



**ABUSHE, THE CHILD WITH PLASTIC EYES**



Abushe lives in Jinka, southern Ethiopia. He is 8 years old. No one would pay any attention to Abushe, but if you catch a glimpse of his eyes, their incredible magnetic colour will stop you in your tracks. One would ascribe it to the effects of great miscegenation, but Abushe actually suffers from the Waardenburg syndrome.



One of the characteristics of this syndrome is an abnormal spacing between the eyes – which is moderately the case for Abushe – but mainly a special pigmentation of the irises. This phenomenon is rare and is thought to occur every 300,000 births on all continents. Its effects are obviously striking on a child with black skin like the little Ethiopian.



Abushe was living and sleeping in his grand ma tukul, the traditional hut made of wood, adobe and thatch, when one night, a fire broke out. In the middle of the tukuls, there is always a fireplace which is used to cook, to repel insects and to provide heat at night.



Abushe and his grandmother were able to survive without any major injuries, except for a burn on the child's forehead, but all the school books and mattresses burned in the fire – a fortune gone up in smoke.



Abushe's most valuable possession remains his red ball, a treasure that he never leaves out of sight, as it is an object of eternal envy for the teenagers around. He never misses a Barcelona game in the bars broadcasting football games and loves Messi: "He is just like me, he is not like the others!"



His parents were surprised to discover his blue eyes. Everyone was afraid that he would be blind. As they were very poor, they could not afford a doctor. They had to wait long months to understand that the child was seeing correctly. They concluded that it was a gift from God and not a curse that had fallen on the family..



Others kids often harass him because of his eyes. They call him "plastic eyes." He cannot stand the incessant remarks. Often, people insult him and call him a "monster." Teenagers beat him up.



At the grand age of 8, Abushe decided to live in town to be near his school. He could not afford to pay the daily bus ticket from his grandmother's village. He shows me a filthy cardboard on the floor, his new bed. "It's dirty here," he whispers, ashamed. For food, he relies on the charity of the patrons of the restaurant opposite his slum.



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