

Stranded, a short story published in Inspire Kindness
2018 E.V. Sparrow

Prince Samir bumped Carrie's head with his arm.

Carrie turned over on the geometric patterned, rust carpet. Her blonde French braid slid across her shoulders. She squinted in the fluorescent lights of London's Heathrow airport and peeked around her blue jacket that doubled for a pillow. *Where's the clock?* Carrie studied Samir's dark profile. "You awake? It's 2:00 am."

He frowned, his eyes closed, "How could I sleep with the loud vacuum?"

"How would I know how you sleep? From what you told me on the bus, your country is really noisy..." Carrie yawned, "...riots and stuff. I don't know how you live in a mess like that."

"True." Samir leaned onto his elbow. "But I like Americans. Your current President Reagan is a cowboy, yes? I have met Americans that are like cowboys in movies. Roaming around. Protecting people or looking for a fight."

"I'm hardly a cowboy."

"Some are childlike and trust everybody." Samir's brown eyes twinkled. "Then they get into trouble."

"Hey!" Carrie sat up and swiped at Samir. She yawned again. "I'd love a hot coffee."

Several yards away, a man dozed against the gray wall outside the closed café. A plump matron sat reading her novel. Three young men wandered past closed metal gates covering the store's doorways.

The janitor and vacuum drew closer.

"Sleeping in trains or parks was awful." Carrie slung her orange backpack onto the nearby row of green, plastic seats. "Airports are worse. Except, I'm glad you stayed with me."

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“It was fate that we met on the bus from Land’s End. I have five sisters. A lady should not be alone.” Samir’s gaze tracked the restless young men. “It is unsafe.”

Carrie nodded, tight-lipped, “Well, I couldn’t afford a hotel. The last time I called the airlines was from an expensive pay phone, in France. Hopefully, the airfare is still the same.” She joined her backpack on the seat. “I saved extra in case the exchange rates changed.”

“Good...” Samir pointed at another janitor with a polisher on the linoleum walkway. “More noise.”

“Let’s move.” Carrie’s tummy growled as she stood. “Excuse me. I haven’t eaten since yesterday morning.”

Samir winked, “I have coins for vending machines.”

Munching peanuts and candy bars, they strolled past Gate A32 and plopped down facing the black windows with a view of twinkling runway lights. Rain pelted and trickled down the glass.

“So, Carrie, I know you’ve been working in Germany, and you are returning home. What made you decide to come overseas?”

“My decision has to do with my faith.” Carrie’s turquoise eyes studied Samir’s reaction. “It’s always a little scary to talk about it to a stranger.”

He leaned forward, elbows on his knees. “I am interested.”

“Okay.” Carrie paused, her heart pounded. “It’s about Jesus.”

“He was a great teacher.”

“And He is even more. He is my Savior and King, since 1975. Six years ago.”

Samir leaned back. His eyes narrowed.

“Do you want me to skip this part?” Carrie raised her eyebrows and bit her lip.

“Why must I always hear about Jesus? I meet people who talk about Him. Some of my boarding school friends talk about Him. Or the Bible? Always the Bible says this, the Bible says that.” Samir shook his head. “It must be fate.” He crossed his legs and stretched out his arms on the chair backs.

“You poor Kuwaiti prince.” Carrie giggled. “Your family sent you to a school where there were bound to be some Christians.”

“My family sends all the princes to boarding school. They do not know about them...” Samir’s hand covered his mouth. “Maybe they do! They can be sneaky.”

“Who’s sneaky?”

“*Hm.* My favorite childhood tutor was a secret Christian. I liked him best.”

“You had tutors?”

Samir crossed his arms and pursed his lips. “No. No. We must speak of you instead.”

“Okay. Where was I?” Carrie stared at the now dark blue, rain-soaked window. “My friend joined an international mission’s group, Project Kibbutz. I went to Israel to visit her and work for the summer—they recently opened their borders to missionaries.” Carrie popped a peanut into her mouth. “The project members were all adopted by Kibbutz families for one year...” She explained her duties, the lifestyle, and turned to Samir.

He stared at Carrie. “So, you all worked as farm laborers?”

Carrie threw up her hands. “Samir, you look surprised. It was fun.”

“But it is very strange to me.”

“No stranger than you, traveling around incognito.” Carrie rolled her eyes. “It was scary when Hezbollah launched Katyusha rockets at us. We had to go down into the bomb shelters a few times—”

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Bang!

They jumped.

“Sorry.” A man in a black cowboy hat lifted his suitcase from the floor. “I ain’t no good at wranglin’ bags.”

Carrie stifled her giggle and glanced at Samir, with his head down. His shoulders shook.

“Sunrise.” Carrie pointed to the tinges of peach-colored light lit up the terminal’s windows. “Today may be my lucky day to go home.”

All around, people jostled for seats with their carry-on luggage. Airline employees arrived for their shifts.

“It’s finally time to check.” Carrie rose and stretched. “Standby list, here I come.” Over her shoulder, she asked, “Are you leaving, Samir?”

“Not yet.”

Samir rose when Carrie returned. “What happened? They did not have tickets available today?”

“The exchange rate for pounds is twenty for ten. I’m short...twenty dollars.” Carrie plunked her backpack on the floor. Her hands shook as she raised them to her face.

Samir ran his hand over his chin. “I have coins for the payphone. That is all.”

“Airhead,” Carrie mumbled. “Should have checked the prices.” *What do I do?* She gulped down a sob. *Pray. Think.*

“Do you have friends here?”

“Yes, a few.” *Breathe.* “Where’s my address book?” Carried shuffled through her backpack, “Got it.”

“Take my coins.”

Carrie called her local friends, then returned to Samir. “Penny’s answering machine was off—I couldn’t leave a message. Alistair’s machine said he’s on holiday in France...I just remembered, my friend, Jean is touring Greece.” Carrie whispered, “No one can help me.”

“I will ask my guardian for money.”

“Guardian?”

“Princes have guardians until we are twenty-one.”

“How old are you?”

“Eighteen. I did not call him when I returned from my holiday last night. He would instruct me to leave you here. I know this.”

“Oh.” Carrie stared at Samir’s back.

“Hello, Sweet,” called out a nearby passenger. “What’s your name?” Carrie twisted around to locate the female Aussie voice. A smiling, middle-aged couple wearing glasses sat two seats over.

“Carrie.”

“American, right? Which state?”

“California. You’re Aussies?”

“New Zealanders. I am Shirley Davidson. This is my husband, John...”

Samir knelt in front of Carrie. “I am sorry. He will not advance my allowance. He is coming to return me to school.”

“I’ll be alone? Where do I go?” Carrie’s voice squeaked, “I already missed standby yesterday. I just...want to go ho-o-o-me!”

Shirley leaned over and patted Carrie’s shoulder, “We overheard you two talking. We were discussing your dilemma.”

John nodded. “We have three daughters and hope that someone would help them if they needed it.”

Carrie blinked away tears.

“You look about twenty, like our youngest.” Shirley handed Carrie a tissue. “We want to help purchase your ticket.”

“You do?” Carrie dabbed her eyes. “I can’t believe it...I can’t say no...you’re so kind!”

Samir grinned. “Fate intervened. Or was it your Jesus? You said He helps you.”

“He can. Once again, I don’t deserve it.” Carrie sniffed. “Thank you, for protecting me, Samir.”

“I must go.” Samir stood. “You will be home soon.”

Carrie tried to hug him, but Samir stepped back and bowed. “Will you write, if I give to you my address?”

“Of course.”

He handed Carrie his card. “I may have more questions for you.” He disappeared into the crowd.

“Let’s check standby,” Shirley nudged Carrie.

A counter clerk scanned the manifest, “You’re in luck. We have a few seats available on this flight.” After the transaction was completed, the ladies returned to their seats.

“I promise I’ll pay you back.” Carrie hugged her ticket. “And thank you so much.”

Shirley sat next to John. “Carrie, did you say your friend is traveling in Greece?”

Carrie nodded. “I told her how hospitable they are to tourists. The island of Corfu is so beautiful and lush.”

John lowered his book. “Corfu? Our youngest daughter, Julia, was touring Corfu.”

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“Wow. We drove mopeds with a Julia Davidson. Tall girl, with curly auburn hair and glasses.”

Shirley turned to John, “Our Julia!”

“Did you know Julia was in an accident on her moped? Nothing bad. Mostly scrapes and bruises. She stayed with us at our hotel for a few days.”

Shirley stared. “That was *you*? Julia told us about it over the phone.”

John grinned. “You helped her, and we unknowingly returned the kindness. Fate, like the young man said.”

Carrie raised her ticket, “God always knows what we need, even before we ask. And He knows just who’ll be kind to us when we’re in trouble.”