

## **A Hard Life Cut Short in Syria**

**Author:** [Hiba al-Rahman](#)

Qamar's life can be summed up in a few words – patience, sacrifice, and generosity.

Qamar sat in the farmhouse where she now lived, having a cup of coffee with her cousin. Calmly, sorrowfully, she talked of the heartache she felt at being displaced from her home in Douma a second time.

She also spoke about her son Khalil, whom she missed terribly. He had been martyred a few months earlier before reaching the age of 18. She said the voices of the children playing in the farmyard brought back memories of when her own children were young and carefree.

The story of Qamar's life can be summed up in a few words – patience, sacrifice, and generosity.

As a young bride of 16, she moved into her husband's family home. His father had died when he was a child, and his mother raised him and his brother alone.

Five years into the marriage, Qamar's mother-in-law suffered partial paralysis, leaving her unable to move or take care of herself.

Without hesitation, Qamar took on the role of nurse as well as daughter-in-law, and was never heard to utter a word of complaint. She cared for her disabled mother-in-law until her death more than ten years, later.

Qamar was blessed with three daughters and three sons. Their good manners are testimony to the effort she put into raising them. Anyone who knows them has nothing but admiration for them and their mother.

The two eldest daughters married their cousins. Qamar arranged the ceremonies, one of them so lavish that people wide and far talked of it.

When the Syrian revolution erupted in 2011, Qamar's whole family became involved in it. Her husband donated money to the cause, and her eldest son Khalil – only 15 years old at the time – organised anti-government demonstrations.

When the Free Syria Army (FSA) was formed, Khalil begged his mother to allow him to join a platoon in Eastern Ghouta. He was so insistent that she finally gave in, and as soon as he finished his ninth-grade exams at school, Khalil enlisted as a photographer with the FSA's Bara platoon.

Before his final exam results came out, Khalil was martyred.

A few months later, Qamar went to the school and collected the certificate he had relinquished for a higher and nobler cause.

Qamar bravely tried to carry on with life, but a face haggard with grief told a different story. Khalil's death had broken her heart and torn her soul to pieces.

The heartbreak did not end there.

Towards the end of 2012, her eldest daughter's husband was arrested. Her daughter, who was expecting her first child, moved back to Qamar's house. She was in a state of shock and spent her days searching for news of her husband.

Qamar's second daughter feared that her own husband would be next, and fled the country to Libya. She asked her mother to join her, but Qamar refused to leave the country for which her son had sacrificed himself.

The next blow that Qamar had to deal with was displacement.

Douma was by then under heavy government attack, and she was forced to leave her home and flee to a nearby town. This displacement distressed her immensely, so as soon as Douma was liberated, she rushed back home and repaired the damage the house had suffered during the numerous airstrikes.

Sadly, life in Douma would never be the same again.

Government forces imposed a siege on Eastern Ghouta, and Qamar was forced to sell all her valuables just to put bread on the table. At times, the burden of meeting the basic needs of her growing children seemed

almost impossible.

In August 2013, the neighbourhood was struck by an air raid and Qamar's husband was seriously injured. He lost an eye and both of his feet.

Once again, Qamar took on the role of nurse and cared for her husband until his wounds healed. Any grief she felt, she hid in her patient, generous heart. She truly was an angel on earth.

As Douma grew increasingly dangerous, fear and uncertainty dominated the household. Once again, Qamar found herself obliged to leave her home to protect her family.

She settled in a farmhouse owned by relatives in al-Sheyfuniya, a settlement in the Damascus countryside, and began to put her life back together.

I paid Qamar a visit at that farmhouse. Her new life was so primitive that I felt as though I had stepped back in time. The family shared one simple room with the most basic of furniture. For food, they grew vegetables in a small patch of land; they drew water from a nearby well to drink.

Despite this poverty, Qamar was as generous as ever, never hesitating to offer her guests food even it meant her children went hungry that day.

She seemed content with her new life. I could tell that from the shadow of a smile on her face.

On November 19, 2015, Qamar was sitting in the farmhouse telling her cousin how desperately she missed her martyred son Khalil and her absent daughter. She was beginning to doubt that she would ever see her daughter again, as the war seemed to be tightening its grip on Syria.

As Qamar calmly talked of her heartache to her cousin, a missile landed nearby, and an evil piece of shrapnel found its way into her kind heart.

That day, Qamar and her cousin joined Khalil among the ranks of Syria's martyrs.

**Qamar al-Said is the pseudonym of a woman from Douma who had begun writing for the Women's Blog of IWPR's Damascus Bureau before her death. We preserve the pseudonym in the interests of her family's security.**

**The author of this article, Hiba al-Rahman (also a pseudonym) is Qamar's niece. Hiba, 29, is a regular Damascus Bureau contributor, head of women's affairs in Douma's local council, and executive director of Cham centre for human rights in Eastern Ghouta. She has been arrested twice since 2011.**

This story was produced by **Syria Stories** (previously Damascus Bureau), IWPR's news platform for Syrian journalists.

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