

The Long Walk Home

By Nick Fieldhouse

The sea had whipped up into a frenzy of violent waves. The boat flexed and shuddered as it fought them in the night, throwing cold water over the passengers. They huddled together, packed tight as they were in the bottom of the rib. It was a flimsy plastic inflatable filled with seasick people. They had lost all sense of time and space, their heads dizzy with sickness, and numb with cold. The wind seemed to drive the sea straight at the boat, pushing it off its course. Those who could were trying to bail out the water as it threatened to swamp the boat. It wallowed in the storm, carrying twice its normal payload. They knew they were going to die. It was just a question of how long.

How had it come to this? They had boarded this craft on a beach near Bodrum. They paid their money, and one of them had used the outboard. There was a compass. All they had to do was drive to Kos, a mere thirty minutes away and they were free. Now they were in the middle of the sea, lashed with wind and rain, cold and ill, and losing all hope.

The boat listed sickeningly as it filled with water. At last it hit a larger wave and slipped under. There were sixteen in a boat designed for eight. As it slid from under them they realised their life jackets were fake. They were in the water in the dark, and many could not swim.

These were Kurdish Syrians from Kobani, and Iraqis from Baghdad, desperate families looking for a better life. Terrorised by ISIS they had fled to Turkey searching for a life in Europe. Now they were drowning in this violent little sea, minutes from the beach.

Channel 16. Someone had a radio. Mayday, Mayday, Mayday.

The sea was merciless in the night. Slowly the group of struggling people washed closer to the shore. As the sun rose the survivors felt their feet touch ground. The beach was close to where they had set out. At last they were saved. Or were they?

There was little Aylan, lying on the sand. Others had been lost. Little Aylan, poor little Aylan "Kurdi" Shenu, lying lifeless on the sand. People started to come down the beach. Help arrived too late for this three year old boy. Going viral on you-tube could not help him now. The Goddess Europa had turned her back on these people. The rich and selfish West had turned away. There was no room for this small child.

Fighting bitter tears, and brushing off the press, the Shenu family turned away and started the long walk home.