
FARIDEH RAZI, TRANSLATED FROM PERSIAN BY NILOUFAR TALEBI

from Vis & I

It all started right here: I was sliding down the indefinite course of time, watching myself run to reach you, counting, *one, two, three...* three more minutes have passed and I still haven't made a decision. I'm never going to see you if I keep up this indecisiveness. Your flight is at 3:30, I should hurry, I might make it in time. Time, do me a favor and pass a little slower. I want to stand face-to-face, stare into your eyes and say what I haven't said. I'm imploding little by little, standing here, present, right now. The colored rings floating in my eyes are making me dizzy. I can't see straight. What happened!? How did this happen!? The passing of time scares me, further separates me from you. You are flying away, just as the instants flit away in the wind, evaporate. Where are you going? Why aren't you taking me? Look at how I'm staring into space, wondering what to do under an avalanche of blazing instant-drops! Really, what am I to do!? Without you!

I see Vis crowned in sundrops and bent down in a daydream, softly murmuring: *You don't realize that I'm running ahead of time, why don't you come with me, the two of us, each within the other, could reach him, keep him from leaving. Come see for yourself how things are in technicolor in my mind's eye, and all I see is crimson!*

I say: *I see nothing aside from the fantasy of you, which weighs heavily on my shoulders, and I'm all grief!*

She looks at me with eyes that are limpid as though in tears, which say: *Then get moving! Why are you still standing there nagging? It's 2:04 now, and his flight is at 3:30. If you want to hear his voice, the voice that said, Y, y, y, you are so beautiful... y, y, y, are so delightful, then run, hurry, call a car and go, don't let him leave.* And I ran and cried: *Vis, Vis!*

She turned around, climbed the meshy steps of the imagination and spread her bewitching canopy over my head. I lowered my head under the weight of her electrifying being, and listened to time beckoning me—tick tock tick tock. I only had one hour and twenty-five minutes. My heart clenched and I ran.

Vis, wait! Wait, don't rush me! Let's go together! Flights are always delayed... especially now with the war and everything... sometimes they don't even green-light flights... it's hard to tell what will happen... all the flights will probably be cancelled tonight too.

Vis looked at me imploringly: *Enough, already! For god's sake, run, hurry all you can! I didn't think that being separated would be this difficult, but this sorrow is colossal. How was I ever able to stand there before him, look him straight in the eyes and say, Go! How did I do that? Look at what I've done to you, how enveloped you are in a fog. You are disappearing among the droplets, vanishing.*

She then made a distinct twirling motion in the air with her fingers.

I ask: *What are you these fingers trying to tell me?*

She says: *Don't they conjure an image or a memory?*

I say: *Memories stand somewhere on deck until we call on them!*

She says: *Then call on them, say something, make me feel him, or somehow make me invoke him in my thoughts. I want to see whether he can see me. Can he see me standing here bewildered? I, for one, can see him crystal-clear! He's standing somewhere next to me, or sitting, I don't know. I can hear his eyes and what they have to say.*

A mysterious pull forces me to close my eyes and imagine you under my lids, to call you with all my might. Do you hear me? I mean, do you really hear me? I hope so! Maybe you'll answer my call (How razor-sharp and cutting your gaze is). What was I thinking when I said, Go?

“Go!”

“Should I?”

“Yes!”

Was it me standing there so fierce, telling you to go, or was it Vis?

“Go. Maybe, just maybe, you’ll have a fresh start, live your life differently over there! Who knows, what you want might actually happen, your expectations of yourself fulfilled. You might become somebody, the person you want, not the one they want, but rather, the one you want. Look at how this slice of life dangling in the wind flits away, passes.”

“How? How many times can a person start over again? Again and again from the beginning!”

“Each new beginning intensifies the splendor of becoming. Look at the conical tip of the mountain: suspended above it are vapors condensed to form clusters of clouds, ever-expanding until they cover the mountain’s entire sky, biding their time to rain.”

“To rain what?”

“Screams!”

“How would a downpour be possible under the shower of shrapnel and death and destruction and wailing!?”

And now I am standing here looking at the mountains, at their snow-capped peaks in the wide heart of the sky, and I see you standing there waiting for a downpour. I can still picture you, you haven’t gone so far away that I can’t sense your presence around me. I see the haloed contours of your body through the car window in the passing flickering lights that sparkle about you, your neck sinking between the shoulders. You seem to be emerging as a figment of the imagination. You exist, your scent lingers in the air, and invisible webs that press us in their delicate threads are spun between us—you standing, me sitting. I sweep my hand to tear the webs. The downy strands stick to my fingers. Desire flows between us. Words are flung from the edges of our gazes. We are going to blush. You are looking at the spot where I had been, but no longer am, and I, entangled in the webs, am looking at where you are, and never was. I laugh, you laugh, my skin tingles with joy (How happy I am).

I said: "There is light there."

He said: "Darkness too."

I said: "We are arriving."

He said: "We are going."

I said: "One day we will all die (Where are we going?!)"

Where are you going?! It's now 2:20. The body of the car tears through the heart of the wind, its windshield frame tracking row after row of pines, each and every streetlamp and tree passing within the frame of its four walls drawing me closer to you. I'll be standing before you in one hour (Would I be able to stand?). I hear my hoarse and unrecognizable voice that's excusing itself:

"Sir, sir, would you please drive faster, please, if... "

"I am sorry, ma'am, this is a car, not a plane. Maybe you should have left earlier, I can't fly!"

Right about now your scarf is caught in the wind, and you are getting farther away from me. But what would happen if the echo of your beaming laughter resounded off the glass surrounding me one more time, if your face rippled from one window to the other, rendering me speechless (How nice it is being able to extract blocks of time)?... I could see through the window that you were approaching. I impulsively held the book closer to my eyes so I could spy on you from above it! You were approaching, this much was true. One window rippled in another and your figure split in two, half in the window next to me, half in the one across, waiting to fuse together. I could see you one step away. The meteor of whether to desire or not had unleashed its messenger. The battle with the self and Vis had begun...

Sussan used to stand by the pond near the red, pink, and white geraniums, and watch herself quiver on the water's thin sheath, laughing as if to say, *you see that I'm trembling, so hold the water still*. The children would stir the water with wooden poles from mosquito nets. Wave after wave, Sussan would shatter to pieces, laughing heartily: *I'm broken, split in half, shattered to pieces, detaching from myself, and sub-*

merging under water along with the de-petalled geraniums, to drown for good. Why don't you take my hand, hear me say, Ouch, see how the sharp shafts of sunlight shine onto my head, how the blue tiles quiver under the light, and watch the wind that hurls the string of instants into space? Pearls burst in the air, and I am born from this explosion of light, in the now, in this very instant. I was undergoing a new birth...

In my mind, I'm looking at you leaning against the door, biting your lips. You've clenched your hands inside your pant pockets (I can see with my mind's eye). My hands sprout next to me, I watch them blossom, grow in silence. The glare from gold eyeglass frames doesn't allow me to see your eyes. Panting, Vis shakes me, pointing to you. *Look who's come! Can you believe it?!*

No, I couldn't believe it. The image in the glass was a projection of Vis' imagination, not reality, because otherwise, what were you doing here, my classroom, during school hours! The children were watching me with mouths agape, able to smell an incident about to happen (I hadn't said a word). Vis was trembling next to me, anticipating something she was aware of, but didn't want. She was panicking, unable to think from the fear. I said: *Be careful, an incident lies asleep behind the door. You'll arouse it if you step on it.*

And you stepped on it. A nice aroma wafted in from the opening and closing of the door. A figure etched itself in space (Its particular contour still lingers in the same spot, I feel you every time I'm there). I didn't look at you, I stared at the children's eyes to watch the echo of your appearance. The children broke in passing peals of laughter, sneaky little giggles. I, too, laughed (I was flustered). The notebook fell out of my hands. I bent down. The memory of two dark green eyes was awakened in the time between this bending and the straightening (One moment stirs up a similar one). I straightened up. The eyes flitted, and you sat down on the chair without saying a word or any formality. The light from the funnel-shaped reading lamp was reflecting on you. I intended to look at the light, but my eyes met yours (How interesting a black ring around the brown iris was,

which just today, when I turned around at the top of the stairs to see that black ring for the last time, the moistness that had swelled around it had not allow me to). Through the crack of the half-open door: you were stretched to the blue blue vault of heaven. How tall you were! You were pulling on the rolled sleeves of the striped blue shirt in order to cover your claws, you were restless as if hanging from a clothesline in the sky and the wind not letting you stand still (Stop! I'm almost there). I couldn't look at you any longer. I lowered my head, and spilled towards the line of stairs and the street. I was in the middle of the staircase when I heard the creaking sound of the door closing. The railing I was holding on to, to steady myself, sprung into the ceiling-less space, the earth became round, real and imaginary forms were entangled, blurring my vision. A stream bubbled at my tiptoes, and the stumbling sky plunged into it. I said: "Goodbye!"

I myself heard my voice. Every now and again eternity lies in moments that are immortalized. You cannot forget that place, that moment, that color in the air, the rain that ripples the sky-pool, the lights that knot into each other, sparks that ignite the pouring rain. You, me, we come into existence to incite a resurrection of the moments, to make them last forever.

"Goodbye."

Did you hear the sound of a door that pounded shut, the sound of breaking, the sound of my voice? I heard the sound of imploding, the sound of the twilight of humanity. We were parting with one word! They say resurrection is futureless. What is life without a future like? Before making it to the street, a blast of explosion hurled me to the ground (How utterly late it was for love). I got myself to the street. There was pandemonium and rising smoke and soot. My eyes fell on a collapsed wall that had a lock of hair lodged in one of its cracks, and on a woman searching for her child. The bomb had destroyed other houses. The sounds of wailing, of caving in, of destruction was pouring out of every corner of the sky.

* * *

Everyone's name has a certain ring to it, which releases a scent that entices you and me to respond, every passing sound has a familiar tone. I was being called by the ring of your voice to help clean up the debris. I couldn't respond. I had a raspy throat, and hazed-over eyes. You were gradually emerging from the dust, taking shape. I was gradually coming to, seeing you. I could barely open my mouth, something stuttered out of me, finally asking:

"What's the fatality this time?"

"I don't know, they haven't released the numbers yet. The word is that apparently they don't give out exact stats in times of war. Tell me what happened to your head!"

I ran my hand over my head, held my bloody palm before my eyes. A lock of the hair that was poking out of the wrecked wall was glistening in my hand.

"I banged my head on the wall."

You turned your head (You wanted to escape the disasters!). I wiped my bloody hand under the table. My fingers rubbed the grooves and reliefs of the carved wood. I mindlessly kept rubbing to soften the wood under them, avoiding looking at you, who was flowing inside my suffering body. I watched myself through your eyes to understand how you saw me! My horizon kept expanding through your vision, and I, alone, tasted the pleasure of placing someone other than myself in my inner eye, tasted desire, presence, and the struggle to connect and be free. Thought was in mid-flight, its final destination next to you, in peace. Vis pulled my hand, meaning: *Come, come, let's lounge under the sun's streaked shadows, laugh for the light that's penetrating us, warm and hearty, and hang from it like a droplet at the tip of a branch. Let's put every place, this place and that, out of our minds, and hold this very moment, the present as it escapes us. At last!...*

I looked under the table at my legs that moved nonstop, never still for a moment. You sat down, you who they call Ramin. I tried to look at your face. I lifted my hand to brush the air off my eyes, to better see you. The index finger, the bony

digit, flashed before my eyes, a talking hand that wanted to rest on the copper skin of your shoulder. You pulled your shoulder away, the hand dropped (You were afraid of me!). I didn't know whether to revel in, or shudder from the way you looked at me.

The fish are floating open-eyed on the surface of the water, as if asleep. I am flicking the glass bowl to wake them. They leap and circle around the bowl terrified and disoriented. They keep opening their mouths as if to say: *Sea... Sea...* I ask, *Have you seen the sea?* With glaring lash-less eyes they gesture to the glass, as if to say: *We haven't, but we've heard,* and they spin around themselves and the bowl. Suddenly, the water splashes and one leaps out and lands on the floor. It's panting. I ask: *Do you want to die or return to the bowl?* It fixes its eyes onto the bowl and opens its mouth: *Sea... Sea...*

Vis, Vis, tell me what am I to do if all he does is come and go, dilly dally, abandon me in the anxious purgatory of having or not having him. What if he appears everywhere, next to me, on the faces of everyone and everything, what if his image glows and I see nothing but him, then what will I do without him?

Vis pounded on my chest to say: *Again, ambivalence, ambivalence. Do away with it, and embrace this completely. Become it! I desire, and I get what I desire, do you understand! You just keep whining, doubting, yo-yoing until you're even more of a captive in a web of delusions. I am daringly slinging arrows of desire at him, and pulling. And you keep and-ifs-or-butsing. Alas, how alien we are to each other. We have co-existed, but in utter isolation. I exist beyond absolute silence, and I will prove my existence, my being me... you'll see how I will make him a captive. I'm that Vis, I'm that Vis, that Vis...*

Then she lay a head on your chest and listened between the groove of your shoulders to your thumping heart that ticked like a clock. You smelled of war.

“Are you going to the front?”

“Yes.”

“When?”

“Tomorrow.”

Again: waiting around, feeling abandoned, cast aside to swallow unshed tears that rip you apart, each shred yearning for union—a union that is mixed with the dread of separation, a presence that is mixed with the pain of absence.

Vis shouted: *Enough! Whining only breeds misery. Open your eyes in mine, to see colors and light, to incite rapture, abandon yourself in me, reap the joys of my being so you can forget these changing times. You must come to terms with the entirety of our era! It is what it is!*

No, I don't want to. I'm not ashamed of whining.

Look at how I reemerge stronger and fiercer the more I burn in each fire that I fall into. Look at how I efface each era inside me in order to see its cruel face. Each person somehow learns what it's like to burn. It's common. I must resist, or else I will be destroyed, my name consigned to oblivion. Do you know how time would pass without me? Me, the only harbinger bearing a message of light, steadfast to my vow. Hear my message: I am Vis, Vis.

I had to return to myself. I drove thoughts to the deepest recesses of my mind, focusing on my fingers stinging from scraping the car seat's leather, and its pieces jammed under my fingernail. The driver's glaring eyes are peering at me in the rearview mirror. I turn away to watch you occupying the space of my mind. What are you waiting for? An incident? The incident is on me, we're heading towards you. Don't you know who I am? I don't either. I keep wondering, *What I am, or what I am supposed to be!* A particle that separates from others spins uncontrollably in the orbiting space, and in this turning, the *I* is created, comes into being...

The driver's cruddy eyes watch me incredulously from the corner of the mirror. The ring of my voice echoes in the car cabin, I've probably been talking out loud to myself. I mustn't allow myself to get lost in myself. Streets, signs, and branches hanging in the wind pass me by. Stars burst into pieces in the heart of the sky, join together again, meteor-like, to form a bigger star, and rest on the car's windshield. The car speeds along, the scent of the streets change. Each street

has its own, as with each person. There's one hour left until takeoff. If the car doesn't go any faster, and if the driver doesn't keep his eyes on the road, rather than eyeing me, we'll never make it. The monument of freedom slowly emerges in the scented night through the dusty haze of lights. Excited, I think: *We're almost there, we'll get there and I'll feel your figure next to mine, and we'll laugh together.* Right now, you're sitting at the top of the Freedom Tower,¹ having strung a rope around the groove of its neck, pulling to take it away with you! Do you hear its voice from the top? It's shouting: *Don't take me away. Let me stay here where I've been planted, I've grown roots here. Where are you taking me, considering all the curve and grace of those raised fists! Have you forgotten how majestic I was when throngs of people gathered around me, sought refuge in me, called me by the name? What days and nights they didn't spend under the shadow of my protection. I'll be forgotten if you take me away, and no one will ever hear my name again. I don't want to be forgotten, don't allow it!...* I closed my eyes and leaned back in the seat, envisioning you.

Loads of people had spread picnics around the Karaj dam, radio in hand for the latest news.² The wave of their commotion echoed through the desert. People were looking at one another without seeing each other, passing through one another without feeling the contours of each other's existence. One could hear the toll of destruction from their invisible intersections. The radio announced: *Attention, Attention, the sound you are hearing now... and it means an attack... is under way,* which would intensify their scampering. Soldiers—whose status as to captured or free, bound for home or the front was unclear—appeared around the bend of the road. They traveled in groups under the round milky moon, hunched inward, with transmogrified faces devoid of any emotion. Some dragged others by the underarm, unconsciously striving to observe order. They weren't going on their own, they were being taken, belts hanging loose, boots sloshing along as if soaked with water. The only people laughing, gloomlessly and unawares, were little boys with hairless girlish faces, playacting snatching guns from one another as if it was

a silly game...

We had all left town, now sitting together around blankets we had spread on the hills. I looked for five small and uniform stones to play knucklebones with together with the children. Khosrow said: "Auntie, we have to bet that whoever wins... "Siamak cut him off: "... Whoever wins must tell a story!" Everyone agreed and we got playing. Your car was visible around the bend of the mountain. Looking at it calmed me. You were probably composing a song in your head, under these circumstances: commotion and anxiety. Khosrow shouted: "Auntie, auntie, where are you? You're ruining our game! Ok, so you're not in the game anymore, move over! Guys, don't play with Auntie anymore." He flung the stones and went to a corner and sulked cross-legged. Just as I was about to say something, the radio announced a state of emergency again. The announcer's voice had a peculiar tone (Would I be able to forget this voice one day?). Siamak gathered the stones and went and sat down by Khosrow. Playing didn't make sense anymore. All heads were tilted back skyward searching for a fire-flower that was about to blossom in the wide heart of the sky and crash onto our heads. I looked at the children. They were staring at us, eyes bulging, a thousand questions flinging from the waves of their gazes...

It was verging on dusk. You swung an arm around my shoulder and started talking without looking at me (Were you talking to yourself or to someone imaginary?): "Do you see, the days come and go, every day loses itself into night. Just as you're about to know yourself, your neighbor, your child, someone gets bored somewhere and points an authoritative finger in some direction and issues an order. On the other end, perhaps it's you or me, whose life, happiness and hard-found peace they destroy, without..."

I said: "Look at these heads that have turned like sunflowers towards the sun! They are in search of smoky dust clouds coming from missiles that launch and destroy, waiting for the rain of death, and you want them to think of other things!"

You said: “Someday, someone or other will write all this down, and that will bring us peace—albeit it might happen when we will no longer need peace of mind.”

“What good is that? Each person writes from their own specific point of view.”

One by one the lights went out, the people-paved street fell into a slumber, and voices hushed into low whispers. Knees to chest, I waited for everyone to fall asleep. Vis was sitting on top of a rock across from me, luminous moon dust sprinkling across her face. I so wanted to avoid looking at her, to be free from the temptation of her very existence, but she disallowed it with her murmuring. When the last light went out, she stood up and listened to the symphony of breaths under the burgeoning shadow of night. I watched her with dread. She started on her way, chin up high and without looking at me. *Vis, Vis, stop, I'm talking to you!* I extended a hand to stop her. She quickly pushed my hand away and slid down the hill, sand and gravel tumbling after her. A few people raised their heads. Vis lay in the shadow of the towering mountain to elude the moonlight. When the commotion died down, she got up and ran, fist at chest clutching her heart. I was witness to the currents of joy that emanated from her into space. Just imagining the incident that was about to happen was causing her to laugh. The closer she got to you, the slower she ran. A waft of your scent permeated the fantasy-inspiring terrain of night. Freedom from me and union with you in longing's raging fever! The moment that was about to happen was dazzling. *Come, let's forget war, forget cruelty, be forgotten, this very passing moment takes my crimson color away with it, clipping my path to oblivion, let's shine, become the sun, isolation wilts us, let's come together and fill the world with us, until perhaps!...*

I stared at the two sparkling flashes that were your eyes through the billowing darkness inside the car, and understood peace, and the absence of thought.

“If, if they see us together!”

“If we survive until dawn!”

The dust-clear sky was blossoming in the midst of all the blue, and we were

turning utterly translucent. We tasted patience between life and death, the splendor of being and desiring. The moon was casting its audacious eyes upon us, I extended a hand to grasp it, it writhed out of my fingers. You were behind the moon, laughing away. I wanted to brush the moon aside. My hand became a beam of light coming at you. I got flustered and woke up drenched in sweat. Dizzy, beside myself, I didn't know where I was! And then, total brightness: you were beside me. A plant had sprouted through the crack in the stones, a purple flower fluttering at its tip. A gentle light was sloping down the mountain. Vis was reclining with closed eyes, and I was awake, watching her with total abandon. One by one, voices were coming to life (Had anyone slept?). I rolled over, peacefully closing my eyes. Suddenly, you shook me vigorously. I didn't open my eyes, just pressed my lids together even tighter. You shouted in my ear: "Move! C'mon, hurry up, you, it's getting light!" Your voice stung the skin of my face. Specks of daylight were splattering onto us through the car. You leapt out and opened the door. The cool morning breeze glided over me.

"Get up, hurry, get up!"

I got up, looked over at you, and was carried away by the flowing air. I wasn't anxious. People were either asleep or awake. It didn't matter, I didn't want to think of them. I was leaving a piece of myself behind with every step I took, each piece dividing into a thousand pieces that were making their way back to you through the peaceful meadow of dawn. Little purple petunia petals waltzed in the air. I was caught in a flurry of their tender wisps, barely able to take a step. Vis was carefree, singing:

Look at this story of mine, told and sung
My name in every mouth, on every tongue
Listen, hear them singing songs of my pain
By every river and on every plain³

I was right! It wasn't a mistake! It was mother's scream bellowing from the top of the hill, and father was muttering something in his bass voice that didn't resemble words.

Vis ran a hand over her face to come to, and I, with silence in my soul, streamed towards the tongue-lashings. As soon as mother saw me, even despite trembling—as if she weren't screaming—she said: “Oh my darling, where have you been... we've been to hell and back!... because, my darling, they dropped so many bombs last night... because...”

Father turned away, clasping his hands behind him as usual, the heart-rending contour of defeat visible in his sloping shoulders. I knew he would forgive. I knew he was suffering, but I just couldn't bear shouldering the weight of his agony. I had to be silent, and think of you and your soothing voice devoid of a single trace of the usual coldness and restlessness in it. Your words inspired hope. The world outside the car was zooming by otherwise, the mysterious wonders of that night fleeting. Vis was becoming *me*, a *me* alien to myself, even. I didn't catch the moment when darkness left, but did capture the moment when father's face was lit. The day had dawned, and night was enveloped in a halo of ambiguities. How tender it was listening to you stirring next to me, and laughing. You laughed too, and our eyes met and we burst into laughter together (It was involuntary). When was it! When?! When the future was bright. When was it that we laughed without a care in the world!

Mother, who came to me with arms folded at the chest, the shade of pleading on her face, and trying not to upset me, said:

“Listen, my darling, Don't... how shall I say!... because people... “(I looked me square in the eyes: strands of white hair were glistening alongside my temples, and my heart still fluttered from mother's shattered voice).

I clung for dear life to the rock under my body to keep me from returning to you, from getting hurt by this lecture, from accepting that mother was right. I

was pleading with myself, in my heart, not to fly down and join you at the bottom of the hill. I kept thinking: *Stay calm... you'll always be her child... even at 80!... not the Pardis who has learned her lessons the hard way... not the independent woman that's as capable as a man. She has probably read everything in your eyes—she is a mother, after all.*

Vis was not looking at me, instead thinking of the rebellion surging inside me, happy that I was coming to see eye to eye with her. Mother was more concerned with my silence than with my pouty protest. She lowered her head when she saw me glaring at her and went to father to calm him down, as she usually did. Then followed ordinary daily tasks, and I was forgotten. I quietly removed myself, perched on top a rock to be engulfed by the sun. Vis watched her inner light, and I, the daylight. All of a sudden, for the umpteenth time in a twenty-four-hour period, everything went to pieces. Red and purple tongues of fire, and a tower, a tower of dust and smoke, were piping up to the sky from one corner, a resurrection of people, dust and dirt. I could see through the fire and haze that the tapering heads of smoke were heading towards where your car was. I looked over at the stunned children, a few sitting, a few standing, staring at somewhere that wasn't there, questioning us with their eyes. I turned the other way and saw a heap of dirt that blocked the view of your car. The car, with you in it, was crushed under a pile of wreckage! You must have been screaming, no one coming to your help. I imagined you were probably choking, your severed hands hanging by the skin. I ran screaming. When I got there, you were bandaging up a man's broken leg. You were hunched over, oblivious to the world. No, it couldn't have been you running around agitated, all safe and sound! My legs buckled. I sat right down. Vis dropped her head between her knees and tried to minimize the involuntary shaking of her body. A sensation, the color of flicking tongues of fire, was spreading throughout my being. Hatred, hatred with its weary leaden color, an emotion I hadn't known until then, was being born, against my wishes. And then, a scream, a bellow from the depths of existence, and then many more, one after the other. No, this wasn't

my voice, my mouth doesn't open this wide, my voice doesn't carry this far. The voice ricocheted off the opposite hill, and was lost (How is one to tolerate all this!). I hollered, hollered and then lost consciousness. When, how much later, I don't know, I came to, I saw you walking towards me, calm and pensive, like a mountain. Hadn't you heard the shouting? It wasn't me, it was the mouth of the volcano that had erupted, and you hadn't noticed. It must have been the calm before the storm, because how could you have had so much composure otherwise? Your eyes were glassy. You sat on a heap of newly-formed rubble. I joined you. You were silent for some time. I was afraid to ask anything, afraid that my screams had incinerated you. And then: "Do you know whose house was bombed in the city last night?"... Vis was standing across from me, not wanting me to listen to you, afraid I would forget her. I turned away to avoid her agitation, and asked:

"Whose house? Tell me!"

"Ahmad's."

"He, himself, too?"

You shook your head and turned away. Dust stacked layer after layer on my chest. My eyes were open, but I couldn't see anything. Suddenly: distant tolls and remote screams. The ringing, the ringing. I covered my ears. Ahmad's shadow fell onto your face. I wave him aside to see your eyes, but a beaming and spirited Ahmad, his voice blending with the ringing, is gesturing to me with such longing: *You see? You understand? He's talking about me. Me!*

1. Built in 1971 for the commemoration of the 2500th anniversary of the Persian Empire, this 'Gateway into Iran' was originally named the Shahyad ("Kings' Memorial") Tower. The name was changed to Azadi ("Freedom") Tower after the 1979 Revolution. It is regarded as a preeminent symbol of Tehran, and marks the west entrance into the city.

2. The town of Karaj is located 12 miles west of Tehran in the foothills of the Alborz mountains.

3. Lyrics from *Vis & Ramin* by Fakhreddin Assad Gorgani, translated by NT.