



**After Us
The Frozen Desert**

MOEIN MANSOORI FARD



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After us: the frozen desert

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Dedicated to:

My dear wife, my compassionate mother and father, my lovely sister and my kind and affable brother, because any line of this book could not be written without their helps.

To all of my dear friends whom I am proud to have them, and I wish them health and succession.

MOEIN MANSOORI FARD

This book is a completely imaginary work and all of the characters, their names, places and the events are the outcome of the author's mind and his imagination, and they don't exist in reality. Any similarity of the persons, places, and events to the reality is completely accidental and is not real. The whole effort of the author in creating this book has been just narrating a story that may fit with the reality and not any other purpose. All of the aspects of the story have been told without any intention.

Chapter 1

The wandering wanderer

My throat and nose are irritated and my lips are dry. Strange wheezing comes out from my throat.

‘Where are you running away? Wait, you goddamn!’

His yell and cry trembles all of my body cells as an electric shock. The more I try to take my steps faster, the less my speed is. Like I’ve fallen into the swamp; the more I struggle, the more I go down. I can hear my heartbeats, it beats too fast. My toes blistered inasmuch as I have been running too much and yet I feel no pain. I can hear his smooth steps and the sound of his clothes which are fluttering in the wind flow. He shouts madly and beg me.

‘Wait! Please wait. I’ll kill you just by one shot. Wait, you goddamn, I have no remedy, I have to do this; I promise you feel no pain.’

He says such things, once threatening, once begging and once both of them. Maybe he is right, I shouldn’t scape. He may help me. He may keep me out of death. I shake my head to let the evil thoughts come out of my head. I should keep my distance from him as far as I can. I should focus on environs, but I feel giddy. My eyes go black. It seems as if black shadows are running to me and throw me off-balance.

Although the sky is a little brighter now, but I can't see the distance further than seven or eight meters. Once in a while, I lose my control and go on my way tottering. The act of the wind once brings him closer to me, so that I feel his hand touches my clothes, and another time keeps him away from me, as if he has made a dive into a ditch.

The more his shouts and the fear of him force me to run faster, the more tiredness, disappointment and the cool wind attack wear me down. I would like to sleep. I would like to die. I like to talk with somebody else in front of fireplace...I'd like...I want. The thoughts which are passing through my head, make the environs dim for me. Suddenly, I feel that the ground is coming toward me. My eyes are closed spontaneously and my hands stand in front of my chest as two levers.

I feel a soft mattress which attracts my body. Coarse grains fill my mouth. My eyes are closed and my body becomes loose. It seems as if an obscure voice from another world is talking to me. I want to reply it, but just a weak voice comes out of my throat.

A tottering shadow approaches me, it is like he has enfolded himself in a black cloth. He has put his hands on his knees and his rib cage goes up and down. He sits on his knees and brings his hand toward my face.

All of a sudden something lifts me up from the ground and stands me on my feet. And this thing is just a fear. Sometimes, fear makes human personality renitent more than bravery. Now this fear has empowered me and with its help I can see the man in front of me who has aimed a rather small knife at me. He is foaming at the mouth and with his wide eyed is looking at me. The sound of his steady, but fast, breathing

leaves the wind behind off and on, and I can hear it. He makes no move. Suddenly, his eyes' expression changes and, while he lowered his eyebrows, looks at me seriously.

'Don't panic! I'll knock you off fast.

I remain frozen, and try to consider all of his motions. I take my knife out of my belt and point it to him. I'd like to thrust my knife into his heart. I press my right foot on the ground to make a sally against him. All of a sudden something from the invisible world strikes my head and dissuade me from doing this. I shake my head to make the ominous crows fly from my shoulders.

I try not to wink my eyelids lest he can go out of my sight. I stand with my feet far from each other to be in a good position to run away. I try to stand straight, but my chest is going to blow out. My panting is not finished yet. Sometimes the images in front of me become dim and the sounds are echoed through my ears like a blast.

He spins the knife in his hand, and a smile appears in the corner of his lips. He throws his knapsack on the ground and approaches me some steps. I want to step backward but yet I don't want to give him even a little chance and I say:

'Wait a minute. Listen to me. We can still endure. We're nearly there. Trust in me. Believe me.'

He comes two steps closer to me without replying a single word. I say again:

'Look. Wait a minute. Listen. This is not the way it should be. Still...'

He cuts me short and says indifferently:

'You listen to me. I haven't come this far to die of hunger...'

I cut his word:

‘I have still some food. We can...’

I can feel his feet pressure on the sands. Suddenly, he jumps on me by taking two steps. I dodge to be secure from his attack. His hand touches my back, but I manage to escape from his claws. I roll on the ground and keep the knife away from my body.

All of a sudden, I hear his yell as he approaches me. I turn and look behind. I see him just one step away from me. My foot aims at him spontaneously and I beat him at his chest. He flops aside. I want to get up, but my body is flinching. I can’t hold the knife in my hands. I experience a heaviness in my head and I feel as though my body has turned into muscles without bones.

He rubs his chest and curses. He takes his knife and stands up slowly. This time, he comes to me calmly and indifferently. Again, I feel something else, beside him, is coming toward me.

‘Come on, you goddamned! I give you everything.’

I throw my knapsack to him. It falls in front of his feet. He pushes it aside with his foot and cries:

‘I haven’t had anything to eat in five days. I can no longer tolerate hunger.’

‘So what about me?’

‘This isn’t my problem.’

Again, I feel my old friend, the fear, beside me. I recede a little, squeeze the knife tightly in my hand and sprinkle a handful of dust onto him. I take the chance and stand up immediately. I see he has covered his eyes with his hands and is cursing steadily whilst yelling.

Suddenly, my soles turn hot, my body flames up and I run to him according to my heartbeats. I lift my hand and beat him

in his leg with my knife. I feel I have fell into a frozen lake. My hands turn pale and my hair stand on end. I take a few steps backwards and just look at him that has fallen on the ground and held his thigh with his hands. His leg is red with his blood that is flowing out through his fingers.

Again, I feel my old friend, the fear, beside me which pushes me. I take a few steps by its force and then, I stop. I should help him. But my friend fear insists on going. I take my knapsack. By the will of the fear, I am forced to escape from there. His yells become muffle in the wind and his image fades out in the darkness.

I intervene my hand in front of my face to see a little bit better and to prevent wind from direct blowing on my face. The wind blows toward me faster than my movement. Blood, knife; I should helped him. His image appears in front of my eyes every second. I knifed him like a coward. His crying. Blood. No, I wouldn't be able to control myself if I back to him.

I go on my way tottering and look around. I can't see anything but my eyes are searching round spontaneously as a habit that is hard to quit. Maybe there would be a hope. I look around carefully may I find it, but it is a wild goose chase, darkness makes it impossible. Besides, the mixture of the darkness with the blue sky associates the depth of the sea.

My feet no longer obey my brain. The darkness, the blood, the knife, and the chill. I sit on my knees like someone who is waiting for his decapitation and put my hands on the ground. It is like my brain is enclosed with a fence. Nothing comes to my mind. My hands are trembling, then break like two sticks and I fall down involuntarily. The sounds turn to silence from ambiguity and a black curtain covers my eyes.

Chapter 2

The shadow of dawn

A sharp and prolonged whistle, along with an obscure darkness, has made a steady condition in my mind. I am looking for a light to escape from this darkness. But there are no voice and no light guiding me. I release myself until the sound and the light come to me.

Things go on the way as I want. The sharp and prolonged whistle in my mind turns into tones, then, its tones change into the sound of the wind, and a soft voice accompanies it. It seems it is approaching me. Now I dare and open my eyes.

My breath comes in short gasps from the cold air. I can't move my fingers. I can't feel my ears. The sky is still a little dark. It is like a suction device is inside me. I'd like to cry. I try to get up, but I can't even move my fingers. I bend my legs toward my breast, thrust my hands in my armpits and dip my head into my collar. My head is shaking continuously and I can hear gnashing of my teeth.

Suddenly, I hear a sound. I narrow my eyes to see more clearly. A shadow is coming toward me lamely. He drops himself on the ground. The shadow of his knife falls on my face. My body turns hot. The dry blood. I wait for my old friend, fear, comes to help me, but there is no sign of it. I just

look at his knife, which is coming toward my neck. Again the waves of a silent whistle echoes through my head.

Then, a thunder peals in my ears. I see the knife which spins quickly in the air and sprinkles the fresh blood. Some drops of the blood splash on my face. The shadow is wounded. It goes away from me lamely, while holding his hand with another one.

I hear the fast footsteps of another shadow from the other side, which stops over my head. He puts his hand on my shoulder and begins to shake me. I do my best to say a word, but I just can wink my eyelids. He puts his weapon under his waistband and puts his knapsack on the ground. He takes a black cloth out of it and put it in front of me. I try to look at his face, but I just see the darkness. He remains still for a second, then goes to the same direction that the first and wounded shadow went. In the midway, he stops and looks at me, and again goes on his way and disappears in the darkness.

I stare at the black cloth. It seems as though it asks me to expand it. Its smell arouses me. It attracts me like a magnet. My hand moves to it spontaneously, touches it and then opens its tie. There are some spam and bread in it, and a small flask of water beside them.

All of my body organs are activated involuntary. I take a piece of bread and thrust it into my mouth. I take the opened can and empty it into my mouth. I gulp them without chewing. I take the flask, lie on the ground on my back and guzzle all of the water.

Gradually, stars lose their lights by daylight, but there is no sign of the sun yet. Ground surface is rather dark. The wind is still blowing, and if I stay this way I'll be frozen. I feel a bad

bellyache. I feel I may vomit at any moment. I can feel the taste of the foods in my throat.

Being filled, my stomach becomes warm. It is like by returning my soul into my body, the heat surrounds me with its flames. Despite, I am trembling, I still watch the stars. I think of the events that I didn't expect them to occur. The events were changed conversely just in ten days. I remember when Wildi brought his food at the table and offered it to me; with the different spirit and manner, his desire was to enter the rescue team and to achieve a big goal. But all of his ideals were changed during ten days, so that he wanted to kill me. I remember his laughter, but those laughter were forgotten so that I stabbed him in his leg without doubt, and I didn't think, even for a moment, that he is my friend. He also forgot me so that he put his knife on my neck. I don't want to think about those events, even about the man who saved my life a few minutes ago. I just want to empty my mind. I want to get out of this predicament. Gradually, clouds are gathering and covering the sky.

Mountains seem like shadows from a distance. It is like they are just a shadow as a whole, which has fallen on a vertical surface and has formed the mountains. Just the sound of the wind can be heard. The wind which is a light and chilly breeze, blowing from east to west. I don't know how long I have remained in this way and looked at the sky. It is only when the sound of bombardment suffuses the sky, I awake from my daydreams. The boom sound of the bombs splits the sky and its light brightens the ground for a few seconds. Thunder pierces the clouds and reaches the ground.

I feel a drop of rain on my face. Little by little, by increase in rain drops, the soft sound of rainfall can be heard. With

each drop falls on my body, I shiver, as if a needle is piercing my body. I feel lightness. I stop when I become wet to the skin. My body trembles thoroughly. When I close my hands to my mouth to warm them, my face becomes irritated by touching my sleeves. Again, I can't feel my ears. I feel debility in my legs. It is like I have worn a barbed trousers. The chill has frozen my blood. I go to the same way that Wildi went. I pierce the darkness and go forward.

Once in a while, a thunderbolt lightens the air. I cross my arms and dip my head into my collar while my teeth are gnashing. Something in me has made my heart clear sighted. Although I am aimless, but I listen to an inner voice. Suddenly, I see a black stain under the blast of a lightning. I bend down to look at it. It's the dried blood. Another stains are also seen in this direction. I follow the stains. All of a sudden, I see three persons in front me. Two of them have made the third one to sit on his knees and one of them has aimed his gun at him. I lie on the ground immediately to hide myself more in the darkness. The darkness also hides the faces of these three persons from me. The distance and the howl of the wind don't let me hear their voices. I haven't a good feeling.

Suddenly, one of these two men pounds the third one's face with his fist. As the latter one is collapsed, I see his face in a short second; he is Wildi. The shadow who saved me from Wildi's hands, now, with the other one were intended to kill Wildi. Why they saved only me? Why they want to kill him? I reawake before my feelings go ahead one step beyond my wisdom. I can't do anything in this condition. I can only save myself. I close myself to the ground as I can. One of

these two men lifts Wildi and delivers him another punch on his face.

They continue doing that until he almost faints. I feel a power in myself, which induces me to help him. Maybe they give up when they see me. But my wisdom doesn't allow this. I also have no chance with them. They are armed with guns and they may not give me another chance to survive.

They suddenly stop beating Wildi, and then, knife in hand, move toward Wildi without saying a word. I see in absolute disbelief, one from forward and one from backward, plunge their knives into Wildi's body. They stab their knives into his stomach, chest, flanks and waist ceaselessly. After that, they leave him while his clothes are red. Blood is flowing from his mouth and nose, and his body is trembling.

One of those two men give Wildi a strong kick to the back and he falls on the ground like a boneless body. They shake their knives several times to clean the blood off the knives. Then they talk to each other for a short time, lift Wildi off the ground, and after taking some steps throw him into a well.

I look at them aghast. I can't believe those who have saved my life, have done this. I tremble involuntary and gnash my teeth. I feel myself hollow. My chest burns and I feel pain in my stomach. I don't know how long I have remained in this way. All of a sudden, I see them are coming to me. They are dressed in long gray rainwear and their faces are covered by black cloth. They are armed to the teeth with grenades and guns. I can't move. It is like I am tied to the ground. I remain that way, and don't move even my eyes; that is to say, I can't. They come closer by each second. I close my eyes and hold my breath. Although they have saved my life, maybe they won't give me this chance again. Maybe they haven't saved

my life. What was the difference between my life and Wildi's that they killed him but saved me? Now I can smell the death.

The only way to escape from death is that I go toward it. This is the only way. I can die here without any resistance or I encounter it. Maybe there is no difference between them and I die in both way, but at least I won't lost my life like cowards. The thought of taking revenge on them, makes me more determined. They should pay penalty for killing Wildi. I open my eyes and clench my fists. I gather all of my power in my legs to attack them.

I push the ground with my feet and my hands and make a lunge toward them. Suddenly I freeze in midway, and stand in front of them like a statue and stare at them. They are nomads and gazed at me like two death angels. So the nomads have back. My body is inflamed.

My eyes just slide over the faces of those two men. They aim their guns at me. Then, one of them lower his gun and approaches me with taking four steps and stares at me. I feel my legs are losing their power bit by bit. Along with weakness, tremor appears in my legs. I didn't think that one day I meet the nomads; the nomads who I heard about them just in fables. Now I realize the reason why Wildi was killed so awfully. With each his breath, it is like a bomb is blasting near my ear. I expect that something stabs into my body, but only his eyes are probing all over my face. Suddenly I see that his knife is coming toward my face. His knife, after passing by over my lips, is drawn from my right cheek to the left one. I feel no pain and just my cheeks become warm. He cleans his knife with my clothes and says: 'Watch yourself!'

While is laughing, he goes away from me, toward his comrade. Suddenly, by hearing the wavy sound of gunfire,

they bend their bodies and aim at the voice side and begin to fire nonstop to the end of their cartridges. I also lie on the ground as a shelter. After changing the cartridge, they wait for a short time and then leave there for an unknown destination.

I rub my hand on my face, it becomes red. The more I think, the less I realize his intention of making such a wound on my face. Did the nomads save my life? They don't know anything but killing. Saving the life of a common man like me is incredible. I can't understand none of the events which occurred at dawn. I go to the well immediately. Everywhere is covered by blood. The rain scatters the blood.

I bend over the well. Call Wildi several times but there comes no response. I look for a way into the well. Its wall are sound and without any gap. I take some pebbles and throw them into the well. They clash with hard earth. As can be guessed, it should be very deep.

I take a piece of cloth out of my knapsack and ignite it. A delightful heat warms up my fingers. I try to prevent the fire from extinguishing by the rain. I lie on the ground and dip my hand into the well as much as possible. Just a little light reaches to the bottom of the well. I can't see anybody there. Only when the cloth is almost burnt, I leave it to secure Wildi from harm. It goes out midway. I call him several times, but again there is silent. I can't do anything alone. Maybe this well is more comfort and safer for him than everywhere; that is to say, his everlasting house. I bid farewell to him and then proceed on my way to nowhere.

It is like I am in a dark corridor which is endless. Nothing can be seen and only with the lightning the ground becomes a little bright. My eyes search in the dark hopelessly. The vapor which is coming out of my mouth obstructs my eyesight for a

few seconds. Getting away from those events, my body is chilled again.

All of a sudden, a lightning is emitted in the sky and after sometime looks like is faded behind a hill. There, again, another lightning occurs and again looks like is faded behind another hill. It is a rather unusual. It is like something prevent it to be seen. I close my eyelids a little and with the third lightning, which is accompanied with an ear-splitting sound, a spark lights my heart. I see a dim image of a house. A gleam light is shimmering in a distance of less than thirty meters.

I hold my breath lest it become a hindrance for my eyesight. My eyes are gazing into the light which is coming forward. I can't believe; finally I have achieved the thing I wished. I praise God ceaselessly, and a smile appears on my lips. Then I slowly move to the place I saw the light. With the fourth lightning, the house, under the passing light, reminds me of the ghost house. The light is from a rather big house which seems to have two floor, accounting the ground floor. Darkness of the air has become like a water color painting and I can see the house beyond this painting. Its walls are cracked. The house is made of bungling job of the brick, wood, and some pieces of metal and plastic. It looks like that the house is kept untouched by the cobwebs. In the lower part of the house, bricks and some pieces of wood and plastic have been collapsed by lapse of time.

Nothing has remained of the walls of its yard. The walls of the house were bored and stovepipes were directed to outdoors. Some windows were blocked with bricks and grout. It has only four windows which are divided between ground floor and first floor.

There are some thick iron beams on the top of the building which have elevated, and some other have arranged beside the house. The iron beams on the top of building are too rusty, so that one of them has bent and fallen on the ground, although it is still linked to its base.

On the top of the building, the remnants of the debris of other floors can be seen. Half of the second floor has fallen completely and there is no door and window in the intact half. Its roof has fallen completely as well. Of third floor, it is remained just a wall which is the lateral and on the right side of the house. In general, only the first floor is available and useable. Yet, the iron beams on the top of the building allow to add some floors to the house in the future.

I suspect a little, maybe I have confused it with something else. It is impossible that anyone resides here. I don't want to think that it is not the same destination that I was looking for, and for this, I dictate it to myself this is the same house.

The hands of the wind are playing a tuneless and longsome music with old aluminum plates which has covered different parts of the building, and, along with old plastic and wooden pieces, it is the only rhythm of the nature which reverberates in this infinite space and shows that the wind is a beginner.

The right entrance door is in lateral side of the house. I go toward it slowly, while I drag my feet on the sands. Again, my heart beats faster but this time it differs from the last time. I stop at the door and look at the signboard which prevents me from confusing here with the ghost house.

Immediately, I look at that part of the sky which is not yet captured with the clouds for the last time. The war is over. The blue sky and the yellow spot which spreads more and more. The war between light and darkness, which has been

occurred for million years. I feel more rain drops on my face.
I read the signboard over the house:

“Dawn Shelter”

Chapter 3

Dawn shelter

A dim light radiates from below the door and once in a while the shadows behind the door, cut it for a short time. I knock the door but no one replies. I knock again, it is ineffectual. Strange sounds can be heard from inside the house and I recline my head on the door to hear this weak tumult better. I take a sand off the ground and knock it hard at the door.

At any moment, rain falls more and more. Suddenly, the tumult, which has filled inside the house, becomes weak and after a short time it stops. After a few seconds it begins again. Then I hear a footsteps which are approaching the door. I keep my distance from the door and hold my knapsack in my hands.

The footsteps stop behind the door and after a few seconds, a wicket on the door is opened insomuch that two blue eyes appears. These are dumb eyes in which the more I probe, the less I find. These big and impudent eyes signify that a man is

looking at me behind the door. He stare at me. His eyes, which are seeking for something, explore my face. After a while the wicket is closed.

Each rain drop pricks my body like a needle. I gnash my teeth so that my head begins to quake involuntary. I am sure that if I stay here more, I will be frozen.

Again, I hear the footsteps approaching door. It stops like the first footsteps. Time passes in silence for a few seconds and then a gibberish conversation begins between them. I hear that the first one goes away from the door and the second one opens the door after a while.

I dry the wet on my face to see well. A beam of light radiates from a gap on the door and forces me to close my eyelids a little and use my hand as a sun visor. Rain drops cascades from my hand like a waterfall. I wink my eyelids several times and, through my fingers, I see a man who is looking at me through the opening in the door.

Again, I see the eyes which are brown and immediately survey me from head to toes. He raises one of his eyebrows and shows his distrust of me. I just show him my smile and assure him. The man behind the door opens it after a short pause.

He is a handsome and tall man, he has split his lax hair on the crown of his head and left them on the face. His skin is smooth and youthful. His face is rigid and serious, and his smile is incompatible with his face. The letter “K” on his necklace, in the circle format, looks very pretty. He is clean and has a good appearance. Finally, he breaks his silence and says:

Hello, I'm Karisan.

Then he reaches out his hand and continuous:

Welcome to the “Down” shelter!

I do my best to reach out my hand to him but my hand is stiff as a stick. My body trembles thoroughly, and I can’t even wink.

Hurry up, come in, you are trembling severely.

Then he goes aside to allow me to enter. I can’t believe that I finally have managed. I take a step into the house doubtfully. A warm wave touches my face which irritates my skin a little. I feel a delicious and pleasant smell. No, I can’t believe, finally everything has finished and I have reached to my destiny.

All round the left side is a counter. In front of it, there are the tables with chairs around them. Almost all of the tables, except three or four of them, are occupied. This shelter is crowded more than the last one. The sound of sudden closing of the door by Karisan, cuts the inside tumult. All of the heads turn to our side and look at us. Suddenly, everyone arise and stand. With eyes wide opened and openmouthed, they stare at us and say:

Man alive! It’s raining.

After a while, they rush into the door and windows like the famished, and gaze into outside longingly. The strange tumult begins, everyone tries to push others aside and reach to the windows. Some, bring their hands out of the windows to touch the rain. Happiness can be seen in some faces and some others are amazed.

Can you believe!?! It’s raining!

Another one says:

I’d forgotten its figure.

A little girl, while her tongue is tied with excitement, says:

Mam! Is this the same rain you told me?

Young women replies her:

Yes my dear. It is the rain I told you about it. Listen, how beautiful is its sound!

I seize the opportunity and take a step. I go toward a table but stop by the sign of Karisan's hand. I widen my eyes to show him my protest and ask him the reason, without saying a word. It happens even as I want; Karisan replies to my eyes with a smile and says:

I'm really sorry, but you should first freshen yourself up a little. Taking a shower would be enough. Go to the bathroom and I'll ask to bring your outfit later.

Then he shows a small room with his finger which it seems has been made newly and is beside the entrance door. He guides me to the bathroom which is in a two-step distance from us. Before I go into it, he blocks my way again and says:

For sure you know the conditions, there isn't so much water and please economize on it. Since you were under the rain for a rather long time, you had better wash yourself well, and finally, if you have any problem call on me or another doctor.

He waits for my reply but I just give him a negative response with my head shake. He opens the door of bathroom for me and I enter. Before closing the door, he says:

There are all you need in bathroom, but if you need something else pull that bell. Please don't prolong your washing. My colleague brings your outfit a few minutes later.

Before closing the door, I take the razor and put my knapsack beside the door. He closes the door slowly and his footsteps fades in tumult. I sigh of relief deeply. I look at the outside through a hole on the door but I just can see a limited area. People are trying to get a better situation to see the

falling diamond rain drops, and also to hear the melodious sound of their landing on the ground.

I back into the bathroom. The first thing that attracts my eyes is the stains on the mirror. Only small part of it is useable. Yet, it is enough for me. As soon as I see my face in the mirror, I take a backward step in wonder. I can't believe it is me. I look around carefully to be assured I'm alone there. When I see only myself, I go toward the mirror slowly. I close and then open my eyes. I feel no change, and I'm the same man who is standing in front the mirror.

Finally, after a while, this image becomes normal to me and I accept that this is my face. This time, I realize the alienation of Karisan. I survey myself in the mirror. My eyes are hollowed and a layer of dirt has changed the color of my skin. It is like glue is poured into my hair. The scar on my face has changed my look. It's a skin deep wound which doesn't need stitches.

I finish washing when I hear knocking on the door. I open the door and, as Karisan said before, one of his colleagues, with some clothes, appears at the door. On a cart attached on his clothes is written: "Yatilan". He puts the clothes on a table near the door, without noticing me and says exhaustedly:

Please use the things that you need.

Then he strokes his beard with his hand and goes back. There is a complete set of clothes which, from their appearance, it is apparent they are not so new. I take and hang them on a clothes rack which is half broken and linked to the wall. I can't endure standing on my feet anymore, so I sit on the floor of the bathroom. All of a sudden I see my feet, it looks like I have walked on the ground full of sharp glass splinters: the new and old wounds; coarse blisters. I don't

know why I feel no pain. They irritate only when water touches them, they burn insomuch I close my eyes and gnash all out my teeth.

I wash my raincoat which is knee high, with small volume of water. It is the only useable clothes that I have. Then I dry myself with a towel from my knapsack. I put my clothes on. I can feel their wear and tear smell easily. I wear my shoes slowly and carefully, take my knapsack and shake it a little and go out of the bathroom after cleaning there.

There are still many people in front of the windows staring at the outside. Others also are looking out of the window, while are sitting on their chairs. By my exit from the bathroom, some of them turn their look toward me. I go to the closest table which is near the window and sit at it.

I feel all of their heavy looks on me. I bow down my head and begin to play with my fingers. I hate to be under the eyes of the others. Although I don't look at them, I can find out the intention of their looks. Some people look at the newcomers out of curiosity, some with no reason, and some are waiting for someone else and with each arrival their eyes become splendent that maybe find the one who they are looking for. Some may frown and some may only stare and pretend that this is the first time they meet someone else. After a while that seems all of the looks are scattered, I look around leeringly. As I guessed, no one notice me. I raise my head and look around like all of the newcomers. There are some candles on each table, on the edge of the windows, on the counter, and Inside of the wall of the shelter which have led to blacken parts of the ceiling. There are also four lamps attached to the ceiling along the salon fairly far from each other. The glimmer of their light, only can bright one room. A few rods

are welded to the ceiling and the wires are passed through them. I follow the course of these wires with my eyes until I reach the room which is on the left side of the counter and near the entrance. A rather noisy clamor comes from this room.

The air is filled with a variety of smells: from the smell of dirt and garbage to the smell of foods which is the strongest. I long for a bowl of soup. Everywhere is swept and the dustbins are empty.

Inside the shelter is different from its outline. There is no sign of stone, wood and plastic inside the house. Conversely, all of the inner walls are made of iron like an equipped war tank. Some iron pillars also are used to support the ceiling. The only places that are not of iron, are the ceiling and floor. Like a green pepper that its appearance may not denotes its taste, the outline of this shelter differs from its inner space.

Some walls are painted completely and some other are half painted. Those parts of the walls which are not painted, are rusted like the doors and seem yellowish. All of the wires which are used to supply the light, are exposed to the eyesight but no one look at them and notice them at all.

There are so many written memorial on the wall which is unknown their writers are still alive or not. There are also many carving on the iron surfaces which some of them are old and some are new. Some of these show the despair of their own writers and some have been written to show the degradation of the world. As far as I can see and read, even one of them have not written about the world in satisfaction.

Behind the counter are the cupboards to the ceiling in which are the glasses, beverages and some plants with big and wide light red leaves. Cupboards are wooden and seem rather

black. It is like they have been in use for many years. Nobody is there behind the counter.

In front the counter, there are the tables which I am sitting at one of them. There are four chairs around each table. Like the cupboards, these chairs are wooden and wear out as well.

While playing with my hands, I look at the table which I am sitting at it. Although they had tried to represent them a little new by painting, there are still so many memorial writings and carvings on them. A piece of the table was cut and its surface was pitted like a bumpy road. One of the legs of the table is shorter than the others, so it is acock and slants to the same side that is heavier and wobbles a little. I move a piece of wood which is on the ground with my foot and after playing with it for a while, I put it under the shorter leg of the table. It works successfully; wobbly leg becomes fixed.

All of a sudden, I see a man who has taken his chair away from the table and is sitting in a dark corner, near the fireplace and stared at me. At first sight, I think I have made a mistake, but when I look at him again, he still keeps his eyes on me. He is gazing at me and his breast goes up and down. His face has dissolved in darkness, and I just can see his glassy eyes. I look behind; maybe he is looking at someone who is sitting behind me and is in his eyeshot, but no one is in his view but me. I stop noticing him, and when I look at him again, he is not there anymore. It is like he is combined with darkness.

Two of Karisan's colleagues go toward the window. Despite people objections, they begin closing windows. Although the windows are made of glass, there is an aluminum window in front of each. These two men are closing the aluminum windows. There is no hole on them and

completely block the light from outside. By closing them, inside the shelter becomes just a little dark.

Suddenly I see the shadow of a person on my table. I raise my head slowly and look at his face. A man is standing near me with a food tray; lassitude and weariness have nested in his eyes.

Here you are. Unfortunately we can't offer you more food than this because of foodstuffs shortage.

He puts the tray on the table and then while is going away from me, points to the door near the fireplace and says:

If you feel sick, call on there to see the doctor.

All of the waiters' clothing is a long and bright raincoat which covers whole of their bodies, and they also dressed in a simple gray trousers and shirt. I look at the food tray: a bowl of soup and a glass of water. Finally, after three weeks, I can eat a square meal.

Some are talking to each other, some fell asleep on the table, and some lied down on the ground and are in a deep sleep. Their world is summarized in these things. Some other are playing games. Two people are sitting in front each other and playing chess. The chessboard is patched up with some pieces of adhesive tape. It is covered with adhesive tape, but is too old so that its black squares have become white and they are identified by the lines around them. Some of chessmen are lost and instead of them some pieces of lathed wood and stone are in use. Four persons have come together and sat on the floor and playing poker. Playing cards has become white and dingy, and are almost alike. It is hard to read their figures.

The meal smells as usual. I look around with each spoon I bring into my mouth. The condition of the people in the

shelter not only is not better than my own, but also is worse. It looks like they have survived through a war or an earthquake. Their faces and clothes have become alike in color. Their clothes are dirty and seem dark. All looks like with each other. Their hair are elflock, disheveled and dirty insomuch that are stuck in bundles. This is just the difference between the forms of men's and women's bodies that makes them differentiable. They are like the suburb slummer and homeless people, with this distinction that they are all alike and there is no difference between them. Their clothes are raggedy and patched. Some are dressed in loose or tight clothes, and some have inharmonious dress. Only a few are well-dressed and clean; they are staff of the shelter.

The thing that shows off most are the women whose ratio to the men is less than one to ten. By the approximate counting that I have done, there are 150 persons in ground floor, and assuming the same number in the first floor, which among them are only 60 women. Some of these women worn wimple and some are unveiled.

I don't know why I was the only one that used the bathroom. Maybe people don't like bath, or maybe my appearance was worse than I thought. As I put the spoon into my mouth slowly, I hear the sound of dragging a chair on the floor from the behind. I turn and look out of curiosity. Two people are sitting on their chairs. One of them stared at me.

I have a strange feeling. An unknown man whose face is covered by his beard, looks suspiciously at the man who has a dirty and small hat on his head and is sitting near him. Then his look turns toward me. He is challenging with himself with frowned eyebrows and narrowed eyelids. It seems that he wants to tell me something but his face remains calm. An

askew smile appears on his lips which are hidden under his beard. He sits and after a while stops looking to my eyes and begin talking with the man next to him. I didn't find anything from his look, so I turn my eyes away from them.

I think about that man's mysterious looks. What was the reason for his looks? I try to look at him again to find out something. So I turn my head toward him slowly. They are still talking to each other. He looks around once in a while and shows the environs to the man who put a hat on his head, while speaking. I try to understand what they are talking about, but they talk quietly. These two outsiders are now completely close together and talk in whisper. Maybe the man had no specific reason for his look and confused me with someone else. When I feel his ignoring, and that he even doesn't see me, I completely feel sure that he mistook me for someone else. I forget them altogether and my ears search for another two person. It becomes as I wish and the conversation between two men who are sitting at the table next to me, engages my mind. One of them takes a thoroughly blackened cigarette case out of his pocket and hold a squashed cigarette in front his own face and looks at it while roll it with fingers. Then, with a nervous laugh, he says:

This is it! This is one year by now that I've spent with a pack of 20. This is the last one. Imagine! Almost two cigarettes per month. What kind of life we are living!?! Why we should get involved in such a misery? This much we were comfort there, but don't think we had a better condition than here. It was all the same, but there, I had three pack of cigarette instead of one pack.

His friend who has rested his chin on hands, says in reply:

It is true that we were hard pressed for something, but there was our home; and what is more, we haven't arrived at their main shelter yet. There, we can certainly find a good condition for ourselves.

The first man breathes a sigh and put his cigarette on the table and says:

Something? Say what we had? Nothing! We thought that here would be different, but it wasn't. Their condition is worse than ours. Although it wasn't so bad in "Life" shelter, it can't be considered as a home.

His friend, while is smoking a cigarette, says:

I still don't know why we left there?

'It is all talk! Just have a look around yourself. What is the difference between here and there?' The first man replies.

'No, it was true. One of my friends who held a good rank, said this. He himself went there before us. And more, are you blind that can't see so many people here?'

His friend, who has a long hair and bushy beard, takes his look off the table, moves his eyes around as his hands play with the splits of the table, and then lower his head again and says:

All of them were seduced. There wasn't a serious matter, they just wanted to eject us from there. They couldn't find any better reason than this.

He put his empty case of cigarette in his pocket and replies:

Don't be foolish! They don't eject their people, and what for? For what reason? Maybe to lessen the crowd, ha?

Maybe.

I said, don't be so foolish. Its news has been spread out everywhere. It is true.

His friend just gives a shrug and says:

By the way, do you know how long has it been since we are in journey?

The man rubs his lips in token of ignorance and says:

How should I know, but I'm sure it's more than one year! If only I had some tobacco.

His friend smiles, then dislocates himself on the chair and finally lays spread-eagled on it and says:

It is one year and three months since we began our trip. Just we've got here. During that, we suffered hardship as long as one hundred years. Now we should start from the beginning. If only we've stayed in the "Life" shelter. Everything was ok there, there was no need to come so far at all.

The other man takes his lighter out of his pocket, lights a cigarette and smokes heartily:

No, I should see their main shelter. Maybe we could do something there. There should be a place for us. These shelters are full and the only thing we can do here is to clean the lavatories.

Then, while shaking his lighter, says nervously:

Damn! This lighter has no gas anymore. Now I don't know how to fill it again.

His friend, while his face assumed a pleadingly figure, says:

Do you know how long it takes to get there? Here are some easy work to do.

The man replies:

It is like you have forgotten we've traveled half of the world. You mean we have come so far to clean the lavatory? We deserve better jobs so they should give us a becoming

one. If they know our background, they would admit us easily.

Then he stands up and take the last puff at his cigarette:

Enough of that! I am going to see if I can find something to eat. I'm so hungry.

The only thing that I think about during this time is their red eyes. Most of the people here have red eyes, with pretty faces and attractive eyes. When I look at each one of them, I see a specific beauty. All of them have the same attractive eyes. There are also common faces among them. I didn't think they could come here. Nonetheless, the population will increase suddenly. Water, food and domicile shortage will wage a bloody war. The war in which men may kill each other just for a drop of water.

Chapter 4

The red refugees

All of a sudden, someone who was dressed in a dark and long clothes, calls a waiter from my behind. I turn and look at the man who called the waiter. He is the man who was staring at me. The waiter moves toward him slowly. Midway, when he is almost near my table, he collides with someone else and falls on my knapsack which is near a leg of the table. It falls on the floor, unzips and my belongings pour out of it.

The man who collided with waiter is one of the two men who were sitting behind me. He unweaves his hat, then, as if newly realized that, begins to apologize:

Sorry, I'm afraid I didn't see you. I was talking with my friend and I didn't see you at all.

Then he bows down to take the waiter's hand. The waiter looks at him angrily, and then gets up. He looks around for a while and says:

I don't need your help. You'd better watch yourself and be attentive.

The friend of hat man comes to help him and says:

Hey man, he begged your pardon. You are going too far!

Hat man confirms what his friend said with shaking his head. The waiter who has a rather athletic body, takes the offensive position and comes one step forward:

I don't need your apologize. Just keep your distance as much as you can. No one invited you here. Here has its regulations.

All at once, all of the red-eyed in the shelter rise from their chairs in support of two men. When two men see their backing, dare to breast the waiter and say:

You're talking too much! Watch up what you say!

The rest of the waiters and the common people, who have not red eyes, rise and rush to help their friend. Like two nations in the battle field, they encounter. The shelter divides into two fronts. An invisible line separates them from each other and each groan at the other. They are just waiting for a sign to attack. Although the reds are more than the commons, the waiter says:

It is mean to be you hear something like this. So be ready for it.

The two outsiders move among the red-eyed crowd like devils and agitate them:

Your words cost you dearly!

Then he looks at the red-eyed crowd. It is like his eyes can hypnotize them. All of them reply him saying hurray and I can see their clenched fists. Against them, the common crowd reach out their hands toward the tables and chairs to use them. Some other are standing near the walls neutrally and just look. All are ready and their eyes stare at each other like a viper and tiger. Their teeth are gnashing under their lips. Their

eyebrows are close together and their body halfcocked against each other. I am standing there just like before and look at them. I don't know what should I do, but just know the first one who would hurt, is me. My sensations threaten that the war is imminent.

Hey, wait a minute!

I hold my hands toward them as a stop sign, and, while trying hard to keep my self-confidence, say:

Do you think the only thing you can do in this conditions is fighting? Here, beside you, are some other people, don't you see women and children? You may hurt them.

Both men look at me amazed and from the Rakovan's look, this is the name which is written on the ID card attached on his shirt, it seems to me that he is shocked. I can see the effect of my words on each face. In some of them anger is subsided thoroughly, some are waiting for my words going on. I search for a more effective phrases to say. Suddenly, Yatilan intervenes and stands by me. He is the same man who brought me clothes. His short beard has covered his face, in which an especial kindness can be seen. He frowns a little, then says:

Be calm. Here isn't the place to fight. Please respect each other. If someone has a grievance, he can report it to the chief of the shelter. It is certainly more effective than quarrel.

Then he points to a crying child and continues:

You can behave in other way.

The outsider's jaw begins to shiver:

Why your chief of the shelter isn't here to answer his subordinate's actions?

The waiter unweaves his frown and replies:

What's wrong? Anybody has said something wrong?

The outsider shows Rakovan with his eyes and says:

He thinks we are his flunky!

Yatilan turns his face to Rakovan and asks him just with his eyes, but only sees his angry look and remains unanswered. As Yatilan takes a deep but short breathe, shakes his head to show his regrets and says:

I'm sorry, I'm sure Rakovan meant something else.

The outsider gives him a derisive smile:

Just this? Finished!? It seems here all things would be amended by excuse, how nice!

I can't do anything more, I apologize again. Rakovan will be punished as well.

The outsider shrugs and raises his eyebrows:

Zounds, how effective it was!

All of the people scatter while griping and wisecracking. Again, the atmosphere inside the shelter becomes calm, but people talk about the event. The red-eyed are still upset and angry, and contempt can be seen in their eyes. Rakovan forces his way through the crowd and enters the room near the fireplace. Like a fountain which falls after it soars, the tempest of the crowd subsides and all of them back to their place. Only I and my knapsack, which is scattered on the floor, remain there.

The commons keep their distance from the red-eyed, separate their chairs and tables and sit in their group. The red-eyed sit at a distance of the common persons.

I bend down over my chair and gather my belongings. The hat man comes to help me but his friend joins to his people. I wonder at his behavior that may make another quarrel. Maybe he wants to compensate his previous act. Although he gathers my outfits, his eyes look around. It is like he wants to see if anybody looks at him. As I see him with suspicion, I don't

want be heedless of him even for a second. I don't want to lose anything of my belongings. His behavior is a little suspicious. I can't find any reason for his help in this quarrel. Yet I can't refuse his help.

When all of my outfits are gathered, that man gives me a box and goes toward his table. I open the box to make sure the ring and the necklace are in the box. Both of them are in the box. I should think up an idea about them; they are all my life.

I look into my knapsack. It seems everything is there. But yet I think I have lost something; I look under the table again. My guess is correct, the bunch of key is near a leg of the table. I bend down hardly and pick it up.

I go on the way to the room which the waiter told me before. People shake their head to show their discontent and turn their back on me. I find the reason without thinking. They are upset because I accepted that man's help. I stand few seconds behind the door. I look at myself maybe I can make my appearance a little better. The only thing I can do is to clean my mouth and shake the crumbs out of my clothes. Then I take a deep breath and knock on the door. A voice replies:

Come in.

I can guess who is in the room. Rakovan is sitting behind his desk, while has inserted his fingers into each other and put them under his chin as a pillar. He beats a rhythm with his foot while is thinking and is await. I enter the room and try to smile:

Hello!

Rakovan doesn't bother to raise his head. Just, while he put his hands on the desk, lifts his eyebrows a little to be able to see me. From his look I realize that he hasn't seen me yet.

With a poker face, and as if I am not his addressee, Rakovan says:

I'm the doctor of the shelter. It's good that...

Suddenly he cuts his word. His eyes survey me from head to toes and finally stop on my face. His face changes: it becomes exactly the same look of few minutes ago. Time passes in silence for a while. I can see he is struggling with himself to find out or remember something. But his face doesn't change any more and he looks at me calmly and a little amazed like before. Once in a while, his eyes looks at me like a dead man, and then ponder again. It seems he wants to adjust my face to his own thoughts. His eyes is still zoomed on me. It is like he has forgotten that I am here. It seems time is frozen and the only thing that moves are my eyes which are trying to avoid direct looking to his eyes. He seems wants to place my face. His heavy looks press on me like two walls. I say:

I have some problem with my legs.

Then he looks at my feet. He lower his head with me like a robot from behind the desk and looks at my legs. After a few second, it seems he has found something and while his look is toward another side, says impatiently:

Please come and sit on that couch and extend your feet so I have a look on them. Your feet have problem, am I right?

Then he shows me with his eyebrows a bed which is in the left side of me. Since I was waiting for this moment, go toward the bed fast, sit on it and extend my feet. He unweaves the wrinkles on his face and stands near the bed while looks at me suspiciously. Before he comes toward me, he takes a key from the drawer of the desk and goes toward a big case on the wall with a pale plus sign on it. He opens it, picks up some

band, disinfectant agent, fiber and needle for stitch, and put them on a table near the bed. He takes his medical gloves out of his pocket and pulls them on. Suddenly, as if he remembered something, scowls and says:

Ah, damn!

Then looks at me and says:

May you do me a favor? I forgot that to pull off your shoes. You have to do it yourself over there.

He waits for my reply. I pull them off immediately and put them near the bed. Now, he doesn't show anymore the anger which he demonstrated when encountered with the red-eyed, as though he has forgotten that thoroughly, or as if it didn't happen to him at all. He thanks me with a winkle and engages in examining my wounds.

His eyes still have the same strange figure and although his eyes are brown, it seems to me that it is the first time I see them. He has a clean appearance almost like Karisan, and has combed his hair upward. As he keeps his face, says:

Perhaps you've seen my name on the card attached to my clothes; however, I'm Rakovan. It seems that you haven't lost so much blood, but too many wounds have covered your feet. You may feel ache a little, because we haven't too much numbing agents and we should use them just for the patients whose conditions are critical. You cannot help but tolerate the pain.

Then, before he begin his work, stare at a point and says:

You like to show heroics, ha?

I was more anxious about myself than to be a hero.

He shows his seeming approval by raising his eyebrows. He engages in stitching. I gnash my teeth and close my eyes each time he infixes the needle into my body. He says:

You didn't choose a proper time to do that.
I couldn't choose but doing that. I did something that seemed to me right.
A bitter smile appears on his lips and says:
Right thing?
I shake my head:
I think so.
He thinks for a while:
If you did wait, you could see the right thing.
Do you mean hurting the women and children? Or even death of some people?
Maybe!
Maybe?
Maybe yea! The disaster which is to be happen to us in future.
I lower my head and think. Rakovan says:
No need to think. The reality is clearer than needs to think about.
I agree with him. I smell the trouble:
Maybe you are taking it too serious. They can't do anything.
I try to convince him and myself as well. His lips take a figure of smile, and he says:
For this I say that you acted heroics uncaused. We lost a good chance. Few minutes ago, they couldn't do anything as well, but they were doing.
You mean that the war would be begun?
He shrugs and says:
I hope it would be just this.
It is possible to prevent it.
Nothing can prevent it. It would be an all-out war.

He stops working, and then, after a pause continues stitching. I say:

Why war? Is there still any reason for it in the world?

There is always a reason for it, even now that the world is destroyed.

He gazes into my eyes:

To be alive!

Silence reigns for a while. The scene of dispute in few minutes ago is displayed in front of my eyes. Rakovan's words correspond entirely with the event that was going to happen. I feel that the death angel is awakened by Rakovan's words.

I look around. The color of the room has turned into gray and black, and the dust on the wall can be seen. Here are two medical couch that I am sitting on one of them, and some picture frames on the wall, and also dusty walls and the frames which their pictures are faded because of this dust.

Where do you come from that your feet become like this?

From "Life" shelter.

Now his stitching job is nearly finished.

For sure, there isn't any place for the people, because where ever you look, you see the red-eyed.

"Life" shelter is the last shelter, but, on the other side, is the first shelter for the red-eyed who arrive there. Food is a serious problem for the people there. There's been a big increase in population, and if things has been continued like before up to now, they've faced with a big problem. Two shelters were built there, but they couldn't solve the problem. Although the stores were filled with the foodstuffs and are supplied every two days, it's not enough.

Haven't it arranged that their chief establishes the relief camp before they get here?

Yeah, it was coordinated for that but nothing was done. As a result, their people put the blame on us.

Did any skirmish happen for that?

I take a deep breath:

Unfortunately, yes. They found us guilty of the death of their dear ones. Too many people died. We hadn't foodstuffs and medical equipment.

What was the result of the skirmishes?

The rebels even advanced toward the chief's office but fortunately there didn't happen something bad and we could control the situation.

One of Rakovan's eyebrow goes up, and he stops stitching: You could or they gave up?

I may say they come to terms with the situation.

He smiles and continues his work:

I know the reason why.

This time, it is me that elevates one of my eyebrows.

He says:

The people of that shelter are rallying and without any trouble. What's better than this? They just recede and look until the circumstance matches by itself. Just there remains the base.

I agree with him entirely, but he is like a viper in one's bosom.

Everywhere is full of red-eyed.

Exactly! Heretofore the number of the people of the shelter was less than twenty, but now there are at least over three hundred persons in the shelter, and we manage the shelter just by ten persons.

The sound of displacing the tables and the chairs can be heard from outside. He pours disinfectant agent on my leg. It is a little cold. With this, I realize that the stitching has finished. He enwinds the band around my leg slowly.

I say:

We can't do anything.

We can: war.

But we are already in war. Another war means...

He cuts my words:

Means world destruction.

And stares at me:

Your face needs stitching.

Then hesitates for a while and says:

I'm sorry. Its scar remains on your face forever.

I rub my hand on it. Irritates. I say:

We can't help it.

He begins his job with smile. I close my eyes and gulp my saliva whenever the needle pierces my skin.

Finished.

Suddenly someone knock on the door and he turns his head.

You can go. If you have problem again or your feet bleed, be sure to call on me.

He gives me a smile, goes to the door and talks to the man behind the door. Takes something from him, raise his hand and shows me a pair of shoes. Their color has changed and are dusty. The color of the margin around each one differs.

He says:

We couldn't find better than this!

I thanks him and wear them promptly. Then, I go toward the door slowly. My feet still ache a little. Suddenly I stop by

Rakovan's voice. While something has spring to his mind, says:

If you can do something for us, call on Karisan. We need someone who is competent to do things. Here, no one is professional nor knows something special.

I shake my head and smile. Before I go out, I stop spontaneously and say:

Always best things happen in the worst conditions.

Chapter 5

The nomads

I see Karisan standing on a chair and is calming the crowd with his hands. Here, the crowd is doubled. Some people have come down from the first floor to hear the Karisan's words.

There is no sign of the tables and chairs. People of the shelter are standing in disorderly rows in front of Karisan, so that they reach at the half a meter distance from him. Even, some people are sitting on the counter to be able to see him.

The steps that lead to the first floor are not exception to this condition. Some are sitting on the banisters, some are stooped and has brought their heads out of the crowd. They are waiting for Karisan's speech. A tumult spreads among the crowd. You can only hear near voices. Expectation, stress, thoughtlessness, and even fear can be seen in all faces which are saying 'what do you think, what has happened?' Karisan's colleagues are trying to quiet the crowd.

I am just behind Karisan, at the 1.5 meter distance from him. I go toward the row which is next to him. I stand between the crowd and his colleagues so that I can see his face. When I walk, my feet ache a little. The pain of my feet is

being forgotten gradually like a smell that after a while becomes normal to us.

Finally, by beginning of the speech, the people become quiet. Karisan takes a paper out of his pocket and looks at it before talking. Then he gulps down his saliva and says loudly:

Quiet! Please be quiet...quiet..quiet. I know that the things I want to tell you would disquiet you but here is called the frozen desert. It means we should expect all kinds of events. I tried hard to prevent this event, but we can't help it. People, from different places, are migrating here ever since. The population of here is increasing. As you see, here is too crowded. Even the people who have come here from other places are much more than the dwellers. It is out of our control, we can't prevent it.

Now the thirst for hearing his words can be seen in all faces.

It's a long time that they give us negative response. They can't do anything for us. We should leave here gradually. Today is almost three weeks we haven't received any foodstuffs. Day by day, our store is running low more and more. If we stay here more, it becomes emptier. It means we should leave here as soon as possible. We can't choose but doing this. They can't support us anymore. Yet, we waited until now may we receive help, but there is no way to choose anymore.

Again, a tumult begins to spread out and everyone speaks to each another. Karisan, again tries to calm them with his hands. His colleagues also try to quiet them again. Finally, after a rather long time, the atmosphere becomes calm again. Karisan looks at the paper one more time and without noticing it, says:

Look, the more we stay here, the closer we get to death. They have a valid reason for they are disable to send us foodstuffs. We must leave here tonight till 9:00 o'clock, that is to say, four hours later. So do your job if you have anything to do. Leave here as soon as possible. My colleagues will help you.

Then after a short pause, he continues:

I know that all of you are eager to know the reason why we don't receive foodstuffs anymore. Here is the farthest place from the main shelter, that is to say, "Hope" shelter, and from "Life" shelter. For this, it is too hard to send the foodstuffs here, and because of this much immigrants, they have a little foodstuffs and manpower. Here is a stopover shelter, here is not a place to live in. It is just a place for the travelers who need to rest for a while and receive some foodstuffs.

No one protests but it is apparent in these faces that they don't agree with this case entirely. This is not the first time that such case happens, so, like the sheep that know their way because of frequent come and go, all of the people understand this case and it has no novelty for them. karisan puts his hand into his pocket and takes out a white paper and while is showing it to the crowd, says:

I know that some of you are strangers and don't know here. My colleagues and I have made a small map. The shelters which you can go there are specified on it. You can see the locations of the "Life", "Horizon", "Ray" and "Hope" shelters. "Ray" shelter is the closest one. By the way, we've written the capacity of each shelter below of them. Please be coordinate with each other and divide between these four shelters. In addition, there are other shelters, such as "Light" shelter that you can also go there. Some of them are indicated

on maps. The closest subsidiary shelter is “Rain” and after that, “Light” shelter. You should reach to these two shelters to get food. Well, any question about the shelters?

The man who is standing in the first row of the crowd and his clean and bright face conflicts with his dirty clothes, wipes the sweat off his face with his sleeve, and says:

Then what about the people who are sick?

Karisan, again coolly, replies:

We’ll help them insofar as we be able and will do anything to make them feel better. For the time being, the number of our sick persons are very small, just four or five of them have serious illness. But if they wouldn’t feel better by that time, we can’t do anything more for them. Just we leave foodstuffs for them. In addition,...

The man who is standing by me raises his hand, and while his eyebrows has been closed together, cuts Karisan’s words and says:

You mean we leave them and go just like this? Isn’t it important what will happen to them? Isn’t important at all that they may die? If they were your family, would you tell the same things? I haven’t travelled this long way to leave my family here.

Karisan gives two papers to one of his colleagues, and says:

I’m really sorry I tell this. We have sent some people to main base to ask for some cars. They’ll send us the cars as soon as they can. But till then you should wait here; we can’t do anything more.

All the people begin to object. All of a sudden a familiar voice among the crowd says ridiculously:

I don’t think so.

The tumult becomes silent at once, and all heads turn toward the center of the crowd. Karisan's face becomes frozen and he looks toward the voice. The owner of the voice forces his way through the crowd and reaches the front row. His hatted friend comes near him and then together hold the crowd under rein like two rioter leaders. Their eyes are the presage of two devils who are breeding ominous thoughts:

Each day we pass through, many people of us pass away. Just look around yourself. We are dying thus at random. You are killing us like this.

Karisan's face is calm and only his eyes move.

We don't leave here.

A tumult confirms his words. Some other protest with loud voice.

We've travelled half the world. With this condition outside equal death.

Karisan says:

If you've travelled half the world, so you can manage the other half too. We feel no enmity toward you. We try to take care of you.

You name it care? If it's not enmity so what is it?

It just means protect you against the likely dangers.

Likely danger? Likely danger is going out of here. Don't you see so many weak people? As soon as they step out, they would die.

Now the red-eyed dare and each one tells a sentence to confirm his words. Suddenly Rakovan appears next to Karisan.

It was planned your chief establishes the support and helping camp, what happened then? If you have to leave here now it is just because that your chief have withdrawn it and

now is watching your misery. All of facilities you have now has come from “Hope” shelter.

Rakovan points to all:

Just have a look at yourself. What do you see? The red refugees, that is, the reason of foodstuffs shortage. If your chief helped us, maybe you wouldn't have to leave here...

Karisan stops him from talking with his hand:

We are trying to do the best. My colleagues will give your ration. It's your choice to stay or leave here. I should mention it that you only can count on your chief help, otherwise “Hope” shelter can't do more than this.

Suddenly the entrance door is opened with a rather loud sound. All heads turn toward the man who has appeared on the doorstep. His clothes are bloody and his hand is bleeding. A knife is stabbed into his leg. While his face has turned pallid and his body trembles, he says:

The nomads have returned.

All the people take one step behind unconsciously soon after they hear this. Their eyes become wide open and look at each other.

What do you mean?

Karisan comes down the chair, forces his way through the crowd and goes toward the wounded man.

What happened?

They've returned. This time they'll kill all and wouldn't leave anyone alive.

Do speak, what happened?

The wounded man, while is trembling, says:

They killed six of us. I managed to escape. They're following me. The nomads have returned. They'll kill all.

His words agitate the crowd like an explosion.

How many are they?

I could see one of them where ever I looked at. They...

Suddenly he loses his balance and falls down. Two waiters go toward him and take him to the first floor. I try to read Karisan's mind through his face, but just find him thinking. He comes to Yatilan, whispers to him something, then, by giving a sign to his colleagues, infers that he want to go to his room. Yatilan stands on the chair instead of Karisan and says:

There is no difference between our people and you. They eat the same food as you do. Where you lie down and sleep is like the place they do. I think everything is said. Now my colleagues help you to be ready to go bed. If you have any question, ask.

It seems the appearance of the nomads has been such a shocking news that everybody has forgotten the events in few minutes ago.

One thing else. Unfortunately, as you know, because of high number of travelers we haven't no more glassy clothes. So don't talk about it anymore. As Karisan said, when we get at the shelter if there be any, I'll send you along with cars, but I don't give you any promise because they have the same problem there.

And after a pause, he continues:

Those who are disable, stay here. Our messenger tries to get at "Life" shelter as fast as possible and send some clothes with the vehicles which would come here for the patients. Just for those who are old and disable. Because finding clothes is as difficult as finding food and isn't the easy job.

He waits for a while and when sees no one heeds his words, begins to talk with his two colleagues who are still by him. I approach them.

It's incredible.

Yatilan, while is thinking, says:

It is long time that there was no news of the nomads. What are they doing here?

His colleague replies:

There should be a reason for this. It isn't good at all. Put all forces on full alert. I can't see a happy ending for it. The red-eyed on one hand and the nomads on the other hand.

Yatilan says:

They've begun killing the people again. This time they have a new plan. They likely do everything.

One of his colleagues says:

May they attack here?

I said that everything is likely. We must be equipped for the battle. Ready for war. You must stand guard. Collect your thoughts well. Stand by your guns. Try to be calm and cool. By the way, call some other who you know them well and trust them fully to come for help.

Then he goes toward Karisan's room. I must see karisan before I go to bed. But I don't think it's a right time to do this, so I go toward the toilet. After a while standing in the queue in front of toilet, I enter and use it. I take the letters out of my pocket and look at them. I'm happy that I haven't lost them. The letters that my life depends on them.

I take one of the letter and aim to open it but suddenly I see my face in the mirror. The stitches show my face otherwise. A harsh and cruel face. I need time to accept this face. I return the letter into my pocket when I hear knocking on the door. I look at the mirror and go out of toilet after a slight hesitation.

Few lamps and candles are on and inside of the shelter is rather in darkness. The crowd which had been aggregated here

now are scattered and tables and chairs can be seen which are heaped on the corner of the wall. But the number of heaped tables and chairs is less than the number which were arranged before. The rest of them must be in other place

All the people have lay down beside each other like in the mass graves and some of them are asleep. Some are snoring but their snores fade in the light sound which is flowing in the shelter. Some are thinking in their bed which is a thin and dirty blanket as a mattress, and another blanket with different design as a coverlet. A man is playing with the hair of his son who is asleep and smiles once in a while; and only he knows its reason.

There is no flaunting flames in fireplace. The light which radiates from below the door, indicates the shift exchange between night and day. The waiters search through the people for those who need help. They also have some blankets in their hands to give those who have not any.

Fatigue can be observed in people's languid faces who even don't care about someone who has lay down near them. They are the people who had not hand in these difficulties but have adapted to them. Why it should be like this and why we should be tortured this much?

These altogether, cooperates to dissuade me from my decision, but I should finish the job which is relegated to me. I sit down on the ground and wait for an occasion. Time passes but I don't see Karisan. I stand up, and before I take my first step, I feel that my trousers is moving.

A little girl staring at my belt and the pone near it. She isn't over five. She looks at there still. Then she stares at me. I have to sit on my legs to be rather equal in height. I take her arm, try to make my voice childish as far as I can, and say:

Hello ladykin, what's your name?

The little girl points with her finger to that place on my belt, as though she wants something which is on my belt. I tuck my shirt upward and my eyes cast on a small toy key bunch. I unfasten it and give it to her without knowing where I have found it. Then ask her:

Would you accept it as a gift from me?

She shakes her head in token of approval. I give her the toy. She takes it eagerly. She has a spick and span appearance and is like a little angel. She is dressed in a long red shirt, and the border of her white skirt is purpled.

She has a beautiful long curly black hair which reaches her arms. My eyes cast on a paper which is attached on her shirt but just half of it is visible. I can only read Kari... on it. I push her hair aside and the rest of the name appears: Karisan.

I ask her:

Let me see, are you Karisan's daughter?

The little girl is quite busy with the toy. I ask her:

Look ladykin, do you know where Karisan is? Can you take me to him?

Again, she confirms with shaking her head. Then she turns quickly and goes up the staircase which ends with the first floor.

Chapter 6

The meeting

She finds her way through the crowd and goes up the stairway without noticing me. At first, I think she hasn't noticed my request, but I see her up there on the stairway. She looks at me. My doubt disappears and I follow her.

First floor, at first glance, looks bigger than ground floor but if we add rooms, counter, store and toilet to this floor, both are the same. The first thing that attracts eyes are the beds which have filled entire space of this floor: the three-decker beds which their distance to the ceiling is just half a meter or a little more. Almost all of the beds are occupied with the people and those which are not occupied are filled with knapsacks or something else to show that the bed belongs to someone. There is a little room between the beds to come and go. Some people have to move edgewise to pass through this space, but this space is good enough in both sides of the corridor. The form of corridor and spaces between the beds are almost like a river and its branches which are narrower than the river itself.

I follow the little girl to the end of the saloon. Karisan is sitting on a chair near the bed and is medicating someone. It seems that the first three beds are assigned to patients.

There is a transverse counter in first floor too. Like the ground floor, the ceiling and the walls are of metal. Some waiters are behind the counter and give foodstuffs to the people who are going to leave here. I wonder that despite the presence of the nomads, some people are leaving here. Maybe staying here means death to them and they don't want to lose the chance of escape.

Like the first floor, there is a cupboard behind the counter which is full of medical equipment. There is no difference between here and ground floor except for here that the walls and ceilings are less yellowish and seem newer. There is no sign of painting on the walls too. I force my way through the people and stop near the bed which Karisan is sitting beside it. He is busy with his job like before and doesn't realize my presence. A black man lay down on the bed calmly and his face is pallid. The sound of his breathing can be heard hardly but his chest goes up and down extremely. Karisan has worn medical gloves and is rubbing an ointment on the black man's skin.

I want to wait for finishing his job but I see the little girl pulling her father's thin raincoat and shows me to him with his looks. Karisan looks at his daughter interrogatory and then his look stops at me. The expression on his face is like those who are thinking to remember someone.

After a while, the expression on his face changes and turns from uncertainty and ambiguity to a soft smile along with emotion. His eyebrows go up according to his smile. Then he gets up and put the ointment near the bed. He drops himself in my bosom without saying something. He hugs me without touching me with his hands. I hug him tightly too. Before I say something, he forestalls me and says:

Hey buddy! What are you doing here? How come you left there? I didn't think I may see you here.

He opens her arms to leave me and looks at me again to ensure that he didn't make a mistake.

It wasn't the right place for me and its job didn't fit me. Maybe I could do that job before, but I can't do it now. It fits someone else.

Karisan makes a frowned gesture by his face and says:

Eventually, you didn't listen to me and did your own thing? They need you so much there. You could help them.

Then he finishes hugging me and says:

Let me see, have you travelled all the way on foot? Sure you are tired?

It is like he realizes my situation from my face and without waiting for my reply, says:

When you came here? Have you eaten yet?

I smile involuntary and say:

So you couldn't place me? It is exactly one hour that I've got here, furthermore, you did open the door to me!

I'm sorry, I've been so busy so that I couldn't place you. Yet I'm sure that I didn't see you...I think you are wrong.

Of course, you're right you can't place me. When I saw my face in the mirror I couldn't recognize myself as well, let alone you. But it was you that opened the door.

What happened to your face?

It's a long story. I'll tell you that if the occasion arises.

He closes the cap of ointment and after a brief look at the black man, pushes his chair aside with his foot. Then tells the little girl:

My dear Nina, take your uncle to my room till I come. My job is nearly finished. Entertain him well.

Then looks strangely at the toy which is in Nina's hand, as though this is the first time in his life that he sees a toy. So he says:

Where did you get this toy?

Nina again replies by looking at me. Karisan pulls off his right hand glove and caresses her hair, and says:

It seems uncle Zairas soothed you well.

Nina gives a sweet and childish smile, and embraces the toy tightly. Karisan continues his job and tells me:

You go with Nina to my room till I finish my job. Get some rest. You see that I'm a little bit busy. I must visit just one of my patients, then I'll come. Nina knows all the things, don't you my dear?

Nina, who is still floating in her childish world, shakes her head. She takes my hand and makes me to follow her. She passes me through the crowd and move forward so masterfully, like an experienced master in solving mathematic equations. Via behind the counter, we enter a corridor, which I haven't seen it before. There is a room in right side, and two rooms in the left. The room which is in the right side, after the stairways to the first floor, leads to the toilet and the store. The clinic which I went there for my wounds, is exactly opposite the store.

Nina leaves my hand and draws away from me on the run. She opens the door of the right hand room and enters after me. She shows me a chair with her hand and then disappears in the next room in the blink of an eye. The next room has no door to the corridor and the only entrance to it is this room. I sit on a big chair which is in front of a rather large table.

This table seems to be a conference table. Some wooden chairs which are not in good condition are arranged in front of the table. The leather of some of these chairs are treaded and only one or two of them are intact. Behind the table are the four file cabinets. Just one of these file cabinets is clean and without dust and newer of all. In the left side of me, opposite the conference table, is a bookcase with a few books which most of them are medical books.

The sound of water splashing, and then clash of the glass and metal tray can be heard, and after a while Nina appears. She walks carefully, but some of beverages is poured in the tray. She holds a red glass and some biscuit in front me. The weight of tray and also Nina's weakness, cause her to tremble more. I take the glass and two biscuits off the tray immediately. She puts the tray on the table and sits on a chair in front me. Then she takes the little doll out of her shirt pocket and begins playing with her toys.

While drinking, my look switches between Nina and considering the walls continuously. The only place which differs from the other parts of the shelter is this room with the clean and white walls with some frames of portraits on them. I become tired of looking these portraits. I wonder why Nina hasn't speak even a word as yet. So I ask her:

Nina, how old are you?

She looks at me strangely, as if I asked her the worst question in the world. Because of this attitude, I make sure that either I asked my question in a bad manner or she is deaf. Suddenly a familiar voice answers my question:

By the next three months, she'll become six, by the way don't wonder if she doesn't speak. She's a little shy and it takes one day she communicates with someone.

Karisan enters. He sighs with a weak smile and lays spread-eagled on a chair in front of me. Then sits straight and says:

Nina, my dear, would you go to that room and draw some painting? I want to talk with uncle Zairas in private.

Nina shakes her head and goes out without looking her father. When Karisan makes sure that she has gone, says:

Indeed, it is because of the shock she has experienced. It was so terrible; now she feels better after a long time. She often kept herself isolated.

He stops talking and close his eyes, as though a bad moment is displayed in front of his eyes. When he opens his eyes, they are red.

I ask him:

What sort of shock?

He closes one of his eyes and after a short time says:

Her mother has died in front of her. She sat near her mom and cried for a day. When she was found, still was sitting and crying.

He bends over the chair to approach me and slowly says:

We don't know anything about her father. She is consigned to me just for safekeeping.

Then he returns to his previous situation and says:

Before she comes here, she was so hermit. She didn't deal with anyone except her dolls. But she has a strong and resistant personality.

Again, he gives me a weak smile, and says loudly, so that Nina could hear it:

By the way, did Nina entertain and receive you?

Nina, again, doesn't reply. Karisan takes a biscuit off the tray:

Well, tell about yourself. How come that you have travelled this far here? I didn't expect to see you here.

I eat the rest of my biscuit and clear the crumbs off my leg onto the ground:

I had no reason to stay there. Finally I should left there.

Why?

Repeating my thoughts associates the bitter memories:

I've come for my brother...

Karisan asks in wonder:

Mansidan?

I answer him with my silence. He asks:

Has something happened to Raya?

I lower my head and say with a deep breath:

She isn't in a good state of health at all. Mansidan has to come back.

Karisan's eyebrows become tangled. He closes his eyes and says:

If he tended to back, he wouldn't ever go.

I want to find and take him back to Raya.

You waste your time on a wild goose chase. He has gone forever.

Do you have any news of him?

He went since that event occurred...I asked everyone about him...but no one has any news of him.

But I must find him.

He wouldn't back.

I'll talk to him, I'll convince him to back. If he knows about the condition of Raya's health, sure he'll back. I messed up everything, I myself will fix it.

That wasn't your fault. Don't blame yourself. No one is guilty.

I want to see Mansidan and tell him that I'll do my best to everything will be ok again. Just if he comes back.

I lower my head lest Karisan sees my wet eyes. He says:

You shouldn't beseech someone who has said no to everything.

My eyes are wetted by tears and I see the images unclear in front of me:

Raya is becoming paralyze completely. If he backs by my beseeching, sure I'll beseech him.

Suddenly the table shakes. Karisan gnashes his teeth and looks at his fist which has pounded the table:

Damn. What was her guilt that he left her alone?

Silence prevails. Karisan's anger along with his breathe comes out of his nose. I press my eyelids onto my eyes tightly to prevent my teardrops from falling.

Who takes care of Raya?

She doesn't like to see anyone. Jalisa is looking after her.

What's doctor's recommendation?

He can't do anything for her. He just says there is only one remedy: Mansidan backs to her.

Doctor Jaikan knows his job well. How do you want to find Mansidan?

Then Karisan takes a deep breath and stands up.

I planned to go to the "Hope" shelter to find you.

I put the letters on Karisan's desk. He backs to his chair while asking with his eyes. He looks at the letters before opening them, as though the envelopes of the letters can show their inwards. He opens the bigger one and begins to read. While reading, the signs of anxiety appear on his face. He opens the second letter, and ponders while reading it. He walks across the room and says:

The first letter is from your father, I think you know its subject. The second one is...

He takes a deep breath:

There's a problem. Maybe I'll have to go to "Life" shelter.

Why you came here from "Hope" shelter?

Karisan backs to his chair and says:

I had to inspect the shelters. Although we had a problem, it may be a good news. A clue to Mansidan's whereabouts.

Suddenly, my heartbeat tinkles on my head. I become such a shocked so that I just can open my mouth.

I don't promise you but maybe you can find a clue.

I gulp my saliva and say:

What was the second letter about?

Maybe you meet some people. Perhaps they can help you. Just think is it worth?

This is my choice.

It may change your way of life entirely.

Whatever it may be, it would be better than this life.

Karisan presses his lips against each other and shakes his head:

Ok! Think about it once more till tomorrow. If you changed your idea, inform me.

I answer decisively:

No need to think. Ok, sure.

It's enough. I can't go on anymore, I am nearly pass out of restlessness. There are two beds in that room which one of them belongs to me and Nina.

Then stops me with his hand and asks me:

By the way...what's up with "Life" shelter?

I made everything ok. Thanks for you respected my decision.

He shakes his head in token of regret:
A foolish decision! You were managing one of the large shelters, you were able to do that.
Many people deserve this more than I. Palisin is managing there very well. Just we should not leave him alone, because I think a riot is breaking out in that shelter.
So you should have stayed with him and helped him.
I give him a weak smile
Are you spoofing me?
Leave it, I respect your decision. Is there anything else you want to tell me?
Maybe you'd better to hear Rakovan's talk.
He shrugs and says:
I heard his words. What's your idea?
His words are thinkable.
Now he gives me a weak smile:
War means idiocy, but always such idiocies have changed our world.
So you've think about it?
Have you ever seen anybody who has never acted stupid even for one time?
I can't make decision like you at all.
You oughtn't, my way is completely different from yours.
We gaze at each other with smile for a while. I say:
Do you think if they capture the "Life" shelter then nobody can recapture this old castle? Once, an army attacked this castle by airplanes and tanks for three days but couldn't destroy it.
That castle could avail six years ago.
It has a capacity of ten thousand people; a perfect town for the reds.

Let's not exhaust ourselves, and leave this decision up to them.

Then he performs some stretching movement:

Nothing is as pleasant as sleep.

Then he stands up and calls Nina. All of a sudden the door opens and some people with agitated faces along with some patients, who hardly are standing on their feet, enter room. One of them who is breathless says:

I'm afraid nowhere is left unoccupied. Everywhere is occupied. I don't know where to place the patients. The only place which is still empty is your room.

Then he becomes silent. Karisan says immediately:

Take two of them to that room and lay them on the bed, and rest of them here on the ground. Just lay the people whose conditions are critical on the bed. Take the chairs and put them aside for lying the rest till I bring my outfits. By the way, call Rakovan to come and help me.

Then he turns toward me and tells me with a wink:

It seems that I can't be your host.

When I go to help, he finishes his talk:

See you later.

I want to stay and help but I know that I can't do anything but bungle up the job. Karisan enters the next room and I go out soon. It seems that a new group is added to the shelter.

Suddenly I face with a large group of the people who have occupied the corridor up to the back of the counter for sleeping. All are searching for a place to sleep. I enter the crowd immediately. From the crowd which is streaming from the first floor to the ground floor, I realize that this floor is filled to capacity.

I look around to find a place to lie down. Suddenly a man gets up from his place and goes to another place, maybe because he is not so adapted to be near the window. I go there promptly. It is almost the same place that I was sitting on the chair.

Then I pull my pillow and a blanket out of my knapsack and spread a thin pad on the floor and lie on it. The ground absorbs all of my tiredness from my toes like a magnet. I feel calmness. The relaxation which saves me from everything and makes a feeling of flight. I stretch my muscles a little and then cover myself with a blanket.

The crowd goes from one side to the other side. My feet are trodden underfoot several times. Two persons fight for the place. A man is asleep on a chair beside the wall. A tumult rises. It is like a single voice is crying. Two people collide with each other and foods spill all over the ground, utter some curses to each other and then busy with gathering and cleaning the spilled foods. By another collide, a man loses his balance and falls on the ground.

These events attract my eyes continuously. Suddenly Nina appears among the crowd while holds a pillow and a small blanket in her hands. She seems is searching for someone or something. When she sees I am shaking my hand for her, falls down, pass through the crowd which jostles her, stops near me and gaze at me.

I tell her:

Look, do you want sleep beside me tonight? I think your daddy is a little busy.

She shakes her head as a sign of approval. I take my knapsack and put it on the other side. Then I spread here pad on the ground. She sits on her knees, put her blanket on the

ground and busy with removing her shoes. After that, she lies and I spread the blanket on her. She hugs her doll and closes her eyes.

Would you like tell you a story.

She shakes her head as no.

Have you any friend?

She opens her eyes. A great sorrow surges all over her face. I look at the depth of her eyes. They transfer an unusual sense to me. She closes her eyes and her cheeks become loose.

Do you like the doll?

This time she shakes her head as yes, but she doesn't open her eyes, neither tell something.

Would you like we play a game tomorrow? I'll close my eyes and you'll go and hide.

Again she shakes her head as a sign of approval but this time a little satisfaction appears on her lips. She opens and then close her eyes. When her face becomes alive and spirited, I tell her goodnight to have a sweet dream.

As a habit, I pull out the small hand-made box of my knapsack. Its appearance shows that the maker of the box have done their best to make it beautiful but they were a little unsuccessful. It has a door which is attached to the box with two hinges and one of them is faulty, so opening or closing its door is hard. Its lock becomes unlock with a little push and it needs no key. Its inner layers help to make its walls more beautiful. Its corners are shredded. A white color, which has been changed to gray by lapse of time, has become apparent because of shredded red layer.

A picture, a necklace and a ring with two parallel lozenge design, are inside the box; the only things my parents left for

me. I wear the ring after a while looking at it. It fits my finger exactly. I take the picture and clean it with my sleeve.

This picture shows an old house in which a man and a woman are sitting near each other on a sofa and smile. Exactly on the middle of picture, a child is playing with toys in front them. The picture is torn exactly where the child is, and half the picture is lost. Only a part of another hand which is playing with toys as well, is apparent where the picture is cut. It should be Mansidan's hand. I look at the picture with regret. For a few seconds I feel that I am living in that house and with my family. I am so fascinated with this picture that I can feel it as a live image in front of my eyes. Ah Mansidan, why you went and left us?

I gulp down my saliva and take a deep breath to control my feelings. I hold the necklace hanging in front of my face and swing it. It has a strange state. It differs from all the necklaces I have ever seen. There is a small square in the middle of necklace which none of its lines is straight.

It is exactly like a spider but because of its outward branches around it, looks very beautiful. The design on the square, has removed its grossness and deformity and has made the square the main and necessary part of the necklace. When I shake one of its branches on the right side, the square becomes open. No one can imagine that the square may open. There is a rather small picture inside the square which shows two friends of mine. How I missed them. I wish I could find them again. I wear the necklace. I should be carefree about the picture too. So I fold it in a plastic pocket and put it in my raincoat pocket. Suddenly I hear a voice is saying:

Sure they were so dear to you. So keep them as much as possible otherwise you'd be sighing all your life.

I turn my head and see an old man whose face is covered entirely with beard. He looks at the ceiling. At first, I think I am not his interlocutor, but when I realize the depth of his despair and regret in his words, it makes me sure.

The world isn't faithful to anyone. Think about how you can compensate the past. Now that just this little girl is left for you, you better do your best for her, like if my wife and my daughter were alive I did so. This makes you happy to the end of your life.

I try to tell him that Nina is not my daughter but manage to do this just when he has gone. He seems to have suffered too much pain, hardship and loneliness, like me that I feel so after my father's death.

I look at the Nina's innocent face, which is like an angel, for the last time. I can't even hear the sound of her breathing. I put my knapsack beside myself to be carefree about it. All of a sudden I see Karisan going toward the door.

The crowd is like a row of trees which are passing by in front of a high speed car and just once in a while it is possible to see the landscape behind them through the empty spaces between them, people deface the visibility as well; however, I can see Karisan like a picture. He stops near the door and I see that his lips move, as though he is talking with someone else, but I can't see this one because of people's come and go. Karisan smiles once in a while and sometimes his mouth remains open.

Their conversation lasts too long so that finally the numbers of people being reduced and I can see that man. Almost his back is toward me, but he turns his face once in a while. It is dark inside the shelter, yet thanks to the light of a candle which is over their head, I can see his profile. His face

is familiar but I can't place him. I have seen him somewhere, he is so familiar. Suddenly, through the light which radiates into my eyes, I see the color of his eyes. It is a dark blue which makes my brain to pull out his file from its dusty archive.

He is Nabidak, a member of "life expectancy" group, who I saw him a few days ago in "Hope" shelter. Like Karisan, he speaks for a while and then becomes silent. They shake hands after a while and Karisan opens the door for Nabidak. His blue eyes turns toward me and gaze at me for a short time before he goes out.

I think he was looking at somewhere else not at me, but after a little deliberation I make sure that he looked at me; Karisan doesn't realize this and returns to his room. I hide my necklace under my clothes, try to make sure of my ring tightness and then close myself to Nina. The heavy eyelids don't give me more chance, I look at Nina and when I see her calmness, I close my eyes.

Chapter 7

The wounded

I wake up while I am panting. I use my hands to get up and sit while my hands hold and keep me in this situation like two pillars. The shelter calms me. After a sigh of relief, I wipe the sweat off my brow. I try to remember my dream, but I can't remember any part of that. It is like I've just closed and opened my eyes. Nina is still asleep. I push my blanket aside and rub my eyes. The old man wakes up from his sleep once in a while, as though he sees nightmare.

I need to wash my face, so using the edge of the window, I pull myself up and get up. Suddenly I face with the mass of the people who are congregated near the entrance door and are whispering. It seems something happened outside the shelter which caused they come here. I make Nina's blanket tidy and go to the toilet, which is not crowded, through the innumerable people who are in a deep sleep. I wash my face and see myself in the mirror for a while. I expect that my face tells something to me, but it is just the face as I see it. I take a deep breath and go out after a short time. There are still some people standing in front of the entrance of the shelter and are looking at the outside. The curiosity takes me there. I ask a slouchy old man who coughs once in a while, and has a military hat on his head:

What happened? Why people are looking outside?

The old man spins his hat to see me well. After a while, when it seems to him that I am a credible man, he answers me:

We heard a voice from the outside, some people went outside for the voice, because he asked for help. But they haven't back yet. Nobody knows what has happened to them.

Let's see, does Karisan know?

The old man frowns and says:

No, he's a little busy, he couldn't come.

I thank him and force my way through the crowd which is increasing and stop in front of the door. Just a small space in outside is lighted by the light which is radiated from inside the shelter. It is too dark outside the shelter. I step out as far as there is light and look around. There is still darkness and I can't see anything.

All of a sudden I hear a voice begging help. I go toward the voice involuntarily. Thanks to the lights which radiate through the windows, I would not lost my way back to the shelter. But the strange thing which draws my interest is that all of the windows are open, while Karisan's colleagues closed them yesterday. Maybe they have opened them when I was asleep.

I drive these thoughts out of my mind and just concentrate if I heard the voice again, find its direction. Through my sixth sense and the guess about its direction, I go straight forward slowly opposite the shelter. I can hear the people's sound which is fading gradually and is changing to a terrible silence. I take the lighter out of my pocket and light it. Its light is enough and lights my way partly. Time passes and fear seizes

me and makes me decide to back to the shelter. But again I hear that helpless moan from a rather short distance. So I pass through the darkness and go forward. It is like an inner inspiration shows the way and guides me.

Suddenly the lighter goes out and as much as I try I can't light it again. So I put it in my pocket again. When I meet the absolute darkness the weakness and indolence penetrate me. I take some steps backward.

I look at the shelter. I am at a short distance from the shelter, but something makes me think about my decision. Maybe I would be able to save someone; this acts like a candle in a dark desert for me. I close my eyes, this makes me feel as if I am someone else. I take a step, and this leads me to take next steps. It is a rather unusual and is out of my knowledge, but I obey it and open my eyes.

I wink my eyelids repeatedly, but this makes no change. Again, I look at the shelter, it is still there. I hold my hand in front my face, but I can't even see it. My fear increases momentarily. I take some steps warily and hear the sound of gritting gravels under my feet. Every a few steps, I turn and look at the shelter so that it is tied up with me. The gravels replace with the sands and then with dry soil. There is no air like the vacuum.

Suddenly the ground under my feet collapses and I fall into a sinkhole. When I open my eyes, I expect that all of these be a dream, but everywhere is still dark. I can see the moon from inside the sinkhole which is shining. I pause for a while, then shake my feet, my body and my hands to be sure they are well and healthy. I can move my fingers easily, and the more important, I can sit.

I give my neck massage for a while and think of the time I have been fainted here. I don't know the exact time, but it has passed insomuch that my neck has become stiff because of being still. I get up hardly with the help of inner wall of the hole. I wish I had wings and could come out of the hole.

Again, I close my eyes to become calm a little but when I open my eyes, he is still here. He lay on the ground as I saw him in my dream last night. His eyes are hidden under his eyelids and are open just insomuch that he can only have a narrow sight. Yet, it seems he has used all of his force to do this.

As in my dream, his leg is broken and blood has covered all over his body. The same wounds suffused his body. I should help him, but I need help too. I approach him one step to inspect his situation, but suddenly his eyes become wide open as a spring. His look is toward the gun which is on the ground.

I cry several times and beg help but no one replies. I wait for a while, maybe a miracle occurs. But I can see the endless pain in his eyes, which are hidden under the shadow of the hole. His condition implies that he wouldn't survive. Even if someone finds us, he wouldn't survive. Now I realize why he points out the gun. I take the gun and aim at his head and...

Suddenly I wake up. I take a deep breath and rub my neck. I'm happy it was just a dream. All of the chairs and tables are arranging again. With this much noise, all the people are woken up, yet a few of them are still asleep. Maybe that hole is Wildi's everlasting house. Maybe he would have calmness there. No, I should pull him out of there. He should not be forgotten so easily.

Waiters and some people are serving the breakfast to the rest of the people. Some of them are eating their breakfast while sitting on the ground, some other at the table. I sit on a chair which is near the place that Nina lay. I put my knapsack on the other chair to keep it for Nina and she can stay close to me. The waiters are in rush to provide breakfast for all the people. Since I am at a distance of the counter, I take my breakfast later. The breakfast is the selfsame last night meal.

As I put the first spoon of the meal in my mouth, suddenly, my eyes meet Nina's eyes and I find her awake. She gazed at me. I go toward her, lift and sit her quickly on a chair next to me, which thanks to my knapsack it is not occupied yet.. She rubs her eyes, makes no complaint and sits there calmly.

Stay here till I bring your breakfast.

But she replies me just with her look and then quickly forces her way through the crowd and disappears. I remain in wonder for a while and put my knapsack on her chair again and then I watch the people.

After a short time, I turn my head and I see Nina while she is looking at me with her washed face and is carrying a small tray in her hands. She puts the tray on the table and waits I take my knapsack off her chair. Then she sits on the chair fast and nimbly. She smiles and begins to eat her meal. She uses the spoon regularly and carefully and eats her meal calmly. This kind of dining whets my appetite.

As I finish my meal gradually, suddenly I see Yatilan passing through the crowd like a snake and coming toward me. His face seems a little angry. Nina also stops dining because of my sudden look and she looks at the same direction. Yatilan stops between me and Nina, then he bends toward Nina and before starts talking with me, he tells her:

Excuse me dear Nina.

Nina smiles and continues eating her meal. Yatilan turns to me and says slowly:

Karisan has business with you.

Then throws Nina a meaningful look. I realize his purpose without explanation. So I tell her:

My dear, go to auntie when you finished your meal. I should go to uncle Karisan. Okey?

She shakes her head while eating her meal. I take my knapsack and go along with yatilan. He forces our way ahead of me. We go toward Karisan's room. Yatilan enters without knocking and waits until I enter too.

Karisan is sitting on the table and is playing with his feet. Some patients lay on their pad on the ground. They used blankets instead of the green cover. Their numbers are more than Karisan's room capacity. There is no equipment in this room. Except two patients who are awake, the rest are asleep. Once in a while, a moan can be heard from them, but it seems their malady is not acute. Two patients are asleep in a corner with no motion, while entirely are covered by their blankets. They even don't groan and their breasts don't move. Yatilan closes the door and stands near the table. Karisan's face is calm and cool and he ponders. As we enter, Karisan turns toward us and stops playing with his feet. Then he says:

You can begin, Yatilan.

Then he offers me a chair to sit. I thank him by shaking my head.

I've assign armed guards in front of each window. People are afraid.

Karisan's eyes are still locked into the table.

Bad news is spread among the people. It is said that they see black shadows through the windows. People complain. They don't want to leave here.

Karisan, without lifting his head, says:

What about the nomads?

Yatilan replies:

The group which we sent out haven't come back yet. They went to check the migrants' condition. The migrants who are newcomers say that the black shadows were chasing them.

So the serious danger has not happened yet?

Not yet.

I interfere:

Do they have any other purpose unless the slaughter?

Yatilan shrugs:

Nobody knows what the nomads are doing here. If they aimed to the slaughter, they would do this now.

No one has ever seen such a behavior of them, it's really strange!

We are inspecting all the people. Maybe we find something strange.

Karisan looks at Yatilan inquisitively and ask him:

Is there any spy in the shelter?

There's no telling. There was no news of the nomads for a long time. They were turning to a legend. Few people could remember them. But now, fear has surrounded everywhere, everybody; even the red-eyed who have never heard their name.

I say:

I mean whether nomads have entered here

Probably.

Did the man who was wounded by the nomads say anything?

Karisan inserts his fingers into each other and says:

They were coming that nomads attacked them. They kill all people of the group. This one managed to escape.

I ask in wonder:

He escaped or they let him be alive?

Yatilan takes a deep breath and says:

Probably they left him alive. No one has ever been able to save his life from the nomads.

Karisan leans on his chair and says:

They wanted to parade their presence; that is, warning.

I shake my head and say:

So they don't attack now. This time, they seem to have a different purpose.

Yatilan sits on a chair. He says:

What should we do? What should we tell the people?

Karisan says:

For the time being, we must wait and see what they want to do. Don't make decision instead of people. They know what they should do.

Suddenly, an event reminds me of the sunrise:

By the way, I must tell something about the nomads.

All of a sudden the door is beaten and Rakovan comes in:

The group returned. Just one of them is alive, the rest are dead.

Yatilan gets up so fast so that his leg catches the edge of the table and his face crumples:

Where is he now?

Again, door opens and two waiters carry a man on their shoulders who is wounded by a knife which is inserted in his leg. His body trembles and his face is pallid:

As we turned our head, they appeared from behind. It's not known how many they are. They killed all.

Karisan shows the bed to the waiters and then says:

Zairas and Yatilán, you two go and prepare the foodstuffs.

Yatilán looks at Karisan in wonder:

What do you mean?

We had better leave here.

Yatilán confirms Karisan's words by closing his eyes and wants me to follow him. I give my knapsack to Rakovan before I go out.

We must ration the foodstuffs.

People wouldn't leave here in this condition.

Doesn't matter. We can't do anything.

I go follow him. We stop in front of the store. It is next to the clinic, right under the stairways. Yatilán enters store before me. A soft and warm breeze touches my face gently. This breeze is a rather strange in such a room which has not any entrance for it. Yatilán doesn't notice it at all and goes toward a manhole. He opens it and then disappears into it.

This is a rather large store but is like a corridor. The broken chairs are put in a corner. In the other side, the cabinets have covered the wall. Some gunny are hung from the ceiling and between them the wires and cables can be seen. I enter the manhole after him and go down through it.

Then I see him busy with lighting some candles somewhere on the wall. When all of the candles are lighted, I notice the difference between here and upper floors. The remnants of concrete walls which are destroyed by lapse of

time, are gathered below the walls. Now, the soft breeze blows faster, so that a howl-like sound can be heard. Yatilan takes the list off the wall, then, while he changes his place searching for light, says:

This is the list of foodstuffs which is remained for us. Those items which have been crossed out are out of stock. Indeed, it's not necessary you look at it since the only foodstuffs in stock are just these boxes and...

Then he gives me the list and waits. The effects of the four classical elements can be seen all over the list and just the same 200 boxes of canned foods, as he said, is not crossed out on the list.

I approach the light to see the writings well. I made no mistake: 200 boxes are placed on each other on a corner. Yatilan is waiting for my reply while has lifted one of his eyebrows.

My eyes move from his face to the other parts of the store and I see about one hundred little yellow plants which are placed in small vases. I ask Yatilan, without I stop looking at them:

The yellow plant?

He strokes his beard:

Yea, we were going to run a farm here. We could supply foodstuffs for the shelter.

Is there any good soil and water around the shelter?

We planned to sow wheat, corn and some fruit trees. Yea, there is still good soil. These plants don't need much water. It is possible to irrigate the whole farm with about twenty liters of water. We found a pipe line of water which isn't certain from where it carries the water to here. At least it is good for farming.

“Life” shelter has very large farms. There, we had hot bread every day. The yellow plant accepts any kind of graft. We even tried fruit trees. It was excellent. So, this water comes from the well which is near the shelter?

No, we thought the pipe line passes over there, but it seems its way has been changed. The well is obsolete and useless. Which one would give better result, graft the yellow plant to the wheat or to the corn?

How deep is the well? Both are good, we used wheat more. We could grow and harvest pomegranates.

A smile appears on his lips:

I think it’s about four meters deep. Why? We can save our world with this plant. I want to try the fruits.

I shake my head:

I was about to fall into it. Orange is very good for graft to the yellow plant.

I prepared a plug for it but I got no occasion to fix it on the well. Come with me.

We go toward two vases on a corner of the room.

I grafted them last week. One to the apple, one to the orange.

The grafted branches of the orange have turned into the color and appearance of the plant.

The orange graft is ready to take to the outside under the direct sunshine, but the apple graft isn’t ready yet.

The color of the apple branches has changed a little, but their appearance is yet the same as original form. I confirm his words:

Yea, if you put it under the sunshine now, it wouldn’t grow anymore. Don’t water it again. Its leaves are losing their colors.

I touch its leaves:

They become thin. If you put it under sunshine when it grew enough, this would be ok.

He presses his lips, shakes her head and says:

Sure. Now let's have a look at foodstuffs.

I lean on a chair, whose one leg is broken, to the wall and sit on it:

Two hundreds of twenty-can packs which equals four thousands can.

Yatilan wrinkles his brow and says:

We have foodstuffs almost for ten days. There is just a problem.

He takes one of the cans and points to its expiration date:

They will be expired five days ahead.

Why you didn't order foodstuffs sooner?

It was appointed they send us some yellow plants and seeds with foodstuffs, but nothing happened.

Well, what to do now?

I go to call for some guys to take the foodstuffs out.

Then he goes up the ladder. I put the list aside and open one of the packs. The number of the cans is the same as in the list. I open a vegetables can and taste it. Its taste hasn't changed yet, but by the next five days it surely would change. Except for canned vegetables, there is canned beans in the list. I search to find one of these among the packs. The expiry date of this kind of canned foods is also five days ahead.

I put the can on the stool and then I follow the breeze direction. I wet my finger tip with saliva to find its direction more exactly. The wind blows just from behind the foodstuffs packs. I approach the wind origin as much as I can, but I can't continue because of so many packs which are in my way.

I check the wall behind the packages. It has different color and is in conflict with the next wall which its color has been scaled. The next wall has the same similarity as well, as if both are made in the same time. Evidently the intention of making these two new walls and link them to the old walls has been to enclose a part of space and use it as a store. Maybe there is a way that links to here and causes the wind flow through here and Karisan's room. Accordingly, since I am downstairs, the wind enters here through the well.

A sudden breeze of cold weather and a weak tremble shake me when I am amazed and ponder for a while and I keep my balance using the wall. The "well" and the "sinkhole" are the words which associate me the last night dream and is displayed in front of my eyes.

Suddenly I feel someone's hand on my shoulder. I turn my face like the possessed people and my eyes search for the hand. I see Yatilan and four people behind him. All of them see me like a dead man who suddenly has come to life and with the exchange of their looks, they aim at me. Some pity and compassion for me can be seen in their eyes. They look at me with eyes wide open.

Hey man, let's see, what happened, are you okay?

Yatilan says that, while is trying to find out something from my look. I don't know why I couldn't hear their footsteps. I shake my head and then, to justify my action, I say:

The taste of the canned foods hasn't changed yet.

I give Yatilan the opened can.

Yea, I hope we'll be lucky they decay later than the expiry date.

Then he shakes his hand and orders his colleagues:

We should take them all to the upstairs. Some people are going to leave here. Please stand at a distance from each other so that we be able to move them easily.

I ask him:

Are they determined to leave here?

It's so better than they stay here and die.

Then all of his colleagues execute his order and they stand at a distance from each other.

But it's not certain that what is lying in wait for them outside of here.

Staying here means staying alive just up to next ten days, naturally, if the nomads don't attack.

The last one of Karisan's colleagues stands near the manhole, up the ladder. I also, comply with them, stand ahead and hand the heavy packs to others. It takes about two hours to take the package out of the store and transfer them to the counters of the ground floor and first floor through the people who come to help us. My shirt is completely wet and it sticks to my skin when I touch it. With each breath, I feel as if my soul is leaving my body. The sores on my soles also ache because of the weight of the packages, but I forget the pain when Yatilan gives me a rather cool beverage.

He asks me:

How was that?

Cool and delicate, thanks.

It's made of yellow plant, I mean a mixture of some products and then make it to a powder. I think it is sweet even without sugar.

I shake my head:

It's marvelous! Its taste is special.

Yatilan smiles:

Remind me to show you something in an occasion. Now get some rest.

Then he winks at me and goes toward Karisan's room. My eyes search for an empty chair. Nina is sitting at the last table on a corner of the shelter and is drawing. No one notices her. When our eyes meet, she smiles. Then she hints me and I go toward her. While looking my face, she shows me her drawings and waits for my opinion:

Is it your drawing? It's unique!

She sneers and then rises from her chair. She gathers her outfits with the help from me and put them on her small bag. She holds my hand and takes me to her room. I guess what she wants. Probably she wants to attach her drawing to the wall.

We enter Karisan's room. Due to the patients, Nina goes slowly toward the bookcase. Here is too dark. After that my eyes adapt to darkness, I see Karisan sitting on a chair. He is beating an irregular rhythm on the table with his fingers. Except for the moans of patients, it is the only sound that can be heard.

What happened?

Yatilan goes away from the wall and says:

Nothing.

Have you got something about the nomads?

The wounded man feels better now, but he has nothing special to tell. He says that the nomads appear from nowhere. The death angel would be in front of you in a wink.

Have they sent any message?

No one has ever heard their voice. They're called silent angels.

I met two of them before I enter the shelter.

Karisan narrows his eyes. I continue:
They attacked someone called Wildi and killed him with
knife.

Karisan says:

Where's his corpse?

They threw him into a well.

How you managed to escape?

They left me alive.

Karisan takes a deep breath:

I've no idea. Can you show me its place?

Sure! I want to take Wildi's body out of the well. He was
my friend.

I think Nina is waiting for you. When your job finished
call me.

I rise from the chair and all of a sudden I see Nina beckons
me. When I enter the room, she comes down of her bed and
shows me her drawing on the wall. Now, there is no sign of
that two patients who were in this room before. Maybe they
are in fine fettle now, maybe... however Nina is released from
the wandering.

Suddenly I see the drawings which are waving like the sea.
I look around to find its motive, but I don't see any cooling or
heating equipment in the room. Again, I look at the drawings
so that I can find the air current. The air waves are coming
from behind the bookcase and Nina's commode. But Nina
doesn't notice the wind flow at all, as if it is common thing
for her. An edge of her drawings which is at a distance of the
wall, sticks to the wall again. I go toward the commodes to
check them, but I can't find any way to see behind them.
Again, I look at the drawings. Air flow stops and I hear a low
shout from the outside.

Chapter 8

Frustration

A weird fear makes me to go out of the room. Karisan is standing near the black man's bed and examines him. The face of the black man seems to me a rather familiar. I guess he is the same man whom Karisan was applying an ointment on his skin upstairs. The pulmotor is connected to him. His upper body is limp and his breast goes up and down fast and irregular. Rakovan is looking at that man while his breast goes up and down as well.

Finally, Yatilan breaks the silence and says:

What happened? Those drugs had no effect?

Karisan stops examining and, while ponders, says:

I can't find any remedy. He becomes worse momentarily. We'd better be ready.

But its signs haven't appeared yet, only his breathing has become more quickly. It may work. Be patient.

Rakovan shakes his head hopelessly and says:

No, he's the fifth one who is struck by this. All of them had the same symptoms. He also shows the same signs. It went wrong again.

Karisan lifts his eyebrow to give Yatilan a sign to perform his order.

Come in and close the door.

I enter and stand near the door. Then he turns toward Yatilan and says:

Do a favor and take Nina out of here. I don't want she becomes worse than this.

I see Nina that appears in front of the door when she hears Karisan's words. Yatilán lifts her in his bosom and goes out. He seems he is afraid of the scene which is going to occur. Time passes in silence for a while since they went, and I can read the instability through both Karisan's and Rakovan's eyes. Although the chaos can be seen clearly in their faces, yet hope glimmers once in a while in their eyes. I can see the sweat on their faces which comes down to their chins, yet they don't move even their heads.

A horrible silence, in which just the sound of their breathings can be heard, fills the room. All of a sudden, while all expect good result and success, a weak tremble and then violent convulsion, shake the black man.

They take and hold his hands and feet immediately, and I help them. I push on his legs but a force from his weak and feeble body, which is unexpected, shake us a little. Then he calms for a while. All of the people in the room are shocked by this scene and anxiety shimmers on their faces. Then, the breathing of the black man becomes more quickly but we hold him, just in case.

Again, time passes in silence for a while. I see hope returns to their faces, but anxiety ruptures their hopeful faces. Yet they try to hide it by pressing their lips and frowning.

After a while, again at the peak point of expectation his breathing becomes slow, insomuch that he seems not to breathe. Rakovan, as if he already prepared himself for this event, takes the electro shocker, but Karisan stops him and begins to give artificial breathing to the black man. Yet, no change can be seen. Then, when he sees his efforts are ineffective, he calls Rakovan.

Rakovan charges the shocker for the first time but it is ineffectual. The second time is the same. Rakovan gulps his saliva and charges the shocker for the last time. Again it has

no effect, just the sound of shaking body of the black man echoes through the room.

They lower their head as if they have reached the end of the world. They breathe a deep sigh and dip in the sea of sorrow. The black man's eyes stared at the ceiling, as though he wants to follow his soul to the heaven. Karisan, while is sorry for the black man's death and for being unsuccessful in his work, sits on the ground and puts his head between his hands. Rakovan gazed at the black man while the electro shocker is in his hands.

Adding the third element, that is, the death of the black man, to the darkness and disappointment, the atmosphere of the room becomes so sad insomuch that it drags me down. I lean to the wall while I sit on my feet. The sound of a beat on the table makes my look to move from an unknown point toward the sound. I see Karisan that pounds with his fist on the table:

Damn! Everything fucked up.

Rakovan, in an encouraging tone, says:

No, things aren't as bad as you say.

Karisan insists on his words and shows this with another beat on the table:

It is so! Didn't you see he didn't change even a little bit? He died like others.

You're wrong. It's true that the death, through all other events, repeated like the rest death, but there was five minutes interval between the convulsion and his death. The rest of patients went into convulsions soon after taking the pills and immediately died, without any pause.

It was just because of his resistance. Our pills weren't effective at all. We can count it as physical resistance of a person, and it may be an exception.

Think a little. The one who could show the maximum resistance just resisted two minutes and he also died after the convulsion. He couldn't stand up to it even for a second. But this one could stay alive after taking the pill and convulsion.

Karisan becomes quiet and calms down like a volcano after its eruption. After a while, looks at the dead man and says:

Maybe his body was resistant to the disease more than the rest, this is why he could tolerate this much. But there was no difference altogether.

Then he sits on his chair and puts his head between his hands on the table.

We should try it on someone else to be assured of the result. It seems unlikely to me that someone else can tolerate this much. I've never met such a patient. My opinion still is this.

Take and bury him. Zairas, you come with me.

Rakovan confirms Karisan's words by shaking his head and stares at the black man. Karisan goes out of the room while his hand is on his brow. I follow him.

What was his malady?

Doesn't matter. He's dead now. Did you know Wildi?

Not too much, we were just fellow travelers.

Do you know anything about him?

He wanted to join the rescue teams. How then?

I was about to see someone. I guess he was Wildi. Have you seen something strange in him?

He talked about an appointment too.

I was waiting for him to bring me some news.

When I reached him, he was captured. After that they beat him, they attacked him with the knife and then threw him into the well.

Karisan ponders and struggles with himself. We continue walking in silence. Karisan's opinion is really efficient. Coming out of that atmosphere and being in the outdoor, fades the death of the black man away. It is like coming out of the marshy air.

We stop near the well which I checked last night. I bend over and look inside the well. The day light couldn't infiltrate into it yet; like someone who looks at the surface of the sea from bottom and can see the light beams which their radiations become high and low by the waves and just can light the small part of the sea, so the depth of the sea lives in darkness.

I say:

It was exactly here.

Then I point at the blood around the well:

They stabbed him there. You can see his blood.

Karisan transposes the gravels carefully along the track of the blood as if he looks for something.

What are you looking for?

Maybe something helps us.

All of his outfits were in his knapsack.

I'm not looking for a certain thing. You informed me late. The footprints are disappeared.

No one was here except us.

He comes back to me.

I should go down. Do you have a rope?

Karisan coughs and says:

You should find him anyhow.

I'll do my best.

He push the gravels and the soil aside with his foot and then a rope appears from under the ground. One end of the rope is tied to a spike which is nailed into the ground. He throws the other end of the rope into the well. I take the rope and go down into the well slowly and carefully with the help of its inner wall, which collapses with each contact of my feet.

I have no fear to the border of darkness and light, but when I reach the darkness, I feel the weakness of my body.

Karisan bends over the mouth of the well and calms me with his face. I feel a cold air in the bottom of the well. I put my feet on the ground and release the rope. Then I lean on the wall of the well and wait for my eyes adaption to the darkness.

No one is inside the well!!! I grabble everywhere but no one is here! It is impossible. I myself saw that he was thrown into the well. Maybe there is another well around the shelter. But before I enter the well I saw the blood stains on the sands. It is impossible. Maybe there is a tunnel or subway inside the well through which Wildi has reached under the shelter.

I grabble from top of the wall so that if there is a hole I could find it. I go on grabbling until I feel the edge of a hole on the wall near the bottom of the well, with my fingers. I dip my hand into the hole. Its size is enough to creep into it. Suddenly I face with a mass of soil. I check the hole but it seems it has collapsed. Maybe this is not a tunnel and it is just appeared because of that collapse.

The other reason that confirms the wrongness of my assumption is the 45 degree direction between the tunnel and the shelter, which rejects my assumption thoroughly. The origin of the wind flow is in the other place.

The height of the wall now is changing. This is the sign of gravels rush. The well will fill within unknown time. I can't believe. Everything is strange. It is impossible that Wildi could survive, let alone he went out of here without help. Maybe this hole collapsed newly.

Karisan, I can't see Wildi here.

Are you sure this is the same well.

Yea, I'm sure. There is a hole, do you know anything about it?

Not at all. Yatilan with some people dug here to supply water for the farm. Maybe Yatilan knows something. He wasn't able to come out of the well alone. Maybe some other people helped him to come out of the well.

If they did that, why ever didn't they bring him to the shelter?

I survey inside the well for the last time, then climb the rope. Karisan looks at the sky thoughtfully:

This is a suspicious case. Wildi's body isn't in the well. They left you alive and yet you're not on a bed in the clinic with a knife in your leg.

I don't know. This is ambiguous also for me.

Is there anything that you haven't told me?

I shake my head:

No! I told you everything.

By the way, is there any blood stain inside the well?

There was too dark and I couldn't see. The gravels which collapsed into the well newly, destroyed everything.

Karisan ponders.

If anything is stolen so there wasn't any case of rubbery as well. So forget this.

I'm sure about what I saw.

Don't trust even in your eyes! Sometimes the illusion is clearer than the reality.

I touch the sore on my face involuntary. It is coarse and painful. Maybe the events of last night were illusions, but the sore on my face is not an illusion. Karisan taps on my shoulder a few times and shakes his head:

Have you made your decision?

I bring my eyebrows close together to make an interrogative gesture.

Are you still determined to find Mansidan?

I can't do anything else.

The corner of his lips goes up:

Come with me.

MOEIN MANSOORI FARD

Chapter 9

The mission

I can't believe. There is no sign of Wildi, this is impossible. I myself saw all of the events last night. Maybe there is a way inside the well which I couldn't see it. But Wildi wasn't able to move himself even by an inch because of his condition.

Karisan doesn't notice to my confusion at all. He takes steps calm and determined. We back to the shelter without talking and we go to his room. He glimpses at the black man who is still on the bed. Karisan closes his eyes for a while, then enters his private room. He lies on the bed and offers me Nina's bed. So I sit on the bed. After a short time he takes his hand off his brow and says:

I want you to accept a responsibility, prior to do anything. This helps you find Mansidan.

I encourage him to continue by shaking my head.

I leave here today. More likely, Rakovan and Yatilán would stay here. Your destiny also depends on the decision you make.

I've never thought about something else except for finding Mansidan.

There is no direct way in which you reach him.

It is hard for me to accept it. Raya's face is continuously in front of my eyes.

It is the only thing that I can do, I'm afraid.

I lower my head and look at my fingers which are inserted into each other.

I can't go back without Mansidan.

So you had better do your best.

How the responsibility which you talked about would help me to find Mansidan?

He shrugs and says:

It may give you some clues. You'll meet the people who probably have seen Mansidan.

Am I alone having this responsibility?

It better to say mission rather than responsibility. You're about to meet some people.

He stares into my eyes and after a while says:

You should be the savior.

Then he lifts one of his eyebrows and waits.

I don't think if I could do it.

You can't be wandering in the deserts with no aim like this.

I thought it might be everything but to be the savior.

You can reach the "Hope" shelter with the saviors. When you reached there, look for someone called Jara. He can help you.

What should I do in rescue team?

Don't worry about that. When you reach there, you would know.

Should I leave here today?

If it is your decision, yes.

I close my eyes. The promise that I gave to Raya echoes through my head. I've promised Raya that I find Mansidan. I take a deep breath and say:

Okay. I agree.

Karisan smiles:

You made the best decision.

I shake my head in reply.

Of course, you're not alone in this way, someone will company you. You should reach the group called "Thunderbolt 1".

Then he takes his wireless off the bed and says:

Vorarin, please come here.

A voice replies from the other side:

I'll come right now.

You can trust him completely. It's enough you know that he has my full trust. He knows his job well.

I shake my head to confirm his words. Then I ask:

Is he a savior too?

He wants to be.

What if I want to go to this mission alone?

Group means to be together.

Then he winks and takes the wireless set. All of a sudden we hear knocking at the door. Karisan puts the wireless in its place and waits. After a while Vorarin appears in front of the door. He is a rather short and small. He has wrapped his head with a kerchief like the house cleaners. He has sunk into the mass of clothes he wore.

Zairas, this is Vorarin.

Then with his hands invites Vorarin to sit near him on the bed. His face is dirty and his clothes is shredded.

I forced to do something I was averse to. In this mission, you need the glassy clothes more than anything else. There were four sets of glassy clothes in the store which I had reserved them for a rainy day. Now they serve you more. An extra clothes also remains for you.

He shifts his look between us:

Any question?

I shake my head in sign of negative. He lies on the bed:

You two, go upstairs and receive the outfits you need from Yatilan.

I distract my attention away from the wind flow which runs and stops once in a while, and I say:

Now?

The sooner the better.

What about the nomads?

Try not to think of them.

A tempest trembles my heart spontaneously, but I feel calm with Karisan. He says:

I should see you before you leave the shelter. There are some letters which you must take and reach them to the shelter. You must be careful not to lose them. You should pull your wits entirely together, you need them.

I assure him, then I stop as a permission to go. Vorarin goes out ahead of me and waits for me out of the room.

Suddenly I remember the promise I gave Nina. We planned to play a game. I go out. Maybe I could find her and apologize her. I see her. She rises from her chair like a spring, as if she was waiting for the end of our talks and then comes to the room. I sit on my toes to become equal in her height, and then I say:

I'm so sorry I couldn't play with you since I was so busy. I had to help them.

I curse myself for why I can't read his mind. She looks at me as a dead. She stares at me. As a fly changes its location in the air, her look changes its place on my eyes continuously and then she enters the room with an agitated face. I curse myself again and go out with a distracted mind. Suddenly I feel a hand on my shoulder which stops me. I return and see Vorarin who looks at me calm and cool.

We must go upstairs to receive our outfits. What do you want to do?

I realize his words after being confused, turn my face and just look at him. He says:

Any problem?

Nina's thought empties my mind a little and gives me a chance to notice Vorarin.

Yea, I mean no, no problem. Let's go and take the outfits.

He says nothing, just looks at me doubtfully, then he goes. I just follow him in the way to upstairs and we don't talk at all. I reach Rakovan's room through a regular but crowded traffic of the ants. I knock at the door before I enter but no one replies. Again I knock, and again no one replies. I open the door slowly and sneak a look into the room. Inside the room is full of the patient who lay on the ground to the door. Rakovan is arranging the medical equipment. I say:

I want my knapsack. Thanks.

You're welcome.

I hardly reach Vorarin through the rolling surge of the people which is flowing on the stairs. The long queue continues to the front of the counter and between the beds and near the stairs. All the people are in toss like the bees in hive.

It's so crowded. We'd better wait.

Anyone who tries to get ahead in queue, will face with people's objection. We enter the queue and suddenly I see a hand which is shaking for us. I stand on my toes to see well. He is Yatilan who shakes his hand for us. Some people look at us because of Yatilan's signal, and this makes it easy for us to go toward him. So we go ahead through the crowd like a snake. Some object us, but we go ahead without noticing them, who push us once in a while. Vorarin uses the space behind me and follows me with no distance. Once in a while, his leg touches the back of my feet and throws me off balance. Finally, we reach the counter. Yatilan says something to his friend and then comes toward us.

Let's go in.

We go toward the small door behind the counter. Vorarin enters ahead of us and Yatilan enters last and closes the door with a sigh of exhaustion. All of the foodstuffs packs are moved here from the store and are arranged on a corner on top of each other. The doors of the upper packs are open and cans show themselves off. A few sheaves of leaflet are set near each other on the table. A part of room is occupied by a big tank of water and a good number of flasks. Yatilan says:

Please come with me.

Then he goes toward the sheaves of leaflet and says:

Please take twenty canned food off the packs, and also eight flasks of water.

He takes two sheets from a sheaf and come to help me. I put the cans in my knapsack and attach the flasks around the knapsack. Vorarin's knapsack is similar to mine except for his knapsack has more facilities than mine.

A brief comment, as you see there are four shelters on the map. We put one of them aside because you used to live there, and cross out the first one, because I'm sure it is full. You can count on two other shelters.

Although I know everything about the shelters, I don't cut his words and listen to him thoroughly. With this comment, I am sure that he knows nothing about our mission. It can be concluded that other people also know nothing about that.

Unfortunately we haven't glassy clothes anymore.

When he finishes his words, we leave the room. He goes to his colleagues and the voice of the objectors against the slackness gradually quiet down. We bid him farewell and go downstairs. In the midway Vorarin says:

By the way, Karisan forgot to say that nobody knows about our mission except Rakovan. It's better to keep that in secret.

I just keep quiet, Vorarin stops and thinks for a while. Then he says:

This is the best time to wear our glassy clothes. We must wear them before we leave. Come with me.

He doesn't wait for my reply and goes toward the store downstairs. Before he enters the store, I ask:

What do you mean? Why here?

Because here is empty and no one has nothing to do here. No one should be informed of the glassy clothes.

Then he opens the door and enters. No one notices here even a little as he said. But I enter cautiously and leave the door half open so that in the case of someone enters, I see their shadows first. The direction of the light beams is so that shadows cast into the room.

I go downstairs to wear my clothes. You change your own here.

Then he get into the way going down through the manhole. Before that, he opens his knapsack and pulls out two sets of glassy clothes which shine like the diamond under the dim light.

Wear this mask over your face and put these lenses on your eyes.

Then he hangs one of the clothes over his hand and puts another one on the knapsack and disappears into the manhole. I go toward the clothes and take it. It is limp as water, clear and colorless like the glass and completely set. It is as delicate as silk and as light as a feather. It is so light that after I wear it, I get used to it and don't feel its weight anymore. It has no smell as well.

I go behind a commode which hides me from the sight of entrance. I remove all of my clothes even my underwear. Then I wear the glassy clothes from its stretch collar. I take the mask, which is a rather thick, and put it over my face. Soon after using the lens, tears wet my eyes.

After a short time since I wore the clothes, suddenly it changes to the color of my skin as if it disappeared. The only sign of its existence and being apart from my body is the mark attached on its collar at the back of the neck. Its pressure on the body disappears after a while. I've worn my clothes but there is no sign of Vorarin yet. I call him but I just hear an obscure reply. I call him again. After a short time he replies:

Wait a second. I'm ready. Just a little...damn...

I wait. Here, the atmosphere is pokey and drowsy. All of a sudden, two white gunnysacks attract my eyes. They are closed tightly. Some fine grains are showing off below them. The upper part of one of these gunnysacks is torn. They are filled with grit. But why they need the grit? I follow the track

of the grit until I reach the manhole. I bend over to have a look into it, all of a sudden in midway, Vorarin with the agitated and hasty tone says:

Hey, wait a minute...I'm ok, I finish my job right now.

Again, I wait for a while and finally he comes up through the manhole slowly. Then he makes his clothes tidy and says:

I'm afraid it lasted a little bit long. I'm ready, we can go.

Just a minute!

He asks in wonder:

What happened?

Is any gunnysack like these down there?

I didn't see any. Why?

No matter. Forget it.

He takes his knapsack and goes out of the room cautiously.

Karisan is standing near the exit door of the shelter. He looks around, and when his eyes meets me, his anxiety subsides in his eyes. I reach Vorarin and we stand in front of Karisan. Nina is also standing near Karisan. He says me with a seemingly rough and annoyed face:

Where were you? I was searching everywhere for you. I thought you've left.

Indeed, here was a little crowded so we changed our clothes in the store.

He pays no attention to me as if he doesn't expect any reply. Then he says:

Fortunately there isn't any news of nomads, so don't worry.

He puts his hand on Nina's head. Nina peeks in at me and when meets my eyes, smiles. Karisan pulls the letters out of his pocket and emphatically says:

I don't emphasize it again, these are very important.

Then he holds the letters in front of me like the playing cards and while pointing on each one, gives some explanations about them.

When you reached the group, you should give this letter to Kidaton, this to Parkad, and this one to Nabidak. These are your letters of introduction. With these letters they would accept you.

Then he gives me the letters while he emphasize on the importance of the letters by shaking them and says:

By the way, these letters are also for Vorarin. However, I prepared a letter of introduction for you, Vorarin.

Vorarin comes ahead and takes the letter of Karisan. He looks at both sides of the letter and then put it into his pocket. Karisan pulls two small black things out of his pocket and shows them in his palm:

These are insignia of the group. All of your information are saved in them. Even if you lost the letters, you must not lose the insignia. There is a place at the back of the insignia in which you put your fingertips to save your fingerprints. Then...

He shows us a sliding back door on the insignia. A fingertip-size place appears. A touch screen which scans the fingerprint. He spins the small set as he speaks:

You must also register your eyeprint ID using this part of the set. This one is a display screen. When it is on, you can enter your data. You will enter the list of the group since when you press the enter key. Then it becomes your identification mean and when you put your finger into it, it confirms your identity. You should be very watchful lest someone obtains this because they can use it. Since you entered your data no one except you can use it, but it may be

hacked and then...well, I have nothing to say anymore and I don't ask you about the foodstuffs because I know Yatilán has given you all you need. Now I have much work to do. If you don't need me, I should go.

I shake my head in sign of negative answer and then I hug him.

By the way, what do you think if I move Raya to the "Hope" shelter?

I don't know whether she accepts or not, but she can come out of that gehenna.

I'll do my best. I want she heals as soon as possible.

I smile:

Really thanks.

He says goodbye and goes to the first floor. I hug Nina too:

Look, do you resent me?

While looking at the ground, she gives me the negative answer by shaking her head and then she smiles.

I shake my hand and leave the shelter with a vague feelings.

Chapter 10

The exodus

We are now outside the shelter. I close my eyes and shelter them from the sunshine under my hand. I close and open my eyes several times but it seems that the earth also has its own light. My eyes aches much. I have to hold my hand in front my eyes completely. Then I open my fingers slowly. Like the sludge which settles in water after a while being stagnate, my eyes also adapt to sunshine by the techniques I've done. Vorarine has closed his eyes too. Fortunately there are still three or four hours left to sunset. Vorarin when sees my contemplation and inattention, comes to me after a slight hesitation and he says:

So?

Now that my eyes adapted to sunshine, I lower my hand and turn my face toward him. Then, I ask in wonder:

So what? What should we do?

All of a sudden the door opens and we force to go aside. Three people come out of the shelter. They pass by us inattentively and this gives us the pretext for move. We take steps just behind them at a short distance. Something strange is teasing me. I can't understand it. Maybe because I am

stepping in a way in which I don't know what will happen for me. I don't know whether I can find Mansidan or not.

Time passes in silence for a while until I see those three people like the shadows of the trees in the sunset. I look behind. I see two people who newly have come out of the shelter. We are just between the people but the speed of the people behind us shows that they will outpace us. As I go on my way slowly, Vorarin says hesitantly:

We should be careful about what we say since now.

I ask him:

Do you know anything about the saviors group?

Not much. They've different missions.

Why do you want to enter the group?

For the personal reasons. I want to do something useful.

Can you talk clearer?

He looks around:

Be quiet for the time being, some people approaching us.

I hear footsteps of two people who approaches us momentarily. I take the white stick off my knapsacks. Then open it until it turns to a stick. After that, I open the umbrella which is attached to the lower end of the stick and I hold it over our heads. Finally those two people reach us and they admire me for the umbrella, while passing by us in wonder.

One of them says:

Look, do you have any stick like this to give us?

They pour some water on the cloth which they have hold over their heads, and then they go away from us.

Well, where should we go?

I need the map.

So I pull the map out of my bag. The irregular and curved lines shows that the map has been drawn by hand. The "Ray",

“Horizon”, and “Hope” shelters are in a line and toward the north, but the “Life” shelter is in the south. Some stopover and new shelters are also shown on the map which one of them is the “Storm” shelter. Vorarin comes closer to me and says:

Well...exactly here. We should get at there.

Then he shows a circle on the map which called “Ralin town”.

The scaling of the map is not correct but beside a line which is drawn as the road, is written 8 km.

We can reach there within two hours. This way, we wouldn't meet darkness.

We go on our way when those two men have gone far away from us. Now no ears can hear our words. I look behind to be sure of there too. Many people, who are more than ten, have left the shelter. Two of them, ahead of the others, are almost behind us. When I see them, I decide to forgo my question. Vorarin also keeps quiet. We go on our way with the same speed until they pass by us.

Gradually, my brow drip sweat. Compare to night which is too cold, day is too hot. A light breeze begins to blow and burns us like a furnace. The umbrella which I have invented, has no effect on heat and just protects us from the light. It is like a sultry weather near the beach, with the difference that here the humidity of the weather is replaced with a dry and torrid air. Silence makes me look at the nature.

My feet sink in the sand. Here, the ground is still sandy. The ground is covered by the sand, as far as the eye can see, nevertheless normal soil can be seen in some parts. Only a few hills have choked the sandy soil from flowing as water.

In some parts, sands have accumulated and have made different hills. Fortunately, neither of them is on our way, but they may relocate by night. If we look from above, we would see ourselves and the “Down” shelter like a black spot in the middle of an infinite white board. This is such a dull and tedious way we should undergo again. Nothing new attracts my eyes but the sand and the yellow color which offends the eye. Vorarin approaches me and says:

It seems the reds have no difficulty with the nomads. I didn't see anybody of our people has left the shelter.

Because the nomad has been a legend for them and a reality for us.

Maybe we better waited too.

Thanks God at least we're not alone.

My feet sink in the sands as in a marsh. It takes no time that my shoes are filled with sand and offend my feet like the prickles. I have to empty my shoes once in a while, otherwise the sores on my feet may bleed again and hot sands may cause blister on my feet.

Vorarin stops with my groan and looks at me perplexedly. I spread a pad on the sands before I sit on the ground. I am sure that at this time of day, sands are hot as glowing coals. I bend my legs toward my breast and remove my shoes. Vorarin also checks his condition and sits by me. He sinks the umbrella into the sands so that it protect us from the sunshine. Then he becomes busy with his feet. I empty sands out of my shoes, meanwhile the shadows of two people fall on us. I push the umbrella aside to see their faces.

An old man is standing by a young man about thirty, but the direction of the sunshine hides their faces from us. When they see we narrowed our eyes and we try to identify them,

they replace the umbrella in its place. I guessed right about them. The old man, who is smaller and unkempt, is the young man's father. Vorarin begins to speak sooner than me. He asks:

Can we be of any help to you?

The old man shakes his head in sign of positive answer. His son says:

Indeed, we are illiterate. We wanted to ask the waiters for help but they were busy.

Then he takes a set out of his knapsack which is like a cell phone and then he gives it to me:

I want you to specify the way on this set.

At first sight, I find out it is a router or GPS set. Its keys are faded and frazzled. In some parts of the set fractures and fractures can be seen. It is the same router I already used it. I can use it blindfolded. I push the power key and ask them:

Which route I should specify for you? Where are you going?

The old man opens his mouth to answer but he stops talking by his son's look. Then his son instead of his father immediately says:

You specify a route in which we reach the "Hope" shelter easily.

I look at the old man to know his opinion. He is thinking and it seems something has hesitated him. Their behaviors show that they don't trust us. Also, it seems this is the first time they use this router. I explain the route for them, before that I specify it:

On the map, it takes two weeks to "Ray" shelter. You'll have to enter other shelters too. You should pass the "Storm" shelter. This way, you can supply your foodstuffs again. After

that you got the “Ray” shelter, you should go on and reach the “Horizon” and then “Hope” shelters. In this route some stopover shelters are being built which make the route easier and shorter. The “Light” shelter is between the “horizon” and the “Hope” shelters. This is the nearest route.

The old man looks at his young son. It is completely obvious that something annoys him, but the young man’s look makes him to be silent.

Yea, this route is good. My father agrees too. Don’t you?

The tensome group which is divided into the two or threesome groups, pass by us slowly. Some of them have a glance at us. The old man and his son, both become quiet. I look at the route guide until they pass by us. The date of the map relates to sixty years ago. All of the cities and the names of all streets can be seen on it. I look for the “Dawn” shelter on the map, but these locations all have changed since then.

All of a sudden, seeing the Ralin town on the map, reminds me Karisan’s map. At a distance of eight kilometers from Ralin town, I will reach the “Dawn” shelter. My eyes lock on display screen perplexedly. I can’t believe, but as I see here, where I am now, used to be a town! I do calculation again, but I’m not wrong. That’s it; here used to be a town but now there is no sign of it. I look around to be assured that there is no town anymore. I can’t see anything but sand. It seems just this shelter has remained of the town. The thick iron beams which are on the top of the building prove this.

While I am thinking, the voice of the old man who is whispering with his son makes me notice their agitated faces. Their whisper gradually becomes louder insomuch I can hear their words.

You shouldn't tell. If you want to talk about there with everyone who we see...

Think a little, you silly boy. We should be assured. If they ...

No father, we find it alone.

His father frowns and says:

Shut up! I don't want to die in the desert.

The son just lower his head and groan in whisper when he finds himself doomed to failure.

I try to defuse the situation with my question:

What happened? Should I mark the route for you or not?

The old man banishes his frown and while is looking at his son, says with a slight hesitation:

I've a question. How I tell it...do you know anything about the "new world" town?

I shake my head and say:

Not much. Just this much I know that such a town is being built.

Vorarin wipes the sweat off his face and fans himself by waving his shirt. He says:

Why do you want to know about there?

The old man pays no attention, just a flash appears on his eyes and then his dry lips gently ripple.

So it's true. Can you tell me a little more about it?

I open my mouth to answer him but Vorarin anticipates me and asks suspected:

What do you mean saying these words?

Now I know what's what. When the old man see himself suspected, he says:

Well... I just wanted to...since I knew that you are Karisan's colleagues so I asked that question.

His son, like an extinct volcano which roars just in itself, looks at his father with no word. In my opinion they are same as other people and I can't call them spy. Hearing my opinion, Vorarin's hesitation is reduced and he says:

What do you know about it?

The old man dishevels his long hair on his face so that protect it from the sun stings, then he says:

I want to know the exact location of this town.

Vorarin looks at the old man's eyes anxiously:

Maybe you want to go there? As a matter of fact, how do you know about it?

No matter how we knew it, but you just mark its location on the map for us.

Essentially, what do you know about it?

He shakes his head and says:

Its name proves everything. We wouldn't have these miseries there. We have lived a painful and repetitious life. So we want to live there like the human beings not as a...

His son finally cut his father's words and says:

What's the problem about that, what happens if we live there?

Vorarin sneers at them and says:

Nothing will happen but when you reach there, there would be no place for you. Further, this is just an experience, if it works, but nothing is certain.

Vorarin words' affects the old man late, so he remains unchanged. Then vorarin points at the son and says:

You mean that in these buildings each with fifty floors there is no room for us?

Sun movement makes Vorarin to set the position of the umbrella again:

Not the fifty-story buildings; they are just seven-story buildings, and furthermore, they have a capacity of less than five thousand people. All of the “Hope” inhabitants know this and have occupied all the places.

In the same time, the son stops searching in his knapsack, pull out a picture and says:

Isn't it?

The picture shows a city which its streets are full of cars and its towers and skyscrapers reach the sky. The people are living their lives; the life which has destroyed many years ago and now the way of life has changed entirely.

If you assume this not ten percent, but one hundred percent retarded in comparison with the “New World“, then you can say yes, it is the same town. I say it again, this is an experimental plan.

Their countenances show as if they don't agree with Vorarin. The son pays no heed to us and tries to intimate his father something. The old man, who seems doesn't like to hide this from us, tries to calm his son by shaking his hand. Then he turns to me and says:

If you want to help us, just mark its location on the map.

Vorarin shrugs inattentively and says:

Seven kilometers over the “Hope” shelter.

I look at the map and find the “Panisora” mountain. Then I mark the place at a distance of seven kilometers from it. Vorarin gives back the picture to old man. The son takes the route guide from me and after a simple appreciation, they depart for their dreamland. Vorarin watches their going. I look at the people who are leaving the shelter continuously.

It was agreed that it remains hushed up until it comes to good result, and being tested on few people.

I reply him:

This isn't a case they could hide it.

He makes a sound without he opens his mouth in confirmation. Then he says:

God only knows what problems would happen with this people.

Surely they have thought about all aspects of this case. What do you know about there?

It is the first town which has been built after the world destruction. With this town, we can come out of the shelters; the narrow and dark shelters. The Fear of death finishes. You can walk there carefree without you have to walk with death. You don't need to wear glassy clothes. You can order food and buy clothes with money.

Money?

This is why it's called new world. There are clothing store, grocery and also restaurant. Some other shops are being opened which belongs to the rich people. They do this just for fun, because nobody has redundant money. They have money just insomuch they can buy "Railar" clothes and feed themselves. For the time being, just one of those people could buy a shirt since the clothing store opened.

Railar clothes? How they earn money? Who pays money? Should you pay for clothes and food?

People who live in "New World" town must pay for themselves. Neither Railar clothes nor Railar food accrue to them and nor any share of Railar will be given to them. Railar is the headquarters or, in common language, government of the "Hope" shelter. Railar is responsible for supplying foodstuffs for the people, I mean they resolve people's needs for free, as you did in the "Hope" and "Life" shelters. The

foodstuffs which you were receiving, were from the Railar. This town is also built by Railar to allow us come out of this dark and worthless life, and we'll be able to back to our previous lifestyle. It's enough living as animals. We should back to thirty years ago when everything was good.

Passing some people by us cuts our talks. A woman has fallen on a man and begs water from him continuously while groaning. The man pays no attention but finally he is forced to leave her on the ground. The man curses almost loudly, then bends over his knapsack.

The rest of the group don't stop for them and go on their way. The woman, unlike the man, has a nice face but the dirt on her face hides this beauty. She has a slender body and is of medium height. The man is similar to her in body and height but his muscles show him as a man. No delicacy can be seen in his body. His face is covered by beard and is fretted. The man leaves his knapsack and brings a water flask to the woman's mouth:

Come on, open your mouth, hurry up you goddamn, they went away. Till when I should suffer for your sake? Hurry up! Or I may regret.

The woman implores him on the hot sands like a fish in frying pan. She has put both hands on her stomach like a fetus and agonizes. But the man pays no attention to her and he rises while cursing:

You don't deserve any favor. Come along! Get up, I fell behind. Bitch! Don't you want I leave you here, do you?

He drinks his glass of water and then puts his knapsack on his shoulder while he cleans his mouth with his sleeve. He goes toward the woman, takes her hand to lift her up, but suddenly a voice says by my side:

Leave her alone!

The man leaves her and looks toward the voice. When I look at my side I see Vorarin whose eyes are filled with anxiety and pity. He takes his pad off the ground and goes toward the woman. Then he spreads out the pad on the sands, lifts her up slowly and makes her lie down on the pad.

Zairas, take and bring me my knapsack and the umbrella. Hurry up!

The people who pass by, just look at us, and with their looks they interfere in our work; in the meantime a man who is standing at a distance of a few meters from us, looks at us once in a while. His eyes are full of anxiety, and he plays with his fingers. Sometimes he looks toward the shelter, and sometimes he looks at the woman who groans. He seems to be waiting for someone or maybe his aim is something else.

When the woman's groan turns to a bitter cry, he becomes more agitated as if he is to hang up. He looks around and strokes his face continuously.

I go toward Vorarin's knapsack and pull the umbrella out of the ground and then I go toward the woman. I put the knapsack near Vorarin and dip the umbrella into the sands so that its shadow falls on the woman. Her man says derisively and cruelly:

It seems some people are here who feel pity for you. I wouldn't leave you alone so easily. Don't think you can cheat me acting like this.

Then he laughs again. I wait for Vorarin's command:

What should I do?

She suffers from kardik. We should give her medicine before she becomes worse.

We have to take her to the shelter. They have medicine.

No they haven't medicine anymore.

I say to that man loudly:

Hey you, do you have any drug for her malady?

He shrugs like the fools and while a quick flash lights up his eyes, he says:

No, but even I had it, I wouldn't waste it for this bitch.

Vorarin dips his hand into his knapsack immediately but with a slight hesitation. Then he takes out a small box of pills. Now I realize his hesitation; all eyes focus on the small box and stop going. The number of the people isn't so many but it may be troublesome. Their looks at the pills are as toothily as of the hungry wolves.

The people are leaving the shelter one by one or in small groups but here more than five people are standing. The man when sees the pack of the pills, as if he is hypnotized, jumps and all the people take a step forward with him.

I anticipated this through vorarin's hesitation. For this, I gather all of my hate in my fist and pound that man's face so that blood drops scatter out of his mouth and I see their glitter in the sunshine for a second. Seeing this, people take one step back and some proceed on their way. All the people look at me frightened and they seem review this scene in their minds. The man falls on the ground on his breast at a distance of a few meters away. He gets up hardly on all fours and stares at the blood flowing out of his mouth. Then he wipes his mouth off with his sleeve and stands on his feet hardly.

During this time, Vorarin puts a pill into the woman's mouth and helps her to gulp the pill with water. The dried tear drops have washed away the dirt on her face and have left some clean routes, as flowing water makes stream. But this is

not her first cry; the tracks of her cries in the past also can be seen on her face.

When the man rises, the woman stops moaning, but she squeezes her stomach with her fingers. When I look at her carefully, I find more beauty on her face. The long eyebrows, a rather tiny and proportionate nose to her face and finally the big red eyes which make her face attractive more than the other parts, even than her lips.

She seems to be less than twenty five or six. Her face looks tired. The man, with his red eyes, roars like a dragon but it seems he is doubtful about his decision. He rubs her face and stares at me:

Alright, I'll settle with you. It isn't time to do it but we'll meet again. I donate this corpus to you.

Then he turns back and follow his group. Midway in his way, he says some curses and threatens continuously. The people also go on their way with the end of the event. I steel can see the hesitation and the regret about the pack of the pills on their faces but my fist affected them so that they would rather to go than taste it.

Chapter 11

The bloody sands

I turn toward Vorarin and sit on my knees on the sands. My knees feel the heat of the sands immediately and the heat gradually turns to hotness. Then while I try to put myself in the wind blow direction to get the cool air, I say:

How's she?

She's good but we should take her to the shelter. She needs treatment. This way...

A shrill voice cuts our words and says:

No need to do this. I have to go as soon as possible.

The young woman opens her eyes and tries to get up from the pad:

Thanks. I'll compensate your efforts, I'll never forget you. For the time being, I just can appreciate you.

Vorarin tries to make her lie down:

No, you should back to the shelter.

But she resists, she sits on the pad and leans on her hand. Her hand is still on her stomach.

I should reach the “Ray” shelter. Ouch!

She tries to rise on her feet but suddenly a voice stops her from doing that:

Hello my lady!

I see a shadow which stops by me. I turn back and look toward the voice owner. He is the man who was standing a few steps far from us and was waiting for someone. His clothes is covered by dust, yet it can be seen that his clothes is black. His thoroughly white hair is combed to one side and his beard is wispy. His face is full of wrinkles and his skin is wizen. The same anxiety can be seen in his eyes. When he approaches the young woman, I also see inconvenience in his eyes. The young woman keeps still when she hears his voice and while stares at him says:

You are still here? I thought you...

Then she begins to cry. The elderly man’s eyes also fill with tears and tear drops roll slowly down his cheeks.

I’m really so sorry for all the things that happened to you. I never forgive myself.

The young woman says between her harrowing sobs:

Thanks god I see you alive. You can’t believe how much I have suffered till now.

Don’t worry. I swear I’ll never leave you alone anymore.

Then he turns toward us and says:

I never forget the favor you did to my daughter. If you weren’t here it wasn’t known what would happene to my lady.

Then he gives a little bow to us and sits on his knees near the young woman. He embraces her although she feels pain. Vorarin comes to me lest disturb them. He says in whisper close to my ear:

We should go now.

He throws his knapsack on his shoulders and signs me with his hand to be ready to go. Then he goes toward them and says:

We have to go. I just wanted to say you must give her one of these pills each day to she feels better. Don't forget this at all. Its effect appears just in continuous use.

I set the umbrella over their heads and then we go. All of a sudden, after some steps, hearing the voice of the elderly man makes us to return.

Sorry!

Vorarin waits for the man to speak:

Can you help me take her to the "Dawn" shelter?

The young woman objects and says:

No, I'm fine. I'm sure I would be better with the pills these two gentlemen gave me. We should go to the "Ray" shelter.

But my lady you aren't in good condition, we must...

You know the condition. We've to go to the "Ray" shelter.

The elderly man keeps quiet. They seem too exhausted, as though they need help. Their silence expresses this to me.

Well, our ways are the same to somewhere. I think we can go along with each other.

As I guessed, they were expecting this suggestion, so the elderly man immediately says:

Thanks. Really thank you!

Then the man lifts the young woman up. Vorarin takes off the umbrella and gives it to me. Then he helps the man to lift the young woman off the ground. They move her like a war wounded person whose legs are hurt. I go toward them and join them. I hold the umbrella over the young woman's head.

Once in a while, the young woman's groan breaks the silence, but we go ahead and watch the landscapes. Occasionally, they talk to each other that I can't hear anything but a whisper. According to the map which I have reviewed it, we must follow a road to reach our destination, and the number of the people who are ahead of us make it easy to find the way.

An old road appears across the sands and shows its cracks and asks for help, as though it tries to save itself from sinking into the sands. The blackness of the road which has turned to a light gray by lapse of time, comes into view, and it tally with the map I have. The sands have created the valleys and the low height hills in our way, as they wished.

The wind sweeps the sands off the road, but this is an ineffectual attempt and sands cover the road again. In the left side of the road, there is a row of poles which are hung with cables like the crippled hands. Some of them are broken from their waists by lapse of time. After a rather short time we stop by the sudden groan.

Ouch!... I should press on my stomach by hand. This way I feel better and I feel less pain. Thanks for your help but Kabirad helps me.

Vorarin leaves her hesitated. Then he takes the umbrella and stands near them. The direction of sunshine is so that the shadow of the umbrella falls on them and on Vorarin himself. I perforce spread a kerchief on my head and pour some water on it.

We pass the hills one after the other until we reach a wide region. The road continues like a river as well but it is hard to find out it is a road, and only a small part of it can be seen. The wind has arranged and unified the wide part of this

region. Like an untroubled sea, there is no hill and is steady. I wish there was a real sea instead of the sea of sands, and I could dive into it, but instead, there is a sun which has caused steady drip of sweat from our faces. My clothes is stuck thoroughly to my body and my feet slide in my shoes.

I wonder why no one speaks. Maybe none of us is in no mood for talk. I am so distressed that just my eyes look around for a refuge. After a period of time walking, almost about two hours by sun movement and the time of sunset, suddenly Vorarin stops and says:

Do you know how many degree is it now?

I wipe the sweat off my face and I say unawares:

It's enough to make me crazy.

It's forty seven degrees centigrade while two hours left to sunset.

Vorarin shakes his shoes to empty them of sands. Then he says:

I'm tired, I need some rest. You seem so. Of course it is most because of the sunshine. It's too oppressive.

I feel it is not his words and it is just for giving them time to rest. I am also tired and agree him to sit on the sands. The man and the young woman, satisfied and thankful, also sit on the pad which Kabirad spreads on the ground. I put my knapsack on the ground and as I look around I say:

As far as I see, there is no sign of walls or houses. We'll make camp here for a while and then rest. I can't walk anymore. And what is more, here we must separate. Our way is toward right hand.

Vorarin pulls out his tent of his knapsack and says:

No need to your tents. Mine is four person-tent. This way we'll waste less time to make camp. It's easy job, I'll make it soon.

So, both me and Kabirad, return our tents into the knapsacks. During making camp by Vorarin, I spread the pad on the ground and then empty sands of my shoes. I say:

We should find a remedy for the sands. I have an idea but I haven't things to do this.

From inside the tent, which is being ready quickly, Vorarin says:

I also have a remedy for it. Simply you should wear these plastic bags on your feet and tie them with some strings.

The young woman and Kabirad show their approvals by shaking their heads. Kabirad goes to help Vorarin. The young woman stares at the work I am doing, once in a while she ponders.

Well, the tent is ready. Come in before the sun roasts you.

The howling wind passes by the tent entrance, as if it brings someone's death news and laments in their absence. The tent dances with the wind slowly. Two sides of the tent is like a troubled water and the waves move the tent slowly. This is not a good sign at all. I am really worry about it and when it stops blowing, I become more worry. I should not leap before looking and not to leap in the dark. This exactly expresses and reminds me something. I remember a book in which was written:

“It is possible to capture a country with a few armies and endless ammunition, and with the same meaning, there is another way in which it is possible to capture a country just with one shot. There are so many differences between them but both of them express the same thing; that is, the success!

Therefor everything must be considered so that it would be a help one day.”

Vorarin, I go roaming around and back soon. Get some rest.

I take my mono scope binocular which I have made it of some pieces of aluminum, and then wend my way. I go ahead through the sands in which my feet sink ankle high. I go on my way untill I see the tent in a view of three-quarter of its real size. I stand on the top of a hill and put the binocular on my right eye.

I should find our thoroughfare. According to the map, I must see a wide road here. But everywhere is covered by sands like the snow, although this view has its own beauty. The sun has lost its power now, although it still makes me sweat. Its light hasn't turned to red yet and it still shines powerfully. There is no mountain to hide the sun behind. It has to change its shift with the moon in the vast horizon.

Here, the road divides in two which will separate the way of four of us. The straight route is the way me and Vorarine should go on and the left is the way they should go. Some people seem like the scarecrows which they have to walk over there.

They seem a rather faded. Some of them are sitting on the ground and some other are going out of sight behind a hill. In their way nothing can be seen but the sands. The road on the left is buried under the sands completely, yet it appears again behind the hill, because a man is mounting a signpost on the hill to show the way.

Through the binocular, I can read the writing on the signpost, but it is just an arrow which shows the direction that we should go through it. The road has come out of a vast

border and shows its size. The road which had only two routes, now has twelve thoroughfares.

I spend a length of time to find a specific thing which may effect on our future, but I get no result. In the last second when I back to the tent, suddenly I see a ceiling which is mounted on two walls and half of it is collapsed. Its color is same as the sands and it is the only reason that I could see it. That's it. It is not far from me, maybe about half an hour walking.

I look through my binocular for the last time to be sure. All of a sudden, on that side, near the signpost, a group of people run away to other side. The clamor of some people can be heard through the wind blow. All of them are in motion to get away from there. Their feet sink in the sands as in a marsh. It is like some hands come out from the sands and take their feet. I move my binocular looking for someone or something caused this, but I can't see anything but the people.

Suddenly all the people freeze in place! I also lie on the sands spontaneously. My eyes are in motion to find the reason of the chaos. All of a sudden I see a man in black behind a hill who moves toward the people slowly.

The nomads!!!

Behind some other hills, a number of the nomads, more than ten, appear like the zombies. They move toward the people slowly. Each of them has a weapon in his hand and goes at the people like a viper to its prey.

When they besiege the people, one of them goes between the people and looks at the faces who are trembling. There is a danger in ambush. I must back to the tent as soon as possible. I recede creeping lest someone sees me. I am sure if I stay, I

would not see a good scene at all. Considering the road, I back toward the tent quickly.

Something is warning in me. I try to put my feet on the sands softly lest my speed reduces. The sands are like the glowing coals which burn my feet. But more important is they are flying in the air and this is a bad sign and we must move as soon as possible.

Suddenly I feel a metal thing behind my head. A cold wave enters my body from the touch point of that metal thing and it trembles all of my body. I just stop without motion.

Pushing his weapon on the back of my head, he makes me move. I wend my way without any resistance. My brain doesn't issue any direct command, and just tells me to change my way or increase my speed whenever I feel more pressure of the weapon on my head.

We pass by a sand hill and I see a few people who sit on their knees and some nomads are standing over them. The fear and anxiety can be seen in all people's faces.

When we reach them, he stops pushing his weapon on my head. One of the nomads who seems to be their chief, when sees me, approaches me and stares at me. After a slight hesitation, he turns back toward the crowd and looks at each of them.

All of a sudden, all the nomads hold their guns at the ready and then aim at the people. I feel my heart stops working. More than eight frightened people look at the nomads. Two people run away howling but...

The sound of the lightning fills the space for five seconds and then nothing...

The dead bodies who slept in their blood forever. The bloody sands are now their mattress. Some of them are still

alive and take their last breathe. When they cough, the blood flows out of their mouth. The plaintive sound of the wind moans about their death. It seems the perception of the wind of this event is more than ours which it laments like this.

The nomad's chief signs with his hand indifferently, then goes away from me. The rest of the nomads walk with him and leave me shocked.

Chapter 12

The valley

All of us are winding the plastic sheets around our feet in silence. We all are thinking. A hidden sorrow in all of us prevents us from speaking. The scene of the cruelly slaughtering by the nomads appears in front of my eyes momentarily. How cruel and inexorable are the human beings. Despite of my effort to tie the string around my feet, I can't succeed. It is like I have forgotten how to tie a knot.

Did you see how they killed the people?

Vorarin says this and become busy with tie the strings. I take a deep breath, close my eyes and say:

They appeared, they killed the people, and then disappeared.

Didn't they see you?

I don't know why I tend to say lie:

No, I hid myself behind a hill.

There was no news of them during so many years ago. Now, they have returned with no reason and have begun the carnage. My head aches. They left me alive among those many people. This is the second time. When I think why they left me alive, my head aches more. Their chief looked at my

wound. The wound on my face is a sign! Why me? Perhaps they mistook me for someone else.

We just heard a volley of bullets. When we got there, everywhere was full of blood and dead bodies.

The young woman says:

Why they kill so many people with no reason?

Vorarin replies:

No one knows. They had become a legend but suddenly here they are again!

Could anyone cope with them?

Didn't you see how they attack?

But somehow they should be stopped yet.

They won't abandon killing the people till they reach their intention.

What's their intention?

They only know.

The young woman curses under her breath. Vorarin says:

I'm glad nothing happened to you.

I appreciate him by a smile. Then I say:

We have to go before darkness. The sands also are in motion. I don't like to face with the nomads again.

Vorarin takes his knapsack and says:

We all are ready.

Then he turns his look toward them and says:

You've just one knapsack and there is no way to return because you'll meet the sand storm. This way you would face with foodstuffs shortage. But if you be slightly thrifty and content yourselves, then you can reach the "Storm" shelter with the foodstuffs we'll give you.

Vorarin finishes tying the knot, puts his knapsack on the ground and gives them four canned food and a flask of water.

He also adds a dress for the young woman and adds the same things from my knapsack.

He puts things in an old shirt taken from Kabirad and then ties the four ends of the shirt together. Then he wipes the sweat off his face as he takes a deep breath and says:

This way your knapsack won't be too heavy.

Then he shows the young woman two sleeves of the shirt, which is now like a knapsack, and says:

Tie these two sleeves around your shoulders, this way it exactly would be like a knapsack.

He takes the shirt off the ground, puts the sleeves around her shoulders and ties them together tightly. Then he says me:

Zairas, we should go.

I go ahead of all to guide them. We go in silence toward the same hill which is not displaced yet. Their anxiety melts and disappears when they see the road, because the wind blow doesn't tail them.

I don't appreciate you again because it should be replied and compensated. I hope we meet each other someday so that I could compensate.

Kabirad confirms her with shaking his head.

As I said we go to the "Ray" shelter. If you pass through there, you can find us there.

This time, Kabirad confirms her with his own words:

I hope we meet each other.

Oh, by the way...

The young woman reaches her hand to her breast and pulls out something from under her shirt. I see a black chain with a square faceted gemstone. She holds it toward me, maybe because I am closer to her than Vorarin. She says:

I want you accept this as a gift and as a token from me. Maybe it is worth nothing, but it would be a symbol of friendship.

They say goodbye and follow the gray road like the robots which just identify a pre-defined line. Once in a while they back and look at us.

I stop where I was considering the situation. The flat and uniform region now changed into a sea which is full of the small waves. I look through my binocular. Sands Around the signpost are red. There should be happened another carnage! I give Vorarin the binocular so that he also aware of the location of that shelter and I have not to see that bloody point anymore.

Half an hour is a long time for us to reach there. We go as fast as possible and as the sands let us. Some clouds have unsettled the clearness of the blue sky, as though the wind also rioted up there in the sky. Again the same event of last night is happening. After an oppressive heat, now we have to tolerate the chill. My body trembles at the thought that the black clouds gradually announce something. The sky and the earth have encircled us like the wild wolves.

The electricity posts reach to here but the road gradually is buried under the sands like the gaps between the mountains. After a short stop to check the situation, I reach Vorarin and I say:

Things are getting worse. We should stay close by, lest we lose each other. With this condition, we'll reach there later than I thought. Damn! It should be happened now!? Damn. Why today things went like this?

The wind pushes us forward like two ghosts as though it wants to throw us into our graves. It blows so fast that we

have to go on slouching. It seems it knows our weak points and so blows to the heaviest side of our knapsacks and throws us off balance. Once in a while, Vorarin catches my clothes to keep his balance. He curses continuously.

It goes on insomuch we have to use our hands as shields and we go on our way with the eyes half open. It is unavoidable. We should go on. We have to shout to speak with each other. It seems the wind has a grudge against us. We entered its territory without permission. If it blows faster, I guess it could lift us off the ground.

I didn't think the wind speeds up so quickly. We should care and prevent. Suddenly, the only and the most effective way comes to my mind and I shout it to Vorarin, but he doesn't reply. I say it again, and again no reply. I look behind and I realize in surprise that he is disappeared. I look around carefully but there is no sign of him and the floating sands, as a whirlwind, don't let me see anywhere. I tremble inside at the thought of his absence.

More likely he has lost me. I decide to search around to find him, but the howling wind prevents me. I perforce do that idea alone. I ask God for the help and sit there until the storm ends.

I pull my blanket out of my knapsack and draw it over my head. I call him several times but he doesn't reply. I am sure that he is lost in the storm. Again I think of searching for him but the threats of the wind calm me. I have to wait for the end of the storm and if I survive then I would call for him. I lie on the ground to be less exposed to the wind. I put my knapsack on that side of my body which wind is blowing. I remain in this state for a while. It seems the storm doesn't want to make

peace with me. I pull my hands entirely into my sleeves to protect them from the hot sands.

All of a sudden I feel that the earth is moving. I don't care and account it for the failure of human senses and the wind. But it happens again. I am right, this is not the earth which moves but it is the wind which moves the sands and me as well! I feel something bad but I can't describe it. I try to take the blanket off my head but a heaviness, which I don't know where it comes from, prevents me. This heaviness appeared all at once.

I take my knapsack which half of it sank in the sands. I try again, but the pressure is too much. My mind is completely involved, I don't care anything. I just want to get out of this predicament. I feel I am in a narrow and dark hole.

In such situation, the fear doubles the human power and people have to do their best for saving themselves from a dangerous situation. I gather all of my power in my feet, then push the blanket aside and find myself on a hill of sands. Although sands speed is almost low, they move me easily.

Suddenly I see a large and dark spot upwind through the defused and flying sands, and it makes me tremble when I approaches it. Fear engulfs me thoroughly, I stand dumbstruck and just look like the fool.

A big valley is in front of me and I go toward it. Despite of my effort, I can't move. I sank in the sands up to my stomach. I flounce like the mad and try to get out the sands. My knapsack is in better position, just a little part of it is in the sands.

My effort is ineffectual and, like the marsh in which the more you wallow, the more you sink, I just exhaust myself

and I stick more in the sands. I am at a distance of less than two meters from the valley. I don't know what I should do.

Again, the fear does its job: sound the alert. Finally I reach my knapsack which moved away from me. Suddenly, I see the front part of a car which emerged from the sands. The car is positioned almost vertically. My knapsack is going toward it. If I could reach it, I would catch my knapsack and also I would survive.

I pull myself slightly out of the sands and reach out my hand to catch the bumper of the car. My knapsack stops by the roof of the car. I look at my knapsack enviously, I regret that I am not in my knapsack place.

My hand is at a distance of only a few centimeters from the bumper. So I stretch my body as far as I can to reach it. At the same time, my knapsack moves and stops behind the open door of the car.

I creep on the sands like a snake until my hand reaches the knapsack, but I can't take it. My hand just touches it shortly. I take my last chance and I jump to catch either my knapsack or the bumper, although I can't take off the ground at all and I just drag, and at the end I feel something in my hand. I don't fall anymore.

When I come to myself, I feel that my throat irritates. I don't need thinking, I know the reason. I still shout. I am dumbstruck, I can't believe what I see. My feet are at a distance of only a few centimeters from the edge. I have pressed my fingers insomuch my pinkie nail thrust in my palm and it is bleeding.

I try to fix my position, then, when I take myself away from the edge of the precipice, I realize that the rope is tied to my knapsack. I reach the car slowly and cautiously. Suddenly

I find out I am going toward the valley again. I pull the rope toward myself so that I go away from the valley, but it is ineffectual. As I pull the rope, it comes with me as if it is released from the knapsack. Yet, I pull it toward myself as fast as possible. As I guess, the ground suddenly collapses under my feet and I fall while I shout and scream.

At the last moments, I grab the edge of precipice instinctively. But it seems some hands caught me from under and pull me into the valley. The sands, on the other hand, trample my hand like the executioner. As I predict, the edge is so frail and unstable. I have lost my power. The edge collapses and again the screams of fear!

In absolute disbelief, I feel something soft in my hand and I see myself suspended in the air. A cascade of sands falls down into the bottom of the valley. The wind shakes me like a hanged man. I raise my head to consider my situation. The blanket is in my hands which is bored by a rod in the middle and saved me from falling. My heart beats fast. Everything happened in less than few seconds. It is unbelievable that I am so close to the death.

It is like the time after we wake up from a deep sleep and everything is meaningless, like a film playing at a fast motion. Now I realize that from what disaster I have been saved. I see more another rods which have come out of the edge wall.

Seemingly, they belong to the houses which are buried under the sand. It seems I am not so far away from the edge of the precipice because sands are falling on me. I try to ascend the blanket but I hear the sound of ripping the blanket. A cool wave passes through my body. It makes my hair stand on end. I stay still. The only organs of my body which move are my

eyes, looking for the way out. I should reach the rods of the wall to find foot hold and to get rid of being suspended.

Suddenly I hear a voice like the avalanche. I look upward unawares and I see a huge mass of the sands which are falling on me. My fingers open instinctively and I release the rod without thinking about its aftermath. I can't realize anything as if in a dream, I just feel a stabbing pain in my back for a while. Then I feel a sledgehammer beating on my breast and takes my breath away. Like in water, as we try to grasp everything to pull ourselves out of water and not to sink and not to drown, I struggle and I absorb the air with all of my power, but it is like something prevents. My head reels and the world becomes dark before my eyes.

I see everywhere blurry. I remember everything as clear as day and still feel a pressure on my breast. I close my eyes at the thought that I can stop the pain doing this. I try more to get the oxygen I need. I feel a hard thing under my breast. I regain my senses little by little. I just feel a hard and rough thing and it is like my feet are floating in the air.

When I move my feet, I realize that I am in unusual condition. I open my eyes and after a few wink I see two very high walls around myself. I shake my head to clear the rest of the giddiness which kept me dumbstruck. When the wind also slaps me in the face I come round completely and look around disbelievingly.

I fell prone upon the iron beam of a house which emerged from the wall, suspended between the earth and the sky. The sand fall over my head is still running, sometimes slow and

sometimes fast. My posture is exactly the same as a wounded person who is carrying on a horse. The sun is shining as usual and the wind does his job likewise. I move my hands which became rigid like iron and take the edge of the iron beam with them. The survival instinct order me to save myself.

I close my eyes without noticing around and my situation, I gather the rest power of my body in my arms and pull myself slightly up. Suddenly I feel that a lightning hits me at back. All of my power gets away from my fingers and my fingers open. A great weakness engulfs me so that I cannot even open my eyes.

I don't know why I stop doing. I am sure that I haven't done anything to save myself but I am still on the iron beam. I open my eyes hardly and search for something which saved me.

I see disbelievingly that my hand grabbed the edge of the beam. I become both hopeful and hopeless. Hopeful because I haven't fallen yet, and hopeless because no one has come to help me. I leave the chimerical thoughts and decide to save myself! I reach another hand the edge. I prepare myself for another lightning and pull myself up while closing my eyes and gnashing my teeth.

As I predicted, a barrel of gunpowder explodes in my breast and yet I pull myself up with trembling hands and then sit on the iron beam. A severe wheezing sound comes out of my breast and I pant ceaselessly. I feel that I have fallen into a sea. My body, wet with sweat, trembles continuously.

Hopelessly and unbelievably I find myself in the middle of the misery and death. A deep valley which I am just in the middle of it. The valley, like a big mouth, swallows greedily the sands from the both sides. The gap between its two walls

is rather wide, maybe more than two hundred meters. The iron beams and some other parts are emerged from both sides of the valley, as if they reached out their hands and ask for help.

I am just on one of these thousands iron beams. I feel that all of these events are in a dream and I will wake up soon; but all of them are real. The red light which has covered half of the sky, evidences the night is coming. I must save myself before the darkness, because then probability of being rescued is too low.

As I sit, I creep on the iron beam like a child until I reach the end of the beam near the wall. I don't know from where I have gotten this much energy but I stand on my feet when I approach the wall of the valley. I feel no pain neither on my back nor my breast. Just my breast irritates when it moves. I find the nearest beam and grab its edge with the help of the wall of the valley. I struggle so much that I finally reach on the beam. This time my lungs don't meet lack of oxygen and I don't pant. I check the situation and catch my breath.

I am at a distance of about two meters from up there. My hands are tired and I hardly hold myself. To reach up there, I should jump to there or I find another way which may be dangerous and may make my way longer. To find another way to up there I should travel the length instead of the height, but this needs energy and time. There is nothing above my head by which I pull myself up. There is only the rod I hung from it by my blanket.

All of a sudden, I see a rope which hung on to the rod. I thanks god and rise to take it. I take some steps toward the middle of the beam to be under the rope. There is nothing to lean on. The wind throws me off balance. I have to open my arms like a ropewalker to keep my balance.

There is a gap between me and the rope and I should jump up to grab it. Although I have no fear of height, this situation terrifies me a little. The valley is too deep so that its bottom is dark. I am sure that even the brave men will be shocked seeing this scene.

I gulp my saliva, then I jump up about a span but it is ineffectual and I can't reach the rope. When I separate from the beam, the wind flows in my clothes and push me aside. So, when I come down to the beam I hardly keep my balance and it obliges me to sit on and grab the beam. My breast and my back irritate and ache.

Again, I stand slowly on the beam and stare at the rope. The wind shakes the rope, yet it is reachable. Again, I gather all of my power in my feet, gnash my teeth and jump up. My hand grasp at the air continuously but it get nothing. I am sure this time I will fall into the valley, but suddenly my hand grasps something and I hold it tightly.

This time, I keep my balance without sitting but prefer to sit on the beam. I gnashed my teeth insomuch my jaws ache and my face muscles are contracted.

I sit there calm for a while until my heart beats slower. I dare not to look at my hand. Maybe there is not in my hand the thing I was looking for. I touch it. It is coarse. I gulp my saliva and look at my hand. I wind the rope on my hand and look upward to find a place to hook the rope. But there is nothing except that rod.

Suddenly I remember the car on the edge of the valley. But I can't remember its location. Yet, the rod over my head implies that it is up there, over my head, because I fell from there and my blanket caught the rod.

Suddenly my hands tremble and my head reels. I wait for a while to recover myself. Then I curl one end of the rope, I concentrate and throw it up with the hope that it sticks somewhere on the car. But it sticks nowhere. I throw it again, but still no result. The sands don't allow it to stick somewhere. I wait. Once in a while, the sand fall becomes weak. Everything depends on the wind and sometimes the sand fall stops completely.

For a short few seconds I get a chance and I throw it up quickly. Suddenly, a mass of the sands rush toward me with the wind blow. Where ever I look at, I see the sands which has blocked the bolt holes. I just stand and look at my killer.

Chapter 13

The hole

I am holding the rope tightly in my hands and am suspended and spinning around in the air while I shout deeply from inside. Suddenly a rod passes by my head quickly, I lose my balance, collide with the iron beam and finally I stop moving after I hit the wall of the valley.

My breast goes up and down continuously and I gulp my saliva once in a while. My body trembles and my hands are shaky. The rope slides off my hand momentarily. I swing in the air looking for an iron beam, and then I come down on one of them by a short jump. I take a rest on the beam until I can clench my fists, then I grab hold of the rope.

Slowly and sweating, while I try to be inattentive to my pains, I climb up the rope. The weather is calmer than before and the sand fall is weak. By each centimeter of ascension, I feel that a nail is stabbed in my body.

When I reach the edge, the sands rush to my face and I have to close my mouth. I cough so that I empty the sands out of my mouth and I grab the edge. But the concreted sands collapse under my hand. Again I have to grab the rope. I pull myself up with the help of the rope. The edges and the ground are loose and wobbly and once in a while, some part of them collapse. I pull myself up and open my way through the sands,

which are knee-high, immediately and go toward my knapsack.

The loop of the rope caught the bumper. Again I thank God and I take my knapsack behind the door of the car. But suddenly something stops me. The position of the rope around the bumper is rather strange. The shape of the bumper doesn't allow the rope to loop around it. This needs more skill and mastery than a random or natural skill to loop the rope around the bumper. I should leave here soon.

The ground is too loose so that I may fall again at any moment. I remember the shelter but in this storm which nothing meets the eye, it is impossible I find it. For the time being, I should go away from here as soon as possible and then I put my plan into effect again. I have to lie on the ground again because as I go forward, more sands debar me; like the sea in which as you approach the center, it becomes deeper.

It seems a great deal of sands has flowed down to the valley again. I have not enough strength to force my way through the sands and I can't forge forward but rather I go backward. I have to hold my hands as a shield in front of my eyes and move slouching. I feel rain drops beating on my face along with the sands.

I find myself sad. Then something smashes into my face severely insomuch that I grab my face, and my head reels under the blow for a while. I fall on the sands and flounce against the sands stream. I open my eyes and suddenly see a yellow snake creeping on the sands. I jump back by fear.

The movement of the snake is rather strange to me. After a while looking at it, I angrily take the rope, which is creeping

like a snake. I don't know why I thought that some animal may live in this desert.

I take the rope which seems has come from nowhere to save me, and pull it toward myself so that it pulls me forward too. As I go forward, I hear the cries which seem come out from the mouth of a ghost or a shadow. The cries are completely vague and hardly can be understood. Finally I approach the voice insomuch I can realize the words:

No long way left, hold out! Don't release the rope. Not too much way left. Just some steps. Come on!

All of these words echoes through my head as if a tape is playing at a slow motion, and I see Vorarin like a ghost. If Vorarin didn't catch me, I would fall on the ground. We push along while all of my weight is on Vorarin's body. His words are like a whisper which echoes through my ears.

I stop with the motion of his hand which presses on my breast. He pulls out a blanket of his knapsack and pulls it over both of us. I don't know why, but I feel that my feet are linked to the ground like the roots of a tree. I feel their weight manifold, but I push along again with the help of Vorarin. I am totally obedient to Vorarin for a while and he guides me. We walk for an unknown period of time continuously, until Vorarin tucks up the edge of the blanket. I see that we are approaching a dark thing. The air is slightly dark or I see it like this. Vorarin is completely bent under my weight and due to his little body, he is physically weak. But he moves me along by his full force. The blanket is completely wet and raindrops leak and fall on us.

Vorarin again tucks up the blanket and I see that the dark spot is the same shelter I have found. We enter and he takes

me to a corner under the ceiling. Then, he crumples up the blanket and throws it aside.

You'd better take off your wet clothes while I set these bricks, otherwise your glassy clothes become ruined.

Then he begins his work. He puts and arranges the scattered bricks as a wall, at a distance of a man room from me. Then he goes toward his knapsack and pulls out a dry blanket, and he does the same with my knapsack, without asking me. Then he sits by me and removes all of his clothes except for his trousers and his shirt. His body is slender. He rises like a statue and says in wonder:

Why you didn't take off your clothes yet?

Then he grumbles under his breath and comes to help me. He only removes my trousers, it seems he had pulled the most part of the blanket over me that my shirt is not wet. He snuggles up to me and gives me one of the blankets:

Pull it over yourself. It would be so cold tonight. We must sleep hunkered and stay close to each other to get warm.

As soon as he becomes quiet, and the air under the blanket becomes warm, I fall asleep despite of my body pains and the intensity of tiredness.

Zairas, get up! Zairas...

Vorarin shakes my shoulder. I open my eyes but I can't see anything. It is like I am looking through a lens closely, everything is dim and unclear. I wink my eyelids repeatedly so that my eyes could see clear. It is dark and the moon is shining. Maybe one or two days left to full moon. I turn my head and see Vorarin sitting near me and tries to wake me up.

I look at him confused. He also stares at me and I can see the pity and compassion in his eyes which change his face. I

look around like the paralytics, who can move only their eyes, to recover my memory.

Seeing the sands, which have reach in front my feet, and the walls of the shelter, I remember all last night events. I can't believe that last night events to be real. It is Just like a dream which newly I woken up. Maybe I am still dreaming, but the pain which increases momentarily disproves it.

I bring my head out of the blanket completely, and the first thing which attracts me is the reek coming out of my mouth. The cold air enters the space under the blanket like the water through a small hole on the dam wall. I pull up the blanket again and just let my eyes to be out of it. Vorarin shows his hand to me and says:

Look this! I saw it a few minutes ago when I woke up.

I show him my disesteem for the matter by looking his hand and then again to the moon. Nothing is matter for me for a while and I just want to look at the moon. But it seems he can't understand what I mean, or he pays no attention to it.

You know, it's not my blood...it's from your back. I think you're wounded. I should have a look at it.

I know it, but I say nothing and do anything. He misunderstands my act and, while reproaches himself, he says with a sad mien:

I'm really sorry for last night. It was all my fault that it happened to you. If I hadn't lost you maybe it wouldn't have happened to you and you won't have wounded. I was coming behind you and then I don't know what happened that I lost you. I look for you so much, I call you many times. I even come here because I thought you may be here. But there was no sign of you. I went back the way to search for you more but the storm became fierce and I had to lie on the ground and

wait. After a while, maybe five minutes, it seemed to me I saw someone. I got up and I reached you one way or another. I wasn't sure it is you, yet I threw the rope and...

He cuts his words at this point, because I know the rest. I don't deem him guilty even for one per cent, I even don't give importance to last night events but I don't know why I am annoyed and sad. I just planned to bring back Mansidan.

The blood stain on Vorarin's hand denotes that maybe the wound on my back isn't serious, but it also may not be superficial; yet, I even don't care about my wounds. Even the moon has no luster to me. I close my eyes. Vorarin says insistently:

I don't like to piggyback you rest of the way. I should have a look at your wound. It's unknown how much blood you've lost till now.

My eyelids are heavy and I want to sleep to the end of the world. My lips just say two words:

I'm fine.

I don't care about my wound but he shows his hand again and says:

I think you lost too much blood. I should treat it before it becomes infected. Hold on, let me help you to be in a better position.

Then he takes off his blanket. A weak shake engulfs him. The reek of his mouth increases and he rubs his hands. He has worn his clothes. He comes to me and after a pause and thinking for a while, he says:

I help you to sit in a position so that I have a look at your back. You must sit toward the small wall I made last night, bend down and lean against the wall.

Then he takes my blanket off. I gasp and my mouth remains open. All of My hair stand on end. I feel like I take a shower outdoor in winter. The air brings us the chill caused by the water on the ground. It is too cold so that my body becomes numb. When Vorrarin sees I am trembling, gives me my trousers, which is dry now, and says:

Put it on for the nonce. You have to tolerate till I finish my job.

My trousers is too cold so that I'd rather not to pull it on. I close my eyes, gnash my teeth and pull my trousers up quickly. Maybe it wouldn't sting and ache this much if I sat on glowing coals; it is like I pull on a trousers of ice.

After a slight hesitation, he takes my hands and separates me from the wall. All of my bones make cracking sound and if he leaves me alone I can't hold myself up, and this way, I would feel thousand knives are thrust into my body and hundred sledgehammers are pounding on my breast. So, when he hears my shout, he doesn't move me and ask me frightened:

What happened? Are you ok?

He receives no reply from me. I grab the wall with my hands and hold myself up. Then I bend forward. Now I realize that why he made this small wall. The sands stopped in the back of the wall. If this wall wasn't there, we would sink half high.

I feel a breath taking burning on my back, and I find out he is taking my shirt out of my body. It is stuck to my body with dried blood. As he says, my back is thoroughly red. He gives a deep sigh when he pulls up my shirt half, and then he stops.

Your back is wounded seriously. Almost up from your shoulder to down on your back is ripped by something sharp. It's not a deep wound but it needs some stitches.

Then he leaves me and spreads his own blanket on the ground.

You should lie on it so I could stitch it.

I lie prostrate on the blanket without his help. I feel a hot spear is thrust into my body little by little. My breast frizzles like a fish in the hot pan. I try to reduce my pain with holding my breath.

He brings his outfits out of knapsack and set them near me. He cleans the blood out of my back and I feel a cold liquid on my back. He starts stitching and breathes a sigh of revulsion once in a while. My body is too numb so that I feel the tip of the needle on my back only every few seconds.

He stitches so fast and finishes his job quickly so that I don't notice when he holds my shirt in front of me. I reach out my hand to take my shirt but he suddenly pulls his hand back and says perplexedly:

What happened to your breast?

His words makes me bend my head down and I see the bruises on my breast caused by the two edges of the iron beam. Now I realize its reason. Vorarin sits on his legs and examines my breast with his soft hands. Then he frowns and says:

It's too bad. Some of your ribs may be broken. What happened to you last night? Tell something. You haven't talked at all since you woke up.

I take my shirt from him and put it on slowly. Then I rise with the help of the wall and he also comes to help me. I take my raincoat but he stops me and says:

Hold on, you should rest.

Then he pauses for a while. He pretends a pitiful face. He challenges with himself. I can see in his face that he finds himself guilty. I don't know what mien I exhibit that he recedes one step.

Forget it, you're not guilty. We should move otherwise we'll meet day. I'm not fine.

He shakes his head to show his agreement. Then he gets ready to go. So I take my knapsack and wend my way.

You should eat something. You seem too weak. Your face is pale. It's because of the blood you've lost. I'm too hungry.

I reply him lifelessly:

We haven't time. We'll eat while walking.

Why you're so in hurry?

I must find Mansidan.

I gasp when I step out. I can't believe such a difference between the temperatures in and out of the shelter. I bring the edges of my raincoat together and Vorarin intertwines his hands.

The wind pours the chill of the wet sands on our faces and then goes on its way. The ground is muddy in some parts and the water has pressed the sands together. When we move and go far away from the shelter, Vorarin says:

It's too cold!

His red face and the reek which is coming out from his mouth prove this. The sands are the snow of our mountains. The difference is in their physicality and just the snow appears here differently. Its chill is the same. Vorarin winds the blanket around his body and proceeds. I do the same as he does and go along with him.

I thanks God the wind blows from behind, yet it makes us tremble. The sound of Vorarin's gnashing is louder than mine. We move ahead slouchy. I am floating in my thoughts. Vorarine stares at me, and I leer at him. He offers me a canned food:

You should eat it, you have lost much blood. I can't realize how you still are alive. How you can walk with such condition?

I take the can.

We'd better talk to get warm. Silence is painful, I mean I hate it.

My idea is different as chalk and cheese. In my opinion, silence is soothing, especially when it is linked with a thought. When I do think, the distance of my way seems shorter than one minute. Maybe he means something else. I take my fork, which its handle is bent, out of my knapsack.

I'm all ears to hear what happened to you.

I tell him the events in some short sentences and he forgets to eat his food while I am talking.

Did you weather these happenings? It's too hard to understand, I mean it's unbelievable.

Then he ponders, yet I change the subject and I say:

Which way we should go?

He puts his fork in the half-eaten can and takes out the map:

If we are still in that road, we shouldn't be so far from there, unless we are walking in the wrong way. Yet, I could see the road few seconds ago, but not now.

There is no sign of the road. It is faded completely by the storm few hours ago. Vorarin suddenly stops reading the map and says:

There's another way. We can find our way using the stars, but I don't know anything about them.

I also shake my head to show that I don't know too.

We'd better mark these two stars lest we lose our way.

Then he points at the two stars, which one is above his left shoulder and the other is above his right shoulder, in the sky. So we go that way. Time passes in silence for a while, then he throws his empty can toward the hungry desert and says:

I hadn't seen a calamity worse than this. Killing this many people, what for?

I stare at him. I see so many differences between me and him; he probably is one or two years younger than me.

I don't know... I don't know at all.

It shouldn't ...

He finishes his words with scream and shout. I turn to him so fast insomuch my breast and back ache. He is not there as if a thunder destroyed him or the earth absorbed him and nothing remained of him.

Chapter 14

The ghost town

I look at his footprint to find where it is faded. Since I was walking about three steps behind him, I go there cautiously. I see a big hole under the moon light, which has engulfed a wide region in absolute darkness. It has a sharp incline, yet it is possible to go down. I search around to find the better way.

Then I realize that it is not just a hole and as I go on its mouth becomes wider. I back to my first place and call him several times but he doesn't reply. It seems that the hole is created by the sands. Cannot call it the hole, but should call it the valley. I have no other recourse but to go down.

I plunge my feet into the sands slowly lest I fall down. Vorarin slipping track on sands is visible. I go down slowly plunging my feet into the sands. As I approach the depth of the valley, its slope reduces to the point that I can walk easily. After coming down a rather long steep path I walk on the level ground.

The ground under my feet is hardpan. Then I see the pavement which has more cracks than a dry desert and as far as I can see a part of the pavement is thoroughly damaged. I see Vorarin's footprint on the sands. He has gone toward one of two buildings on the right hand.

The electricity posts are bent as if they genuflect to someone, and the remnants of their wires are wriggling on the

ground by the wind. Many of them have no wire. There is a broad boulevard which has made a gap between the buildings. There are some small and high buildings on the both sides and they seem to me as the black giants from afar. The buildings with no door and window, with collapsed walls and without ceiling; the iron beams which emerged from the buildings like the broken bones. I can also see only the frames and skeleton of some buildings.

A fog of darkness has nested in the town and made it like a ghost town. I see the shadows from a distance which make me tremble with the howling wind. The signboards of the buildings are swinging and doors open and close continuously. I can hear scream and shout from inside of the buildings. Some cars have covered the road surface irregularly. The sign of burning can be seen on some of them, and some other have lost their color by lapse of time and nothing remained but some pieces of rusted metal.

I call Vorarin several times but I hear no reply. Then I hear a footstep which its direction is indistinguishable. I go toward the right side from the middle of the road unconsciously and then I bend down behind a burned car.

The ashes represent the darkness and fix unluckiness of the town in my mind. Something says me I cannot get out of here easily. It is like a fault is under my fate.

I look around to hold some aces in case of danger and to get the chance. I wait for a while but nothing appears. Darkness has made everything the same color. I decide to enter the first building but it sank into the sands and just a small part of it is apparent. I go toward the second building slowly and cautiously and enter it through a window. The sands have surrounded the town like the flood and make

advance every day. The outskirts of the town also are surrounded by stone hills. Although the stone hills stand against the sands like a dam, the rush of the sands is madly and nearly overflow.

The sands could enter these buildings, the surface of this building is also full of sands, a big hole is apparent on a wall and half of the inner part of the building is thoroughly destroyed. There are just some broken tables, the rusted cabinets, broken glass on the floor, a sand dune in the middle of the hall, a burning sign in the corner of the hall and half burned woods. The doors of the cabinets dance with the wind and play a rough music.

I have never been in such situation. It is like a mathematics equation which I don't know where I should begin, but I know I should consider all of the possible events before I search for Vorarin. I don't know yet what happened to him but the only obvious matter is that his disappearing wasn't without the reason.

I go to the first floor to have a view of outside. Suddenly I hear a voice makes me to hide myself in a dark corner of the room. Time passes in silence for a while. Again, I hear the same voice which says slowly and cautiously:

Why you don't come up, Zairas?

This is Vorarin's voice which comes from upstairs. He speaks calmly and shows that he is alone. The tone of his words makes me go up according to his voice calmly and cautiously. I stop in the part that I can see the second floor easily. He is sitting next to a window. He looks at the stairs I am ascending while he looks outside. Once he sees me, he says:

What're you doing down there? Talk as quiet as you can and watch up. Be careful about the windows.

I pass by some remained stairs and reach him. His appearance shows that nothing happened to him. He suddenly pours a wisp of sands next to me. I look upward, the roof is half-ruined, yet the remnants of the upstairs can be seen. When Vorarin sees my interrogatory face, without waiting for my question, he says:

You'd better see outside yourself and you'll find out everything.

I approach the window slowly and cautiously assuming outside is full of enemy. I look at outside with one eye. The headmost house is destroyed completely. I also can see the side boulevard, it looks like the entrance boulevard of the town. Four armed shadows are standing in the middle of the boulevard. They wore the blue regimentals and helmets.

I don't know what they're doing here, but still and all, they're not here without reason. Our mission almost begins from here. As Karisan said, they're many in number. There are a number of them in the entrance boulevard of the town, I had to come here, we should be very careful.

I move away from the window and I say:

Are we going to scuffle with them? What's going on here at all?

He also moves away from the window and says:

What do you mean? Don't you know anything of the mission?

Karisan said to me I'm going to be a savior.

Still the same and nothing else.

But now there are blue eye soldiers in the street.

Any event may happen to the saviors. You should be ready.

But I didn't want this, I just want to find Mansidan.

I can't realize what you're saying. Who is Mansidan? We should just reach the group.

I wasn't supposed to be here.

I sit in a corner and hold my head between my hands.

Raya is waiting for me, I should back.

Vorarin, wide eyed, says:

What's the matter? I can't get at all what are you saying about.

I flame with anger. I like to shout. I squeeze my head tightly. My breath comes in pants, I roar under my breath. Raya's image flashes momentarily in front my eyes. She, lying on her bed, is waiting for her love, Mansidan, back to her. I pound on my brow:

God damn you Mansidan, bloody.

I do everything to back Mansidan. I take a deep breath and try to free my mind. I close my eyes and imagine an endless dark space. I put my hands on my eyes and push them:

Sorry, I confused for a second. What's the mission?

He shrugs and says:

I don't know likewise. Karisan said we must find the group.

Silence falls over, we both ponder to find a remedy.

I got it. We should stay here for the time being and check the situation. Those soldiers means danger, and danger could be everywhere.

He agrees and says:

We look around from here to find the enemy's situation. I saw two of them in Main Boulevard. I had to come here but I'm not sure they are just those two.

How we should find the group?

I don't know.

So what're we doing here? To turn around ourselves?

He lapses into silence, then breathes a sigh and says:

Let's find a safe place, then we'll think about it. You keep your eyes on outside through the right window, me from this side.

I go toward the window through the darkness and hold on to the wall. I bring my head a little out of the window and look around. Nobody can be seen. Likewise, no one is behind the windows of the opposite buildings. They are not expected to show themselves. In this case we should go ahead under the shadow and darkness of the buildings.

I see no one here.

Vorarin says quietly:

Here still are those four guys, who seem are talking to each other. I think they're not so many that they hold some guards in each street.

So here's their base, or they've something important here which they keep guards in both boulevards.

Suddenly, the sound of hitting a metal thing on the pavement attracts my attention. I look at outside quickly, but I can't see anyone. No rat came out of his hole. All of a sudden the view of the boulevard reminds something to me: the map.

I search for it all over my knapsack and finally I find it. Its edges are torn and some parts of it which is close to the edges are erased. Since it is a large-scale map so is folded as a

notebook and it spreads out like a wallet and at the end forms a complete map.

I find the intended town. Although its edition date is thirty years ago I am sure it hasn't suffered a sea change. When I find our way I figure out that it hasn't changed at all. There are so many boulevards but if we get the name of the boulevard I fell on, we can find our way. I tear out that part of the map and put it in a specific place lest I forget.

Let me see, what's the matter?

At least I got a map of here to find our way. As I see, we are almost in west side of the town.

This way...

All of a sudden Vorarin lies on the ground frightened. I also lie on the ground without knowing the reason. His eyes is wide open and he bites his lips. The exhalation from his nose displaces the sands on the ground. Then the light of a torch falls into the house, pauses a little and then checks another window. Next, it returns to the first place and examines more carefully inside the house and then turns off. The vague voices of those four guys can be heard while the light is moving about.

Vorarin signals me with his eyebrows and intimates me that I go toward to the commode creeping, which is turned over in the middle of the room. So we reach behind the commode. After that I see Vorarin lets out his breath. Maybe he thought that his breath may disclose where we are hiding. Like the possessed one, whose face is pale with fear, he says:

How they found out we are here? We should leave here soon. Hurry up, we should go.

I stop him by hand and I say:

We must be alert and consider everything. We can't do anything without planning. They're able to entrap us easily. Are you sure there was nobody else except these soldiers?

Yeah, I told you before. They were two, yet I'm not sure but when you did whatever I told,

I become sure.

Since I couldn't realize what he means, think a little and he also helps me to get it:

I mean when I signaled you to reach here.

I look at him perplexedly and I say:

I found you fluky.

Vorarin, while anxiety engulfed him thoroughly, says:

So you didn't see me through the window? You were doing whatever I told.

No, I entered here for no good reason.

So how you came here?

As I try to look around and notice the voices, I say:

I heard a footstep then I went behind a car and next I entered this house. I didn't see anybody and just heard a voice.

Vorarin goes toward the window on the left side to the boulevard, which we both came in through it, and looks at the outside carefully.

I'm sure they're not just this number. They may hid in the buildings and consider everywhere. But they're not too many to consider everywhere.

We go downstairs. While we pass by, the sands fall down on the ground from under the stairs like a collapsing cave. This warn us to be aware of all the buildings, specially the stairs. Like an old bridge which seems secure but is hollow inwardly, we should not trust in this unstable and wobbly

town which may level to the ground by a five magnitude earthquake. Yet I don't think it becomes worse than this.

I check outside before I go out. Although the ghosts are wandering about everywhere, I go out. Vorarin comes out after a little delay to be able to react in emergency. I stay behind a burnt car a rather long time. I can't see anyone. It is likely they watch us through the buildings.

We seek refuge near the buildings to be safe in the darker shadows. When my eyes meet the building where we were, I stop perplexedly. Just now I realize why it is so small. More than half of it has been destroyed and maybe just one fifth of it is remained intact.

We look at the opposite buildings with each step we take. Every shadow stops us when it appears behind a window but we go on soon after we find out it was an illusion. We go ahead aimlessly like the ghosts until a signpost in the middle of the boulevard finally attracts our attention with its cursing sound.

I move forward like a sheep among a wolf pack, then I stop behind a car which is near a signpost to be sure I am in right boulevard. Vorarin stays in his place and looks around. I hold the signpost and read its faded text:

Tariban

I back to Vorarin and tell him the written name on the signpost. Then I pull the map out of my pocket. I guessed right. We are exactly in the west side of the town and we can leave the town within one hour walking. We go on our way with the help of the map and suddenly Vorarin breaths a deep sigh. I realize his sigh without any question. Exactly the middle of the map is chafed and part of it is deleted.

Although we don't know where we should go, yet we should keep distance as far as possible. We must not to lose our position. Some paths may be blocked. I draw an imaginary line according to the boulevard. I don't need the map for the time being so I put it on my pocket to be completely focus on my situation.

We'd better move within a distance.

I confirm his words. We wend at a distance from each other. There is a silence which nobody wants to break it. We move forward fast and with short steps. We go straight to the end of the boulevard. At the same time my eyes meet the shops and stores. Some of their signboards are broken or rusted but many of them have no signboard. All of the doors and windows have no glass, yet there are no broken glass on the ground.

All of the inner spaces are covered with dust. Even a mass of dust can be seen on the floor of the shops. There are no goods on the shelves if there are any shelf. Everywhere is covered with ashes and all of the walls seem dark. There are also some residential buildings which seem they raised to the sky once upon a time, as if the lapse of the time have affected and bended their waists. There can be seen the collapsed walls, rusted metals and faded signboards. There is no difference between here and a war torn town.

Sometimes, when the environs is slightly open and we are likely to be seen, we have to pass through inside the house. There is more security inside the house but it reduces our speed.

Finally, after passing through the shadows and darkness for half an hour, we arrive at the end of the boulevard. An almost broad boulevard crosses this boulevard and makes an

intersection. As far it can be seen, the new boulevard has subsided but the details is not visible because of the darkness. The boulevard has been divided into two halves by a big crack which the sewage canals can be seen through it. A number of cars and some parts of a building have fell down into the crack.

We stop inside one of the half dilapidated shops near the intersection. We get some rest and drink water while our eyes and ears are on alert. Vorarine pours some water on his face then, as he looks at the dropping water through his fingers, he says:

It is a normal weather tonight, otherwise we should have been frozen but...

He is right and just a soft breeze is blowing which reddens our faces a little. Maybe the reason is the cuppy form of the town and also the buildings which limit the wind speed. The reason is not a matter of fact for me but it is important to me that not to tremble because of the cold air. Yet I keep close to a commode and I say:

How you agreed to be a savior without knowing anything about the mission?

Vorarin shakes his hands to dry them faster. Then he reaches out his legs and says:

With the same reason that you know nothing, yet you become a savior.

I keep quiet. He is a stranger to know my reason and his reason is not important for me too. I try to think about finding the group. Finding a few people in this town is like looking for some needles in a haystack. There should be a connecting way between them and us. Maybe the group must find us but

it is unlikely to me. Maybe...suddenly I remember the insignia of the group. We have forgotten to activate them.

MOEIN MANSOORI FARD

The mysterious call

Vorarin's eyes move with my hands movement. He asks:
What happened?

When he sees the insignia, he searches his knapsack for his own insignia. I turn it on. Its display becomes blue, then, after a short time, "Please wait" appears on the screen. Vorarin comes to me and blame himself grumbling:

Why it didn't come to my mind? Maybe we could find the group by this set.

Then, "*All for each other to live*" appears on the display. After a while, the motto disappears and another phrase appears on the screen:

"Please enter your fingerprint via the rear scanner"

I push aside the drawer door of the scanner at the rear of the set. Then I put my finger tip on its screen. The set makes a beep sound. Again the same command appears on the display and asks me to enter my fingerprint for the second time. After that, another command appears:

"Expose your eye in front the scanner"

I expose my right eye in front of the scanner. A blue ray passes over my eye. Again, I hear a beep sound. As I guess, it asks me to expose my eye in front the scanner again. When it confirms both scans, another command appears. The set wants

me to enter my personal data and asks me to be careful entering the data. Once I entered the data, the last phrase appears:

“Your registration finished. You are now a member of Thunderbolt 1. You must try to keep safe the insignia. You will be asked four times every 24 hours to put your fingerprint and expose your eye to the scanner. In the case of disobey the command, the insignia will burn down completely. This is just to prevent abusing the set by others in case of you lose the set. If you suspect that the insignia may be in enemy’s hand, do destroy it. The best tool the enemy may use it against you, is this insignia.”

Then it allows me to use the set after appreciation and wishing me good luck. It has limited options:

“Correspondence and talk with group members”

“Using the map and route guide”

“Viewing the position of the group members”

“Connection with the base”

“Viewing the commands”

“Membership confirmation”

Now I realize why Karisan so insisted on keeping the insignia. The enemy will be able to destroy all the group if get the insignia. Since it has a touch screen, I touch the *“Viewing the position of the group members”* option by my finger. *“Searching...”* appears on the screen and after a short time, it finds a person. Vorarin’s face is flushed with excitement. His insignia also has found the same person. A lamp on the set begins blinking and makes a discontinuous but permanent beep:

A-2-----position: within a 20-meter radius

In action

Acceptance: accordant

Fingerprint confirmation: five hours ago

Vorarin bends forward and looks at outside. Then he turns the set around in the air circularly. All of a sudden, the set beeps continuously and its lamp blinks fast in front the exit door.

I think the set sends a sort of signal around and finds someone who has the same set. This kind of beeping and blinking shows that someone is this side at a distance of twenty meters from us, but why my set doesn't show you?

I look at the display carefully and I say:

I think we skipped something...

Suddenly my eyes meet another option which is in a box in another corner of the screen:

I got it! I should guessed. This set is able to allow us hide ourselves from the other members of the group optionally. If the radius of the receiving signals is wide, it should find all of the members, not just one, for I think not the group is one person.

Then I press on the "Mission settings" by my finger. As I thought the "Acceptance" and "Mission" options are off. I turn on the "Acceptance" option and at the same time the second option on the Vorarin's set becomes on:

A-6-----position: within a 1-meter radius

Mission: cancelled

Acceptance: accordant

Fingerprint confirmation: five minutes ago

Vorarin also turns on the "Acceptance" option. The "A-7" option appears on my set.

As I see, I guess there aren't more than seven people in our group!

Vorarin confirms my words with shaking his head but he is pale and he ponders.

What's the matter?

They've five guards only in one street while we are just seven in our group.

He is right but the quantity is not always the factor of the victory. Maybe some groups from the "Hope" shelter are here and each one covers a part of the town.

Now that we found this one, we'd better reach him as soon as possible. We don't know here and the enemy may be everywhere.

He turns off his set, goes toward a collapsed wall which has turned into a chair, sits on it and leans on the wall. Then he removes the remained plastic sheet around his ankles and pulls off his shoes. Although we wound plastic sheets around our feet, I feel some sands in my shoes. So I empty my shoes. We should be ready to go.

Suddenly something comes into my mind which trembles me and makes me to gulp my saliva, so that my hands stop tying involuntary. As the insignia can guide us to the members of the group, it can easily take us to the enemy. I feel myself into an icy lake and it causes a cold wave trembles all of my body and makes my hair stand on end.

The insignia may guide us toward the enemy like the cheese which attracts a mouse to the trap. Why those four people's sets are off? Why there couldn't be seen any reaction to the appearance of our name on the display? Does it mean the presence of two new members has no importance to it?

I pull the set out of my pocket. The sign of four black and white people who are hand in hand, is spinning. All options appear on the screen when my finger touches it. I enter in “*Position of group members*”. A-2 is still in his position and hasn’t moved even a little bit. The “*fingerprint confirmation*” shows five hours and ten minutes ago. If it is as mentioned in instruction four times in a day, he has to confirm his fingerprint again fifty minutes later. Yet, if A-2 is taken captive, they will force him to reconfirm his fingerprint. I must communicate with him. Vorarin comes toward me and shows his anxiety with his question:

Let’s see, what’s the matter? Is there any problem?

Anybody hear me?

I am waiting for reply from the set, while I managed to communicate, but there is no response. Again, I repeat my question but nobody replies. When I become sure, I answer Vorarin’s question:

Things don’t match up.

He, who seems smelled the matter, says:

Maybe he’s in a situation that he can’t reply us.

It is possible, so I send him my request in text. Time passes for a while, yet I receive no response. I send my message again, it remains without reply.

As I said, it may be a trap. We shouldn’t go there unadvised. We should check conditions, or maybe we’d better not to risk. We can get away from here easily, without any risk.

Vorarin pauses for a while and then he says:

It’s possible but in case of they’ve taken him captive we should help him.

But we have no information about his captivity. We don't know yet if he is alive.

We'll know it within forty five minutes later. If he reconfirms his fingerprint, we'll find out he is still alive.

I go to the darkness to be safe from the moonlight which has lighted inside a little.

But even if he is dead, they can use his fingerprint.

He relocates himself to see outside well. Then, with an anxious but determined face, he says:

Yeah, but it's different for the eye scanning. In addition to eye color determination, it can recognize human death. These are written in setting section of the manual.

Well, what do you mean?

He intends to show me something with his words.

I mean that as much as it may be a trap, it is likely not to be. Maybe he is dead, but equally it is likely he is alive and needs our help.

He is absolutely right and if the probability of being alive for him is less enough, still we should go to help him. But the letters confront me with a dilemma. In addition, we are doing something like saving a prey from the hungry lions. The result is anxiety and worryment for me, who has no experience in this case.

I can't believe yet what a trouble I have gotten into. The rapid eyes movement and shaking of Vorarin's body show that he has a confused and involved mind too.

The things you said means that we should wait for the time being to see if he reconfirms his fingerprint. We shouldn't risk for nothing. I go near the shop door to watch for the outside.

I sit near the entrance door and look at the outside through the holes on the wall. The gray dust of the rusted metals are

floating in the air and thicken the darkness. A skyscraper is exactly in front of us and have hidden the moon completely. Exactly like the blue sky and the rays of the sun shining through the cloud gaps, the moon can be seen through the holes and cracks on the wall.

The skyscraper has a scruffy and messy facing. It has fallen on the left side buildings like a broken tree from its waist, but part of it is still standing. The upper part of it which is the same as foliage of a tree, has fallen on the middle of the boulevard. Yet some of the huge iron beams are linked to its body. Almost nine floors are still intact. The top of the skyscraper is designed like the spaceships, and is so big that covers the width of the boulevard. There is a deep pitting on it. All the buildings around it are destroyed. The received signal is from this building. But nothing suspicious can be seen.

All of a sudden I feel a hand on my shoulder and another hand on my mouth. I turn my head without any attempt and I see Vorarin whose face is pale and his eyes are wide open.

I heard a footstep. I guess he's coming here.

He speaks so quietly that I have to bring my ears close to his mouth. I stare at outside through a hole on the wall. Two other shadows are coming toward the shop where we are. They seem are talking to each other but I can hear just a squeak sound.

I hear the footstep of the first one who passes by us. I move aside from the door. As I guessed, the blue soldier, who is almost head and shoulders taller than me, passes by the door. I don't know why I didn't hear his footstep. Maybe he walks slowly or he takes step on the sands. He has no mask on

his face but his back is toward me and darkness doesn't allow me to see his face.

Those two people come toward this one who stops now. They stand in front him, then they bring their right foot forward at the same time as if they take a step and then they stamp their feet on the ground, next they freeze. One of them says with a thick and rough voice:

Mission accomplished.

Their superior, with a thicker and rougher voice than the soldier's, which is like a canary voice, says:

What happened?

We found there, now the group are searching.

The second soldier says following his coworker:

The south zone also was found and the group is working on.

Nothing has been found yet?

Both answer together:

No.

Damn. There are at least twenty zones in this town. What number region is this?

Both soldiers are standing like the statue and don't move. The mood of their faces can't be seen from under their masks. Just their superior looks around once in a while.

This is the twelfth, sir.

The superior says with anger:

How much it takes to find all?

They hesitate a moment, as if both are waiting for someone to reply. Finally, they break the ice and one of them says:

About two weeks, at this pace.

Their chief, while is ready to jump like a leopard, comes one step closer to them, and says screamingly:

What? It takes two weeks? So what the hell are you doing? Maybe you think you are picnicking here? A child also could find everywhere easily if he is given a map. The town would be buried entirely under the sands by two weeks.

The soldier, while his voice trills, says:

We need reinforcements, sir.

The soldiers receive a mocking reply:

Now I'm sure you are picnicking!

He raise his voice insomuch that his voice echoes through the shop:

What the hell are you fifty men doing here? You a bunch of nonentities need reinforcements!?

The wind reigns the silence and then goes away. The two soldiers are standing there without any motion and are looking at their chief, who stamps his foot on the ground, and takes steps to the left and right off and on. His face is not visible but his bald head is. I see his profile occasionally but his face is faded in the darkness.

He finally stops, he loses his patience, and says:

Where's that stupid moron guy?

Hail, sir!

A man comes out from the opposite alley, performs the same thing which seems to be a kind of military salute, and says:

That region has subsided entirely, yet we searched for everywhere.

Well?

Well...we should circumscribe it.

You mean there's no way you reach it?

I mean the subsidence almost reaches to a one hundred meter radius. No building remained intact too.

The commander turns on his wireless set and says:
Ravigan, what did you do?
A weak hiss is heard and then a normal voice says:
Nothing yet, Kansen, we're searching for the nonce.
What did those three men do? Have they ever reported something?

They haven't found anything likewise.

I go to the base. If you find something, inform me.

The tone of the man from the other side of the wireless shows that they are either of the same ranks or are comrades. Kansen turns off the wireless and says to those three:

You watchdog around here. I guess some are tailing us. Be alert. There may be many cows in this town but we are looking for those who are marked. By the way, did you post some guards somewhere I told you?

The third soldier replies:

Yes sir. All are in the positions you assigned.

Kansen says mockingly and scornfully:

At least you could do this.

The three of them salute and then disappear in the darkness.

They wait until that Kansen disappears in the darkness, then one of the soldiers says:

God damn you, where the hell were you? He was near to lacerate us. I don't know at all why they send us to report to Kansen. All of us have wireless set, don't we?

The third soldier removes his hat and says:

Something is suspicious here.

He has wispy beard and hair. His face looks like a fox, and most importantly, his eyes are blue; they are so chromatic and shiny that I can see them from afar easily and they shine like

two full moon in the darkness. The two other soldiers also remove their masks following their confrere. Their eyes are blue and shiny likewise. The second soldier, while breathe a sigh, says:

We shouldn't joined them from the beginning. Soon after I reach there I'll resign and leave.

The soldier next to him calms him with his hand and asks:
What's the matter? Anything happened?

The third soldier, while is looking at the distant and seems is thinking, says:

Something is happening, we are not alone here.

The second soldier sits on the hood of a car, and as a creakiness sound comes out from the car, the last tire comes off the car and lies on the ground. This attracts all for a short moment and then it is disremembered when the sound of the metal on the pavement cuts off. After that he begins to swing his legs in the air. The first soldier, while leans to the car, says:

This's obvious that we're not alone. Certainly the "Hope" group is here too. It seems they're the performer of this game. All of these events are their fault. But I don't know why they don't show themselves and do anything.

The second soldier interferences and says:

I said from the very first day that the "Hope" group" is here. Once I saw one of them in the darkness.

The third one sits on the collapsed part of the building and says:

This's not important fact. Kansen also knows it but pretends ignorance. It's as clear as daylight that they don't sit around and do nothing at all, but they'll engage. The problem is something else, something more important than this.

The second soldier stops swinging his legs and says:

In the case of we couldn't find it there wouldn't be anything more important than this, because I don't think at all that Kansen leaves us alive then.

The third one puts his hand under his chin and ponders. The first soldier's eyes show his impatience by gazing at the third soldier, and he folds his arms but says nothing and waits.

Another group is here except for us and the "Hope" group.

They look at the third soldiers in wonder. They stare at him dumb stricken as if an electric shock has made them frozen.

What do you mean?

The third soldier keeps quiet.

Maybe you mean...

Yeah.

Their mouths remain open like the apoplectics.

The red group?

The third soldier shakes his head.

Whence they become aware?

They fail to answer with their silence. The three of them cogitate, so that they don't even look at each other. It seems to them to be lost in the history for a few years. Finally, the first soldier, while is looking at the building in the opposite, says:

Whence you knew it? There wasn't any report of them to be seen as yet. Nobody's said anything likewise. I, who've been in the most missions, didn't see anything too.

The first soldier, as beats his fingers on his cheek, says:

I also hadn't seen no one till half an hour ago but when I was coming here I saw one of them. It seemed he hadn't seen me, so I went close to him as I could. At first, I thought that he's one of our group but he hadn't worn our uniform. He seemed waiting for someone. He kept waiting about two or

three minutes but nobody came. So when he became sure that nobody would come, he went. I decided to chase him.

Then he becomes silent and looks around.

I thought he is one of the common people or maybe of the “Hope” group. I followed him to somewhere till he suddenly turned and looked backward. That time I saw his red eyes. He immediately moved and I followed him again. All of a sudden he began running and disappeared in darkness.

He takes a pause and then says:

Of course, this event dispelled my doubt, since where ever I went recently it seemed to me that some people were there before me. Their footprints were visible clearly. I guess they’ve finished their works in the east side of the town, now they’ve come this part and are searching.

The second soldier who is sitting on the hood of the car, looks at the sky and says:

Woe! What the calamity is this we cursed with? Does Kansen know?

I didn’t say anything to him, but I should report it to him. They are interfering us and if they find it sooner, we would be knocked off. I think we should be ready for some skirmishes.

The third soldier stands on his feet, hangs his machine gun on his shoulder and hold his pistol in his hand:

I’ve to go now and report Kansen personally. You keep sentry around here and watch up. We are rabbits in this game, we can’t see anybody but they can. I think their campsites should be around here. Here is exactly in the middle of twenty five western regions.

The second soldier, with eyes wide open and wrinkled brows, says:

So what about Kansen?

Leave it to me.

When he fades in the darkness, the two other soldiers also disappear at the end side of the boulevard. Vorarin, who seems has held his breath till now, while pretends to be calm, says:

It's become a knotty problem. It works to the detriment of us. I knew from the beginning the reds don't sit around and do nothing at all.

I approach the door and look at outside carefully.

It's not exactly the same you're saying. It's to our benefit they don't focus thoroughly on us anymore. It seems the reds and the blues are looking for something, as we do.

Vorarin shrugs:

I don't know anything more.

We should go to that building where the signals come from. The way they talked to each other and that they didn't notice this building is as if nobody is there in that building. We can't trust it. The signal might be from the reds. Let's go.

Chapter 16

The invisible enemy

I look at the outside carefully, nobody can be seen in the darkness. Vorarin stares at the building as well. Just like a culprit who looks at his halter to be sure it is real, he looks at the building and gulp his saliva once in a while. His face doesn't show off the nervous mood and it is not so much to makes him play with his hand or bite his lips.

I see nobody in the street. It's time to move. But, before we go, for we have at least a loophole, I'll enter the building through the main door, you from the other side. This way, if one of us get caught, would be able to inform the other.

It is not the best way, because if they have held the building, certainly they have thought about that as well. Most importantly, they keep their eyes on us. I put my knapsack on my shoulders and move ahead of Vorarin. I move counter to the way in which the two soldiers passed, while I keep close to the car, and then monitor the boulevard through the disjoined door of the car. Vorarine comes to me by my hand signal and after a while stands beside the opposite car. He also signals me in the same way to reach the building. I wait for Vorarin beside the entry door.

Vorarin passes the last car and stands by me in the darkness. His face is calm and he plays with his lips once in a while. This is not the first time that he does it. It seems to be his habit, but it makes his face attractive and funny.

I enter through here. You should enter by the next building. Surely you'll have no difficulty to enter because the wall between these two buildings has collapsed. You stay there till I inform you. You, too, make me aware in case of you see something suspicious, with the insignia.

He stops playing with his lips, looks around nervously and wends while he takes a deep breath. He manages to enter the building through a big hole within thirty seconds.

When he fades away in the darkness of the possessed building, I step into the building after taking a deep breath. My body tickles a bit and a cold wave passes through my body off and on. I reach into the building close to the wall like a lizard.

There is no difference between inside and outside of the building. The walls are like the shredded body and everywhere is full of the bricks. The four pillars form a quadrangle and the elevator is in the middle of it. The wires of the elevator are cut and its cabin is like a crushed cube, as if it fell down swiftly. This is a big building which has stairs in both sides. There can be seen the bent iron beams and can be heard the sound of the wind which associates the winter. Everything is gray; even the elevator seems like a hallucinous coffin. The ashes and the dust on the ground may help us. These shows some foot tracks but faded. I approach them.

The radiated rays from the moon which pass through the holes on the wall and reaches here, show the floating dust in

the air. A soft but cold breeze passing through the holes makes the fearsome sounds too.

I sit on my feet and keep my balance putting my hands on the ground, while I am on alert for any sound around me. I feel a shooting pain in my breast and back. But at least I am lucky that the wounds on my feet are healed. Though I feel pain, I bend down to have a look at the foot tracks. Most of them are faded away and just few of them are intact. There also can be seen some palm tracks that seems to be someone's intention to clear the foot tracks. The remained tracks seem similar and are only toward the stairs and the hole on the wall at the end of the building, yet no one can be seen and no sound can be heard and just the sound of landslide from the upstairs can be heard once in a while.

Suddenly I remember the letters. I forgot them and that I came here with them. I feel my heart beats in my breast. A weakness engulfs my body. I curse myself for my neglect. I should be free of care about them. I look around until I meet a mass of debris which is heaped on a corner. I put the letters into the debris and cover them with some bricks. Then I attach my insignia with a pin on my breast under my shirt to make it easier to use. Next, I press its button:

Nothing much is happening here for the nonce, what about you, Vorarin?

A weak hiss, which only I can hear it, and then Vorarin's voice is heard:

No, I see nothing suspicious as well. Everywhere is calm.

Catch me up.

Then I push the button again and wait in the darkness until I hear a foot step after less than one minute. Surely he is Vorarin, yet I don't throw caution into the wind. When he

comes close to here, he takes his steps slowly until he reaches the edge of the wall. After a while a black body is seen who is looking around. He seeks refuge in the edges like me and as he takes step toward me, he says:

Zairas...Zairas...Zairas...

I reply him with a soft and short whistle. He turns his head toward me like a sharp eyed eagle and after a pause he comes to me.

I think nobody is here.

Don't you see the foot tracks? The enemy always waits in ambush.

Where? Where's it?

Then he looks along my forefinger and after watching for a while he says in wonder:

How did you find them? They seems to be old.

I shake my head and say:

No, you're completely wrong. They're not old but whoever he was or they were, tried to clean the tracks. This causes one to be doubted since it isn't clear that the track is left from one guy or more.

Well, what do you intend to do now?

Nothing special comes to my mind and I just follow the same common way.

Nothing. Just the same usual way. I go upstairs, you stay here. If the situation seems under control there, I'll inform you.

I reach to the left side stairs through the debris and ruins and take step cautiously. I feel landslide under my feet and with each step the groaning sound of the stairs can be heard. All of the walls are gray, like the war-torn regions.

I reach the first floor. Everything is untouched and nothing special can't be seen. The elevator also passes through here, and closing to the edges, downstairs can be seen. So many corridors are there which the origin of all is the elevator. There is also a long counter in the left side. No furniture and equipment can be found in the building, and there can be seen just some rusted and useless metals. Also, there are stairs to the upper floors from four sides.

I take the insignia off my breast and activate the A-2 address. The lamp begins blinking and makes a beep sound. I turn it all around like a compass until its light and the beep sound become extended.

The beep sound becomes extended and the light blinks so fast toward the right side, just where I am. The set shows me an oblique direction in which I should pass through a corridor to reach him.

I enter the corridor and go forward slowly along the right side. There is no foot track. Although the fresh air enters here easily, everything smells musty. The sound of the wind just can be heard which passes through the holes on the walls and roars like a dragon. I wish I were wind, and I could inspect everywhere swimmingly.

Finally I reach where I intended to. The signals guide me to one of the room on the left side which is just in front of me. There is no door and I can see inside the room easily without I enter it. It seems that an earthquake have occurred in this room since everything is scattered and ruined on the ground: the file cabinets, the broken chairs and tables, the lampshade, half burned books. And I see the splinter glass for the first time.

Since the dust which has covered everything is untouched and shows no foot track or sign, it proves that my act is foolish, yet I relocate things with my feet. Again, I check my insignia set, but it shows just here.

Where does your insignia point at, Vorarin?

Maybe my insignia shows wrong.

Wait!

The sound of pushing some buttons is heard. Then he says:

Aha, found. As I see, it should be where you went up, just that side. Only there the beep sound becomes extended. Did you find something?

Not yet. Here's nothing but an empty room. I'm just in this position, yet nobody is here.

Maybe they left their insignia here but there is no sign of their entrance. Here is just like a crypt where nobody has get in there for many years. All of a sudden the hiss sound from the insignia is heard and Vorarin says excitedly:

Hey, this set just shows the direction not the height, I guess. That is, he may be in upper floors.

What he says makes sense to me. I return toward the stairs and enter the second floor through the steps which are collapsed almost alternately. My voice echoes through the building as in a cave. Here is similar to the first floor but here, the direction of the corridors is different.

When I look at the insignia, I see that it beeps at the same direction, but now in the second floor, continuously. So Vorarin's assumption comes true. This time I find another corridor and I go toward the direction that the insignia shows. Here again, the signal comes from inside of a room. I enter and look around. Here, just like the downstairs, everything is

untouched and a five-millimeter layer of the ashes has covered everywhere.

The insignia points at the wall. I enter the other room but it shows again the same wall. Then I go to the third floor but there is just an empty space where the insignia points at, and no room or corridor can be seen. No need to look for, and the location, which the insignia shows, can be seen easily.

What's up? Did you find anything?

Anxiety and worryment can be felt in his voice.

I'm in third floor but nobody is here. He should be in upper floors.

I'm coming up.

I wait until I see him finally on the stairs. There is still a little anxiety in his face which disappears when he comes close to me.

There are nine floors in this building. He might be in each of them. Except for the foot tracks in the first floor, there's no sign of human beings. I think we don't need to be so cautious.

Don't be deceived by appearance. It's like the sea which is calm now and becomes stormy one hour later. Here makes me feel the same. I go ahead of you, and you keep your distance.

He accepts indisputably and waits until I move. I go up the stairs and reach the fourth floor. I stand beside the stairs until Vorarin joins me. Here is also calm and its design is similar to the first floor, but there is no corridor on the left side where I am now. There are only a series of rooms which are next to each other.

Suddenly I hear the sound of collapsing and a sharp scream bears bad news. I turn back but I can't see Vorarin. I try each step before I pass through. Four steps have collapsed together. The perpetual screams are heard. I see Vorarin's hand which

has grabbed the edge and he tries to do the same with his other hand.

Keep calm, I catch you now. Hang in there a bit.

I reach him with the help of the gray and curved banister near the stairs and I see his hand which trembles and his fingers which release the edge little by little. I try to take his hand several times but he is at a rather long distance from me.

Again I hear an earsplitting scream but I manage to grab his hand at the last second, while I hold the banister with my other hand. The banister groans under the weight of our body. According to his puniness, his weight is low but he pulls me down so that I am nearly fall. I still hold the banister with my hand and pull him up a little, but he can't grab the edge and his body pulls us downward. The banister makes a cry-like sound and one of its pillars severs.

I count to three, then I pull you up. You should grab the edge unless the banister will sever.

I feel the falling sands under my feet. A weak quake shakes the stairs and, like the aftershocks, warns a big quake. I fix my foothold, then, after a deep breath, I count to three and pull him up. All of a sudden I feel like a hot iron is put on my waist and my breast.

He grabs the edge and pulls himself up. Suddenly the step under my feet collapses but I manage to save myself. I pull the banister like a rope and lay myself on the ground in the fourth floor. My breast goes up and down ceaselessly. Vorarin is also on the floor on all fours and he coughs. He is dusty cap a pie. I find out why he doesn't shout anymore; he pours out his salvia to empty his mouth of dust.

Are you ok?

He shakes his head but his face says something else.

Five other floors still remain.

He wipes off his mouth with his sleeves and says:

Damn, I wish I stayed in the first floor.

Yeah, you informed all the world with this much fuss you made. We don't need to hide ourselves anymore. If there is anybody here, now he is aware of us. Just God grant nobody heard us from outside. We should hurry up.

I go toward the room which the signal comes from, and open the door slowly. This is a rather big room in which nothing is seen, as if ransacked by brigands. The signal comes from behind the wall which there is no way to reach there. Yet this is the only room in which can't be seen so much ashes, and it has almost its own dark brown color. My mind is so confused that I return to Vorarin immediately. He shakes his head regretfully and then he rises. Before going up the stairs, he says:

I'm really sorry, I couldn't help it. I go ahead of you and try the stairs to be safe.

My fear is doubled, and I feel my muscles become constricted. I experience a strange weakness in my body. I decide to go back, but it is too late. It might be a trap from the very beginning. Though nothing has changed, revealing our presence along with Vorarin's shouts have affected me spontaneously.

I want to get out of here as soon as possible. But now there is no way to return. He tries the stairs at a distance of five steps ahead of me, and I move only with his permission. We find nothing and see nobody in the fifth floor too. Here is like an untouched cake, it seems unlikely that some have made a trap here for us. My mind is so confused that I can't understand what Vorarin says and where we go.

At the end of the fifth floor, moon shines on us and like a savior it saves me from my thought. Vorarin finds its reason; it seems as if they have exploded a bomb in sixth floor, it is has been ruined completely. There can't be seen any wall or window. There is no way to upstairs and the sixth floor is just the roof of the downstairs. I don't know why I haven't seen the destruction of this floor.

There are some short wall up to our breasts. The fresh air and a cold breeze can be felt, which enters my clothes, makes my body tremble and then gets out. It seems that the moon scatters the seeds of cold air by its soft light. Looking at the moon makes me feel cold.

From up here the landscapes make us calm and dazzle for a short time. It is dark but I can see the remnants of the dead buildings which seem like a cemetery that all of its gravestones are broken. The wind is like a wail which rises from them and seeks help. This view robs everything from my mind and calms my mind for few seconds.

It's too gloomy.

Vorarin looks regretfully. The town is thoroughly gray; the town which its darkness is darker than darkness and its silence is more deadly than every other silence. I can hear death steps in the streets of the town. His usher, the wind, accompanies him. Suddenly a hand moves in front of my face and distracts me, that is to say, draws me out of the marsh.

It looks like you burn your farm with your own hands. This shows the human selfishness. He's ready to destroy everything and of course himself to prevent others from having something. I always thought what could hell look like, but now the hell is just in front me.

He points at the opposite street:

I wish there was a delicatessen I could buy a sandwich.

He points at the street again:

You think what would the town look like if it was rebuild?

He doesn't wait for my reply:

Probably the heights of the buildings wouldn't allow us to see the horizon line. Everywhere would be full of colored lamps, big billboards, red, blue and green. So many cars in the streets, and the sound of the horns would show that the town is alive. Sidewalks would be full of passengers who jostle you. Why things went the way they did?

Then he becomes quiet, and I say:

We are expiating our previous generations. The nature is also revenging.

Do you know exactly how the world destroyed?

The elders says when they woke up, the sun was too angry. All people died of skin cancer. Those who survived, suffered from cataract and then become blind. All of their products destroyed and all of the animals died. No tree stayed alive. All nations destroyed themselves in atomic world war, instead of they try to improve the situation. We remained and a hell. For this we wear glassy clothes, sleep all day and are active night time.

Till when it should be like this?

Till we want this. I wish God and nature forgive us.

The "Hope" group members are doing their best. We're here for this.

To save the world? How we should save this frozen desert?

Maybe, I don't know. Maybe we shouldn't allow the world becomes worse than this.

I look at his eyes and ask him:

Is it supposed to make war again?

I hope not.

So what are the blue and red groups doing here? What are they looking for?

I don't know. Nothing is clear, but they broke the borders.

The reds are double-crossing.

He takes a deep breath and says:

We can't say this. It isn't clear yet why they're here.

It's so important that these three groups are facing each other after too many years. The blue group kept themselves to themselves. I hadn't even seen a blue-eye at close range., And also the reds who came here because of losing their lives.

They didn't keep aloof so that you think. They delimit for themselves and they sent their flag for us too.

I ask in wonder:

I'd never heard about it.

They intended to trade with us. They asked us to delimit and send them our flag. They have progressed a good deal after the world destruction. They turned a ruined town to an alive and well town.

They parted company with us from the beginning.

What do you mean?

A cold wind trembles my body. I say:

After that the world destroyed, those who stayed alive seek refuge in the shelters. More than ninety five percent of the people died. The distance caused the remained people to divide into different groups. There were the big shelters around the world. After passing the age of "vacuity", two big shelters parted company with us entirely.

You mean the red and the blue groups?

Exactly. Nobody knows what happened that their eyes and their blood turned into blue and red. All say that it's because

of the radioactive materials, but it's simply enough you refer to the old books and see that this isn't the A-bomb effects.

So what it could be?

Nobody knows but themselves.

It means...

All of a sudden Vorarin cuts his word halfway, looks behind me over my shoulder, and says:

What's that!?

I turn back but I see nothing. He points with his finger. There are two small black box of the size of matches box are mounted on the walls of the stairs. Suddenly my body becomes loose. I look toward where Vorarin stared at. As I guessed, there are four shadows who are coming toward us. I feel so much energy and as I begin to run, I say:

Hurry up! We should get out of here. Move it!

Vorarin looks at me like the possessed, he is shocked a little. He follows me running without any question. We move slowly, but faster than before, on the stairs. We wouldn't get chance to get out of here. So we should find somewhere to hide. The walls of the fifth floor are full of holes and there is no intact wall. We have to go to the fourth floor.

We hear the sound of people talking to each other which echoes through the building. I look down through the stairs. The lights of their torches are searching everywhere. They break doors, if any, and search everywhere. Two of them are coming to the second floor.

Damn! They're coming up. We should hide somewhere.

Vorarin becomes pale. He, while tries to hide his voice tremor, says:

They'll find us. We can't hide ourselves anywhere.

It's better than they come and find us easily.

I go toward the first door I see and open it slowly. But there is no way; there are just some windows which are useless because of their heights, nevertheless Vorarin goes toward a window and examine there. From his nervous face, I realize that there is no loophole.

I look around to find something to close the door, but there is nothing. The only hope for us is destroyed. There is no way to return as well. Breaking each door is like a sledgehammer which is pounded on my head. I can hear footsteps and the sound of equipment caused by movement.

It is like the death knell is ringing to announce our death. Both of us stand near the door. Maybe we could do anything. The footsteps come closer every second. I have held my breath insomuch that I feel I am suffocating. Vorarin has clasped and hugged the wall tightly so that he wants to hide himself into it.

It is like I pass through one hundred years until their footsteps echo through fourth floor. Then the sound of breaking a door is heard. It makes me feel the earth under my feet collapsed. Vorarin loses his patience and comes to me.

They're coming, what do we do?

The sound of another door, which is metallic, is heard. Vorarin goes away from the door. I go toward him and take some bricks off the wall. Vorarin takes a rod off the ground too and stands by me. He gulps his saliva once in a while.

All of a sudden I lose my balance and pull his shirt. He bends on his knees along with me. My right leg burns and makes me wince.

My leg stuck in the hole of first floor. It seems to be collapsed because of being loose. I try to pull my leg out of the hole but it stuck tightly. Vorarin comes to help me and

relocates my foot slowly, but it doesn't come out. Meanwhile, I hear the sound of door breaking. I look at the door but it is not the door of this room. My heart almost stops beating. My nostrils quiver intensely. I feel pain and fear together. I shake and relocate my leg faster and this makes me feel more pain, but I don't care; this pain is better than death.

I hold my breath for the last time and try to pull out my leg. It seems that my soul wants to leave my body through the big toe. The strange weakness stops me. It nauseates me. My body trembles, and I can't keep my balance.

I stay in this way for a while. Then I remember our insignias. We should destroy them, but I have not energy to open my mouth and tell it to Vorarin. I hear their footsteps who are approaching us. All of a sudden an idea springs to my mind. My hands stop trembling and my vertigo ends automatically. I unlace my shoes, hold my breath and pull my leg out of the hole. Anxiety blocks mind and prevents us to make a correct decision.

The sounds of those soldiers' footsteps don't give me a chance to think of the pain. They stop behind the door. It seems my soul is leaving my body. I get up and go toward the wall. Maybe there is a loophole that I haven't seen it yet. But there is just a wall. I return and look at the door with Vorarin.

Suddenly, along with breaking the door, a hand covers my mouth and I feel that I am pulled back.

Chapter 17

A-2

Hush! Be quiet!

The hands are removed from our mouth after convincing us to be calm. His short words is enough for us. The strange man goes toward the hole on the wall and while he looks through the hole, makes it clear with his hand that we should be quiet. The sound of shooting and then collapsing the wall are heard:

It was from here. I heard it. I don't know where they disappeared.

Then the sound of two other men is heard who enter the room. One of them asks:

What happened, did you find them?

The other one replies from the room:

They may have escaped through the windows.

No, it's too high. They couldn't escape through them.

Then he begins cursing:

Damn! We should find them.

You two, go downstairs and stay there, and we both go to the fifth floor to search there. If you find them don't let them escape, even one of them should not escape.

The sound of stamping feet, which seems to be for salute, is heard. Then the echoing sounds gradually fade away. The

two other, noticing the footsteps, go upstairs. Their footsteps is heard such as the rats or wandering ghosts in the sewer.

There is a small room in which, like the old times, the king hid after a defeat. It has two windows in both sides to view outside. The only furniture in the room are the chair and a table with some burnt candles on it. The room is too small so that three persons could not lie beside each other. It has been built just for a reason, like a tiger's camouflage, it is for being out of sight from the others, and also to view them all.

Unlike all other walls, no hole can't be seen on the walls here. Their whitey color shows that the security measures have been considered. There is also a field glasses hung from the nail on the wall. In a corner, is a folded sleeping bag with a raincoat on it, and beside them is the stranger's knapsack.

Vorarin rises hesitantly. The bandage around my injured foot has become loose and my foot is red. The stranger appraises us. His face is sort of familiar. When I see his grayish white hair, and also his bushy moustache which matches his short beard, I place him. Compared to a few years ago, his mostly black hair has turned into mostly white.

His moustache has not been an exception to this case. The wrinkles on his face have become slightly more and remind me of the cracks on the desert. But he looks at me as a stranger.

Wait till they've gone, then you go immediately. You'd better not to make sound.

Then he goes toward his knapsack and begins to arrange it. He also puts the sleeping bag on the back of his knapsack.

Whenever they go, we all would get out of here, and you would go on your way.

He looks at us askance.

I want to introduce myself but then I avoid it and just say:
But we both are members of the “Hope” shelter.

He frowns and this spreads all over his face. But he doesn't throw caution into the winds and says:

So you are A-6 and A-7?

His eyes appraise us, while he smiles. He seems like an experienced teacher who can read his student's mind at the first glance and is aware of their inner man.

Why you didn't reply us? You should simply wrote a word then we never stuck in this funk.

He doesn't notice me at all. As he become busy with the insignia, he says:

We couldn't trust everyone, or reply to each message we receive. You know well each could be a trap.

I hear the blue soldiers who drag their legs like the defeated army and like a wounded tiger, going downstairs. Their curses echo through the building as in a mountain.

He is the same Nabidak whom Karisan talked in the “Dawn” shelter before going to bed, and then he left there. He goes toward his binoculars and takes it off. Then he goes near the window and looks at outside. After a while focusing on a single point, he moves his binoculars; he is following the soldiers through the binoculars. Vorarin is standing in a corner and is still shocked. Nabidak brings out his notebook and writes on it.

Until things become completely safe, you have a look at your friend's foot. I think he couldn't go on with this leg. This way we may lose one of our group personnel.

Vorarin, like the thunderstruck people, takes a clean handkerchief and gets busy with cleaning my foot, while he lowers his head. Nabidak hesitates a moment and then says:

How did they find you?
He is still looking outside through his binoculars.
They set some sensors in the corridors.
He sets aside his binoculars and asks:
How did you find them?
His looks is full of doubt.
Their lights are invisible, but I saw their supply on the wall
by chance. They may set them in other locations.
He takes his binocular again and looks at outside:
I myself set them on the wall to inform me if someone
enters. They found you otherwise.
Vorarin's hands trembles while working and he just looks
at my foot. He looks at me once in a while and steals a glance
at me. He prepares stitching outfits again and then get busy
with stitching. Nabidak pulls a nail on the door which is used
as a handle; a quadrangular emerges from the wall and comes
into view.
I go out to have a look at outside to see if there is someone.
You get ready till I come back. They may back momentarily.
He closes the door and just his footsteps can be heard
which fades away after a short time.
It aches too much.
Thanks god he showed up. Do you know this guy? I mean
he maybe posed as one of the group personnel.
Don't be afraid! Your anxiety is inapposite.
Can we trust him?
Yeah, if you don't trust in yourself but you can trust him.
He's been in service as much as we lived. However I've seen
him just two or three times.
But I don't like him more.

The sound of Nabadak's footsteps cut our words. Door opens and he makes us to get up by the sign of his hand. While his face shows the coolness and self-confidence, he says:

There is no sign of them for the time being. We can go.

He takes his knapsack and moves ahead of us. The soft breeze brings us the smell of his body sweat. His clothes hangs in tatters. He stops on the stairs ahead of us and shows us an object with a monitor on it. It can be held in his palm. A red light blinks on it. Then, he sits on his legs and takes two black small objects off the wall. He puts them into his knapsack and then we move again.

I feel as if I put my right foot on the thousands nails. Once in a while, Vorarin helps me and I put my weight on his shoulder. In the fourth floor, we are constrained to reach to the other side from where the stairs have collapsed, with the help of the banisters near the stairs. I feel like my soul is leaving my body until we finish passing through the banisters. Although it takes a long time we reach downstairs, he says nothing and moves forward in step with me. Before we exit from the building, I take the letters from under the debris. We manage to get out through a ruined wall and enter a rather broad street.

We should pass through the houses lest they see us. I go ahead of you, sign you when I find everywhere safe. Don't do anything wrong. They may be everywhere. Look, do you have gun?

He receives his answer from our looks. So he removes two pistols from under his shirt and says:

Unlock them but be very careful. They each have just seven bullets and I'm out of ammo. Just fire in case of

emergency; use them only when you know you would kill by them. They're much more than us in number. If they find our place our number is up. It's no long way to there but it may happen thousands of events in this way.

Then he goes to the other side of the street and enters one of the buildings. Vorarin sits on his knees and we wait till he informs us. The wind bears no news and just pours some sands on us and then goes away. Suddenly a sharp sound is heard. We hesitate a moment but we hear the same sound again. I move along with Vorarin and we cross the street. Then we see Nabidak who monitors us through a window. The house has nothing special to describe, it looks like all other buildings. Nabidak comes down quickly from the first floor. Vorarin holds out his pistol toward Nabidak:

I don't need it.

Nabidak takes it with no question and says:

We should pass through these ruins. Although we would be seen less, don't throw caution into the winds. We go on this way. Keep your distance.

Then he moves on and we follow him at a distance. We move forward through the buildings, cellars, basements, and roofs for half an hour continuously. Although we are half of his age, we drop behind him and we gasp. My leg is slightly better and allows me to walk faster. He always moves ahead and then signals us. Finally we enter a narrower street. He, with his short raincoat and the hat on his head, looks like a night killer who looks for his next victim.

All of a sudden, I hear a sound which causes me stop. I open my mouth to inform Nabidak but I see him bent down and shows us his hand to be quiet. Then he signs us to go toward the wall and hide ourselves.

We'd better bypass here.

My suggestion is out of fear. With the Nabadak's signal, we go toward the wall of the building which has collapsed on the middle of the street and hide behind it to be out of sight.

No, we should have a look at inside. You stay here till I come back.

He stands up to go but he takes a pause and says:

Zairas, you must enter the building from the other side. We may need to blindside them.

Hearing my name from his mouth, I wonder. Maybe he knows me. Vorarin is so nervous that hears nothing.

Let's see, do we need enter that building?

He fails to answer me. He just makes me to be silent by his hand sign. This is an almost big building that two big signboards, which are still readable, has covered its two sides. There are still some words readable on the signboards which are not faded and among them "Hotel" can be seen.

I go from right side, you from the left. And you, better stay here, and don't ask this much when you're in the mission.

Vorarin shakes his head but I guess he regrets for giving back his gun. I pass through some cars when he signals me with his hand, and reach near the building. I pause for a second and look at the dark alley by the hotel. I hold onto the wall. I am ready to inform others if I see something suspicious.

After considering the situation for a while, I hold the gun in front my eyes to be able to aim at. I go forward slowly but I reach to the end of the building sooner than I thought. I feel too much cold which trembles my body. I am almost behind the building. I check around carefully and stay there too

much. I gulp my saliva and go toward the backdoor cautiously.

I wait for a short time, maybe I see Nabidak but there is no sign of him. So I decide to stay here, but suddenly it comes to my mind maybe he needs my help. There is no intact wall to makes me enter through the door. There is a break on the walls wherever I look which a car can pass through them easily. I put my feet on the hardpan to make less sound. I enter the building. Everywhere is suffused with a bad smell. I move forward slowly in the darkness.

The more I go ahead the more smell is. The strange sound echoes through the building. Here is an open space in which there is no room or corridor. There are just some shabby walls in front of me at the end of the building. I move forward like a sewer rat that just its sounds is heard off and on, and I hold the gun in my hand.

All of a sudden, a blue soldier appears from behind a half ruined wall like the thunderbolt and hold his gun toward me. I don't know how he scented my presence? I also aim at him.

He holds his gun toward me and doesn't move. I aim at his head. I can't see his eyes and this makes me problem. I could read his mind easily from his eyes and the mood of his face but now I can't make a decision in this situation. I should try to keep my spirits up lest I give my rival a chance. So I stare at him and hold my head up. I don't wink my eyelids, I am standing without motion. I want to show him my self-confidence.

Suddenly I see the smoke which fades him away. I don't lower my gun but I bend a little and lower my head. I wait until the smoke clears and I find out what happened. The white smoke disappears in less than few seconds and I see the

blue soldier who lied on the floor but his gun is still in his hand.

My eyes slip from the gun on the soldier. I see no blood. I see in the darkness a faded shadow appears from behind that shabby wall. His body is in the dark but I can see that he wore his hair in ponytail. He goes toward the soldier with no words and throws the gun away of soldier's reach. Then he turns the soldier with his leg and looks at him for a while. The glass on his helmet is broken like the car window and his face is invisible.

That trigger is made you pull and fire it.

He smiles as he shakes his head. His voice is soft, and his body seems a rather horrible in darkness; he is tall and his arms are thick and his body is an athletic build. He can do the same thing that the blue soldier experienced just with his punch. Nabidak jumps down from the first floor and lands between us:

What're you doing here?

The strange man goes toward the stairs and sits on it. Then he smiles jeeringly and says:

You gathered people and made a group for yourself!? From where you find them?

Nabidak presses his lips and says:

Shouldn't you be on your post now?

Do you teach me a lesson? We're here for a week, despite you know no news here.

We can't leave them so easily. We should be curious to find out about their motives. You speak as if it doesn't concern to you and it doesn't matter to you at all!

You, too, speak like you don't know we're wasting our time. We just keep our eyes on some soldiers to see what the hell they're doing here!

It's not a good reason you leave your post. Nobody knows where they might be.

The strange man sneers again:

Yeah, surely nobody knows their place. You detained so many people instead of you get ready for defense. Yea, nobody knows but Karisan and Parkad and a few more.

Nabidak, who cannot convince him, takes a deep breath and says:

Well, what's up? What are they doing there? You were supposed to turn on your insignia once in a while and give us some news, what happened then?

As usual, they're discovering. I think they've figured out now that we pulled their legs. But, a few hours ago they were busy as in their first day. The town will sink into the sands sooner than they thought. Almost all of their soldiers are working. They might find me at any moment, so I left there. I forgot this damned insignia absolutely.

All of a sudden, Nabidak turns and holds his gun toward the shadow who appears from behind the building.

It's me, Vorarin.

Nabidak mutters some curses and lowers his gun.

Our mission is almost finished. We'll leave here within next three or four days.

The stranger turns his eyes to the other place and says:

It's good you arrived at this conclusion unless we would be suffocated under the sands by next week.

Now cut it out. You know that I can't make any decision. You were free to choose not to enter the mission from the

beginning. Now that you joined, you should go on to the end. Now we have to go to the base. We need to consult Parkad.

The stranger points at both of us with his eyes. Nabadak shakes his head and says:

You didn't kill him, did you?

No. we don't need to hide ourselves, they know we're here. They posted guards in some buildings. They scour the town for us but they don't give up rummaging.

Nabadak lifts his lips to show his derision, and then checks his cartridge clip:

Well, I go ahead of you. kidaton! You follow us behind these two guys. So, you two, stay between us.

Next he takes a pause, as if he changed his opinion. He says to Kidaton:

Come in to the room, I wanna talk to you in private.

Then they enter the room in the right side which is almost intact. I hear they stop and it seems they begin to talk. Vorarin comes beside me and leans on the wall:

You left me there high and dry to chat with each other here? Who was this one?

You guess!

I had never seen Kidaton, but I had heard his name. Vorarin doesn't know yet that he is beside the most trustful persons.

Maybe he is A-3?

That's right. Everything is going well.

Vorarin points at the blue soldier:

Who's this? Did you this to him?

I shake my head in sign of no and then I go toward the blue soldier. Curiosity attracts me to him, I cannot lose this chance. As I guess, he is dressed in blue army clothes and fastened a

belt with ammunition and a torch around his waist. Besides a machine gun, he has two pistols on his belt. His breast goes up and down fast and his breath, which comes out through the broken glass on his helmet, makes the sands fly.

Suddenly my eyes meet the dark room which the soldier and Kidaton have come out from. The room has no way to light enters, and only some parts of the sidewall which is joined to another room, are collapsed so that a thin man can hardly pass through it. The presence of Kidaton and the blue soldier in that room is slightly unusual. There is a hole on the ceiling of the room which more likely Kidaton has entered the room through it.

What's the matter?

I have nothing to reply vorarin. I just say:

It's clear from their words that they were already aware of the matter. They've gotten everything somehow.

The "Hope" group doesn't lose anything so easily. They got ready for everything.

Then he becomes silent and I stare at the blue soldier. After a rather short time, Nabidak and Kidaton come out of the room and Nabidak says:

As I said, we move.

They check around, then Nabidak moves at a distance from us. He moves forward through the ruined buildings and we follow him too. Kidaton takes steps in silence. He stops once in a while to keep his distance from us. Sometimes, he pulls himself up with one hand from the height and then comes down easily from which I am sure if I jump down, I will broke my leg. His arms are bare and so many scrapes can be seen on them. He wore only two T-shirts together in this cold weather and his hands are black because of his gloves. He also

has tied his short rain coat around his waist and a pistol is under his waistband. He reacts to any kind of sounds and looks immediately toward the sound origin; he just looks at there for a second and then moves on again. He may get older by next year or later on. His physical strength also proves this. When we arrive at their hideaway, he joins us without he pants.

Three floors of the building remained intact, but half of the third floor is ruined and there are so many windows in front of it. A big billboard is on the building, it is so big that it has made a single floor alone. The billboard is ruined completely and just its metallic body remained.

Nabidak and kidaton enter the building before us. A man is standing near the windowsill and looks outside. He has a normal face and the only distinction between him and others is his long white hair which come down to his shoulders. The wrinkles on his face, show that he has defeated in the fight with the time. He doesn't show any reaction to us as if we are just some invisible elf. When all four of us stop and stare at him, he says:

Is this your first mission? Even a blind man can see you in this darkness.

Nabidak sneers and says:

Of course not when you're here. What's up? Something new?

Kidaton goes toward the chair and sits on it, which makes sound and likely to break at any moment. Then fills a glass with water from a flask on the table, and says:

Only the blue soldiers don't know that here is our hideaway. We can't stay here anymore.

The old man, who I guess to be Parkad, turns to Nabidak. Midway, his eyes stop on me and Vorarin, as if he sees us just now. Then he says:

What's the matter?

Nabidak puts his knapsack in a corner and says:

Well..., leave it. Nothing happened?

Parkad still looks at me. He goes away from the windowsill and throws his binoculars toward Kidaton and says:

Well, don't you want to introduce these two guys to me?

Kidaton goes up a ladder which is behind the wall. It seems to be his turn to stand guard. Nabidak opens his knapsack and brings two cans out of it and says:

Right is Zairas and the left one, Vorarin.

Then he throws one of the cans to the Parkad. Nabidak gives a cough and says:

Hey boys do you want any?

Vorarin shakes his head and I say:

No, thanks. We've already had some snacks.

Finally, my patience runs out and I am constrained to sit near the door. I feel pain in my ankle, but with an enjoyable, but cold, breeze my mind becomes calm; it mitigates my breast, waist and back pains. Vorarin also sits by me and leans on the wall.

Parkad opens his can and becomes busy eating. A number of guns are arranged on the table. Three mattresses are also spread in a corner. While he is eating his food, Parkad points at us and asks:

Well, what are these two guys doing here?

Nabidak with a full mouth, but clearly, says:

They're new people of the group.

Parkad holds his spoon in front of his mouth and says in wonder and with wide open eyes:

New members?

Yea, Karisan sent them.

His words makes me wonder. I don't know how he knows we came here on behalf of Karisan. Parkad frowns and says:

why he sent them?

Nabidak smiles:

I guess they've letters of introduction in which you can find the reason.

Parkad stares at us, and nabidak's words suddenly remind me of the letters. So, I pull out the letter related to parkad and I give it to Nabidak. He looks at the back of the letter and then gives it to Parkad. He puts his can and spoon on the windowsill and becomes busy with reading the letter. His face doesn't change while reading the letter. Then he throws it into the oven. The letter burns slowly and joins the ashes in the oven.

Karisan has explained me everything in this letter. Although he knew that our group is complete, made this decision. You shouldn't do anything without consulting us. You shouldn't show any heroic act. This group, like any other group, has its own laws which you must respect.

Then he takes his can and says:

If you're tired now, find somewhere and take a rest. We'll talk to each other about the mission tomorrow.

Vorarin stands up and tries to prepare somewhere to sleep on. I don't know whether Karisan has not said anything about me or Parkard didn't care it. But he looks at me with appraising eyes once in a while. Maybe Karisan discussed

about my father with Parkad, but he didn't mention it. Certainly something is written about Vorarin too, but he even doesn't look at Vorarin.

Finally he eats the last spoon of his food and asks Nabidak:
What's up? They're still there?

Nabidak throws the emptied can aside and then says:

Yeah, they're still there. They stand guards from three directions in turn. Seems they don't want to give over.

Parkad, who also has finished his food, puts the can in a corner of the room and says:

Well, here would be under the sands by a week. Besides, they hope most for here. How many of them are there?

Finally Kidaton breaks his silence and says from above:

Thirty six. It seems another group supposed to join them. They haven't so much time. They began to searching the west part of the town yesterday. They are searching up to a range. Except for the west, there still remained the east and the north sides. Half of their force are searching around the regions they already searched.

Nabidak reaches out his legs on the table, rubs them and says:

What should we do? Do need we ask reinforcement?

Parkad gives the negative answer with his eyebrows and says:

No. No need to do this. They can't find it. If things go like this and wind blows faster, they can't search all over the town. Yet, we shouldn't underestimate them. They know their own job well. They search in the more likely regions and don't waste their time. Our plan is changed, we must find it before they do it.

Kidaton makes no objection but Nabidak says angrily:

What? Why? Why our plan changed? Is there any problem? They can't find it as easily as you think.

Parkad looks at outside through the window and says:

Karisan asked me to do this. The plan supposed to be this from the beginning, now it's sealed. We should talk about it tomorrow.

Nabidak winces and makes objection:

No, we can't do this. The situation is too bad now, they're everywhere and have guards all around the town. Surely they ask for reinforcements because of the weather conditions.

Kidaton also intervene from up the ladder and says:

We should do this from the beginning. But we're just passing days and nights in this hell.

Parkad adds:

Some strange things are happening that...

All of a sudden, his word reminds me of that three soldiers' talking. I cut his word immediately and say:

I'm not sure but I think the reds are also in the town.

Both stare at me but I can't see anything special in their face. They don't show wonder but Nabidak's face changes slightly.

How do you know it?

The manner he asks the question, reveals his hesitation.

Before I saw Nabidak, some soldiers were talking about the red group, they were saying that they've seen one of them and also their footsteps in the west side of the town and recently, they've seen them in this part of the town.

None of them makes his eyes wide open and not even ponder.

I knew that.

Nabidak confirms parkad with shaking his head and says:

This was clear but I don't know who was or were these spies who spread this news. This couldn't be happened after so many years.

Finally it would be unmasked. Now we must prevent it. We should reorganize the group. Surely we have a rat in the group who could fixed himself in our group like the roots of a tree into the earth and we can't find him easily.

Vorarine has spread two blankets on the floor and while he is watching their talks, stares at me once in a while. Some red root-like capillaries can be seen in his eyes, he seems slightly faint and yawns off and on. Parkad, while stretches his body, rises from the chair and says:

Nabidak I'm going to bed, I'm so tired. We'll talk about everything tomorrow. You stay a little bit here to be sure everything is ok.

Then he goes toward one of the blankets. Following him, Vorarin lies on another blanket immediately, without gets any permission. Nabidak sits on the chair instead of Parkad and stares at outside. I go toward Vorarin in the room which seems to be the only room in the building. Except for the blankets and two knapsacks, there is nothing in the room. I lie on the blanket and put the knapsack beside myself. Although the blanket is thick, the small and big rubbles torture my back. So I have to change my place a little.

The only sound which is heard is the wind which brings and pours some sands into the room and then goes away. Occasionally, the sound of Kidaton's footsteps which walks on the roof, or Nabidak who rises from the chair and walks because of rigidity of his legs are heard.

No sound is heard from Parkad. Even he seems not breathing. Karisan told me that when I reach hear, I would get

news about Mansidan. But now I am just in the middle of a big trouble. Sleep finally comes to me as for the others and embraces me as a snake entwines around its victim. I close my eyes and the last thing I hear is the sound of the wind which falls on my eyelids as a lullaby.

MOEIN MANSOORI FARD

The familiar strangers

Dark, light, dark, light, dark...

I wink my eyelids repeatedly and look over there carefully. Then I realize that the ceiling seems to me this way. Some pale white parts still can be seen on it. When some dust fall on my face from the ceiling, I realize that I am drowsy. I get up and sit, then empty the dust out of my mouth clumsily. Luckily, I closed my eyes in time but not about my mouth. I wipe my face up with my sleeve and look around.

Vorarin stares at me like the confounded people and doesn't move at all. He is still under the blanket and is slightly languid. Maybe he woke up because of my sudden movement. When everything seems calm to him, he backs into the blanket again and closes his eyes.

It is still cold and makes me tremble a little, but an angular light has illuminated inside the room. No sound can be heard. The incoming light through the windows and the walls, shows the floating dust particles in the air. They move slowly. I push the blanket aside and stand up with the help of the wall. Then I shake dust off my clothes to make it clean.

Hearing the sound of insignia, I read the message on its screen. I am asked to register my presence. I begin to do this and put my finger on the scanner and my eyes in front of it.

When I finish, put it on its place and suddenly my eyes meet Kidaton who lied by the wall. I don't know why I didn't see him. His left hand is on his head and he is drawing an imaginary figures in the air. Once in a while, he shakes his leg which he put it over the other one. I don't want to disturb him, but it is the best chance to give him the letter. I take the letter out of my knapsack and go to him. His eyes are closed and although he heard my footsteps, pays no attention to me.

Sorry...

His hand freezes in the air and then lands on his body. He opens his eyes and after a pause close them again. I consider it as his permission, so I say:

I have a letter from Karisan for you.

I hold the letter toward him and wait. Without opening his eyes, he reaches out his hand and takes the letter. Then he tears the edge of the envelope with his teeth, pulls the letter out with his lips and become busy with reading.

I get out the room both to not to disturb him reading the letter and also give Nabidak his letter. The chair is empty. The window through it parkad was looking at outside now is covered by the debris. Almost nobody can see inside from the outside. The entrance door is half opened. I go toward the door and look outside through it. It seems to me the sun has come out from his shelter completely.

I tremble when sunlight touches my body. Sunlight, although languidly, fondles me. I open the door to see the town under the sunlight, but suddenly a voice stops me:

Watch up!

The sound of paper crumpling is heard and then a sudden silence falls over. I don't need to reply and go out through the

door. I guessed correctly, the sun is seen fully; it looks like a magic which has changed everything.

Although the town is still mournful and lifeless, its eerie state is reduced. Those wandering ghosts who were roving in the town, now have crept into their nests. Passing the night away, those possessed buildings now are just some ruins. Dawning of the day, has disappeared the fog of darkness and town is now out of its shell.

The skin of the town has kept its own color and everywhere is still seen gray. The world destruction can be seen easily under the sunshine. There is no intact building; all have collapsed and ruined. It seems they sank in silence since many years ago. As far as the eye can reach, there is no building higher than ten-story, but the extended iron beams up to the sky show that they were skyscrapers once upon a time.

No form of life can be seen here. The streets and the alleys are just the passageways and crossings for the wind. No sound can be heard but the sound of collapsing and falling walls which break the law of silence of many years.

My eyes look around to find something significant. Both Nabidak and Parkad are out of sight. Our group base is hidden behind a dam of houses. In this position the probability of being seen by the enemy is too low. For this reason, I go to the other side of the building and suddenly I see a broad street in which, like a crack in the ice, a big gap is seen.

I am at a distance of a building from the street, yet I can see its detail easily. Like a disemboweled stomach, all of its inner components are visible. Waste water pipes are like the broken bones. The channels containing wires are also visible. Like a mass grave, there are a number of cars into it. Their

colors are faded and their body rusted. I can see a bus among them.

There is also a hole in the middle of an intersection in which a building has collapsed and joined to the dead buildings. All of a sudden, these signs remind me of something. I turn back and see the building in which the last night event occurred. It is exactly opposite of our base. Except for the first floor, all other floors are visible.

I am staring at there that suddenly I feel the presence of someone from behind. My muscles become constricted but I return spontaneously. I see Nabidak who aimed his gun at me. I can't recognize the mood on his face because of the weakness which has engulfed my body. He lower his gun immediately and says:

You should be aware of all around. Is there any problem?

I shake my head and pull out the letter:

No, no problem. I just have a letter from Karisan for you.

He takes the letter in wonder and opens it immediately. At first, his eyes pass over the words slowly but then gradually they move more quickly on the letter. He seems worry and looks around, as if an oracle would come to help him.

Hasn't Parkad returned yet?

At the same time, a shadow jumps down from the opposite building. Having this much motion is slightly more for his age. If anyone else were him, he would walk with the help of a cane or at least he would rest at home.

Let's go in, we should begin the mission. We've not much time.

His tone is a little husky and formal, but a kind of affability can be seen in his face, or maybe it only seems to me. He creates a pleasant calmness in one's heart. He enters the

hideaway before us and sits on his own chair. Then he takes off his flask and drinks some water.

Soon after Kidaton sees us, he rises and wakes Vorarin up with a soft kick. Vorarin gets up immediately, goes toward his knapsack, pours some water on his face and then stands by me. He is a little dozy but his face is brighter than last night. Kidaton leans on a wall which is slanted and says:

Well, what's up? How's the situation?

Parkad drinks the last gulp and wipe off his mouth with his sleeve:

They're everywhere innumerable. They took control of the situation, as I guessed. As far as it's possible, we should not enter from the main door.

Nabidak also sits on the ruined wall and says thoughtfully:

Parkad, if we do this, they may suspect and we lose the chance of burying the town under the sands. They've time to be sure if they see us, then...

Kidaton uses Nabidak's pause and continues:

Maybe we couldn't do our mission and they find it before us.

Parkad confirms their words by closing his eyes, and says:

I know that its risk is high but it's as dangerous as if we can't find it. We should move and act prudently.

Suddenly I remember A-4 and A-5. I have forgotten them completely because of the recent happenings.

We still have two other people. I think our work would be easier with their help.

Parkad replies me just with a single look, opens his mouth to continue but suddenly the door opens and two men appear.

While lifting his eyebrows, Parkad rises from the chair and asks:

What're you doing here?

The man who is one step ahead of the other one, says:

We had to leave there.

Then he moves aside for his coworker to come in and stand by him. Parkad asks him colly:

What for? What happened?

The first one, without any attention to me, maybe because Vorarin is in front of me and disturbs his sight, darts a quick look at Vorarin, puts their knapsacks in a corner, goes toward one of the empty chairs and sits:

Things went for the worse there. If we didn't leave there, surely they would find us. They are searching there inch by inch.

Kidaton moves away from the wall, frowns and says:

Who?

The second man folds his arms and replies instead of the first one:

Except for the blue group, the reds also have entered. They work and help each other like brothers.

Nabidak places his elbows on his knees.

What do you mean?

The first man lifts his right eyebrow, unfold his arms and says:

They mind their own business and don't disturb each other. It is like they don't see each other. Each goes on his own way and they do their things.

His manner is so familiar to me. I have seen this too many times. I look at him carefully may I place him. He has a rather long beard and mustache, his shoulders are covered by his long hair. Although his beard shows him older than his age, when I look at the skin of his face and also his body, I realize

that he is not older than twenty five or six. His eyes are absolutely black and his appearance and his hair seem disheveled. Dirt makes his hands seem coarse and all of his clothes are pallid. His face is very familiar but I can't place him. I dart a look at his comrade, maybe I know this one. But he seems completely stranger to me. Nabidak gives a sneer and says:

God grant they remain this way to the end.

The first man adds:

You can see one blue or red soldier in each ten meters. However they struggled with each other several times, but they weren't so serious. Just some shoots but no one killed. I think we should embark on and get it out of here and look for it before they find it.

Parkad sits on his chair again and, as if nothing happened, says calmly:

We were talking about it too.

So, what's the decision?

Parkad relocates himself on the chair and lean on the backrest. Along with his movement, a groaning sound is heard from the chair. Then he strokes his beard and says:

They're everywhere. We can't enter through the main door. We should come in via the secret path, unless we would be in a big trouble.

Well, what's the plan now? What should we do?

Parkad says to Nabidak:

We're large in number so we can't move together. We should divide in four groups.

Everybody listens to Parkad in silence.

We'll keep our eyes on the region to consider the situation. Don't embark on any adventure unless you ensured.

Nabidak and Kidaton and those two men listen to these recommendations without enthusiasm; Vorarin and I are parkad's interlocutors.

There're three entrances. We should be ensured of all. They may be blocked. We shouldn't waste time.

He reaches out his hand to his knapsack and pulls a map out of it. Then he contemplates on it for a while and places it into the knapsack again and says:

Zairas and I will enter through the medial way. You two, get in via the last one. Vorarin and Nabidak, you stay by the first entrance and stand guard.

He points at those two stranger with his eyebrows.

Kidaton knows his job too. We should start just now.

All of a sudden my eyes meet the first stranger who stares at me. He struggles with himself and the state of his face changes. I also feel something special. He seems more familiar to me momentarily. Suddenly he skips and runs to me. I even haven't chance to wonder. He embraces me and holds me tight in his arms.

Damned, what're you doing here, man?

Then he releases me from his arms and looks at my face enthusiastically. His face hasn't changed at all and he just become manlier, so that if he shaves his beard maybe no change would be seen.

Saidan, what're you doing here?

With an ineffable happiness, he says:

Time changes our destiny, and I wasn't an exception too. You didn't say that what're you doing here?

I need your help.

When I come to myself, I realize my sound trills. I can't believe that Saidan, my best friend, is standing in front me. I

thank god continuously by my heart. Karisan was right. Probably Saidan knows where Mansidan is. Parkad rises from the chair without noticing us and puts his knapsack in the room.

Leave this conversation for later. Zairas and you Vorarin, come here.

There are three guns on the table. He places one of them under his waistband, and gives Vorarin the other one. I don't want leave Saidan. I have borne all of these difficulties just to see him. But he pushes me with his hands. Nabadak checks his gun to be sure that it works and is charged.

We've much time to chat, fellow.

He says that when he sees me going toward Saidan.

I should talk with you.

Saidan's friend approaches me with the steady steps and stops in front me with a smile:

Have you forgotten your old friends?

Is it you Brasen? You...you? What's going on here? Why? Why...?

I had never experienced this much distrust to my eyes. I feel I'm in the vacuity. He opens his arms and sinks me in his embrace.

I owe you an apology, for I left you alone. Forgive me...

I get out of his arms without any attention to his words and just stare at him and Saidan. They only smile at me dazedly.

Hey, cut it out. You'll see each other again. Leave it for another time, and put your knapsacks here.

Nabadak says this, as he takes his knapsack into the room.

An anxiety has aroused in my heart. I don't believe that I am standing by Saidan and Brasen. I never thought I meet them again. Those five fellows check their equipment and get

ready to go. Kidaton gets out sooner than others, but it seems that Parkad and Nabidak aren't in hurry; Parkad is searching into his knapsack and Nabidak is examining his gun.

Remember that whenever you find yourself in danger, do fire. Yet try no one be aware of our presence, but don't hesitate to shoot.

Parkad confirms Nabidak and says:

Our mission is not kidding and may anything happens. You may lose your life but you should do your job. If you're afraid, you can leave the group just now.

They say such a word just for us. Then Parkad stops searching and says:

Yeah, I found them. Turn off your insignia.

Then he throws two wireless sets toward us:

Simply enough you press its button.

Parkad fastens his gun around his waist and says after a deep breath:

I'm ready.

Landslide

Vorarin, following Nabidak, goes out through the door with a worried and nervous face. Parkad goes toward the door and says:

Hurry up! We should go.

Before we exit, Saidan puts his hand on my shoulder and says:

I know it's a little difficult but you'll get used to it. Take it easy.

Then gives a smile and says:

Good luck. See you.

He shakes his head and winks at me. I pound a soft fist on his arm and thanks him. Parkad opens the door and exits. I also get out after him. I hold my hand in front of my eyes involuntarily. I close my eyes and then open them slowly.

I see Vorarin's and Nabidak's footsteps which go away from where we are going to, with an angle of thirty degrees. I take my steps faster to reach Parkad, and walk by him. We enter calmly in an alley, or perhaps a rather broad street which is narrowed by collapsed buildings. In some parts, a wall has been made by the ruins. We enter a building in the midway and go up to the first floor through its stairs. Then we enter

another building via the debris which has turned into a bridge between the two buildings. We pass in silence all the way. I find it the best chance to release my mind from the confusion made by my questions. I hem to attract his attention and say:

What's going on here?

He stops at windowsill of the first floor and looks around:

What do you think?

I shrug and say:

I don't know, indeed.

In fact, I guessed it to some extent, but it is like an unproved theory; three groups are looking for something precious. He jump down through the window and moves on without he waits for me. Although the distance between the window and the ground is high, the collapsed and scattered debris make the distance less than it is. I jump on the debris, which has turned into the steps, and reach him.

What's my duty in the group?

A soundless smile appears on his lips:

You should do whatever we tell you.

When I see he parries my question, I become silent and walk beside him. We get out a building and enter another one; we pass our way street by street and roof by roof. On a roof, while observing around, suddenly he says:

Have you any glassy clothes? It would become stormy today.

Yeah, Karisan gave me and Vorarin glassy clothes.

What was your job?

Management, mostly in offices.

He sits on a half-ruined wall near the roof so that being out of sight, and find refuge under the shadow of the wall.

Karisan has explained about you a little. Are you Alandima's son?

I shake my head to confirm him. He says:

Finally we managed to meet you.

I ask with a false admiration:

Had you been in communication with my father?

As he stares at distance, sneers and says:

I know him as much as your age.

This time, I ask in real wonder:

Haven't I met you in my father's interment?

I am really a stranger to my father's friends. Maybe I was a hermit or...yes, I haven't seen nowhere but "Life" shelter. This is the first time that I leave there.

You'd better stay there. Everyone has been made for some particular work. You should have followed your father's way.

It was a big shelter and I couldn't manage it.

He replies me with his look, without saying a word. He stares at distance again. The meaning of his look is completely clear. It was exactly for five years that my father couldn't get out of his bed. I had to do all of the works of the shelter. Maybe all of the people saw me as owner of the shelter, but I wasn't be able to take even one step without my father's help.

Prolonging his sitting, I also sit. The sweat drops are waiting for a stream to join and fall. The earth, like a furnace, melts us into itself. No breeze blows, both to breaks the silence between us and cool me with the help of the sweat on my body.

What are we looking for, here? Where should we go?

Do you care?

Well...yeah!

Seems you don't know yet that you shouldn't be mouthiness. One may be there in downstairs and listens to our words. This is one of the many rules you should respect.

It is like I have fallen on a chess board, I don't know what I am, what should I do, and what is happening to me. I remain without motion and just look around. I think about the mission and kill the time until he lifts and reaches out his hand to his ear:

What happened, Kidaton?

I can hear Kidaton at this short distance from him and because the soft breeze makes no noise:

I'm just now in the position, but there's a problem.

What happened?

You yourself must see it.

He pauses and then says:

I can't talk anymore. Reach me soon.

Then his voice cuts off completely. Parkad rises immediately and says:

We should make haste.

He looks around for a while, then we come down through the next building. We come in a broad street and move forward from the edges. The roadbed is covered by sands thoroughly and our footsteps make tracks, but Parkad doesn't care; he takes steps continuously.

We go on through the buildings. After a short walk, Parkad stops suddenly and changes the path. We enter a narrow alley which is made by collapsed buildings. Part of here has ceiling. At the end, we reach a three or four story building.

You get in from here and I'll enter from the other side. Be quiet and don't make any sound. Go slowly as you can. Hold

your gun in your hand and be ready to fire. I'll get in a little bit after you.

Then he wends to where he mentioned. It is all clear that he send me in as a prey to be sure there is safe. I enter through a hole on a wall. Then I find myself in a room which three other walls is intact. I pull out my gun and reach the door by the wall. I hold on the edge of the door frame and appraise the other side through a hole on the wall. No one and even no shadow is seen.

Half of the building has collapsed and there is no stairs. Just a little space is available. Almost everywhere is covered by the collapsed walls and debris. I encourage myself pressing my hands all over the gun and get out of my hole like a rat.

No one appears in front of me and no sound is heard. Everywhere is calm and I just can hear my footsteps on the floor. When I look around, I find out that nobody can be in the ground floor. The only entrance is that room.

The building is just like a cripple one who if try to rise, would lose his balance and falls on a side. The flexion of the building is visible from this angle clearly, it is like an elbow.

I wait for a while, but nothing happens. I should find a way to next floor. All of a sudden my eyes meet the debris which is like a stairs, like the huddled masses of lava, which is made by collapsed part of the ceiling and formed a stairs to the upper floor. I go up slowly over them which are not equal in size and height and reach to the second floor.

Continuous bending, makes pain in my breast and stomach. Here is like the lower floor, but with a more limited space. The ruined part of this floor is more but its stairs, despite of losing some steps, seems safe and intact. I manage to reach the last floor, although I have to jump from one step

to the other and tolerate my ankle pain. Although the flexion of the building is not too much, its gradient causes off balance. Like a mountain in which the more you become close to its top, the less become its diameter, here also is remained just a room in the last floor. Because of the gradient of the building flexion, debris of the collapsed walls are gathered in a corner; one almost needs to leap to pass through. Suddenly I meet someone who is looking through his binoculars. I don't know why I didn't see him. I come to myself and hold my gun toward him.

Your action is too weak. Your promptitude would throw you in at deep end.

His white hair introduces him to me sooner than his words. Like me, he also bended forward to walk and he is looking around through his field glasses.

Be careful about the middle of the room, its floor is loose.

I follow his recommendation and go toward him. There is a wide region in front of us, but so many buildings block our sight, yet a small part is in our sight entirely. In Parkad's spying direction, there is a seven or eight-story building. It is at a distance of one hundred meters from us and seems almost intact.

Kidaton, I'm now in the position, what's the problem?

A weak hiss is heard, then a weak voice says:

Look at between the main building and M-3, you'll find out.

Parkad turns and goes toward the other side of the room and looks outside through the window. I can't see his face, but he takes his head out of the window, stares at a point and saying no, he shows me something bad happened.

Damn! What's happened there?

Kidaton replies from the other side:

Earth's subsided.

When?

Nothing was happened by yesterday.

I go toward the window and look outside too. At a distance almost fifty meters from here, land has subsided and sank everything in itself. Buildings, like the wrecked ships, are huddled in the hole. The squashed cars are also seen among them. The buildings around the hole are affected by the subsidence and are slightly leaned.

Well, what should we do now, Parkad?

He stares at that point dumb stricken and shows no reaction. Kidaton repeats his question. Parkad, without stops looking there, says:

Where's Nabidak?

They're also in the position. Exactly in Y-junction, I mean the same branched roads which is thoroughly destroyed.

You mean the entrance is completely destroyed? Is it impossible to reach there?

Kidaton makes a pause and then says:

I don't know, but half of the road destroyed. Yet the other half remained intact. More likely, of course, its entrance may buried under the debris, or may not. If we intended to get in from there, we should find it first.

Parkad, while again stares at a point with a worried face, says:

We must find it. It's too bad. They may find the entrance. Reach there quickly, kidaton. We shouldn't lose time. Inform Nabidak too.

He hangs his field glasses from his neck and hide it under his raincoat:

Hurry up! We should move. Our path to there is closer. Come on, shake a leg! We have no time.

He reach downstairs and I follow him immediately.

Get ready! From here and then your gun should be in your hand. Be careful!

I prepare my gun and follow him who takes step non-stop.

Move on by me. when you feel danger, you should part from me. Each one who is caught, the other shouldn't risk his life to save him. Got it?

I shake my head, then we move on in silence.

We go on our way through the ruins and hide ourselves in a corner, off and on. Although Parkad takes step calmly, he turns his head around and watches the dead buildings. We pass by the edges and move forward through the buildings like rats. We take step slowly lest make noise.

Our group are just these people?

He turns back as he walks and looks at me. Then, again, his eyes search around:

Why, any problem?

No, I meant is this number enough to perform the mission?

He jumps over an obstacle, stops at a door and looks around.

Yes, it's enough.

Then he enters the street and I follow him. We go through a short distance to enter the buildings again. But, after passing through a building, we come in the street again.

We go on our way under the sunshine. The sun is almost in the middle of the sky and over our heads. It works continuously like a furnace. The wind is still on strike, even a grain of sand can't be seen flying in the air. We are just like

the lizards which are creeping and move forward. Walking under the sunshine, has made my body hot as if I am on a fire.

Silence on one hand, and hit from the other hand made me confused and distressed. My eyes become dim and black. Streams of sweat are flowing on my face like a water fall, and my body is sticky all over. Once in a while, a bended building or a tall wall save us from the energy carrier particles. Finally, we enter a building. Parkad sits breathless on a ruined step of upper floor, and while he wipes his brow with his sleeve, says:

Damn! We are nearly roasted in this air.

He looks at his watch and says:

Finally its life ran out.

He taps on the watch several times and cleans its glass with his sleeves. Then he puts it on his ear to be sure, and listens to its heart beat; but he shakes his head hopelessly, breathe a sigh and takes it off from his hand, looks at it under the light and then throw it aside and says nervously:

Its battery is scarce and isn't obtained at all. What time is it?

I press a button on my watch to read the time.

About eleven, two or three minutes is left.

He looks outside through the ruined part of the wall. Then he says:

Turn on your insignia and set it on radar mode.

So I take out my insignia and turn it on. I enter in specifications section and turn on the acceptance option. Then I look at him to perform the next order, but he still looks outside. I account his inattentiveness for the end of the orders and I wait. I guessed correctly. He says nothing and I wait.

Once in a while, I look at the insignia display and outside in turn until I see a new name on the display:

R-1-----position: within a 20-meter radius

Mission: cancelled

Acceptance: accordant

Fingerprint confirmation: two hours ago

He is certainly from another group, because his name is different from us. It may be the reason why Parkad is looking outside, and he is waiting for someone. But, however, I should tell him the matter:

Someone is detected by radar, he seems to be from another group.

He even doesn't turn his head toward me. Maybe he told me to turn on my insignia to be sure of R-2 presence or guiding him to here. The distance of R-2 becomes lesser and he comes close to us. I decide to turn off the insignia that suddenly a message appears on the display:

End of appointed time. You must rescan your fingerprint. In the case of disobedience, the set would be destroyed in less than two minutes.

This is the same message that woke me up this morning. I push aside the rear door of the insignia and put my finger on its screen. My fingerprint is confirmed with a soft beep. Then an acknowledgement message appears on the display for performing the order. When the message disappears, I see the R-2 who is at a distance of just two meters from us. I exit the acceptance option on the insignia and then turn it off. I stay where I am standing and look at the point which Parkad is looking.

A slim and tall man enters. His face is full of hair and his beard hang down to his breast. His hair is disheveled and he dressed in tatters. He seems to be saved from fighting with a lion. Although he is white-skinned, only his eyes are seen white in his dark face. His toes are visible through the cuts on his boots. He has used the wires instead of bootlace. His raincoat has turned into a shirt as well.

Seeing Parkad, he puts his gun under his waistband. Then he opens his mouth happily and says:

You don't know how happy I am that I see human again!

Parkad moves his lips slightly but there is no affection on his face.

Henceforth you'll see human as you wish.

The new member laughs but soon after he sees me, although his smile doesn't change, he assumes an air of caution. He asks Parkad by moving his eyebrow toward me, to introduce me. Parkad darts a look at me and says:

He's Alandima's son.

The new member, as a wolf looks his prey, stares at me dumb stricken. He surveys me unbelievably but like a mad whose behavior is unpredictable, begins to laugh and says:

Alandima's son? Well, finally I met you. What was your name? Wait a minute, I'd remember, what? What was? Sa... no, no. Sia... no, no!

Parkad helps him:

Zairas.

The new member confirms Parkad like a cock-a-hoop child:

Yeah, that's it! You know, I was sure that I'll finally meet you some day.

Then he pauses for a while and says:

What're you doing here?

Parkad replies him:

He's in our group now.

The new member frowns. I don't know what is going on in his head. It seems to him a little strange that he sees me here, I guess. He seems to me an interesting man, I like his manner. He has a pleasant face and I feel comfortable with him.

I'd better introduce myself. I'm Jonadin. It's true our group names are different but as a whole, we're in one single group. You can count on me, whenever you need help just tell me.

Finishing Jonadin's word, Parkard interferences:

Enough for now. The situation has changed completely. You should do whatever you can.

Jonadin's face assumes an air of serious:

What happened? I reach here soon after received your message. If you'd sent later, I wouldn't have been in the town anymore.

The plan's changed. We need your help.

Jonadin's face assumes an air of wonder and his eyes become wide open:

The plan has changed? What're you telling about?

Parkad shows him the random-made chair of debris:

We should return the "fire".

Jonadin makes a pause while he is sitting and says:

What?

Parkad hold out his hand to stop him and says:

I know, but we should do this. It seems the location of the fire is betrayed. But it remains to be seen. However, we should proceed as soon as possible. Karisan also asked us this.

May it be because of the reds and blues groups?

Parkad folds his arms and shakes his head.

Well, what should we do now?

Parkad taps on the back of his arm with his forefinger and, while staring at the floor, says:

We must find the fire and get it out before them.

So, what're you waiting for?

He intimates with his look that he is asking me too. Parkad again folds his arms and says:

There's a problem. Three entrances to the building are destroyed. Land has subsided just there and all of the ways are ruined. They may find a way to get in there at any moment.

Maybe the main entrance is blocked.

Parkad shakes his head and says:

We can't take a risk. It may be not blocked. If the entrance is available, it makes our job easier, unless we're facing with a big problem.

Their faces are confused and nervous. It is clear from their words that we should keep something away from those two groups. I am happy that I have finally found out something, but the event which is likely to happen, makes me worry. The imagination of being shot and having a bullet on my body, trembles me.

If the entrance is blocked we are facing with a big problem, and just remains one way, that is, we do enter through the main door of the building. There we would also encounter difficulties, because that point is in the middle and it's hard to pass.

Parkad shakes his head and says:

I informed the group and asked them to reach there. They should be in the location now. We should join them too. Our

only hope is the same secret way, unless you know another way which we don't know.

Jonadin shakes his head and says:

I search all over there but I couldn't find any way to enter and to get out.

Parkad puts and pushes his hands on his knees and rises:

Well, now we should move.

What about the plan?

Jonadin asks this while rises from the random-made chair.

Now, we should just join the group. We have no time, I'll explain on the way.

Parkad moves ahead of us and enters the ruined street which the collapsed buildings have made a ceiling over it. Jonadin asks me to follow him with his hand signal. He reaches Parkad and takes step by him. I just follow them from behind.

It is cooler under the shadow and a soft breeze is blowing now. With the beginning of the wind blowing, houses again are howling. Sands are floating in the air. A small whirlwind passes in front us off and on, and once in a while collapsing a part of the buildings catches our eyes. Both of them move on cautiously and monitor around carefully. Time passes in silent until we reach the end of the street and then Parkad stops and says:

Where did you see the red group?

He hide himself in a dent in the wall and peeps around through a hole on the wall. Jonadin reaches a burnt lorry off the street and looks around through its load grate, and I hide myself behind a ruined wall.

Near the main building. They didn't bother to hide themselves.

Maybe they arrived recently. As Zairas and Saidan said, the blue group heard from the red group newly. Yet we are on red alert. We have to act in time and prudently, nevertheless it remains just that way...let's go, nobody is there.

Jonadin shakes his head to confirm and we move again. We cross the street and enter the metro station which is along with the street. The escalators have been slept since many years ago, the tiles of the walls are unstuck and have covered the stairs along with the collapsed ceiling. All of the fluorescent tubes on the ceiling are broken and their wires are hung from them. The inner space has a strange color and looks like a clothes which have been left under the sunshine for a long time. Unlike the town atmosphere, it doesn't make me a good feeling, although some color can be seen here.

We go down the stairs slowly. The sound of breaking tiles under our feet echoes through the building. The side stairs is cleaner to some extent. As we go down, the light from the back reveals something strange in front us. A small door is in the middle and a wall of bars, tires, wires, iron beams, is made around it to prevent others from entering, and also to be a support for the door. The empty space between them is so small that only a hand can pass through it. This is just like a trench with barbed wires around it, but its door is open.

Parkad enters before us. This time Jonadin waits for me to enter first, then he gets in. I expect to see nowhere but here is light. The broken windows on the ceiling toward the sky and also the holes on the right side wall, make here bright.

As I guessed, here also has suffered changes caused by humans. The waiting hall of the station are partitioned and made some rooms, and an oven can be seen in each. There are some empty cans everywhere, some old chairs and tables, the

picture frames on the walls, some threadbare and dusty cloth and rugs, kettles, and broken dishes. In some rooms there are also wardrobe and bedding.

In addition to soil, cement and plaster, cloth and nylon are also used in the track of the walls. Some of them are arranged acock. Some ruined and some are left halfway. These are the rooms in which the refugees were living, and now dust has replaced them and is the permanent resident of these rooms. The wind also visits here once in a while.

Sand has covered everywhere like the snow and in some parts has made some high and low hills. Like the path which is made by frequent passing of the cars, there is a narrow way caused by passing people, but is less visible; wind has cleaned its track.

Parkad and Jonadin pass by them inattentively and reach the railroads and wagons through the path in the sands. Wagons have been changed into a residential region. All of the windows are covered by some pieces of wood and iron. The barrels are unfolded and used as doors of the wagons. Although the railroads are intact, some wagons have derailed. When I pass by a wagon which one of its window is open, I find out that all of appurtenance are detached and ejected and it is turned into a house. Most of the furniture which is needed for a house, can be seen here. Between the wagons and the walls there are still some ropes which were used for drying the clothes.

Parkad and jonadin take steps on the rails and move ahead along the tunnel and near the wagons. Although the wagons line still continues, wagon-houses are just in the waiting hall, and as we proceed they disappear from our sight.

You said that we have only one way? What's that?

Parkad looks at Jonadin and after a pause says:

In case of the entrance isn't blocked, two of us should enter and get the fire out. The rest of the group would wait for interfere if any problem appears. Of course it's just my view and depends on the conditions.

And if it's blocked?

Our plan may change but then it would be too hard for us. These two groups hung around here so they smelled that the fire should be somewhere around here.

Do we need inform thunderbolt-2 or another group? This way we may do our work easier and more confidently.

No, time doesn't allow this and most importantly, few persons make few difficulties. We should only act correctly and planned.

Then he looks at me as if he has a definite intention:

Their large number is just because they don't know the exact place of the fire. They've a little time to find it. We have an ace for the nonce, that is, we know where it is and...

All of a sudden Parkad reaches his hand to his waist and brings his wireless set from under his raincoat.

Hey parkad, we are now in the position, where're you?

In the metro station. I found Jonadin. We'll be there by ten minutes. Where's Kidaton?

Just a minute!

The sound cuts off for a short time, and then Nabidak says:

He's here too.

How's things going on?

Again, the sound cuts off for a short time.

As I see from here, the metro is completely safe. Nobody is about there. But here, the blue soldiers are innumerable. The

subsided land attracted them too much. All is for that damned building which is betrayed.

What about the reds?

No, they still hide themselves. Just the blue group have imposed the martial law and do whatever they wish. It's not important for them to be seen and they're searching severely. Kidaton said that when he was coming here, the blue soldiers were searching the north side of the subsided region. They're likely to reach here by evening, if they wouldn't change their plan, and then, they'll find the way to get in.

Saying this words, all of us go pale. I, who don't know anything about these events, feel quite overcome by fear.

Look, as you're in metro station and the subsidence has occurred exactly near you, I think you can find the entrance easier than us.

Now I find out the origins of lights which come from the right side wall; there are so many holes across the metro which allow the light comes inside. All of a sudden, Parkad runs the rest of the way until he reaches the part in which half of the metro is ruined along with the subsidence. Its height is the same as for the tunnel, and its length is almost three meters.

He goes on to the edge of the hole and looks at inside. Jonadin joins him, and I approach there slowly and stop at a distance of one step from them. Although my eyes got used to the light, it still annoys them. I close and press my eyelids, then after several winking, look outside. Suddenly I feel overcome by fear and my knees sag. It gives me vertigo and my eyes go black. I go back two steps involuntary and lean on the wall. Although I kept distance from there, I can see the view of the other side clearly. There are so many pipes and

sewage canals on the wall of the hole. Some iron beams also emerged from the walls.

I overcome my fear and go closer. The height of the hole is about forty meters with a radius of one hundred meters. It is really huge. Again I feel emptiness and I have to put my hand on parkad's shoulders. He pays no attention to me and still stares at the hole.

The north side of the hole is filled up to the half by debris of the collapsed buildings but the south part of the hole, in which the secret way passes through, is still empty. In addition to the collapsed buildings into the hole, the pavements of the road and some pieces of rusted metals also can be seen. My eyes begin to look for in the south side of the hole. I don't know that is the anxiety which prevents me from seeing the things, or I really haven't seen it. I decide to begin searching again but Parkad and Jonadin make it easy for me. I follow their view direction until I see a black squarish spot on the wall of the hole.

Damn! It's completely visible. I wonder why they haven't seen it yet.

Jonadin confirms him and says:

Nabidak is right, they'll find it by evening.

Parkad replace his wireless set under his waistband and says:

We should go.

He takes his steps fast and move ahead nonstop. I feel that my soul returns to my body again, since I get away from the horrible hole. I go on the rest of the way in silence until we reach the place the ceiling has collapsed and has made an upward stairway. Parkad go up through it immediately, but takes care at the end of it and before he passes the last step,

looks around carefully. Then he signals us with his hand to go up. Jonadin asks me to go first. I go up the stairs with the help of my hands and stand by Parkad. He is looking around like an eagle. His eyes moves fast from one building to another one:

We should reach that building.

MOEIN MANSOORI FARD

Chapter 20

The encounter

He points at a three-story building which is at a distance of about ten meters from the hole. From here which we standing on, there is no much distance to there, in less than five minutes we would reach that point. I pass this distance in silence. The more we become close to that building, the more visible becomes the secret entrance. No part of the wall of the hole is slop but this part which has a gradient of fifty degrees and can be seen from everywhere; just like a crosscut of a watermelon. Its surface can be seen from each side. We stop at the building with Parkad's hand signal. He looks around and then takes out his wireless:

Nabidak, we are in the ground in front of the building. Come soon.

As the footstep is heard from the other side, Nabidak says:

We're coming.

We enter the building with other sign of Parkad's hand and stop at the entrance door. He finds a place and sits on. Jonadin leans on the wall, and I just stay somewhere near the door.

There is a counter in the right side of entrance which still can be seen the written word "*Information*" on a signboard above it. Half of the counter is burnt and there is nothing behind it. There are so many shops inside the building which

all of their showcases are broken and all of the goods inside them are stolen. Maybe one says it in other words, that is, people seized the goods because they were waifs.

Now the footsteps of two people is heard who are coming down. The sound is heard from the stairs at the end of the hall. A sound of dragging leg on the ground also can be heard from the outside. It can be guessed easily that who they are.

Finally, the sounds come so close that Nabidak and Vorarin from the end of the hall, and Kidaton from the entrance door appear at the same time. Kidaton stands near me without saying any word. Approaching these two, Nabidak's face assumes an air of anxious. Seeing me, Vorarin's face muscles begin to shake and, although he doesn't smile, I can see the happiness in his face. When Nabidak stops, Vorarin stands near him and looks at the new member, Jonadin.

What's your decision, Parkad?

Nabidak gets down to the brass stack.

We have no choice but getting the fire out.

Is there any necessity for getting it out now? If you were intended to bury it under the sands, there was a better way to do it. You should just told me, then I would set there in fire and everything was destroyed. Still now we can do it and be rid of it forever.

Jonadin says this straightaway and without any anxiety. I, although not knowing about the fire, agree with him too; that is, as they haven't ever care about getting out the fire from here, now, again they can ignore doing this easily. All, except for me and Vorarin, look at Jonadin strangely, as if he has done something wrong.

What then? What's in it that made it so important?

Kidaton moves his eyebrow toward him and says to Parkad:

Didn't you tell Jonadin about it yet?

Parkad rubs his face and says:

It doesn't matter now. We'll tell him later. Jonadin, you know down there well, don't you?

Jonadin laughs and says:

You know, I'm living here for six months, if I'm not wrong! I didn't leave there even a day.

Parkad, sank in his thoughts, says:

Good enough!

Nabidak frowns and narrows his eyes:

What's your plan, Parkad?

We haven't time more than by this evening, that is, less than six hours. We can't take any risk. Our biggest problem is the land subsidence, which if it didn't happen, we wouldn't have these problems. This event made a big problem for us. As the entrance become visible, our problems began, unless we had about one week and we could get the fire out from here without any problem and easily.

Everyone listens to him carefully.

We have to send two guys down there to get it out.

Then he looks at all and asks in wonder:

Where're Saiden and Brasen?

Kidaton says:

They'll come. Well, one of those two guys is Jonadin and who's the next?

Although he doesn't look at no one, his tone shows he is asking all of us. Nabidak and Jonadin both look at Kidaton, but Parkad just stares at his opposite wall.

Are you sure, Parkad?

It seems that Nabidak is still in doubt. Parkad shakes his head decisively and says:

Yeah.

Well. We're ready. What should we do with this situation?

Finally, Parkad averts his eyes from the wall and, while looking at the faces of all members of the group, says:

Six of us should stay outside to be help in case of need. Two other should go down there to bring the fire. As Kidaton said, one of them is Jonadin.

Jonadin makes no objection and just waits for the rest of Parkad's words.

I'll go with him.

Kidaton says this decisively as he leaned on the wall and folded his arms.

No, we need you, Kidaton. If we weren't constrained, I wouldn't send Jonadin there too. Whoever goes down there, can't do anything. He would be just like a soldier without gun. Those two who go down, just should bring the fire out. Those who stay outside are the key persons.

My body trembles with the look which Parkad darts at me and Vorarin.

We need the experienced and strong persons and we can't lose one by sending him down there. The one who goes down with Jonadin, should help him. All of the group members can help Jonadin and this isn't a hard work.

I realize his purpose completely. Vorarin is shocked too and looks at me dumbstruck.

Zairas will go down with Jonadin.

It is near I open my mouth and say "why me?" but I come to myself and I don't say anything. It seems that all are satisfied with this decision and say nothing. I have to enter

that hole. I feel a sucker set in my stomach and its power is set on maximum. The thought of I should go five meters down into the hole to reach the entrance of the secret way, makes me gulp my saliva repeatedly. The last night event enforces this fear and stings the scars left from that event.

Well, where should we be positioned?

Parkad replies Kidaton:

In the main building.

Parkad rises and goes toward a hole on the left side of the entrance door and stares at outside. Nabidak, as watches Parkad's going, says:

Well, who'll stay here? We can't leave here all together.

We'll burst here.

All of us look at Parkad and then we look at each other.

What do you mean? This way we block the bolt hole for Zairas and Jonadin and the blast would inform the others.

Parkad still looks outside as if he searches for something.

Nabidak, I still wonder why they haven't found here yet, or maybe they'll find here later. The probability finding here is ninety percent.

Imagine, when we are in main building and one group finds here, then there would be no way to get out and both Jonadin and Zairas would stuck.

We can wait for them here, but no, we can't risk. They may be many in number.

Kidaton, while relocates the sands with his foot, says:

How do you want to burst the entrance?

Jonadin puts his knapsack on the ground and brings out two palm size black boxes and as he shows them to others, says:

Don't worry, when I was gathering my outfits, I took these too. If you need any martial things, just tell me.

Parkad still looks outside and stares at a point momentarily. Nabadak looks him suspiciously. In my opinion, too, Parkad doesn't behave as usual.

All hide away!

All of a sudden, each of us searches and finds somewhere to hide, like the raided sheep. All hide ourselves behind the pillars or the walls. I take one step backward and get into a dent in the wall. There is no partitive rib on the wall in my left side and just the right side wall hides me from the entrance view. I can see Parkad easily, as he bent under a hole, keeps himself close to the wall and is silent. Jonadin hid behind the entrance door, Kidaton behind the counter, and Vorarin in the shop. But I can't see Nabadak.

Then I hear the footsteps of three persons who are approaching the building from behind. They seem to be talking to each other but I hear them unclearly. The sound of their footsteps shows that they take step a rather slowly. As it seems, they pass by the hole in which Parkad hid, and go toward the entrance door.

Hush! Nobody move!

I realize that Nabadak hid himself behind a pillar, near Vorarin.

No...that's right...yes... yes sir...

As they come closer, their voices become clearer. I see Parkad's hand taking the gun off his back and releases the safety lock. I press my gun in my hand.

The land has subsided here, if there was anything here now it should be destroyed.

Mr. Lasfor is right, sir.

The third one who seems to be their chief, says calmly:

Keep your eyes open for every move around.

The first voice, Lasfor, says persistently:

We already searched here but we found nothing. Now that it has subsided so it can't be here. We'd better don't waste time here.

It's true that we didn't find anything here, but now subsiding the land we may find something.

Then I hear just one footstep still walking. It seems the two other are standing:

What do you mean, Baltin?

From the footstep I find out their chief, Baltin, stops and says:

We're horsing around. It's true their plan is revealed but they tried to pull our legs by the word "Hotel".

You mean all was false? There's no hotel at all?

Lasfor's voice shows he is slightly shocked at this news.

No, the hotel exists.

Why don't you speak clearly?

Baltin sneers and says:

The word hotel is just a word to attract all's attention; but you should get in from somewhere else. This way all look for the hotel and no one can't find there.

Lasfor, as his tone shows that he doesn't agree with him, says:

How do you know the hotel is here?

Baltin again sneers and says:

Since there is nowhere in this town that three hotels be in a line, and if you add an office building to the top of this line, there would be the figure of a flower.

Who said that?

Baltin pays no attention to Lasfor's question and says:

We should search for the secret way.

The third soldier who kept silent heretofore, says:

But the blue soldiers are checking the region. They might have found there by now.

Baltin again with the same calmness and self-confidence says:

Maybe, but they're searching just for a hotel, and not for a secret underground way. By the way, they are searching in the north side, while the secret way should be in the south part. They don't know about the secret way and are searching just for sure. Maybe they reach here by chance.

Lasfor says hesitatively:

Well, if this secret way exists and we'll find it, then what can we do threesome?

In case of we find there, we'll inform our group but we'll act according to the plan I already devised.

What plan?

Baltin, who seems plagued by so many questions, his voice assumes an air of serious:

It's enough!

The sound of a deep breath is heard and then the owner of the voice, that is Lasfor, says:

Yes sir, where should we begin?

From here, in front of this building.

Hearing this, all of my hair stand on end. They will find there just by first look. Those three soldier move on and all of a sudden Parkad gets out quickly through the door and goes toward them. kidaton changes his place and stands opposite of

the Jonadin, in the other side of the door. I get out of the dent too. Vorarin comes to me but he is silent and seems is waiting for the happenings in outside. Parkad, as he gets out through the door, moves on slowly. Suddenly those three footsteps cut off and I hear the chink and clang sound of their equipment, and their guns which seem they aimed at him.

I find a small hole on the wall which through it I can see Parkad and also those three soldiers. He is standing in front of them armless. They dressed in red uniforms and, like the blue group, have masks on their faces. The one who is in the right side, lowers his gun and says:

Where're the rest of your group?

From his voice I find out he is Baltin. Although he lowers his gun, he doesn't sheathe it. The two other soldier still aim at Parkad, without even move their guns a little.

What're you doing here?

He shrugs his shoulders:

What do you think?

Parkad lifts one of his eyebrows and while narrows his other eye, says:

Do you forget you underwrote some papers?

Baltin gives a sneer and says:

Did we contrary to those papers? Did my people anything wrong?

Your people are dying of hunger.

This isn't my will.

You were supposed to make a camp for help.

My people can cope with their problems.

All of a sudden, I see baltin who turns to the secret entrance. His eyes can't be seen under his mask. He, again, turns his head to Parkad. Although the secret way is hidden

from his point of view, Parkad's presence probably made him a rather suspicious.

When their chief can't cope with his people, we can't expect they could.

Their chief is trying to do better jobs.

Parkad frowns:

Hide-and-peek game?

Baltin utters a derisive laugh:

It worths playing. Maybe I can say "I see you" before the others.

Be ready, boys. We should interfere. Keep your eyes on me. When I told you, Jonadin and Zairas would go toward Parkad through the entrance door. Vorarin and kidaton would enter with me from behind.

Everyone confirms either saying "ok" or shaking heads, and waits.

Now! Go! Hurry up!

Nabidak says this slowly with a tone of bawling and makes me come to myself, so my feet guide me to the door. My feet are like the preprogrammed computers, they do their job automatically. I lift my gun to be able to aim at easily. I run toward Parkad, behind Jonadin. Nabidak, Vorarin and kidaton besiege them from behind. All of a sudden, Saidan and brasen appear from back of the wall and stand by those three. All stare at each other in silence and hold their guns toward the rivals. No one reacts. Baltin looks at all and says:

I'll back.

Then he sheaths his gun and moves and says his people:

Let's go.

He passes through Nabidak and Vorarin and disappears behind the building.

Chapter 21

The entrance

We should hurry up, Parkad. They'll return.

I can find out the depth of Nabidak's anxiety. It is enough they back with more people, then we will lose both our life and the fire.

Zairas, Jonadin! Be ready.

We go to the top of the secret entrance and hang around there. Saidan comes to me and says:

What's happened? Where should you go?

I point at the secret way and, while I try to hide my anguish, say:

We have to enter the secret way by rope.

Parkad! I'll go down instead of Zairas.

I become so happy with saidan's suggestion. Height, explosion and gunshot tremble me. Parkad decisively says:

No Saidan! We need you here. No, you can't. Hey Saidan...no you Kidaton! Go around and stand guard. Just be around here. We'll inform you if we need help.

Soon after Parkad finishes his word, Kidaton, without gives him the positive answer, disappears behind the building as quick as a flash. Saidan puts his hand on my shoulder regretly and says:

I'm sorry, we should obey peremptorily whatever Parkad says. Don't worry, I'll have your back from here.

I smile and wink at him:

Don't worry, I'll cope it. I should talk with you about Mansidan.

All of a sudden Saidan becomes pale, gulp his saliva and says:

I...

His word is cut off.

Parkad says to jonadin:

You should go down, but there's a problem. We didn't know the land has subsided here. Hence, we haven't any tool. Do you have something come in handy?

He replies sneering:

When I was leaving here I gathered and brought them along.

Then he puts his knapsack on the ground and search into it.

What should be used for explosion?

The tone of Nabadak's voice shows that it has come to his mind suddenly. I tell Saidan:

Have you heard anything about him? I must meet him.

Saidan lowers his head and says calmly:

Is Raya unwell?

As I open my mouth, Saidan becomes compel to keep distance from me, by Parkad's hand sign. Jonadin says:

Don't worry, it would be solved.

Then he brings two black palm size box out of his knapsack and put them on the floor. There is a small monitor and a red light on each box. Then he removes a looped rope from the back of the knapsack and place it beside the boxes. Evidently his knapsack is full of the odds and ends.

I'm afraid I haven't more than a loop of rope.

He shakes his head in sign of regret. All of a sudden I remember my rope, but I regret more than Jonadin because I have lost my rope in that damned fall. Then I remember the yellow snake-like rope and I say:

Where's your rope, Vorarin?

Vorarin, who seems shocked, like a robot which suddenly runs after a long time silence, puts his knapsack on the ground and says:

Yeah, you are right, I'd forgotten it.

Then he searches and finds the rope on the back of his knapsack, under the blanket, and place it on the floor beside Jonadin's rope.

Well, it's enough. We can start.

But Parkad gives no reaction, he is like a statue.

Nabidak! I must talk with you.

All of a sudden all guys look at Parkad with wide open eyes. Vorarin comes to me and with a doubtful tone says:

What happened?

Saidan also looks at me in wonder and I just shrug my shoulders.

It's not a good time for this, Parkad. They may reach here at any moment.

Parkad pays no attention to Nabidak and goes away from us. Nabidak, perforcedly, follows him and they stand at a distance from us so that we couldn't hear their words, and then they begin talking to each other. Nabidak listens more than he talks, but he says some words once in a while. I say to Vorarin:

Do you know anything about the matter?

Vorarin looks at me and then, while his look turns around, says doubtfully:

Well..., indeed I don't know anything about the fire but I heard something about here from Nabadak.

About here?

Yeah, there was a secret way which linked five buildings to each other, and from there it was connected to three other buildings, in some branches. Their purpose was that they could reach the main building.

Which building?

I don't know yet, although I don't think it is all the matter. More likely, the buildings were in the important positions, but Nabadak didn't tell me more. Now, except for the main building, those four are destroyed completely.

There's a problem, they behave a rather abnormally.

He frowns and while he puckers his lips, says:

I can't see anything strange.

I point at Nabadak and Parkad who are talking to each other, with my eyebrows. Vorarin looks at them and says indifferently:

Well, possibly they're talking about something important.

About what? What's more important than the fire they talk about? It's so important that they left work and now due to the lack of time, they're discussing.

Vorarin doesn't move and just looks at them.

The fire now is more important than their life. We wanted to destroy it heretofore but I don't know what happened that they decided to get it out of here.

They both talk very quietly until they conclude their conversations and come back to us.

Well guys, get ready! Nabadak you inform Kidaton.

Looking at the point of landslide, I suffer vertigo and I feel heaviness on my head.

Why should I inform Kidaton? He'd better stands guard. There should be someone to aware us in case of danger.

Parkad shows Nabidak the ropes with his hand and says:

We need the force of Kidaton's arms. These ropes are short and don't work alone. We should tie the ropes together, but the problem is that there is nothing around here to link and tie the rope, besides, we would lose some rope for tying. We have to send them down by ourselves.

He is right, nothing is seen here to tie the rope. We must tie the ropes together. Nabidak calls Kidaton by his wireless and he comes here in less than a minute.

Kidaton, just you can tie these two ropes together.

Jonadin, while points at kidaton's thick arms, throws the rope to him. Kidaton ties a tight knot. Then Parkad like a master says:

We should test it. Take the two ends of the rope and pull it to be sure it is secure.

My feet are so weak that I have no tendency to take step and help them, but Vorarin goes to help them. He takes one end of the rope along with Kidaton and Saidan, and from the other side, Nabidak, Jonadin and Brasen pull the other end of the rope. A sound is heard from the rope, but nothing happens to the knot. Parkad shows his satisfaction for the rope by shaking his head:

Jonadin, get ready! You should go down. Tie the rope around your waist tightly.

Then says to others:

You should take the other end of the rope and send Jonadin and Zairas down.

All shake head and wait for Jonadin to be ready. Jonadin returns the small bombs into his knapsack, puts it over his shoulders and ties the rope around his waist. Then as he tries the rope, says:

Well, I'm ready. You can send me down.

All, except for Parkad and me, go toward the rope. Along with taking the rope, Parkad, who emphasizes by shaking his forefinger, says:

When you reach down there, remember that you should blast two walls so that you manage to block the entrance way. Jonadin you know it well. Then you reach the fire and get it out of there. After you entered the secret way, we go toward the main building and will wait for you there. You should come very quickly.

Jonadin replies him with peace of mind:

Don't worry, trust me. It shouldn't take more than twenty minutes. See you.

Then he goes toward the edge of the hole. four of us, hold the rope tightly and send him down slowly.

I have to swing myself to be able enter the entrance.

Jonadin has to shout so that we are enabled to hear his words. In less than two minutes, the rope becomes loose.

Well Zairas, it's your turn. Come on, get ready.

I go toward the edge of the hole without looking at Parkad or even reply him, and take the end of the rope. I don't know what I am doing. Nothing is under my control. Saidan comes to help me and ties the rope around my waist. Then he ensures me:

Take care. Don't worry. We keep our eyes on you and have your back.

I just shake my head. I still can't believe that I have to enter this damned hole. It seems that a force controls me. I go reverse to the edge of the hole and try not to look into it. Saidan says:

We're ready. Go down slowly and confidently.

The rest also show their readiness with shaking their heads.

I go down from the edge backwardly, like a thief who comes down from a wall. I enter the hole by my lower body and feel the rope pressure which helps me go down easily. While I keep my distance from the wall by my feet, I walk downward on the wall holding the rope tightly. I don't look at the bottom at all.

Again, I suffer vertigo, am overcome by nausea and my hair stand on end. For a short time, I hear all voices vaguely, I can't understand even one word. But then, I gradually hear Jonadin's voice who is approaching me momentarily. As I go down, I close my eyes for a short time. I ask God just keeps the rope safe and it would not rupture. I feel I am falling into this damned hole.

There's no long way left, Zairas.

I open my eyes and see Jonadin. I am almost at a distance of one meter to be in front him. He holds a thin and a rather long rod in his hand.

Well guys, enough. Stop.

The rope stops moving. He reaches out the rod to me:

Take it and I'll pull you in.

The lower part of the edge of the way is almost ruined about a meter. There is no room to place our feet on. Perforcedly, we should pass this one meter distance with the help of this rod. Now I realize that why Jonadin was swinging in the air. I hold the rod with one hand and keep my balance

with the help of the rope. When I reach the ground, he takes my raincoat and keeps me away from the edge.

My feet are numb and I can't stand on them. I drag myself on the ground with the help of my hands until I reach the wall of the tunnel and then I lean on it. I put my hands on my bended knees and hold my head with my hands. My heartbeats is so fast that I think he can hear it. I close my eyes to end my vertigo.

Are you afraid of the height?

I answer decisively:

No, I'm not afraid of anything high, I'm just afraid of holes and wells. I feel choked in them.

He gives me smile and says:

You'll get used to everything gradually. Now get up and help me to mount these two little bombs.

There is no sign of the rope and no sound is heard from above. I stand up with the help of the wall and take a deep breath. He again brings out the bombs out of his knapsack and gets busy. He has already turned on their monitors and now is doing some functions on them.

How's twenty seconds?

I ask in wonder:

For what? For explosion?

Yeah!

Isn't there any remote control?

He goes to the second bomb and says:

No, I've lost it. Well, that's it. Now we should mount them on the wall.

He looks around:

Aha, I got it. Put this bomb between those rods.

Then he gives me one of the small bombs and shows me the place with his hand. It is not heavy. Some rods emerged from the body of the tunnel on which the bomb can be mounted easily. So I place the bomb between the rods.

Press its green button.

According to him, I push the green button which is bigger than others. All of a sudden the red lamp begins to blink. I am slightly overcome by fear:

Well, what to do now?

He says unbelievably:

We should get away!

What!?

I feel that I nearly jump out of my skin. Then I see him begins to run away. Following him, I also take steps so fast that outpace him. Luckily, we keep a good distance from the bombs by the time of explosion.

The blasting sound is so loud that I cover my ears by hand, but still I hear a sharp whistle in my head. A cloud of dust rises so that I can't see Jonadin anymore. My throat hurts and makes me cough. I cover my mouth with the wristband of my raincoat and keep distance from the blast location.

I curse him nonstop in my mind. He could increase the time of the blast lest we don't suffer this situation. Without noticing him, I go away from there so far that I get out of the blast dust. I coughed so much that my eyes are wet.

My mouth is dried out and I need water. So I drink some water and I wipe my eyes with my sleeve. Time passes slowly more than I expected and Jonadin is still out of my sight. All of a sudden it comes to my mind that maybe he is hurt.

I call him several times but no response is heard. There is still dust in the air and it has hidden the depth of the tunnel. I decide to return that I see a shadow who is coming to me.

Well, now the entrance is blocked completely. Let's go.

His seems normal and that the dust had no effect on him.

Well, what should we do now?

I hope at least he answers me.

Move on. You'll find out. From now and then the situation is risky. All would come here because of the blast. So Parkad and the rest are in danger.

Taking fast steps, he shows me that we should go.

Chapter 22

The fire

The tunnel is thoroughly white. The more we advance, the more I become surprised. Almost each four meters, there are some fluorescent lamps on the ceiling which all of them are intact. The wall is almost new and no spot is seen. Jonadin lights the way and moves forward in front of me. He shows no tendency to talk.

What should we do?

Didn't Parkad explain it to you then?

He did, but...

You must help me to get the fire out.

What should the rest of the group do?

I reach him and walk beside him. The corner of his lips is lifted but he says without smiling:

They'll do their tasks on time. For the nonce, everything depends on us. We should be ready for everything. You just do whatever I tell you. When we reach there you'll find out.

I don't know why explanation is a hard work for the members of this group. He sank in thinking. We go on in silence until I ask him:

What's the fire? Why fire?

Well...I don't know! And I'm not interested to know. Fire is the abbreviation of "Flash Illumination Related to Explosion". When the atomic bomb is exploded, a glaring white light illuminates everywhere, like the thunderbolt, but many times stronger. If you look at this light, you would lose your sight for a short time or forever.

Then he smiles without opening his mouth:

I thought so much about the reason of selecting this name. Maybe its glaring and flashing are because of everyone is attracted to it. Like now that all are searching for the fire. But I couldn't find any reason for its blindingness. I can't believe...how fast it passed. The fire was protected by me, although it was my mischance that my turn to stand guard was when all had left here. Indeed, two people were here with me, but I had to kill one of them. The other left here for a mission.

My curiosity is aroused:

Why did you kill him?

He says regretfully:

He was one of my best friends, but he was betraying. One day that I and my other friend were out to see how things are going on in the town, he tried to rob and take the fire away. We were lucky that we returned in time and that removing the fire usually takes time. When we arrived at and saw him removing the fire from the machine, I surprised too much. Then he began to fire at us.

He becomes silent. It seems that the image of that event appears in front his eyes again.

Despite of our requests that he stops doing that, he was decided to remove the fire from the machine. Finally I constrained to fire at him. I fired him first at his leg, but he

didn't give up; if I hadn't shot him in chest, he would have killed my friend.

He falls silent and I feel no need to ask about the rest.

Take this.

He gives me the torch and call Parkad by his wireless:

What's up? What did you do?

Parkad, with a little delay, says:

We didn't meet anybody in the way. We're almost in the main building. Where're you? Did you explode the entrance?

We'll be there within two minutes. We did explode the entrance so that even light can't enter there. Where would you take position? Do you know the entrance way?

Yeah, we know. We'll stay somewhere around the main building. I smell something fishy is going on. Do whatever you can. Just get the fire out of there.

Okay, we do our best.

He turns off the wireless and says:

You did hear it.

Then he takes his steps so fast that we almost run. We reach there sooner than Jonadin said. He takes the torch from me and goes toward a door which is as big as the opening of the tunnel. The more we close, the more visible the door becomes. There are two big handles on it and beside each an off lamp is seen. There is no way to see inside; to do this, the door should be opened inevitably.

At the first glance, it seems opaque, but when I touch the handle the dust falls off from the door and the shining steel appears. Despite its body, It is lighter than I thought and can be opened with a slightly push inward. So we enter, but Jonadin stops me with his hand and says:

Wait here, I'll back soon.

He takes the torch along and leaves me in darkness. The sound of collision with table and falling things on the ground is heard until that the sound of his footsteps cuts and after a short time, the sound of pressing a key is heard.

Like a flash in the dark of the night, suddenly the fluorescent lamps light the space and makes me fall into the reverie. I don't believe seeing this scene. I am sure it is just a dream and not real.

Six computers which are set in orderly rows, have filled the space of this small hall. Beside each computer, there is a different machine which I have never seen even its picture. But when I look carefully, I can recognize the printers and scanners among them. On some tables the microscope also can be seen. All of these sets and devices are on a table which surrounds each chair like a fence. All of the chairs and tables are the same and their arrangements are similar.

On the opposite wall is a big monitor which almost has covered all the wall. Half of the right side wall is made of glass and has a door into a room. Although its window is opalline, inside the room can be seen.

Some tables are arranged all around the room and a big table in the middle, full of lab tubes, green, yellow, and red solvents and other tools which I have never seen none of them. There are so many laboratory equipment that looking at one of them, I forget the rest.

The room on the left side is exactly the same as the room on the right side, as if they are copied, but their equipment are different. In this room a variety of experimental equipment can be seen which all are the different sets with a small display on each. It seem they are used for control the

machines. There is another door on the left side which Jonadin comes out through it and calls me with his hand to follow him.

Hurry up! We should go and get the fire out.

I am surprised by this atmosphere insomuch that I don't want leave here. The most interesting thing that I feel fond of, is the constituent materials. Everywhere is made of shiny steel, from the chairs and tables to the wall and machines.

Hey Zairas! What're you doing? Hey you...

All of a sudden I see Jonadin who looks at me in wonder with open mouth. He signals me with his hand. There are two doors, one in front and the other on the left side.

Jonadin opens the front door immediately and we enter a narrow but a rather long hall. Here, six door can be seen which are on the both sides equally. The floor is carpeted and the doors are in red. On each door is written a doctor's name.

Jonadin goes straight to the door which is written doctor Vilatin. Following him I enter the room. I hear my heartbeat which increases momentarily. Maybe I am dreaming. All of a sudden I feel that someone is pulling me toward himself.

Hey, what's wrong with you? Why you don't follow me?

I see Jonadin who pulls me and makes me to walk in step with him.

Nothing, don't worry. I'm sorry.

A small mirror on the wall which has a flame-like silver margins, attracts my attention more. The small and big drawings of landscapes and portraits with the fretwork margins of flowers, arise one's talent.

A tall and slim wooden wardrobe up to the ceiling with an engraved drawing of a lion on it, is in a corner of the room. On the other side is a bed with the same design. The quilt and

the pillow on the bed actuate me to lie on. Beside the bed is a lowboy with a clock, a desk lamp and a vase.

And finally a unique carpet and the ivory color of the wall finish the design. I didn't think that my dream would come true so soon. I should describe this place to all. I wish I had my camera and took some photos and show them to all.

Oh my God, I can't believe I am here, the only place which has remained safe and intact, the only place which is kept secured from misery. It is like a pearl which grows in the heart of sea dangers. I rub my hand on the wall and wardrobe to be sure I am not dreaming. No I am not dreaming, since none of my dreams wasn't so clear.

No, I think something happened to you. Are you ok? Where's your mind wandering? A penny for your thoughts!

Nothing, but I'm slightly surprised by here.

He gives me a smile, then passes by indifferently and even doesn't look at them. He goes toward the mirror and stops in front of it. Then he cleans his right palm with a rather neat handkerchief and puts it on the mirror. The mirror screen works as a camera flash light, and then a soft beep is heard.

Jonadin takes his hand off the mirror and after a short time a message appears on the mirror. I can't read it at this distance. My curiosity is aroused and I go toward him, but when I reach him the message disappears from the mirror. The next beep is heard and at the same time, a small square door appears on the wall. The door opens automatically and a machine which looks like a computer is seen.

Jonadin places his left hand on the screen and his right eye on the eyepiece of the machine. Again, he waits for a while until the computer-like machine opens like a door and shows

its inner part. All of its components are of metal and it is like a strong box in inside.

Jonadin reaches out his hand and brings out the only thing which is inside. This is a black box like a pen box. Jonadin opens it and looks at inside. Then he shakes his head in sign of satisfaction and closes it. I can't see inside of the box, because Jonadin is exactly in front of me. He puts it into his raincoat pocket and says:

Well, our mission accomplished!

He closes the secret door on the wall and gets out the room. I also follow him, but before this, I look at inside the room as much as I can, to save it in my mind forever. I save all detail of the room in my mind. I step backward without returning to profit from the last seconds. I leave the door open to be able see inside even when I am leaving there. At last, when the room disappears behind the wall, I have to take steps along with Jonadin. We pass through the connecting door to the hall and then we reach the main hall.

We should exit from that door...

All of a sudden he cuts his word and says in a timorous and suspicious tone:

What's this sound?

He puts his finger on his nose to makes me quiet and is frozen like a statue. He is right, I also hear sounds. It is like a herd of rhino are running; in addition to the sound they make, they also shake the earth. He is overcome by fear, so he says:

Whose footstep is it? I don't think anyone knows here except for our group.

Maybe they're Parkad and others!?

No, they couldn't be. They surely would inform us.

The footsteps reaches to back of the wall. It seems they should not be more than four. After a short time the sound of beating on the wall is heard; it seems something is pounded on the wall. Again the footsteps is heard going up quickly. Once in a while the sound of their conversation is heard, but it is not clear. My sixth sense tells me that something would happen here. The dominant atmosphere also proves this and trembles my body. Suddenly the wireless utters sound and Parkad says so agitatedly:

Hey guys, watch up! The reds have found your place, they may be there at any moment. Hide everywhere you can. They shouldn't find the fire!

Soon after Parkad finishes his words, a fearsome sound is heard and a cloud of dust engulfs everywhere and makes us to cough. All of a sudden Jonadin and I lie on the ground and aim our gun at the sound origin. I slowly go toward Jonadin who took shelter behind a table, and then we wait for dust settle down.

Don't be afraid! Just keep your eyes around. The Fire is in our hand, they can't do anything. Don't part from me and do whatever I tell you forthwith. Parkad and the rest never leave us alone.

The dust gradually lies and we can see the existing scene; seeing that the monitor on the wall is completely destroyed and a big hole is seen instead. As I guessed, four red soldiers, while inspect everywhere with their guns, enter. Three of them look around nonstop, but the fourth one doesn't care and he seems is looking for something, although he has mask on his face and I can't see his eyes.

Don't get flustered, you should get a grip on yourself and fix your attention. Let's see, how many bullet you have?

I don't know.

He grasps and takes gun from me.

Few but better than nothing. Your cartridge clip just has seven bullet. Don't waste them and don't shot pointlessly.

Then, again, he looks at them and next he looks at the right side and says:

I should change my place lest they blindside us from the right.

He shows right side of me:

I should go there. You keep here and I fix my attention on there. When I said now, shoot at them till I reach there. Don't shoot more than one.

I hold my breath and shake my head to confirm. He changes his place with me without he rises. I consider the red soldiers' situation to be able react correctly and also be in a better position.

Now!

He rises with a short shout and passes the distance with four steps and at last he creeps on the ground and takes shelter behind the computer table. At the same time, when he rises, I lift my gun and without lifting my head and aiming, I pull the trigger.

All of a sudden, the gun releases from my hand by the kick that I receive from the gun, but I manage to grab it in the last second. The sound of shooting trembles me like the sound of pounding a sledgehammer on the anvil. Luckily, they are blindsided and Jonadin reaches his aim easily. They also react to my shot and immediately take shelter behind the tables.

Jonadin shows me his hand in sign of stop, then he thumbs up to show me that I did well. He checks around from the edge of the table. The dust cloud, now, completely

disappeared and the hall can be seen thoroughly. A big hole is made on the wall and the monitor is destroyed completely. Those four red soldiers can't be seen because of taking shelter. I look at the scene in disbelief. My shot hit one of the monitors and upset it on the floor.

We don't want to hurt you, we just want the fire. I don't want to bleed.

Then he makes a pause and says:

There is no way to escape for you. Of course, if you didn't blast the secret way, maybe you could.

Then his tone assumes an air of serious:

My people surrounded here from outside, so give up without any fight.

Jonadin replies Baltin shooting a bullet. Baltin with a tone full of threatening replies:

This is the last warn. If you don't do what I want, we would fusillade and riddle here. If you...

Jonadin doesn't let him finishes his words and replies him with another shot. All of a sudden, I see those four red soldiers who come out from their shelter, stand up and aim their guns at us. As far as I see their cartridge clips have more than thirty or forty bullets.

Suddenly, as if we experience a bombardment, the sound of firing guns echoes through all over the hall and whistling bullets from up, left and right side irritate my ears. At the same time, the sound of breaking windows and ricocheting bullets are heard. All of the machines and monitors on the tables are thrown into the air and all of the papers fly in the air.

The sound is so much that I cover my ears with my hands. I lean on the table involuntarily and bend my legs toward my

breast as far as I can. I lower my head and place it on my knees.

After a while, hearing the sound of falling shells, shooting finishes. The bullet holes have made dissimilar and dark figures on the wall. All of the equipment are upset on the floor and none of them is unharmed.

All of a sudden my eyes meet Jonadin which around him is filled with blood.

Chapter 23

The siege

He pushes his hand on his arms, but blood is flowing down through his fingers. He gnashes his teeth and his eyes are closed. I measure their situation from the edge of the table to go to Jonadin's help. He opens his eyes and gives me a thumbs up. His face is white and his brow is dripping sweat.

Detain them!

I see the reds who are closing to us momentarily. They take steps cautiously and look around with every little sound. I gulp my saliva and shoot at them aimlessly. I leave a long interval between my shoots to detain them more.

Jonadin has brought out a cloth from his knapsack and is busy with tying it around his arm with the help his teeth, to prevent bleeding. I continue shooting until I hear a weak sound instead of gunfire.

Now, the color has turned back to Jonadin's face and he got a grip on himself. He takes his gun off the ground and fires at them aimlessly. All of a sudden the bump sound against the walls and doors attracts those four soldiers' attention, like the peal of the town bells. They return quickly and look at two people who have entered through two different doors. Parkad and Kidaton, holding their guns in

hand, are standing there and each one aimed at two of them. Parkad, while frowned, says to Baltin:

Get off my people's back.

They shot at us causeless. We don't care what you do! Live and let live, of course till then our goals are different.

Parkad and Kidaton ensheate their guns. I hint to Kidaton. I try to attract his attention to Jonadin, but he takes no notice.

Our goals? It's the ball and here is the field!

Baltin takes some steps toward Parkad.

Vultures are flying everywhere!

So what're you waiting for?

I'm doing my job, I'm not asking for trouble!

Again, I signal Kidaton by my hand to attract his notice. This time I manage. I guide him toward Jonadin with my eyes.

Jonadin is shot.

All eyes turn to Jonadin. Kidaton pushes aside the soldier who is in his way and goes toward Jonadin. Jonadin, while his face is frowned and his hand is on his wound, says:

That ratter was spying here. I should killed him from the first time I suspected him.

Baltin says:

Not ratter! The loyal and dutiful soldier.

He was in our group, before he joins your group. He was a traitor.

All of a sudden, the sound of footsteps and clanging equipment on the stairs is heard. They take steps slowly and orderly. All listen to the echoing sound until six people appear from those two doors which Parkad and Kidaton entered.

The blue group.

Their guns are sheathed. After considering the situation, they take steps calmly toward us. Jonadin takes the chance and says to me:

You should go down and cut the power off. Before you enter the hall, there's a door on the left. You go down the stairs, find the fuse box and cut the power. Take care that nobody see you.

Then he says, while coughing and groaning:

There...

He puts his hand in his pocket and takes the "fire" out:

When you cut the power then you should get away from here. There's a ladder which takes you to the fourth floor. Come and take the "fire". You should get out of here. When you arrived at fourth floor, you should escape by the air.

He pushes the "fire" on the floor toward me. Then I take it off and while I look at it and Jonadin intermittently, say in wonder:

What!? Me? What should I do?

I look behind may I find his addressee, but there is no one but me. When Jonadin sees my astonishment, while he wrinkles his face, says:

Don't be stupid. You should get out of here before we lose time. You're our only hope.

I put the "fire" into my raincoat pocket and fasten its zip. While other are talking to each other, I creep toward the door slowly. No one notices me. I drag myself on the ground until I reach at a distance of two steps from the door. Then I get at the half-open door with a little jump. I reach the door on the left side immediately and open it slowly lest someone hears it. Then I go down the stairs.

There is a rather large storeroom that makes me besotted. The cabinets are full of raw foodstuffs. Potato, tomato, onion...the huge refrigerators to preserve meat and dairy products; the pasteurized water. The separate cabinets in which are all kind of spicery and flavors. There are two doors in this room; on one of them is written "Electricity room", and on the other: "cooling and heating house". The only ladder, which seems to be the same that Jonadin told me, is near the electricity room.

All kind of smells hang in the air of storeroom, but the waft of spices and flavors arouses the smelling more. Among these smells, an especial musty smell attracts me. I go toward the fuse box which is near the ladder and open its door by pressing a button. As I guessed, the fuses of each section are set beside each other. Kitchen, main lab, rooms, and main hall. After a pause, I switch off all of the fuses, even the fuse of this storeroom. Turning off the all lamps, the sound which was heard from the hall stops.

I don't waste my time more and go up the ladder. It is a narrow canal upward which I can see the light on top. Many parts of the canal is ruined so that the ladder is not connected to anywhere in the upper parts of the canal. But I reach top of the canal anyway. The canal is destroyed completely exactly on the fourth floor and there is no way to upper parts.

I hold the edge and pull myself up. Then I find myself in an almost large room. This room is a little familiar to me. When I see the hole on the floor, I remember the room. Here is the same sinister place in which we met Nabidak and my foot sank into the hole.

I curse myself why I didn't ask Jonadin more about the aerial escape. I look around maybe something attracts my

attention, but there is nothing relating to this matter. I go slowly to the door, may I see something special. I go out through the door and look at the lower floors from the open space. I see the red group shadows who are wandering and guarding. Some guards, who seem to be more than eight persons, has covered up to the second floor. There is no way to get away. I go back to the room, perforce.

As Jonadin said, there should be a way to get out of this building. I have to search here carefully. I go toward some windows which just their frames are remained. Still the track of Vorarin's footstep can be seen near the windows.

In front of me there is a wide street which its real form and order is mixed up by the debris of the collapsed buildings. I can't find anything. Maybe Jonadin meant something else. Maybe I should go down via the pipes or with a rope. To be sure, I get my body out of the window and reach the outer edge of the building. I hold the frame of the window tightly and before I put my weight on my feet, I check the outer edges for their resistance.

A warm wind slightly annoys my face and shakes my clothes. The sun has passed almost half of the sky and has lost his power. I fist my hand more tightly and I bend down as far as I can and look down. There is no pipe or rod for going down.

I overcome by despair and attempt to return that something attracts my notice. A rod like the handlebar is on the wires of the posts which reach the opposite street. It is clear that the rod is shaped to this form by hand.

Now I realize Jonadin's purpose. I have to glide on the wires. But being the first experience and the height, frighten

me. Suddenly I hear a footstep which comes close to this room:

I heard a sound from here. I nose around here and then come back.

His footsteps shows that he comes to this side. There is no way to return anymore. At the same time the soldier enters, I take the rod and put it on the wires. I hold its both ends tightly and release myself.

At the same time I fly away, I hear the red soldier's shuts who calls his confrere. Because of my speed, the wind has made my eyes wet. The contact of the rod and the wires, makes arcs above my head like the squib. At first, the gradient of the wires is slightly high but it becomes as horizon line gradually and at the end turns to an ascending and upward line. Fortunately, this gradient helps me to stop easily at the end of the way. But in the midway, my eyes meet something horrible which makes me lose my endurance to hold the rod and I am near to fall down. About ten red soldiers are standing in the middle of the street and are waiting for me, who just like a culprit is dragging to the deathsman unwantedly.

The height is considerable and after that I come down, ten guns are aimed at me. Finally I stop on a post without any trouble. I put my feet on the holes of the post and hold its top with my hands tightly. I detain myself may someone comes to help me, but I just exhaust myself. They are still standing at a distance of ten meters from me like the statues, all armed to the teeth. At the same time that I am coming down from the post, one of them who seems to be their front man, approaches me. I release the post at a height of one meter above the ground and land in with a jump. The soldier, gun in hand, stands between me and the other soldiers and says:

Where's the fire?
I haven't anything to say and just look at him. He again asks:

I said where's the fire?
The thing you're looking for, isn't with me.

He calls two soldiers with his hand signal.
Search him!
Two soldiers parted from the rest and come to me. One of them grabs my collar and pulls me:

Open your arms, hurry up!
I resist a little but then I open my arms like the wings of an airplane. I am sure they will find it. So I have to do something, but nothing comes to my mind. All of a sudden my eyes meet Vorarin who hid behind a wall in the street on the left hand. To be sure, I peep into the street without I turn my head. He is standing there.

Nabidak is certainly with him. So I should detain the red soldiers a little. I move my hand toward my gun, but I remember that I mislaid it in the laboratory. I damn myself. I have to detain them in other way:

Hey, I said the fire is not with me!
The same soldier again pulls my collar:
Shut up and be quiet or I'll break your neck!
I said it's not with me.

Then I push them back and they immediately draw their gun at me and one of them says almost shouting:

Seems you like we stretch you just here on the sands. It's the same difference to see you dead or alive body, so beware of changing my decision. Now put your knapsack on the ground.

Doing this, they both will deplete my knapsack and they will find the “fire” which is in the pocket of my raincoat. Luckily, for the time being, my knapsack belt has blocked my pocket and they can’t find and bring it out. It seems that Vorarin is not determined to do something; he is steel standing there and just looks. Suddenly one of the soldiers shouts:

Grenade! Lie on the ground!

All the soldiers and me immediately lie on the ground. I put my hands on my head and close my eyes involuntarily. All wait for explosion but nothing happens, no terrific sound is heard and no light is seen. I stay more at this position for sure, but again, nothing happens. I look around through my fingers.

I feel I am in a white room. A white mist hung and swallowed everywhere; I can’t see no one. Maybe I am dreaming or I am dead. I rise immediately. I try to cleave the mist to come out of this imagination. I gradually feel pepper in my throat. I feel I am standing in a sauna. My eyes are tearing and shed tears, as if some onions are minced near my eyes.

I become sure that I am not dead but if it goes on this way, I surely will die. I am almost near to fall on the ground that then my hands are pulled and I begin to run. As I take steps involuntarily, the mist becomes thin and goes aside like a curtain, as though I get out of the sauna.

Someone held my hand and pulls me following him. My eyes filled with tears and I can’t see him clearly. I just take steps with him. The rush of fresh air invigorates me a little, but I hardly keep my balance. With this condition, I throw him off balance too. Sometimes he bears my weight and then has to pull me.

I wipe my tears with my sleeve but it doesn't lessen the irritation of my eyes. The irritation is so much that I wink so fast that my eyes are almost close. I am close to be suffocated of over coughing. If he release my hand I would lost like a child among the crowd. I want to stop moving and bend on my knees but he pulls my hand to I take step with him.

Come on! We haven't much time. Be patient a little.

His voice is like vorarin's, but he couldn't be him. There was no sign of Vorarin until the last second. All of a sudden my hand is released but then my other hand is held quickly. Changing my hand, the path also changes. We turn right and I hear the stranger's voice who goes on his way.

This time I am not lucky and fall in the ground with the sudden change of direction and my escort also lose his balance, but I don't know he fell down or not. I try to open my eyes even for a short time, but it is so painful that they open and close spontaneously.

Come on Zairas! Get up, we should get away from here soon.

Now I recognize the voice. He is Vorarin. I gather all of my power in my feet, put my hands on the ground, and, while he looped his hands around my waist, I stand on my feet.

Yeah, that's it... get up.

While I am rising, suddenly I lose my balance but I manage to keep my balance with my hand and his help. I stand on my feet slightly bended.

Just come with me quickly. Hurry up. We haven't time anymore.

Then he pulls me severely. I follow him winking. My throat stings so much that I can't say anything; I just cough nonstop.

Faster Zairas! Come on! We should get away from here soon. Come, come.

But I can't. My head aches so much that my muscles become loose and I fall on the ground again. My feet are exhausted and I just creep on the ground. Vorarin tries to lift me up.

Get up now. Get up, come on Zairas, get up...

When he sees my indifference, he remains immobile for a while. Then he says agitated:

Get up! Get up! We should hide out. They're coming here. Come on Zairas. Get up. Get up!

Again, he loops his hand around my waist and lift me up in force. I hardly hold myself on my feet. Then we enter a building on the left side. I keep my balance with the help of the wall and we hide behind a burnt wooden commode in a dark room. He covers my mouth with his hand tightly and says panicky:

Hush! Be quiet! They're somewhere around here. Don't move!

I bend my legs to have more control on them. My eyes sting reduced, yet I can't keep open my eyes even for a short time. I ensure Vorarin and he takes his hand off my mouth after a pause. Although my mouth is closed, I cough nonstop.

Hush! I hear their footsteps. They're coming here.

Then he pauses briefly:

What should we do now?

I bethink myself of the "fire". So I bring it out of my pocket and hold it toward him. Then I say between my coughs:

Take it..you..sho..uld take...It...away...fr...om here.
I...can't...co...me...with...you. the...y are...loo...king
for...me. You...can...

No, I don't know where I should go.

I say persistently:

The...y don't...know...the fire...is...with...you. Yo...u
should...get...it out of...here as...soon as...possi...ble.
Hurry...up! What...are you...wai...ting for? Take...it...

He pauses for a while and then he takes it from me:

Stay here we'll come for you.

I ensure him with shaking my head. Then he gives me a
gun and says:

Just God grants they don't see me. Now, they're
everywhere.

He enters the corridor we came here through it and moves
forward cautiously. The sound of his footsteps on the debris is
heard and then, after a while I can't hear his footstep
anymore.

Chapter 24

The plan

I don't know how long is I hid behind this commode, just I know that it is as long as I only cough once in a while just because of my throat stings and my tears dried away now. My winking now is normal and just my head aches a little.

Vorarin should be away from here. Just God grants him and hope that nothing bad happened to him. No sound is heard anymore. It is just the wind which visits its territory. Where are the rest of my group? What happened to them? What should I do? Where should I go?

I bring my insignia out of my pocket with a mild attempt and before turning it on, I bethink myself of Parkad's words: we should keep our insignia off. But I have no choice now and the wireless range is short. Before entering the acceptance option, I take a look at the list of group personnel, maybe I find one of them. I look at the off options dispiritedly until the A-4 option becomes on in disbelief. Brasen or Saidan has turned his insignia, but it is soon to trust it. He is closing to me but his direction is not exactly toward me. I don't know whether I keep my insignia on or not. It is possible someone else is using his insignia. Maybe I'd better go toward him, but it may be a trap. I keep my insignia off. I myself should go toward him.

I go toward the exit door cautiously. The sun now shines milder and the sands are flying in the air again. Before I exit, I look around carefully. No one is seen in this confine. I check Saidan's or Brasen's position step by step. He is steel closing to this confine. I should come in his way so that he wouldn't be able to see me. He moves in an almost straight line, and just occasionally changes his way but then he returns to the same direction.

I take position in the first floor of a building which is almost in his way. He or someone else is approaching momentarily. He stops once in a while, reduces his speed until he reaches me. I try to see him through a hole on the wall, but it seems he passes through the buildings. I should find a better position. I take a step to get out of here but he changes his direction and comes exactly toward me. As far as it goes, if he passes by here, I will see him easily in the first floor. So I look for a hole in the floor and finally I find one. I lie on the floor and put my eye on the hole.

My heart beats faster with each step he takes. I feel as if I am in a road full of up and down, which with each down my heart quails. Now I can hear his footsteps. He walks slowly and stops near the entrance door. I just can see his legs. I try to change my position quietly to be able to see his face, but the size of the hole doesn't allow me.

I wait for a while until he comes ahead. He is Saidan. I open my mouth to call him, but maybe he is a trap. I say so quietly that only he can hear:

Are you alone Saidan?

He begins to turn his head around and says in disbelief:

You're here, Zairas? I'm alone. Nobody is with me. Don't worry.

I'm here. Wait a minute, I'll come down.

As I go down the stairs, he says:

Turning on my insignia, I hoped I could find someone.

I go forward and hug him. He embraces me warmly too.

What happened down there?

We enter a room to be in safe place:

We found the fire and we were getting out that suddenly the red group reached. If Parkad and Kidaton didn't come, we would lose it. Then the blue group entered. Jonadin was shot. Kidaton and Parkad were taken captive, so I took the fire and got away through a secret way which went to the fourth floor till the red soldiers caught me and then suddenly someone...

Saidan shows his hand to stop me talking, then says:

I know the rest.

What did you do?

He shakes his head hopelessly and says:

According to three plans, we took position in three points to have all over the building in our control. Vorarin and I were monitoring the same confine you got away from. Brasen and Nabadak on one side, and Kidaton and Parkad on other side. No one and nothing couldn't pass by us and enter that place.

He sits on an outworn furniture:

When the red group arrived and entered, we couldn't do anything. They were too many. Nothing came to our mind till I don't know what happened that the blue group reached. It was too odd. It seemed someone informed them. How can I tell you, you should were there and saw. It's hard to explain. Parkad and kidaton entered there so that the blue group could see them. I was completely confused and couldn't realize their purpose.

I say:

They show the entrance to the blue group deliberately to take advantage of their presence.

He confirms me and says anxiously:

I've never been in such situation. I don't know what we should do. There's no sign of Brasen and Nabidak. I don't know that we must look for Parkad and Kidaton or... by the way, where's Vorarin?

Suddenly I bethink myself of Vorarin and say with a low shout:

Ah, the fire!?

I turn on my insignia, but there is no sign of Vorarin. His insignia is off and there is no message on the display. While his face shows anxiety, Saidan says:

What's the matter?

The fire is with Vorarin.

He says in disbelief:

What!?! With him? For what?

When we got out of tear gas, I was too unwell, I couldn't walk even one step. The soldiers were approaching us. I forced him to take the fire away from here, but now, there is no sign of him.

He puts his hand on his head and says groaning:

Ah...maybe he is caught! Damn! How it comes.

Where were you?

Samirana and I were fending off the soldiers you could get away.

What should we do now?

As he shakes his head, Saidan holds and shakes his hand in front me and says:

I don't know anything at all. I'm completely confused. My brain is overloaded. I really don't know what we should do!

He pauses, pounds his fist on the wall and says:

Parkad and Kidaton are caught, there's no news of Brasen and Nabadak, Vorarin is lost, and we lost the fire too. Damn!

We, both, think about the events in silence. All of a sudden the insignia which is in my hand, vibrates. My eyes turn to it as fast as a flash. Saidan who also heard the sound of my insignia, comes toward me immediately and bends down on my insignia.

"You have a message"

This is an audio message from Vorarin. I play it:

"Zairas! I am caught and the red soldiers are taking me to their base now. Do whatever you can."

The sound is too low so that I have to bring the insignia close to my ear to hear his voice. His voice clearly shows that he hardly has sent this message to me.

I quickly search for Vorarin's location on the map and find him at a distance of three hundred and fifty meters from us. Saidan takes the insignia from me immediately and his eyes moves on the insignia looking for Vorarin's situation.

I know where this place is.

Suddenly, Vorarin's insignia becomes off, and we both stare at each other in disbelief. Saidan rubs his face:

We've to do something before we lost the fire.

Saying this, I feel I am in a labyrinth that I don't know which way I should choose.

We should go and save Vorarin or we would lose the fire.

Although his word is completely reasonable, it is strange too.

Just two of us?

He leans on the wall and says:

I don't know. I just know we should do this. How? I don't know.

Where're you Saidan?

Saidan reaches out his hand and takes his finger wireless and replies:

Samirana, where're you?

What happened? Did you manage to get Zairas away?

Saidan replies him importunately and agitatedly:

Samirana, the knives are out, you should reach out.

Where're you?

Come to the same trysting place. I and Zairas will be there within a few minutes. I'll explain you everything.

Ok, I'll come soon too.

He replaces his wireless and says:

Maybe Samiran helps us. This way we're at least three. Let's go.

He wends before me and shows the way.

Saidan?

What?

Any news of Mansidan?

Saidan tries to escape from looking directly to my eyes.

I couldn't find him, is Raya unwell?

She needs Mansidan. You were supposed to find him.

For this I didn't return. I couldn't return and look her in the eyes.

Then he breathe a sigh and lower his head.

I searched wherever I thought I could find any sign of Mansidan, but he wasn't there. No one had any news of him.

But I have to find him. Raya is becoming completely paralyzed.

He looks at me with the spiritless eyes and says:

The thought of Raya agonizes me.
All was my fault. I should expiate.
I try not to look at his eyes. He consoles me:
That was an accident and Raya's paralyze wasn't any
concerned with you.

Raya is the only one who is expiating.
He says with a serious and angry tone:
The only one who should expiate is Mansidan.
I keep quiet to pacify him. We walk for a short time. He
says:

Who takes care of Raya?
Jalisa promised me that cares for her.
What about the shelter? Who's managing there?
Palisin. When you and Brasen did go, I became alone.
He shakes his head and says:
I'm sorry. I couldn't bear there, I felt a heavy despondence.
Brasen couldn't find Mansidan too. We were aimless, we
didn't know what to do. Brasen decided to join the saviors
group.

I miss those days but I hope they would never repeat again.
What's your decision?
That I find Mansidan anyhow. I need your help.
So why you joined the saviors?
Karisan said that I may find a clue here.
He closes his eyes and shakes his head:
Sorry, I don't know anything. I even went to the "Hope"
shelter.

Is it possible something bad have happened to him?
Wish we knew it at least. Maybe brasen knows something.
He left the "Life" shelter before me to find Mansidan. I met
Brasen in "Hope" shelter.

Where's Brasen?

Saidan shakes his head and says:

I don't know. All of our group vanished. Now the fire is more important.

But not for me!

He looks in wonder:

You have to do the thing you accepted to the end.

I just agreed to be in the saviors group. I don't care about the fire! Karisan didn't tell me anything about it.

The fire would destroy all the world. The fire is more important than everything, even than humans, even...than Raya.

I stop involuntary, flame with anger, my jaw trembles and my head grows hot:

You did forget the past so easily!

No, I didn't. Always something happens out of our control.

Raya is dying and you think of something else!? What's so important than human's life?

All the people's life. You're not supposed to do this, but we should do it.

I shake my head, and while I take a deep breath say:

You do whatever you wish, but it doesn't concern me. I just care for my friend who is dying there and all forgot her.

You're wrong, Raya is one of the reasons that I'm here.

If it was important to you, you would have found him.

Saidan says loudly:

When the world is to be destroyed, who cares Raya's paralyze?

I say shouting:

What's this damned fire which a bunch of zeroes are looking for it? What's that made you turn your back on everything?

I didn't turn my back on no one. I'm just doing the right thing.

You left your friend alone, does it mean right thing?

I just came here to look after my friend, Raya.

I'm not in your group anymore!

I turn my back on Saidan and change my way to the first street that I meet. Saidan reaches me and says:

Damned! The war is coming. This time we all would die. The fire shouldn't be in others' hands. The fire means destruction.

He pushes my shoulders to stop me, and says:

Raya will recover.

While his breast goes up and down, he says:

Just give me a chance. You should help me. No one remained but you and me.

I say:

What help?

We should find the fire.

Why?

The fire means destruction. People would kill each other at a wink. The war which never ends. The world is not the thing you think. Don't you see too many people are looking for it?

What's the fire?

I don't know, and don't care to know. I just want Raya feels well.

How Raya would recover?

A smile appears on his lips:

Trust me.

We go on our way in silence until Saidan stops at the end of an alley and points at somewhere:

We should go there.

This is a common building and is similar to all of the buildings in this town. It has nothing special compare to the rest buildings and like everywhere, this is also ruined. Saidan enters the building ahead of me and goes toward the last room at the end of the corridor. There is an open trapdoor on the floor.

Saidan draws his gun and then, without turning his head to me and just with a hand sign have me to remain in my place and to be quiet. Then he approaches the edge of the trapdoor and checks inside. After that he says slowly and quietly:

Hey Samirana! Are you inside there?

After a while silence, a rather skirl voice says:

I haven' any other place to go but here. You come late!?

Saidan takes an interrogative look at me and then goes down slowly. I also go down after him and then close the trapdoor. This place is lighted just with a candle and everything is in a black mist. Someone is standing by the candle whose face, in the lack of light, is not so visible at this distance. Beside her leg someone has fallen on the floor fainted. Saidan says:

What's the matter? What's going on here? What the hell the red soldier doing here?

Samirana pulls up two chairs and then says:

This cove was chasing me. You're roundly surprised.

Is dead?

Not yet. I don't know what I should do with him.

Saidan goes toward to one of the chairs, sits on it and says:

It didn't go in the way we wished. Vorarin is caught and because of our bad chance, the fire is with him.

Samirana signs me with her hand to sit on the chair:

Why the fire is with Vorarin?

I welcome her offer and go toward the chair to be able to see her face.

Everything mixed up. Vorarin was constrained to transfer the fire but I don't know what happened that he caught. You should helped him.

Finally I position somehow I can see her face under the light of candle. Her girly face is completely goes with her body. She has hidden her hair under a kerchief and tightened it with a knot behind her head. Her big and black eyes, while is in complete contrast with her small mouth, show her very beautiful. In comparison with other women, she is tall and her face is calm.

The only thing that makes me wonder are the small wounds on her face, but they give her face special attraction instead of make her ugly. She dressed in a rather thick and long shirt down to her knees and wore a long raincoat on. She seems to be younger than me.

She says indifferently:

That was enough.

Saidan looks at me in wonder and says:

You alone could hide Zairas.

Samirana goes toward a table which is in darkness and sits on it.

We had to backtrack. For this, first I got Zairas away from them then Vorarin had to do his job well, but he didn't.

You coped out too soon.

I said don't engage me in this story.

But now you engaged.
I don't want continue anymore.
Saidan gnash his teeth and says:
You must say this at first. Don't think I'm fool.
Samirana comes down from the chair angrily and, while
fisted her hands, says:
What're you trying to prove?
Saidan rises from his chair too:
Whatever happens to you is because of your fault, you
shouldn't blame it on others.
You don't know anything, so you'd better don't talk about
it. I didn't cop out but I can't go on.
Why don't you can go on? Because you're weak.
Yeah, I'm weak. I'm leaving now.
Yeah you'd better didn't come here, you showed yourself,
you're a wretch.
Saidan turns his face to me and says:
Let's go Zairas.
Saidan looks indifferently at Samiran who stares at me
with the grudge and hatred. Then he goes toward the ladder
and goes up. Samirana's fisted hands suddenly open. Her tears
washes all of the apparent disgust elements away from her
face. I take some steps toward her involuntary. Her body
shakes with her sobs and her hands tremble.
I owe you an excuse for you save my life. If you didn't
help me, I wouldn't have any chance to compensate my fault.
Some failures can't be redressed.
Fate gives all chance, it just depends to ourselves to use it
or miss it.
Aside from fate, many things contribute to.

No one interferes but you. Maybe your work wouldn't be valuable for anyone but it is important for yourself. The most important part is just this. You should be satisfied with what you do.

This's not easy as you say.

I smile:

We determine whether it would be easy or not. Maybe the actions of all the people around us is just for notice our work.

I can't hear any voice from her. She is sitting as before and doesn't move. Her hands don't tremble anymore and she is silent.

It's all words.

Her voice still trills a little. I say:

I just so believe in my words that I'm here now and will do my decision.

She lifts his head and while looks at me, says:

Prove it.

It's not the thing to prove by words, but should do it.

So how you try to prove something with words?

I didn't talk with you at all and I never wanted to prove something with my words. The main reason is me who is standing in front of you now. I'm not the word.

Hey Zairas, what're you waiting for then? Let's go.

I return and go toward the ladder. Saidan is standing up there and looks at me with a sad and dull face. I go up the ladder and stand by him.

I didn't want to talk with her that way, but I had no choice but that.

What's her problem?

She sees the world differently. No time to explain it to you, we should go, I have to think.

So what about Samirana?

It's her choice. We should act ourselves for the time being.

Saidan, gun in hand, wends that suddenly, before we get out, we hear a footstep on the ladder which echoes through the trench. Samirana gets out through the trapdoor and stands in front us. Her face is now dry. She, while looks at me, says:

I know where the red's shelter is. I have a plan.

Chapter 25

Escape

It is twilight. I review the plan with each step I take, lest I make a mistake. I go toward the red group's base through the buildings, which are just some walls rather than the building. Once in a while I stop to check the situation.

I almost reach the building which Samirana drew it for me and I saw it from afar. This is just in front of me. A big building which like all other buildings, its upper floors are ruined and as far as I can see only three floors of the building are useable. The rear parts of the building are completely ruined and there is no other building within a 20-meter radius of this building.

I move forward from the margins slowly and stop at a distance of a few meters from the base. I hide behind a wall and wait. I can see two soldiers who stand guarding in the third floor. At the margin of 20-meter radius four soldiers also are guarding just within a five or six-meter radius.

I pause for a while both to keep cool and the necessary situation appears. I close my eyes and empty my mind. I stay this way for a minute, then take a deep breath, use autosuggestion, open my eyes and take the first step.

It is very harder than what I thought. It is like one hundred people pull me with a rope from behind and just by one person from the reds' base. I think of Vorarin, and the fire.

I take another step hardly, but guiding my feet is not under my control. I take some steps until I reach behind a thick iron beam. I have to wait a little until the red soldier be in front of me. He approaches me calmly and slowly, while he doesn't care about around more. He sometime looks downward and then looks at the sky. He also shakes his head or hand for his teammates.

It seems I am lucky. He stops in three steps away from me, and his teammates are in the farthest point from us. Thanks to an iron beam and a wall, I am out of his sight. I close my eyes for the last time and take steps at full speed toward him.

I jump at him who is subjected to my sudden attack, and we both roll on the sands. Before I can react, I see in absolute belief that he gets up from the ground sooner than me and comes toward me with the fisted hands. I feel like someone pulls me from behind. His fist passes by my face at a distance of some centimeters, but when I come to myself, his leg lands on my breast and after slightly flying in the air, I come down on the sands on my back. I feel no energy in my body. My eyes become dim and I suffer vertigo. I feel as if my heart beats in my head.

Hurry up! Get up! Sit on your knees!

I open my eyes hardly and look at the red soldier who has a mask on his face.

Hey! What's the matter?

I hear two footsteps who come toward us.

I said sit on your knees!

He shows me to obey him with a kick on my side. I hold my breath while I sit with the help of my right arm and push my other and on my breast to mitigate its pain. I close my eyes and sit on my knees with the help of my hand.

Who's he?

The first soldier who still aimed his gun at me, says:

I don't know. He suddenly went at me.

One of those two soldiers comes toward me, he smiles while appraises me and says:

I know him. We were looking for you in the heavens but now found you on the earth!

The best reaction is to be silent.

Surely you've come to save your friend!

I stipulate:

I came to make a deal.

He says angrily:

A deal?

He sneers:

Thanks God I didn't blow your brains out.

I say with a sardonic tone:

I don't think Baltin has the same idea about the fire.

He stops appraising me and stares at me without motion. Time passes in silence for a while until I feel that I am lifting from the ground. The same soldier grabs my collar and lifts me.

Come in, I see what're you saying.

Suddenly the first soldier says insistently:

I'll take him in.

The second soldier push me ahead and says indifferently:

No, you stay here. I myself will take him. I wanna see how he wants to deal.

He pushes me forward with his gun every two or three steps. Now that we are close to the entrance door of the building, I can see four personnel carriers on the right side of the building. One soldier is guarding between them. As we approach there, he looks at us carefully.

We go toward the door and stop in front of it. Four support beams hold the door from two sides. The corners of the door are rough casted and two steps are made with arranging two rows of stones. The outer side color of the door has turned to yellow-orange and many holes can be seen on it.

The wicket on the door is pushed aside and two red eyes appear. The handle is pulled and the door opens. Three soldiers, who are gathered around the fire, rise as we enter. Three other soldiers are guarding in the first floor. Two other soldiers at the end of the building, one standing and one sitting, turn toward us as we enter. The right side of the door have been out of my sight. Two soldiers are sitting on two almost intact wing chairs and are talking to each other.

His gun is pressed on my back and guide me toward them. One of them rises and makes the other one rises. Then they stride the remained steps toward us and stop one step away.

How did you find him?

The soldier removes his gun from my back and says:

He himself came here.

Those two soldiers who have not mask on their face, look at each other in wonder and then the soldier who is in front of me, clasps his hands behind his back and while his cold look goes with his face, says:

What do you mean?

When I arrived I saw him fighting with one of our soldiers.

The soldier who is in front of me turns his eyes to me and while frowns, says:

Well?

The soldier behind me replies instead of me:

He says that he's come to make a deal.

He has his own tongue and can talk. You can go now.

Yes sir!

The sound of opening the door is heard and he gets out through the door.

Well?

I try not to look in his eyes lest I can talk more easily.

I want to talk with your chief.

The corner of his lips slightly lifts up:

Baltin isn't here. You can make deal with me!

I guess he should be Lasfor. I just look at him. The sound of burning firewood and the wind are the only sounds which can be heard. It seems all are looking at us.

Send him where his friend is!

One of those soldiers who are sitting around the fire, comes toward me with no delay and takes me dragging to the end of the base. In some parts a few threadbare chairs and furniture are seen. But a very big luster still hangs from the ceiling. Just the door and the windows has made here like a building unless it is rather like a niches.

In the front are two doors at the end of the building where those two soldiers are guarding. As we approach, one of them who is sitting on the floor, rises and along with the other one comes toward us.

Throw him where his friend is.

The soldier who takes me over, says:

Move along!

We go toward the right door, it opens and I am pushed in. At first, I think there is dark but the light is as other parts of the building. All of a sudden I see Vorarin who rises from the floor and approaches me. His vision is sand-blind and his face is loose. As I look at him, he lowers his head and looks at other point.

I'm really sorry. I did my best but I didn't think things go this way. They showed up suddenly. I tried to get away but they caught me.

It doesn't matter anymore. We should think of get away.

He lifts his head and looks me in the eyes, and says with regret and sympathy:

If we stayed together, we'd be caught.

It doesn't matter. I said forget it. We should find a way to get out.

I go toward him and ask him whispering:

Where's the fire?

He reaches out his hand to his coat to take it out but I hold his hand in midway and say slowly:

No, keep it by yourself

He looks at me with wide open eyes but obeys me without question.

Well, what do you want to do now? Any plan?

I shake my head and while I try keep cool, say:

We should wait.

I feel this plan is slightly problematic. Something unexpected has happened which is unknown to me. A bad feeling trembles each single cell of my body.

Wait for what?

I shrug my shoulders foolishly and say:

I don't know...maybe for an event...I don't know, we should wait.

One of his eyebrows is lifted and he looks at me in wonder. Is there any hole?

I checked the room, there's no way out. Although the wall is a rather thin, I don't think we could use it. There's a big hole on the wall but...

Where?

He shakes his head hopelessly and says:

Unfortunately it's out of the room on the left side, but they have covered it with a piece of debris.

I shake my head to confirm and I say:

Yeah I saw there.

Time passes in silence for a while until he says:

What're you thinking about?

Nothing!

You're so cool! I can't realize at all what do you want to do. Would you tell me something about your plan? I'm getting mad!

I try to elude replying:

Be quiet! They may hear us.

I go toward the door and look for a hole. I find one easily. Two soldiers are still sitting there and talk to each other. The last orange rays of sunshine are fading away and now the reflection of the fire can be seen on the wall. The shadows of the soldiers come along with the fire and are drawn with trembling flames on the wall.

As far as I can see everything is the same as before. All of a sudden a door opens and a soldier, while carrying a rather big box, goes toward the same man who is the chief in the case of

Baltin absence. He disappears behind a wall and I can't see them anymore.

Before I stop watching, suddenly my eyes meet the first floor. The ground and the first floor have not any ceiling! Now our work has become harder than we guessed.

What happened?

Anxiety has changed his face completely.

I don't know what happened.

All of a sudden the sound of an explosion and collapsing buildings are heard. Then the earth quakes and makes all the people aghast. With this blasting sound there wouldn't be any way to return and we should only trust in God. I go quickly to the hole on the door to check the situation.

What happened? What's going on?

His voice trills clearly. I try to calm him without I turn to him:

Nothing, just be calm. We should wait.

Vorarin groans:

What do you mean?

I say persistently:

Just be quiet and calm and listen to me, do whatever I say.

As I guessed, the event caused a commotion in the soldiers. All the red soldiers are standing cautiously and up in arms.

What's that?

Hey what's going on? What happened?

One soldier who I can't see him, says:

It's not clear but I can see so much dust in the air. It seems a building is exploded.

Their chief comes one step ahead.

Go and see what happened. In case of any danger, call us. One of you also go with them. And you! Keep them company.

One of two soldiers who are guarding in front of the door, joins those three soldiers quickly. The other soldiers jump down from the first floor and before they exit, lower their head in sign of salute and then get out.

Vorarin loses his patience and while he groans, says:

Hey, would you tell me what's going on here or not?

I see a soldier who comes toward us.

Move away from the door, Vorarin!

I also go aside with Vorarin and sit on the floor. It takes more time than I guess until I hear the door flies open. I sign Vorarin with my hand to stay there. Then I go to the door half-raised. The door stands ajar and no one enters. I look outside through the hole to be sure.

There is no sign of the soldier who stood guard here, and also of the soldier who was coming here. The number of soldiers is reduced to four. Two of them are in the ground floor and two other in the first floor. I call Vorarin with my hand to come near me:

Follow me with no question!

He shakes his head. I open the door slowly but I can't prevent the creaky sound of the door. I move my hand slower to reduce the sound. With each creaking of the door, I gnash more tightly insomuch my jaws ache.

I open the door so that we can exit and I step out of the room. I see the shadow of a soldier in the ground floor who is guarding near the fire, but there is no sign of the second one.

There is no way to return anymore. I wish I had not any heart in my breast. This way that it beats in my breast, makes a sound which causes all notice us. Luckily, Vorarin is behind

me and he can't see my face. I gulp my saliva and take another step.

Six steps to escape or two steps to take risk! I don't know which way I should choose. Now that the way of escape is in front of me, freedom has closed my eyes. I am overcome by temptation to take the next step but suddenly the spell is broken and it brings me to reason. So I take two risky steps and reach the next room.

Leave the door completely open and come in the room with me.

Vorarin winces to show me his opposition and roars:

What're you saying? We can get away from here now!

I control myself hardly and say:

I said listen to my words. Hurry up, come with me.

Suddenly the shadow on the wall stops moving and reaches out his hand to his gun. I jump into the room and when Vorarin sees this, he also dives into the room. I close the door quickly but quietly and keep away from it. I seek refuge in a corner along with Vorarin, keep close to the wall and hide ourselves in the dark.

I hear a footstep. He takes step almost fast and I hear the sound of his gun which he replaces in his hands. Vorarin bites his lower lip and his face is tensed. As far as I hear he takes step toward us. Maybe he has heard my heartbeat! The footstep stops a few meters away from the door and a shout is heard:

They got away!

I heard the second footstep which after passing a distance in running, stops near the first soldier and asks in wonder or out of fear:

How did they escape?

I don't know but they're not in the room.

All of a sudden I feel that my stomach crumples up. I gnash my teeth and stare at the door.

We must go for them. We shouldn't lose them so easily. I don't think they've gone away from here.

Their chief says out of disability:

We should find them. We shouldn't lose them. Do whatever you can to find them.

Then he shouts:

You two, come down from there!

All of a sudden the earth quakes and then those two soldiers say together:

We're ready!

You take these two and with all the guards go and find them. Just find them!

Hurry up! Let's go.

I go to the door to be sure. I check the situation through the hole on the door; nobody is there in the building. Then I signal quietly Vorarin, who is still near the wall, to come toward me. His face clearly shows that he is still in consternation.

We should get out of here before they return.

I open the door and we go toward the hole on the wall. The light of the fire is so weak that just can move the darkness away once in a while. Now we can get out of here with no trouble.

I sit on the ground to kick the debris, which has blocked the hole, more easily. I bend my leg to beat the wall with all force that Vorarin voice stops me:

Come, take this from me. It's a heavy responsibility. I don't want to get the jitters anymore.

I am afraid of taking it too, as if I have a grenade in my hand. I take the “fire” from him with a blink and thanks him, then put it on a pocket behind my neck. I hit the first beat with all force. The wall trembles a little and the blocked part slightly moves. Luckily this makes less sound. I give the wall the second hit and the blocked part heels.

Eventually the blocked part falls like a cut tree by the pressure of Vorarin’s hands at a 30-degree angle. A hole within an almost one meter radius and one meter from the ground appears in front us.

You go first.

He lies on the ground without any resist and passes through the hole and I do the same as he did. Suddenly I see a red soldier who held his gun toward Vorarin.

Sit down on your knees quickly! Damn you! Didn’t hear what I said?

Suddenly a shout is heard from behind:

Catch them! Don’t let them get away! Come, they’re here.

I see him running. I look at those two soldiers dumbfounded and in disbelief. My body is stiffed. My eyes just move on those three soldiers. All of a sudden Vorarin blinks at me and jump on the first soldier who held his gun toward him:

Get away!

I take step immediately. It seems I am a marionette in the hands of the puppeteer. I can’t do anything for Vorarin. I take my steps fast and long. I get away in opposite direction of the soldiers, to the end of the building. I should go far from here as much as I can. I run to the buildings which surrounded the main building like the wall. I hear a soldier asks help from two other soldiers to follow me.

They run fast, one can say they run double a common person. So they reach me sooner than I thought. I should enter the desolated buildings to get away from them.

Suddenly a cloud of dust rises in the air in front of me. I turn my head to check the situation. Those three soldiers are shooting toward me. I am just ten meters away to get out of open space and enter the ruins.

I try to swerve while I am running to bewilder them. Eventually I reach a building and with the help of my hand dive into the building through a window. Then, pushing my body on a door, I enter the room. I go up stairs to the second floor. I go to another building over the ruined part of the wall with a long jump. Then I jump down from the rooftop and enter a side street.

Upon this escape, now they are far from me. I enter other buildings in the same manner and bewilder them by changing my direction. But they are still around me. I reduce my speed to both gather my attention and get my breath back. My breast stings and I cough.

I bend on my knees and press my sides. Then I take step tottering and pass through a building. I should take a rest. I feel nausea. I go toward a wall, sit and lean on it. I feel lack of oxygen. I have to take deep breath to prevent of suffocation.

The footsteps of the red soldiers are closing to me sporadically. I hear their shouts cursing each other. I make no attempt to escape and just sitting here. I am so thirsty. Maybe darkness helps me.

Hey, are you sure he came this way?

Yeah, I myself saw him. He was going this way, he couldn't go too far. He seemed to be wounded.

Search everywhere carefully. He may hid somewhere.

I close my eyes and say:
My God help me.
When I open my eyes, I see Samirana standing in front of
me.

Are you okay?

I try much to avoid frowning but I can't control my voice:

Where were you?

Stay here. Now is my turn.

She disappears behind the wall. I hear her footstep which
changes to running.

I found him! He's getting away from here! Come this way.

Then I hear their footsteps in chase of samirana.

The diluted air flows in my lungs little by little. Now I
breathe almost easily and regularly and my body fills with
energy gradually so that I can move my feet again. My body
is sticky and my palate become coarse. My shoulders slightly
aches but luckily my wounds don't. I should have a look at
them. They may be infected during this period of time.

Although the weather is calm, I feel cold which increases
momentarily. The moon is upper than the horizon line of the
buildings and I can see it easily. I bring out my insignia and
turn it on. Then I enter the "*group members*" option and,
looking for a turned-on insignia, I review the list. All is off
except for one: Saidan. He is almost two hundred meters away
from me and is moving. With an approximate and assumed
line, I draw a pathway for him. As I see, he is going to the
place which we arranged.

I stand on my feet with the help of the wall and remain that
way to get my balance. Then I take step in the dark and go for
Saidan. The earth is slightly lighted under the moonlight and I
can recognize my way.

I go toward that point from each way which shortens my way, but at a fixed speed to be able to react in case of danger. When he reaches that point, I am just twenty meters away from him. At a distance of five meters, I stand just behind a wall of a building. Then I go toward a wall which is full of the holes and cracks and look inside. I see Saidan sitting on the debris and is busy with his insignia. He pushes a button and brings it close to his mouth:

Where're you Zairas?

I go toward the entrance door and enter without replying him. As he sees me, Saidan stands up and asks frightened:

Are you safe?

Yeah!

He takes a deep breath and says:

What happened to you? How you managed to escape?

I ask in wonder:

What? What do you mean how I did escape?

All of a sudden a shadow appears at the door and, while she pants continuously for breath, says:

The mission accomplished.

Then Samirana enters the building, while she put her hand on one of her kidneys.

Where's Vorarin?

I bethink myself of Vorarin with Samirana's question. I had forgotten Vorarin completely.

I'm here!

Vorarin gets out of the room in front of my wondering eyes and while he has a flask of water in his hand says:

What a plan you made!

Hey! What's going on here?

I can't avoid asking this question. Samirana, while one of her eyebrows is lifted, says:

What's happened then?

What're Vorarin doing here?

Where he supposed to be? We had gone to save Vorarin, if I'm not wrong!

Vorarin was caught in the last moment.

Saidan interferes and says:

Hey, hey wait a minute. There's a problem. How did you escape from there?

Samirana is confused, so she says:

Let me see, what happened? You talk slightly strange. Didn't you act according to plan?

I say:

Saidan is speaking a little strange.

Saidan says excited:

I thought you understood.

I open my arms and say:

What?

Do you remember when you jumped at me?

Yeah.

After I caught you, I tried to take you into their base but that guy came and prevented me.

Well?

Then I tried to find a way but I couldn't approach the base. I had to stand guard. They were watching me from the first and second floor. If I made a suspicious act, they would find out.

I don't realize at all what do you mean.

When Samirana exploded the building I wasn't there.

You mean you didn't open the door?

He lifts his hands and says:

No way. When the building was exploded, a group of them went out. I take advantage of the opportunity and went to the base. I turned around the building and I came where you and Vorarin were supposed to get away from. That time, I saw you coming out through the hole. Unluckily, that moment, the soldier who was protecting the vehicles, saw us. vorarin jumped at me and I was constrained to arrest him. After that those three soldiers followed you, I took advantage of the opportunity and went away from there with Vorarin.

I feel that I have faced with the hardest mathematical problem.

So who opened the door for us?

Saidan shrugs. Samirana asks:

How did you escape?

While I try to concentrate my mind, I say:

After the explosion, the door was opened according to our plan. One of the soldiers did that. But there was a problem which was the first and second floor hadn't roof, that is, I mean there was an empty space through there the soldiers in those floors could see downstairs easily. We were constrained to enter the next room and make them imagine we escaped. All of the soldiers got out of the building. We took advantage of the opportunity too and got out through the hole. You know the rest.

When I finish my word, all sink in thinking about our savior. I can't believe that a spy from the "Hope" group is among the reds, or maybe the matter is something else. Maybe the reason for he helps us is something else. Maybe, maybe...there are thousands of reasons for someone to help us. Vorarin reaches out the water flask to me:

I think you need some water.

I take the flask from him and then he continues:

He might be anyone but he's been a chance for us.

I can't forget that soldier. It seemed that he knew us and was aware of our plan, or without knowing the plan, he conformed to our plan by the chance.

There's no sign of Nabidak and Parkad and others. What should we do now?

We all come down to earth with Vorarin's words. Saidan, while shrugs, with a loose face and half-opened eyes, says:

I don't know anything at all. My mind is blocked. I've never been in such situation. They're caught on one hand, and the fire on other hand...

Vorarin says:

What about we search for them? Maybe we could find them. There're three hypotheses; they're prisoner of the blue group, prisoner of red group or, they managed to get away.

I say:

In my opinion, we should get out of here; this is the law of our group: if one is caught, we shouldn't go to save.

They turn and stare at me as I guessed. Saidan leers at me while he frowns. Although he says nothing, his face remains frowning.

A mild smile can be seen hardly on Samirana's face. She looks at me with her eyes alight.

I agree with Zairas. The fire is more important.

Her words correspond with her face mood. Vorarin also agrees with two of us.

I agree with you too. Our goal was to keep the fire away from them.

Saidan shows his opposition at last and says:

Maybe the need our help. We can't leave here this way.

Samirana folds her arms and says:

You seem you're not of our group. Don't you know the laws of the group? When you have a big goal, even your friend doesn't matter at all. This is a brief of the laws.

Saidan shows no resist and, while hold his hand in front of her to show his deference, says:

Well...okay. I have nothing to say anymore.

I show them my empty hands and say:

We can't get out of here without our knapsacks. We need foodstuff and tools.

Saidan goes toward the entrance door and says:

So let's go.

Chapter 26

The savior

Each one of them has occupied one side of the base for themselves. Saidan fell asleep with my insistence under the blanket up to his chin. Vorarin also has lain completely under a blanket. Samirana, also has lain on her side under the blanket just in the same row of Saidan, but on the other side of the blanket. She has put one hand under her head and is drawing different obscure figures with her other hand on the sands on the base floor.

I slightly distance myself from the window to be safe from the wind. Then I enter the room through the door which is made by human and nature, to find something warm for myself in the knapsack. Maybe I could borrow some clothes from those three. I wish lapse of time was fast and tomorrow would come soon. Nabidak's, Parkad's, kidaton's and Brasen's knapsacks are still here. This means they have faced with the problem.

I bend over my knapsack but I can't find something useful. It comes to my mind to use the blanket but it is cloggy. Maybe I find a clothes in others' knapsacks.

I wanna tell you something.

Samiran says this quietly, while remains in the same position and as she continues drawing on the sand, without

turning to me. I leave the knapsack and go toward the door and lean on the wall:

I hear.

I owe you a thanks.

For what?

For your help. I'll stand guard.

I didn't help... I'm just looking for a clothes. We should stand guard in turn.

To show her I am serious, I go away from the wall and go out.

You can find a coat in my knapsack.

When I go over her head to take her coat out of the knapsack, her eyes are closed. I open the small pocket of the knapsack, take her coat and get out of the base.

At first, the wind trembles my body so that I decide to return in, but if I return, I will fall asleep. So I go toward the building which is next to our base and sit on its steps so that I position in a depth and nobody can see me.

Moon still shines dimly and draws back darkness and enables me to see. The monotone of the galloping wind and replacing sands encourages me to sleep. Cold also can't prevent me from sleeping, I should keep myself busy.

Thinking of the past affects me more and put me to sleep.

I reach out my hand and bring the "fire" out of my raincoat back pocket. Its box is so tempting, as if it says taciturnly "do open me". I spin it in my hand and look at the blue wavy grooves all over it. What may be inside it? What is it which has played all the people off against themselves?

I open its two small locks which are very similar to the locks of a suitcase. I put my fingers on its edges and slowly

open it. It is still dark inside and nothing is seen. My hands tremble, I gulp my saliva and wink.

A metal plate shows off. I touch it. Its surface is polished. When I take it off, the bottom of the box suddenly lights. A monitor is devised on its bottom and a message appears on its screen:

“look at the metallic plate”

I take the metallic plate and hold it in front my eyes, but I can't see anything. The plate is completely polished but it reflects nothing. I change my position to get help from the moonshine, but, again, nothing can be seen on the plate. I look at the monitor, another message appears:

“The FIRE is what you see on the metallic plate”

I look at the plate carefully. I don't know why I can't see my face on the plate. Nothing can be reflected on the plate. Suddenly I remember Saidan's words: “the fire destroys everything”. His word completely corresponds with the lack of reflection on the plate. All of a sudden another message appears:

“do decide”

Then display turns off and goes aside. The complete space of the box now is visible and I notice a very small black box. There is a tiny monitor which shows a message:

“saving the world”

I replace the metallic plate into the box without deliberation, close its door and hold it in my hand tightly. My heart beats in my head. I close my eyes tightly and take a deep breath. Then I remove my necklace and open its secret door. Luckily the box is so small that my necklace holds it easily.

I wear the necklace and stand up to walk and empty my mind. Two hours still remain to next one's turn to stand

guard. I keep my distance from the base and just move around it.

The wind has scattered my hair completely on my face. My raincoat is sailing with the wind like a sailcloth and its sounds companies the howling wind. An irking silence makes me take step in different direction. All the events parade in front of my eyes. Why I entered this case?

When I go away from the base, suddenly I hear a strange sound. I stop and listen carefully. It is like a snake is creeping on the ground or...maybe a creature...or maybe it is just the sound of the wind which makes imaginary sounds in my exhausted mind. I try not to notice it but...the sound is closing to me. Surely, the wind has carried this sound from afar to this point. I go toward the base. I feel something bad. I should warn my friends. Maybe someone or more people are coming here.

Mansidan's here!

Saidan comes out of darkness and stands in front of me with an agitated face.

What do you mean? Where're you? Didn't you sleep?

Saidan takes my hand:

We've no time, we should leave here. I'll tell you what happened.

Wait! What do you mean? Mansidan...?

I said no time to explain. Some were following me.

I enter the base and block the door by putting a chair under the door handle. Then I go toward the room and suddenly I see Samirana who stands in front of me with an anxious face:

What happened?

Some are approaching here. I don't know who they're. We'd better leave here as soon as possible.

Samirana wakes Vorarin up.

Take your knapsack. We shouldn't lose time.

Vorarin says in wonder:

What about others' knapsacks?

Saidan, while puts his knapsack on his shoulders, says decisively:

We can't carry excessive load with ourselves.

Vorine gathers the blankets confusedly and takes his knapsack. All are ready to get out of here. I go to the door to take the chair away from the door that suddenly I see eight shadows who are standing in front the base.

Seek refuge!

I listen to Samirana's warning and go near the window and lurk just there. Those shadows, who are increasing in number momentarily, are standing in a military line in front of us.

Surely they're not of our group.

I agree with Saidan

The walls are not tenacious here. We should go in the room.

Upon my word, all enter the room and take refuge. We have no way to get away at all. Anyhow, we can't escape from here. Vorarin has receded as far as he could and held his gun in his hands tightly. Saidan and I are standing on both sides of the room. Samirana is standing near me and looks at them through a hole on the wall.

They have aimed their guns toward us and three of them part from the rest and come toward the base. I look around to find a way to get away, but only a window in the room shows us outside. I try it but it is too small. I kick the wall angrily and say:

Damn! We are caught. There's no way to escape, what to do now?

No one says anything. Vorarin is panting, Saidan has leaned against the wall and closed his eyes. Samirana is standing unarmed and looks at me. All of a sudden, blasting sound of the guns is heard. Saidan asks all of us with a shout to lie on the floor. I lie on the floor before he shouts. The bullets make holes on the wall unrelenting, and the sound of ricocheting bullets can be heard. Inside the base, a tenuous fog of dust engulfs everywhere. If they continue this way, the building will collapse, but the gunfire finishes soon.

Two shots are fired at them; Saidan shoots aimlessly. When I follow his approximate aiming direction, I see three red soldiers who have approached the entrance door. Saidan fires another bullet to keep them away.

Although everywhere is engulfed with dust, I can see the tracks of the bullets which have formed here like a strainer. Suddenly an idea comes to my mind:

I have an idea. Watch for the door. Saidan come here.

Vorarin, whose face has turned pallid and his gun trembles in his hand, goes to the door quickly and leans on the wall. Samirana rises from the floor with the dusty face and clothes and takes position on the other side.

They're surrounding us from three direction.

Vorarin's warning makes Saidan comes to me, and he, while bites his lips, says:

Zairas! Do whatever you wish, but soon. Maybe we have no other way.

I have to make some holes on the wall by some bullets and then we should try to break the wall by hit. Look, have you any bullets?

He begins to fire at the wall without replying me. He fires five bullets in a row at the height of the wall. The intervals between the holes made by the bullets, makes a line about one meter long on the wall. Then I also shoot five bullets at a distance of half a meter from Saidan's, on the wall. I fire two remained bullets at the top of the wall to make the one in half meter rectangle. Saidan uses another cartridge to reduce the intervals between the holes. Then we hit the wall with all force after counting down.

The wall shakes with each beat we make and the split between the beams increases. Vorarin and Samirana fire at them once in a while, but all of Samirana's shoots miss the target or hit the wall. Vorarin, while his brow is dripping with sweat, seldom appears in front of the door and shoots. Just a few of them fire at us from outside. The wind is blowing severely now, and the sands which are floating in the air, come to help us and block their vision. This is a chance that we should completely take advantage of. All of a sudden, gunshot from outside stops, and after a short time a thick voice says:

You've something in trust from us and we held a few people of you in trust. You'd better come out and talk with us. Some of your group are our hostages. Giving us the fire, the case would be finished.

I don't notice his words and say to Samirana and Vorarin insistently:

Just don't let them to come close.

We've not enough bullets.

We hit the wall with all force and finally a dim light comes in through the crack on the wall. Saidan has covered his mouth and is coughing. My throat also is agitated gradually

and stings. I should give a rest to my foot and use my other foot to hit the wall. Now I almost can pass my hand through the crack. It should be the end of our work.

Samirana, Vorarin! Come here. We should wreck the wall with a hit.

Four of us stand in a row:

Now!

We all hit the wall very hard. As I guessed, the wall falls down, and, like a bomb, makes so much dust. We close our eyes and put one hand on them as a shelter and use our other hand as a cane.

I get out of the dust confine. My eyes are tearing and my hand pushes the air away, looking for fresh air. I feel pin stings my eyes. I rub them and wink fast. The rest are coughing while they put their hands on their knees.

We haven't much time. We should get away from here before they notice our escape. Maybe a few soldiers are waiting for us behind the building. No resort, it is our last alternative. So I go toward them and say:

Hurry up! We should leave here. Vorarin and I from this way, you two that way. We can escape more easily this way and have more chance.

Saidan says:

Where we would meet each other again?

We'd be in call with each other.

Then, while they are still coughing, go on their way with the fast steps and get away from us. We go toward the wrecked buildings. No one is chasing us. Maybe they have lost us. We move ahead in a narrow road full speed. No soldier waylays us or shoot at us. Although we've kept

enough distance from there, we still take step long and fast without reducing speed.

Vorarin stumbles. His face is red and his kerchief, which he has wound around his head, is wet. He runs after me. I reduce my speed until he reaches me and suddenly I see Brasen. Mansidan is standing near him. They are standing near a building and are talking with each other. For a moment, I feel that my heart stops beating; my head becomes heavy and my eyes become hot. Vorarin says:

Hurry up Zairas! What're you doing?

All of a sudden, upon seeing me, they get out of sight behind the wall. I change my direction and run following them. Suddenly a shadow comes out of darkness. He is in red. I reach out my hand toward my gun frightened to draw it out, but it is too late; he aimed his gun at me. I frowns to get my confidence.

He doesn't notice to Vorarin at all. It seems he hasn't seen him yet. I leer at Vorarin, he is in darkness. Moonshine draws Vorarin's gun on the wall. The red soldier is still standing there and doesn't move. I am waiting for Vorarin but it seems he is in doubt to shoot, or his decision is something else. The way the red soldier is standing, his next move can't be predicted. Maybe he is killing time until his other people arrive.

Against my expectation, Vorarin finally overcomes his hesitation. I can see his finger movement which is pressing on the trigger. I close my eyes involuntarily and ask Vorarin for help after God, in my heart. Then I hear two gunshot which tremble my body. All of a sudden, my hand is throw backward insomuch I lose my balance but I keep my balance again before I fall down.

When I come to myself again, the red soldier has disappeared. My fingers and palms sting. Suddenly I hear a shriek from left side. So I quickly turn toward the shout. Vorarin has scuffled with the red soldier. Vorarin can't help but wards off the red soldier's hits. I go to help him without thinking about a few seconds ago events.

I pound a rather heavy fist on his back, loop my arms around his neck and pull him backward with my all force. His weight falls on me and we both fall down. Vorarin is on all fours, coughs nonstop and rubs his throat.

I push the red soldier away and get up from the ground quickly. All of a sudden a punch comes to my face, but I quickly recede my head instinctively. So his punch misses my face. The next punch is thrown toward me with no delay. So I perform repeat the same movement.

All of a sudden I feel pain in my stomach and fall on my back on the sands. I reach out my hand toward my stomach involuntary and press it. His footprint is imprinted on my stomach.

When I come to myself, I see a very foggy shadow which is coming toward me. His leg is hanging in the air and as I can see he has aimed it at my stomach. It is slightly late to stand up. So to be safe from his kick, I roll on the ground. It works and he can't kick me. He repeats his kick and I am also constrained to roll again.

I expect him to continue kicking me but I see him who is whirling madly. When I look more carefully, I see Vorarin who has looped his arms around the red soldier's neck and pressing so tight as if he wants to strangle him.

I rise from the ground quickly and go to help Vorarin. The red soldier frees himself from Vorarin's arms and push him

over, before I reach them. So I go toward him and, before he could do anything else, I kick him tightly and drop him on the ground.

I try to put him in a position he wouldn't be able to do anything. Suddenly, I see a gun near my foot. I take it off the ground quickly and aim it at the red soldier. When he sees the gun, stops struggling and remains motionless. He says nothing and just looks at me. I can kill him but I am not a killer. Without being distracted away from the red soldier, I say to Vorarin:

Hurry up Vorarin, we've to go. Some other may show up at any moment.

All of a sudden, some fine particles are flown to my face. Before I can do anything, my eyes sting. I reach out my hand to my face. I close my eyes tightly and press on my eyelids with my fingers.

I hold my breath for a few seconds and then I am dragged on the ground. A strange sound comes out from my throat and I open my mouth completely. I feel my lungs have turned into the eye of a needle.

On the other hand, an intolerable pain burns my eyes like the fire. I can't open my eyes. I feel that my head is near to blast, and feel heaviness in my head and can't move it. I turn to my side and try to enter air in my lungs. It seems someone is playing trumpet near my ears and two hard substance are pressing my head from two sides. I grasp at the ground.

Suddenly, all of the pressure from my body and my head stimulate my throat and air enters my lungs with the first cough and I can feel air flow into my lungs. I try to open my eyes. I put my fingers on my eyes. My face is wet. My eye sting has greatly reduced. Tears have helped me and caused

some of the sands come out of my eyes. I slightly rub my eyes and can keep open them with nonstop winking.

A voice says imploringly:

Zairas help...Zairas...

The voice is so familiar. I rise from the ground with the help of my hands and suddenly I feel that a bullet passes through my breast and goes out of my back. I put my hands on the ground to avoid falling down. I remain this way for a short time and then get up. To keep my balance, I spread my legs apart. Two are fighting with each other. One of them throws his fist and kick toward the other, and this one receives them thoroughly.

The defeated fighter falls on the ground with a dreadful knock and snuggles like a fetus in mother's womb. The triumphant takes the black thing off the ground and holds it toward the defeated one.

Suddenly, seeing the military red uniform, all of the events are review in my mind within a second. I go for him immediately and hit him severely with my shoulders and drive him against the wall.

The sound of all of red soldier's accouterments cuts off. No punch comes toward me and no gun is aimed at me. The red soldier doesn't move and just is standing against the wall.

I look at the soldier, who is still standing, with the eyes which can't see clearly yet. A rod has pierced his breast just in the middle. I push away his torn clothes. The rod has passed through his heart just in the middle, but I can't see any blood.

We should leave here. Some are coming here.

I take step woozy and move along by Vorarin. I turn just with him and take step just when he does. That red soldier have not any blood. I am getting mad. All of a sudden, upon

turning into a street, we face with a few red soldiers. Before they begin to shoot at us, we come back and go on the previous way. Now those four soldiers are following us. They would reach us within thirty minutes if they take step this way.

When we turn, you'll leave me. I'll make them to follow me and you'll get away via a bypath.

I shake my head.

Well, now you go that way.

After turning to that street, I enter another street again. I take step so that my eyes become misty. I can't enter the buildings because of the pains I feel in my back and breast. I just go away from here.

Suddenly I see a red soldier who is running after me. It seems that Vorarin couldn't divert all of the red soldiers to himself. I enter a broad street and walk aimlessly on the paving. As I go along, the pavement gradually replaces with dust and sands. The red soldiers is about ten meters away from me. I don't stand a chance.

I reach the end of the street. There is only a way on the left side. I get ready to turn that way. Suddenly my leg is catch on something and I fall on the ground severely. Because of the gradient of the ground, I am dragged a few meters. An intolerable pain engulfs my forearms, elbows and knees and my back stings, as if I have fallen into a hole full of ember.

At the end, my head smashes into something. Strange sounds echo through my head. Pain comes from behind my head and goes toward my brow. I experience a severe vertigo and my eyesight becomes misty. I wink a few times and suddenly I see the red soldier who has aimed his gun toward me.

Hey guys! I found him...

All of a sudden a bullet passes through the middle of his head which brings out some red blood and sprinkles some drops on my face. His muscles become loose and results in falling down of the gun and wireless set from his hands. He sits on his knees, and then lies on his breast.

I hardly lift my head, which is still in fight, and look at the point that seems the bullet came from. Another red soldier is standing slightly away from us and smoke is still coming out from the barrel of his gun. I see him faded. He comes toward me. His detail becomes clear with each step he takes toward me. His clothes is torn just on the breast. All of a sudden, an idea flashes in my mind; he is the same soldier who was killed by piercing the rod on his breast and had no blood. I feel that he is the one who opened the door and we escaped.

As he sits on his feet, removes his mask. His hair dispersed on his face. His eyes are completely black, without any pupil and eyelid. While only his lips move, He says with a spiritless face:

Hang on! They need you.

He goes away from me and disappears behind a building. I can't tolerate the weight of my head anymore. I loosen my neck muscles and fall on the sands.

Revenge

My body is wet and itches. I wink a few times until I finally can see clearly. The heat rises from the ground and the wavy air makes me see around broken. When I tongue my palate, I feel as if I chafe two rugs on each other. My lips are rimous. My neck is gone to sleep and I can't shake it. My body shivers, as if it has turned into a stone. I would like to sleep. Even I don't try to move a little. I close my eyes and remain this way. I don't want to think about anything. I don't care about anything.

It seems as if rain is falling down on me instead of the sunrays. I feel the dripping sweat on my body. Once in a while, a wind blow works as a natural cooler when it passes through my wet clothes. I look at the effect of my breath which moves sands. There has been made a cavity hole on the sands and the number of sands which are moving by my breath reduces momentarily, insofar as sands just shake in their places. I hold my breath and then blow it to the sands with full power; a cavity two times greater than the first one is made.

All of a sudden a black thing on the sands catches my attention. I order my right hand, which is bended toward my body, but it doesn't move. I gather all of my force and, while I

try to make my fingers to obey my order by looking at them, I manage to move my forefinger.

I warm up my body by limbering. Then I put my palm on the sands to turn on my back. All of a sudden I feel as if some snakes come out from the ground and bite my palm. I see some tiny blisters on my palm within a few seconds. I cool them with my saliva.

I relocate the sands with my hand with a little caution to reach the sands which are slightly cooler. I position my hands in a good situation, make them pillar of my body and, while they tremble, I go on all fours.

As I expect, I suddenly close my eyes, gnash my teeth, hold my head with my hands and try to keep it steady. It is like a hammer is beating on one side of my head continuously. When I reach out my finger toward that point of my head, my eyes become dim and I lose my balance. When I hold my finger in front of my eyes I see some fresh blood on it.

My body sweat is dripping on my wounds and stings like salinated water. The sun shines directly on my face and causes I feel more headache. I hold my hand in front of my eyes as a shelter but lights passes through my fingers and hurts my eyes. I try to stick my fingers together but I can't; my hand trembles.

My sleeves are completely torn and red blood is clotted on my hand. My hand has received so many wounds. I get up from the ground with the help of one hand, while I hold my head with another hand and spread out my legs.

I press my eyelids and put my hand on them. I feel that I am in a hurricane. I relocate my feet to find a good foothold to avoid falling down.

All of a sudden, my eyes meet that black thing again. This is my insignia which is crumpled like a paper. Some part of it is melted and mixed with the sands. I take it off the ground and, while my eyes are half-opened, go toward a shadow calmly and cautiously.

I reach a wall and seek refuge under its shadow. I sit, stretch my legs and lean my head on the wall. I take deep breaths repeatedly both to calm my pain and to make up my mind. I press my head on the wall tightly and fist my hands.

I take a flask out of my knapsack, refresh my lips and quench my thirst. Then I open a can and devour its content. I open another can, but this time I eat slowly and calmly. My hands tremor is almost finished and my eyes can see clearly. My neck can hold my head and I can move my feet.

The rear of the insignia is completely melted. A lower part of it, is stretched like the ice cream. The buttons on the insignia also has suffered a sea change and mixed with its body. They hardly can be pressed. Its display screen is almost intact and I push its button. It turns on and shows an image. Then a message appears:

“All of the data has been lost because of lack of fingerprint confirmation. In case of you reconfirm your fingerprint and your eyeprint, you only can see your inbox messages.”

I have to break the protective door of the scanner. Then I clean its screen and put my finger on the scanner; no response. I try again but it doesn't accept my fingerprint. I put my finger on the scanner for the last time and suddenly it recognize my fingerprint. Then I expose my eye in front of the scanner and it recognize my eyeprint at first attempt.

There's no option on the screen and I just can enter inbox messages. All of the messages are from Saidan. He has sent

me the last message very later than other messages. I open the message:

“tilted pillar”

Tilted pillar! What does he mean? Just these two words are seen on the message screen. The display turns off and on a few times and then remains off forever. I give some taps on the insignia, but it doesn't work. It seems like its mission was to give me this message. So I throw it aside and close my eyes.

Surely Saidan has told about something which I have faced with. But I can't realize what he means saying tilted pillar. Thousands of meaning can be in this phrase. Maybe his purpose is a wall that...no...I don't know at all what the tilted wall is? Place? Object? Person?...?

I wish he hadn't sent me this message with this much security. As these two words represent, I should assume that they refer to a place and surely, I have faced with this location since then I have met Saidan. And also, Saidan's purpose of saying these words represent a symbol which its equivalent can be found. If these two words show a symbol, which they do, I must search for it in my mind.

Main station of the group, red group base, secret shelter, the FIRE hideaway, and some places which were our rendezvous; all the places I can remember. But none of them look like the “tilted pillar”.

Nothing occurs to me, however I think much. Maybe it isn't a place at all. Oh, my head aches. I have to go to a safe place. I open my eyes and suddenly I see a building just in front of me, like a tree which is bent under the weight of its boughs; the “tilted pillar”. Maybe it is the same thing which Saidan meant to say.

I remember when I attended Parkad; the building in which Parkad was looking out, was tilted to one side and I had to bend my body against the gradient to keep my balance. When I look carefully, I realize that it is the same building.

Surely I will meet Sidan in that place. It is not too far from here, but it is possible that the message was sent from the enemies. For the time being, I have no choice but to go there.

I rise by the help of the wall. I feel like an earthquake in my head. I put my hand on my brow, close my eyes and take step slowly. I pass through the alleys and buildings and I sit once in a while to get rest.

I stop near the tilted pillar and then go to the same way in which parkad and I entered the building. Nothing suspicious is seen from here. I take step toward the entrance that suddenly I hear a voice.

You're a traitor! You sold all you have...how dared you to do that? How could you forget these many years?

This is Saidan's voice which trembles with anger. The man whose back is almost toward me, aimed his gun at Saidan. My heartbeat soars quickly. My body shivers and trembles. I take long steps, go toward him and shove him severely with my shoulder. The gunshot echoes through the building, and then I hear a wail.

While falling down, he parts from me and I fall down on the ground like a boulder. A lengthy whistle echoes through my head. My eyes rotate in their sockets and show me moving scenes in front of me. A strange wheeze comes out from my throat while I breathe. It seems like there is no bone in my body. I can't move any part of my body.

I see Saidan who comes toward me and bends over me. He puts his hands on my shoulder. His lips move but I can't hear

him. He shakes me slowly and his lips move again. He seems frightened. I want to give him response but my lips don't move.

His another hand is on his shoulder and is pressing it. The red blood is flowing through his fingers and his right side is red. Once in a while, he winces and closes his eyes.

All of a sudden he stops and takes a knife out of his waistband with his left hand. Then he keeps distance from me and opens and shuts his mouth quickly. He looks at a point which is not in my sight. Sometimes his mouth becomes wide open and sometimes he gnashes his teeth.

Suddenly a shadow goes toward Saidan quickly and pounds his hand on Saidan's breast like a hammer. Saidan dodges and gets ready for the next attack. His right hand is hurt completely; his obvious weak point.

Soon after the first attack, the raider begins the next attack. The knife is aimed at Saidan's right side, but he parries it with his leg. This time, Saidan goes at him and guide the knife toward his breast. The raider dodges and cuts a groove on Saidan's left arm.

Saidan retreats and gets defensive. The raider attacks again and kicks Saidan's breast. Saidan goes backward totteringly and bumps into the wall. The raider takes advantage of this opportunity and stabs his knife into Saidan's right leg. Saidan pounds with his fist on the raider's face and manages to loosen his grasp.

Saidan takes breath quickly and gnashes his teeth. His face is pale and wet with sweat. He goes away from the wall totteringly and spins the knife in his hand. The raider is waiting for an ideal situation. They stand in front of each

other for a while in silence until the raider attacks, as he is expected to.

Saidan is standing motionless as if he doesn't want to do anything. The raider's knife goes toward Saidan's neck from the left that suddenly Saidan spins on his right leg and sends the knife toward the raider's neck. After that, Saidan loses his balance and falls on the ground.

It is completely surprising! The raider, like me, certainly didn't expect that Saidan goes at him from the side he is wounded. The raider falls on the ground and remains still. Saidan gets up hardly with the help of his left hand and comes to me with the unbalanced steps. He has a faint and wan smile on his face and bends slightly to keep his balance. Then he sits on his knees near me and asks:

Are you okay, Zairas?

What's going on here?

He gets a look at the still body and says with a deep sorrow:

Nothing, let's get out of here. Can you walk?

I don't know.

I help you to get up.

He bends down to loop his hand around me but suddenly he freezes as if he has changed into a statue. I can see his face which has turned red and his lips tremble. The knife drops from his hand and then his hand reaches out toward his side.

Blood flows out of his side like a geyser. He hardly stands on his feet but can't tolerate and sits on his knees. I see the raider who is just in front of me and Saidan. A red line is clotted on his neck, as if his head is cut and then is stitched again.

He is Brasen. He wore a poker face; no happiness, no fury and no regret is on his face. He stands in front of Saidan, who has knelt like a sacrifice, and looks at me after having a short look at Saidan.

Just silence and nothing else...

All of a sudden someone appears from behind the wall and comes toward Saidan. My eyes suddenly become dim. He has a square face with a swarthy but smooth skin, a narrow and tiny nose, and plump but commensurate cheeks. He has got close and smooth shave, and a bundle of white hair in front of his head is in direct conflict with his hair which is darker than coal.

When I look at the brilliant and attractive eyes which seem unknown feelings are hidden behind them, I replace him. That black spot on his right eye, which is linked to his pupil and is slightly irregular, has covered his pupil like an inkblot on a blank paper and seems as if his right eye has two pupils.

He is my brother. My muscles become loose and I stare at what I see like a motionless dead body. My brother, Mansidan, after three years, is here, is standing in front of Saidan while aimed his gun at him. I involuntary say:

Please...

He remains staring at me, as if he is looking for something in my eyes.

Damned! Wait!

He aims at Saidan's heart, without noticing my request, and pulls the trigger. The gunshot echoes through my ears and my heart stops beating for a second. My head aches with each winking. Saidan shows no resist, accept the shot and falls on the ground. Blood flows from the corner of his lips and he stares at me.

I say to Mansidan:

Damned! He'd come here to find you! He was your friend!

Then I shout:

Raya is dying there, you're a damned bastards. I'll kill you, fucking shit!

My jaw trembles. My head inflames, and I gnash my teeth. When I come to myself, I find out that I have reach near Mansidan dragging. I try to stand on my feet that a hand takes my collar and lifts me from the ground. The eye which has two pupils comes in front of me and he says whispering:

You're such a rubbish that even don't deserve dying. You're the last one who I want to kill; that is, the last man on the earth. Try to enjoy the last moments of your null and void life.

He brings his face close to me and says:

Raya is the first one who'll die.

His eyes quickly move with my eye's movement. I can't see nothing but hate in his eyes.

Like me, the world is tired of the people. It's enough! Just our death can fix things up.

Then he removes his hands from my collar. I fall on the ground and everything trembles in front of my eyes. Mansidan takes his last look at me:

We're reaching the end of the world.

Then he goes toward Saidan, searches his body and pockets until he finds something. He takes it out and looks at it carefully. When my head stops beating, the images in front of my eyes become clearer. The "FIRE" is in his hands!

My hand reaches out toward my necklace involuntary. I can feel it in my hand. Mansidan opens its door. Then shakes

his head and disappears behind a wall. Brasen also goes following him.

I go creeping toward Saidan, who is dying, until I reach over him. He is just staring at me. My eyes fill with tears, my body, from stomach to my throat inflames. I try to quench it with gulping my saliva, but it just cause more pain.

Take care of the fire. Everything depends on it. It's the only reason of all the events in the world. The world will destroy again. This time no one would survive. Avoid Mansidan, he is not that Mansidan we knew.

I am so confused that just can open my mouth in wonder. He says:

Mansidan took the fake "fire". I knew he looks for it. He though it's with me. Take this watch.

He points at a wristwatch on the ground.

Take it with yourself wherever you go. It helps you.

A teardrop comes out from the corner of his eye.

I'm sorry I couldn't do anything. Ask Raya to forgive me. Take care of her. Don't let anyone hurts her.

I say:

You did whatever you could...

He gives a sad smile. His heart stops beating and his eyes remain closed. I burst into tears. My tears fall on his face, drop by drop. I stroke his head and put my head on his own. I say to myself:

I'll miss you.

My sobs harry me. All of a sudden my eyes lose their sight and I feel some nails are hammering into my head. I grasp at ground but my pain increases so that a horrible sound echoes through my head and makes me run out of patience, and darkness...

Chapter 28

The transporters

I am sitting on the top of a rather high building and am looking at the sun which is going down behind the dead buildings. It is twilight and just a red spot, in conflict with the gray color of the sky, is over the town.

My inner great and deep sorrow is the origin of the stream which is falling from my eyes and has wet my face. The wind shakes my clothes and, passing through my tears, cools my face. Sunset and darkness on the one hand, and the howling wind and the inner deep sorrow on the other hand, make the world colorless increasingly. Clouds are in red and their dark color is less obvious.

I remember Saidan who...

I am choked with tears. Maybe...

I stare at sunset. It seems that the sun realizes my heartache that has assumed such an air of sadness. Clouds have gathered around the sun, which is going down, and have made the sky darker. I wish it rained. Maybe it would wash all off these sorrows away and would take them into the depths of the earth.

I remember the days I and Mansidan were working on a car. A car which looked like anything but a car. It was like we made a car afresh. We used to work all of our free times on the car. We

gathered parts of broken down cars and finally after a few months, we switched on a car which was completely according to our ideal. When Mansidan turned the switch on and the car began working, we jumped up and down and cheered. We decided to try it, so we pushed the car and got it out of the storeroom in which we were working.

A small enclosure in front of the shelter was paved, but was covered by sands. We checked everything. Mansidan got on and looked at me, as if he waited for my consent. I shook my head and Mansidan gnashed his teeth and then he switched on the car. The sound of its engine was smooth and monotone; although it became louder once in a while, energized us.

Mansidan asked me to get on the car. I doubted but happiness made me jump into the car. Mansidan put his hand on the gearshift and asked me to put my hand on his hand too. We shift it into first together. He stepped on the gas slowly. Pavement moved under the car and things around us went away. The screeching sound of the car was lost among the sound of the engine. I felt that the car has not enough stability but...

That day, we drove the car from the beginning to the end of the shelter enclosure. At night, we feasted, but Saidan and Brasen were annoyed with us, why we switched on the car without telling them, but indeed our happiness didn't let us wait for their presence.

The next day, we all got on the car but this time, we drove the car outside the shelter enclosure. Mansidan drove the care even up to the 75 kilometers per hour. Its steering wheel was slightly tight. We drove the car every day for a month. We fixed up its faults wholly. The enclosure around the shelter didn't let us to drive the car over that speed, so we decided to drive on the main road which wasn't too far from the shelter. It took a month until we swept the sands off the road. We made a small fence of rusted metals off the road to prevent reentering the sands on the road. But we still had to clean the road every few days. We couldn't drive over 100

kilometers per hour too. That car was almost all of our fun and delight.

I breathe a sigh and the next image appears in front of my eyes involuntary...

Raya asked me to drive twosome. I checked everything except for the brake, but I wish I had checked it.

I was sure that the brakes shouldn't have any problem. But alas...I wish I had checked. Raya got on the car. I switched on the car that Mansidan arrived and joined us. I assured him that everything works well. I sat by Mansidan who was the driver and Raya sat on the backseat. We moved on.

At the end of the road was a broad valley. We were laughing and, as usual, Mansidan was disputing with Raya. They always made happy moments by provoking their dispute. When we reached the end of the road, suddenly Mansidan's face turned pale and his mouth remained open. While he was winking fast and his eyes popped with fear, he said that the brakes don't work. He stepped on the break over and over but with no effect, until we reached the sands.

I can't remember the rest of the event, however long and hard I think about it. It is like it happened in darkness.

But I never forget the next accident. I remember it so clear that as if I can repeat it now. I remember that:

I feel as if someone pounds his fist on my brow quickly. The screeching sound from under the car and Raya's shout asking help, have weakened my body. My feet tremble. My eyes are wandering from the car to Raya, and from Raya to the car. My side aches and my breast is bloody. My head is dripping blood and one of my leg is numb. It seems like I am roped to two horse which are running away from each other. A part of me asks me to go toward the car, while another part says save Raya.

All of a sudden, upon sliding the car into the valley, I take step involuntary toward the car to save Mansidan. I try to open the door

of the car, but it is locked. I kick the door. Suddenly the car goes down more into the valley.

Help Zairas! No! Please! No!

All of a sudden, upon Raya's humble request, my hands stop working. I look at her who is hanging from the edge of the valley. She tries to pull herself up but there is not enough power in the arms of a woman.

I back to help her but...

She has no chance to survive, that is, my instinct tells me not to leave my brother to help his fiancée. Mansidan has more chance to survive than Raya. It is possible that the car falls into the valley later than Raya.

My eyes fill with tears.

I collapse. I curse myself and turn away from Raya, not to see her at least, but her cries tremble my body. I kick the door again but it has no effect. I repeat this a few times, but it is useless. All of a sudden I see Mansidan who opens his eyes and looks at me, while gasping for breath. Anxiety and disquietude can be seen in his eyes.

Come on! Give me your hand. You must get out of the car, hurry up!

I reach out my hand to him through the broken window of the car.

Where's Raya?

I said give me your hand. We haven't much time. The car is likely to fall at any moment into...

All of a sudden the car moves toward the valley screeching.

Hurry up! Give me your hand! I'm telling you give me your hand!

Mansidan! Zairas! Help! Help me!

Upon hearing raya's voice, Mansidan pales and stops gasping. He looks at me pleadingly and says:

Please go and help her. I can save myself. Zairas please! I'm of no matter. Go save her. Zairas please!...

I knock the door of the car again, without noticing him. I can see his cheeks which are wet.

Zairas, please! Please! I beg you! Leave me. Zairas! Zairas! If I lose her...

The car is falling down! Hurry up! Damned! I can't open the door. You have to come out through the window. Give me your hand, hurry up!

He stares at me with the wet eyes. It seems that time is frozen. He looks at me with the eyes filled with anger and hate. I feel the ground is collapsing under my feet. I can't tolerate his looks. I lower my head and again knock the door without noticing him. Door opens! I reach out my hand but he pushes my hand away.

If you don't save her, I'll never forgive you to the end of my life.

And he says with full hatred:

You're responsible for my love's death!

His word makes me go some steps away from the car. Hearing Raya's shouts, I go toward her. She is still hanging from the edge with one hand. I see her hand which gradually slides on the edge. She is near to fall into the valley. I pass the remained distance taking long steps rushingly, after taking some short steps. I grab the ground with one hand to not to fall into the valley, and try to take her hand with my nother hand. When I reach her, she removes her hand from the edge an falls down into the valley with a shout, but I manage to take her hand in the last second. I suffer vertigo and my eyesight becomes dim. I can't breathe. My breast is near to burst.

Raya! Pull yourself up. Hurry up! I can't hold you anymore.

I can feel there is no power in her arm anymore. She tries her best to take and hold my hand, but she release my hand once in a while.

Hold my hand. I can't hold you more. Try to pull yourself up. Come on! You can! Please be quick!

I feel as if my hand is putting out of joint. She says while crying:

I can't! I can't! Please don't leave me!

You can! Just try a little more. You should just take my hand with your both hands. Come on! You can. Please! You can.

She stops sobbing and looks at my face which is full of entreaty.

You can. Believe me. You can. Hurry up!

She closes her eyes and after a pause, she takes my hand with her other hand, while she opens her eyes. Now, my hand is held with her both hands.

Well. Now...

All of my joints ache. My hand is numb.

Now...

Suddenly I feel I am going into the valley. I give more pressure on the ground with my hand to hold myself, but Raya's weight pulls me down into the valley. I try to get help from my feet but it is not effective and I am still pulled into the valley. If I don't release her... but... Mansidan...

All of a sudden I see the car which is falling down into the valley. Mansidan!

My eyes meet Raya's innocent face with the eyes shedding tears.

Thanks for everything, thanks.

Then she opens her both hands...

Tears clogs my throat and I begin to sob. The memory of that event trembles me. It is darker now. Half of the sun is hidden behind the buildings. Samirana is standing near the edge of the building and cries slowly. She looks at me once in a while, and cries more severely with my sobs. Perhaps she knows what is going on in my heart. Her face reminds me of Raya, when I was leaving her.

I remember Raya. She always was stared at the wall while was sitting on her wheelchair. Happiness had left her face forever. After that event, I never saw her beautiful lips give smile again seeing me, that she begs me again like a little girl to help her to conciliate my brother. Raya was like a sister to

me. She used to consult with me before doing anything but now she just stares at the wall and sheds tears.

I go to Raya's room and knock the door. As usual, no response. I open the door. I see her who is on her wheelchair as usual and is thinking. Her cheeks are wet. Although her face is full of wounds, she is still beautiful. She has worn her black hair loose on her shoulders, and is dressed in a simple trousers and shirt.

You..., too, are...are leav...ing me...like Mansidan an...and father?

More tears flow on her face. She closes her eyes and cries slowly.

This time, I can't tell lie. I have to leave her. I can't see her in this situation anymore. Her legs and her left hand will remain numb to the end of her life. She even can't move her head easily.

I sit on her bed, near her, so that she would be able to see my face easily.

Wh...why you do...n't sa...say any...thing? Do...you wa...want lea...ve me alo...ne?

Seeing her lips, I burst into tears. She can't talk easily yet after a few years. This was what I had done to her. It was me who took her youthful and mirth. I try to talk between my sobs so that don't let my voice to trembles.

I can't see you this way anymore. My sister shouldn't be this way. I don't want these days being the hell for you. I want to go and find Mansidan.

She looks at me with her wide open eyes. Her eyes are red.

N...no...no. don't d...do it! ple...please. Zairas...pl...ease!

She cries louder. I can't tolerate anymore. I put my head on her hand, which is numb now, and say to her between my sobs:

Please forgive me. I did this to you. I caused Mansidan leaves you. I caused you to be in this situation. Please...

No...n...no, plea...se don't say...thi...s. It wa..was my des...destiny. You're no...not guil...ty. No...one is gui...guilty.

I can't say anything in reply. I just continue crying. Maybe hope, light and mirth would come back to her life if Mansidan returns. I can't see anymore that she is melting drop by drop.

I'm leaving here today, and you too. This way, the walls and doors of here wouldn't recapture the memories. You should go somewhere at least you would be in calm and peace. I promise you I'll back again and will stay with you.

She cries more and says pleadingly:

No Zairas! No. please don't do it to...to me. I wa...want to...sta...y...he...here. If yo...you do...thi...this to...me, I'll...die. Plea...please.

I can't tolerate more. I rise from the bed and go toward the door quickly.

Except for the letter, have you anything more to tell him?

How di...did you...fin..d the let...letter?

I look at her face. A body without soul...

I have no patience anymore. I sob more. A lonely and paralytic girl in a corner of this world, is sitting awaiting for someone who today...

The sun now has went down behind the burnt buildings and just shines some red and yellow rays on the clouds. I will take revenge on Mansidan and Brasen.

To be continued...

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