

BURDEN OF CARING

Marwa Sarah



I was in the middle.

In the middle of this vortex.

I like to help but I couldn't follow-up many things consuming me, a huge pressure overwhelming me.

I have to study, to work, to find an apartment and above all I have to be okay!

I tried to see him on a regular basis, but I did not succeed.

He is moody and unsteady, talks a lot and smells really really nasty.

Sometimes I can't even stand it.

I didn't want to give up, but I did not succeed. Together, we videotaped different sections. He was very happy.

I was happy with the concept of attention and assistance more than my actual care for him.

I got bored.

My name is Marwa.

His name is Husni.

We came to Vienna at almost the same time.

I knew him from a young age, he was a school friend of my cousin.

I forgot him, I didn't see him anymore.

I came to Vienna in February 2013.

I went to one of the cultural centres which were considered secular.

I became a daily visitor to that centre, where I would meet people and drink coffee.

I heard about him; I heard a lot about him.

I never expected him to be the boy that I used to know...

The one who I had forgotten and, later, a subject that I was not paying attention to.

They spoke a lot about him.

How he had been living on the street and how he slept in gardens and how intelligent and knowledge-

able about global politics and history, he was.

One day the Lebanese centre's official was wondering where I was from and I told him that I'm from Homs.

He was surprised and said that Husni is also from Homs.

I told him that the name sounds familiar but I couldn't remember.

He said he'll call me if Husni came to the centre.

In less than a month...

The centre was planning a cultural event about Palestine, and I was helping in arranging the hall and preparing the place.

And there he comes, Husni...

Yes, I immediately knew him...

I knew his face, his glasses and all his features...

But of course, he didn't remember me...

It's natural sometimes to remember people's faces but they wouldn't remember...

Especially if the relationship didn't last for long or it was just a smattering.

The centre's official came and said...

'Husni, Marwa is also from Homs.'

Husni noted the surprised face I had and the grief signals of course...

Grief over his tragic appearance and tattered look...

His smell was what approached me the most, but I had to smile...

We spoke a few words and he seemed not really interested in my presence, and after a while I understood everything.

The centre's official told me about the sorrow Husni suffered since he'd come to Vienna from Athens with his Egyptian friend...

Husni lived in Athens for seven years...

He spoke Greek fluently...



We didn't have real information whether he had studied or worked, but we knew he was opposed to the regime and a political activist... I searched for him and found, on the Internet, several articles and videos in which he spoke about anarchism.

Husni had come to Vienna because an Egyptian friend of his, had convinced him that Vienna is the centre of the political movement in Europe... and that they could seek refuge and live a better life... Husni was sick... And he still is...



At that time, all Mahmoud wanted was to take advantage of Husni... Making Husni pay him the costs of smuggling to Vienna and then no longer speaking with him... Husni entered a real depression due to his friend's treachery... And because of his medical and psychological status he did not know what he would do in Vienna...

The life that was waiting for him in Vienna... He tried to communicate with his friend to find a place to reside in but his friend disappeared, or rather no longer wanted any contact with him...



Husni remained living on the streets for about four months... They stole his wallet, his money and all the papers that would prove his identity. He remained homeless without friends or a family all that time... The group that comes to the cultural centre takes care of him from time to time. He loves to go to that place frequently because of the rejection he receives from the rest of the people due to his smell and appearance.



Nearly two years it goes in this way further... None of us knew what is the disease he's suffering from but we all were concerned about him... The burden became more stressful... He was unable to shower or even speak normally... He smoked hysterically and ate like crazy but he stayed sickly slim and couldn't sit in one place for more than ten minutes... He was fond of politics, history and anti-governmental youth movements... Heated arguments began to erupt in the centre that turned into problems over time, and no one could stand him any longer. His revolutionary ideas and his erratic seizures be-

gan to annoy the rest of the people and they started to make up excuses to evade him...

He was a real burden...

I had a strange feeling towards him, a strange case of care, or a responsibility if I may say...

I contacted his family so they would pay attention to him... The situation was also strange...His family were in a state of denial that he was suffering from any psychiatric or neurological problems...

After a great effort, I could book him a plane and send him to his family who had taken refuge in Sweden.

February 2015.

Husni came back after an absence of three months.

I was happy.

Not because he came back, but I was happy in his absence.

I receive a surprising call from a strange number.

I answer, and there he is, without greetings.

Marwa I returned to Vienna!

I asked who it was, and he answered laughing...

It's Husni have you forgotten me?

I could not laugh. I knew he has come to stay here and nothing good would happen.

He started calling me, at least, three times a day.

I began to feel pressured.

I tried to see him whenever I had the chance.

Then I found an almost full-time job.

and the real challenge began.

My job was to find jobs for refugees.

It was a really tiring job, I had to meet eight refugees a day.

I was so tired that I began to get depressed.

Stories of homelessness, murder, death, displacement and disintegration of families...

I couldn't see him very often.

I apologised to him constantly until the relationship was cut off for about six months.

On August 25th, twelve o'clock –

I have half an hour to buy a snack for lunch and go back to work –

and there walks Husni in dirty clothes and a long beard with a bad smell that almost fills the whole street.

I didn't recognise him at first, but I felt it was him.

I approached a little bit and I wondered:

'Husni... Is that you?'

He didn't answer me and he was in a pitiful condition.

I repeated the question several times until he said

'I want to contact my brother, they have stolen my wallet.'

'Again!??' I asked...

He didn't answer...

We entered a fast food restaurant; I bought him a meal to eat and I wrote an online letter to his brother.

I sat and waited for a response.

He didn't respond and break time was over.

I left him at the restaurant and went back to work.

A strange mix of questions and thoughts was crossing my mind.

I wished he would die so this nightmare could end.

I do not know what makes people so different, and I don't mean a negative or a positive difference.

Just different.

What makes some of us care more than others?

Is 'care' a genetic or acquired recipe?

Is it monopolised by women because of the subject of motherhood, or is it more complicated?

Those were tough nights.

I did not know where he was, and I did worry too much.

I started thinking about where he was, what he was eating and where he would sleep!

And there was still no response.

Four days had passed since I had sent, his brother, the letter.

He wrote me:

'Sorry Marwa I've been too busy, tell me what's up?'

I told him that I wanted to talk instead of writing.

I called –

he answered.

'Your brother is in a very bad condition, I don't know if he will survive the winter. They stole his wallet and everything he had, he has no phone. I saw him by chance; he's in a pathetic situation.'

He replies:

'But I thought he was good.'

I was very busy with my studies but my family was assuring me that he's fine.'

I retort sharply:

'If you want to kill him, then ignore him.'

If you really care, you must come to Vienna to look for him.'

Call ended.

A week after the call, the brother contacted me saying he's coming in the next couple of days and he needs to know exactly where he is.
I told him that he's lost and I do not know anything about him and that he carries no means of communication.

The brother came.
We searched for two days.
We looked in all asylums, sick and homeless centres, and in refugee support centres.
We searched everywhere.
Finally, we found him.
We found someone who knew him and showed us the place where he slept.

I didn't approach him,
I can't handle these moments sometimes.

I wasn't aware why I wanted to help him, or why I did care.

But I was sure; it is my duty to do this.

His brother stayed for a short period in Vienna.
He took him to the doctor and found him a place to sleep.
He re-submitted his papers to the government and issued him a new passport and a health insurance.

Husni began his treatment and it showed he was suffering from schizophrenia with paranoia and nervous diseases.

He started to improve physically,
but he was unbearable.

No one was able to hear his speeches, nor listen to him classifying weapons, or his visits to the embassy of North Korea.

I used to be absent-minded while he's speaking and suddenly he started testing my concentration.
Asking me about the last thing he was talking about.
I apologise to him politely saying that I have a headache.
I wanted to help him but I couldn't continue.
He began dealing with me as if I was his mother.

Sometimes, emotionally taking advantage of me, and other times, manipulating my affection for him.
But eventually, he became more explicit.
He used to say to me:
'I'm going to die if no one talks to me.'

I used to take the opportunity to contact him when a large group of friends went out together; so that no one had to listen to him more than for an hour.

I began to have strange feelings.
I no longer really cared for him.

He could really manage his affairs and had already started to improve.
My conscience began to settle down.
I didn't feel what I felt previously.
And then I found out it was a real care, but it almost managed to turn into another kind of care.

Lately, I started to yell at him a lot.

He used to come to my house in the middle of the night in tears claiming to miss his father.
One day, his brother was visiting him; he ran away and came to me –
saying: 'my brother doesn't understand me, you are my only friend'.

I am becoming weak when he says this, and all of a sudden he becomes attached to me emotionally.
He wants to be the centre of attention.
Always trying to concern me with his affairs and illness.

It was time to leave.
I couldn't keep going.
He refused to go to any hands-on workshops for people with mental health problems to occupy themselves.
He refused to do any work.

All he wanted was to roam the streets, and for me to roam them with him.

My mission was over.
I couldn't stand his presence.



Relationships often evolve to become sick, unhealthy and even unsatisfactory. To what possible extent could we help without damaging the relationship.... it either turns the one being taken care of into a dependent person or the other one starts misusing the power!

How can we stop caring for someone?

A too old mother.
A disabled brother.
A single depressed father.

When should we give and when to stop?

We often see people abusing dogs in the streets. What is the nature of the relationship between the owner and the dog: Is it an emotional relationship or an authoritative relationship?

To what extent can these relationships affect us?

So many questions are spinning in my head.