



# Forget-Me-Not

A story from West Armenia 1915

# Forget-Me-Not

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## Author's foreword

People are asking me why I wrote a story from a country that is so far from the Czech Republic and what I have with Armenia in common.

The simple and short answer would be "I do not know, it just came that way." But maybe I have some explanation:

In the 1980s, when I was studying, I was writing with a girl from Armenia for a while. She has never come to Czechoslovakia and I never went on a trip to Armenia. For both of them it was impossible at the time. Thanks to her, I read something about Armenia and considered an unrealistic excursion to the beauty of the Caucasus country.

Then someday in 1988 an earthquake came to Armenia, and the girl stopped answering my letters, and I fainted with the fact that it was one of the great victims of the earthquake. And I've forgotten about Armenia for a long time.

But a couple of few years ago, I woke up one morning and realized that the story of this book came after me. I did not know much details, but it was all done. As if my heroine came to me and told me to him.

For some time I've been looking for what it is, where it could have happened-it did not fit me into anything I wrote, did, read. But after a bit of searching, according to reality, I inferred that it was Armenia and the beginning of the twentieth century. It sounds a little fantastically, I admit, but that's how it was.

So I started reading and searching for details. I came to see that the story of my "my" heroine Narine was not that special at all. And in many mentions I found similar, some more intertwined, others less. They all had the same horror of the situation. The Central European, who is well-acquainted with the Shoah in WW2, may think that he will not catch

anything. But what happened in Armenia in 1915 made me surprised and surpassed the most terrible visions.

From these staged stories I took a variety of details. Narine's story is largely a historical pasticcio; is composed of a series of real events and stories of girls like Narine. The strongest and greatest inspiration from them was the narration of Aurora Mardigian. It almost seemed to tell me that night.

I reread the stories and renamed the historical figures in the book and committed some small geographical literary license. The real stories are mostly episodic, fragmentary, intricate, full of many details, leaking and difficult to read for today's reader or viewer. Detachment from specific historical people allowed me to write narratives more compact, denser and faster with a clear dramatic line - not purely documentary. Still, the stories described in it are real and historical, indeed they became real people in West Armenia in the spring of 1915.

Because people, after reading, asked me if there were so terrible things there, I have to answer. Yes. The stories in this book have happened. Even worse I could not write.

And one more note to the end:

I wrote this story in parallel in two forms - as a literary novel and as a film script. From the first sentences, I have a clear vision that the book should come out not only in the Czech version and the book is about to create a movie. So I'm looking for publishers in the United States or other countries. And I'm even looking for patrons and investors to help me realize the vision of the film story. Maybe you can help me in this search.

*Tomas Houska, april 2016*

## 1 Sunrise in the Mountains.

A flock of sheep was lazily moving along a wide hillside like white tufts. Aramig did not pay much attention to it. He stared down from a gradual but majestic hill. All he could see around him were mountains. Beautiful green slopes, ravines and forests. Far in the East he could discern the greyish horizon shivering in the hot air. Aramig's gaze wandered slowly across the countryside.

In the North the mountains descend into a broad plain that runs to the city of Musch and far beyond towards the horizon where it rose into more hills.

He loved the view. It was this freedom that made him do something seemingly foolish – he abandoned grand plans in favour of sheep herding on the slopes above the smallish city. He did it for the peace, slow rhythm, wonderful air and endless freedom – and these mornings.

Bleating of sheep sprawling along the hillside. Tinkling of bells. Aromatic scent of grass from which the sun has not yet pulled all the water of the morning dew, the moist warm gusts of wind which is not hot yet and make a nice transition between cold nights and sunny days. Sitting on a small rock on the hilltop, he let the sheep graze down on the slope and enjoyed the moment when the sun jumps over the horizon and brightens the whole land with golden rays.

“Pity you don't want to come, I would like to see you there,” Narine said in an attempt to convince Aramig. She sat right next to him. A small girl staring into the distance and setting her face to the first rays of the sun.

“That stooge Ismet is going to be there too, right?” Aramig was assuring himself.

“You are wronging him.” She was angry with him. “He is a very kind and nice boy. He knows how to behave.”

Aramig laughed. “One day he is going to have a good career, just like his father.”

Narine frowned. She did not understand why Aramig did not like him. “You do not want to achieve anything great in your life?”

Aramig shrugged his shoulders. “I am never going to be a trader like my uncle,” he observed the mountains. “I prefer to be here and feel like I am half way between earth and heaven.”

“I wish I could achieve something in my life! Something that would make my husband respect me.” Narine was daydreaming.

“Ismet?” She sensed a faint sarcasm in his voice.

“Maybe,” she admitted.

Aramig just shook his head.

“When you come back I will celebrate it with you, whether you are a famous opera singer and a wife of a great Bey or just my little sister Narine,” he smiled at her to dissipate the conflict brewing around Ismet’s presence at the celebration. “Don’t worry, I will also come on Tuesday.”

“To play chess? You have started a beautiful tradition,” Narine smiled.

The breeze carried the voice of a muezzin. It drew them from the reverie and made them look into the valley.

Down under them the city of Musch shuddered in the lee of the mountains. Roofs and narrow streets. A cathedral. Sunrays dancing on the cupola of a minaret. The muezzin could be heard again. Aramig sadly sighed. The time of morning dreaming was over and he would have to go down.

His eyes quickly darted over the city and to the opposite slope where the first glimpse of sunlight danced on dun-colored stones of the Haspet castle ruins. The castle was built in the ancient times by king Orontes to protect the city of Musch from Alexander.

It is time to go back to town he thought to himself. He stood up and walked a few steps down the slope towards his flock. He hit the ground a couple of times with his staff and then he held it in a vertical position as a sign for his sheep. The flock gradually started to register the daily repeated instruction and slowly headed down towards the road. The girl was watching him intently and she understood that they were going home.

Aramig winked at Narine who stood up and at a leisurely pace followed the shepherd dog that deliberately directed the flock down the slope. He paused for the last time and surveyed the town's rooftops. There was no need to hurry, the flock lazily drew together and started to move towards the road. He would be able to catch up to it easily. But he still enjoyed the view.

The rising sun radiated upon the white houses and the shining roof of the church floated above them. It was a nice view, he thought to himself as he calmly followed the swaying herd.

## 2 Narine Was Carelessly Returning Down the Street

A group of Azarians' Turkish neighbours sat on the porch at the house and when Narine amicably shouted "Iyi gynler!" they casually waved and answered in the same, friendly tone "Gunaydin Bayan!" But they did not think so seriously. As soon as Narine crossed, their faces froze again, and the pupils withdrew to a narrow cliff. Above them, she knocked on the window shutter as someone closed the window.

The Azarian family house looked a bit unapproachable from the outside, but it was comfortable inside and it was decorated with the exquisite taste of Narine's mother, Mrs. Azarian.

3 The garden had a gate of white stone because Mrs. Azarian was convinced that the main gate must represent the family well. And the door was often open as a sign of the Azarians' hospitality.

#### 4 It Was Busy in the Azarian House

The hall was lined with soft and comfortable divans with a variety of spread clothes. Elegantly dressed ladies sat here – and between them the dominating Mrs. Azarian.

The floor in the hall and in the rooms was covered with beautiful, mostly Persian, carpets; the walls were decorated with amazing hand woven tapestries. Mrs. Azarian took great care to make sure her house was just as luxurious as the rich oriental houses of the Turks, but everything was also perfectly balanced, there wasn't too much of anything and the various items matched their style and colours into one harmonious whole.

An icon of Madonna stood on the stone ledge in front of the room. This icon has been handed down for generations in the Azarian family. It came from Byzantium and one of the Azarian ancestors brought it from there when the great city succumbed to the frenzy of iconoclasm. This way, he saved it. Now it decorated the hall as a proof of the family's centuries old tradition.

Mrs. Azarian dreamed that when her children grew up and will have their own offsprings, they will all be meeting here several times per year and enjoy the atmosphere together. And of course, she loved these salon

meetings with her friends where they planned various, mostly cultural, events together.

"I would not start with the theatre, it should be at the very end." One of the ladies argued with the others.

"But, will people be able to still concentrate?" another one replied.

Mother sighed, "Aramig makes uncle worried."

"In the beginning, I would have given the singing choir and would like to have a short song, both Kurdish and Turkish, to say that this city is for everyone." Mrs. Azarian explained her idea.

"Will anyone write it?" She asked the first of the women questions, one of the participants signed up. "I'll write it, I'll make a program."

"And make a poster with a program hanging out on the door." Mrs. Azarian continued.

"Trilingual!" She was an enthusiastic lady she'd written.

When Narine came in, she was surprised by the crunch and the rush that was going on here. Narina's mother organized a meeting of a group of local Armenian women. Narine knew it already, as more and more festivals approached, the mother and the girlfriend organized various events - such as a charity bazaar, children's performance at school, and so on.

When Mother had noticed that Narine had come in, she wondered, "I thought you'd been a long time, but I did not want to wake you up on Sunday."

Narine smiled. "I was here behind Aramig, and I wanted to get him back to lunch at Easter."

"...and?" The mother was curious about the result.

Narine shook her head. "He bothers him ... but I'll tell you then." She stopped because she did not want to admit to those foreign women what kind of dispute they had with Aramig.

Narine nodded and walked through the hall. She left mother to her business of organising the charitable bazaar. "I'm going to get dressed for church."

Her mother jumped up and looked at the great clock between the windows. "Good Lord, it's late!"

## 5 The Cathedral in Mush

Was one of the oldest Christian churches in the world and was also the largest cathedral in West Armenia. It stood at the outskirts of the city on a small hill and its brightly shining roofs were visible from afar. The citizens of Mush were proud of it and crowds of people filled it each Sunday coming to worship.

## 6 The Nave Was Filled With Singing Worship

The air smelled of resin incense and rays of sun entering through the windows painted sharp light tongues in the dome's misty atmosphere.

Father Hagopian led the Sunday service in the cathedral.

Behind the altar was a small mystical door to the oldest part of the cathedral - a chapel with the tomb of John the Baptist built in the fourth century. Its antiquity was evident from the shape and austerity of the entrance portal decoration. The cathedral standing in the Karapet complex was the biggest and most beautiful in the whole of Western Armenia.

The walls shone with colours and frescoes and Narine felt like today's sermon was special, even though the real festive worship would be next week during the Feast of Resurrection. But perhaps it was because she

knew she was going to travel to Vienna and who knew how many years she would not see her home town.

### *Makar Yekmalian Les Chants de La Liturgie Armenienne*

#### 7 Father's Office Smelled of Tobacco

Aram's fingers carefully followed columns in one row. He tried to understand the numbers.

"And is it important to note it down this way?" he tried to resist his father, "it looks like a lot of work."

"It gives you feedback about your costs. And about what you need when you have to calculate which transaction is going to pay off and which not."

"And why do I have to know this? It's the accountant who keeps the books."

"But you must be able to understand them. The accountant will write numbers in the books, but you are going to manage our whole business one day and you have to know what these numbers mean. And you have to be able to see from these numbers, where our business is heading. You have to stay ahead, so nothing may surprise you."

Aram sighed sadly.

#### 8 Tones of Bach Sounded through the Salon

Narine played piano and sang aria „Hört, ihr Augen, auf zu weinen". Her mother was listening devoutly and Taline sat restlessly. Obviously, she was not interested in the music at all.

Suddenly, Narine made a mistake and then another one. Then she stopped playing and stared into the notes. Then she started shouting at her sister. „What have you done here?"

Taline hardly concealed her joy.

Narine jumped from the piano and, holding the score sheets in her hand, she lunged at her younger sister. "Just because you have no talent does not mean that you may destroy my notes!" And she prepared to hit her sister.

"Girls, what are you doing!?"

"She is jealous that I can do something she cannot and I am going to achieve something in my life!"

"And whom, do you think, is interested in that?!" Taline snapped back, then turned and ran to avoid getting hit.

"Enough! Stop! " their mother shouted.

"Yes, stop it!" Taline joined in.

"Why should I stop?! Is she always going to get away with everything?"

"Just because you cannot play something does not mean that you can blame your sister!" mother tried to calm Narine down. Taline used this opportunity to taunt her sister "Cannot play! Cannot play!"

Narine added in vigour. "I make mistakes? She scribbled in my notes, look at it! " Narine showed the score sheet to her mother to convince her that her anger was justified.

9 The scene was interrupted by a creak of the gate

and all three of them looked out to the garden and towards the gate. It was the Bey, coming in with his son Ismet.

Two soldiers who formed their guard of honour remained standing in the gate.

10 All the fuss and hassle stopped as by a miracle.

Narine tried to act like a proper young lady. Only Taline continued making faces at her to make her mad again. But this time she failed.

The Bey and Ismet entered. They were beautifully and colourfully dressed. Ismet was in his officer's uniform with a sabre hanging at his side.

Ismet smiled at Narine and gallantly and very courteously gave her and her mother a bouquet. "Allow me to greet the finest Armenian lady of the Musch pashalic."

Mother was flattered and Narine could not take her eyes off Ismet.

"I'm glad you came to our house, gentlemen!" Mother welcomed them. Mother and the Bey noticed smiling, how Narine and Ismet eyed each other. "Are you coming to see my husband, Bey?"

The Bey nodded. "Yes, we need to discuss something. And Ismet is going to enjoy a cup of tea with the young gentlemen, I heard they agreed on some kind of a game."

"Of course, my husband is in the study with Aram. ... Taline, take the Bey to your father. And Narine, take Ismet to the young gentlemen in the lounge... and prepare tea. Serve it to your father and the Bey and then to the young gentlemen," mother organised the situation as best as she could.

The daughters have long forgotten their fight and obeyed, each taking one of the guests to their destinations.

"You look beautiful. As always, of course. But when I see you, I notice it more and more," Ismet sweetly flattered Narine. She simpered and it was obvious she enjoyed the attention.

"It did not occur to me that you would come to play chess with my cousins," she admitted, "are you interested in this game now?"

Ismet admitted conspiratorially. "Not at all. But it was a good excuse for seeing you. "

Narine smiled, "You should not go to chess, but in the morning with Bach?"

"I do not know him," Ismet admitted.

Narine laughed: "Composer. I'm learning to sing his aria. "

Of course, Ismet nodded, though he did not know what he was talking about.

"But you can fix it, I'll sing it on that evening party. Will you come? "

"Are you going to sing at party?" Ismet was surprised.

"You have to come," she laughed with him, opening Ismet's door to the lounge.

## 11 Narine 's Cousins Sat in the Lounge

Levon and Karen were placing figures on the chessboard. When Ismet entered with Narine by his side, they were surprised. "I would not expect you here, Ismet! Come in, welcome to the club. "

"And neither would I." Aramig just could not resist being sarcastic.

"I will bring you the tea!" Narine winked at them.

## 12 A Ray of Light Entered the Study

through the open door. Mirza Sandjak Bey stood in the doorway and smiled heartily at the father.

"Greetings, Mr. Azarian!"

The father raised his eyes from the papers and outstretched his arms. “You really surprised me, Bey! I’m glad to see you. I will ask my daughter to bring tea!”

“There is no need,” the Bey smiled. “She let me into the house and she is already preparing it!”

“That’s great, come, sit down.” Father then turned to Aram. “We studied the accounting books with Aram. I’m trying to teach him how to manage a business.”

Aram respectfully greeted the Bey. “Hello Bey!”

“Go to the young gentlemen, we are done with the accounting books for today,” father said to Aram. Aram bowed to the Bey one more time and left the room.

“That is very wise. How old is Aram anyway? The time flies so fast.” The Bey praised father for Aram’s upbringing.

“He is nineteen. It’s about time he learned it.”

The Bey nodded.

Narine entered and brought a teapot, cups and spoons on a big silver plate. Father and the Bey sat in comfortable armchairs around a small conference table and Narine poured the tea.

“Ismet was finally appointed a position in the army. He is looking forward to it. I’m a proud father of a young officer now,” the Bey boasted. And Narine carefully listened to what he said about Ismet.

“Congratulations! That is great!” father shared the Bey’s joy.

Narine Left Her Father And the Bey Alone to Discuss What Needed to be Discussed. The Bey was the city’s governor and father sat with him in comfortable armchairs. They both watched the steam rising from the teapot and discussed quite practical matters.

“I’m sure you are aware that British ships attacked our defensive positions in the straights,” the Bey started the discussion. “Our most gracious monarch will have to react to this military aggression. You know, I have not received any instructions in this matter yet, but I would expect there will be requisitions for the army soon.”

The Bey looked worried; it was obvious that the looming war worried him. It will undoubtedly make him face numerous tasks which will be difficult to execute. Finding solutions to such tasks was often both unpleasant and exhausting at the same time. Narine’s father, trader Azarian, attempted to alleviate some of the Bey’s worries.

“I thought that it would be prudent to prepare for the hard times which come hand in hand with the war. I managed to buy stocks of sugar for a very good price. I have received a message that they are stored in a warehouse in Erzurum. And I also managed to buy cotton. I bought all things possible, while they were available” father Mirza explained to Sanjak Bey.

They sat in the comfortable chairs around a low table and discussed in a friendly atmosphere. Although it was hot outside, the Azarian’s study kept a pleasant temperature. The room smelled of pipe tobacco and the stretched curtains let in a subdued light.

“You are a prudent man, Mr. Azarian,” the Bey praised him, “our government will need all these supplies. I’m sure you know that the Minister of War, Enver Pasha, distrusts Armenians. He blames you for the failure in the winter campaign at Sarikamish.”

Father was not surprised. “That is why I am talking about it.”

A smile appeared on the faces of both men. They knew each other long enough to know.

Bej lowered his voice: “I’m afraid of the news from Istanbul, you know Enver Pasha is probably in the government difficult to explain the defeats

to the east and is looking for someone to seduce," he said to the father with worrying sincerity, "I hope your measure will calm him down and understand that the Armenians in Musch are on the government side. "

Father felt his concern, "There can be no doubt about that."

"I know it," he said, "our young mens are just looking for the ultimate solution. It will be a difficult time, Mr. Azarian. "

"Do you have any specific reports?"

"I do not have. I have not recently. It worries me. "

His father smiled, "If you are a provincial governor, I'm not worried about the future."

Bey gave him a smile, "Even after the war, the son is already crazy about the big victories."

### 13 The Company of Young Men Met at the Tea in the Lounge

Ismet sat down and Aram entered soon after.

The young gentlemen wore nice European suits, which was just the right attire for an afternoon tea session like this one. Ismet was visibly proud of his new uniform which distinguished him from the others. And it must be said: the uniform looked great on him and clearly displayed his social status. The Azarians may be wealthier in terms of money, but they are just Armenians and Aram will never make a career comparable to Ismet's. Aram will never become a higher ranking officer in the Ottoman army. Ismet has been appointed into officer's rank at the start of his career, because he has been the son of the local Bey. And he wore his colourful uniform with adequate pride just like a cock wears its colourful feathers. He knew all too well it impresses both his peers and young girls.

The cousins Karen and Aram placed figures on the chessboard and made first moves while talking. Aram lit a pipe and first offered it to

Ismet. He willingly accepted it. He pulled on the pipe and quietly, thoughtfully watched the players. “Will you try it with us, Ismet?” Aram asked.

“I never played it,” Ismet admitted. “I heard it is like a small battle.”

“It takes time to learn it, it is quite a difficult game. But you will learn to combine your moves, think several steps ahead, consider various options, plan further moves. This way, you will train your judgment.” Karen encouraged him.

“Judgment?” He could not hide his disappointment. “OK... but what is that good for? I hoped it was about fighting.”

Aram followed Karen’s explanation, “For instance, when you want to build a big company, when you want to achieve something big.”

“You speak like a Jew. Why would I want to build a great company?”

“Perhaps because you might want a good income, or you want to build wealth.”

For Ismet, this was a completely different approach to the world. “If I wanted money and wealth, Allah will tell me: ‘There it is. Go and take it. And I will go and take it.’”

“Even if it is not yours?” Aram snapped back.

“But it will be mine! Because Allah will give it to me. Don't you understand that?”

Karen defended the chess. “It is not just about business. If you want to achieve something great you must know how to plan your steps. The cause and the consequence. To compare various options and to know how to make the right decision. This is very useful even in the army.”

Ismet shook his head over Aram’s explanation. “Come to think of it, this is quite a blasphemous game. Not good for good believers.” He took

the chessboard, lifted it up and toppled all the figures. They rolled on the table and some fell to the floor.

“Where are your plans now? You cannot plan and make decisions, that is for the Almighty. You are here just to do his bidding.”

“So whether you win or you lose, it is Allah’s will. Whatever you do you do not feel guilty over anything,” Aramig started to understand Ismet’s thinking, “it was just Allah’s will.”

“Of course!” Ismet wondered how can they not understand.

Aramig laughed.

Karen tried to prevent a possible conflict. “You don't have to play, I just thought you might like it.” In the meantime, Aram picked up the fallen figures and attempted to put them back into their original positions. Luckily, they played only a few turns of the game.

Narine entered with tea for the young men.

She placed the cups on the table and poured steaming tea from the teapot.

“Will you not watch their chess game?” Ismet questioned her.

Narine shook her head. “No, I’m having my German language lesson.”

“You are learning German?” Ismet did not understand, “Why would girls want to learn foreign languages?”

Karen did not pass the opportunity to provoke Ismet.

“She is going to Vienna. She will sing in the opera and will become a famous singer. She will travel. You can’t travel if you don’t know foreign languages.”

Ismet was unpleasantly surprised. He pulled on the chibouk and pondered the idea. It did not make sense to him. “If I want to go to

Vienna, we will conquer it and make them speak Turkish.” He thought about what Karen told him again. “A singer?” he stared at Narine in surprise.

“I am going to conquer Vienna with my singing.” She smiled at him. When you come there as a general or an ambassador, you will have the place of honour at my concert.” She looked him in the eyes and waited for his reaction. But Ismet was shocked. Suddenly he no longer wanted to be courteous, to encourage her and wish for her to be happy. “It will suit you more if you are the princess of the Musch pashalik.”

Narine smiled at him. And then she left the room. The young gentlemen returned to their game and discussions.

#### 14 Narine Was Lying in Her Bed Unable to Sleep

Taline was not much better. A glowing stream of soft blue moonlight flowed in through the window.

„It looks as if that star winked at me,“ she whispered.

The room melted away

#### 15 They stood high in the mountains,

the brilliant moonlight illuminated the countryside. They felt the freshening air flowing down the ridge shattering their hair springs.

And on the way down the ridge, the bright silhouette of the rider came in the silver armor.

"Prince Vardan!" Narine was shocked. They sat down on the pillows.

Vardan drove up to them. Then he bent down and gave a pomegranate without words.

The girls took apples and stared at him. And Prince Vardan turned his horse again and left without any further words. They looked behind him, wondering.

16 Narine made an explanation in the silence of the bedroom  
"Sometimes they wear magical gifts."

Taline twisted in bed and turned from the window to Narine.

The pomegranate put it on the table beside the bed. Then she stared back into the sky again and closed her eyes.

Narine watches her and also closes her eyes.

17 The Square in Front of the School

resounded with the sound of a bell. One of the teachers stood on the porch and rang so vigorously that the sound carried through the nearby streets.

Schoolgirls quickly walked to the school. They were all Armenian. Narine and her sister were among them. The girl's school was led by Miss Louis, an American who decided to spend her life helping girls in this remote part of the world.

18 A Geography Lesson

was taking place in the girls' class. A great map of Europe, the Mediterranean Sea and the Ottoman Empire was unrolled over the blackboard.

Ms. Louis was explaining: "The Ottoman Empire is like a roof under which many different nations of various cultures and languages may thrive. You can see that it is similar to Austria or Russia. In the future, all people will be able to get along and nations will disappear."

Narine raised her hand. Ms. Louis looked at her and gestured for her to speak. "Could war change it all?"

Ms. Louis thought about it and then shook her head resolutely. "No, no, this is probably impossible. Can't you see that this arrangement is logical? Anything else would not make sense. You see, the multi-national states are a guarantee of stability."

"Can the war affect us too in some way?" another girl asked worriedly.

Ms. Louis was optimistic. "I think that the war will soon be over. Today, politicians are wise people and they know that continuing the war would have horrible consequences."

"Ms. Louis, do you think that the United States will join the war?" someone asked.

"Absolutely not. The war must be ended soon. I think that diplomats are working on it even as we speak. Soon it will all end."

The girls in the class looked satisfied with the answers.

Ms. Louis did not fail to remind them of their duties. "Do not forget. Tomorrow we meet in the great room of the city hall for rehearsal. The concert is on Monday, so practice well. We do not want to fail, do we? And after the holiday we will write a test about those capital cities!" And she pointed at the map importantly with her finger.

## 19 The Square in Front of the School Sprang to Life.

A crowd of chirping and laughing girls emerged from the heavy school door into the thirsty blazing sun. Most of them just finished their lessons and that is always a reason to rejoice.

A buzzing fly flew past the, now silent, bell. Then it changed its mind and flew into the building through one of the open windows.

## 20 The Air Inside the Classroom Was Motionless Even Though the Windows Were All Wide Open

The high noon sun drew contrasting shapes on Narine's school desk.

Narine had enough today. She could no longer concentrate on the French phrases her teacher tried to explain to them. "Je ne parle pas l'anglais. Je parle le français." Much of Narine's attention was attracted by the fly buzzing around her head.

Three other girls were not much better.

„What is wrong with you“ Miss Louis interrupted her futile effort, „is it too long for you?“

Narine sighed. „Why do I have to learn French when I am going to Vienna where everyone speaks German?“

"You will need both. All the important people in Europe speak French. It is the language of the diplomats," miss Louise tried to convince her. „Just try it. I'm not speaking... Russian, I'm speaking French.“

It was clear to Narine that she will not talk her way out of this. "Je ne parle pas russe. Je parle le français," Narine exhaled annoyed.

"Excellent!" the teacher was thrilled.

## 21 The Kitchen Was Full of Scent and Clouds of Steam Were Rising from the Pots.

The mother was checking up on the cook and tasted the fruit of their joint work.

“They will be perfectly ready on Monday. We can take them out now.”

They pulled Gatha from the oven and quickly replaced it with bread.

## 22 When Narine and Taline Entered the Hall in Their Family's House,

they found an unexpected surprise. Their oldest sister Thamar was there with her husband Dirkan sitting on the divan right next to their mother.

“Thamar and Dirkam came for the holiday!”

“Wow!” Taline screamed and ran to hug her sister. Thamar stood up and Taline stopped and stared at her belly.

“Be careful!” the mother tried to suppress Taline's wild joy, but Thamar hugged her sister. “You are going to be an aunt,” she smiled. Narine watched the surprise and then hugged her sister too.

“We came for the holiday, so we could all be together,” Thamar was explaining to her sisters.

“When will it come?” Narine asked excitedly.

“In about one month,” Thamar smiled.

“And Aram already knows it?” Narine was curious.

“He does. He went to see father in his office,” mother nodded.

“Our father is torturing him with the accounting again?” Narine smiled.

“Father wants Aram to learn how to manage the company? Isn't it too early for that?” Thamar wondered.

“Father wants Aram to learn everything from the start. I think that he has a secret plan to open a branch office in Istanbul... So when it calms down ...but shhh!” mother signalled eloquently to the daughters. “Right now it is a secret.” All three girls were surprised.

“Aram is going to be thrilled!” Narine appreciated the idea. “He will go to Istanbul and will have his own office. Our father hit the bullseye with this plan.”

“It sounds beautiful ... and I do not want to spoil Aram, but would not it be better to wait a bit? I have very strange news from Istanbul. ”

“Well, maybe my father is doing more. He has always been thoughtful,” said Mother.

“And I heard that you are going to go to Vienna?” Thamar questioned her.

“They already replied to me and father agreed to pay the tuition fees. So I’m learning German now and I am going to depart after the holiday.”

“That is great, isn’t it?” Thamar shared her joy.

“It is,” Narine blushed, “I’m looking forward to it so much.”

“We will think of you proudly!” Thamar hugged her sister. “And you will have to visit us from time to time, so we can tell everyone: ‘This is our sister!’”

## 23 The Yard of the Laundry Was Busy

Workers were loading carefully wrapped packages onto readied lorries while other workers carried other parcels into the warehouse at the other side of the yard. A regular tug of machines could be heard from inside the building.

Aram walked through here often; he liked the lively buzz of his father’s business. And he really was proud of it because Mr. Azarian provided work for many people from the city and the surrounding area.

## 24 Aram Was Walking Through the Spinning Mill.

It was mostly the Armenian women who worked here. The great halls were full of them. The mill processed wool from a wide area and the father made the point to equip his spinning mill with modern technology. So it really was a quite modern factory.

Aram swiftly walked through the hall and headed to the offices. He peeked curiously into the door and greeted with the employees. "Hello!" and they replied "Hello Mr. Aram!" which sounded as if they took him for an adult man who belongs here.

## 25 He found his father in the next door

making some kind of a long list with one of his deputies.

"Good morning father. Mother told me I should be here at two."

"It's good you have come, Aram," father raised his eyes from the order. "I have a surprise for you."

"A surprise?"

The father nodded and worriedly looked at his watch. "Hopefully it will be here in time," he said caringly.

Aram glanced at him questioningly. But then he heard a weird noise from the outside. He looked out of the window and saw that a brand new luxurious car arrived at the mill's yard.

"Here it is!" father noted satisfied.

## 26 The Car Stopped in Front of the Spinning Mill

A Renault AR sign was visible on the car's hood. A serious looking man stepped from the car and looked around the mill's yard. A group of boys of various ages ran around the car and looked at it curiously. It's not

that they had never seen a car before, but it had always been only for a moment when someone important arrived at the city.

Mr. Azarian showed himself in front of the door together with Aram. The driver greeted the father with a bow.

“Precise like a watch!” Mr. Azarian praised the driver. “This is our new driver, Mr. Vahan... and this is my son Aram,” father introduced them.

“Our new driver?” Aram wondered. “You bought that car?”

“I did,” father nodded, “I haven't really told you yet, but we are going to open a representative office in Istanbul this summer. We have orders from the US, Austria... once the war is over we are going to expand to Europe and the whole world,” Mr. Azarian explained his dreams to his son. “We are going to need this car to travel between Istanbul and Musch.”

“A representative office in Istanbul?” Aram said in awe. “... and who is going to take care of it? You cannot manage the company here and trade in Istanbul at the same time.”

“You are right. It has to be someone who knows the company well. And someone who knows our business and accounting ... someone who also knows some foreign language.”

Aram shook his head. “You know someone like that?”

The driver and the father both smiled.

“Of course I do,” father said assuredly.

At first, Aram did not understand. Then he was amazed. “It's me?”

Both the father and the driver smiled more and more. Aram radiated with excitement like a light bulb. He was totally overpowered by the idea. “You think I can manage this?”

“I have absolutely no doubt, Mr. Business Director!” father patted Aram on the shoulder.

27 When Mr. Vahan brought his father and Aram to the house, Neighborts came to see the fad. They all heard about them, but Musch is far to the east, and there was no one here. Mr. Azarian may have taken it as a purely practical measure to manage his businesses more easily, but most of the locals were aware that he was pushing him up on the social rankings of the province.

Mr. Vahan stayed with the car, and his father and Aram got out of the car and walked through the door to the house.

28 Mother Narine and Taline both came to the door.

Mother was aware of the surprise, but the two girls were as surprised as the jealous crowd of idiots, who, given Mr Azarian's position, took a respectful distance.

Just a few moments after their arrival, a group of riders appeared: Ismet accompanied by a group of soldiers. Officer uniform. With his commander's role, he visibly made a good and quick comeback.

"We're glad to see you, Ismet!" His mother welcomed him.

Ismet dismounted from his horse while he helped one of the soldiers, who then took his horses.

"I'm now Ismet Bey, Lieutenant of the Sultan's Army," he said strangely, deliberately, "yesterday I got the appointment decree. And in the future everyone will have to act with due respect!" With those words, he walked in from the street.

"The officers' uniform is really nice," Narine said.

In the meantime Ismet turned to Mr. Azarian, who went to hand Ismet and welcomed him. But Ismet did not respond to this gesture, and continued the speech he had probably prepared in detail.

"I was thinking about Narine. It will be best to leave those nonsense. She will convert to Islam. I came to her as a woman," he said dryly to his father.

Father stared at first, but then he laughed as he thought it funny, "That's a funny request for a hand!"

Instead of her father, Narine replied "But Ismet, I will never convert to Islam. And I have never heard a stranger request for marriage. "

Ismet did not understand what his father was smiling at. "I did not come to ask, I came to order you as a lieutenant of the imperial army!"

"But I have not come to ask you. I came to order you!"

"You cannot order love, don 't you understand that?"

Ismet raised his voice. He was not used to anyone questioning him. "You did not understand. A Muslim woman must obey. I can order obedience."

Narine looked at him in amazement. "A Muslim woman perhaps, but not an Armenian woman."

"You will be sorry for this." He spat in answer. Then he turned to his soldiers. "Search the house! And when you are done, I want a report!" He did not even look at Narine any more, turned and marched off to his horse.

29 He turned and walked a few steps to his horse.

One of the soldiers held his stirrup. Ismet mounted and in a lordly manner rode away through the street.

### 30 The Whole Family Started to Gather in the Lounge

The afternoon sun shone through the windows and Narine played piano. This time she did not sing. She did not try to play any difficult pieces of music either. She just strummed simple, sweet melodies for herself and for the others to enjoy the moment.

Father sat on the divan and listened to her dreamily, just like everyone else. There was a knock on the door and a postman stuck his head in. Father frowned at first wondering who is disturbing the fine afternoon. "Enter!" He nodded to the newcomer.

"I wish you a very nice afternoon. And I am sorry to disturb, Mr. Azarian. But there is an important mail. It is with the stamp of the ministry." The postman entered.

Narine stopped playing and father stood up from the divan, annoyed, and took over the post. It was rolled up in a carton tube and looked strange.

The postman saluted. "Enjoy a happy and undisturbed holiday!" he wished and left.

Father, visibly annoyed, opened the envelope, opened the tube and pulled out a great document. He read it with amazement showing in his face. When he had finished reading the message, he victoriously looked around at members of his family.

"What does it say?" Narine asked curiously. Aram stood up and went to have a look over his father's shoulder. He quietly handed the paper to him. Aram carefully read the message aloud. "With pleasure and honour, on behalf of the Turkish Government, we hereby award Mr. Aram Azarian, a trader from the city of Musch, a diploma to express our recognition and gratitude for his loyal and valuable services in developing the economy of Musch and Biltis district." Aram finished reading and looked at his father with surprise.

Mother stood up and wanted to look at the message with her own eyes. “You could not have gotten a better gift this holiday. This is wonderful, Aram.” She praised her husband.

The whole family applauded the father shortly, but sincerely.

### 31 The Family Met in the Dining Hall for Dinner

It has been dark outside for a while and the dining hall was lit sparsely. Although the table was set for a simple, fasting meal, everyone understood this was a special holiday night, despite the fact that the holiday was only about to come.

Thamar and mother were lighting candles and flickering candlelight made the hall look very intimate.

Everyone looked at the father and he spoke a prayer. “Thank you Lord for all the gifts that you are giving us. We thank you for all the moments we can enjoy as a family together. And we thank you for our faith, because a man is not sustained by bread alone, but it is the word of God that makes us better and richer. Jesus Christ, our Lord, Your son, died on the cross to pay for our sins and give us an eternal life. We thank you, that we can celebrate his death and resurrection as a family together. Please, let it be so for ever. Amen.”

“Amen” all the others replied.

“Enjoy your meal!” mother wished them and everyone else replied “Thank you. You too!”

### 32 Narine’s Bedroom Window Had a Nice View.

Rooftops and beyond them bluish mountains. It was dawn.

A little bird hopped on the windowsill and sang merrily. Suddenly, there was a loud noise and the bird flew away.

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