

'a story that everyone should read, written with empathy, tenderness and hope'
Patrice Lawrence, author of *Orangeboy*

Boy, Everywhere

How far would you go to get back home?



A. M. Dassu

*For everyone who had to leave everything
behind and start again*

Boy, Everywhere

A. M. Dassu



Chapter 1

It all started going wrong during English. It was the last lesson on Thursday before the weekend, we'd just finished reading *To Kill a Mockingbird* and Miss Majida stood at the whiteboard going through some comprehension questions. I was scribbling them down, my head resting on my arm, when Leila tapped me on my shoulder from behind and handed me a note.

Are you coming ice-skating tomorrow?

I'd started writing back when the door flew open and Mr Abdo, our principal, burst into the room.

I shot up from my desk the second he entered and straightened my shoulders. Everyone's eyes were fixed on Mr Abdo, their faces blank.

'Pack your bags. You're all to go home,' he said, rubbing the creases on his tired, worn face. 'See you back here on Sunday morning.'

We didn't need telling twice. Everyone slapped their books shut and the room erupted into noisy chatter. My best friend Joseph turned to me and our eyes locked in confusion.

'Your parents and guardians have been called and are on their way to collect you,' Mr Abdo added, loosening the knot in his tie, his lips thin and tight, lines deepening across his brow.

'But why, Sir?' asked someone from the back of the class.

'There's been a bombing. This is not a drill, eighth grade. We need to get you all home. You know the protocol.'

A collective gasp rose from the room.

Through the sash windows, the sky was a clear blue. I couldn't see any smoke. Everything looked normal. The old orange tree stood firm in the sunlit courtyard, the gold crescent moon on top of the mosque's minaret gleamed in the distance. Behind it the red, white and black-striped flag on top of the church tower fluttered gently in the breeze, cars were hooting their horns and the newspaper seller was still shouting out to people passing by his stall.

Where had the bomb gone off? Panic prickled through me as I thought of home. I wished phones were allowed in school so I could just call to see if Mama, Baba and Sara were okay. I grabbed my bag to get my iPad, but remembered it wasn't in there. 'Joseph, get your tablet out,' I said. 'Just want to check what's happened – I left my iPad at home.'

'They won't have bombed anywhere near us, Sami. Don't worry,' said Joseph, pulling his tablet out of his bag and swiping to log in. 'What shall I type?' he asked, leaning in towards me.

'Google "bombing in Damascus".'

After a second, he pursed his lips and said, 'Nothing's coming up.' He showed me the error message – the internet was down again for the second time that day.

My shoulders tensed. I quickly reminded myself that it was usually the outskirts of the city that were bombed. Most of Syria was torn apart because of the war, but no one had gotten close to Damascus.

'Your mama and baba are at work, right?' Joseph asked, his eyes focused on my forehead. I realised I was sweating and wiped the back of my arm across my face.

'Yeah, Baba's at the hospital but Mama worked from home today because Sara wasn't feeling well. They *should*

be at the mall now,' I said, glancing at my Swatch. 'She's picking up my football boots before the trials.'

'Well, no one's ever bombed the centre. The government's always on high alert. Just chill, bro,' said Joseph, lightly pushing his fist into my shoulder before turning to put his tablet away.

He was right. But every time there was a bomb alert, I couldn't help worrying. *Damascus is safe*, I told myself. I took a deep breath, gathered my books, and packed them into my bag while Mr Abdo spoke to Miss Majida. She had her hand over her mouth and looked like she was about to burst into tears.

A backpack pushed past my arm, followed by another – everyone was already leaving.

'They're doing you a favour, Sami. You weren't gonna pass the English test later anyway.' I turned to find George grinning at me, then pushing Joseph. 'Neither were you, sucker.'

Even at a time like this, George couldn't help being an idiot. Maybe it was his way of showing he wasn't nervous like me, but it was so annoying.

'You're the one that's gonna fail, loser,' said Joseph, sticking his face into George's.

George sneered at Joseph. 'Shut up! You're so fat, the only English letters you know are K, F, C.' He turned to me, raising his eyebrows and running his hands through his hair.

So dumb, I thought. George still hadn't gotten over Joseph coming from a non-English-speaking school.

The class babble and sound of scraping chairs made it hard to think of a quick response, but I had to stick up for Joseph, whose cheeks were now the colour of tomatoes.

I rolled my eyes at George. ‘We’ll see. K, F and C are still three more letters than you know. Did you stay up all week thinking of that one?’ His grin grew, so I added, ‘Should I use *smaller* words to make sure you understand what I’m saying?’ It wasn’t the greatest comeback but I couldn’t think of anything else.

George’s mini fan club, which consisted of exactly two friends, tugged him away.

‘Loser,’ I muttered as they left.

Joseph and I joined the stream of kids leaving the classroom. Mr Abdo was now speaking to Miss Majida at the door, but she stopped talking the second I drifted towards it.

Joseph clutched his backpack, his head lowered. He was unusually quiet. Ugh. George had gotten to him again.

‘You want to go to Damer’s for ice cream after the trials?’ I asked to cheer him up.

‘Yeah, of course, man!’ Joseph said, his eyes sparkling with excitement. ‘Then we can go again tomorrow after ice-skating.’ He grinned.

Mr Abdo marched past us. ‘Hang on,’ I said to Joseph and ran to catch up with him.

‘Um, Sir, we’re supposed to be going to football after school. Where should we wait?’ I asked, wondering if Mama had collected my football boots.

He picked up his pace and strode into the classroom next door to ours and started talking to the teacher inside. I shrugged at Joseph as he caught up with me.

We rushed down the central stairway of the school behind the swarm of students and flowed into the large reception area, where our physics teacher, Miss Maria, was

ushering everyone out of the side exit. I slowed down as I spotted Joseph's dad in a smart dark-grey suit, sitting on the deep-buttoned green leather sofa with his head in his hands. No one else's parents were inside, which was odd. The dark wood-panelled walls where the president's portrait hung made him look even gloomier.

'Baba?' said Joseph. His dad looked up.

'Ah, Sami, come here.' Joseph's dad stood up and reached out to hug me first. *Weird*. I went to him, feeling awkward, and as he embraced me tightly my heart began to race.

He pressed my head against his shoulder and ruffled my hair, then released me and grabbed Joseph. I stepped back, feeling woozy from inhaling his strong aftershave.

'Right, let's get you both home,' he said in Arabic, turning from Joseph.

'But what about the football trials?' I asked. 'Our driver is bringing my boots. I have to wait for him!'

'Your baba asked me to pick you up. It's not safe to be out today.'

'But Baba!' Joseph interrupted. 'We were gonna get on the team today! This is so unfair!'

'Joseph, I already told you, it's not safe to be at the stadium.'

Joseph tutted, shoved his fist into the carved wooden door, and walked out.

'Thank you! I'll keep you updated,' Joseph's dad shouted at the school receptionist as he followed Joseph out. I ran after him, my stomach lurching. Baba wouldn't send Joseph's dad to pick me up unless it was serious. Maybe the bombing was really bad. Baba would know because of the

number of casualties coming in at the hospital.

The street outside school was a tangle of gridlocked cars and beeping horns. Cars were double parked across the sidewalk, leaving hardly any room to walk between them. The newspaper seller shoved papers and magazines into our sides as we walked past his stall, desperately trying to get them sold while the street was jammed with people. We all got into Joseph's dad's Honda CRV and I pulled the seat belt over me slowly, looking out at all the parents frowning in their cars. Joseph glanced at me and then pulled out his tablet.

'Can't believe they dropped a bomb today of all days... I've been waiting ages for this,' he muttered under his breath.

'I know...' I said. 'I bet Avraham's on his way with my boots as well. He's probably stuck in all the traffic now.'

'What did you end up ordering?' he asked, pressing *Play* on a game.

'Can't get the Nike Magistas in Damascus. So I got the Adidas Predators.'

'Oooh, nice.' He looked out of the window and then said, 'Thanks for sticking up for me with George.' His cheeks were flushed again.

'No worries. I'd never leave you to face that thug alone.'

George and his stupid gang had bullied Joseph ever since we started middle school. They thought they could do or say anything they wanted because they were *ulad masooleen* – kids of government officials. I'd never seen Joseph look so sad or alone as that first week of middle school, and I never wanted him to feel that way again. I'd always be there for him. It had always been Sami and Joseph. And it would be for ever.

‘Ignore him,’ I said. ‘He’s just jealous of your skills – still hasn’t gotten over last semester when you scored that penalty.’

Joseph smiled. ‘Yeah, that was awesome. Do you think they’ll rearrange the trials to next week now?’

‘Yeah, probably.’

As Joseph went back to his game, I stared out the window, checking out everyone’s cars. Leila’s mama was in her space-grey Lexus RX, but I couldn’t see Leila through the tinted glass. *Oh man*. I realised I’d totally forgotten to reply to her note after Mr Abdo walked in. I hoped I hadn’t upset her. I’d message when I got home and tell her me and Joseph would be at the ice rink at 3 p.m. tomorrow.

It took twenty minutes to get out of the school street behind all the other cars, but when we got moving I could see the high-rise buildings were still intact, the roads were clear, traffic only building up near the checkpoints. There were a few fluffy clouds scattered in the sky. Something circled the blue far away, probably a helicopter. I still couldn’t see any smoke in the air. *They probably bombed the outskirts of the city*, I reassured myself again.

On the way to Joseph’s neighbourhood, a crowd of people were gathered outside a big villa, the men in smart suits and the women in dresses, some wearing headscarves. But I was more interested in the cars they were standing next to – a black Bentley and a white Rolls Royce parked on the road. Both Joseph and I sat up to get a better look, our mouths open, practically drooling.

‘Whoa. What do you think they’re here for?’ I asked Joseph.

‘Probably a wedding... or a funeral,’ he said, showing

me his game score and smirking. 'I beat you, right?'

'Hey! Give me that,' I said, grabbing his tablet and pressing *Play*. We'd been doing this for weeks.

Joseph's dad parked outside their apartment building. As the car stopped on the smooth black tarmac, we heard what must've been gunshots in the distance. I always thought it sounded like rain hitting a tin roof. But it wasn't raining. We jumped out, sheltered our heads with our arms and ran through their black front gates. We raced straight up to Joseph's bedroom, throwing our bags down next to some dried orange peel he hadn't bothered throwing away.

I sat on the end of his bed while Joseph switched on his PlayStation and small flat screen TV. 'May as well play *FIFA* if we can't play the real thing, eh?' he said, his chin jutting out because of his grumpy face.

'Yeah, may as well,' I said, wishing the trials hadn't been cancelled and that we were showing off the skills we'd been practising in the stadium instead.

There was a small knock on the door and it opened. 'Hi, you two. Do you want anything to eat?' asked Joseph's mama.

'Nah,' said Joseph, still facing the TV screen, waiting for the game to load.

'How about you, Sami?'

'No thanks, Aunty, but can I have a drink, please?'

Joseph's mama smiled. 'Sure. What would you like? Coke?'

'Yes, thanks. Shall I call my mama to get Avraham to pick me up? He's probably waiting for me at school.'

'No!' she said quickly, in a strange high-pitched voice. 'Your baba wants you to stay for dinner. Stay there – I'll be

right back with that Coke!’ She pulled the door tight and left.

I bit my lip and frowned. Even Aunty was acting weird. I grabbed the remote from Joseph’s hands and put it on TV mode.

‘Hey! What you doing?’ shouted Joseph.

‘Shhh, I just wanna check the news. See why Baba got us picked up. Don’t you wanna know?’

‘Not really. All they’ll show is more dead people.’

‘Oh, come on, it’ll only take a minute.’

‘Go on then,’ said Joseph.

I flicked through the channels one by one. Kids’ cartoons, music, documentaries, news channel. My head started spinning as I read the headline flashing in red at the bottom of the screen.

DAMASCUS: CHAM CITY CENTER MALL REBEL TERRORIST BOMB ATTACK

I sat staring at the image on the screen. The once-shiny glass building was now partly rubble. The glass half of the mall was a broken grey shell and the concrete half was just barely standing. There were no windows or doors left in any of it and people in high-vis jackets rushed through the smoke, debris, rows of police cars and ambulances. I watched, but couldn’t move. My ears throbbed. I could see Joseph’s arms waving around next to me. Everything had slowed down, the noise from the TV and Joseph’s words muffled. I tried to say something, but nothing came out.

The mall had been bombed. Mama and Sara were there. Buying *my* football boots.

Chapter 2

A knock on the door broke my daze. I turned – Joseph’s mama’s head poked through the opening.

I leapt up from the bed. ‘I need to go!’ I yelled. ‘You’ve got to take me, now!’

Joseph’s mama took one look at the TV and rushed towards me, handing the Coke to Joseph. She grabbed my shoulders and fixed her eyes on mine.

‘Sami, you can’t go there. They’ll be okay.’

‘NO!’ I struggled under her firm grip. ‘You HAVE to take me, NOW!’

‘Listen, *habibi*, your baba is there. He’s finding them. They’ll be fine. Please. Sami.’ She pulled me back to the bed and sat down beside me, holding on to the cross around her neck. Tears rolled down her cheeks.

‘But it’s my fault they went!’ I jumped up again. ‘I have to go there!’ I grabbed my bag and ran through the door, leaping down the stairs two at a time.

‘SAMI, come back!’ Joseph’s mama shouted after me.

I swung around the bottom of the staircase and into the hallway. As I neared the front door, Joseph’s dad stepped in front of it.

‘Let me go! I need to go!’ I shouted, pushing my hands into his chest.

‘You can’t do anything now.’ He put his hands over mine. ‘Please, come and sit down and I’ll explain what happened.’

Pain stabbed at my heart and I slipped to the floor,

sobbing. 'I know what happened! I made them go. I killed my mama and sister!' I screamed.

Joseph's dad knelt down and put his arms around my shoulders, gently lifting me.

'Come on.' He walked me through to the living room. Joseph and his mama stood on the bottom step, staring at me, their faces grey. I wanted the ground to open up and swallow me whole. I wanted the rebels to drop a bomb and crush ME.

Joseph's dad led me to the sofa and sat me down. 'Why do you think it's your fault, Sami?'

I sobbed into my hands, thinking about this morning. *Why did I make them go?* I tried to picture Mama's face when I'd been pleading with her to pick up my football boots.

'Oh, come on, I really need them tonight!' I'd said in Arabic to Mama, trying to mimic Sara's wide-eyed look.

She took a sip of steaming coffee and put her mug back on the kitchen island, before logging into her laptop.

'Sami, I'm supposed to be *working* from home. I have got mid-semester reports to sign and I'm not in the mood to trek through a mall looking for football boots,' she'd said, still staring at her MacBook screen through her rimless glasses.

'But, Mama, you can sign your stuff in the morning and then you can go to the gym at the mall, so you can easily pick up my boots,' I said, dumping my cereal bowl in the sink and walking back towards her.

'I can't. I've got to get through two hundred student

reports before lunch and then I've got a charity benefit at the Four Seasons hotel.'

I had put on my most desperate face. 'Don't you want me to get selected for the team? Please, Mama, I ordered them to the store, so you don't even need to look around. You'll be straight in and straight out.'

Mama sighed and picked up her coffee. 'Oh, Sami, why do you have to be so disorganised? You could have bought them over the weekend. You knew you had the football trials. Avraham has a hospital check-up today, so he can't get them, and that means I have to drive myself *and* I've got Sara with me, so it won't be a quick in and out.'

I had to try one more time. 'Can't you *quickly* get them before your charity thing? Please? And then Avraham can drop off my boots at school after his appointment?'

She'd looked up at me, back at her screen and then at me again with the faintest of smiles.

'Thanks, Mama! I already emailed you the collection receipt.' I pecked her on the cheek, grabbed my backpack from the kitchen counter and ran out to our Mazda 6 waiting on the drive.

'Sorry, sorry, Avraham. Are we going to be late?' I slammed the car door shut, blocking out the sound of our neighbour's lawnmower. 'I had to convince Mama to pick up my football boots.'

'No, we are okay,' said Avraham, glancing at his watch.

'Will you have time to pick up my boots from Mama's charity thing and then bring them to me before the end of school please? *Please?*'

'Sami, Sir, you are a cheeky chappie. After my appointment,

if your mama tells me to do this, of course I will.’

‘Thanks! Avraham, you’re the best.’

He’d tipped the front of his black chauffeur hat in the rearview mirror as the front gates opened slowly.

This morning, I couldn’t wait for school to finish. Joseph and I planned to tear through the Under-15s football trials and make sure we got chosen to play for the school team. I’d thought those Adidas Predators would make me unstoppable. But what did I know? *Nothing*.

A phone rang, breaking the memory. Joseph’s dad rushed to pick it up. ‘Tarek! How are they?’

It was Baba! I ran and snatched the phone from Joseph’s dad.

‘Baba! Come and get me. Please!’ I blubbered.

‘Sami, I can’t. I need to stay with your mama and Sara. Give the phone back to Uncle Tony.’

‘I’m so sorry...’

‘Why are you sorry? Please get Uncle – I need to speak to him and then get back.’

‘I shouldn’t have made them go. They’d be alive right now...’

‘Sami, *listen*, will you? This is not the time. They’re alive, praise be to God. But I need to get back to them. Give the phone to Uncle Tony now.’

I peeled the phone from my ear, handed it to Joseph’s dad, and traipsed back to the sofa. ‘They’re alive,’ I said, slumping back down next to Joseph.

‘Huh?’ Joseph turned to me, smiling. ‘Thank God for that!’

‘But they might not be okay,’ I said, still looking ahead.

‘What do you mean?’

‘They might have no legs or something. Baba said he had to get back to them. Maybe they’re being operated on.’

‘Come on, bro, don’t think like that. They’ll be all right.’ He nudged my shoulder with his.

Joseph’s dad put the phone down and turned around. Beads of sweat had formed on his forehead.

I jumped up. ‘You have to take me. Please, Uncle, I need to see them.’

‘Sami, they’re okay – they’re alive,’ he said, wiping his brow with the back of his arm.

‘Then please just let me go and see them!’ I slapped my arms on my sides.

He fixed me with his brown eyes and took a deep breath. ‘Get your shoes on. Let’s go.’ He walked out of the room.

‘Huh?’ I looked at Joseph, my mouth hanging open. I didn’t think it’d be that easy to convince him. Maybe he’d realised I wasn’t going to stop asking. I ran for my shoes before he changed his mind.

I don’t know how long it took to get to the hospital. Time seemed to freeze; each red traffic light seemed to take hours to change. Finally we were pulling up. As soon as Joseph’s dad stopped the car, I opened the door and zoomed towards the hospital entrance.

‘Sami! Wait!’ Joseph’s dad called after me, but I wasn’t waiting for anyone.

An overpowering hospital smell of disinfectant and rubber hit me as I rushed through the double doors. Then

came the stench of vomit, dust and burned meat. It was mayhem inside, with doctors in blue overalls rushing from one place to the next and people lying on stretchers in the hallways, their clothes and skin covered in blood. Most beds had their curtains drawn and every few seconds a scream from a different place pierced my ears.

I ran to the reception desk and leant over it, the fluorescent lighting flickering above me. 'I need to find my mama and sister. Uh... um... Zeina and Sara al-Hafez.'

'AAAAAAAAGGGGGHHHHHHH!' came another scream. I jumped and turned to see where it came from, but couldn't tell. My heart felt as if it was beating twice as fast as normal.

'They're up in ward five, level two,' the receptionist said, still staring at her computer.

'Thanks.' I turned around and began weaving through the people sitting on the floor – some bandaged, all with zombie eyes, unseeing – trying to avoid the blood on the floor smeared with footprints. There was no sign of Joseph's dad yet. Two dust-covered children walked through the corridor accompanied by a nurse, peering into each side room as they passed.

'Is this your mama?' the nurse asked them.

I gulped and took a deep breath. It was like a bad scene from a movie. So this was what Baba had been working with for years whenever there was a bombing in the suburbs. It hit me that I didn't know if I could become a doctor like him. I couldn't deal with stuff like this! Right then I was wishing I could walk with my eyes closed. But I had to move forward for Mama and Sara.

A crowd of people waited outside the elevators, so I

squeezed past them and headed for the stairs, leaving the screaming and crying behind. It was a relief to get away into the empty, cold stairwell. I ran up two steps at a time. By the time I got to the second floor, I had to bend over to catch my breath before pushing through the door into the ward.

A nurse sat behind a desk at the entrance. 'Zeina, Zeina al-Hafez... I need to see her. She's my mama,' I panted, wheezing in a strong smell of antiseptic.

'You're Dr Tarek's son! My God, haven't you grown!' The curly-haired nurse smiled and pointed to her left. 'She's in bay three, your sister next to her.'

'Thanks!' I ran through the ward, passing beds of people. It was quiet and calm compared to downstairs; men and women lay still, their arms by their sides. I didn't know if they were dead or waiting to die, but I shuddered just thinking about it.

I stopped under the sign for bay three, outside a blue curtain pulled around two bed spaces. 'Mama?' I asked.

'Sami!' Baba opened the curtain fast. I slid in through the gap and froze. Mama and Sara lay next to each other on separate beds. Baba must've moved the cabinet between the beds to bring them closer together.

They both wore oxygen masks. Their closed eyes were swollen and bruised, as if they'd been beaten in a boxing match. I stood still and scanned the space, trying to work out what everything did. They each had a tube inserted into their arm, attached to a bag of liquid, and a monitor that beeped every second. Other than their eyes and a few small cuts on their faces, I couldn't see any injuries. I moved around to check that they still had their arms and legs.

Baba put his arm around me as I neared him. 'They'll be okay, son. They'll be okay... '

I looked up at him; his face was pale and his eyes swollen, but not like Mama's and Sara's, more as if he'd been crying a lot. Mama and Sara hadn't moved since I entered.

'Can... can I talk to them?' I whispered.

'They've been sedated, so they won't be able to hear you right now. I spoke to the consultant. It's best for them to stay here tonight, so the other doctors can monitor them.' He turned to look at the curtains. 'Where's Tony?'

'Um, he's coming.' I shrugged, my shoulder still under Baba's arm, my eyes fixed on Mama and Sara.

What have I done? I thought.

Don't die. Please don't die.

AN OLD BARN BOOK

First published in the UK, Australia and New Zealand
in 2020 by Old Barn Books Ltd
Copyright © 2020 by A. M. Dassu

All rights reserved.

No part of this book may be reproduced or transmitted
in any form or by any means, electronic, or mechanical,
including photocopying, recording or by any information storage and
retrieval system, without prior permission in writing from the publisher.

Old Barn Books Ltd
West Sussex, RH20 1JW
Email: info@oldbarnbooks.com
Web: www.oldbarnbooks.com

Follow us on facebook, twitter or instagram: @oldbarnbooks
Teaching resources for our books are available
to download from our website

ISBN: 978-1-91064-664-9
eBook ISBN: 9781910646656

Distributed in the UK and Ireland by Bounce Sales & Marketing Ltd
and in Australia and New Zealand by Walker Books Australia

UK edition edited by Emma Roberts
Cover design by kind permission of Lee & Low Books Inc.
Cover illustration by Zainab Daby Faidhi
Design by Mike Jolley

Printed in the U.K.

First UK edition
10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1

*Publisher's Note: whilst the author, in the course of writing this book, spoke
to many people who had been through the experiences described, the
characters and events in this story are fictitious and not based
on any particular individuals or their life stories.*

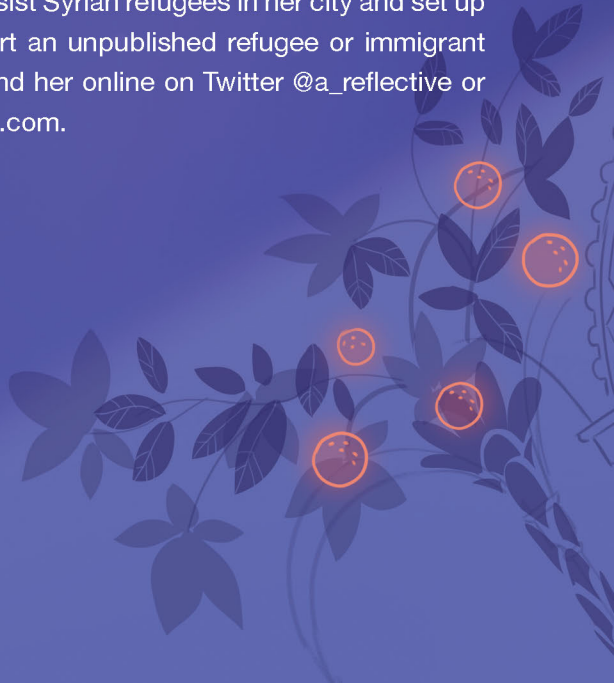


FSC® helps take care of forests
and the people and wildlife
that call them home.

About the Author

A. M. Dassu is a writer of both fiction and non-fiction, based in the heart of England. She is the Deputy Editor of SCBWI-BI's *Words & Pictures* magazine and a Director of Inclusive Minds, a unique organisation for people who are passionate about inclusion, diversity, equality and accessibility in children's literature, and are committed to changing the face of children's books. Previously, she has worked in project management, marketing and editorial. Her work has been published by The Huffington Post, Times Educational Supplement, SCOOP Magazine, Lee & Low Books, and DK Books. She won the international We Need Diverse Books mentorship award in 2017.

A. M. Dassu has used her publishing advances for *Boy, Everywhere* to assist Syrian refugees in her city and set up a grant to support an unpublished refugee or immigrant writer. You can find her online on Twitter @a_reflective or at www.amdassu.com.



Praise for *Boy, Everywhere*:

ONE TO WATCH: 'poignant and powerful... An impressive, thoughtful debut...'
Fiona Noble, The Bookseller

'Such a realistic story, Sami could be my son, daughter or any of their friends.'
Mayida Yord, Teacher in Damascus, Syria

*'I felt thoroughly harrowed (as indeed I should). Such an important book –
and so timely.'*

Tanya Landman, Carnegie Award-winning author

*'It's amazing, it's like she [the writer] was amongst us. It's like she's been living here.
She knows how people think and react...'*

Mohamad Ghabash, 12-year-old student in Damascus, Syria,
whose father is a surgeon and mother a teacher, like Sami's.

*'It marks the truth of our sad reality here in Syria, and most importantly shows the
message we always wanted to blurt out but couldn't, we aren't happy we came to your
land, we were forced to. In the name of a person who has gone through half what Sami
has gone through from bullying to hatred of us, I can affirm that the story told in this
book is a hundred percent true... I really like this book, with all its heart warming,
dramatically realistic events that would definitely move something in you.*

I hope it gets the attention it deserves, we need it.'

Layla Jazairy, 15 year old student in Damascus, Syria

*'Good books leave you a little bit changed. Boy, Everywhere
made me want to change the world. Everyone should read this book.'*

Kathryn Evans, children's author

*'This carefully researched and empathetic novel will, deservedly,
be compared to Elizabeth Laird... a brilliantly crafted debut.'*

Caroline Fielding CILIP, Youth Libraries Group

*'It's been great to finally read a book that challenges stereotypes and shows the reality of
Syrians before the war. I loved the characters, they were very realistic and so
convincing, the friendships so real. A brilliant novel. I truly appreciate how passionate
A.M. Dassu is about the topic, and how much time she spent talking to Syrians inside
and outside the country to hear their stories and make sure to amplify their voices.'*

Nadine Kaadan, children's author and illustrator from Damascus, Syria
who now lives in London

'Casually smashing stereotypes and challenging thinking...'

Alexandra Strick, Consultant, BookTrust

'I looked around. Were we going to be staying in this one room with all of these people? There were no windows, just the locked door behind us, the only light from candles dotted about on the floor... *You can do this, Sami, I told myself. It'll all be okay once you get to England.*'

A life transformed by war

Sami is a typical 13 year-old: he loves his friends, football, PlayStation and iPad. But a bombing in a mall changes his life. Sami and his family flee their comfortable home in Damascus to make the perilous and painful journey towards a new life in the U.K. Leaving everything behind, Sami discovers a world he'd never encountered – harsh, dangerous, but also at times unexpectedly kind and hopeful.

Deeply empathetic, 'Boy, Everywhere' is essential reading. Once started, it is not easy to put down; once finished, it is not easy to forget.'

North Somerset Teachers' Book Award blog

This is excellent. Moving. Powerful.
Top debut. It's a belter of a book!

Catherine Johnson, award-winning author and screenwriter



Cover illustration by Daby Zainab Faidhi
eBook available
www.oldbarnbooks.com

£7.99

ISBN 978-1-910646-64-9



9 781910 646649