



THE ZORYAN INSTITUTE

"In The Valley of Death"
by Nevart Artzrouni
of Smyrna

January 21, 1969
Beirut

Prof. Stanley E. Kerr
109 Cedar Lane
Princeton, N.J., U.S.A.

Dear Professor:

I think it was on the 30-th of December that I sent to you a letter and the translation of Mrs. Hripsimé Iskenderian's memories. I do not know if you have received that material because I have not received any word from you after that. During the Christmas season all letters are late, so probably that is the reason for the delay of your letter.

On January 1, I discovered a booklet in my home-library entitled, "In the Valley of Death" written by Nevart Artzrouni. My mother said that she had bought it more than a year ago when they were selling it in our church-yard, the proceeds of which were to be used for some benevolent purpose.

Reading it that afternoon, I discovered that it is a truly great story. The importance of this great story lies in the fact that it is an extremely agonizing Odyssey of a woman who passed through a series of actual massacres during the deportations and miraculously survived.

That evening I started the translation. Very little was deleted as non-factual and unimportant. I was so much fascinated by this great epic that the translation took six nights only, including one week-end. I am sure a great movie can be built on this story alone if a producer from Hollywood ever puts his hands on it.

This material was ready for mailing since about ten days, but I put it off, hoping, meanwhile, to receive a letter from you, acknowledging receipt of the last story which I sent to you on December 30-th. At the same time I wanted to know more about the author and heroine - Mrs. Nevart Artzrouni.

Nevart Artzrouni has died last year. Her husband Hagop had died in the forties, after the war. They have two sons and a daughter. One son is in New York and the other two are in Beirut. They are from our church (First Armenian Evangelical Church of Beirut). Nevart Artzrouni's husband used to be called Mardirossian, but ~~they~~ later they changed their ~~xx~~ second name to Ahajot. Her son, Mr. Ahajot, who is in Beirut, is the ~~xx~~ assistant director of the American Life Insurance Co., Beirut branch. He travels extensively in the Arab lands and is a rich man. He donated the six lustres of our church, and her mother, Mary Artzrouni, was given the honour of cutting the ribbon for the opening ceremony of some construction in the basement of our church, for which she had donated 1000 L.Leb.

Mr. Tilkian promised to introduce me to Mr. Ahajot. I have seen him in the church but I have not been acquainted with him. I am looking forward to meet him or his sister. I have some questions concerning the story.

I hope you received the story of Mrs. Anna Der Garabedian (formerly Mahshikian) of Detroit. I would like to know your opinion about it. I would also like to know what you think about Hripsimé Iskenderian's story, if you ever received it. That was also a great and interesting story, because it gives one an idea of what went on in and around the city of Deir ez-Zor during the deportations.

Richard G. Hovanissian's book, "Armenia on the Road to Independence - 1918" is catalogued in the Jafet library. Dr. Karayan is reading it now, and then it is reserved for me.



The government closed all the French schools and expelled the friars and nuns out of the country.

My brother-in-law, Zarouhi's husband, became a military doctor. His family stayed in town and we were in their house.

One day, a few months later, my brother-in-law did not come home. We sent the servant after him. After a while we saw his horse coming home, alone. We were informed later that ~~the~~ Turkish government officials had invited him to a coffee-house. They had stripped him of his military uniform, taken his sword, tied his hands at his back and had deported him with other refugees.

That night we could not sleep. My sister's four children (the eldest 8 years old) also stayed awake with us. The horse in the stable was hitting its hoofs on the ground and neighing. It refused to eat for a week, became ill and died.

One day the town-crier declared that all the Armenian craftsman who renounce their Christian faith and become Turks will not be deported. Many artisans renounced their faith, became Turks, wrapped turbans around their heads and continued their works.

Parents of our students came to us for advice. "If you don't want your daughters to marry Turks, we should all join together, hire some wagons and flee from this town." They agreed. We were thirty families.

My brother-in-law had a friend who was a Greek. My sister Zarouhi called and told him about our plan. The poor man wept as he told us how the Turks had killed my brother-in-law. He promised to improvise us with wagons.

THE CARAVAN

One day early morning we set out. We passed in front of the government-house. We gave the keys of our house to officials there. They took them ~~a~~ without objection. They knew that whether we were in the city or outside, it was the same thing.

From Tokat we followed the road to Yeni Khan. In our wagon was my elder sister with her four children: Arousiac, 8 years old; Araxia, 6 years; Armenouhi, 4 and Vartan, 2 years. My sister Hayganoush was also with us. We told the coachman that we were all three married; that our husbands were in the army.

The same evening we safely reached Yeni Khan. During ~~a~~ supper, an old Armenian woman hurriedly came to us, whispered a few words to my sister Zarouhi and they went away. After a while my sister returned.

"They took me to the serai of Yeni Khan. There were high-ranking officers. I was scared. They assured me that my husband was killed, and if we continued ~~the~~ our journey, we would meet the same fate."

When Zarouhi hears this, she exclaims, "Where~~ever~~ my husband was killed, I want to be killed in the same place!"

The children started crying and asking for their ~~a~~ father. The old woman came back to say that they had marked our wagon. "If you set out, they will stop you on the way and drag you out." They had questioned our coachman to make sure that we were truly the school-teachers. He had sworn that we were not.

Very soon we entered the wagons and started our journey. After a while we came across to a caravan of women escorted by two gendarmes. Hayganoush and me stepped down from our wagon~~s~~ and mingled with the caravan. Zarouhi and her children followed us in the wagon.

In the evening the gendarme ordered a halt. We were to encamp in a field.

At midnight there was some noise and panic. We hear that the governor's sons are looking for us. ~~They~~ We hid under some rags. They didn't find us. Next morning Zarouhi told us that our pursuers had gone to her. She had sworn that she had not seen us. They go to Mrs. Mehroubé, the mother of our students. They tell her:

"We have brought your little daughter. If you tell us the place of the two sisters, we shall give you back your little daughter."

She answers that she does not know our place and begs them to give back her daughter. They refuse. The little girl was not with them so they were probably lying.

I will never forget Mrs. Mehroubé's self-devotion. She knew our place.

We continued our journey in the wagons, following the caravan. We pass through desert-like, uninhabited lands.

One evening all the wagons fled, taking ^{our} belongings and provisions with them. We joined the caravan.

We walk for days under the sun without seeing a single village. The children cry for water. They are exhausted. We try to convince them that we are going to daddy, but in vain.

We face a mountain. We have to climb to its top to go to the other side. It is noon. Our heads and our feet are burning from the sun but we have to move. Many women fall on the ground exhausted, but no body pays attention to them. We come across to corpses. Some fatty fluid is oozing from dead bodies swollen under the sun. The children are crying and are unable to walk. Mothers carry them on their backs. Every-body must move without a pause. The gendarmes are pursuing us with their whips. We are moving upwards leaving behind us infants and those who are exhausted from walking. Cries are heard from behind, "Don't leave us here. Take us with you."

My elder sister is carrying her little boy Vartan on her back, and holding Arme-nouhi by the hand. Hayganoush is holding Arousiac and I have grasped Araxia's little hands. We are hardly able to drag them behind us.

"I am burning, aunty, I want some water ..." I keeps on repeating Araxia. I had hidden a fragment of a melon. I give it to her.

At last we reach the top of the mountain and descend into the valley. We must pass the night there.

Every evening the Kurds would come to plunder us, take the good-looking girls and go. We would rub mud on our faces and avoid showing ourselves. ~~Something~~ Sometimes villagers would come ~~mm~~ with their donkeys to sell us something to eat demanding tenfold of its price.

Walking day after day we reach the flanks of the Euphrates river. During nights many would flee towards Malatia. We did not dare do it. After a few days they passed us on the other side of the river on rafts. They would abandon the sick and those incapable of walking any further. They would throw the rest of us one by one onto the rafts. Some would fall into the water, others would have their limbs broken.

On the other side of the river we continued our journey led by one gendarme alone. There were no more villages and nothing green.

One evening, Zarouhi's elder daughter Arousiac, 8 years old, unable to bear the tortures and fatigue of the endless journey, became ill, and, calling "Papa ... papa" died. Very early next morning, we buried her in a ditch, without shedding any tears. Our ~~hearts~~ hearts were hardened like rocks and we thought that blessed were the dead.

Thereafter the roads are sandy and deserted. Our feet would burn from the heat of the sand, and our heads, from the sun. Many would succumb on the way. At nights the rumbling of crows would not let us sleep. They would come in groups to peck the dead bodies.

One morning the Kurds started pursuing us. Everybody was fleeing not to fall into the hands of those savages. Thousands of women and children were running one way or the other. Claspings Araxia by the hand, I was running. After a while the poor child exclaimed, "I can't run any longer."



Carrying her on my back, I continued to run. I felt that she was about to fall. "Aunty, I want water ... I am going to die ..."

There is no water around. I continue to run. The Kurds approach. I am tired. My steps slow down. Araxia faints by uttering "Water ..." I thought of leaving her but I was not able to do it. Some more effort and I reach my sisters.

It is evening. I lay Araxia on the ground. I improvise some water which she drinks insatiably, but she is ill all night. In the morning I carry Araxia on my back. My sisters take the other children and we continue our journey. After a while there is some noise and everybody is panicked. The Kurds have returned. Cries and moans all over. "Gendarme, they are taking our daughters!" implore some women. I flee with Araxia on my back. All of a sudden we fall. I stand up with difficulty, but Araxia has lost her consciousness. Taking her last breath, she utters, "Aunty, water ... water ..." Before witnessing her death, I leave her on the sand and continue running.

We are thirsty and exhausted. For a mug of dirty water, we gave some golden ornaments, my sister gave her wedding ring and I gave a precious medal left from my grand-mother.

On the way we meet another caravan of women. They had turned Turks to stay in town, but later they were deported just the same. After walking for many days we again face the Euphrates river.

We stayed there for many weeks. Countless were those who were dying daily. Many women, despaired or insaned, were throwing themselves into the river. Others were dying from hunger or disease. The river was full of corpses, which were being driven away, in awkward positions.

Zarouhi who was pregnant, had a baby. The baby died soon and she, overtaken with grief for the deaths of her two children, became sick.

One morning Hayganoush went to fetch some water from the river. I heard some noise. I ran and was told that my sister had thrown herself into the river.

I was left with Zarouhi and her two children, Armenouhi and Vartan.

IN THE VALLEY OF DEATH

After a week or so an order was issued to cross the river. Passing to the other side I run to the parents of my former students for consultation. We decide to hire two donkeys, one for my sister and the other for the children. After long search we find a donkey-driver. I hold the reins of the donkey on which my sister was riding. The reins of the other donkey was held by the donkey-driver.

We set out and proceeded very slowly. After a while I looked back but the donkey driver and the children were not there. I give the reins of the donkey to my sister and I run backward. Women were shouting, "Turn back, you can't find them." I keep on running. They are nowhere to be seen. I inquire if there is any village in the area and what is its name.

"Titirij" they answer. I return keeping in mind the name of the village, hoping that if I stay alive I will return one day to save our dear ones.

I reach my sister. She was insaned. Her tongue was a little out of the mouth; her eyes wide open. She was staring at me speechless. We helped her be seated on the donkey and we drove on.

That day we were extremely tired. We walked all day and they did not allow us to rest a minute. There was no shadow on the way. A desolate land of hills and valleys.

Finally they stopped us in the evening in a valley. I helped my sister come down from the donkey. She lay on the ground. Every family ~~settled~~ settled down to rest.



Donkey drivers did not show up that evening to sell us something to eat.

We were overcome by a dull anxiety and some whispers began to spread. We had sort of a presentiment that we were in the valley of death. We drew closer together in groups and began to pray. A fearless protestant woman began to preach:

"You should be ready since it is not too late. God is calling you. Repent, so that you may be worthy of His Kingdom!"

A group of gendarmes arrive and forbid us to make tents. They gather all the little boys and girls and take them away. Mothers are panicked. All of a sudden there is ~~much~~ silence. We hear the cracking of gunfire coming over the hills. Grief and anxiety turn to general wailing and moaning.

I am seated near my sister and praying. All of a sudden she wakes up, and,

"Nevart, I am hungry. Please get me some food." She had not eaten for two days. "I will try" I answer. I go around to fetch some food, but return empty-handed.

The gendarmes return back. Mothers assault them demanding their children.

"Those who pay will have their children." ■ Women naively put into the hands of the gendarmes whatever money or ornaments they still had, without realizing that their children were already massacred!

Now it is our turn. We are thousands in number. The gendarmes would come and take a group away, and, after a while would come to take new groups. I am waiting near my sister. We are the last group. She is incapable of moving. She gives me her money, 50 gold Pounds, thinking that I might save myself by bribing the gendarmes. I hide the money in my boots. I kiss her and I run to join the group.

They drove us to a mountain. They searched each woman for money, pierced her abdomen with a sword and rolled her down. It was my turn. I had hidden our family picture and my high school diploma under my bosom and I had a few coins in my hands. I thought of pretending to be insane. I had wrapped a rag on my head and made silly movements when the gendarme approached me.

"This one is also beautiful, but she is insane" were his only words. They pushed me to one side where there were some other women. It was evening. They grouped us in pairs and drove us onward. A little beyond we came across to men who were massacred. There were little pools of blood on the ground. I made a shrieking noise. A gendarme approached, and, hitting me on the head with his gun, said, "Yuru! yuru!" (Walk! walk!).

After a few steps there were again shrieks and panic. A valley full of the naked corpses of women, piled on top of each other. Stepping on the corpses we cross to the other side. Night is falling. I look yonder, A great number of Kurds, with swords and clubs in their hands, are making their way down the side of the mountain. The gendarmes, apparently, their jobs accomplished, deliver us to the Kurds.

An old Kurd approaches me and delivers a blow on my head. I cry. He hits again. I keep on crying, and, finding out that the more I cry the more he intensifies his blows, I fall on the ground and pretend to be fainted. He dashes on me and starts taking out my clothes searching for money. He takes out my boots. Finding the money, he puts the coins in his pocket, and, giving me a last blow, goes away.

It was dark now and we were not seeing each other. The Kurds went to their villages. The survivors were calling each other. We regrouped. All of us were wounded. Warm blood was oozing from my forehead. I wrapped it with a rag.

What were we going to do? Some wished to stay there. I got up and said:

"I won't stay here, because the Kurds will return back in the morning. Those who want can follow me." I picked a fez from the ground - I don't know why - and started walking. We were about fifty girls and women. We didn't know where we were going. At dawn, some refused to follow me. They took another road, hoping to reach a village and die there peacefully.



We were ten left. We were walking through deserted places and valleys to avoid being seen. We came across a river and six of our group wanted to throw themselves into the river. I begged them not to do it and I explained to them that committing suicide was a sin. They were not convinced. They went ahead and threw themselves into the river. After a while, the current was carrying their swollen bodies, their eyes turned towards the sky.

Now we were four left. Mrs. Veronica from Erzurum with her ten year old girl, another woman and myself. We continued to walk. We were hungry. All of a sudden we noticed two Kurds, bread in their hands, coming down the mountain in our direction. One of them looked at my clothes and took out a knife. I undressed and gave him my dress. Surprisingly, they gave us the bread and proceeded towards the valley of death. We went our way under the scorching sun.

Mrs. Veronica's daughter had received a blow on her head. It was a deep wound. We could see the brain, and, walking under the sun, the wound was worm infected. We were exhausted. We were looking for a place where we could rest and die - our last resting place.

I don't know ~~how~~ how long we walked. One day we again came across to the Euphrates river. We decided to rest in a cane field. Shrunk behind a marshy sand pike, we were waiting for death to be saved. The woman who was with us was delirious. I closed her mouth with my hands so that the Kurds wouldn't hear. The poor woman was in her death agony. After a while, her eyes and mouth got deformed and she passed away. Mrs. Veronica's daughter was also ill. Pus was oozing from the maggoty wound on her head. She was wounded since a month and was very feeble. One night she asked for some water. I had a little mug. I went to the river to fetch some water. She drank, and, her eyes wide open, said in delirium: "I am going to die ... You will be tortured more ..."

Early morning, using the mug, we opened a ditch in the sand and buried her.

I was left alone with Mrs. Veronica.

After sunrise we heard noises. "Gendarme! gendarme! They have taken my daughter!" It was a new caravan of women.

"They will slaughter you also" I said to myself and began uttering the Psalm, "The Lord is my Shepherd ..."

We hid behind the canes for about a week. I was contemplating of moving somewhere else. We had not eaten anything since one week except roots.

Next morning we set out. The women's new caravan was out of sight. There had been some rain; we were walking through slippery mud, but who cared. We walk on and on. We reach a valley and there is a mountain facing us. We encounter a familiar sight - corpses of women, lying on the ground altogether naked, hair hanging from the shoulders, heads high upright, in awkward positions. All of them slaughtered. We have to step on the corpses to cross the valley. My lips repeat the psalm, "Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil: for thou art with me; thy rod and thy staff they comfort me."

We climb up on the mountain. During daytime we hide in the caves, in the evening we take off without knowing where we are going. We are like insanes. We wander without a purpose, eating grass and drinking rain-water.

It starts snowing. I take care that Mrs. Veronica stays alive - not to leave me alone!

And thus, week after week!

THE NARROW ROAD

One night when we had slept on the snow, I awoke Mrs. Veronica: "Aren't you hearing the church bells? It is Armenia here. Get up, let us go!"



"Are you crazy? Are you dreaming? I hear no church bells, and, as for Armenia, God only knows where that is!" she answered.

"No! A voice told me that we should get out of here. We shall encounter two roads. One narrow that leads to the mountain, and the other, wide, that takes to the city. We must follow the narrow road."

"We are already dead" continued Mrs. Veronika. "Let's walk in the morning without hiding!"

And we did exactly that! We met a shepherd who was taking his cows to the pasture. We followed him until we came across to two roads. One was narrow which was twisting along the side of the mountain, and the other wide. The shepherd followed the wide road, and we followed the narrow one, towards the mountain. We had hardly taken a few steps when we came across to some Kurds.

"Oh, my God!" I exclaimed. "Is this your miracle?"

A little beyond, in front of a hut, they were baking bread and distributing to Armenian women. We mingled in the crowd to get some. They were baking the bread on a "saj" (convex metal plate). We were famished. When I approached, ~~the~~ a young woman held me by the hand and took me in. She gave me a loaf. I snatched it from her hands and swallowed the bites whole, without chewing!

It was the Moukhtar's house (village-chief). The Moukhtar's daughter and daughter-in-law were baking the bread and feeding the refugees.

The old Moukhtar's wife came in. The young woman who gave me bread was her daughter. She uttered some Kurdish words to her mother who translated them to me in Turkish. She said that her daughter wants to keep me as her ~~ma~~ maid. I pointed to Mrs. Veronica and said, "If you keep also my mother, I stay."

They refused. They took me in and closed the door.

I washed myself, put on Kurdish clothes and stayed there. The Moukhtar's daughter had three children, one, seven and ten years old. Her husband was in the army.

For one week she did not let me out. One day she sent me to fetch some water. I met Mrs. Veronica there. I embraced her. We wept and told our stories. She was coming to the fountain every day, hoping to see me there.

"Do you know what happened after they closed the door on me? They married me to a dirty Kurd!"- and she pointed her finger to her hut. "Blessed are you who are eating well. I am longing for bread made of wheat-flour. I am grinding lentils on a stone-mill, make bread, and that's all that I eat. As for the other women, they came and drove them away to be massacred."

Thereafter, occasionally, I would put some cheese in a loaf of bread and take it to Mrs. Veronica.

Once I met her again at the fountain. She told me her dream: "Two birds were flying in the air. They shot one of them with a pistolet. One of the birds was hit and fell down, while the other flew away. I think that you will survive."

I embraced her and said, "Since they will kill all the Armenians, I will die with you."

Every day the Kurds would go to places where Armenians were massacred, to plunder. Their homes were replenished with clothing and money, but with the clothing came also the plague which took away many lives. The Moukhtar's daughter, who had given me bread, his son and daughter-in-law, were infected with the plague and they all died. I was left with the old Moukhtar, his wife and the three grand-children.

The husband of the Moukhtar's daughter arrived. Finding his house locked, he came to the house of his father-in-law. He stayed a few weeks. One evening he was talking to the Moukhtar in Kurdish. I was beginning to understand a little. They were talking about me. He wanted to take me to his house with the three children.



The Moukhtar was refusing. One evening he returned from work and had a fight with his father-in-law. He took his children and me to his house. I was feluctant to go, but he dragged me out.

It was cold. I lit the fire and we sat on the ground. I was thinking what to do at night. I decided to flee. I rocked the baby in the cradle to make him sleep. The other children slept on the ground. He sat near me and started talking in Turkish. He said that tomorrow they will round up all the remaining Armenians from the villages and will kill them. He approached me more and more. Sensing what was at the back of his mind, I pinched the little baby in the cradle. He started crying.

The Kurd dashed on me. He held me by the throat, pressing firmly. The boy who was sleeping on the ground awoke and asked, "What is it, papa?"

In the morning he ~~x~~ went to plow his land in the valley facing the Moukhtar's house. I cleaned the room and put things in order; I fed the children, then I thought of fleeing - but where? From the back door I entered ~~x~~ into the stable. From the dung of cows they had made bricks for burning in winter. It was piled up to the ceiling. I made a place and hid myself in. I prefered to die there hungry rather than be dishonoured by a savage Kurd. Until evening I stayed there repeating the 23-rd psalm.

It was night. I felt more relaxed but I could not sleep. The door of the stable was pushed open with a great noise. It was the Kurd followed by two gendarmes.

"I am sure that she is here. I ~~xx~~ saw her entering from the field."

The gendarmes looked around, threw away the packs of straw but could not find me. They left, threatening, "If you don't deliver this woman by tomorrow morning, we will burn your hut!"

After a while the Moukhtar and his son-in-law returned. Pulling down the pile of cow-dung bricks, they discovered me. We went to the Moukhtar's house. I implored them to stay there. I didn't want to go with the Kurd. The latter took his children and went away. The Moukhtar and his wife were ~~x~~ sympathetic but had no choice. They had to surrender me to the gendarmes.

Early morning the Moukhtar was saddling his donkey. His wife gave me a loaf of bread with cheese inside. The Moukhtar rode on the donkey and I followed her.

They had already rounded up all the Armenians who had taken refuge in that village. When we reached a village, the Moukhtar surrendered me to a gendarme and returned back. The gendarme asked my name and left. A little beyond a group of Armenian women flocked together were moaning and wailing. Mrs. Veronica was among them. I ran and embraced her. We wept together.

"It is good that you were not with us last night" she said. "Each gendarme took one of us, and the rest were divided among the Kurds."

A gendarme ordered us to start walking. We walked all day. We reached a villlge where we passed the night. The Armenian women of that village were made to join our caravan. In this way, from village after village, our number increased. Now we were about a hundred.

~~Once~~ Once a day they would give us a lentil-soup. It would be full of small pebbles. Kurdish women of villages would pity us and make the soup. After walking for many days, our feet became swollen. Fortunately we used to pass the nights in stables where it was warm. Day after day our number was shrinking again. The good-looking ones would be sorted and taken away. One night we reached a ~~hamlet~~ village.

"Your journey ends!" said the gendarmes.

Therefore this is where we would be killed! Our end was coming! All the night we prayed. I would always stick to Mrs. Veronica. "She is my mother", I would say.



THE CRITICAL MOMENT

At sunrise, they called us out ~~of~~ from the stables and lined us in the village square. New horsemen had arrived. They were not gendarmes but looked like high-ranking officers. They were two. One had come from Urfa, they said, and the other from Siverek (near Diyarbakir). They had come to kill us. Riding on their horses, they were glaring at us like two voracious hawks!

They give orders to the gendarmes to drive us to the forest. With a shower of whips we ~~the~~ reach the place. They line us. For quarter of an hour, they proudly parade in front of us. One of the officers, descends from his horse, and, graciously puts his feet on the ground. The gun in his hands, he smiles maliciously. All of sudden he fixes his gun on his shoulder and starts shooting at us one by one. Screams and laments. He shows no sign of fatigue - he lauds and fires his gun without pause! My turn will reach soon. I have embraced Mrs. Veronica, my head turned to one side.

There is a pause. I turn my face. With a bold voice he calls me, "Approach, giavour!" (infidel!).

I squeeze Veronica more. Someone pulls me by the hand and I fall on the ground. I close my ears not to hear the crack of the gun-fire. But ... no! They are not aiming at me. The massa cre is continuing. All the women fall except me and another girl.

We were spared. We passed the night in the house of the village moukhtar. We were terrified. We were moaning and praying.

Next morning the officers came with their soldiers and took us away. Our torments had not ended yet. They were riding and we were walking. After a while I looked around, but the other girl was not there.

I think we were in a place between Urfa and Siverek. The officers were arguing. Each one wanted to take me for him. The officer, major Yusif, who had spared my life, said,

"Neither for you, nor for me!" He turned his gun towards me and ...

I remember no more. When I awoke, I was in the house of a village Moukhtar. They had left me there until their return. I felt very tired. I stayed in bed for about a month.

In the house of the Moukhtar there were about 20 girls and boys between 15-20 years old. They were all Armenians converted to Turks. The Moukhtar had fields of rice. The girls would pound the rice and the boys would take it on camels to Urfa or other cities for selling. Turkish soldiers had occupied part of the house and had turned it into a garrison. They were living there on account of the village. Every day a few lambs had to be slaughtered for them for food. They were recruiting soldiers. The whole villagers used to tremble at their sight.

Weeks were passing. I had recovered my health and was working in the fields. There was fear in my heart that the officers would return.

Once I was cleaning the stable. I heard a voice. It was one of the Armenian boys, about 20 years old. He approached.

"I am an Armenian, ~~from Urfa~~ from Urfa. During nights I go to the city with the camels to transport rice. If you want come with me. I have a relative there. I will take you to their house."

I didn't want to be the cause of his death so I refused.

The Moukhtar's wife liked me and wanted me to marry his son, but the Moukhtar, farsighted, said, "One day the officers may return."

And truly, major Yusif returned with his soldiers and demanded me from the Moukhtar. The latter wanted to buy me in order to marry me with his 17 year old boy. The

major refused and took me with him.

We reached Siverrek, at the house of the major's mother-in-law. I got down from the donkey and went in.

"Don't be scared. You will stay with us. The major is my son-in-law. I understand your troubles. My eight year old girl died last night. Her name was Sultan."

I embraced her and said, "Keep me in the place of Sultan."

In the evening the major came home. He called me and warned: "If you flee, I will kill you." Turning to his mother-in-law, "Keep her for me. I am going to war in the Van-Moush (Mus in Turkish, west side of the lake) area. On my return, I will marry her."

He left. Every day I would pray that he would be killed in the war.

They were two in the house. Major Yusif's mother-in-law and her husband. They had two daughters: Sultan, who had died, and the major's wife, who used to live in the outskirts of the town. Their house, in the center of the town, had one room, and an annex stable. Every morning I would put the house in order, feed the horse and take the cows out of town to the herds. They dressed me with a home-knit "zibouné" (Kurdish dress); a flat fez with a black crape wrapped around it on my head, and my hair interlaced in fine bundles over my shoulders. They named me "Hanum", hoping that I would be converted to a Kurd. Every morning, I would take the cows and attend to the household needs. I was sad, I would weep secretly. I would go to the fields to fetch grass for the cows, and collect cow-dung. It was war, everything was expensive and there was no bread in the city. They would bake bread from lentils. The old woman, who was called Ana, was shadowing me all the time.

Months passed. There was no news from the major. One day Ana said that we would go to her daughter's house. She used to live alone. My work doubled. I had to attend to the needs of the two houses.

The major's ^{wife} ~~house~~ would take me to the stable and give me a beating. She would show me her husband's bloody sword and threaten to kill me if I ever consented to marry her husband. That horrible woman would incite her mother Ana to kill me before the return of her husband.

She was pregnant and would soon have a baby. One night until morning she cried and screamed and finally delivered the baby - dead! Her animosity towards me increased. She was looking for a chance to kill me personally.

One day she took me to the stable, and, drawing her husband's sword, dashed on me, shouting, "You will not take my husband from me!". I ran right and left and she pursued me. The servant-soldier burst into the stable, took the sword from her and said, "Poor Manum!"

I ran to Ana's house and told her the story. She wouldn't listen.

It is spring. I was going to the vineyard with ~~my~~ a group of girls to bring grapes in a huge basket. On the way we passed near vineyards, formerly belonging to Armenians. The girls were happily telling each other how the "giavours" were driven out of town and massacred. Stunned, I was speechless. Then they pointed to place where the clergy were ~~stingily~~ baked on "saj"s (convex metal plates for baking bread).

One day early in the morning I was ~~xxx~~ taking the cows to the herd. An old woman approached and asked me in Armenian:

"Are you Armenian? my girl?"

I could hardly believe it. She told me her story and then added, "Do you know, my girl, that they brought new Armenian refugees here? They are driving them towards Diyarbakir to be massacred. There were men among them. They picked thirty artisans from them, carpenters, tailors, iron-smiths, etc. They will work for the army. I am cooking their food." With these words he departed.



In the evening I went to bring the cows. I waited and waited but our cows did not arrive. I ran to the shepherd.

"I brought them until the town-square. After that what happened I do not know," he answered.

How could I return home? The major's wife would kill me. I ran right and left. I asked passers-by whether they had seen two cows. Not a single hint. Night was drawing. Desperately, I turned back home. On the way I met Ana. I informed her that the cows are missing and tearfully implored her to protect me.

"Don't weep, Hanum, we will look for them together" said she.

After a while we find the cows and return home.

When Ana's husband sees me in a bad condition, he shouts at his wife: "What is happening to this poor girl! Wasn't she going to take the place of your daughter Sultan? She is no more a giavour (infidel), she is from us. Love her like your daughter!"

The old man used to like me. His eyes were weak, and he would find his way by groping. His wife neglected him and he would often stay hungry. I used to give him food, and I was under his protection. He was, nevertheless, respected in the town. Young Kurds, who were considering to elope me from the fields, would refrain from the temptation, hearing that I was in the service of Hanné.

THE PRICE OF MY LIFE

One day the major's wife became seriously ill. The government doctor was coming to treat her, but would move her head, finding her condition hopeless. I was working day and night in the house, cleaning, washing, feeding the animals, making bricks from cow-dung, etc.

Winter was drawing. Everyday women were visiting the sick woman, each one bringing a new home-made drug. One day, one of them said:

"Among the Armenian craftsmen stationed in town, one is a good doctor. He cures diseases of the eyes; he cures people bitten by scorpions - why have you waited till now!"

Next day the Armenian youth had come and examined the sick woman, recommending some treatment. Thereafter, he used to come daily to see her. One morning he saw me, and, knowing that I am an Armenian, decides to save me.

Weeks pass and the condition of the sick woman improves. Seeing this, the young Armenian makes the following proposition to Ana: "If I cure your daughter completely, will you give me this girl, or, will you sell her to me?"

Hearing about the money, Ana answered, "I will sell her."

In the event of the major's return, both of us would be killed. Ana would have the money, and the woman would have her husband. They agree on 200 gold pounds.

Next day Ana sent me to the Armenian doctor's house with the pretext of calling him. The old Armenian cook was there. "You must marry him to save yourself from these people" she told me.

I did not want to marry. I was sure that these thirty young Armenian artisans would one day be deported and massacred. I turned back to Ana's house and continued to work there.

Ana's patience was expired. Her son-in-law could be back any day. She calls the doctor to her daughter's house, cashes the 200 gold pounds and comes back home happily. She gives me her final order:

"Tomorrow the cook will come and take you. Get ready!"

The old woman came and took me to Hagop's house. I was weeping and reluctant to marry. He approached and told me, "I brought you here to marry you but you are weeping!"



You will stay with the cook until you make up your mind."

Mr. Hagop would come occasionally, talk to me and ask about my tortuous experiences. One day he said:

"Why don't you ask who I am, what do I do and where I come from?" He continued: "I am from Marash. I am a copper-smith and not a doctor. I am practicing medicine here with the help of an Armenian military physician. I examine the patient and I report to the army doctor. He tells me the treatment and what to prescribe. I worked day and night for you until I was able to collect all that money."

Day by day I was able to understand him so I became more friendly.

We were hearing that Armenian refugee caravans were arriving via Biyarbakir and were being massacred near Siverek. The perpetrators of the massacres were the soldiers of major Yusif.

The Armenian boys in Siverek were given individual work-shops where they would attend to private and government orders - but always under army supervision. Mr. Hagop used to pay a monthly salary to a Turkish gendarme to protect his shop. The latter had married an Armenian woman who had an eight year old boy. I was able to be acquainted with her. Her name was Mrs. Nouritza. She was from Tokat and she ~~new~~ knew me. She told me her story:

"My husband was a tailor. He denounced his Christian faith and became a Turk. He was engaged in army work - making army uniforms for soldiers. After one year they deported also those families who had turned Turks. On the way many died or were massacred. The gendarme I am living with was leading our caravan. When he saw me, he put it in his mind to kill my husband. One day when we were at the environs of Dicranakert (Diyarbakir), they came and sorted all the men on the pretext that they were ill and needed hospitalization. The same night they drove us out of the city. I promised money to the gendarme if he would save my husband. He took the money and he also took me. With the remaining money and golden ornaments, I was able to save my ~~boy~~ son. The gendarme went and brought him from the caravan. The gendarme had killed my husband. He himself told me. How do you want me to live with such a beast? A Kurd took my sister. She is here. They tried to poison the poor creature three times, but they failed."

I was reconciled with my fate. During the same week I got married with Mr. Hagop.

One day my husband was late. It was eleven o'clock and he wasn't back yet. I was alone, praying and waiting. There was a knock at the door. It was he with an Armenian girl. Her name was Osanna. Her body was bruised from the blows she had received. She was in profound desperation. My husband had saved her and the next day got her married to one of his friends.

Thereafter he saved several tortured girls and had them marry his friends. But we were always afraid of being rounded up and killed.

After some days caravans of Kurds arrive from Van and Mus regions. They encamp on the fields. They are hungry and sick. They bring the plague to the city. They go begging from door to door and whatever type of animals they find, they slaughter and eat. There are no more astray dogs and cats in the streets.

With the caravan returns also major Yusif. When he goes to his house and does not find me there, he decides to kill me and my husband.

One day he gets drunk and heads straight to Hagop's shop. Fortunately he finds there another officer, a captain, whose wife was undergoing medical treatment by Hagop. The captain hinders the monster from executing his plan. He calms him by saying that Hagop is a good man who treats both Turks and Kurds and others impartially and often free of charge. The major is convinced and goes back home. His wife and mother-in-law tell him that Hanum was very sick and that they sold her in order to get rid of her.

My husband got acquainted with the wife of the former governor who was a widow. She was called Sultan Hanum. She was a very rich woman. She was keeping two Armenian



sisters, Siranoush and Vartanoush who were from Sivas. They were related to my aunt's daughter-in-law.

One day I went to a Turkish bath. A Kurdish woman was beating an Armenian girl aged between 15 and 20 years. She was beating her with her fist and a metal mug. The poor girl fell on the ground. I assaulted the Kurdish woman to revenge the Armenian girl, but they separated us.

The Armenian girl had allegedly married the brother of the Kurdish woman. That's why she wanted to kill her. Later she had succeeded in strangling her.

Once there was a knock at my door. Opening the door, I was faced with a girl turned skeleton. Finding that she is an Armenian, I took her in, washed and changed her clothes. She lay on the bed. I asked her from where she is. "Amasya" (north-west of Sivas) she answered. "They massacred all my family. About ten Kurds took me to the mountain, raped, and then rolled me down the mountain. I don't know how many days later I awoke and went to the city to beg. I was hungry."

My husband came in the evening and saw her. He brought the army doctor. He examined her and said, "She will not pull through. All her body is smashed. She has an incurable disease." After a few days she died. At night we threw her in a well to join her unfortunate kinsmen there.

One evening my husband comes home to say, "Nevart, they have brought the Armenian artisans from Diyarbakir, hands tied at their backs, to be massacred." We look at each other, speechless. Next day, my husband and his companions^{go} to their workshops, as usual. The policemen come and take them one by one to prison.

In the evening my husband does not come home. I go to the houses of the other craftsmen, but nobody had returned home. We come together with the other women, only to wail and pray. I return home, desperate. It is midnight. The city is lit by the full moon. I hear cracks of gunfire. I run to my Kurdish neighbor's house and awake everybody. They listen to the barrage of gunfire. After a while there is silence. Until morning I weep ~~and~~ and pray. In the morning a Kurdish youth comes and tells, "All the Armenian craftsmen from Diyarbakir were executed by shooting."

I feel mad. Where to go and how to save them. I run to Ana. "Don't worry. The craftsmen of this town are still in prison. Let's go and see Yakub (They used to call my husband by this name). Let's take some food with us."

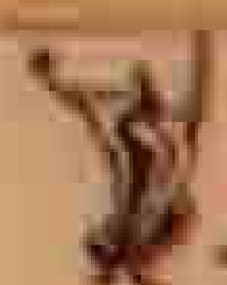
It was forbidden to see the detainees. The prison-guard was an acquaintance to Ana. The doors open. All the Armenian young men were in a dungeon. I call my husband by name. He comes. In the dim light I can recognize his face. He looks as though he was jailed for years. He was pale. "Nevart, be Brave. Try to save us."

Was there any hope? We return home. On the way Ana tells me, "If we fail to save your husband, we will take you in our house." I reach home and I fall on the ground exhausted and faltering. It is night - a long and dreadful night! I am waiting for daylight. To whom shall I go? Something comes to my mind. Early morning I run to Sultan Hanum. I knock at the door. The door-keeper opens the door and I go in. Siranoush wakes up and comes to me. With tearful eyes I ~~will~~ tell her that all of the thirty Armenian craftsmen are detained for execution.

When Sultan Hanum wakes up I go and tell her the story. She calms me saying, "I will do my best to help because both the army and the people need these artisans."

The ~~lucky~~ boys are in prison since eight days. We send them food and clothing but they refuse to give them. They beat and torture them but execution is postponed because the war has ended and the British have entered Aleppo.

One day my husband came home escorted by two policemen. He was bearded and pale. He approached and said, "They are taking me to the captain's house. His wife is sick. I promised money to these men to let me drop home, change my clothes and see you." I paid each one one gold pound. They waited. Meanwhile my husband said, "They will



kill us. Find a way to save us." They left.

Sultan Hanum and Ana were doing their best to save them from execution.

After a week they were all released from jail. We were happy. Most of the boys were sick. They were unrecognizable. They were lice infected from tip to toe.

TOWARDS FREEDOM

One day the captain called my husband to say, "We will send you off to your home-towns. Get ready."

The boys thought it prudent to take some policemen with them for protection until Aleppo. My husband consulted Sultan Hanum. The latter arranged for four policemen to accompany us, with pay.

We took some provisions with us and the caravan of wagons set out. It was noon and we sat down to lunch. There were corpses all over. One of the policemen said, "It was here that they executed Zohrab and Vartkes" (the two Armenian deputies).

When we reached Kilis (north of Aleppo), my husband said, "I will go neither to Marash nor to Tokat." We separated from the rest, ~~then~~ hired a horse-carriage and set out towards Alexandrette.

We are in December. Dark clouds have covered the sky. It is raining. The roads are muddy. The carriage is advancing very slowly. Towards evening we reach a village which they were calling Hamam. We enter into a little khan. There were many Armenians there. It was very cold and raining outside. The owner of the khan was adding pieces of wood to the fire-place, and we were warming ourselves. The door of the khan opens and two armed men burst in. We are scared. The khan-keeper calls them to approach the fire. They first talk to us in Kurdish but nobody gives an answer. Then they talk to the khan-keeper in a high-pitched voice and say, "On the way we robbed the Armenians and took their money."

They divide the money into four parts. They give one part to the khan-keeper, saying, "We will kill these also here tonight and divide the money."

I used to understand Kurdish very well. I understood every word they said. I nodded my husband out. I told him about the plot. I said, "Let's leave this place even if ~~we~~ we die on the road." I spoke to some of the Armenians there but they did not believe me. They wanted to pass the night in the inn because of the torrential rain.

We set out in a carriage. We saw a few British soldiers who passed by on their motorcycles. We called, but they didn't pay attention. The carriage stopped advancing because of the mud. My husband and Mr. Dicran, the apprentice in his workshop, stepped down to push the carriage. It would move a little and then stop again.

We were in fear that gun-men would arrive, rob and kill us.

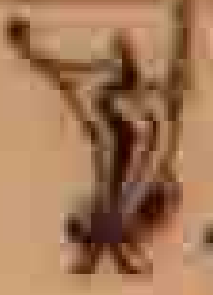
Night was falling and it was silent all around. We could notice some lamp lights far away. We hurry to reach that village. Impossible. The carriage stops ~~in~~ ~~never~~ moving. We all step down to push the carriage. I look around. From the mountain side two shadows are moving towards us.

"Hagop, the robbers are coming!" They advance. Pointing their guns to us,

"Money!" they say.

Dicran surrenders all the money he has. They are not satisfied. They hit my husband on the head. He surrenders his purse containing some "megidiye"s (Turkish silver coins). They continue to beat him saying, "Your girdle!" They beat him so hard on the head that, confused, he runs backwards and the gunmen follow him. The other ~~gunman~~ robber ~~gun~~ gets into the carriage and throws out everything, searching for money. We call my husband to surrender his girdle. They take and go away.

We leave the carriage and ~~run~~ run towards the village. Blood is running from the



head of my husband. We knock at a door. They take us in. They are Armenians who take care of cattle and sheep in the stable.

"Don't stay here. They will kill you. The house belongs to the chief of the village. The robbers work for him."

We step out of the stable. Where to go? We walk aimlessly. We meet British soldiers. They have newly arrived. Seeing the blood on my husband's head, they approach. I tell them in English what befell us. They put medicine on the wound and bandage it. They give us food and shelter for the night.

Next morning I accompany the soldiers to the khan-keeper in Hamam. The Armenians who were about twenty in number, are not there. The soldiers ask the khan-keeper for a man named Hassan. They manacle ~~him~~ him and threaten to burn all the village unless he tells them where Hassan is. He leads us to Hassan's house. We knock at the door. There is no answer. We break open the door and go in. He is still asleep with his gun placed near him. I recognized him. They ~~awakened~~ woke him up with the barrels of their guns, and searched him. They found 25 gold pounds with him. They manacled him also and we went back. One day later, four British soldiers took Hassan and the khan-keeper to Alexandrette and surrendered them to the French authorities. The French imprisoned ~~him~~ them.

We had accompanied the British soldiers to Alexandrette. They gave us the 25 gold pounds and some change found with the robber Hassan. We went to a little inn. We were happy.

In every street we walked, we used to hear people talking Armenian. There were Armenian volunteers from the United States in the French army. They would watch and see to it that no harm befell the Armenians in the city.

No Turk could walk in the street. No Turkish moulla could show up on a ~~Turkish~~ minaret. The volunteers would drag him down ~~in~~ and make him sweep the streets. It looked as though Alexandrette was Armenia. Survivors from the deportations would arrive there from everywhere. Everything was changed. Churches, schools, clubs reopened.

The incoming refugees would first settle in a place outside town called Pounar Bashi. They would live under ramshackle tents in extremely miserable conditions. Rain would turn the place into swamps. Many used to die from ~~M~~ malaria. The Armenian volunteers, seeing this, would hire houses in town and settle the refugees there.

The Turk virtually did not exist there. In the streets we would hear Armenian, French and the Arabic languages.

In the summer of 1922, with some Armenian families, we moved to Soghun-Oluk, a summer resort on the side of a mountain, which had beautiful scenery. Our husbands used to work in the city and come to us in the week-ends. The Armenian ~~x~~ volunteers would visit the villages and the summer resorts. They would look for a chance to start a fight with a Turk to revenge themselves. We were living in freedom and we had no more fears.

In Alexandrette our house was right next to the house of Rev. Kennedy, an American preacher from the Evangelical church. One day after the church service Rev. Kennedy called me with my husband and said, "I have heard about you. You are not officially married yet. I want to marry you in the church officially. The next Sunday I was married. I taught one year in Rev. Kennedy's school - as I had vowed - together with a certain Miss Anna.

I stayed two years in Alexandrette and took steps to look for my relatives in the States. I located my cousins (from my mother's side), Aram and Khoren Andonian, and three of my father's sisters. We started corresponding with them.

My cousins wanted to take us to the States. We moved to Beirut, hoping to emigrate to America from there, but the quota was full, so we stayed in Beirut.