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WHISPERS BEHIND THE BATTLE LINE A critical analysis and translation of a Persian play by Alireza Naderi

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#### **Publication Date**

2020

Peer reviewed|Thesis/dissertation

UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA

SANTA CRUZ

**WHISPERS BEHIND THE BATTLE LINE**

**A critical analysis and translation of a Persian play by Alireza Naderi**

A thesis submitted in partial satisfaction  
of the requirements for the degree of

MASTER OF ARTS

in

THEATER ARTS

by

**Peyman Shams**

March 2020

The Thesis of Peyman Shams

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## **Abstract**

### **WHISPERS BEHIND THE BATTLE LINE**

**A critical analysis and translation of a Persian play by Alireza Naderi**

**by**

**Peyman Shams**

*The Whispers behind the Battle Line*, by the prominent Iranian playwright Alireza Naderi in 1993, is one of the most important plays about the Iran–Iraq war. This highly acclaimed play which has never been translated, is valuable for English-reading scholars and artists because deals with one of the most important events in contemporary Iranian history. Also, its production history shows the relationship of theatre to the state and the process and effect of censorship in theater in Iran.

In this thesis, I explored the social and political context in which the play was written, the role of censorship in Iranian theatre-making process. I finally concluded with an assessment of the current state of Iranian dramaturgy as it pertains to this history.

## Introduction

The Iranian revolution in 1979 stopped all the cultural and artistic activities of the former regime, including theater, and set new standards for the production of art works based on the values of the Islamic Revolution. Various institutions were formed to direct artistic activities that controlled almost all of the country's artistic and cultural production before and after publication. The outbreak of war between Iran and Iraq shortly after the Islamic Revolution, led the Islamic government to further restrict artistic activities, especially about the war, under the pretext of preserving national unity against the foreign enemies. These conditions made it impossible for most artists to produce valuable artwork in the context of the Iran-Iraq War, as one of the most important events in contemporary Iranian history. However, some artists including Alireza Naderi, have attempted to create works that, unlike government-sponsored art as the Holy Defense art, portray a critical image of the war as a social phenomenon.

In 1993, Iranian playwright Alireza Naderi wrote *Whispers behind the Battle Line*. This remarkable play has never been translated. It's valuable for English-reading scholars and artists because it gives tremendous insight into Iran's political and cultural history, and its production history is more or less a map of the relationship of theatre to government in Iran for the past 40 years. In this thesis, I will explore the context in which the play was written, the contours of the war and its effect on Iranian national self-awareness, the role of censorship in Iranian theatre

writing and production, and finally will conclude with an assessment of the current state of Iranian dramaturgy as it pertains to this history.

### **Synopsis of the play**

#### **Act I**

Night. One of the soldiers, Parviz, is on guard. The rest of the soldiers are asleep. The sergeant walks out of the officers' barracks and talks to Parviz. Their conversation reveals that another soldier, Alireza, has postponed his military leave because the war has stopped temporarily and Alireza doesn't want to waste his leave in these circumstances. Parviz wants to do the same, but the sergeant warns him to leave the front whenever he can.

Shahriar enters and takes the guard from Parviz. After a while, a sudden loud sound of a stone smashing the water tanker is heard. Shahriar calls the sergeant because he thinks Iraqis are throwing stones. The sergeant and Parviz go to check the area. Alireza enters. He asks Parviz the guarding schedule and sleeps.

#### **Act II**

Next morning. The soldiers are arguing because one of them fell asleep last night during his shift so their group has been without any guard for hours. The

soldiers accuse each other. Finally it turns out that Alireza has put the guarding list under the pillow of the next guard (Baqer) and slept.

Alireza and Parviz go into the barracks. Other soldiers talk about various topics. Baqer believes that officers (the sergeant and the captain) are throwing stones at the tanker because they want to make guarding necessary. They discuss the military situation, Israeli–Palestinian conflict, their religious beliefs, the Islamic revolution, and etc. Alireza and Parviz come back. Alireza mocks them and their ideas.

The sergeant enters. He informs Parviz that his leave has been approved. Parviz goes to get ready to leave. The sergeant exits and Alireza continues mimicking others. The captain enters and gives Parviz the leaving permission document. He announces that all the military leaves, from now on, have been canceled. Alireza gets upset. Parviz takes a group picture of them before leaving.

### **Act III**

Night. Baqer and Shahriar are on guard. The sergeant enters and announces the military alert. Again there is throwing of stones. Alireza enters. He is very upset and nervous. Later we find out that he has taken drugs. He apologizes to others and talks about his fear of death. Baqer tries to calm him down. Also, Baqer reveals that Alireza is the person who throws stones. Others enter. The captain announces that the ceasefire is over and the war has resumed. Everyone except Alireza exits to get ready



for the war. Alireza, alone on the stage, kills the candle that he uses while telling a joke by moistening his fingers with his own tears.

### **Political and social context**

On February 11, 1979 the Islamic Revolution of Iran succeeded to overthrow the last monarch of Iran. Before the constitution was adopted, a referendum was held on April 1, 1979, to decide on the general form of the new state as the Islamic Republic of Iran. The different political parties had different opinions, but Ayatollah Khomeini, the leader of the Revolution, said: “What the nation wants is an Islamic republic, not just a republic, not a democracy, not a democratic republic. Do not use this term, democratic. That is the western style” (Lazgee 6).

One of the most important features of the Iranian Revolution was the lack of clarity on the structure of the post-revolution political system. None of the revolutionary people and groups had a specific plan for running the post-revolution country. The various tendencies of non-religious liberals, Marxists, and Islamic groups had different plans for the future constitution in mind as no economic and social program had been discussed before (Digard 219).

In a general, post-revolutionary political groups were divided into three groups:

1. Islamist groups that followed Ayatollah Khomeini. The Islamic Republic Party was the most important organization of this group.
2. National-Religious groups also known as the liberal faction. Their most important organization was the Freedom Movement of Iran party.
3. Left parties that included various groups, such as the Tudeh Party of Iran, Organization of Iranian People's Fedai Guerrillas, and the Mojahedin of the Islamic Revolution of Iran (Jafaryani 70).

Although these various groups were united before the revolution to overthrow the Shah's regime, they competed against each other after the revolution to gain the political power.

The National-Religious Group formed the first government, the Interim Government, in the Islamic Republic of Iran. It was formed a few days before the victory of the revolution on the order of Ayatollah Khomeini and under the prime minister of Mehdi Bazargan.

Bazargan's government did not have the authority to run the country independently from the Ayatollah, and various groups repeatedly challenged it. This government was dependent on Ayatollah Khomeini's orders on every major and minor issue. It was unable to control the society in a state of revolutionary passion and became known as “the knife without the blade” (Digard 220).

On Nov 4, 1979, a group of college students who later identified themselves as Muslim Student Followers of the Imam's Line occupied the US Embassy and

started the Iran hostage crisis. This led to further divisions between political groups. The interim government resigned in response to the hostage crisis because they believed that it was contrary to international law and would lead to the isolation of Iran in the world and the US confrontation with Iran (Sarvi 116).

But the hostage crisis was endorsed by Ayatollah Khomeini as a revolution “greater than the first revolution” (Sarvi 113). Indeed, it was a turning point in the Islamic Revolution for the Islamists and the Islamic Republic Party because it strengthened them. Prior to the hostage, leftist groups criticized the revolution's relationship with the US and propagated that the Islamic Revolution would not only conflict with the US but would compromise with it. But with the Islamists occupying the US embassy, their theory was shattered (Jafaryani 83).

One year after the revolution, the first Iranian presidential election was held in January 1980, and Abolhassan Banisadr was elected with seventy-five percent of the vote. He was liberal in political thinking and was closer to the National-Religious group but he also gained the support of leftist groups and some Islamists.

When he became president and Ayatollah Khomeini delegated him the commander-in-chief, the conflicts of the first year of the revolution were temporarily reduced. However, the country had been plagued by many problems, such as the hostage crisis, clashes between political groups at universities and economic problems. Banisadr sought to maintain the stability of the country, but preferred to reinforce Khomeini's support rather than coordinate with different groups (Digard

240). He lost many of his supporters through actions such as the fight against intellectuals and the cleansing of cultural and academic circles.

Leftism was prevalent in universities and many armed and unarmed groups such as Organization of Iranian People's Fedai Guerrillas, and the Mojahedin of the Islamic Revolution of Iran had offices in the universities (Jafaryani 89). In April 1980, Banisadr (the president), Akbar Hashemi Rafsanjani (the Speaker of Parliament) and Hasan Habibi (the Minister of Higher Education) announced the beginning of the Cultural Revolution and ordered that all universities be closed for two years for Islamization. With the closure of universities, leftist groups and non-religious liberals lost their most important base and were severely repressed by the government.

On September 22, 1980, Iraq invaded Iran and the war began. Conflicts between extremist religious groups and Banisadr's supporters continued and the possibility of peaceful coexistence disappeared. The Islamist group and the Islamic Republic Party openly opposed Banisadr because they considered him as the Trojan Horse of liberalism (Digard 242). The leaders of the Islamic Republic Party accused Banisadr and his supporters of inability to manage the war and violating Islamic law and called on Ayatollah Khomeini, who had a neutral stand until then, to intervene. Khomeini ousted Banisadr from the commander-in-chief post. Banisadr tried to regain Khomeini's support, but the parliament impeached him. Finally on June 22, 1981 Banisadr was ousted from the presidency with Khomeini's approval.

After the ousting of Banisadr, the country became involved in terror and bloody internal struggles between different groups. Many people were killed and imprisoned during this time under the pretext of collaborating with leftist groups or supporting Banisadr. More than 10,000 people were killed during the removing of liberals and leftists (Digard 221).

The Islamist group gradually succeeded in removing other groups from the Iranian political scene and they took over all three branches of government legislative, executive, and judiciary. The Islamists' determination to Islamicize the educational system, cultural structures, and political directions led to the establishment of several bureaus, organizations, and committees, namely the Supreme Council of the Cultural Revolution, the Center for Dramatic Arts (CDA), and the Islamic Development Organization in the immediate years after the revolution (Moosavi 69).

### **Iran–Iraq War**

The war between Iran and Iraq, which lasted for almost eight years, began on September 22, 1980 when Iraq invaded Iran. Before the war, relations between the two countries deteriorated steadily following the Islamic Revolution in Iran in 1979. The most important reasons for their conflicts were the political ambitions of both countries as well as territorial and ideological differences.

There were several factors that influenced the Iraqi regime's decision to start the war: Saddam Hussein's ambition for political and economic hegemony in the

Persian Gulf, strengthening Iraq security and counteracting the impact of the Islamic Revolution on the large Iraqi Shiite population, the collapse of the Iranian armed forces and the post-revolution political turmoil in Iran. The ideology of the Islamic Republic of Iran, and the attempt to export the Islamic Revolution ideas to other Muslim countries, was perceived by Iraqi leaders as a threat to its secular ideology and their country. Iranian propaganda, aimed at Iraq's disaffected population, focused on the un-Islamic character of the secular Ba'th ideology and was intended to incite Iraqis to revolt and topple the regime of Saddam Hussein (Maddy-Weitzmann, 181).

Before the Islamic Revolution, Iran, with the support of the United States, was the main power in the region. Relations between the United States and the Islamic Republic quickly deteriorated after the revolution, and especially after the seizing the American Embassy in 1979. Due to the post-revolutionary turmoil in Iran and deteriorating relations with the Arab states coupled with cuts to US military resources, Iran lost its position as the region's main power. Saddam Hussein wanted to exploit these conditions to achieve his goals.

Iraq expected that Iran would accept Iraqi military supremacy after the invasion and immediately would submit to Iraqi demands (Chubin and Tripp 54). Almost all of Iran's oil reserves exist in Khuzestan province, which borders Iraq. Iraq imagined that it could easily occupy these areas. The Iraqi war strategy was to fight a limited war, instead of a full-scale one (Karsh 18). Iraq imagined that the war would end quickly. One reason was that the Iranian armed forces were not ready for war.

This was due to the arms embargo imposed after the US hostage crisis. This has led to a shortage of spare parts for US-made military equipment in Iran. Also, the Islamic authorities did not trust senior military officers, many of whom were loyal to the former king. After the revolution, regular cleanups were carried out in the Iranian army.

Iraq invaded Iranian territory along three fronts. The main goal was the capture of Khorramshahr and Abadan, the sites of large oil refineries. On October 24, 1980, with heavy costs and casualties, Iraq occupied Khorramshahr and surrounded Abadan. Iraq could not quickly defeat the Iranian armed forces, although it had more air force and armies. One reason was that the Iranians, though surprised by the offensive, immediately formed a resistance, which included a combination of the army, police, Revolutionary Guards and volunteer units. Another reason was the incompetence of the Iraqi military leadership, which committed strategic and tactical blunders (Cordesman 47).

The situation in Iran was not ready for war. The post-revolution cleansing of the army led to major changes at its head. The key positions were held by those who had no military command experience and were promoted after the revolution because of their adherence to the Islamic principles of the revolution.

In October 1980, Khomeini joined the regular army and the Revolutionary Guards and formed a supreme defense council responsible for the war. President Banisadr was appointed Chairman of the Council. But the council was ineffective due

to power struggles at the time between Banisadr and clerics such as Ayatollah Beheshti and Rafsanjani. Their conflict was mainly over the political orientation of the Islamic Republic (Menashri173). In June 1981, Banisadr was stripped of his command of the army and later dismissed as president. The power struggle between him and Beheshti was resolved in favor of the latter as Khomeini withdrew his support for Banisadr. Khomeini blamed Banisadr for the situation at the front, where the war had settled into a stalemate with Iraqi forces occupying Iranian soil (Ibid).

In September 1981, Iran managed to push back the Iraqis and end the siege of Abadan, which lasted almost a year. It was carried out by the combined forces of the regular army and the Revolutionary Guards, who utilized a war strategy which consisted of a mixture of classical maneuvers and innovative tactics (Karsh 24). Part of these tactics was using human waves in which Basiji units- volunteer troops who were not trained and had no proper weapons- were attacking Iraqi defensive positions and cleared the way for the regular army.

In the spring of 1982, the Iranians launched offensives that eventually led to the liberation of Khorramshahr on May 24, 1982. It was an important milestone in the war. Following this defeat, Saddam Hussein announced on June 20, 1982, that all Iraqi forces had begun to withdraw from Iran. He offered a ceasefire, but Iran, which had gained confidence after recent successes, demanded more conditions for the end of the war. Besides insisting on a complete withdrawal of Iraqi forces, Iran demanded the overthrow of Saddam Hussein and the Ba'th regime, substantial reparation, and



the repatriation of 100,000 Shi'ites expelled from Iraq in 1980 (New York Times, 21 June 1982). So the war continued.

In July 1982, Iranian leaders decided to advance into Iraqi territory. They believed that Iran should punish Iraq for its aggression. The Iranian army launched a major offensive called Operation Ramadan toward Basra in Iraq. After two weeks of heavy fighting, Iranian forces failed to overcome the Iraqi defenses and suffered a severe defeat.

In 1984, Iraq threatened to attack Iranian cities in the event of a new offensive. But Iran launched a new offensive. Instead, Iraq attacked Dezful with missiles and launched air strikes on other cities. Iran retaliated by air strikes on Basra, Mandali and other Iraqi border towns. This was the beginning of the "war of cities" during which many civilians were killed.

While war continued on all fronts, including in the Persian Gulf and other countries became more involved, the UN Security Council accepted Resolution 598 on July 20, 1987 that called for an immediate cease-fire. Iraq accepted the resolution, provided Iran also had to accept it. On July 18, 1988, President Khamenei announced that Iran had accepted the Resolution. On September 20, the war ended without any gains for both sides, and the cease-fire between the two countries officially began. The Iran-Iraq War has been called "the longest conventional war of the 20th century," and cost 1 million casualties and \$1.19 trillion (Hiro 3).

## **Theater in post-revolution Iran**

The Islamic Revolution, especially in the first months, created special conditions for various political groups and parties to operate in a free environment. These groups, often secretive during the Shah's regime, could now freely propagate their ideas. Therefore, all parties and groups used every means, including theater, to gain popular support and legitimacy. This led to the production and performance of many shows with radical political and propaganda tendencies in the early period of the revolution. Various political groups including Islamists, leftists and nationalists, who saw theater as the most accessible and effective way to promote their ideas, turned to this art. The public also embraced this art. In the first year of the revolution, only in Tehran more than eighty plays were performed in various places such as theaters, universities, mosques, factories and streets (Kashan Fallah 105).

Among the political groups in the early years of the revolution leftist groups, which were supported by academics and artists, paid more attention to the theater. In most theaters, plays by leftist artists such as Bertolt Brecht and Athol Fugard or existentialists like Albert Camus and Jean-Paul Sartre were performed. This trend continued almost until the Cultural Revolution and before the war.

Another important point during this period was the formation of religious theaters. Although academic and artistic environments were largely leftist at the time, Islamist groups also made great efforts to compete in the political and social arena. Prior to the revolution, most religious groups considered the arts, especially theater,

to be immoral and anti-religious. This kept them away from professional theater groups. But after the revolution, Islamists, who did not have much access to theaters, used the mosques as cultural and art centers. Non-professional artists began working in religious centers and mosques, along with some religious artists who failed to work in professional theater. This type of religious performances was welcomed by a group of people despite the technical weaknesses caused by their inexperience. These performances established a branch in the country's theater as a religious and ritual theater that became the core and origin of the Holy Defense Theater (Kashan Fallah 110).

### **Censorship**

Since the Islamic Republic of Iran is a religious state, no artistic or cultural work should be in violation of Islamic law. All cultural and artistic works, including books, magazines, films, plays, and shows have to obtain a license for publication. However, the licensing rules are not clear and largely depend on the views of the officials. Thus, it is possible that a single play be censored in different ways at different times and venues. For example, *Whispers behind the Battle Line*, which was canceled in 1995, was performed six years later during the reform era, without censorship.

Interestingly, the play was performed in later years with different censorship. In 2012, Khilnejad directed the play almost like the original one, but in 2017, he was forced not to show that Alireza is on drugs (Ashofteh). Also Sattari, who directed the

play in another theater in the same year, says that one of the Holy Defense Theater associations sent them a confidential letter, warning that the characters should not smoke because no one was smoking at the war front (Sattari).

Theatre censorship is in two parts, first of the text and then the performance. In a 2019 personal interview Naderi told me about the censorship process of the *Whispers behind the Battle Line* in 1995: “We performed the play for the Committee of Theatre Supervision to get the license. They told me that I must change different parts of the play, which contradicted the usual plays about the war, before performing at the festival. I promised to make the changes but I didn't.”

Usually these points are more important:

- It must not be anti-Islam.
- It must not be communistic.
- It must not contribute to the cultural, political, or economic influence of foreign enemies.
- It must not contain any sexual relationship or indecent words.
- It must satisfy the artistic judgment of the censor.

For the performance:

- There must be no physical contact between men and women.

-The body and the hair of the actresses must be concealed and no tight dresses are allowed.

-There should be no dance or pop music.

-It must satisfy the artistic judgment of the censor (Lazgee 19).

The combination of these largely unwritten rules not only gives officials a great deal of authority in censoring and controlling shows, but also leads artists to commit self-censorship before presenting their works. Naderi told me about the first draft of the play: “In the original draft of the play, there were three Armenian, Georgian and Jew characters. But such a play would not be allowed to perform because these characters would not be accepted as Iranian. So I removed them, except for the Jew character, from the play”.

This situation becomes even more difficult when a theater artist wants to work on a subject such as the Iran-Iraq war because not only is this war a very important and controversial political and social issue in contemporary Iranian history, but the Islamic regime has limited the possibility of criticizing it by defining it as a holy defense and linking it with the religion. Naderi told me in the same interview about the problems after the first performance: “For years, every new manager in the Ministry of Culture and Islamic Guidance questioned me about this play. Even the Islamic Republic of Iran Army sued me because they believed that the play has offended the army. All of these problems occurred to me when none of them had ever seen the play, as it had only been performed at a student festival. Official government

organizations opposed the play because it challenged the image they wanted to present of the war.”

### **Holy Defense Theater**

After the beginning the war between Iran and Iraq, a kind of theater was formed by the state in Iran, as the Holy Defense Theater. “Holy Defense Theater is a kind of theater in our country (Iran) where the human values of the warriors are dramatically staged” (Kashan Fallah 115).

The government’s considerable investment in this type of theatre is easily understood by looking at the numerous festivals that were organized throughout these eight years in various venues, including war-stricken provinces (Moosavi 69). In addition to numerous festivals, during and after the war, various government organizations support this type of art:

- The Foundation for the Preservation and Publication of Holy Defense Works and Values
- The Revolution and the Holy Defense Theater Association
- Foundation of Martyrs and Veterans Affairs
- Artistic Department of the Islamic Republic of Iran Army
- Artistic Department of the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps
- Artistic Department of the Law Enforcement Force of the Islamic Republic of Iran

- Artistic Department of the Basij<sup>1</sup> (Fadaei 34).

Given the short time between the Islamic Revolution and the onset of the war, the war was interpreted as a holy war between Islam and blasphemy. The interesting thing about the definition of Holy Defense Theater is that most definitions focus on the holy aspect of it rather than the theater.

“The Holy Defense Theater is first a worldview and an ideal, and then a theater in which we do not face merely a show, but rather a manifestation of the beliefs, aspirations and values of a nation based on the religious worldview” (Yasrebi 47).

Personal ideas about the definition of Holy Defense Theater go as far as one expert in the field writes: “For me as a theater artist and a warrior the stage is the fortification, the prop is a gun, the stage light is a flare, the sound effect is the sound of bullets shooting, the director is the commander, the playwright is the military operations designer, and the actor is a Basiji” (Noshir).

This holiness, which is also defined by a limited number of authorities, makes written or unwritten laws applicable to the holy defense theater. Allowed stories, how to portray the characters of the protagonists and main characters, how to reflect the atmosphere of the fronts, and the type of remembrance of war in general, are the most important limits set by this view.

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<sup>1</sup> The Organization for Mobilization of the Oppressed

This type of theater had three main purposes:

- Reflecting the events of the war and familiarizing people with the values of the holy defense.
- Strengthening the morale of the warriors and people to continue the war.
- Recording the holy defense events and values for transmission to future generations (A. Naderi 106)

Return to Shia religion, resistance to the enemy to victory, obedience to the leader, martyrdom and self-sacrifice are the most important values that this kind of theater wanted to convey to the audience.

The characters of this type of theater were manifestations of these values.

- They do not seek to satisfy worldly needs, but seek spiritual perfection.
- Their purpose is to fulfill their duty, so either superficial defeat or success in the war is the victory for them.
- They are religious figures that have absolute trust in God's will.
- Morally they are heroes who have no weaknesses or their mistakes are not seen because of their positive characteristics.
- They are idealistic characters who are not afraid of death under the influence of Shiite values, so they are ready to sacrifice.
- They are capable of spiritual experiences, so sometimes unusual and miraculous events occur to them.



Such circumstances made prominent playwrights not consider the war as an appropriate subject for the creation of the play. Even though their plays have had references to the war, they have been symbolic and complex so that the general audience is incapable of understanding them.

The lack of professional artists in this field, especially during the war years, led to a group of religious people who were unfamiliar with the principles of playwriting produced many works. These playwrights, immersed in their beliefs, were completely unaware of the rules of drama and its fundamental differences with other areas of literature such as poetry and fiction and have written plays that many of them are not actually a drama. Nasrollah Ghadari writes:

A playwright who writes play about war first must have some experience of war. Then he must know techniques. We, in these years, have not been good learners. Furthermore, we have not allowed others to criticize us. We still have not created even one good quality play about war. We still have not believed that first we must reject the war itself, and then we must support the holy defense. We have always been going to extremes in our art works. (Lazgee 17)

### **Exegesis of the Play**

#### **Challenging the prevalent narrative of the war history**

Unlike most Holy Defense plays that summarize the Iran-Iraq war only in the struggle against an invader enemy, the play points to many of the socio-political

events of that era that had a significant impact on the onset and continuation of the war.

In the play, we can see examples of disputes between different political groups, especially through the debate between Baqer as a leftist and Doostali as an Islamist. Although these characters agree that the regime was cruel and corrupt before the revolution, they have different ideas about the policies of the new government in various fields such as the economic system of the new government, the government's foreign policy, the Israeli–Palestinian conflict, and managing the war.

**Baqer**            *(Turning the pages of the newspaper)* Israel is not going to crumble like Mohammad Reza's<sup>2</sup> regime. Nothing changes with throwing stones at Israel. Also, Iran should not tie its revolution's fate to the Palestine problem because it's primarily an Arab concern. *(He gives the newspaper to Doostali)* Why are you upset?

**Doostali**        I see. We should not interfere in Afghanistan because our northern friends<sup>3</sup> would be upset. We should not interfere in Palestine because it's just an Arab concern... (Naderi 28)

As I mentioned above, Banisadr's presidency is a crucial milestone in Iranian history. There are many references to Banisadr and the events of his time in this play.

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<sup>2</sup> Mohammad Reza Pahlavi was the last king of Iran from 16 September 1941 until his overthrow by the Islamic Revolution on 11 February 1979.

<sup>3</sup> USSR

The relative freedom of political debate in his time is one of the issues mentioned in the play:

**Alireza** ... God curse Banisadr who promoted free discussions in this country. (Naderi 53)

The Cultural Revolution is one of the major events of Banisadr's time that has had a significant impact on Iran's future. In the play, Shahriar is one of the victims of the Cultural Revolution and the closure of universities, who has missed the opportunity to continue education.

**Shahriar** (*Sighing*) I got my diploma in Math and Physics with a good GPA. I was getting ready for the university but... (Naderi 57).

Banisadr's dismissal, which was elected by a very substantial majority, had a profound effect on Iran's political future. In the play, Banisadr's election and his removal from the presidency are criticized:

**Alireza's voice** You don't know what the policy is. For example, that Mr. Banisadr. You didn't know that he is an American puppet, did you? You realized it later. That's policy (Naderi 36).

Also, the story of the arresting and exiling Shahriar, which Alireza narrates in a comedic way, points the chaos and political strife after Banisadr's removal:

**Alireza** ... When I went to the garrison I realized that everything had changed. They arrested me without any logical, legal, or rational reason. They started asking

nonsense questions: How many people were with you? Where did you hide Banisadr? How did you help Rajavi escape? Confess! (Naderi 42)

### **Narrating a deleted part of the history of the war**

The play takes place after Iran's victory in Khorramshahr which prompted Iraq to offer a ceasefire, and before Iranian forces invade Iraqi territory. This part of the war is one of the most important and challenging events of the war. Before this time, almost all Iranian social and political groups believed that it is necessary to fight against the invasion of Iraq. But when Iran defeated Iraq and Iraqi forces retreated almost to their borders, many believed that Iran should accept the peace offer and end the war. Why Iran continued the fruitless war for another six years in which, in addition to economic costs, countless people were killed and injured, is one of the most important questions in contemporary Iranian history that has yet to be answered.

Naderi told me in a 2019 personal interview: “I was a soldier at the time. Iraq had offered a ceasefire but Iran had refused. For one month, Iran was firing at the Iraqis, but they did not fire a single shot. For me, that particular part of the war was the most dramatic moment in the Iran-Iraq war that has not been mentioned in any art work such as theater or film. On one side is a group of people called Iraqis and on the other is a group called Iranians. Two nations that have practically no difference, except the last word in the name of their country [Iran and Iraq]. In the past they were a single nation and even today they have very similar social and political status. I

myself had relatives who lived in Iraq. The futility of the war was more visible than ever at the time”. That's why he emphasizes the exact date of the event in the play:

**Alireza** ... What year are we in? It's 1982, isn't it? (Naderi 21)

### **Challenging the Holy defense Theater**

As I mentioned before, in the Holy Defense plays, fighting in the war is a sacred task that make even defeats or death become a real victory. So the characters in these plays never criticize the war. But in this play, different characters blame the war. Alireza grumbles that “We are here because we are unfortunate or unlucky”. Shahriar believes that the war has ruined his future as a scientist. In Baqer's view, the war destroyed the aims of the revolution and created a new bourgeois class. For Farkhondeh, the war is causing all his misery:

**Farkhondeh** This war has embarrassed me, Baqer... This goddamn war made me embarrassed... I'm down. It threw me down... (Naderi 62)

The characters of the Holy Defense plays are often perfect, spiritual and religious people who are not afraid of death and are eager to become martyrs. But in this play, the characters are ordinary people with different beliefs who love life and are afraid of death. Yousef is a Jew and Baqer is a communist. Shahriar is a young man who falls in love with a girl and tries to have a relationship with her (that is a sin in Islam). Alireza and Parviz make fun of others, gamble and take drugs. They try to leave on a proper time to stay alive. Even Doostali, a Muslim religious figure, is

having a sexual dream at the beginning of the play that shows his interest in worldly pleasures.

In the third act, Alireza clearly expresses his fear of death and makes Baqer confess that he fears death too.

**Alireza**            Come on! I'm talking about death, about not being. Aren't you afraid of it?

**Baqer**            (*He throws the shell piece*) Yes, I am... (Naderi 76)

Another important difference between this play and the Holy Defense plays is the existence of diverse lines of conflict in *The Whispers behind the Battle Line*. In the Holy Defense plays, the antagonists and the protagonists are quite clear; the main conflict is between Iranian warriors as good and Iraqi enemies as evil.

But in this play, although Alireza is the main character that often creates and develops the actions of the play, none of the characters can be considered as the protagonist or the antagonist. Each character represents different parts of society who have been involved in the war for various reasons. This causes different lines of conflict in the play.

Alireza in the last Act when he is under the influence of drugs shows the line of psychic conflict. Some characters in the play express the line of personal conflict. For example in the second Act, the sergeant wants to leave the war because of the captain's behavior but he doesn't leave because he is worried that others will accuse him of fearing the war and death. Even the line of individual and social conflict is not

a conflict between the characters of the play and foreign enemies. The conflicts between Baqer, Doostali, Yousef and Alireza are mostly political and ideological conflicts. If there is an enemy that the characters have to fight against, they are the ones who use war to promote their wealth and power.

### **Production History**

*Whispers behind the Battle Line* was written by Alireza Naderi in 1993. It is one of the first plays that take a realistic look at the Iran-Iraq war. Many experts such as Reza Ashofteh and Ramtin Shahbazi believe the play is one of the best plays about the war (Ashofteh).

This play is exceptional in many ways in the contemporary Iranian theater. This is the first play written against the view of the administrators of that time on the Iran-Iraq war. Naderi told me in a 2019 personal interview “In 1990, after the end of the war, I went to university to study theater. At that time, what I saw in theater, cinema, and television was not the same as my experience in war. It made me decide to write about the war”. Naderi, who was himself a soldier in the war, said in the same interview about his first play about the war: “The first play I wrote about the war was *Ata, the defeated Sardar*. This play was different in content and form in comparison to other plays of that era about war. The play was performed only twice at the university and never obtain a license for public performance.”

In addition, his next play, *The Whispers behind the Battle Line*, deals with a short period of the war that is rarely mentioned in artworks related to the Iran-Iraq

War. Also, the play has attempted to show the diversity of people involved in the Iran-Iraq war and it is the first and foremost unusual in this respect. In his view, the play not only was a resistance to the themes imposed on war-related works, but also it was structurally new for the Iranian theater at that time.

Because this was different from "Holy Defense" plays, it encountered great difficulty in publishing and performing. "At that time some people told me you shouldn't write this play or you should write this play 10 years later", Naderi said in a 2007 interview.

The play was first staged at the Iran University Theater Festival in the winter of 1995 as Naderi's thesis (as playwright and director) in the Molavi Hall. The cast were Mohammad Reza Sadatmand, Ahmad Kavari, Mehdi Soltani, Payam Yazdani, Hosein Mahmoodian, Reza Samadpoor, Mohammad Pouya and Mostafa Parvin. But before the show was over, a group of religious extremists stormed the scene and threw the actors out. Naderi told me in a 2019 personal interview: "A group of religious fanatics, some of whom had weapons, stormed the scene. They not only canceled the show but completely shut down the festival. Many of them are currently journalists, filmmakers and university professors. One of them, who now holds an important post in the country's theater, wrote in a newspaper that this play has insulted the values of war. That was the beginning of my troubles as a theater artist". After this, the play was not performed for many years, and the group, especially Alireza Naderi, was insulted and even was accused of spying.



After several years, with the rise of the reformist government and the improvement of political and social freedoms, the play was finally staged in 2002 at the 20<sup>th</sup> Fajr International Theater Festival. Naderi told me in a 2019 personal interview: “During the Reformist period, I was asked to perform this play at the Fajr International Theater Festival because the Ministry of Culture officials at the time wanted to show that social space was being freer.”

In this show, Naderi was the director, Hojat Seyed Alikhani was the Assistant Director and the cast were Farhad Aslani, Ahman Kavari, Mehdi Soltani, Payam Yazdani, Hosein Mahmoodian, Reza Samadpoor, Sina Dadras, and Mostafa Parvin. Farhad Aslani won the best actor award for playing Alireza in the festival<sup>4</sup>. Then the play was staged at the City Theatre complex in 2003. The performance was welcomed by audiences and critics.

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<sup>4</sup> <https://theater.ir/fa/26945>



*Whispers behind the Battle Line* directed by Alireza Naderi (2002)

In his review of the show, Ramtin Shahbazi wrote a description of it. The set design of the performance was realistic. The stage design that resembles an earthen fortification shows characters in an impasse. The first act begins in the dark. The characters are present as ghosts. Their physical movements are less visible and the focus of the audience is more on the inside of the characters. The second act in daylight is divided into two main parts. The first part is devoted to the debate between Doostali and Baqer. In this part, the director removes any additional moves and elements from the scene to keep the audience focused on their conversation. Even

Alireza and Parviz, who are fooling around, leave the scene and go into the barrack in this part. Some critics say this is the weakest part of the show because of the lack of visualization and characters' verbosity. But in the second part, the director attracts audiences by using dynamic staging and Aslani's brilliant acting as Alireza. The third act happens in the dark again. The audience's attention is focused on the characters' unconscious, their fears and concerns. This darkness complements the darkness of the first act.

Seventeen years after the first performance of the play, Ashkan Khilnejad, as the director, staged the play as his thesis in the Molavi Hall in 2012. The cast were Navid Mohammadzadeh, Sina Balahang, Amir Ahmad Qazvini, Mehdi Farizeh, Hamid Rahimi, Mohammad Hadi Ataei, Keyvan Saketof and Mohammad Ashkanfar who were mostly young and unknown actors. The set design of the performance was more minimalist than Naderi's. In this show, Ashkan tried to have a faithful version of Alireza Naderi's play but at the same time, he also has his own idea and worldview as a director. A battle line with only a few things can be seen on the scene. Two barracks on both side and some ammunition boxes, are all there is to the scenery. Even the characters' clothes except for the captain are not military uniforms. In in a 2013 interview Khilnejad said: "During the show I tried my best to avoid showing the war. Our attempt was to express the play in a social context".



*Whispers behind the Battle Line* directed by Ashkan Khilnejad (2012)

In order to create the visual storytelling of the show, Khilnejad used light, scene, and sound design in addition to his well-played cast. He was able to do a part of the space creating by choosing the sounds, music, and songs broadcast on Iranian television and radio during the war.

Some critics like Narges Sadeqinia have considered the stage design to be a weakness of this performance. She states that the scene design is quite simple and not reminiscent of a war situation. She believes that the main problem is the black color of the sandbags, which distances the scene design from the actual space.

The show was very successful at the box office. While the capacity of the hall is about 170 people, more than 200 people watched the show every night. Some audience had to sit on the floor to watch the play. About the audience reaction Ashkan said in a 2013 interview: “We had audiences crying from the beginning to the

end because they remembered that space and those days. One of them was not able to talk to me after the show because of crying; even the actors were impressed after the show”.

Mohammad Reza Sattari staged the play in the Molavi Hall in 2016 and then in the Hafez Hall in 2017. The cast of the show were Ramin Parchami, Tomaj Danesh Behzadi, Hojat Qolami, Omid Rezaei, Ramin Delfani, Mohammad Reza Sattari, Sam Qavam, and Masood Abedi.

As well as adhering to the structure of the play, Sattari has made some changes to the play. For example, a cell phone conversation is played at the beginning and end of the performance, leading the audience to the idea that events are going through the flashback in the mind of one of the characters. Another important difference is the design of the stage. Painted tires are used instead of sandbags in this show that takes the show away from realistic performance.

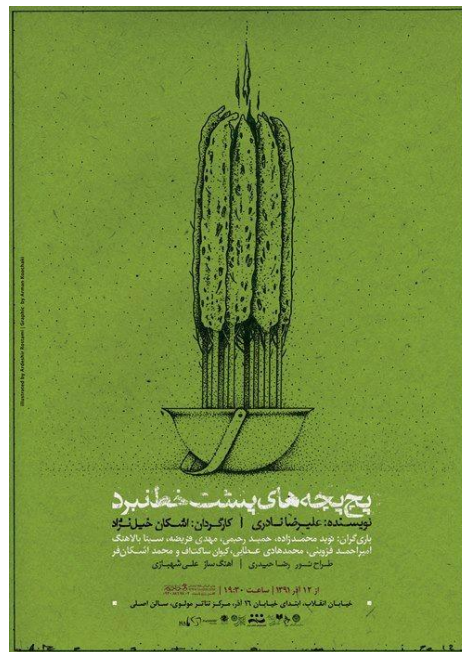


*Whispers behind the Battle Line* directed by Mohammad Reza Sattari (2017)

The show was not very successful in attracting audiences and most critics like Hasan Parsaei have criticized the performance. Directing is often simple and weak and staging is repetitive and sedentary. Parsaei states that acting of the cast is not believable: “It is as if the characters in the play are not in the front line, but in the courtyard of an educational garrison and there is no danger to them”.

Ashkan Khilnejad staged the play with the same cast in the Shahrzad Theater in 2017. This performance was almost similar to their previous performance in 2012. Khilnejad said in a 2017 interview about this show: “If the previous show were 95% close to the text, we are 100 percent faithful to the play in this performance”. As the capacity of the Shahrzad Theater was greater than that of Molavi’s (300 seats), and the show was performed for a longer time (about 3 months), the box office was even more successful than their previous performance. However, some critics, such as Ehsan Zivaralam, believe that this war drama is not attractive anymore. He argues that the problem is not in the text or in the performance, but rather, it is because of the difference in audience. The major audience of the previous performance was often students who had spent their childhood in the war. They came to watch the show because they had questions similar to Naderi's questions about the war. But the audience of the latter show does not have such questions. They don't care about Naderi’s concerns. Only actor Navid Mohammadzadeh is important to them. In 2012, Navid was just a talented young actor along with the rest of the group, but he is a famous cinema superstar now. Paying attention to the difference between the two promotional posters is helpful. The first poster featured the symbolic image of a

military helmet containing seven trees. But the latter is a single image of Navid Mohammadzadeh. The show is the same. The cast energy is the same. The staging is the same, and even more dynamic, but the atmosphere is something else. There is no curious audience. The war does not matter to them. Navid as Alireza cries and speaks of death on stage, but the audience whispers to somebody next to her: “How can we take pictures with Navid after the show?”



Poster of *Whispers behind the Battle Line* directed by Ashkan Khilnejad (2012)



Poster of *Whispers behind the Battle Line* directed by Ashkan Khilnejad (2017)

## Conclusion

In her 2015 article “Dramaturgy in Post-Revolution Iran,” Marjan Moosavi writes that “Nevertheless, it should be emphasized that politically and religiously informed dramaturgies have offered new ways of negotiating and legitimizing their roles as critics and censors or creators and practitioners of theatre to the members of the Supervision Committee as well as dramaturgs and directors. The prospect of such discourse and practice is positioning the Iranian performance tradition in a condition that is nationally growing and internationally becoming recognized.” This is an important article and a grand part of Moosavi’s ongoing efforts to educate western scholars and artists about Iranian theatre.



However, as my case study of *Whispers behind the Battle Line* shows, it's far more complicated and I am not as optimistic as Moosavi based on my recent experiences in theatre in Tehran. The last theater group I collaborated with in Tehran decided to stage a play based on *King Lear*. The original play had many overt and covert references to sociopolitical issues. When the play was sent to the Supervision Committee, who are now more skilled at censorship than before, eliminated many of those references. But the group couldn't cancel the performance because an expensive venue was booked months ago. On the other hand, adding a celebrity to the cast, forced the playwright and director to change the play so that actress has a larger role. In the end, this performance was nothing but a superficial comedy, though it succeeded somewhat in the box office.

As we have seen, creation and production history of *Whispers behind the Battle Line* maps extremely well onto Iranian political/cultural history to reveal the most important forces at work on Iranian theatre in the last 40 years. Since the Islamic Revolution in 1979, the Iranian state has used various institutions and laws to control and direct artistic activities, including theater. An important recent event in Iranian theater is the reduction of the state's financial support for the theater and the expansion of private theaters, which make theater activities dependent on box office. However, the control and censorship of the shows continues. Both the play and the performance must still be approved by the supervisory committees in order to obtain the license for public performance. Today, theater artists in Iran must both reduce the risk of canceling the show by the Supervision Committees and employ strategies such

as using celebrities and more entertainment to attract more audiences. In my opinion, the combination of these two factors undermines the artistic and critical value of theater in Iran.

**Appendix**

**The Whispers behind the Battle Line**

By Alireza Naderi

Translated by Peyman Shams

UC Santa Cruz

Department of Theater Arts

MA Program

## Characters

### Soldiers:

Alireza: He was raised in the south of Tehran<sup>5</sup> with all its good and bad.

Baqer: No matter where he is from.

Doostali: He is from the north of the country.

Yousef: He is a knowledgeable Jew.

Shahriar: He is from Yazd (in the center of the country<sup>6</sup>).

Parviz: He is from Tehran, but not the south.

### Officers:

Farkhondeh (Sergeant): He is from Mashhad (in the east of the country).

Captain: He has no name. It doesn't matter where he is from.

## Setting

*The location of an infantry battalion in the southern fronts of the Iran-Iraq war. Ramadan 1982. There is a fortification with a guard point upstage which overlooks a plain and the Iraqis' bulwark (The plain and the Iraqis' bulwark are not onstage but the characters' action implies that the audience is in the same location as Iranian army). At left there is big water tanker and the entrance to the soldiers' barracks, which has a window facing the scene. At right is the entrance to the officers' barracks that sports a CB radio antenna. There are two clotheslines with*

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<sup>5</sup> The old and poor part of the city

<sup>6</sup> A city in the center of Iran

*clothes on them at both sides of the scene. At the beginning of the show, only unclear images of all these are seen in the dark.*

## **ACT ONE**

*Night. In the dark, the red glow of a cigarette is seen. The vague sound of music is heard from a radio. Parviz smokes and accompanies the music by whistling.*

*The door of the officers' barracks opens and a weak light comes out. A shadowy figure comes out of the barracks. This is Farkhondeh. He wants to close the door, but a sleepy voice is heard from the inside.*

**Captain**        *(from inside)* leave it open. It's so hot. Let some air in!

*(Farkhondeh hobbles sleepily toward the water tanker. Seeing him, Parviz moves a little as if saluting.)*

**Farkhondeh**    There is not a bit of a breeze in this weather. What a land is this.

**Parviz**         Hi!

**Farkhondeh**    Who are you?

**Parviz**         Parviz Doolabi here! Can't sleep? ... Do you want a cigarette?

**Farkhondeh**    What kind?

**Parviz** Azadi<sup>7</sup>, as ever.

*(Parviz goes and takes a cigarette from where he hides them. Farkhondeh sees)*

**Farkhondeh** Why are you hiding your cigarettes?

**Parviz** *(pointing at Baqer, who is sleeping on a blanket)* Just between you and me, he is a chain-smoker, even with his sick lungs.

**Farkhondeh** I wonder how they can sleep in this heat.

**Parviz** You could sleep outside too. See how they enjoy it! *(He turns on the flashlight and points at some mosquito nets where some soldiers are sleeping in)*

**Farkhondeh** I see... *(He laughs)*. Thank you God! Who would believe you could sleep outside? God bless Sadaam's fathers. It's as if the war is over. *(Parviz lights a cigarette and gives it to Farkhondeh. Farkhondeh takes a puff and coughs)* You shouldn't have lit it. It makes my mouth bitter as a snake's tail *(He spits)*. That darling one, Alireza, isn't here tonight. Where is he?

**Parviz** He's gone to one of his friends for a party. Can I phone him?

**Farkhondeh** No, let him have his party.

**Parviz** Let me shake him up a little *(He is going to call, just for fun, killing time)*.

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<sup>7</sup> A cheap cigarette brand

**Farkhondeh** He is so rigid.

**Parviz** He is so devious he is like Churchill!

**Farkhondeh** He is so stiff an earthquake couldn't shake him.

**Parviz** Oh, this phone is really broken.

**Farkhondeh** I said give it up.

**Parviz** It was his turn to go on leave, but when he realizes there wasn't any active fighting, not a gun or a cannon, for a whole month, he decides to stick around and take his leave later, when the fighting starts up again. He messes up the order of furloughs! And then he says to the Captain how wonderful it is staying at front for the holy month of Ramadan!

**Farkhondeh** That's why the Captain went for it.

**Parviz** This is the politics of the ceasefire *(on phone)* Hello...

**Farkhondeh** *(in order to in avoid waking up others)* Sh!

*(The connection has been made. Parviz loudly speaks on the phone)*

**Parviz** Hey! How are you guy? ... Thanks ... you are so happy to be in the back, aren't you? Got extra furlough time, compotes, hot lentils ... Please call our Alireza... *(To Farkhondeh)* Sergeant! If there is really no war this month, let me leave after the end of the month too. It's a pity that people go back to Tehran when there's peace here and watch their parents fasting, isn't?

**Farkhondeh** Leave whenever you can. Don't hesitate.

**Parviz** *(on the phone)* Hello! ... What are you doing there? ... What? ... He isn't? Then where is he? *(To Farkhondeh)* He says Alireza is back here. *(On the phone)* No, he has not arrived yet... Nothing ... I had something to discuss with him... Why? Because the voice of the war will start again tomorrow... I swear... How do I know? Shahriar just read us the Iraq army's announcement. It said that since Iran didn't accept the ceasefire proposal then...

*(Farkhondeh, who doesn't like this conversation, goes to the Parviz to take the phone from him)*

**Farkhondeh** Don't start rumors! What is this bullshit?! Give me the phone *(He takes the phone from him)*

**Parviz** Wait... Hello...

**Farkhondeh** Give it to me! ... *(On the phone)* Hello ... No way ... Just rumors... No, be calm ... its ceasefire... he is full of bullshit ... No ... No ... Enjoy life in the back, assholes.

*(The cannon fire lights the scene for moments)*

**Parviz** 1001, 1002, 1003 ...

*(Iran's artillery bombards)*

**Farkhondeh** It is so close.

**Parviz** They are one kilometer away.



**Farkhondeh** They're shooting from the road.

**Parviz** They are closer, I just counted.

**Farkhondeh** So they advanced.

**Parviz** That is news, is not? *(Farkhondeh doesn't care)*... I said isn't?

**Farkhondeh** What?

**Parviz** I asked if is this the attack?

**Farkhondeh** No. On Ramadan? No way.

*(Another cannon bullet is fired into the Iraqi enemy. Farkhondeh takes Parviz to the fortification to see where the bombardment will land)*

**Farkhondeh** Let's see where the shot hits. *(They watch)* Right now ten Iraqi scouts are locating us for the end of the month.

**Parviz** At the end of the month they will plow our land with their cannons...  
Sh! *(Someone's whisper is heard)*

**Farkhondeh** Who is it?

*(Parviz tiptoes toward someone who is mumbling in his sleep. Shahriar comes sleepy to change the watch)*

**Shahriar** What's up? ...

**Parviz** *(to Shahriar)* Sh! Come here Sergeant.

**Farkhondeh** Leave him. He is asleep.

**Parviz** *(with a suppressed laugh)* That is Doostali. He is dreaming.

*(Parviz and Shahriar crouch near his head in order to listen while they try to control their laughing)*

**Farkhondeh** Leave him!

**Parviz** Come here Sergeant. He is saying something.

**Shahriar** He is sucking something.

**Parviz** Come here Sergeant. Please!

**Shahriar** *(He watches carefully)* He is sucking a pacifier.

**Parviz** It isn't a pacifier, silly! Come here Sergeant. Please come.

**Farkhondeh** You are so disgusting. Go away. *(To Shahriar)* What are you staring at? Get away! *(Shahriar fearfully retreats)* Hey! Come here *(Shahriar comes back)* Wake me up before dawn to pray. The captain also wants to go to town. Do you understand?

*(Farkhondeh leaves)*

**Parviz** *(to Shahriar)* This is the list. Doostali is next. He was dreaming of home, stupid!

**Farkhondeh's voice** Where is the pitcher?

**Parviz** It should be there. *(To Shahriar)* Don't fall asleep!

**Shahriar** No.

*(Parviz takes off the holster and gives it to Shahriar. Then goes and lies down somewhere near the water tanker. Shahriar goes and brings his radio)*

**Parviz** Oh God! I am so exhausted.

**Shahriar** There are a lot of mosquitoes.

**Parviz** Say something new, Shahriar.

**Shahriar** It's very hot too.

**Parviz** What's happening in the world? America has not said anything?

**Shahriar** Just Lebanon. They all have forgotten about us.

**Parviz** *(Yawning)* Be careful. There was some noise.

**Shahriar** It's not my first time.

**Parviz** Good night!

**Shahriar** Good night to you!

*(Parviz sleeps. Shahriar fiddles with the radio station and finally, he sets it on a channel that plays a soft music. After a while, the sudden loud sound of a stone smashing the water tanker is heard)*

**Shahriar** *(Scared)* Stone... Parviz! The stones again...

**Farkhondeh's voice** What was that?

**Parviz** You did it yourself.

**Shahriar** No!

**Parviz** Don't lie!

**Shahriar** Swear to God!

*(Farkhondeh comes)*

**Farkhondeh** What was that?

**Shahriar** It was a stone I think.

**Farkhondeh** You didn't throw it, did you Parviz?

**Parviz** I'm not a psychopath.

**Shahriar** Who threw it? ... Bastard...

**Farkhondeh** Don't talk. Lower the radio... Why are you looking at me? ... Look on that side. That side... Iraq is on that side... Parviz! Take your gun and come on Parviz!

**Parviz** I just went to sleep...

**Farkhondeh** Wake up! Don't jabber, come on. *(To Shahriar)* Don't be afraid, ok? It's nothing. Go to your post. Be careful.

**Shahriar** Ok.

*(Farkhondeh and Parviz go. Shahriar is afraid. He is looking around. He washes his face to avoid falling asleep. Someone's voice is heard from a distance)*

**Parviz** Halt! Halt! *(He holds his gun in the direction of the sound)* Halt!

**Alireza's voice** It's me.

**Shahriar** Is that you, sir? *(Alireza, sleepy and tired, enters)* Hello, what's up?

**Alireza** Cut the rubbish. I said don't give me "Hello, what's up?" Didn't I? Lower your gun down. What's gotten into you?

**Shahriar** They're throwing stones, sir. The Iraqis are throwing stones.

**Alireza** You're kidding me.

**Shahriar** Kidding?

**Alireza** When there is neither war nor peace, it is a ceasefire. And a one-way ceasefire is just a joke, idiot!

**Shahriar** The Sergeant and Parviz have gone over to that side. There.

**Alireza** Where? They're throwing from that side. *(He drags Parviz to the fortification)* there, near that burnt tank. Look at its left side. They are picking up their corpses.

**Shahriar** *(Afraid)* Why did they throw the stone?

**Alireza** They are looking for you ... *(Yawning)* Who is up after you?

**Shahriar** Doostali.

**Alireza** After him?

**Shahriar** Yourself.

**Alireza** After me?

**Shahriar** Baqer.

**Alireza** *(He lies down near Baqer)*... Ok ... So many stars!

**Shahriar** Sir?

**Alireza** Hmmm...

**Shahriar** If I were you, I would request your furlough now...

**Alireza** Curiosity killed the cat...

**Shahriar** The war is scarier now... *(Alireza snores)* Are you sleeping? ... Please don't sleep.

*(Shahriar calls Alireza again but he doesn't answer. He inevitably goes to his radio. He changes the radio station and finally, he set it to Iran's channel that plays the morning religious program).*

## **Act 2**

*Morning. Parviz is washing his face near the water tanker. Doostali is skillfully trimming the beard of Baqer who is sitting on an ammunition box. Shahriar is squatting sadly near the officer's barracks.*

**Parviz** ... It is obvious. You are always fiddling with your radio. The radio has been your everything. What are you listening to? Radio Kuwait? Radio Iraq? Radio Mojahed? What are you looking for? You do such silly things. Poor kid, that's why you are exiled here away from Tehran. You were hearing the southern train whistle there, but the whistle of mortar bombs shakes you in your shoes here. You were playing with your balls there, but bullets play with you here. A guard must not sleep on the front line especially given this situation.

**Shahriar** I didn't sleep Parviz! If you check the list, I had to take the guard from you and I did...

**Parviz** And who was the guard after you? Give me the list. Where is the list then?

**Doostali** You had to deliver it to me, hadn't you?

**Shahriar** Yes

**Doostali** But you didn't. I was after you but you didn't wake me up.

**Parviz** That's the problem. Who was after Doostali? No one. Why? Because he was sleeping. Because Mr. Shahriar didn't wake him up. He fell asleep during his guard.

**Shahriar** I didn't sleep!

**Parviz** Six or seven hours is a long time. Hundreds of Iraqis patrols are hanging around. We were all asleep for six or seven hours without any guard; the sergeant has missed his morning praying; the captain couldn't go to town and so on. If someone had come ...

**Shahriar** Everything is Alireza's fault.

**Baqer** Why? You made a mistake, Shahriar!

**Doostali** Even if you give us a hundred excuses, you made a hundred and one mistakes.

**Parviz** No doubt about it! You will be punished.

**Shahriar** I gave Alireza the list and asked him “are you awake?” he said yes. I said don’t fall asleep because it’s dangerous. They are throwing stones. Also the captain wants to go to town and the sergeant wants to pray... It seemed he wasn’t normal... he...

*(Alireza who is in the soldiers' barracks enters, protesting)*

**Alireza** Cut the rubbish! It’s not any of your business.

**Shahriar** My radio has been seized. I will be punished.

**Alireza** It’s not your fault, dunce. *(Point to Baqer)* The list was under his pillow.

**Baqer** *(Shocked)* What?

**Alireza** It was.

**Baqer** Under my pillow?

**Alireza** Do you trust Yousef? You have to trust him because he does not swear by the Qur'an. *(To Yousef)* Swear by your religion. Where was the list?  
*(He takes Yousef's book and gives him)*



**Yousef** I say the truth even if I don't swear. *(To Baqer)* The list was under your pillow.

**Baqer** When?

**Yousef** When I woke up early in the morning to work out I noticed that there was no *guard*. I asked Alireza and he said that I should check under your pillow.

**Doostali** *(To Alireza)* Who did you wake up?

**Alireza** Shahriar.

**Doostali** I was supposed to wake you up, wasn't I?

**Alireza** He woke me up *(He mimics Shahriar)*

"Sir! Sir!"

Yes.

"Hello, what's up?"

Cut the rubbish.

"You are the guard".

Ok, get away.

“Are you awake?”

Yes

“Don’t fall asleep.”

Ok.

“Are you awake?” ...

**Shahriar** But you were asleep. Your eyes were closed. That’s why I was repeating. It seemed you were dreaming.

**Doostali** That’s enough, Shahriar...

**Alireza** You gave me the list to wake up the next one who was Baqer. And I took it, didn’t I?

**Shahriar** Yes.

**Alireza** I did my guard duty then I woke Baqer up. He also took the list and put it under his pillow and slept...

**Baqer** Ok! If the list was under my pillow, it means that I was asleep. There is no...

**Farkhondeh’s voice** A guard who sleeps during his duty, has endangered everyone’s lives. Now go and explain it to the captain.



**Alireza**           *(He puts on the apron and sits in Baqer's place. To Shahriar)* Stupid,  
why don't you just tell Doostali that you took his watch?

**Doostali**           Shahriar! Why didn't you tell me? Why didn't you say anything, boy?

*(Shahriar goes to the soldiers' barracks)*

**Doostali**           Now I feel bad.

**Alireza**           He didn't want to tell you. His kindness kills me. *(Mocking)* "The  
devoted son of the nation", "suffering others pains"

*(Doostali is preparing hairdressing supplies for Alireza)*

**Parviz**           Alireza, give me the towel.

*(Alireza gets up, goes to Parviz and gives him the towel.)*

**Parviz**           *(He takes the towel. Secretly to Alireza)* How crafty you are!

**Alireza**           *(While he is peeping at Doostali and Yousef. With a low voice)* Why?

**Parviz**           Baqer never falls asleep. You got him in trouble, didn't you?

**Alireza**           *(Loudly)* How beautiful you are! Like the moon!

**Parviz**           Thanks. *(Whispering)* You didn't wake him up, did you?

**Alireza**           *(Threatening)* Just these pimples have reduced your beauty.

**Parviz** It will be ok. *(Whispering)* You put the list under his pillow and slept, didn't you? This is your usual work. You always cheat when it is your turn.

**Alireza** *(Loudly)* You should always shave your face. Then use perfume and let it burn.

**Parviz** It was unfair, wasn't it?

**Alireza** *(Whispering)* Come on, baby! As long as they are here, why do we have to watch?

**Parviz** But don't say that nobody caught you.

*(Alireza goes back and sits on the box to have Doostali cut his hair.)*

**Alireza** Their roots must be burned.

**Doostali** Whose?

**Alireza** His pimples, my dear Doostali.

*(Doostali is cutting Alireza's hair. Parviz comes and grabs the mirror from Alireza. He goes and examines his pimples.)*

**Parviz** Look! My mother said that it would get better with a cold wind, but it didn't.

**Yousef**        There is some medicine for it ... but not in Iran ...

**Parviz**        Yes. I've heard you can get it in Israel.

**Alireza**        Don't burst his bubble. Guide him, Yousef.

**Yousef**        I'm telling you for the hundredth time: If you touch them, they get infected and their scars will remain forever. Change your diet. The sausages, the jelly rolls, the creamy sweets...

**Parviz**        Oh! Don't say that! I'm dying for those snacks.

**Alireza**        *(He comes and takes the mirror from Parviz)* Hopefully at my wedding, I will give you so much to eat that a big pimple like a walnut grows on your face.

**Doostali**        At the victory party, hopefully!

*(Shahriar comes out from the barracks with clothes and sits near the water tanker to wash.)*

**Parviz**        When is that victory coming?

**Alireza**        They promise the moon.

**Doostali**        It's almost done! It's the last breath of Saddam.

- Alireza** I see. Your ass is two kilometers away from the border, and yet we can't advance and play conquerors... "last breath" indeed. What year are we in? It's 1982, isn't it?
- Doostali** *(He is suddenly trembling and fainting)* Let me sit for a moment...
- Alireza** What's the matter, Doostali?
- Parviz** What's the matter? Look at his face!
- Yousef** He is falling. Doostali!
- Doostali** I'm ok. Let me sit down.
- Alireza** Water! Yousef, water! He is probably hungry. Have you eaten yet?
- Shahriar** He didn't wake up for *Sahari*<sup>8</sup>.
- Alireza** *(Attacking Shahriar)* You were supposed to wake him up for *Sahari*. You stupid dolt, didn't you know that he scheduled his shift to eat *Sahari*? Why didn't you wake him up? Do you think that you did him a favor?
- Parviz** *(He pulls Alireza away)* Come and help Doostali.
- Yousef** *(Coming with glass of water)* Water. Can he drink water?

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<sup>8</sup> Sahari or Sahur ("pre-dawn meal"; is an Islamic term referring to the meal consumed early in the morning before fasting, during or outside Ramadan. Being the last meal before fasting from dawn to, Sahur allows the person fasting to avoid the weakness caused by the fast.

**Alireza** Give it to me. Water. Please Doostali...

**Doostali** I'm ok.

**Alireza** You have to drink. Fasting is not obligatory in this heat. Please drink. It makes you well. Yousef brought it. The water which a Jew brings is the best thing for Iftar<sup>9</sup>.

**Doostali** *(He rejects the glass)* Thanks Yousef.

**Parviz** *(He take the glass from Yousef)* Please leave. You have embarrassed him.

**Alireza** What do you mean?

**Parviz** I mean... He is a Jew and maybe a Muslim doesn't want to...

**Alireza** Shut up! Give me the glass... Please drink it Doostali.

**Doostali** No.

**Alireza** You didn't eat *Sahari*. You could die...

**Doostali** Don't tempt me, I'm not thirsty. I'm better now.

**Alireza** You have to drink water.

**Doostali** *(He takes the glass from Alireza)* Ok, ok. I'm alright. Sit down Alireza.

*(Doostali takes the scissors in order to cut his hair)*

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<sup>9</sup> Iftar is the evening meal to break the fast during Ramadan.



**Baqer's voice** Ok Sergeant, ok. *(He angrily comes out of the officers' barracks with Shahriar's radio. To Shahriar)* Your radio.

**Shahriar** Thank you.

**Baqer** *(He gives the radio to Shahriar and angrily goes to Alireza)* Alireza, you must be embarrassed that...

**Alireza** *(Interrupting him. To Parviz)* Let's play Monopoly.

**Parviz** Ok!

*(Alireza takes the apron off and gives it to Baqer politely. Baqer lets out a sigh and takes the apron. He brings a cigarette pack out of his pocket which is empty)*

**Baqer** Parviz! Please give me a cigarette. *(Parviz is rubbing his fingers to signal money)* I'll pay you back, you miser!

**Parviz** *(Playfully)* You already owe me a bundle!

*(Baqer angrily throws the empty pack to Parviz. Parviz goes into the barracks with Alireza. Baqer nags. He wears the apron and sits on the ammunition box)*

**Baqer** *(To Doostali)* Do it, Master barber. *(Doostali is distracted)* What's with you?

**Doostali**      What? *(He comes to himself and pours the glass of water on Baqer's head)*

**Baqer**      *(Shivering)* That's cold!

*(Doostali begins his work. After a while Baqer angrily starts talking)*

**Baqer**      Some people are yelling, some are fighting. Everyone doubts each other.  
But the main culprit has vanished.

**Yousef**      The culprit is one of us.

**Baqer**      Did you see the list under my pillow?

**Yousef**      You have a right to not believe...

**Baqer**      Maybe it was under my pillow, but I didn't fall asleep. Someone put it there. I'll find out ...

**Yousef**      You always have problem with the guard duty.

**Baqer**      Yes! Why should we have to endure such a vigil when there is no danger?

**Yousef**      You don't take the stones seriously.

**Baqer**      Oh come on! *(Pause)* Have you ever been at a funeral ceremony? Someone is dead. Everyone is crying. But some people are just

worried about the ceremonial details, food, flowers and so on. The guy is dead, but, right in front of his family's eyes, the most important issue is that the food is undercooked! This is "diverting the discussion". Do you think that the Iraqi is a fool? He has to come a long way, cross the minefield, and come to our fortification just to throw some stones at us seven soldiers!

**Doostali** Eight!

**Baqer** You make it a big deal. (*Mockingly*) Maybe all the Iraq armies are arranging to throw stones at us seven soldiers!

**Doostali** Eight!

**Baqer** There are many front lines, from Mehran to Khoramshahr<sup>10</sup>. Go and ask everyone. They don't have this problem, do they? If you don't believe me let's go two kilometers further along and ask the Basijis<sup>11</sup>.

**Doostali** But the stones are thrown towards us.

**Baqer** This is the Captain's work. As long as we're out here, his leadership is unquestioned. (*Mockingly*) I bet the Captain is the one out there throwing stones! (*The others laugh*) It will finally be revealed.

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<sup>10</sup> Two cities involved in the war

<sup>11</sup> A paramilitary volunteer militia that were urged by Khomeini to fight in the Iran-Iraq War

*(Beeping sound of a truck)*

**Parviz's voice**     Shahriar! Ice! Ice! Hurry up! The truck is going.

*(Shahriar goes to get ice)*

**Baqer**             The ceasefire has lasted days. They haven't even shot a bullet.

**Doostali**          But we didn't accept the ceasefire.

**Baqer**             Yes, I know. Ok, Saddam has done wrong to propose a ceasefire because of Ramadan. My point is that how does the stone throwing matter, when a one-way ceasefire has been proposed.

**Doostali**          Maybe when they come to pick up their corpses, they throw some stones at the same time.

**Baqer**             Come on! You're someone who has been in war for years – you know the Iraqis don't do that. I bet it's the Captain work.

**Doostali**          But the Captain wasn't there last night.

**Baqer**             Maybe the sergeant! One of them does it. They really are united. They just pretend to argue in front of us.

**Doostali**          You saw with your own eyes that the sergeant attacked the Captain with an axe. That wasn't pretend, was it?

**Baqer** You saw how soon they reconciled.

**Doostali** That day you said it was a real fight between a superior and a subordinate. Now you say that they are united against us?

*(Shahriar enters with a block of ice. He carries a newspaper in his teeth.*

*Yousef goes and gets the newspaper)*

**Doostali** News! News! News! What is written there?

**Yousef** *(He looks at the newspaper)* Quds<sup>12</sup>, Palestine, Israeli crimes, Quds Day<sup>13</sup> ...

**Doostali** *(Reading the newspaper)* "A billion Muslims will rally to liberate Quds".

**Yousef** This strong desire of Muslims to recapture Jerusalem reminds me of a story.

**Baqer** *(He lights a cigarette)* That reminds me of the third world war, us against Israel!

**Yousef** The story of Jacob's children.

**Doostali** Nonsense tales!

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<sup>12</sup> Jerusalem

<sup>13</sup> Quds Day (Jerusalem Day), officially called International Quds Day, is an annual event held on the last Friday of Ramadan that was initiated by the Islamic Republic of Iran in 1979 to express support for the Palestinians and oppose Zionism and Israel.

- Baqer**        *(To Yousef)* Tell the story.
- Yousef**        Jacob had twelve children who had their own tribes. They left Egypt to conquer the Promised Land. Only the tribe of Jacob's son Judah arrived in Palestine and became famous. There was no report from the other eleven tribes. Now there is a belief that everyone who wants to be in Jerusalem, is from the later generation of those missing tribes.
- Doostali**      Quds is the first Qibla<sup>14</sup> of Muslims and is occupied by Israel now.
- Baqer**        Oil! As long as there is oil in the Middle East, Palestine will remain under Israeli occupation.
- Doostali**      The outcome of the occupation is clear. Take a look at that side of the fortification, near that burnt tank. See how the corpses swell and then disintegrate and ants eat every part of them... *(They continue to talk)*
- Shahriar**      *(To Baqer)* Alireza said Iraqis throw the stones from over there.
- Baqer**        Alireza is wrong, like you.
- Shahriar**      He said that there are more than a hundred corpses out there.

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<sup>14</sup> The Qibla is the direction that should be faced when a Muslim prays.

**Baqer** Do they pick up their corpses and throw stones too?

**Shahriar** Alireza said so.

**Baqer** They are two kilometers away; moreover, they aren't stupid, are they?  
*(They continue to talk)*

**Doostali** *(To Yousef)* It's been thirty years already that the Palestinians are fighting.

**Yousef** But Israel is the result of an ideology.

**Doostali** They are just puppets of the USA.

**Yousef** But they are powerful.

**Doostali** Palestinians have learned how to fight *(He takes the newspaper from Yousef and goes to Baqer to cut his hair)*

**Baqer** Stones?

**Doostali** That's the way to fight against Israel: the Stone Revolution. The way of Islamic Revelation. *(He gives the newspaper to Baqer who is still arguing with Shahriar. He grabs Baqer's cigarette and crushes it under his foot)* Don't smoke!

**Baqer**           *(Turning the pages of the newspaper)* Israel is not going to crumble like Mohammad Reza's<sup>15</sup> regime. Nothing changes with throwing stones at Israel. Also, Iran should not tie its revolution's fate to the Palestine problem because it's primarily an Arab concern. *(He gives the newspaper to Doostali)* Why are you upset?

**Doostali**        I see. We should not interfere in Afghanistan because our northern friends<sup>16</sup> would be upset. We should not interfere in Palestine because it's just an Arab concern...

**Baqer**            I didn't said it's just an Arab concern. Our support of Palestine during these four years is more than the Arab's during forty years of occupation, while in our war all the Arabs are on Saddam's side.

**Doostali**        There are two blue stripes on the flag of Israel. Do you know what they mean?

**Baqer**            I haven't noticed.

**Doostali**        And you Yousef?

**Yousef**          On the flag of Israel?

**Doostali**        Two blue stripes. Symbol of two rivers; The Tigris and Euphrates

---

<sup>15</sup> Mohammad Reza Pahlavi was the last king of Iran from 16 September 1941 until his overthrow by the Islamic Revolution on 11 February 1979.

<sup>16</sup> USSR



**Yousef**            The Promised Land.

**Doostali**            The extent of this the Promised Land is from Africa to Iraq. Israelis are looking for such a land. They are moving forward step by step, with help of their servant: The Arabs' reactionary regimes and the support of the great master<sup>17</sup>.

**Baqer**                Why do you think that the world has masters and servants like a village?

**Doostali**            Today, the USA and the USSR have divided the world between themselves like two great masters, haven't they?

**Baqer**                Your analysis is like that of a peasant, with the same vocabulary of an agricultural worker.

**Doostali**            Because I am a peasant. What is your analysis in urban vocabulary?

**Baqer**                My analysis is obvious. I have said it hundreds times but...

**Doostali**            Sometimes I wonder, if you have such beliefs, why are you here?

**Baqer**                To defend the revolution. This is the first priority of my belief.

**Doostali**            All guys on this front...

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<sup>17</sup> USA

**Baqer** No way! That really makes me angry. An intelligent man should not generalize from himself. How many of the soldiers here are paying attention to our story of the revolution? I don't speak for other soldiers. Just between us seven soldiers (*Doostali reminds him with sign language*) Ok, eight soldiers. I'm here because I did not want the army to be without revolutionary people. You could also be a normal soldier in Tehran but you come here to do your holy duty and you've been here for a long time. But Yousef isn't here for such reasons. He is like Robinson Crusoe. Yes, he is our friend, he is our compatriot but the revolution is worse than an earthquake for his family. Or Shahriar; he is a poor boy who has been punished and exiled here from Tehran for a trivial reason. Or them (*Pointing to the officers' barracks*) or those two guys (*Pointing to the soldiers' barracks where Alireza and Parviz are*). So, if there is a joint goal it is just between you and me. We are in the same class, the revolution...

**Doostali** Me and you?! Do you think that you understand the motives of everyone and you can classify them? No one has forced them to go to this war.

**Baqer** But they have not volunteered. Just you and I have...

**Doostali** You and I have nothing in common.

**Baqer** Ok! But you agree with me that just four years after an anti-imperial revolution, when the children of the revolution are fighting against a mercenary of imperialism, a new bourgeois class is growing in cities and is sucking the blood of the people.

**Doostali** Yes, I agree but...

**Baqer** And you agree that the revolutionary government cannot...

**Doostali** Have you seen the horseflies?

**Baqer** I'm not finished yet. The revolutionary government cannot...

**Doostali** Horseflies...

**Baqer** Let me finish!

**Doostali** Let me have my turn to speak!

**Baqer** You never let anyone finish what they are saying.

**Doostali** I want to say that I see that class too. Before the horseflies die, they spawn all their eggs. When the Shah left the country, the rich used the advantage of the chaotic situation. The war also improved the situation for them...

**Baqer** Let me say two things. First, they are not from the Shah's generation. His children either escaped with him or are now in the Evin<sup>18</sup> prisons. They are a group of marketers who hid themselves among the people during the revolution, abused the war situation, and are sucking the blood of the people now. Second, you say that they are using the revolution and the war for their personal benefit; I say it's even worse! They are guiding the revolution and the war for their own benefit and also spend little money on the war... (He falls to coughing because of anger)

**Doostali** *(Upset)* When I was a soldier at the Evin prison, there was a prisoner who was arrested for smuggling diamonds. He had concealed diamonds in the vagina of his virgin daughter. He looked like a Muslim revolutionary and prayed several times a day.

**Baqer** People like that are arrested...

**Doostali** Many of them aren't. They are people who don't know the sky, the poetry, the stars, or love. They are only satisfied with hoarding goods, like sewer rats.

**Baqer** With smelly breath and bellies as big as a barrel of oil...

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<sup>18</sup> Evin Prison has been the primary site for the holding Iran's political prisoners, before and after the Islamic Revolution.

- Doostali** They always are eating, day and night.
- Baqer** Everywhere...
- Doostali** They make a phone call to Shemiranat<sup>19</sup> every two hours. They have paid their Khums<sup>20</sup> in advance.
- Baqer** They only completed fourth grade in primary school, but they have four houses, forty million in money ...
- Doostali** The concept of life is death for them. They tolerate the revolution, but they actually prefer a Shah's hair strand to thousands people like you and I. *(Mimicking)* Stupid youth! How do you disrupt a country? Foolish misfortunes! A wise man does not walk on landmines, does he? As the General said...
- Baqer** *(Mimicking)* War requires tactics. For example, what is this fire pit?
- Doostali** *(Laughing)* Khoramshahr.
- Baqer** *(Mimicking)* We have to besiege it, don't we? You cannot advance like a herd. *(Coughing)* Stupid youth!
- Doostali** *(Upset)* They call us stupid youths...

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<sup>19</sup> the richest county in Tehran

<sup>20</sup> In Islamic tradition, Khums refers to the required religious obligation of any Muslim to pay one-fifth of their acquired wealth to the state of Islam.

**Baqer** Our real fight is against them. (His hair cut is finished. He gets up)

**Doostali** But we are here now.

**Baqer** *(He goes to the water tank.)* That Damn Saddam makes us dependent on them. It's the best historical opportunity for the comprador-bourgeoisie of Iran.

**Yousef** So you both agree: we are all abused.

**Doostali** Jews are our brothers in this country.

**Baqer** *(While he is washing his head)* So you have accepted the story of those missing tribes.

**Doostali** I said that they are just nonsense tales. Prophet Muhammad had has reasons to change Muslims' Qibla from Jerusalem. Maybe he was worried about such idle talks.

**Baqer** Really?

**Doostali** I said maybe.

**Baqer** Why did Muhammad do it, then?

**Doostali** I'm not the spokesman of Islam.

**Baqer** However, you know these issues better than us.

- Doostali** Al-Aqsa in Jerusalem symbolizes Judaism and Christianity. And the symbol of Islam as you know is...
- Baqer** The Kaaba (*Doostali and Yousef laugh*) What?
- Doostali** Study a little! It's Al-Masjid Al-Ḥarām.
- Yousef** (*Laughing*) You're Muslim, aren't you? (*Baqer look at him angrily. He stops laughing*)
- Baqer** (*He threatening goes to Yousef and suddenly opens his book in front of Yousef's face*) The Lord is my shepherd too. (*He goes to the soldiers' barracks*)
- Doostali** (*Loudly to Baqer*) Muhammad moved from Al-Aqsa to Al-Masjid Al-Ḥaram in order to join these two Holy places, to join himself with Moses and Jesus, to join Islam, Christianity and Judaism.
- Baqer's voice** Islam and Zionism?! (*He comes out the barracks*)
- Yousef** Zionism is the melting point of Judaism, but the other religions have such points too.
- Doostali** It's not just religions that melt and are misused, is it? Also arts, philosophy, science...
- Baqer** Yes, but the disasters made from the misuse of religion are the biggest.

**Yousef** I think the soul of the religion is different from its outward appearance.

**Doostali** Opponents with religion don't pay attention to the soul of the religion, they just judge the appearance.

**Yousef** A rabbi is a far cry from Moses.

**Doostali** A pope is a far cry from Jesus. A caliph is a far cry from Muhammad.

**Baqer** Interesting! It's as if you really agree on the religion. But when you talk about Islam, and Judaism, you disagree very much. *(The voices of Alireza and Parviz arguing is heard from the barracks)* I just want to know that the soul of all religions is the same, isn't it? *(The voices of Alireza and Parviz becomes louder)* Ah! They are at it again! Give them the cold shoulder.

**Alireza's voice** This game has nothing to do with luck. You can ask these gentlemen! Are you finished Baqer? *(Baqer doesn't answer)* Are you mad at me? Ok, be angry. We are here because we are unfortunate or unlucky. *(He throws some monopoly money out of the barracks window)* Here you are. All the money is yours.

**Baqer** *(He gives the money back through the window)* These are fake!

**Doostali** Alireza! This game is...



**Alireza** It's not Haram<sup>21</sup>. It's just gambling.

**Doostali** You could do something else, why gamble?

**Baqer** Or at least make a real bet, not one on fake money!

**Alireza's voice** Bet on what? On the Captain? Discovering Antarctica? The sergeant's poultry? Nursing lepers or the old?

**Baqer** Sit and say something useful. Discuss and learn something.

**Alireza's voice** Ok! Parviz! Let's discuss.

**Parviz's voice** Really?

**Alireza's voice** Certainly!

**Parviz's voice** (*Mocking*) In fact, I should mention that "Fideologish"<sup>22</sup> is a concept that...

**Alireza's voice** (*Mocking*) I made a brilliant statement, didn't I?

**Parviz's voice** Nope!

**Alireza's voice** And why "nope"?!

**Parviz's voice** I should demonstrate why I disagree. My demonstration is that...

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<sup>21</sup> Forbidden or proscribed by Islamic law

<sup>22</sup> A meaningless word

**Alireza's voice**        Actually you are so young and raw. You must become old and ripe, because youths are the future of the country, but when they are old.

**Parviz's voice**        Oh!

**Alireza's voice**        You don't know what the policy is. For example, that Mr. Banisadr<sup>23</sup>. You didn't know that he is an American puppet, did you? You realized it later. That's policy.

**Parviz's voice**        I see! So the policy is the thing that is covert at first and then becomes overt, is it?

**Alireza's voice**        Or another example. Honda Motorcycles, "the horses of the revolutionaries", are made in Japan, aren't they?

**Parviz's voice**        Yes, I suppose.

**Alireza's voice**        Or why Honda Motorcycles? Take for example an Iraqi soldier, who is sitting in Iraq and resisting...

**Parviz's voice**        He's not sitting, he's sleeping

**Alireza's voice**        Sitting.

**Parviz's voice**        Sleeping.

---

<sup>23</sup> He was the first President of Iran after the 1979 Iranian Revolution abolished the monarchy, serving from 1980 until he was impeached by parliament on 1981.

**Alireza's voice**     Sitting.

**Parviz's voice**     I am sure that he is sleeping.

**Alireza's voice**     How do you know? Who reports to you? You are in touch with them, aren't you? You are a blind-hearted hypocrite!

**Parviz's voice**     Me? Why do you slander me?

*(Parviz runs away from the barrack. Alireza follows him)*

**Alireza**     Are you resisting? Do you want to break down your physical resistance?

      This Iraqi soldier breaks down because of resisting. Resisting and breaking, again resisting and breaking...

*(While Alireza is following Parviz, Baqer kicks Parviz and he falls down)*

**Parviz**     Ouch! You fucking communist!

**Alireza**     That's policy too. *(He rummages in Parviz's pockets and gives his candy to others)*

**Parviz**     I see, so the resisting is related to policy!

**Alireza**     Yes, many other things are related to policy too. Many things which are incomprehensible for these guys are related to division and production... Do you know?

**Parviz** Yes...

**Alireza** *(He throws a chocolate to Baqer)* Get it!

**Baqer** Uh huh!

**Alireza** *(To Parviz)* So, twelve hotels...

**Parviz** Eleven.

**Alireza** Ok! Eleven hotels, two cinema halls, three beach house, ten cars and a lot of money *(He takes a cigarette pack out of Parviz's pocket)*

**Parviz** Don't share them!

**Alireza** It's co-living. Share everything; everyone gets a small portion then no one has any money to help others. Everyone is poor!

*(Alireza shares cigarettes between the guys. First Shahriar, then Doostali who rejects it because of the fasting, and Baqer who asks for another one and then goes to Shahriar and takes his cigarette too)*

**Parviz** *(To Baqer)* You are a Bolshevik communist, aren't you?

**Baqer** Cut the rubbish!

**Parviz** Communist! *(To Alireza)* Professor!, why his Fideologish is boiling ...

**Alireza** Shame on you! First, it's Ideology not Fideologish. Second, it's our brains that are boiling because of this hot weather.

**Parviz** I never understand anything, especially when I'm hungry.

**Alireza** *(He is chanting slogans mockingly)* Bread expensive, Peas expensive ...

**Baqer** I will sock your mouth if ...

**Alireza** *(He mocks Baqer)* The end does the means, how?

**Parviz** It "justifies" the means, but how?

**Alireza** It takes a long time to explain it to you. Say ok first.

**Parviz** Ok.

**Alireza** Good job! Now, books. *(He takes Baqer's and Yousef's books)* You must read them.

**Parviz** All of them?

**Alireza** I see it's difficult for you. So you can look at their pictures. Look, this is Lenin. Look how his head glows. I'd die for his bald head!

**Parviz** Who is this?

**Alireza** That is Stalin. I'd die for his mustache! He wanted to divide the world with his mustache. Look at the honor in his eyes.

**Parviz** He was a murderer, wasn't he?

**Alireza** What?

**Parviz** It is said that he massacred people.

**Alireza** Oh! Stupid Parviz! He killed only five million farmers in order to develop scientific agriculture. Do you call this a massacre? Those damn farmers didn't want to divide their fields. He said: "Don't you?" They said: "No". He said: "No?" They said: "No". He said: "So I will fuck..."

**Doostali** Ok! Don't be rude!

**Baqer** *(He grabs his book from Alireza)* Give it here. What is your business with Stalin, at all? *(Yousef take his book too)*

**Alireza** Who is Stalin? I said Israel. *(He mimics Yousef)* Well, it's true that Israelis are Jews but Jews aren't Israelis. Well, tigers don't eat vegetables so they hunt deer. Israelis have no home so they are tenant of the Palestinians and they will leave soon. Well, let the Jews decide. It's just a lie about Jews. Since Jews are born old, their hands are trembling. So when they want to shave a man's beard, they cut his throat. I mean, you know me. Since I'm a minority, I have come to war to become someone. Now, while I'm reading books, I have decided to fight the damn Iraqis to the death. Bravo! Good for me!

**Parviz** Bravo! Good for him! Bravo! Good for him!... (*Shahriar goes out from the barracks with a hammer for breaking the ice block*) Bravo! Good for him! ... (*To Alireza*) Look at him!

**Alireza** I wish his father's condom never broke.

*(Everybody laughs)*

**Baqer** Please tell his story. The Persepolis Cinema.

**Alireza** (*He mimics Shahriar*) Hello, what's up? (*To Parviz*) Give me his radio. (*Parviz seizes the radio out of Shahriar's pocket and gives it to Alireza. Alireza continues to mimic*) I was the soldier at the airport. One day when I was in my post, I saw a beautiful girl whose eyes were so ...

**Baqer** Wide!

**Alireza** Yes, Wide! (*Everybody laughs*). She got me in the sack with her gaze. We made a date for 4 p.m. by the Persepolis cinema. The girl was so happy she was guffawing. I did it! I said to myself (*Everybody laughs*). Next day, I went for the date. (*He imitates Shahriar waiting and checking his watch*) Four o'clock became five, became six, became seven, and became ten! But the girl...

**Parviz** Didn't come!

**Alireza** She didn't come. I didn't go to the garrison. I thought that "maybe they had guests. She will come tomorrow because she promised me". Next day, I went again but she didn't come. I thought that "maybe their guests wanted to leave and she has gone to accompany them". So, I didn't go to the garrison again. Next day, I went again but she didn't come. The cinema changed its film twice, but she...

**Parviz** Didn't come! (*Everybody laughs*)

**Shahriar** Don't lie! What are you talking about?

**Alireza** Briefly, I thought that her guests would not leave. I became disappointed and returned to the garrison. When I went to the garrison I realized that everything had changed. They arrested me without any logical, legal, or rational reason. They started asking nonsense questions: How many people were with you? Where did you hide Banisadr? How did you help Rajavi<sup>24</sup> escape? Confess!

**Baqer** (*Laughing*) Why Shahriar?

**Parviz** What was your crime?

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<sup>24</sup> Massoud Rajavi is one of the two leaders of the People's Mujahedin of Iran (MEK), alongside his wife Maryam Rajavi. In 1981, when Ayatollah Khomeini dismissed President Banisadr and a new wave of arrests and executions started in the country, Rajavi and Banisadr fled to Paris from Tehran's airbase. In 1986 Rajavi moved to Iraq and set up a base on the Iranian border. Rajavi was welcomed in Baghdad by Iraqi President Saddam Hussein.



**Alireza** At that time, streets were higgledy-piggledy. The National Front<sup>25</sup>, Mojahedin<sup>26</sup>, majorities, minorities, the left-wingers, the right-wingers, and Islamists, all were playing in the streets. Mojahedin were murdering people with blade cutters, Islamists flattening them with batons in order to fit them into Iran's map. They thought that I was responsible for all of these! *(Everybody laughs)* When they realized that I just had a date with a girl next to the Persepolis cinema, they punished me and exiled me here. Now, hello, what's up? *(Everybody laughs)*

**Parviz** What do you know about that girl?

**Alireza** Actually, I have no reliable information about her. I'm listening the radio to be notified by the center. *(He mimics a radio announcer)* Mr. Shahriar Sharghi! In order to get married, please come back to Tehran. Mr. Shahriar Sharghi you aren't shit...

**Shahriar** *(Angrily to Alireza)* So who is the shit? You?

*(Everybody stops laughing. Silence. Everybody is surprised and looks at Shahriar)*

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<sup>25</sup> The National Front of Iran is an opposition political organization in Iran. It was banned in July 1981

<sup>26</sup> The People's Mojahedin Organization of Iran is an Iranian political–militant organization based on Islamic and Socialist ideology and advocates overthrowing the Islamic Republic of Iran leadership and installing its own government.

**Alireza**        *(He threateningly goes to Shahriar; Shahriar is scared)* What? Are you calling me a shit?

*(Alireza goes to attack Shahriar. A struggle begins but everybody knows that it's just another of Alireza's games. They amusingly control Alireza but he continues)*

**Alireza**        I must kill him. He insulted me...

**Doostali**      Please forgive him. He won't do it again.

**Baqer**         *(He pulls Alireza away and mischievously points to Doostali)* Look at him! Talk about him!

**Alireza**        *(He starts to mimic Doostali)* I take refuge in the Lord. Backbiting? Never! No way!

**Baqer**         It's not backbiting. He is here. He has gravitas.

**Alireza**        Does he? No, he doesn't.

**Baqer**         Yes, he does.

**Parviz**         None of your business. *(To Doostali)* Do you have gravitas?

**Doostali**        Come on! Leave me alone.

**Parviz**         Don't you? If you have any, let us see it.

**Alireza**            He has, but a little.

**Doostali**            What?

**Alireza**            *(Points to Yousef)* He doesn't have any.

**Yousef**            What is that "gravitas"?

**Parviz**            Don't be curious. You have enough too.

**Baqer**            Get to the point!

**Alireza**            *(He mimics Doostali)* Parviz, let's cut your hair. *(Parviz leaves)* My brother, you shouldn't talk about others' dreams. It's backbiting. I take refuge in the Lord... Our miseries don't come from above; we are responsible for them. However the tigers aren't vegetarian, but we shouldn't allow them to hunt the deer. We have to make the tigers vegetarian. We shouldn't be sorry if we have some insolvable difficulties but we should try to solve the solvable difficulties, such as corruption. You see Parviz, we are fighting with corruption but you are fighting with those pimples. We have to work so hard, but if you just have fewer jelly rolls and creamy sweets, your problem will be solved. Yes, you are free! But what's the meaning of freedom? Does it mean creamy sweets? Jelly rolls? The belly? Oh Parviz! How happy we are that we are not born in the west. Dr. Alexis Carrel states that

there is no freedom in the west. There is no freedom anywhere. There is no freedom in any democracy. (With his normal accent) Now, Parviz like a horse that is watching the farrier says: *(He mimics Parviz)* Doostali, you are saying all these things in order to prevent me using that face cream, aren't you? But it's just a pimple cream, not a makeup cream. I'm not the kind of man who uses make up.

*(Everybody laughs. Suddenly Baqer looks at the entrance of the officers' barracks)*

**Baqer** Sh! The sergeant!

*(Everybody stops laughing. Everyone sits down somewhere and looks busy. Alireza goes to help Shahriar to break the ice block. Farkhondeh goes out from the barracks with an ice cooler. The guys say "hi" to him. He goes to Alireza and Shahriar)*

**Farkhondeh** This ice block is very small, as I put it in the cooler...

**Alireza** I said that too. He got two blocks. It becomes one block as it is put in the cooler. Even the two become one as he brings them. It becomes a half block as it goes into the cooler.

**Parviz** The two become one as it is brought from Ahvaz. In Shahriar's hand, it becomes a half from the truck to here.

**Alireza** It becomes a quarter as it is transferred into the cooler.

**Parviz** After half an hour, nothing remains. It gets warm.

**Farkhondeh** *(He isn't aware that they are teasing him)* So you mean why do they give us ice at all?

**Alireza** *(With a suppressed laugh)* If they don't want to give us ice, why do they give us coolers?

*(Everybody suppresses his laugh. Farkhondeh isn't aware)*

**Farkhondeh** It's very small for eight people... *(To Parviz)* So, you are going to Tehran.

**Parviz** What?

**Farkhondeh** You asked for a furlough, didn't you?

**Parviz** *(Very happy)* Oh! So it's accepted?

**Farkhondeh** Yes. Gather your belongings and go with the dinner truck.

*(Farkhondeh exits. Parviz happily wants to go to the soldiers' barracks, Alireza stops him)*

**Alireza** So you are leaving, instead of me. You should be honored.

**Baqer** Have good time in Tehran.

**Farkhondeh's voice** Where is the pitcher? Why are you playing with it? Do you really have a diploma? That diploma is just a piece of shit!

*(Everybody suppresses his laughter)*

**Parviz** Sh! He was really angry last night. I said to Alireza. He's been badly bitten by mosquitoes. He said I wish I was an animal!

**Baqer** I think he would like to be a fox!

**Alireza** He is genetically a fox. He is keeping the poultry because of his unconscious.

**Doostali** That's enough guys! No more backbiting!

**Baqer** It's not backbiting. We're just kidding around.

**Alireza** I have new news about him that would make you die laughing if I tell. I heard it yesterday evening, just about nineteen hours ago. A real scoop! But it's a secret. Don't leak who or where ...

**Baqer** Tell it!

**Alireza** Promise, Yousef!

**Yousef** Ok, tell.

**Baqer** Come on! We swear.

**Parviz** Tell it! It will remain just among us sixty five million people.<sup>27</sup>

**Alireza** Get away! I won't tell you. You will tell it in Tehran and have fun. You have to go to the barrack. *(Parviz goes and starts to gather his stuff.*

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<sup>27</sup> Iranian population at that time

*Alireza starts telling*) Do you know Abdonoori? Last night he saw my friend Mozafar and told him. He said that the sergeant Farkhondeh went to the Officers' Academy to be an officer. After six, seven months, it was revealed that his diploma wasn't acceptable. It was a fake one. He was expelled from the Officers' Academy and he was moved to the Sergeant's school. You see! Someone who wanted to be an officer was unfortunately going to be a sergeant!

**Baqer** It means that he would finally be a sergeant major! *(Everybody laughs)*

**Alireza** This miserable man...

**Baqer** The sergeant?

**Alireza** Yes, he is...

**Baqer** I always said that he had a failure in his life that made him that nervous.

**Doostali** Don't believe Abdonoori.

**Alireza** I swore! He also said that he has attempted suicide several times.

**Baqer** The sergeant?

**Alireza** Yes, seriously suicidal!

**Doostali** Was Abdonoori sober when he was giving this information to you?

**Alireza** Of course he was. Farkhondeh always wanted to be an officer, not a sergeant. At the sergeant's school, he did his best to either get back to the officers' academy or be fired from the army, but he couldn't. Until... Shahriar! Be on the lookout that he doesn't come. *(Alireza*

*places Shahriar to watch and continues to tell the story with a low voice)* Until there came a day when he was following the school commander, a colonel. The colonel was going to the officer's restroom and Farkhondeh secretly followed him. The colonel in all his glory sits and starts releasing. Farkhondeh quietly goes up the short wall of the restroom. He sits on the wall and stares at the colonel. After a few minutes while the colonel with all his grandeur and greatness is struggling, Farkhondeh sounds out: *(He mimics Farkhondeh)* Sir! Excuse me! I would be grateful if you could help me to... *(With his normal voice)* The colonel freezes. They just stare into each other's eyes for three minutes. Suddenly, he pulls up his pants and goes to his office. Next day, Farkhondeh is in a jail, then in the army of Khorasan and now he is keeping his poultry here.

*(Everybody is guffawing)*

- Doostali**        It's nonsense.
- Alireza**        I said he swore!
- Doostali**        His swearing doesn't make it true.
- Baqer**         From the very first days, I realized that he has an unresolved complex. That night when he attacked the Captain with an axe I said that, didn't I?
- Yousef**        He resents us so much for our diplomas. He resents the captain too.



**Parviz** He is a bachelor.

**Alireza** He is a humiliated man. Even Parviz, a poltroon private soldier, should just kill himself being among all these high school graduate soldiers.

*(Everybody laughs)*

**Parviz** Shut up! Fuck your diploma! Do you want me to say how your diploma...

**Yousef** Sh! The sergeant is coming!

*(Silence. Everyone looks busy. Farkhondeh comes. He puts the pitcher near the water tanker, takes the cooler and goes to the officers' barracks)*

**Baqer** Wow! He must have heard us, but he said nothing!

**Alireza** *(He mimics Abdonoori)* He shouldn't be here in the front; he should be there in Tehran. *(With his normal voice)* When Mozafar was out he didn't say a word but when he came back he didn't stop talking.

**Parviz** Are you sure that Mozafar has gone to headquarters?

**Alireza** Yes I am. His dear uncle supports him.

**Parviz** No!

**Alireza** Yes, he went. Would you like to go to headquarters too?

**Doostali** Why does Mozafar behave like this? He was in the artillery center, and then he went to missile center, and now headquarters.

**Alireza**            variety! He cannot stay in one place.

**Doostali**            You even libel your neighbor.

**Baqer**                He's lying. He's not their neighbor. That wealthy Mozafar with his effeminate gestures is a far cry from Alireza.

**Alireza**                We were neighbors. We stayed, they left. They got rich in the chaos of the beginning of the revolution. His father just had an old truck. When the revolution happened, he started dealing in land. After two years, he got wealthy and they went to the north of Tehran. Ah, those were the days! He was fighting with his wife every day. Mozafar's mother had picked up and dropped their big TV several times! That lousy man loved Homeyra<sup>28</sup>!

**Doostali**                Who is Homeyra?

**Alireza**                *(He sings)* "The tears fall down..."

**Baqer**                *(To Doostali)* That singer.

**Alireza**                He said that "she always looks at me". He did not realize that Homeyra was looking at the camera!

*(Everybody laughs)*

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<sup>28</sup> An Iranian singer before the revolution.

**Doostali**           What a fool he was!

**Baqer**             It's not nonsense at all. The suppressed complexes of poor people show up in these ways. *(To Alireza)* How did you know that?

**Alireza**           Everybody knew. His wife had told other women. No sound was heard from his truck except Homeyra's voice. One time we made fun of him. We gathered money with neighbor guys. We bought lots of Homeyra's photos. At night, we pasted those pictures to the walls and doors of their house, windows of his car and wherever we could. In the morning, when he went out of the house, he froze. He stared at the walls. As usual, he went to our house. My sister said that while he was crying he complained to my father about me. My father was a fanatic Muslim. I said to myself that my death was near! I quickly went to my father's room and began praying. The old man came in. He was waiting for me to finish praying. It was obvious that he was really angry. He walked several times around the room and suddenly started: *(He mimics his father)* Alireza, my boy, my son, my darling... You fishwife! *(Everybody laughs)* That was his worst swear word. *(He mimics his father)* Fishwife! Why did you do that? Shame on you!... I said please let me explain dad! I did not do that alone. We as the mosque guys made this decision together. Why should a married man

be in love with that slut? It's an honorable neighborhood. Do you want every man in this neighborhood to fall in love with someone else? Today Homeyra, tomorrow Soosan and Hayedeh and Neli and Leila and Marjan and Maloosak and Bita and Sima and Googoosh<sup>29</sup> and so on! We aren't dead dad, are we? ... He calmed down. He said: "Well done! Bravo! I am proud of you my son!" *(Pause. He sighs)* How simple and pure they are!

**Doostali** A father like him, but a son such as you ...

**Alireza** *(Thinking)* When I was a kid, neighbors and bakers and butchers and teachers and schoolmasters, even the mullah<sup>30</sup> of our neighborhood, even my father who I was really afraid of, all were just like toys for me.

**Baqer** Because you didn't have toys!

**Alireza** No. When I compared people with toys, I saw that toys are angrier and more serious.

**Doostali** You observe people well because you are smart, and you represent them well because you are really an actor. I am jealous of you most of the time.

**Alireza** Thank you so much!

**Baqer** Yes, Doostali is right.

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<sup>29</sup> All were Iranian female singers before the revolution

<sup>30</sup> A Muslim man, educated in Islamic theology and sacred law

**Alireza**           What a surprise! You two finally agree on one thing.

**Doostali**           *(To Baqer)* But it is said that one who observes himself is wise. *(He takes the cigarette which Baqer smokes)* Don't smoke!

**Baqer**            There is no difference. He, as you said, observes people minutely - that means he observes the environment. When he observes the environment, since he is a product of the environment, he can also observe himself. That means he is a sociologist whose knowledge has not been obtained from the academies.

**Doostali**            A human being is not just a product of the environment. Human nature ...

**Baqer**            Human nature is influenced by the environment.

**Doostali**            No, human nature is always fixed. A human is always a human.

**Baqer**            So all these killers, torturers, dictators, Shahs, SAVAK<sup>31</sup> agents ...

**Doostali**            It's obvious. Humans have some commonalities with animals that...

**Yousef**            The environment is not without effect, also there is heredity...

**Doostali**            *(To Yousef)* Would you be certain to be a Zionist If you were born in Israel?

**Yousef**            Maybe. But all Israeli people are not murderers, are they?

**Baqer**            He thinks they are.

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<sup>31</sup> Organization of National Intelligence and Security of the Nation was the secret police, domestic security and intelligence service in Iran during the reign of the Pahlavi dynasty.

**Doostali** It's your idea that the environment produces the human, isn't it? I believe that a human remains a human even among animals.

**Baqer** But animal traits will affect him.

**Doostali** Humans have some instincts like animals, such as eating, reproduction and so on. Those are fixed. But thoughts and notions...

**Alireza** *(During others' conversation, he is busy with a lighter which doesn't work. He is nervous and their conversation makes him angrier)* Give up, for God's Sake! That discussion again! Don't you get tired of it? God curse Banisadr who promoted free discussions in this country.

**Doostali** It's not related to Banisadr. It was written 1,400 years ago: "And the servants of those who are..."

**Alireza** Don't recite Quran at me. I know it. I say, don't engage in barren discussions.

**Doostali** Barren discussions? We are learning.

**Baqer** I only mean that your sociology...

**Alireza** *(Yelling)* I have no sociology. I'm just someone who wants everyone to laugh, to kill some time, to forget this hell. *(Silence. Everyone surprised looks at him. Alireza goes to the back fortification while he is sadly whispering a poem)*

The singer boy had gone to the war

He was singing loudly

In order that his friends don't hear the mortars' sound...

**Yousef** Whose is this poem?

**Alireza** It's my own. Bet you didn't see that coming. *(He continues)*

The singer boy had gone to the war

And with mad snaps of his fingers

He smothered the mines' sound...

**Baqer** You really are a poet!

**Alireza** We will see him in the city

With his friends, his brothers

If they survive the mines...

**Baqer** If they what?

**Alireza** *(Sighing)* No matter. Where is the pitcher? I'm going to do a common animal action.

*(Alireza goes to take the pitcher but Parviz grabs it)*

**Parviz** Get it if you can!

*(Parviz throws the pitcher to Shahriar. Shahriar throws it to others. Alireza tries to get it. Monkey in the Middle. The game continues until the captain's enters. When the captain arrives the pitcher is with Shahriar. Everybody salutes).*

**Captain** Take this, Parviz. Your leave papers. And a train ticket. You can go tonight.

**Parviz** *(Excited)* Thank you captain!

**Captain**            You are so lucky!

**Parviz**             Why?

**Captain**            I'm not sure but it's something new because all furloughs have been canceled.

**Alireza**            *(Shocked)* Canceled? Why, captain?

**Captain**            It's not clear yet. I'm going to headquarters for that. You will know soon. Go to your work. *(To Alireza who is sad)* What? Are you upset?

**Alireza**            No captain.

**Captain**            It's not going so bad with you in this war.

*(Parviz who had gone to the barracks comes back with a camera)*

**Parviz**             Captain please let's take a picture together.

*(Everybody except Alireza, who is sad, gets ready to take the picture. They call Alireza but he is as if in another world. Finally Baqer goes and brings him. Doostali brings the sergeant. Everyone stands in line except Parviz who wants to take the picture)*

**Parviz**            *(He sets the camera)* Say Cheese!

### Act III

*Darkness. We hear Baqer's guffaw, and a little light illuminates the scene. It's a hot and lethargic night. Baqer and Shahriar, who is on guard, are sitting together.*



*Baqer is laughing at something Shahriar said. The sound of some unidentifiable music is heard on Shahriar's radio.*

**Shahriar** Why are you laughing like that? What do a fish's eyes look like?

**Baqer** *(He coughs from laughing)* What a metaphor, Shahriar!

**Shahriar** What do a fish's eyes look like?

**Baqer** Never mind!

**Shahriar** Please, Baqer!

**Baqer** *(He fans himself because of the heat)* Forget it...

*(A short silence)*

**Shahriar** *(Dreamy)* When she told me that my eyes are like fish eyes... *(Baqer laughs again)* Don't laugh! Tell me what do a fish's eyes look like?

**Baqer** Fish eyes... *(Looking for proper words to explain)* are neither penetrating nor curious. They goggle and are lightless. *(He turns Shahriar's face towards himself)* Let me see... Yes, she was a perspicacious girl! *(He laughs)*

**Shahriar** *(Sadly)* Perspicacious and unpunctual...

**Baqer**            *(He has noticed Shahriar's sad tone. He quits laughing. Affably)*  
Don't worry. Iranians are unpunctual from birth.

**Shahriar**        Is your problem also related to unpunctuality?

**Baqer**            *(He sighs)* This war should have happened when we were either too old or newborn...

**Shahriar**        Wouldn't it be better if it never happened? Then the universities would be open and people like me...

**Baqer**            By the way, what was your major?

**Shahriar**        Microminiaturization.

**Baqer**            *(Surprised)* What?

**Shahriar**        Micro-minia-turization.

**Baqer**            *(With a distrustful laugh)* Are you sure there is such a major in the Iranian universities?

**Shahriar**        It's not a major. Look Baqer, the slogan of computer designers is a sentence: Smaller and again smaller. In fact, designing devices with the power of thousands of people, but one thousandth of the weight of a human...

*(The sudden sound of a stone smashing the water tanker startles them)*

**Shahriar**        *(Scared)* What was that?

**Baqer**            *(With a muffled voice)* Sit down!

**Shahriar**        Iraqis?

**Baqer**            Don't be afraid!

**Shahriar**        But the guys...

**Baqer**            Sit down! Don't move!

**Shahriar**        *(To the officers' barracks)* Sergeant! Sergeant! Stones. Iraqis...

**Farkhondeh's voice**    What, again?

**Shahriar**        Stones, Sergeant! Stones. Iraqis are throwing stones.

**Farkhondeh's voice**    When?

**Shahriar**        Right now! I was talking with Baqer then...

**Farkhondeh**        *(He comes out of the barrack)* How many times have I told you  
not to talk on guard duty?

**Baqer**            *(Craning over the fortification to see the Iraqi's line)* Sh! They are  
Iraqis, Sergeant.

**Farkhondeh** Don't make a fuss!

**Baqer** You don't believe us, Sergeant?

**Farkhondeh** Do you see anything?

**Baqer** If I saw I wouldn't be scared!

*(The sounds of footsteps)*

**Shahriar** *(Scared. Toward the sound)* Halt! Halt!

**Farkhondeh** *(He runs towards Shahriar. Angry)* You should only say halt when you actually see someone, soldier!

*(Another stone)*

**Baqer** *(To the Sergeant)* You see?

**Farkhondeh** *(He runs towards Baqer and looks over the fortification with him)*

Yeah. There, from there... Why do they throw stones? *(Phone ringing.*

*To Shahriar)* Go tell whoever that is to hang up. I want to talk to headquarters. Hurry up!

*(Shahriar runs. After a short greeting he calls the sergeant)*

**Shahriar** Sergeant! It's Abdonoori.

*(The sergeant comes and takes the phone. Shahriar goes to Baqer and looks over the fortification. Baqer roughly grabs Shahriar's shirt and pulls him down to not be seen by the enemy)*

**Farkhondeh** *(on the phone, sarcastically)* Hello... Hi. How are you, Abdonoori? Everything okay on your end? ... Hm? Oh, no, there is no war, just a little stone throwing ... I don't know who... look, could you put the Captain on the phone? ... No... Well, where is he? ... The fortification for what? ... *(Something he hears from the phone gradually changes his tone and makes him angrier. Baqer's and Shahriar's attention is drawn to him)* Me? ... Where did you hear that? ... Who told you? ... Who told him? ... Who did you tell? ... Fuck you!... *(He angrily slams the phone and stands up)*

**Baqer** What's happened, Sergeant?

**Farkhondeh** *(He crazily goes around the scene and collects his stuff. Baqer follows him)* What a liar!

**Baqer** Did something happen?

**Farkhondeh** The peace is over. *(While he is collecting his clothes from the clotheslines)* That is it. That is it! I'm done. My good nature has a limit, you know! I've trained in the army my entire adult life, and now I'm

taking orders from this little kid, with his fake bachelor's degree that's not worth pissing on. I'm done letting civilians kick my ass. To hell with a Sergeant's salary!

**Baqer** Sergeant!

**Shahriar** what's happened?

**Baqer** What did the Captain say about you?

**Farkhondeh** If he doesn't shut up I'll choke him.

**Baqer** Did he say something?

**Farkhondeh** The dirty backbiter! All I said was that my clothes don't suit me – an officer's uniform is a better match for my height and body type. So he goes and tells the Colonel I've been speaking out against the Army! First that clumsy sissy lies to my face, then he speaks ill of miserable me behind my back. *(He bends into the dugout to take something)*

**Baqer** You aren't miserable...

**Farkhondeh** These kinds of people are our true enemy, not those poor bastards who are picking up their corpses and throwing some gravel. *(He pulls out his military bag from the dugout and puts his clothes in)* Did you know the Captain is scared to come here at night? He never pokes his

head out of the dugout in the front line. Has he ever sat down to talk to you? He says that since it doesn't make money courage is of no use – nor is fighting for a country the size of a matchbox! He complains that in an Islamic war you have to fight for free!

**Baqer**           *(He tries to calm him)* He didn't say a bad thing. Our soldiers aren't mercenary. Most guys are volunteers.

**Farkhondeh**     Hey! What do you think, that I'm the backbiter now?

**Baqer**            No way, Sergeant!

**Farkhondeh**     The Captain and I had made our peace. Now, we're at war again, just the two of us. No matter what, I always have to pay him back for something. But now I'm leaving. Come what may! *(He takes his bag and wants to go)*

**Baqer**            *(He stops the sergeant)* You can't desert, Sergeant!

**Farkhondeh**     What's the worst that can happen? Will they chop me up? I already almost died three times out here! *(He wants to go)*

**Baqer**            *(He tries to catch his bag)* Give that to me, Sergeant! This is how the world is. If you desert, everyone will say you were too scared to fight! They will say you were afraid of death, won't they?

*(Baqer's last words calm his anger. He turns loose and releases the bag slowly to fall to the ground. Baqer steadily picks up the bag and puts it out of Farkhondeh's reach. Farkhondeh, broken and shuffling, goes to the water tanker and starts washing his face. Baqer goes and sits next to him. A long silence)*

**Farkhondeh**     *(Choked with tears)* I wish I were a real coward. I'd be lying in my home...

**Baqer**            *(Kindly)* So stay! Talk to the Captain in the morning. Reach an agreement or cope with him... What can you do? So what? We conscripted guys, we're gone in two years. The captain is a conscripted soldier too. He will be gone in six months. But you'll stick around. *(He brings a cigarette out of his pocket and gives Farkhondeh)* We're used to you, sergeant. We have no one to help us get through this war without you.

**Farkhondeh**     But I'm always the one who has to sacrifice in this war...

**Baqer**            War is not always about advancing. Sometimes it's about retreating.

*(Baqer lights his lighter and brings it to Farkhondeh's face to light the cigarette, but he's shocked to see Farkhondeh's crying. Farkhondeh turns away.)*



**Farkhondeh** This war has embarrassed me, Baqer... This goddamn war made me embarrassed... I'm down. It threw me down...

**Baqer** *(Deeply affected)* You're not even old yet.

**Farkhondeh** *(Stands up)* I can neither go nor stay... *(He takes his bags and shuffling goes to the barrack)* Oh! The Army... Oh!...

*(Farkhondeh goes into the barrack and after a while the sound of his crying is heard. Baqer sits and lights a cigarette. Shahriar wants to say something but Baqer bitterly stops him. Baqer takes a puff and wipes his tears. Alireza enters with a pot in his hands. He puts the pot in their barrack. Then he takes a look at Baqer and Shahriar. Hearing the sound of Farkhonde's crying, he looks at the officer's barrack)*

**Alireza** What's happened?

**Baqer** Nothing, Nothing. They threw stones. We heard footsteps...

**Alireza** *(Going to the officer's barrack)* What's wrong with the sergeant?

**Baqer** *(He stops Alireza)* Sh! Nothing, leave him alone.

**Alireza** What's happened?

**Baqer** *(Changing the topic)* How long have you been back?

**Alireza** Long time!

**Shahriar** Sh! Do you hear the sound?

**Baqer** *(Listening)* What sound?

**Alireza** Drums.

**Shahriar** Drums? That's the sound of a tank chain.

**Baqer** *(He sighs)* It starts again. We almost forgot what it was like.

**Alireza** *(He lies down)* Go to sleep, you all. If you stay awake too long, you start to forget things. Sleep to remember what color your mother's eyes are. Another midnight has passed and I'm still awake for no reason.

**Baqer** You could sleep earlier.

**Alireza** I was roaming around, watching the sky. Look: *(Poetically)* behind the speedy cloud pieces, the moon is crawling and gliding on them smoothly. Oh, if this night were not poisoned by waiting.

**Baqer** *(He is surprised by Alireza's melancholic mood. He goes to Alireza and looks at him)* Are you ok?

**Alireza** The moon, the moon, the moon!

**Baqer**            Good for you! *(He wants to go to the barrack)*

**Alireza**           Baqer!

**Baqer**            *(He stops)* What?

**Alireza**           Come here ... Come to me, you won't regret it. Come... I want to show you the Parviz's hidden stash of cigarettes.

**Baqer**            Let me go to sleep, Ali.

*(Baqer, sad and bored, goes to the barrack. Alireza is not normal)*

**Alireza**           Shahriar!

**Shahriar**        Yes, Alireza.

**Alireza**           Bring your gun.

**Shahriar**        Ok...

**Alireza**           Is your gun loaded?

**Shahriar**        Yes. Twenty bullets. One in the barrel and nineteen in the magazine.

**Alireza**           Flip off the safety, active the barrage mode, bring it here, and give it to me.

**Shahriar**        But that's dangerous!

**Alireza** Do what I say! (*Shahriar obeys and hesitantly gives him the gun. Alireza puts the gun under his chin*). What would happen now if my finger goes on the trigger, Shahriar?

**Shahriar** (*Worried*) Be careful, sir! You're not okay. The gun is loaded.

**Alireza** I'm at the end of my tether, Shahriar... I'd like to talk to someone.

**Shahriar** Let me call Baqer.

**Alireza** No! His speech doesn't work for me. He's a good guy but he has a series of words that he keeps repeating.

**Shahriar** (*Desperate*) Doostali and Yousef aren't here too...

*(Alireza, who still holds the gun under his chin, puts his finger on the trigger and closes his eyes. After a short pause, he imitates the sound of firing.*

*Shahriar falls to the ground in fear. Alireza laughs.)*

**Alireza** Are you scared? Don't be scared. (*He takes a look at Shahriar. He stops laughing, with a sudden anger goes to Shahriar and points the gun at him*). Do you know what I hate about you? You're a coward. You're not curious.

**Shahriar** But...

**Alireza** (*Shouting*) But what?

**Shahriar**        *(He is going to faint in fear. On a single breath)* An English scientist said that curiosity is a bad habit if you think about the number of curious deer that have been killed because they paused just for a moment to take a look at the hunter's hat or his gun.

*(Silence. Alireza, surprised by Shahriar's pompous speech, looks at him)*

**Alireza**        Say it again, but articulately.

**Shahriar**        An English scientist...

**Alireza**        Ok!

**Shahriar**        Ok what, Alireza?

**Alireza**        When did he say this? Where?

**Shahriar**        In the book: "alphabet of the universe", if I'm not mistaken page 341, in the self-adaptive system section. W. Ashby.

**Alireza**        Ok. What else, Shahriar.

**Shahriar**        What, sir?

**Alireza**        *(Nervous. With threat)* Just talk! Don't say "what sir" again. Talk a little more completely.

**Shahriar**        What should I say? Maybe you should ask me something.

**Alireza** I don't know what to ask - you should answer me anyway. This gun is loaded, you know?

**Shahriar** That's really dangerous, sir!

**Alireza** Come on! Just talk. Talk about that thing.

**Shahriar** The self-adaptive system?

**Alireza** Yes.

**Shahriar** Self-Adaptation is an important and valuable feature that all organisms, especially we human beings, have developed over a millions years of evolution... *(Whimpering)* Why are you interested in this tonight?

**Alireza** I beg you please don't stop. Talk, Shahriar. You have to teach me this self-adaptive system tonight. It's important to me.

**Shahriar** Your Self-Adaptation is already very high, sir. You quickly adapt to any situation and help others to adapt. You've changed this war front to a park or a school yard. But I have no power to adapt to these conditions at all...

**Alireza** *(Wondering)* Are you high or is it me?

**Shahriar**        *(Sad)* All humans aren't the same, sir. Some people display their abilities better when they are at risk, like you. Some become awkward in difficult situations, like me. The blasting of a mortar, a war cannon, or even throwing a stone makes me anxious. Not only I am unable to do anything, but also my life is disrupted. *(Pause. Ashamed)* Sir, I've gotten better in these ceasefire days, haven't I?

**Alireza**        Yeah! Yeah! You have keen ears. I'm 100 meters from the fortification yet when you say halt.

**Shahriar**        *(Proudly)* That's nothing. At the Ghale Morghi Airport, I broke the record of pilots' professional precision. Look sir, ordinary people's ears can just recognize some sounds. Pilots, who are the healthiest people, are able to detect changes in engine speed as little as 3 percent! But at the Ghale Morghi Airport, I improved this record to one and a half percent in the industrial hearing test. *(With a proud laugh)* All pilots said that how exceptional Shahriar Sharghi's ears are! *(He is laughing but he realizes that Alireza's mind is somewhere else. He stops laughing. Cautious)* Sir! ... *(Alireza is oblivious)* Sir!

**Alireza**        *(Shocked)* Yes?

**Shahriar**        Am I boring you?

**Alireza** No! No! ... What did you study, Shahriar?

**Shahriar** *(Sighing)* I got my diploma in Math and Physics with a good GPA. I was getting ready for the university but the war began... The major I wanted to study is very useful for the future of Iran. Is microminiaturization familiar to you?

**Alireza** What?

**Shahriar** The slogan of computer designers, sir, is a sentence: Smaller and again smaller. The future world is the computer world, dear Alireza. A device that weighs one hundredth or one thousandth of us but it can do in five minutes what we couldn't finish in 500 years...

*(Alireza, who getting worse, stares at Shahriar all the time he is talking. A long silence)*

**Alireza** Have you talked to anyone else about these things?

**Shahriar** No.

**Alireza** Does Baqer know anything about you?

**Shahriar** We talk sometimes but please don't tell him these things. I just wanted you not to be alone... Now please let me put that gun's safety back on.



**Alireza** Leave it! Answer me. Why are you here?

**Shahriar** I'm like you, like other guys. It is war, sir.

**Alireza** You mean you have come to shoot with your hands? *(On the verge of crying)* Oh! How much you curse me in your heart because of that girl and that Persepolis cinema story...

**Shahriar** *(Sadly)* Ghale Morghi, Persepolis cinema, Javadieh... These are full of memories for me. But the story wasn't as ridiculous as you said it was. Shahriar Sharghi has never been that ridiculous... *(Pause)* Now let me put the safety on. If your finger goes on the trigger, twenty bullets...

**Alireza** Leave it, Shahriar! Leave it! I'm all right. Go to sleep, go. *(Shahriar is hesitant to leave Alireza alone but he eventually goes to the barrack)* Shahriar! *(Shahriar turns)* Can that device you talked about detect the voice of...no, the smell of ... no, the shadow of death?

**Shahriar** These devices are related to life and math, sir.

**Alireza** But I can see its shadow.

*(Baqer coughing comes out of the barrack while he is fanning himself because of the heat. Seeing him, Shahriar goes to him and says something in his ear while he is pointing at Alireza)*

**Baqer**            *(He take a look at Alireza and Shahriar in surprise)* What are you talking about? What happened? *(Shahriair goes into the barrack)*  
What happened, Alireza? Alireza! *(He anxiously sits in front of Alireza)*  
What wrong with you tonight, Alireza?

**Alireza**            *(He takes a long breath to stop crying)* I am very all right.

**Baqer**            Really? Good for you! Where were you?

**Alireza**            What should I say?

**Baqer**            The answer.

**Alireza**            Ask a question then.

**Baqer**            Don't play innocent.

**Alireza**            Swear to God! Why are you laughing, you vile motherfucker?

**Baqer**            Ali!

**Alireza**            Do you think I'm blind, motherfucker?

**Baqer**            *(Offended)* Ali!

**Alireza**            Shut up! You deserve worse. You are so happy that I've been deceived, aren't you?

**Baqer**            By whom?

**Alireza**           Where is Parviz now? He's on an express train, his back to the world of death and war. Are you aware that all front lines are on high alert from ten o'clock tonight?

**Baqer**            So what?

**Alireza**           Yesterday all furloughs were canceled. Today we're on high alert. Tomorrow must be the big push.

**Baqer**            So what? It's not your first time, is it?

**Alireza**           I had premonition... I'm sick of it. *(He suddenly runs to the water tanker and vomits)*

**Baqer**            *(He runs to Alireza and rubs his shoulders anxiously)* Take it easy.

**Alireza**           We'll be okay, right?

**Baqer**            Yes, yes.

**Alireza**           Where is Doostali to pray for me?

**Baqer**            What's wrong with you, Ali?

**Alireza**            Some guys were praying out there. Dua Kumayl<sup>32</sup>... Tonight is Thursday night, isn't it?

**Baqer**            I don't know.

**Alireza**            Yes, it is Thursday night. Some guys were praying.

**Baqer**            So, you could join them.

**Alireza**            I wanted to do. But two or three guys surrounded me. They said:  
"You better come with us, or else. It is nothing, it doesn't take long...  
Just three puffs..."

**Baqer**            *(He stands up)* Oh!

**Alireza**            I need to sober up... Is lemon juice good?

**Baqer**            The best thing is that you sleep.

**Alireza**            I can't sleep... Fuck! Is this what happens with weed and hash?

**Baqer**            *(Watching around)* Sh!

**Alireza**            No one should know... I want a cold thing.

**Baqer**            Stay! I will bring for you.

*(Baqer wants to go but Alireza grabs his leg and stares into his eyes)*

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<sup>32</sup> Dua Kumayl (literally the Supplication of Kumayl) is a supplication famous among Shi'a for its perceived beauty and a traditional supplication in Shi'a.

**Alireza**            Until the end of your life, you will say that Alireza was a bad guy, won't you?

**Baqer**            *(Upset)* What are you saying, buddy? *(He goes into the barrack)*

**Alireza**            Until the end of life! The end... This is the end, I swear... How hot the earth is... *(He lurches forward)* Fuck it! Why am I like this?... Where is everybody? We should just talk. Our Baqer is a good guy. He has a handful of words that keeps repeating... But Shahriar is a scientist! Doostali is a mystic, Yousef is lovely, and Parviz ... Parviz is a piece of shit. This is me, Alireza! Khuzestan! Do you see your ruin?

**Baqer**            *(He comes out of the barrack with a glass in his hand)* I thought you were not interested in this kind of business.

**Alireza**            The bell has tolled, the school is closed, and the kids are going home. I am also at the end of the line, plump and rounded. I am a first-grade student. There is a cemetery between our school and our house. Through the cemetery, in the line, toward home...Hope my mom is home. home without mom is a jail... Alireza! Write my son: "All for one and one for all".

**Baqer**            Your behavior, Alireza, ...

**Alireza**            I have paid the price for my behavior in advance...

**Baqer** I'm just telling for your own sake.

**Alireza** Oh God! Just three puffs can make your head that hot! ... Daddy ...  
Daddy...

**Baqer** Yeah?

**Alireza** I no longer agree that a man should mind his own business. I ...

**Baqer** Please Alireza...

**Alireza** Why don't you go to sleep? Do you have to stay awake?

**Baqer** You're talking nonsense. Go to sleep. If someone wakes up, sees your condition and reports you, your number is up.

**Alireza** I know what your problem is. You worry about being blamed for sitting with me. You irritate me. A passionate young man like me...

**Baqer** Sh! Be quiet!

**Alireza** What?

**Baqer** *(Listening)* That sound...

**Alireza** Are you another Shahriar? His ears are as keen as a deer's too. Do you know that Shahriar is a ...

**Baqer** Sh! There is a sound...

**Alireza** It always sounds first.

**Baqer** I think they are the guys.

**Alireza** They aren't throwing stones, are they?

**Baqer** When you are here, no.

**Alireza** What do you mean?

**Baqer** It's you – you're the one. Are you laughing?

**Alireza** So, you're not scared because you think it's me. But I swear that...

**Baqer** Sh! (He takes the gun and goes toward the sound) Halt!

**Doostali's voice** It's us, Baqer.

**Baqer** *(He anxiously runs to Alireza and tries to drag him into the barrack)*  
It's our guys. Go to the barrack. Get up. It's Yousef but he's not alone, Doostali is with him!

**Alireza** *(He resists)* I don't see anything.

**Baqer** Get up!

**Alireza** I didn't steal anything from anyone, did I?

**Baqer** Get up if you know what's good for you.

**Alireza** I don't have to go to the barrack. I'm sitting here.

**Baqer** Don't be ridiculous. For your own sake, dammit.

**Alireza** I'm staying here. Leave me alone.

**Baqer** I don't give a shit, but don't speak, or they will find out. Ok? The Captain is with them too. Go!

**Captain's voice** Who is on guard?

**Baqer** *(He pushes Alireza to a corner and runs to the fortification to pretend watching)* I am, Captain! Good evening.

**Captain's voice** Hi there!

**Doostali's voice** Why is it you, Baqer?

**Baqer** Who else would it be?

**Doostali's voice** Didn't Alireza come back?

**Baqer** He did, but he wasn't feeling well. I stayed on for him.

**Captain's voice** Was he telling the truth or cheating?

**Baqer** Alireza never cheats, does he?



**Captain**        *(He enters and goes to the fortification)* You know what he did? He called up the kitchen and told them it was me, and ordered up a pot of lentils. He did a good job. All the chefs swear that it was my voice...  
What's going on here?

*(Doostali and Yousef, who has a flashlight, enter too. Doostali goes to the water tanker to clean his muddy pants)*

**Doostali**        We saw some movement. It is not clear what they are doing.

**Captain**        Don't hurry. It will be clear in a few days. *(He is going to the barrack)*

**Baqer**            Is it true that we're going to push?

**Captain**        God willing! Good night. Where is the Sergeant?

**Baqer**            He was just around.

*(The captain goes into the officer's barrack. After a while, Baqer runs to the door of the barrack to eavesdrop)*

**Baqer**            There will be a fight now.

**Yousef**          Why? What happened?

**Baqer**            Sh!

**Doostali**        Not again?

**Baqer**            There was chaos here ten minutes ago. I don't know what  
Abdonoori said to the sergeant, but whatever it was, it made him  
frantic.            *(Baqer quietly sits to eavesdrop)*

**Alireza**            *(From where he was hiding. Laughing)* God Almighty! A Jew goes to  
Dua Kumay! A communist eavesdrops...

**Doostali**            Why didn't the singer boy come?

**Alireza**            That idiot Alireza was invited to another party.

**Doostali**            God bless him!

*(Alireza comes and join them)*

**Alireza**            God bless you! Did you enjoy your prayer, dear Yousef?

**Baqer**              Sh!

**Yousef**              He says keep quiet... I was just watching.

**Baqer**              *(He runs to them)* He's talking about the high alert. He says it will  
start at twelve o'clock. What time is it now? *(Yousef puts the  
flashlight on Doostali's wristwatch)*

**Doostali**            *(Looking at his wristwatch)* I cannot see but it's about 10:30.

**Baqer**              Is it the push?

**Doostali** Without a doubt!

**Baqer** When?

**Doostali** Not clear. Maybe tomorrow, maybe ten days later, or maybe at next dawn.

*(Baqer goes to the barrack again)*

**Alireza** Do you have a cigarette, Doostali?

**Doostali** You know I don't smoke, don't you?

**Alireza** I know, but someone needs to give me a cigarette...

**Doostali** What are you doing like that? I thought you were smart.

**Alireza** Why What? What has happened?

**Doostali** You know better than I. Are you sick? What's wrong with you?  
Come here. Come. What did you do at that party?

**Alireza** *(He comes to Doostali and wants to hug him)* Forgive me dear Doosti.

**Doostali** *(Nervously)* Back off, or else... You make me mad, Alireza.

**Alireza**            Else what? What is the last step? Death? It's all over for me. But...  
but my stomach is lurching. I'm afraid you'll make fun of me but... I'm  
scared.

**Doostali**           Scared?! That's not like you.

**Alireza**            Do you think I'm afraid of death? Not at all! I'm scared of when  
school kids draw a horseshoe mustache on my photo and nobody  
knows who Alireza was, where he was...

**Yousef**            *(He pulls Alireza aside)* I think you better sleep.

**Alireza**            I cannot sleep. How can I sleep, Yousef?

**Baqer**            *(He comes to others)* What's going on, Alireza? *(Pause. His attention  
is still on officer's barracks)* For all the sergeant huffed and puffed, I  
thought a fight would break out when the Captain came, but look  
how kind they are together.

**Alireza**            *(He takes a piece of an artillery shell out of his pocket)* Look. I went  
to the kitchen to get something for Doostali's Sahari, and I found this  
in the lentils. It's a piece of an artillery shell, a piece of scrap metal.  
This will be plunged into our bodies, won't it?

**Baqer**            *(He takes the shell piece and looks at it)* Are you afraid of this?

**Alireza** Aren't you?

**Baqer** *(Thinking)* I'm afraid that when we die and become dust, everything may not be ok in our cities; the revolution, justice ...

**Alireza** Come on! I'm talking about death, about not being. Aren't you afraid of it?

**Baqer** *(He throws the shell piece)* Yes, I am. *(with lump in his throat)* Life is not just a bunch of dry grass that you should burn it for no reason...

**Doostali** *(He Comes to Baqer an touches his shoulder)* A man who does not lose his life for something, will lose it for nothing... *(Pointing to Alireza)* That's why you hid him? Because he's high?

**Baqer** He just is tired. He's fine. His mother's face has come to his mind.

**Doostali** Mother... *(He takes the gun from Baqer and goes up the fortification)*

**Yousef** He should sleep.

**Baqer** He is ok now. Aren't you, Alireza?

**Alireza** Yah!

**Baqer** *(Whispering)* Could you go to sleep?

**Alireza** I can't sleep sinfully, can I?

**Baqer** Sin? You have committed no sin. Did he, Doostali? Tell him he didn't commit a sin.

**Alireza** *(Humming)* I have never done anything that was not somehow sinful.

**Baqer** Doostali!

**Doostali** Yes.

**Baqer** What are you doing?

**Doostali** Last viewings!

**Baqer** Can you see anything?

**Doostali** My eyes get so weak. On the way to the mosque, I fell into holes several times.

**Baqer** Vitamin and protein deficiency! You're killing yourself.

**Doostali** Those corpses on the other side of the fortification are now full of vitamins, aren't they?

*(Alireza goes into the barrack)*

**Alireza's voice** Oh, oh, oh! I said lentils, you said protein. The best medicine for poor memory is cooked lentils, dear Doosti!... Do you starve for

humanity's lack of food or for understanding the suffering of the hungry? Because, one day - Good old days! - My dad said that we fast in order to become aware of the suffering of the poor. I said daddy, why do the poor fast? He said come on boy, run, come here... Come here boys... *(He gradually brings the dinner stuff like the lentils pot, bread and etc. of out of the barrack)* Guys, let's go around Dad's table. Come! Yousef, Baqer, Doostali... Call Shahriar too. Parviz is gone anyway. Now we are seven. Could I call the sergeant and the captain too? *(To Yousef)* Come, Judah! *(Yousef and Alireza spread the tablecloth on the ground. Alireza puts the pot in the center)* let's sit. Come, dear Doostali. Yousef, take off your boots. I will wash your feet. Your feet smell... *(Yousef, who seems to be upset, leaves)* Where are you going?

**Yousef** I'll come back.

*(Farkhondeh comes out of the barrack)*

**Farkhondeh** Squad Attention! Move it, soldiers. Hurry up... Get up Alireza... *(He takes a look at the tablecloth)* It's not dinner time, is it?

**Alireza** It is an untimely dinner. Help yourself. It is lentils.

**Farkhondeh** Follow your orders! Hurry up soldiers!

**Alireza** Is something going on?

**Farkhondeh** Yah! The captain will explain... run soldiers! (*Seeing the captain who comes out of the barrack*) Squad, Attention!

**Captain** Come and sit guys. Come here (*He sees the tablecloth*) You had dinner?

**Alireza** Yes we did, captain. I got this lentils pot for Doostali.

**Captain** Yes, I've heard. When we have time, you'll have to show me how you imitate my voice.

**Alireza** Oh! They slander me, captain.

**Captain** Then why are you munching away yourself?

**Alireza** Believers fast, sinners eat... Help yourself, Doostali. We are your guests.

**Doostali** Thank you, Alireza

**Alireza** (*To the captain*) Please help yourself

**Captain** Sit down Farkhondeh.

**Farkhondeh** Of course, captain.

**Doostali** Why are you standing, Yousef?



**Yousef** I'm fine here. I have a cold.

**Baqer** Come on!

*(Baqer and Doostali bring Yousef to the tablecloth. Yousef puts a candle on the tablecloth and Alireza lights it. Scene light turn off and we can see them sitting on the floor, around tablecloth only in the light of the candle)*

**Captain** It is the high alert from twelve o'clock tonight... Don't you have spoons?

**Farkhondeh** I'll bring some.

**Captain** Sit down. All sit down.

**Doostali** We can eat with our hands. This is the last supper, isn't it?

**Baqer** Is it the push, captain?

**Captain** I'm not sure. Here is a border of two thousand kilometers. But probably, we will push to the depth of the enemy territory.

**Doostali** Hopefully, this is the last attack.

**Baqer** Will we cross the border?

**Captain** The border...

**Alireza** Then, when will we know what will happen to us? I mean, to be or not to be.

**Captain** It is not your first time, is it? Everybody in. Side by side. The volunteers, people, Sepahis, Basijis... *(He eats a mouthful and gets up)* After having dinner, get up and take some light stuff, so if the move command is issued we will be ready *(He wants to go to the barrack, but he remembers something. He comes back and puts the flashlight on the faces of all guys who are having dinner as if there is no war and death)* By the way, one of us must stay here to take care of our equipment. Not me; I have to be on the CB radio. *(He goes into the barrack)*

**Alireza** Who will stay?

**Baqer** Ha! We all are gone.

*(Baqer and Doostali get up and go to prepare their stuff)*

**Farkhondeh** *(Pointing to the breadcrumb on the tablecloth)* Take these for the chickens. *(He gets up and goes).*

**Alireza** Dear Shahriar, please prepare my stuff too.

**Yousef** I'll do it. *(He goes)*

*(Now no one is around the table except Alireza whose face can be seen in the candle light. Everyone else is gathering his belongings in the dark at the back stage. Only the muted sound of their talking or walking can be heard)*

**Alireza**        What happened? So what about the lentils? *(No answer)* In the worst case the sun will rise tomorrow and will not see us anymore... *(He eats a mouthful)* Do you want to hear a joke? *(No answer)* ok, I'll tell one. One day a million guys set an appointment at an inn. The first one comes in and goes up to the host. *(Mimicking the first person)* "Do you have a room available?" *(Mimicking the host)* "We only have a five-bed room". *(Mimicking the first person)* "No problem. We just want to sleep". He got the key and went into the room and saw a candle lit in the room. He wanted to put out the candle and sleep. *(He mimics the first person's blowing)* "Puff! Puff!" But he could not put out the candle<sup>33</sup>. He went to sleep. The second one came. *(Mimicking the second person)* "Do you have an available room?" *(Mimicking the host)* "We only have a five-bed room". *(Mimicking the second person)* "No problem. We just want to sleep". He went into the room and saw a candle lit. *(Mimicking the first person)* "Can you put the candle out?" *(Mimicking the second person)* "Sure! That's easy. Puff! Puff!"

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<sup>33</sup> Besides the host, Alireza mimics five other person as following during this joke: A man whose jaw tilted to the right, left, forward, back and finally a person with a forward rosebud mouth.

*(Mimicking the first person) "Nope?" (Mimicking the second person)*  
"Nope!". They went to sleep. *(Pause)* The third one came. *(Mimicking the first person) "Can you put the candle out?" (Mimicking the second person) "Can you put the candle out?" (Mimicking third person)*  
"Sure! That's easy. Puff! Puff!" *(Mimicking the first person) "Nope?" (Mimicking the first person) "Nope?" (Mimicking the third person)*  
"Nope!" *(Pause. Gradually he is choked with tears).* The fourth one came. *(Mimicking the first person) "Can you put the candle out?" (Mimicking the second person) "Can you put the candle out?" (Mimicking third person) "Can you put the candle out?" (Mimicking the fourth person) "Puff! Puff!" (Mimicking the first person) "Nope?" (Mimicking the first person) "Nope?" (Mimicking the third person) "Nope?" (Mimicking the fourth person) "Nope!". (Pause. He can barely not cry).* The fifth one came. *(Mimicking the first person) "Can you put the candle out?" (Mimicking the second person) "Can you put the candle out?" (Mimicking third person) "Can you put the ...?" (Mimicking the fourth person) "Can you..." (Mimicking the fifth person) "Nope?" (Mimicking the first person) "Nope?" (Mimicking the third person) "Sure! That's easy" ...*

*(With tears streaming down his face, Alireza moistens his fingers on his tongue and kills the candle)*      **The end**

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