

2HB

# 2HB *vol.11*

## **Three Dollops of Ketchup**

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“... As a matter of fact, these  
were three dollops of ketchup they'd  
accidentally splattered on each other's clothes”

## One:

### The Bath Towel and The Three Garbage Bags

Our apartment was on the fourth floor; we rented out the other three. We had no guests except the neighbours, not until that morning. When the doorbell rang at ten fifteen and my mother opened the door, and for the second time today there was a very tall man with a black suit standing in front of the door.

He showed his badge, and we realized he was from the homicide division.

My mother stepped away from the door to let him in. Before entering, he grabbed a bagful of what seemed to be new designer clothes and came in. He took a chair in the living room, took off his coat and said he was investigating the murder that happened last week in the lower apartment.

My mother said, "But we already told your partner everything."

The detective replied, "Yes but that partner saw his wife, who had left him years ago, right in front of the police station, so they went to a café to eat something and never came back."

My mother said, "Ok. Now what do you want to know?"

The detective replied, "There are many questions remaining. And missing details. But first I want to take a shower." My mother said, "The bathroom is on the left at the end of the hallway."

With a towel wrapped around him, the detective returned to his seat. "Where's your mother?" he asked.

"She went out for a walk with the neighbours and will be back in an hour," I replied.

"Call her and ask her to get a pack of Pall Malls for me."

When I called, we heard the ringtone behind the door, then the sound of her keys as the door opened.

Again she sat down in front of the detective. "We can continue if you like."

The detective asked, "Where have you been?" and looked at me.

My mother replied, "I went out for a walk with the neighbours."

The detective said, "A ten minute stroll!"

My mother replied, "Well no one was home, and there was blood seeping out from under their door."

The detective quickly ran out in his bath towel, jumping the stairs until he was outside the apartment building. From the balcony, we saw him staring at the three garbage bags in front of the main door. He looked up at my mother: "When I arrived these three bags were not here, I'm going to open them." My mother said, "They're dirty, let me throw you a glove," and dropped a single white glove for the detective. From above, we saw bags being opened one by one, and in each was the body of one of the neighbours. A man, an old woman and another man. The detective hurried back up and knocked. My mother opened the door but did not let him in. The detective said, "Can I enter?"

My mother said, "What do you want?" and the detective angrily replied, "I am detective Yasser from the Department of Homicide, I was sitting on that sofa five minutes ago".

My mother said, "But you're only wearing a bath towel," and closed the door.

## Two:

### Though the bird may die , keep the flight in mind

I got out of the car with my colleagues, still wearing the white towel, as if I was holding on to a swan.

The boy opened the door, and from his cold attitude, I knew I was dealing with a professional team. "Where's your mother," I asked.

"She went out for a walk with the neighbours," she replied. I said, "Which neighbours? They're all dead". "The old neighbours," he answered. "We have the warrant to search the house," I told him. Upon which he said, "If you're looking for your belongings, we've put them in front of the door". "Step aside you little brat," I said. "We need to search the house". When we went in, there was nothing there. Only the boy's bed, a book collection and a television with a Shajarian concert playing. "What do you do," I asked the boy. "I'm a welder," he replied. I asked him, "What happened to the furniture?" and he said, "We had borrowed it, so we gave it back." The whole situation was so suspicious that my colleagues were beginning to suspect my own account of the entire thing, or to think that there was something wrong with me.

Meanwhile the mother came in, and went to the fridge without paying any attention to us, after which she took a jug of lemonade and poured a glass for everyone. I asked her whether she lived alone, and she said, "Yes, but recently we had guests." "You aren't upset that your neighbours are dead?" I asked, and she looked at the ceiling, took a sip of her lemonade and paused for a moment before saying, "Though the bird may die, keep the flight in mind."

I said, "Apparently you're a poet, am I right?" She said, "No, I'm a painter and I also work for the telephone company." I said, "Well in that case I have to make a studio visit." She said, "Next week, there will be an exhibition of paintings by employees of the State Telecommunications headquarters. She then took three invitation cards out of her purse and gave one to me, and another to the one of my colleagues, but not to the other.

She looked at me and said, "I would be delighted to see you."

As we were about to leave, we heard the sound of the evening prayer; which lent a mystical air to that empty house. I suggested praying together, if everyone agreed.

We went to the kitchen for wudhu and then lined up for the prayer—due to various issues I cannot say who our imam was. Only that we all lined up in a few rows in that big living room, and as we started to pray, quite suddenly, a helicopter crashed into the window, and with the sound of the explosion, we all spontaneously looked behind us. No one was hurt, except for the three passengers who were burning in the fire.

Within seconds, the house was crammed with people. Firefighters, some passers-by, the paramedics and all the local shopkeepers were in the living room. In all the chaos, the woman's poetic phrase somehow came to mind - though the bird may die , keep the flight in mind - and it overwhelmed me. When I focused on my surroundings again, I realized that the boy and his mother were gone, but the situation was so grave that I did not even try to go look for them. I was still holding the exhibition card.

### Three:

Painting Exhibition of the Employees of the State Telecommunications Headquarters

I had first seen the detective at the zoo. He easily prevented the suicide of the boy who had climbed up the cypress tree protesting animal abuse. I remember the detective climbing the tree wearing a black suit and a holding red rose. I perfectly remember every single detail.

He showed the rose to the boy and said: "This flower is so beautiful. But it is cut from its stem, in the name of some pathetic example of love; you are like this flower. Be careful not to be cut from your stem because of some stupid love, and splash your blood around the floor of the zoo. Your parents will never forgive you for this. Also, it would put an end to your fight against animal abuse. I have a pigeon myself, and because of your courage today, I will take it to the garage behind the house and set it free. No one will ever catch it anymore".

His words, sentence for sentence, still ring in my ears, and I even remember the picture that was published all over the newspapers the day after. In the picture, the detective, the boy and the pigeon were smiling as they experienced a new life. I remember when the boy came down the tree and hugged the detective, and they started to walk to the detective's house.

Today, as always, he was wearing black. When he entered the exhibition space he was accompanied by only one of his colleagues. He noticed me across the room, talking to some people, and discretely implied that he preferred to see the paintings first, so I could continue talking. He quickly passed by all the artwork until he stood in front of mine, and, with the scrutiny of a critic, looked at the red flowers I had painted. When I approached to thank him he said, "If it's OK with you, we'll be leaving." I said, "Everybody's dropping by tonight, you are welcome to come." He said, "But we do not know anyone""Neither do I," I answered, and the three of us laughed until our eyes filled with tears.

### Four:

A Bullet and Four Lemon Wedges

It appeared as if he'd caught my mother's eye, since she invited him and his friend to the after-party. On the way home I told her, "They aren't to be trusted. Them showing up was suspicious." My mother replied, "Have you forgotten I've read everything on my palms already?" She opened her hand in front of my face and continued, "We will be going north. In those green woods, we see trees instead of these people, and only the hand of god can reach us. The fog, the sound of nightingales and the cabin overlooking the river; think of these things." I said, "But you cannot weld by a river." Upon which she said, "We will only spend the spring there". When we got out of the car it was ten thirty; my mother gave me a bunch of flowers and we went up the stairs. The party was crowded, and with the sound of live music it was hard to follow a conversation. A man was playing the trumpet and his wife was holding his moustache. Suddenly, the detective shot a blank and everybody screamed, and hid under the tables. They were still under the tables when he broke into laughter and said, "Just kidding!"<sup>1</sup>

When he saw that some people were angry he turned bright red and quickly took a lemon, sliced it in four and played a song with each of the wedges, as if it was a harmonica. He wanted to impress my mother with the four lemon wedges and the gunshot and he visibly succeeded, since my mother put another lemon on his plate and asked for four more songs. Then they did a Spanish dance together. Obviously, tomorrow they would all lose their jobs, but tomorrow morning was a new day. And so they all went to work.

**Five:**

## Decorative Victimization

"Exhibition review: artists of the state telecommunications headquarters"

Setareh Gallery presents new works by the painters of the State Telecommunications Headquarters. All in all, the works represent dull manifestations of an encounter between industry, abstraction and nature.

On the entrance wall, we see Falamak's large canvases of telephones on dining tables. This series could be considered a blending of impressionism and telecommunication. Every now and then, one hears the sound clip of a telephone ringing, then falling silent, followed by the sound of a door slamming shut. In the work of Ms. Gorgam, the delicacy of color, concept and structure has saturated the work. In each work, we see red flowers dripping paint across the painting. In the photograph of the artist standing by the work, the harmony of the red color and her lipstick is clearly visible. The high prices of the series, between 15,000,000 to 30,000,000 Rial, was the reason why none of the works were sold, but moving right along, the work of Reza Makan represents the conflict between good and evil, and what makes these works refreshing is its display. Those white canvases with white paint dripping on thick, shiny black frames; this is what lends the concept a particular energy. It could be argued that the decorative features, the aesthetic of the context and the display itself bestow a unique sense of harmony on these works. In the work of other artists, including Ashk Bous, attempts are made to visualize ancient Iranian festivities vis a vis religious themes. For instance, a still life that had originally been a Haft Sin table was accompanied with a Koran and a large calendar in the background, presenting the date of the work in solar, lunar (hejri) and Roman calendars. Poupak Jim's paintings, meanwhile, appropriate Iranian calligraphy and ceramics to create an abstract environment; a mix between the work of Parviz Kalantari and Hossein Zendehtroudi, but still succeeding in creating a personal style. But Goli Fathi's work has the most to offer in terms of Decorative Victimization. These works have no distinct characteristics and are mostly spontaneous improvisations on canvas, which turns the aesthetic content into cliché. In any case, most of the works in this exhibition present a new trend in the country's visual art scene, and, given that naïve tendencies are an important constituent of the works of the artists at this government institution, one can anticipate that in future exhibitions, we will witness a new use of media in the works by these same artists.

Vahid Sharifian  
Iran Daily

**Six:**

## Two Eagles in the Sky, One Eagle in the Sky

In the morning, we washed the fruit and lay under the mosquito net, looking at pictures of the opening and the after party. In the background of a picture of myself, standing next to one of the paintings - my lipstick was in perfect harmony with the red flowers in the work - one could see a bit of detective Yasser's head and coat sleeve. I asked Mardook,

"Do you know this guy?" But Mardook had disappeared, even though he was around here sniffing flowers by the river just a few minutes ago.

I started running through the woods, unable to think. In that moment, it was probably only the photograph in my hand that kept me from being very afraid. I called Mardook a few times, but it was only the silence of the woods that came closer with every moment, minute by minute, as it further blended with the sound of the waterfall. Suddenly Mardook appeared, standing there by the waterfall, staring at something. It was actually the reflection of a man and a horse in the pristine water, and that man was none other than the detective, still in his black suit, riding a white horse over the green Shomal cliffs. Mardook said, "Didn't I say this guy is suspicious, can't you see he follows us anywhere we go?" I did not respond, but walked up to the waterfall and waved at the detective. I was hoping that my face, free of any make-up, was not visible from the distance.

I shouted, "Mardook says you are suspicious." The detective replied, "Maybe it's because of my suit."

Behind the detective, two eagles were flying in the distance. It was an amazing scene. An eagle suddenly flew out of sight and Mardook shouted, "Detective, be careful!", but had not even finished his sentence when the detective suddenly saw the shadow of an eagle on his shoulder. The horse neighed loudly, with the sound echoing through the woods as it fell down the waterfall together with the detective. Perhaps the horse's belly hitting the water was the only reason the detective survived.

Mardook and I waded through the shallow water until we reached the injured detective. Nearby, a few red apples and a notebook were floating. The detective mumbled, "My car is parked to the east of the woods, it's a yellow Peykan Javanan, and has a flat tire." I started wondering why I still held the photograph in my hand, when I noticed that the photo, the waterfall and my hand were all soaked with blood, and that the detective had lost consciousness. In that moment, the only thing that came to mind, over and over, was the phrase "Though the bird may die, keep the flight in mind."

**Seven:**

A Cross Section of the Media Coverage of the Shomal Incident

Etemad: the detective was caught in the waterfall, the horse died.

Etemad Melli: the woman, the son and detective Yasser survived the Shomal incident.

Amordad: the Shomal incident causes the death of a pure-bred Iranian horse.

Neshat: was detective Yasser another target of the serial killings?

Jomhour Eslami: a suspicious mother and son and an incident by the waterfall.

Keyhan: a notorious woman saves life of respected detective (an enemy can also, when God so wishes, be the cause of grace).

Hamshahri: the woman and her son saved the life of special detective Yasser (now at Dey Hospital).

Ham Mihan: the fall of detective Yasser and the death of his thirty million Rial horse.

Shargh: the corpse of detective Yasser's horse was not returned to his family.

Hambastegi: detective Yasser's blood fills the waterfall.

Payam Ashti: a woman and her son save the life of a detective.

Ya Lesarat: detective Yasser, a few steps from martyrdom.

**Eight:**

The Smell of Blood in Your Sleep

When I came around, everybody clapped. I blurrily saw the nurse's beady eyes as she leaned toward me and said: "an hour ago a chandelier fell on your head." What I later found out was that after the fall, Ms. Gorgam and her son took me to their house. Since I had lost a lot of blood, the doctors conducted a successful surgery on me right then and there, under the chandeliers in the middle of the living room, and according to the nurse, the surgery was barely finished when the chandelier fell on my head. I was quickly taken to hospital and soon regained consciousness. I don't want to say I was disgusted by the whole business with the waterfall and the romance and excitement, but I was truly exhausted. I asked the doctor, "Can I ride my bicycle from tomorrow?" but he looked down, paused for a few seconds and said, "You've lost one of your feet. From now on, you can only ride caboose."

I lost consciousness again, and in my dream I saw Ms. Gorgam on a "Three Snake" bicycle. I was on the sidesaddle, feeding the ducks by the poolside. The water in the pool was actually blood, and I was actually cutting chunks from my flesh and throwing them at the ducks. It was a round pool in a compound as pretty as a postcard. Ms. Gorgan kept riding around the pool, and I wasn't worried about anything. Ms. Gorgan said, "This is a Chinese horse, it belongs to Mardook, I asked his permission. You can adjust the speed." I said, "Well isn't this the same waterfall under which I spread a net, and it filled up with fish and ducks?" She said, "Yes, but it has now turned into a swimming pool." "Why does it smell like blood?" I asked. She said, "Because I've painted the bottom." "Can you go a bit slower?" I asked. She said, "No, I'm worried what will happen if you find your feet." I looked at my feet and saw my toenails were painted." I said, "I see my feet are in place." "Congratulations!" she said. I woke up and again everyone clapped for me.

## Nine:

Sepahan: 4 Shamooshak 1: <sup>2</sup>

I sat on the sofa watching football, the team hit a corner and the match ended. The phone rang again, it was the hospital. They said the detective had regained consciousness and wanted to talk to me.

The detective said, "Dear Mardook, why don't you answer the phone?"

I said, "I was watching football." He said, "No problem, sorry to bother you."

I said, "How kindhearted you've become." He said, "Yes, I think having one foot less directs more blood to the heart," and then added, "do you know what the final score was?" I said, "Sepahan won the championship." Suddenly I heard the detective crying on the phone. I said, "Are you saying that..." and he answered, "Yes, I am a loyal fan." "Is that why your car is yellow?" I asked, and he said, "Yes, I love their jerseys." I said, "But this is not the only time they won, I never knew the football matches are so important to you," and the detective replied, "It's the first time that I'm missing one foot and Sepahan becomes champion." I said, "Well, did you play yourself?" He said, "You don't get what I mean. Can I talk to your mother please?" I said, "She went out for a walk with the neighbours." He said, "Ok, can you be at Hockney café at 3pm?" I said, "Yes, sure."

At 2:45 pm, my mother and I were standing near the pine trees by the café.

We stared at the white storefront in front of us, both us sensing that something either good or bad to was about to happen. Suddenly the detective came out of the flower shop wearing an artificial foot. The flower shop was the one with the white storefront. I said to myself that we'd saved his life and all he had was a bunch of flowers in his hands. As we entered the coffee shop, the TV was showing replays of the Shamooshak and Sepahan goals. For a few minutes, the three of us watched silently. Suddenly, my mother said, "Do you know who the commentator is?" I said I did not. She said, "It's Mr. Pichak, the previous third floor neighbor whose wife had an accident in Nowshahr." The results briefly appeared in large letters on the TV: Sepahan Esphehan 4-Shamooshak Nowshahr 1.

I said, "Is he a football commentator?" My mother said he sometimes did commentary on replays. Then she turned to the detective and said, "Well detective, congratulations on your new leg." He said, "Thanks." He offered my mother his Pall Mall cigarettes and my mother thanked him in turn.

Detective Yasser said, "First, I thought of buying a painting for your living room. I was passing in front of the "Dadashi" gallery when it came to my mind, but then I thought you might not like it, because you are quite modern. I bought flowers instead, so you could smell them, paint them, take pictures by them and decorate your house." Then he unpacked his camera and took a picture of my mother and myself with the flowers on the table. I also took one of him and my mother. Then my mother took one of me and him, and then gave the camera to the waiter so he could take one of the three of us. While leaving, my mother turned to detective Yasser and said, "Come more often." All the events that had occurred since the first time he stepped into our house flashed by in his mind like a film. "Definitely," he said. And excited that my mom had accepted him, even with one leg missing, he parted from us. We had not walked more than ten feet when he

turned and shouted, "By the way," and started walking back towards us, taking a little box out of his pocket, saying, "I almost forgot." It was a gold coin with the picture of Imam Khomeini on it.<sup>3</sup>

On the way back I asked my mother why didn't we order anything at the coffee shop. My mom did not answer and I didn't ask again.

## Ten:

### We'll Take Umbrellas to the Island

This was the fifth time that the detective came to our house. Although we had become close by then, as he entered, suspicion still filled the house. Maybe Mardook was right, because recently he really would get into details a lot.

This time he brought me a box of Pantel red paint. He took his coat off and sat on the sofa. He said, "Can I ask about your ex-husband?" I said, "No." He said, "Whatever you prefer, I just wanted to know if the picture of the biker on your wall is your husband?"

"No," I said, "my husband was an artist and loved his work and his family."

He asked, "Did you get divorced?" I said, "No, he became a victim of his art." He said, "Was his surname Avini?"<sup>4</sup> I said, "No, why?" He said, "Because your son's eyes look like his." I said, "Yes, maybe." And to change the subject I added, "Should I bring something to eat?" "No," he said.

I said, "By the way, why don't you bring the pictures we took at the coffee shop?" He said, "Actually I was in the elevator at the mall when I dropped the camera and it was completely ruined." Tears filled my eyes and I started crying, and said, "My husband also fell from a great height and was also ruined." He said, "Let's talk about him a little, you can just let it all out." I don't know why I told him everything, the fact that he was a painter, that he took his canvases and easels on big cranes and painted the city, that when he was painting the sunset over the city at the height of 400 meters the crane suddenly split, right down the middle.

I was crying like a child when he said, "I want to live with you." When I stopped crying I smiled. He said, "I am trying to close the case of these murders as soon as possible. I do not want a wedding with a bunch of bodies on my hands." I said, "Me neither," and he said, "I gave the case to the boys, even though they're stupid, but at least I'll be rid of it." I said, "Do you want to go to Kish island at the end of the month?" He thought about this a little and then said, "I don't know what the weather is like on the island in autumn. Does it rain?" I said, "Well we can always take umbrellas to the island." He smiled and closed his eyes affirmatively. He put out his cigarette and made to leave. I said, "You could also stay." He said, "It's late and I need to get up early." I said, "Why early?" and he said, "I exercise."

He closed the door, and windows of hope were opened in my heart.

## Eleven:

### Syringes - and the Problem of Selling the Dog

I told my colleague that she simply couldn't be guilty. "She's a single woman living with her son, and the only thing she does is paint flowers." My colleague said, "She is only one of the suspects." I asked who the others are. He said, "A bus driver who was changing a flat tire close to the area, and a girl who'd lost her dog." Although I had become very close to Mrs. Gorgam, and even admired her, I told my colleague, "You see, I am keeping an eye on them, but haven't yet found anything but a pretty painter and a moron boy who thinks he is a genius." He said, "Yes, we are more suspicious of the girl, but we've heard nothing from her but the barking of her dog." I said, "What about the driver?" He said, "He's now working at Kish Transportations, but we haven't investigated him yet." I said, "Well what have you been doing all this time. It's now four months that you've been on this case and the pages of your report are all empty." He said, "We got the results from the autopsy." I said, "So what was the result?" He replied, "On the buttocks of all four victims were needle marks, and on the arm of the old woman there were tooth marks from some kind of animal." I said, "Did you test the girl's dog?" He said, "We couldn't, because by the time we got to the airport, she'd sold the dog, or just given it to someone. And the guy quickly got on the plane, and all we heard was the dog barking. As we were trying to get permissions to stop the plane, it took off. But according to the autopsy results, a lot of blood had been extracted from the corpses." I said, "Well maybe this happened in the Department of Forensic Medicine?" He said, "Yes maybe, but the marks of the syringes are considerably larger than their syringes." I said, "Once I saw a few very large syringes on the grass outside the Department of Forensic Medicine." He said, "No, I've seen those too, the marks on the victims are still much bigger."

I said, "Anyway, I'm going to Kish at the end of the month. I can interrogate the bus driver." My colleague asked, "Are you flying?" "You expected me to bike there?" I replied. He said, "What day is your flight?" I said, "What are you suspicious of me as well?" He said, "No, but they predicted thunderstorms in the south for this week." I thanked him for his concern and looked up at the sky. It was clear.



## Twelve:

### Red Helicopter

You could tell from the way he acted that the detective considered me a big liar, or a dork. As it happens I had become a professional welder. I felt I had to show him that I could do anything, and prove to him that he was a suspicious bastard and that all his thoughts about me were wrong. It's true that I hated physics and astronomy in school, but I still managed to grasp both. Actually, the detective didn't know my profession. He didn't know I could do anything with enough persistence, and, with the help of god, I'd now decided to make a helicopter and fly it myself, so I could join them when they went to Kish.

I had six days time, and wanted to do something completely new. I brushed my teeth and went on the roof to make my helicopter, but just then a thunderstorm hit and it began to rain, a heavy rain like the ones you see in cartoons. I was forced to stop working and sadly stared at the sky. And I saw my father's face in the clouds. His face changed colour with each strike of thunder, and suddenly, in between the rain and thunder, his voice came booming across the rooftop, saying,

"Believe in yourself. With this helicopter, you can wash all dark thoughts from the mind of the detective, just like the rain that washes the pigeon droppings. Prove yourself. Actually I don't trust this guy either." The heavy rain suddenly stopped, the clouds cleared and the sun came back again.

By the third day I'd fixed a junkyard engine and put it on the helicopter. I took the sofa that was laying around on the rooftop in the sun and put it inside the cabin for seating, and assembled a little kitchen with a ceramic sink that I found by the wall, hidden in the shade.

On the fourth night, the helicopter was ready in the moonlight. My mom and I smiled at each other under the stars. I told my mom, "The paint job is on you".

Early in the morning when I came to the roof, I saw that my mother was painting the helicopter with the red paint that detective Yasser had brought. By noon, the painting was done, and all that remained were the windows.

The helicopter sparkled under the blue sunlit sky, and my mother and I were smiling. The three of us felt proud in our hearts.

I climbed in for a test flight. When I turned on the engine my mother's hair danced in the wind. I rose slowly, and began flying around the block. I passed a flock of migrant ducks and waved at them, and they waved back. One has a beautiful view from up there: a cop went to a coffee shop with his wife, a bus driver changed a flat tire, a girl was looking for her dog. I could just feel the sweat of our neighbours playing football, as it evaporated in the sky. As I was landing, a pigeon entered the cabin and sat on the sink, then flew away after a few minutes. I successfully landed on the rooftop, stepped out and hugged my mother. I had a present for her - a pigeon egg which sparkled like a pearl.

## Thirteen:

### A Villa in Palestine

Friday morning, detective Yasser came to our house with three airline tickets and said, "We are flying tonight."

Mardook confidently walked up to the detective, and wanted to take him to the roof to show him the masterpiece. The detective made excuses, but Mardook insisted. The detective coldly muttered, "Leave it for after the trip." I told him, "Mardook has made a helicopter and wants to take us to the island." As he was putting the tickets in his side pocket, he looked down and said, "Oh well done, since when is Mardook a pilot, I thought he barely knew how to walk about in his shoes," and laughed out loud. I also laughed and said, "No, Mardook is a genius, he has even written books." Mardook, who more than anything wanted to befriend the detective, laughed until his eyes watered up and with his hands in his back pockets, he said, "Have fun." The detective asked, "Aren't you coming?" Mardook responded, "Yes, but my flight is a bit longer than yours."

Detective Yasser shook his head and furrowed his eyebrows in a where-is-he-taking-this-kind of way. I said, "Mardook wanted to take us to the island, and go to Palestine from there." The detective responded, "But there's a war over there." Mardook said, "But we won't join the war." The detective said, "The war might join you." And we all laughed and I interrupted, "We have a small 20 square metre apartment that is very safe." Detective Yasser once again wanted to get into details, but he controlled himself and merely said, "Be careful." Then he offered me his Pall Mall cigarettes, and I took one and tapped the back of his large hand so as to say thank you. This was our first physical contact.

The detective took out a video tape. I put it in the VCR player and the three of us sat down to watch it. The film was about the tourist attractions on Kish island; jet skis, five star hotels, aquariums, a diver feeding the dolphins, traditional dance and native music, ultra-modern shopping malls, cycling tracks, vineyards, all of which pumped up our excitement over Kish. We watched the film to the end, and after a few seconds of snowy fuzz it played the famous Homeyra video clip:

"The kings all disappeared

The castles were all that remained"

Mardook said he was really sorry he could not come, and that the Kish vineyards really interested him. The detective uttered a cheap, lazy laugh. He was almost happy Mardook was not coming. Not even to the airport. As he was leaving he said, "See you at the airport tonight Mrs. Gorgam," implying that even if Mardook suddenly decided to come, he'd better just forget about it.

**Fourteen:**  
Heart and Target

It's true the thermometers on Kish Island showed only 20 degrees centigrade, but the steam from the sea became rivers of perspiration on our foreheads, so we spent our first day in the hotel. The room had a view of the sea, and Mrs. Gorgam, stared at the sea continuously, just like a poet. She said, "This window is the sea's book of poems and has something new in it every minute of the night and day." I said, "Yes, but the book is a limited edition. When you stand in front of it, I cannot read anymore." She did not even smile at what I said, all day she just faced the sea with her back to me, and just before dusk she put on her lipstick, turned to me and said, "I am feeling quite nostalgic, let's go out for a walk." We went for a little walk and had tea under one of those big umbrellas in front of the hotel, and returned to our hotel room. When night came, I asked, "What are your plans for tomorrow?" She said, "I want to get a nosejob." I said, "Here on the island?" She said, "Yes I had made an appointment before we came." I said, "You didn't mention anything about this." She replied harshly, "Why should I have told you, why do you want to meddle in my most personal matters." I said, "I don't think your nostril is your most personal matter." She gave me a look, then took her purse and went to the bathroom and shut the door. I realized she had her period. In the morning, she was not in bed, but had left a note: "will be home by evening, didn't want to wake you up, bye".

I had to use this opportunity to go see the bus driver. It was almost noon when I left the hotel for the bus company.

I told the boss, "I am looking for Mr. Boraz, he's new here." The guy, sluggish and in a lousy mood said, "Go to route 9, he's having lunch in his bus." On route 9, fourteen empty buses were parked, and only one had its doors open. Slowly, I put my foot on the first stair and carefully looked inside the bus, down the aisle, where I saw a fat guy, visibly drunk, and sitting next to him was Mrs. Gorgam. They were joking and painting moustaches on each other with black magic markers. I retreated, holding my breath, and very slowly walked a couple of buses down route 9 before bursting into laughter. Mrs. Gorgam had gotten such a horrible nose job that she looked like a circus clown. Suddenly I went pale; feeling shocked by my own behaviour. Actually I had seen so much of Mrs. Gorgam in the past few days, and was focused on her so entirely, that I completely forgot that I was looking for a suspect bus driver.

I slowly walked back to the bus, to listen in on their conversation. But the door was now closed, and I assumed they were both gone. When I got to the hotel, Mrs. Gorgam was asleep, and I was quietly detaching my leg and putting it away when she suddenly woke up. I did not mention anything. On the third day I left early, leaving her a note: "did not want to wake you up, will be back by evening".

After I interrogated the driver and got back to the hotel, Mrs. Gorgam was taking a shower. I went to the bathroom door; raised my voice a little and asked,

"Do you know Boraz?" "What?" she asked. I said, "Boraz, I am asking whether you know Boraz?" She paused in surprise. A natural reaction of course. She said, "He's my brother in law."

When she came out I said, "Do you know he's one of the homicide suspects?" She said, "No, why?" I said, "The night of the murder, he was seen taking a bag to his bus, and before that he was changing a flat tire." She said, "No, maybe he was taking food somewhere, as a votive offering perhaps. Actually he often goes and gives food to the needy at night." I said, "How do you know?" She said, "I help him sometimes." I asked, "Are you very close to him?" She said, "Not as close as I am to you." Actually, her answers were quite similar to Boraz. I said, "Did you remove your nose or have a nosejob?" She said, "When I remove the bandage you will see how chic it looks. Actually I did all this for you." I said, "For me you could have done other things. You could go fishing. Or do your hair Lady Gaga style. Or when I asked you the time yesterday, you could have tried not to look so disgusted." Mrs. Gorgam said, "But you asked at the wrong moment. A canary had just come to sing by the window." I laughed and said, "What was it singing?" Suddenly she turned, snapping her fingers, and said, "It was singing:

You are more beautiful than the sea  
Don't go to the streets at night  
The neighbour's kids are thieves  
They will steal my love

We laughed through the night, laughed until we finally fell asleep. The morning of the last day of our vacation, we went to see the pastry festival on the island, and then to a shooting competition; the Cup of Persian Gulf martyrs. Mrs. Gorgam insisted I do some shooting myself.

I showed my card and we went inside, where I fired one bullet and it caused a seagull to fall. I don't know why I shot this poorly, and when Mrs. Gorgam said, "That was great!" I realized that she was either a cruel person or simply liked me very much. Either way, she thought I did it on purpose. Then she said, "Give it to me so I can give it a shot." I hesitantly gave the gun to her, and nervously lit a cigarette. When Mrs. Gorgam saw the cigarette she said, "Could you blow a heart-shaped smoke ring please." I did as I was told and she shot the bullet through my heart and exactly into the target.

## Fifteen:

Transcript of detective Yasser's interrogation of the bus driver

- The night of the incident you were seen carrying a bag into the bus.
- That night we had saffron rice pudding as a votive. One must think of the needy too.
- But the blood of the murdered old woman matches the DNA of the blood on the bus floor.
- All I remember from that day was an old woman with heavy makeup sitting near a girl, and the girl was with her dog.
- But animals are not allowed on the bus.
- I'm a member of the animal rights society. Plus it was late, and the girl said the dog needed a caesarean.
- And then?
- The dog kept on barking, the old woman told the girl: make that shit head shut up. The girl said: shit head yourself, even without makeup she still looks better than you. Then the old woman said: shut up or I'll stick this umbrella in your eyes. Then she opened and closed the umbrella a few times. The girl let the leash go and I stopped right then and said: both of you get out! The dog jumped out, but only after biting the old woman's arm, and then I think it also bit the rear tire. After which as you know I had to change the tire and all that. But I heard that the girl was looking for her dog until morning.
- From who?
- The locals.
- Did she find the dog?
- No, apparently she got lost as well, and then sometime in the early morning, the dog found her in a diner on West 17th Blvd.
- From whom did you hear this?
- From the morning shift drivers of West 17th Blvd.
- The dog bit the old woman and you just left her there?
- No, I offered her a ride, but she ran for the girl. The old woman looked Balkan, she could run so fast.
- You said you had a flat tire so how could you give her a ride?
- Well, I would have called the boys. Some of them work at the taxi service
- You know after they retire they drive cabs.
- Do you have any particular relationship to Mrs. Gorgam?
- Well yes, she is Mardook's mother.
- I mean a special relationship?
- Oh, you mean a special relationship. No, I have my own life
- I saw you painting moustaches on each other at the back of the bus.
- Well we wanted to see what we look like, especially since she just had a nose job.
- Well what did you look like?
- Like interrogators.
- Shut up.

Click

## Sixteen:

Blasphemy

When detective Yasser entered the apartment, he compared my friend and I to a couple of pigs. We were naked when the detective suddenly opened the door and started cursing as he saw us. First I intended to ignore him, so I simply said, "Oh, you were supposed to come back Tuesday afternoon, and by the way what happened to my mom?"

The detective responded with a hiss, "She went to get some cabbage on the way."

I said, "Was the island fun? Did you ride on boats?"

The detective took a drag from his cigarette and said, "Get your nose out of my ass."

I got pissed off and said, "So you're a real brave lionheart when mom is not around?"

He said, "Yeah, but at least I'm not a pig. When your mother comes, I'm telling her everything."

I said, "What will you tell her? We were just welding."

He replied with a grin, "Yes, and that is exactly what I am going to tell her:"

My friend whispered to me, "Maybe we should hold a knife to his neck."

I said, "No, when my mom comes back he'll get distracted."

Then out of the blue, detective Yasser said, "Your uncle is a fucking alcoholic, and you are just like him."

I said, "You don't have any evidence to prove this."

He said, "The tip of his nose is always red and he has a huge gut, isn't that evidence enough?"

I said, "This is because of the island's weather. In fact he is a devoted Shi'ite who directs his passengers to the right path."

The detective said, "He should start with his nephew."

I said, "With all due respect I am beginning to lose my temper."

He said, "You've already lost it."

Furiously I wanted to grab his lapel, but I was lucky the doorbell rang, just in time, and I changed direction so as to open the door

It was my mother, with a cabbage in hand. She noticed the air was tense and that a fight was going on. She put the cabbage down and asked, "Mardook, why don't you have any clothes on?"

The detective said, "Your son was welding with his friend."

My mom said, "What's wrong with that?"

The detective said, "But his friend was doing this to his body."

My mom said, "Which friend?" and I said, "He went out the back door."

My mother bit her lip and said, "Turn around Mardook."

I did not want them to see the tattoo on my back, at least not just yet. But they did see it, and to make things worse they both shouted:

"Hamburger!"

I was in deep trouble, and totally confused. I pulled myself together and said

I hadn't realized what he'd done until that very moment. I had asked him to tattoo the image of his holiness Ali, and that I will never forgive him for what he had done.

The detective turned to my mother and said, "The things he does make me sick," and took the last drag from his cigarette. As he left he said, "You will pay for this soon enough." He slammed the door and my mom burst into tears. She cried for half a day and then she fell asleep.

### Seventeen:

"The Unfinished Alphabet of the Sea"

I thought about how I might manage to understand the alphabet of the sea; the boats, the harbour, the fish and the seashells. It seemed as if all the mysteries of the sea were hidden in the seashells detective Yasser and I had collected by the sea, and which were now sitting there shining on the dining table. With its vastness and its waves, the sea promises a whole life of excitement, what a pity that I got my period the first day and could not go swimming, but still it was so much fun.

I was deep in these memories when suddenly the doorbell rang and everything fell apart. It was the postman with a subpoena from the homicide division. They were really taking it this far now. I immediately called detective Yasser's cell phone.

"They have sent me a subpoena, what does this mean?" I said, adding "I am really tired of this, the autumn is coming to an end and you have not even proposed yet. All the neighbours whisper to one another when they see me."

Detective Yasser paused and said, "You see, this is only a formality. I am supposed to question you. You can even choose not to respond, it will only take an hour and then we can go to the zoo together. I just want this all to end. You can simply say everything that you know."

I said, "But I've already told everything to your colleagues"

The detective said, "Yes, but there were three more murders after that. I have said that no one has cause to suspect you but you should help me as much as you can."

As I played with the seashells on the table I said, "OK, now do you love me?"

His voice trembled as he said, "Of course." I could tell that his eyes were tearing from the other end of the line. In an attempt to calm him down I said, "OK, I am taking off my clothes to go and wash, see you."

He said, "Take our seashells under the shower." I said, "OK, now at the very least you should laugh." He laughed and said, "See you."

**Eighteen:**

## As Bright as a Burning Cigarette

My colleague gathered some solid evidence and dropped charges against Gorgam. The date of Boraz' move to the island was the exact same date on which the girl went to the airport. According to my colleague's information, the girl had given the dog to Boraz, so there was a relationship between the two that Boraz wanted to conceal. During the interrogation I asked Mrs. Gorgam to recount in all detail the day I went to her house. I asked, "Did you hear any sound before I came?" She said, "Yes, the sound of a dog barking."

She said the dog probably wore a bell, because she heard some chimes. I asked if her brother in law was recently in a relationship, and she said, "He frequently changes his relationships." I responded with sarcasm: "Just like his cigarettes." She agreed, saying, "Yes, he actually makes the most possible use of his girlfriends. Just like he smokes his cigarettes to the butt." I suddenly realized that during the interrogation he'd put out his cigarette halfway through. I said, "Did you go to the airport to say goodbye to him the day he left for the island?" She said, "No, I usually do go, but that day he asked me not to." I asked, "Did he say why?" She paused for a moment and then said, "Yes, he said that he was nauseous and might throw up at the airport. He did not want me to see him in that state." I said, "And when we were at the island, do you know if he received suspicious phone calls on his cell?" Gorgam said, "He does not have a cellphone." But I remembered that he had a cellphone at the interrogation.

That day, after Boraz' interrogation, I told my colleague, "It's Boraz. And the girl is probably his partner." My colleague said, "But why did she take her dog to the scene?" I said, "Maybe to help her enter the victim's apartment. Maybe she would say that her dog was ill and ask for help or something, and get inside that way."

My colleague said, "So what was their intention?" I said, "This will easily become clear later. What needs to be figured out now is my cigarette." I took out a Pall Mall and he lit it for me. "Just as simple as that," I said.

**Nineteen:**

## Ears and Bells

After the interrogation, I got home exhausted and burnt out. Not sure why, but I had the image of our friend Shahin swirling in my head. Last year, he burnt to death in front of twenty cameras. Which happened because someone spread a rumour that he worshipped idols. I remember that whenever he would come over for breakfast, he would wear a black necktie with red dots on it, and every time he would say: I was in the slammer last night. At the breakfast table he often had dry blood around his mouth, and a shiner. I remember whenever Mardook asked him why, he said, "They planted an eggplant under my eye, it will grow by next year hopefully." When they buried him, Mardook and I planted an eggplant on his grave to mark it, since they did not allow us to get him a gravestone. I spent a few hours thinking these thoughts, and just as the sun was right in the very middle of the sky the phone rang. It was Setareh Gallery. They told me that the big painting had been sold, one of those 30 million Rial ones. I asked who bought it and they told me the name of some family. I felt relieved, and went to the terrace for a smoke. All of a sudden I saw a girl with a very familiar face. She was bathed in sweat and moving quickly, with her scarf falling off her head. She had a pair of bells dangling from her ears. As she passed the trash bags, she threw a bunch of red roses in the bin. I flicked the cigarette butt right next to the flowers. At that very moment, a white poodle dog jumped up, grabbed the bunch of flowers, and ran toward the girl who was now quite a distance away. The girl was ignoring the dog as it caught up to her with the bouquet. As I turned my head, I heard a gunshot and two or three screams. I craned my neck and peered at the end of the street, but everything looked calm. Suddenly the doorbell rang, and I opened the door in fear. It was Mardook and he had a nosebleed.

**Twenty:**  
Shut up  
Ketch Up<sup>5</sup>

Detective Yasser was really getting on my nerves. His attitude was getting me addicted to hookah.

I would go out in the morning with a friend and smoke hookah until my nose bled. At that time, we could smoke hookah everywhere, it only was later that the Ministry of Hygiene had closed down the hookah places with the help of security forces.

My psychological balance was disturbed. I had nightmares every night. I dreamt that they would strip and lash me. My mother and detective Yasser were always standing in the corner and the lashes were rhythmic blows to my back. I could not see who was torturing me but I somehow felt it was I myself. Blood would cover my tattoo and I'd scream. Then the guy would say, "Shut up!" and my mom and detective Yasser would enthusiastically respond, "Ketch up!" On account of these pointless dreams my days were devastating and the threatening text messages I'd send to detective Yasser were mocked by my own mother. Once I wrote to him, "I am behind you." Another time, "Bastard, look out for the motorbikes." My mom would repeat these and laugh. Once, when she got back from work, she told me to "stop acting like a child" and we had an argument. She said, "You just piss him off by doing this." "He won't get pissed off this way," I said, adding "he's one of those people who would resign within a week and open a grocery store. Neither his job nor anything else ever piss him off. Only you are important to him. And the games on the football field." The argument heated up, and my mom said, "You're sick, he's much older than you." I said, "What is it? He hasn't called you for a week and you're feeling blue?" Under my breath, I called her a bitch, and she suddenly felt dizzy and fell to the carpet. I sat beside her and smoked hookah until she regained consciousness.

**Twenty one:**  
Torch of Flowers

I said, "It was for her sake that I shaved my beard and combed my moustache, and now see how she treats me. That was from her son."

My colleague said, "Well, she doesn't know your situation. Anyway, don't put your heart into this, the girl hasn't opened her mouth yet. Who knows, maybe it was them all along."

I said, "But you said you had enough evidence on the girl and that you'll make her talk."

My colleague said, "Well her record is clear." I said, "But what about the Olympic torch? Didn't she say she wanted to steal it with her friends?"

My colleague said, "That was just a silly scheme with her classmates, besides she was only 16 back then. The torch did not pass through here after all, don't you remember?"

I said, "Well in any case that mark is a dog bite, and being seen in the apartment would mark her as guilty. Why did she run from us after all? Even when we shot at her she didn't stop."

In the middle of this argument, a soldier opened the door holding a dog in his arms with a bunch of flowers clamped in its jaws. The soldier reported, "Sir, we found this ten minutes ago by the Sepah Square fountains, but did not manage to get these flowers out of its mouth. We immediately called the medical team, and they anesthetized the dog and we still barely got the stems out from between its jaws. Attached to the stems was a card, half soaked in dog spit, the only part we could read said 'love'."

I took the bunch of flowers to the interrogation room and threw it in front of the girl. They'd put a black gag over her mouth and she had a black eye. I said, "Do you expect her to talk with her mouth closed?" My colleague said, "We were conducting a technical interrogation on her." When they took off the gag I said, "Your poor dog confessed to everything." When the girl saw the flowers and heard what I said, she suddenly mumbled "Brz" and quickly swallowed the card.

Shortly after, I remember holding the card in my hand, and this is when the secret was revealed. For the second half had Boraz' handwriting, and it read: "Love, Boraz."

## Twenty two:

Transcript of the interrogation with the girl

- What is your relationship with Boraz?
- We had a love affair.
- When did this affair start?
- When I rode the bus with my dog.
- How? Tell me more.
- That night I was his last passenger, and he asked me if I felt like going to Shomal, and I said yes.
- How did you get to Shomal?
- From Chalous road.
- With what?
- With the transportation company's bus.
- Did you have a flat tire that night?
- No, he had recently changed the flat tire.
- You were seen walking up the stairs the day of the murders.
- I did not kill them.
- But they were alive before you entered the apartment.
- No, my dog was sick and I went to ask for help.
- What was wrong with the dog?
- She was pregnant and I thought it was time. But when I got to there, blood was running out from underneath the one door, and the other was half open.
- You didn't enter?
- I did, because my dog suddenly jumped inside the house and I followed her.
- And bit the elbow of the old woman?
- I don't know what was wrong with her, but she was nervous.
- Who opened the front door?
- Mrs. Gorgam.
- Why didn't you use the elevator?
- Because I panicked, and besides didn't want the puppies to be born inside an elevator.
- Then what did you do?
- I shut the door and went to the top floor.
- Then?
- She did me a favour and called a cab to the vet.
- Did you tell her about the bodies?
- I don't remember. I was distracted by the dog.
- But Gorgam says she doesn't know you.
- Well, I found out later who she is, I mean Boraz told me.
- What happened after the puppies were born? Why didn't you call the police?
- Because I told Boraz about it and he said it's better if the police don't find out about it, because it would cause trouble and all, and the police find out about these things pretty quickly anyways.

- Are you still involved with Boraz?
- No.
- Why?
- Because of the smell of his sweat. Also, his mouth always smelled like pastrami. He still does want to be with me though.
- Did Mrs. Boraz ever find out about your relationship?
- No.
- When did you end your relationship with Boraz?
- When Gorgam was coming to Kish, I took my dog and came back.
- Did you ever tell Boraz that maybe Gorgam committed these murders?
- Yes. In fact we had an argument over this. He said it couldn't be and I believed it the whole time. Boraz has never lied in his life.
- The interrogator laughs and then continues.
- You have to help us bring him over here.
- What do you have to do with him?
- Apparently one of you is lying.
- About what?
- About what happened that morning.
- You probably beat him up so he decided to mess with you. You cops do anything for a promotion.
- Now cut the crap. The smartest thing for you to do is to help us arrest him.

"What is a wise thing to do  
I shouted like a youngster  
Nothing much, at least it seems like it.  
Even when I follow my dog while walking  
Friend  
Maybe we have tried too much  
To be remembered"  
Poem by Ted Kooser and Jim Harrison

### Twenty Three:

#### Electrodes and Electrons

It was almost a week since Yasser had last called me. What was the reason? Was it related to that shot that was heard all over the city?

What if he's been killed? The papers would have mentioned it. He disappeared after the shot, after the flowers fell into the trash bin. I have to call him myself.

As I reached for the phone it rang. It was Boraz, calling from the island. He was chewing gum, and was noticeably nervous. He said, he wanted to stay with us for a couple of days. Apparently on some mission. But what kind of mission? A mission on a weekend?

I told him that after the sound of the bullet, detective Yasser had disappeared. He asked me about the girl and the flowers, and I told him about the white dog and the stylish bells dangling from her ears. He blew his bubble gum until it popped and hung up. All of this spread anxiety all around the house. I could not get myself to do anything. I prepared two canvases and left the flowers half finished. Mardook did not leave his room. We did not talk to each other and this increased my stress and loneliness. Sitting in his room, his beard was getting longer by the day, and Christmas was approaching. Every year, he grew his black beard to play the role of an oriental Santa. Much like his father, the boy is really persistent. I remember he spent two years on the book he eventually published. "Electrodes and Electrons." When the university press paid him his fee he bought me some Narcissuses.

Well I was angry with him. He was the only reminder of my husband I had left, and I did not want him addicted to hookah. Plus he'd insulted me. Still, I went to his door with a smile, knowing he would cheer up. He always used to say, "There are two things that make me happy; your smile and the snow." One winter he even told me, "Now that it hasn't snowed, smile". And I smiled and the snow began to fall.

One way or another I had to go patch things up. Especially since Boraz was coming from the island and it was not good for him to see us in such distress. Now that detective Yasser had vanished, he trusted me.

I put a flower in my hair in case he ignored me, so I could quickly whip it out and he would smile, and we would be friends again.

So I put on a smile, and moved toward his door, when suddenly I heard something break inside the room and he shouted.

### Twenty Four:

#### Sad Warriors

My heart broke when I realized my mother thinks more of her bastard lover than her own son. I lost my temper for a moment and broke the hookah in my hand.

As I shouted, my mother opened the door and saw my bloody hands, and asked me what had happened.

She panicked and couldn't see that a toilet paper roll was rolling across the room behind her, and was already spread all the way down the hall. I felt even the toilet roll was worried about me.

My mother cleared the pieces of broken glass and told me she loved me, like a snowy country road, like the old days, like the narcissuses I had bought her.

She said she was so angry about the way the detective behaved, and did not want us to live in this house anymore. She wanted us to move downstairs.

Lying in each other's arms we cried and cried, and like two sad old warriors, we put our heads on each other's shoulders. Then she said, "Uncle Boraz is coming, let's go and pick him up from the airport, go and shave that beard off, it's not nice to go to the airport like that. I said, "You go by yourself, I'm keeping my beard for Christmas". My mother said, "OK I will go, but at least trim it up a bit, and if you feel like it, take our stuff downstairs. Can anyone imagine what's happened to us in this house." That night, when uncle Boraz arrived from the airport with mom, for a moment he did not recognize me. Then he kissed my face and said, "What's this beard doing here. Haza sorojon mozih va kavakebon monir."<sup>6</sup> Then he put his hand in his pocket and gave me a pack of foreign Smarties. I said, "I'll keep these to give to children on Christmas Eve." My mother said, "He wants to do an impression of Santa with his black beard again." Uncle Boraz said, "This way you'll present a nicer image of Islam." Together they felt proud of me and laughed. Then Boraz and my mom went to her room to discuss everything in private. When they came out I saw that my mom had a pair of bells on her ears. She said, "Uncle Boraz brought me these, now I won't get lost." The three of us laughed until our eyes filled with tears and my mom said, "I think I should go prepare dinner." Just then, her mobile phone rang. When she came out I asked, "Was it that bastard?" and my mother said to uncle Boraz, "He says he wants to see me, and I said I'm not in town." Uncle Boraz went deep into thought.

At the dinner table, we turned out the lights and lit the candles, and my mom said, "In memory of your father." But I realized that she was lying and my heart broke again.



## Twenty Five:

Red Heart, Bloody Flower

I felt dizzy when my colleague said good morning and claimed that, this time, he had strong evidence against Mrs. Gorgam.

As it was, when my colleague went to Nowshahr, he saw one of Mrs. Gorgam's paintings on his cousin's wall. He borrowed the work for one day and the result of his examinations showed that the painting was done with Pantell colors but was mixed with the blood of the third floor victim, along with saliva and urine. Now she was proven guilty. I cringed, and became quite nervous. My colleague asked, "You feel sorry for her don't you?" I did not answer and asked, "So what happened to the blood on the floor of the bus?" He said, "They probably transferred the bodies somewhere else and extracted the blood."

I realized this was the reason for the syringe that was lying next to the narcissuses. I asked, "But why would they need to take the bodies somewhere else, the last three only made it as far as the front door: Did the dog really bite the old woman? And was that even related to what happened that morning? Or is the girl lying?" My colleague said, "Why would she lie, now that we've found out about everything?" I said, "Well for her dog not to get sentenced. Or maybe she teamed up with Boraz to lead us astray. Do you think you can drag Boraz here?" He replied, "Not yet. Today, when the girl went to meet him, he did not show up and his phone was off."

We decided to arrest Mrs. Gorgam.

That night as I headed to her place, I decided to tell her what had happened, and I knew that even if she was really convicted, I wanted to save her. She was not inherently bad, and I couldn't believe that she could have actually murdered someone. How could someone who stared for hours at the sea and spoke such poetry kill anyone? Besides, they were all from a religious household.

I called her a block before reaching her house, and when I heard her voice after eight days, tears filled my eyes. I said, "I want to talk to you." She said, "I'm out of town."

I rang the doorbell in the hope of seeing Mardook but he wasn't there either:

The apartment was all dark; like a haunted house.

I was happy Gorgam had managed to escape, but sad that I might not see her again. Just then my colleague called me and said, "To prepare for the arrest we'll keep the house under surveillance, and you'd better turn off your cell, maybe they have tracking devices, they're a real bunch of bastards." I agreed and turned my phone off, but my heart was still light.

"I assume

My heart had never been as warm and red

I feel

In the worse moments of this deadening night

In my heart thousands of sun springs

Boil from certainty"<sup>7</sup>

## Twenty Six:

Autumnal Christmas

On Christmas afternoon, the wind began to blow. Leaves were floating in the air and falling to the ground.

I asked Mardook, "Where do you want to go in this wind?" He did not answer my question and said, "The Smarties will make children very happy this year." The Santa outfit went really well with Mardook's thick beard. I asked him to use the back door. I said, "It's better this way. I'm afraid detective Yasser may be lurking, even though I told him we're not home. On your way back, pick up a pack of Pall Malls."

When Boraz woke up from his afternoon nap the streetlights had just been turned on, but the inside of the house was dark. When I looked out the window again I saw some Arabs hanging out by the door. I asked, "Boraz who are these guys? They've been here for a while now," and he said, "Oh, why didn't you wake me up? These are my friends. They came from Kish. I think they rang the upstairs doorbell and no one was there." I said, "They could have called your cell," but he said, "My cell is off, now open the door and let them in."

I said, "Call them and tell them to use the back door, I'm afraid Yasser is somewhere out there."

Before they came up, Boraz said, "Why don't you want to talk to Yasser? These guys don't have anything to do with you. Go meet him somewhere. If he asks about me, tell him you don't know anything." I said, "Are you kidding me? You think nothing's been going on this week? You think there's no reason he hasn't called me?" My heart started beating fast again, a beating that gained strength with the memory of recent months.

Around 11 the food was ready and we started eating. Mardook wasn't back yet. I told Boraz, "Can you get a cigarette from your friends?" and smoked the cigarette in one go while looking at the clock. It was now midnight and Mardook wasn't back yet. I told Boraz, "Mardook is late" and he said: "maybe he's visiting that friend." I said, "No they aren't friends anymore." He said, "Maybe since it's a celebration they've reconciled." I said, "No way, I know what Mardook is like. He's forgiving but he will never get over the joke on his holiness Ali. He said his friend's joke was unforgivable, and besides, he never reconciles with anyone just hanging out on the street, he has his principles."

Boraz asked what his had friend done when my cellphone rang and it was Yasser, saying, "Mardook is with us."

## Twenty Seven:

The Conversation between Mardook and Detective Yasser

- It's all over Mardook.
  - Oh, really?
  - Your mom doesn't want me anymore.
  - I wonder why.
  - She hasn't called me in a week.
  - You didn't call her either.
  - In one of her paintings we found the blood of one of the victims.
  - This is a set-up.
  - I can't believe it either... Mardook, I know I bothered you a lot.
  - I will never forgive you for your insults.
  - I have no control. I'm a soldier.
  - That's got nothing to do with it. I'm a welder.
  - Then what were you doing in Palestine if you're a welder?
  - Do you want to make me talk?
  - No really, what did you do in Palestine?
  - I exercised.
  - You went for an exercise?
  - My uncle raised me, lying is not in our blood.
  - Your uncle has told you not to say a thing. There isn't a straight bone in his body.
  - There is only one path in this world and that is the way of the truth.
  - If you don't say what you've been up to in Palestine I will give you a lashing.
  - I know it's easy for you to do. After all I'm only 22.
  - I want to know the truth. I want to help you. I don't have anyone beside your mom.
  - Well, I just took some boxes down there. White boxes.
  - To your apartment?
  - Yes.
  - What was inside them?
  - First aid.
  - You're lying, why would they hide first aid?
  - I don't know, I never opened them.
  - I know you too well to believe that.
  - I know you too.
  - Then it's better you don't play around; if you don't tell me I cannot help you.
  - What can you do? You're just a man in love.
  - I swear to the sun that I can save you.
  - Hah, why to the sun?
  - I don't know, maybe in your job the sun is a poetic affair.
  - That is correct, actually.
  - Then tell me what's in those boxes.
  - What will happen if I do?
- I just want to know that your mother is not guilty.
  - With that pale skin of hers, how can she be guilty?
  - You should be ashamed of yourself.
  - Why.
  - Nothing. What was in those boxes? Ammunition? Weapons? Bombs? Tell me what was in those boxes Mardook.
  - Blood, bags of blood. That's all.
  - I see, from whom did you get the boxes.
  - Uncle Boraz.
  - Where did you get them from?
  - From our house, they were under the dining table.
  - How did you get them out of the house?
  - From the back door we throw them on the highway, and deliver the white boxes to the airport.
  - How much do you get?
  - Do you get paid when you pray?
  - Don't play around, I said do you get paid or not?
  - Uncle Boraz sometimes gives me pocket money. Because he likes me.
  - The last time was when you flew to Palestine, right?
  - Yes. But we had already sent the shipment. Before you went to the island with my mom.
  - I love your mother.
  - She loves you too.
  - How can I know?
  - Call her. She's worried about us.

## Twenty Eight:

### I Turn the Lights On

I climbed a big Christmas tree and started giving out Smarties to children. They had gathered all around the tree saying, "Throw some, throw some!"

Suddenly from the corner of my eye I saw detective Yasser, buying a pack of Pall Malls from the kiosk opposite the tree. When he approached the tree I froze, as if I were part of the decorations.

But the children didn't know him and kept repeating, "Throw some more, throw some more!" The detective looked down at the kids, then up at me, and said, "Sir, come down from that tree, it's about to break." I climbed down, trying to face the tree, but the detective was still standing there, and our eyes met for a moment. "Well, well, well," he said, "Mr. Mardook the welder." The children didn't say anything and went on to another Santa.

It was around 9:30 pm and the streets were filled with honking and traffic.

The detective said, "Let's use the public bus," and I said, "Where to?" He said, "To my house, hurry up," but I said, "let's save that for another time, I have to go home." So he said, "Oh yeah, then we can go together." I said, "No, we have guests," and he asked me who, so I said, "Uncle Boraz." He said, "I know him and he knows me," but I said, "Then let's go to your house." As we sat on the bus, we talked football, but I was just playing along.

When we got to his place I wanted to turn the lights on, when he said, "I will turn the lights on myself, that's not the switch." Then he pulled up a chair beneath the chandelier and tied me to it with a pink thread, and started bombarding me with questions. His tone had turned scary. He threatened to whip me and it reminded me of my nightmares. I was totally freaked out and couldn't talk, no matter how hard I tried.

It was a heavy atmosphere and a distressing situation. The detective finally called my mother when I asked him to.

That was when I realized that he was passionately in love with my mother, since his eyes filled with tears a few times. But he hated me. As if my mother belonged to him from the start, and I was some bastard intruding in his life.

He told my mother, "We have Mardook." They arranged to meet the next day at our house. On the phone he started saying that, "We will escape together," and that he will sort things out and so on.

Apparently my mother agreed, since the last thing detective Yasser said was, "Don't worry I will see her tomorrow."

Then he hung up, untied me and we talked more football. Later that night, he handcuffed me to his king size bed and we fell asleep.

## Twenty Nine:

### Last Chapter

We woke up at around eleven in the morning and headed toward Gorgam's. There were many unresolved issues; the blood at the bottom of the bus, the blood in the paintings, Boraz' affair with the girl, and the question of whether my colleagues had now hooked up with the girl themselves, and were both lying. Actually I hadn't figured out anything yet, and had no clue how to save Gorgam. But it was possible somehow. Boraz was a dangerous individual and looked like a KGB agent, at least from a distance, but in my eyes, and in those of many others including himself, he was a man of God. I told myself to follow my heart. As we got closer to the house, I saw three garbage bags outside the door; I kicked them and they were filled with grass. Grass the landscaper had recently mowed. Suddenly I noticed a special police vehicle, with no one inside.

When we got to the fourth floor on the elevator, it was exactly half past eleven.

Mardook opened the door, and as we entered I saw there was nothing left in the house. Only the boy's bed, a bookshelf and a television set that was turned off. I didn't ask any questions but I was disappointed. I was expecting Gorgam's kind and poetic smile. Mardook said, "Call and say we arrived" and when I called Gorgam her voice came from right outside the door. She immediately said she wanted to see Mardook, and I said, "Come inside now." She said, "No, first tell Mardook to come stand by the door." I told Mardook to go to the door and followed him there.

I said, "Is it that we cannot trust love in this world?" She said, "Yes, but first I need to make sure that you love me enough not to do anything to my son." When we got to the door, I opened the door just a crack so she could see him, but suddenly a furry hand dragged him out and quickly locked me inside.

From the peep hole I saw they were going to the roof. Boraz, Gorgam and Mardook. Without hesitation, I shot at the door lock and ran after them. But they quickly hopped on a red helicopter and flew into the Christmas Day sky. Disappointed, I went back to the house. The sound of the helicopter was so loud that I thought there were tens of helicopters up there. Interestingly, I was right. Black police helicopters had surrounded them in mid air. Down in the street, people were standing around staring, it was really busy down there.

Suddenly I saw white smoke rise from their helicopter, and realized it was crashing. The helicopter tried to reach the rooftop, but instead it hit the apartment window and crashed into the room, to then explode by the bookshelf. The three passengers were burning in the flames, and the bookshelf had fallen and was burning too. But suddenly I saw a door open behind the bookshelf. One could hear the sound of people's footsteps in the stairway. Suddenly I heard the noon prayer echo through the air, bestowing a special kind of glamour on the whole situation. I testify that Ali is the vice regent of God. People still hadn't reached the apartment, so I grabbed my clothes and exited through the back door.

I pulled into the freeway and drove toward the airport.

The end.

1. English in the original.
2. Shamooshak and Sepahan are two provincial teams in the Iranian football league
3. There are two types of gold coins in the Iranian gold market; Old design (Tarhe Ghadim) and New design (Tarhe Jadid) . One is from the Pahlavi era and the other from the current government bearing the picture of Imam Khomeini. The newer coins are cheaper than the older ones.
4. Morteza Avini was an Iranian war documentarist who died in the Iran-Iraq war.
5. English in the original
6. "These are bright lights and glittering stars." Arabic in the original.
7. Poem by Ahmad Shamlou

## Writer's biography:

### VAHID SHARIFIAN

Vahid Sharifian was born in 1982 in Isfahan, Iran. He is a visual artist and a writer, receiving a B.A in painting from the University of Tehran where he is still based. His artwork has been featured in numerous exhibitions; ICA London, Ropac Gallery Paris, Den frie Centre of Contemporary Art Copenhagen, Kunstraum Deutsch Bank Salzburg, Galleria Il Gabbiano Rome, Khastoo Gallery LA, Chelsea Art Museum New York. He is also the author of *Funeral* (screenplay), *The Line of Pines* and *the White Cat* (poetry), *The Second Son of Mary* (poetry), and *Songs of Black Tulips* (poetry). He currently lives in Tehran, Iran.

# Colophon

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