WIFE, 33, sits in the front and glares at him.

DALA

That's Haneen. She is our teacher.  
We have to help her or they will  
kill her.

Jalal backs up quickly, spinning wheels in the gravel and stops by Haneen.

JALAL

Quick. Get in.

Haneen puts the bag down and quickly throws the backpack in the back. A car HONKS. A car suddenly appears through the dust. The car speeds past narrowly missing her but hitting her bag. It sends the contents, including a Bible, a sandwich, and water bottles, flying through the air. She grabs the top of the truck bed and quickly jumps in like a gymnast on a palm horse. Jalal looks back and when he sees she is in he races off through the dust.

EXT. BACK OF PICKUP

Haneen, Dala, and Makhdoom are in the back of the truck. They are holding on to the sides and cab as they are bounced along. Both behind them and ahead of them are only clouds of dust.

DALA

I'm scared. Daddy says ISIS is  
taking girls like me as slaves.  
They behead us Christians.

HANEEN

It isn't just Christians they hate.  
They want to kill anyone that does  
not believe what they do.

Haneen checks and tries to make her backpack more secure as it bounces around. She tries to change the subject.

HANEEN (CONT'D)

I will miss my Dolma and my cheese sandwiches... with tomatoes.

The three watch as they pass many deserted cars and trucks along the road. There are dust clouds from cars ahead and behind. EXPLOSIONS are heard from the town behind them and plumes of smoke billow upwards. The children stare back to the city. The children start crying.

HANEEN (CONT'D)

"Remember Lot's wife". Don't look back to the city. It has fallen.

They continue down the road. More EXPLOSIONS and fire occur in the city. Haneen looks at the children crying.

HANEEN (CONT'D)

It is all in the past. Here, let me tell you an old Persian story.

The children wipe their eyes and turn to listen.

HANEEN (CONT'D)

A king sentenced a prisoner to death. He gave him the choice of a quick death by archers or going through a large ominous black door. The prisoner picks the archers.

An artillery round explodes a few hundred yards from the truck. Haneen is startled and pauses the story.

DALA

Is this supposed to cheer us up?

Haneen puts her hand on Dala's head. There is an EXPLOSION.

HANEEN

The king's attendant asked "What is behind the big black door?" The king answered "Freedom, but very few pick it. They are more afraid of the unknown than even swift certain death".

DALA

Hope always. Where there is life, there is still hope. A chance.

The Haneen wipes Dala's tears. They hug as they continue down the road. Slowly Makhdoom comes closer and Haneen puts her arm around him as well. There is an EXPLOSION. It is much closer than those before. ZARAH, 40, walks alone down the road carrying a single bag and is struggling. Jalal passes and slows to stop. Haneen pounds on the roof of the truck.

HANEEN

(shouting and pounding)

No. No don't stop. They are getting closer.

Jalal stops the truck.

JALAL

If we do not help others when we can, we end up like those we now flee from and tomorrow we would need to flee from ourselves.

Haneen sits back down dejected and stifles some tears. Jalal quickly backs the truck up to Zarah.

JALAL (CONT'D)

Quick. Get in.

Haneen crawls over the jumble of bags. She reaches down to help Zarah up and into the truck bed. They continue down the road. They pass another body beside the road. Haneen points to the mountain to redirect the children's attention.

HANEEN

Sinjar Mountains. We'll be safe there. See the Iraqi helicopters.

The road goes straight but the dust clouds turn.

JALAL

We're going off road. I'll take this old truck as far as it can go.

Jalal turns the truck off the road and toward the mountains. The sun is setting. In the distance, through the dust, some cars turn on their lights. The lights lead to the foot of the mountain range where one by one the lights go out as they reach the bottom.

EXT. SINJAR FOOTHILLS - EVENING

They reach the foothills of the Sinjar mountains. It is clear that the truck cannot go farther in the rugged terrain and steep slope. There are cars and trucks scattered around. The site is littered with heavy discarded items.

It is a clear night and the moon is nearly full. Groups of people ascend the slopes, struggling to make the climb. They can only carry a few items. Haneen carries her backpack and a few other bags for the children. They start their climb. Zarah is struggling to keep up.

ZARAH

Go on. Save yourselves.

Haneen looks back at Zarah and then helps the children over some ledges. She looks back again at Zarah who waves her on.

EXT. SINJAR MOUNTAIN RIDGE - NIGHT

Haneen and Jalal's family walk slowly and silently through the huddled masses. Dala holds tightly to her mother's hand. Makhdoom walks close to Jalal trying to look brave.

At the top of the ridge there are hundreds of people. Some are walking aimlessly, some in fetal positions crying. A mother holds her lifeless child and rocks back and forth sobbing. A man wearing a yamaka stands silently with his palms upwards. There are no tents, no shelters but a few sheets here and there draped over family groups. One man is wearing a Zarathushtri head-covering and is dressed in what was once a white suit. Haneen looks down to avoid eye contact.

Occasionally they pass a dead body. The smell is unbearable. Haneen covers her nose with the scarf. In the distance there are flashes and RUMBLINGS.

They find an empty area. They move some stones and smooth the ground. They rest an uneasy rest as the moon sets and night is coming to an end. Below hundreds of people are still ascending the slopes. As the night is about spent, Zarah finally reaches them. Haneen takes her bag and the two hug.

EXT. SINJAR MOUNTAIN RIDGE - DAWN

Dawn breaks and there are not hundreds of refugees. There are thousands and many more struggling on the slopes.

There is an air drop from a British C-130 cargo plane of bundles of water and supplies but only enough for perhaps a hundred. It is not near enough. From time to time, an Iraqi helicopter or a US drone flies over. There is a clamor and fights as people swarm to grab bundles that are scattered here and there from the air drop.

Planes and helicopters are bombing some of the ISIS approaching the mountain.

Haneen walks through the masses and again sees dead bodies. She motions to several of those standing around.

HANEEN

Help. If we are to survive, we must remove these bodies. We must get the bodies out of the camp.

A FEW MEN AND WOMEN and Zarah come to help. Haneen and Zarah go to A WOMAN crying over her dead daughter. They start to wrap her in a sheet. A helicopter buzzes the camp and there is a wave of people running toward where it is descending. Fathers are running carrying their children in hope. Others fall and are trampled.

HANEEN (CONT'D)

What is going on?

A WOMAN

They can take a few if the shelling stops. The lucky ones get out to freedom, food, water.

The woman looks down at her daughter.

A WOMAN (CONT'D)

But we are left to die.

Haneen and Zarah drop the body and run with the mob. Haneen pushes past a young boy knocking him to the ground. She glances back but he has disappeared into the mob. She continues to the chopper. The chopper is besieged with people. Haneen cannot get close. The chopper leaves. Haneen returns to where the woman and body are and continues the gruesome task of wrapping the child. Zarah returns to help.

HANEEN

I am sorry. I am sorry. I fear I... we are turning into an animals.

The burial site is a steep 20 foot slope removed from the rest of the camp and past the area used as a latrine. One by one Haneen and others gather the bodies and take them to the site and then slide them down. They have removed dozens and there are yet many left. Zarah is obviously fatigued. Haneen notices.

HANEEN (CONT'D)

We must rest. I'll return in an hour.

Haneen walks slowly with Zarah back to where Jalal and his family are sitting.

She retrieves the first aid kit and hand sanitizer from her pack. She cleans her hands with the sanitizer. She puts a band-aid on a gash on her hand. She takes a water bottle and an apple out of her pack. She slowly drinks.

HANEEN (CONT'D)

I don't know if I can do this anymore. I feel so unclean. I wish I was one of the lucky ones flying to food, water, a hot shower, and away from this horror.

She reaches in her pack, smiles, and hands the children some hard candy. She returns to the gruesome task of body removal. As they taking care of a body, a helicopter lands on the ledge below near the burial site. Haneen runs to it.

The PILOT , male 35, shouts:

PILOT

Quick get in.

A wave of people rushes to the chopper. Among the group is SAMEAH, female, 12, who is handed up into the chopper by her father. Haneen grabs her. Haneen then reaches down to Zarah. The chopper quickly lifts off but Zarah does not make it in time. The chopper leaves as Zarah reaches skyward.

ZARAH

Haneen.

SAMEAH

Daddy... Daddy...

EXT. HELICOPTER BAY - DAY

The chopper flies off. Below Zarah and Sameah's father are lost in a torrent of people. The mob is reaching upward and shouting. Parents are holding up their children. The chopper gains altitude. The ISIS army approaches the foot of the mountain. In the distance, there are other small camps on two other hill tops to the northwest. Families are waving scarves and rags as the chopper flies over them. Haneen points to them and shouts to the pilot.

HANEEN

What about them?

The Pilot shouts back above the engine roar.

PILOT

We can't help. Strong winds. Steep slopes. No place to land.

They fly on to the northwest. The Pilot waves his hands and points. He again shouts to be heard over the engine's roar.

PILOT (CONT'D)

Look. Remember. See the trees.  
There is a farm, freedom, safety,  
food, water and we will send trucks  
to pick you up. You can't see it  
from the ground... Remember.

Haneen and the others look intently at the trees some six kilometers away. They land.

PILOT (CONT'D)

Quick. Out. God be with you. We  
must return to the battle and keep  
them from advancing to the mountain  
and keep the escape routes clear.

The chopper takes off and as it passes back over, the crew throws out two canteens of water and they point in the direction of the trees unseen from the ground. They watch as it flies back to the Sinjar Mountains. Suddenly the chopper is hit with a missile, It spins out of control. Haneen catches a look of desperation on the pilot's face just before it disappears from view. A LOUD EXPLOSION and the billowing smoke from the other side of the mountain signals his fate.

EXT. DESERT FLOOR - DAY

Haneen and the others set out through the hot rocky desert in the direction where the farm and trees should be.

HANEEN

I never want to go through anything  
like that again. Death, fear,  
hunger, hopelessness. Just six  
kilometers to freedom, food, water.  
My prayer has been answered.

EXT. FARM - EVENING

They reach the farm and are welcomed by the FARMER, male, 35. The Farmer greets them with water, bread, cheese and some boiled eggs.

FARMER

Drink slowly but drink your fill.  
You are safe now. There are trucks  
here every few days to take those  
that make it this far to freedom.

HANEEN

Thank you. For I was hungry and you gave me food.

FARMER

We must all serve and help each other in these troubled times. In the end, a war of fear and hate will not be won by bombs but by compassion and love.

Haneen is sitting across from Sameah. Haneen takes the bread, tears it and hands the loaf over to Sameah. She puts some cheese between the pieces. Sameah smiles with a dirty face and mirrors Haneen's actions. Haneen bows her head for a moment and looks across the table. Sameah is enjoying the makeshift cheese sandwich and water.

HANEEN

Finally my cheese sandwich.

Sameah looks up and smiles. Haneen takes a bite of the sandwich and she looks again at Sameah. Haneen starts to remember.

SERIES OF FLASHBACK SHOTS

A) Jalal, "If we do not help others when we can, we end up like those we now flee from and tomorrow we would need to flee from ourselves"

B) Haneen and Zarah dropping the girl's body to run to the chopper

C) Haneen pushing the boy aside in the rush to the chopper.

D) Zarah and Sameah's father reaching skyward to the chopper and being lost in the torrent of people

END OF SERIES OF SHOTS

Haneen lowers her head and cries into her hands. She slowly lifts her head and looks again at Sameah.

HANEEN (CONT'D)

When we were hiking here, all I wanted was freedom, food, water. And now I am blessed with a cheese sandwich ... and your smile.

Haneen watches Sameah enjoy her sandwich and every so slowly eats her own.

EXT. FARM COURTYARD - NIGHT

The Farmer gives blankets to the refugees. The refugees lie down in the courtyard. Haneen stares up at the stars twinkling brightly overhead in the moonless night.

HANEEN

Thank you God for my freedom.

Haneen looks to the mountains in the distance. Occasionally EXPLOSIONS rumble in the distance and light the mountains. She looks back into the courtyard and sees Sameah sleeping holding tightly to a bottle of water in one hand and holding a boiled egg in the other. Haneen looks up to the stars and closes her eyes.

HANEEN (CONT'D)

(in a whisper)

Not won with bombs but with  
compassion and love.

EXT. FARM COURTYARD - EARLY MORNING

The Farmer is coming out to the courtyard carrying some loaves of bread.

FARMER

Peace be with you. I hope everyone slept well. The transports should be here early afternoon to take you on to true freedom and real food.

The farmer walks out to the courtyard gate. Haneen follows.

HANEEN

I hate to ask you. You have done so much. But I want to help others to find this place. Will you drive me and some water jugs as far as you can back into the desert?

FARMER

Are you sure? I thought you just wanted freedom and some good food.

HANEEN

Not bombs but serving in compassion and love will end this.

The Farmer nods with understanding. The two load the farmer's truck with water bottles, jugs and some loafs of bread wrapped in cloth.

FARMER

My truck can only go three or four kilometers through those boulders.

HANEEN

I understand.

EXT. HOT ROCKY DESERT TERRAIN - DAY

The two bury the water and food and mark the location with a rock and draw a cross on the rock. Haneen takes a stick and tears a strip of blue cloth from her hem and puts it on the stick as a streamer to be seen from a distance.

HANEEN

That should help. We just barely made it last time. If it was not for the canteens from the chopper we would have died here.

She puts the straps of the two canteens over her shoulder. She starts to walk to one of the isolated distant mountain camps. The farmer gets in the truck, waves, and drives off.

EXT. FARM - AFTERNOON

A few days later a group of about twenty people, men, women, children, are in the distance coming in from the desert. They are lead by someone in a blue jilbib.

The farmer gets in his truck and rushes to meet them.

EXT. FARM COURTYARD - MORNING

The survivors are eating breakfast. AHMED, male, 40, looks around the courtyard.

AHMED

Where is Haneen? I need to the thank her.

FARMER

She left at first light.

AHMED

No. All she talked about while we were hiking here was getting free again and so she could have some Dolma or at least a cheese sandwich with tomatoes. She can't have returned to that horror.

FARMER

She says there is another group to help. If you want to thank her, then refill the jugs and carry as many as you can to where you found them and some along the path here.

Ahmed looks down at the bread in his hand, then to his family, then to the pile of water jugs to the side. He looks to his WIFE, 40. She nods support.

AHMED

You are right. I will return these and more.

HYDAR, male, 35, stands.

HYDAR

I will go with you. Two can carry more.

Ahmed stretches out his hand to his wife. She tears part of her scarf. She takes a piece of cheese and hands it with the scarf to him. He cuts two slices of bread and places the cheese between them. He wraps the cheese sandwich in the scarf. Those sitting around tear off some of their loaves and rise one or two at a time and voice their thanks.

OTHERS

(scattered repeats)

Here. Take my bread. And mine.

EXT. EASTERN MOUNTAIN RANGE- EARLY MORNING

The dawn is breaking above mountains in the east.

INSERT - AERIAL VIEW

An aerial view from a fast flying drone. The camera shows the farm. It moves quickly along the desert towards the mountains in the south east. There are now a dozen water stations marked with streamers of various colors. The mountains are alive with flashes of lights from bombs. On one distance hill we see someone in a blue jilbab climbing a treacherous slope to a family atop a rugged mountain rise.

FADE OUT.

