

# Rafidia al-Jamal

*Rafidia al-Jamal is a thirty-five-year-old mother of five. Her brother was killed during the first Intifada (1987-1991). She called her 13 year old daughter Jirah, which means “wounds”, because of the sorrow she felt after her brother was killed. She is well educated and very articulate.*

When the army first entered they took over the roofs of high buildings, and positioned themselves on the top of mosques. My sister is a nurse. She was assigned to work in one of the field hospitals that were set up in every area being invaded.

Around four in the morning, we heard the explosion of a shell. My sister was supposed to go to the hospital right away to help care for the wounded. This is why she left the house—especially after we heard people screaming for help. My sister was wearing her white uniform, and I was still in my nightgown. I put a scarf on my head and went to escort her as she crossed the street. Before we left, I asked her to wash for prayer. She had so much faith, especially in times like these. When the shell fell we did not feel any fear, we just knew that some people were in need of rescue.

When we went outside, some neighbors were also out. We asked them who was wounded. As we were talking with them, Israeli bullets began to fall on us like rain. I was wounded in my left shoulder. Israeli soldiers were positioned on the top of the mosque, and that was the direction from which the bullets came. I told my sister Fadwa that I was wounded. We were standing under a light post, so it was very clear who we were from the way we were dressed. But as she tried to help me, her head fell on me. She was showered with bullets. Fadwa fell on my leg and now I was lying on the ground. The bullet broke my leg. With her head resting on me I told her, “Make your prayers,” because I knew she was going to die. I didn’t expect her to die so fast though—she couldn’t finish her prayers. Since then, I have been thinking of nothing but her. People will be talking to me and I’ll be thinking about my sister. Everything in life, no matter how significant it might appear, compared to that moment is nothing. Before she died, I said to her, “Where is your wound, put your hand on your wound!” She couldn’t. She tried to talk, and all that came out of her mouth was groaning.



*Rafidia al-Jamal*

Some people on the other side of the street wanted to come and help us.

“Stay there!” I told them.

“What happened?” they asked.

“My sister and I are wounded,” I said, “and she cannot speak.”

“Let us come and pull you to safety,” they pleaded. I didn’t want anyone else to die. I knew that my sister and I were going to die, and I wanted to die together. The Israelis were watching us from afar, but they continued

to shoot at us. Another bullet entered my right leg, and one into my waist. I put my head on the ground and covered my head with my arms. I wasn’t afraid. I felt that God was with me. I was sitting in a pool of blood. I didn’t know who to worry about—myself, my sister, or those who wanted to come and help us. My husband was in the house with my children. When he tried to come out, they fired a shell at him. He shouted at me to come toward him. Instead I started going back. I just wanted to make sure he wouldn’t approach and get killed. Finally I decided to crawl. I started crawling very slowly, but then they shot at me again. A bullet hit me in the chest. It took me ages to reach the gate of our house. All I could think of was Fadwa. Once I reached there, just the second my husband stepped outside to help me, another shell fell right beside him—but he got me in. He said he was going to get my sister. “Don’t go,” I told him, “she is dead.”

My children came with towels to cover my wounds. My children were crushed. They were so afraid as they looked at me with blood covering my body. For two months, I was separated from my children. While I was in the hospital, they stayed for a few days with their father, then they spent the rest of the time with my family. We were all away from each other. My children have nightmares.

On that night when my sister was killed and I was wounded, the

ambulance managed to reach us some hours later. They risked their lives to help us. They put my sister in the ambulance and my husband shouted at them, "My wife is wounded!" He carried me to the ambulance and ran back to be with my children. Just the moment the ambulance began moving, a shell fell near it. I was bleeding from six places on my body, and my sister was lying beside me dead. On the way to the hospital I drifted in and out of consciousness several times. Each time I would open my eyes, I would be looking at the face of my dead sister. My sister was twenty-seven years old. You can ask the nurses in the hospital about her, she was so kind. Some people say that God chose her to be a martyr because she was so kind. She was my best friend. At times I felt like a mother to her. I was always so excited when she would call and say that she was coming to visit. It has been three months since she died. There is so much sorrow in my heart, I just cannot convey my pain to anyone. I think about her every moment of my life.

*Rafidia was permanently disabled from her wounds and needs the assistance of crutches to walk.*