

**THE STORY OF MY LIFE:
FROM ANATOLIA
TO CALIFORNIA**

Efronia Nazarian Khatchadourian

Translated by Herant Katchadourian

Haigazian University Press

Beirut 2023

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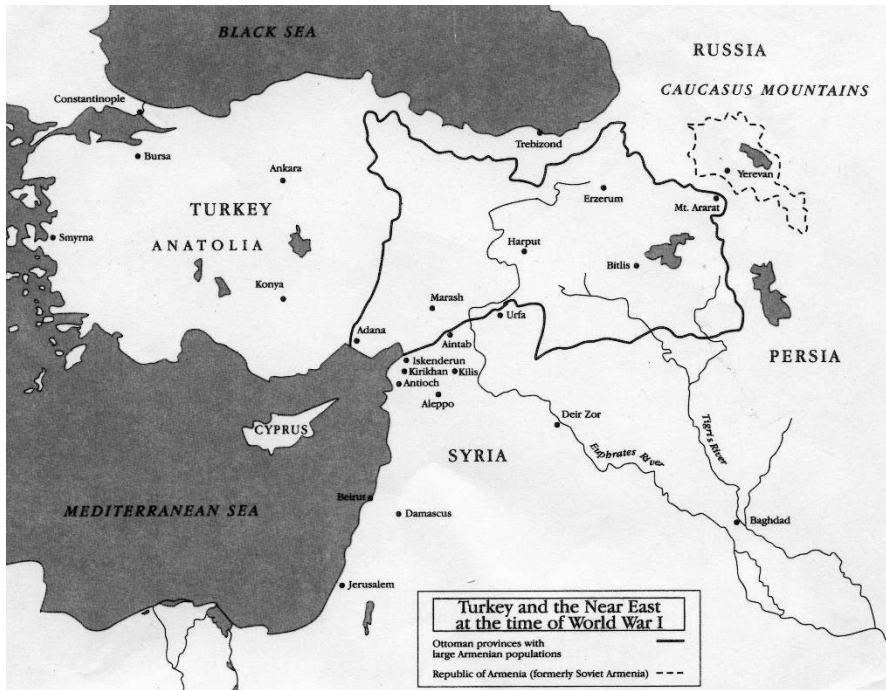
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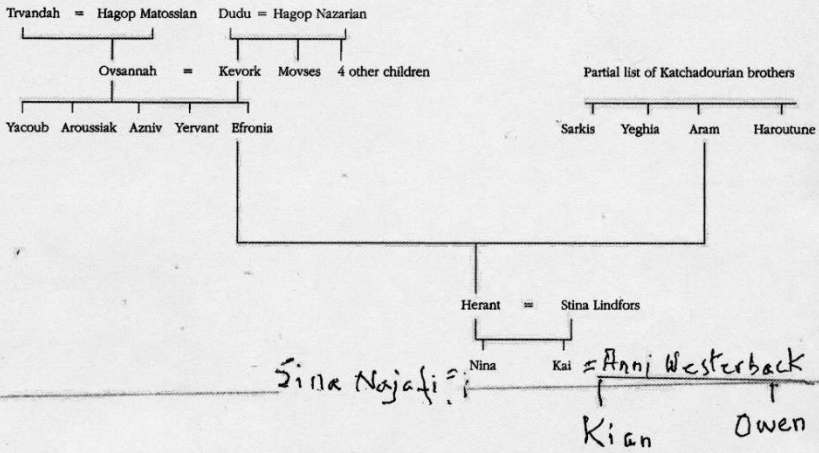


Efronia's family in 1893, before she was born in 1895. From the left, Mother Ovsanna, Arousiak, Aznive, Yacoub, Father Kevork with Yervant on his lap



Map of the region of Turkey including Aintab and Iskenderun

Efronia's family tree.



Sina Najafi

Kai = Anni Westerback

Kian Owen

Sina Najafi

Anni Westerback

Kian

Owen

Efronia's genealogy

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

First and foremost is my deep sense of gratitude to my mother, Efronia. She undertook the task of writing the story of her life when she was 87 years old. Her story is suffused with the boundless love she had for me—her one and only son. The story she tells speaks for itself.

The second person who played a singular role in the writing of this book is my wife, Stina. She was the first to suggest to my mother to write down the story of her life. The entry in the Appendix entitled “Efronia and Stina” tells the story of their close relationship in greater detail.

More recently, two persons have taken the initiative in suggesting the publication of Efronia’s autobiography in Armenian and English respectively. The first is Vahan Ter-Ghevondian, the Director of the Matenadaran in Yerevan, and the second is Paul Haidostian, the President of Haigazian University in Lebanon. Vahakn Keshishian has taken the responsibility for the preparation of the Armenian manuscript for publication and Antranig Dakessian for its English counterpart.

When I translated my mother’s Armenian manuscript into English some years ago, I had inadvertently left out some pages. Under Antranig Dakessian’s meticulous guidance, Sevan Balabanian has now painstakingly completed that task by translating the missing pages into English.

To all of them, I owe a deep sense of gratitude.

Herant Katchadourian

PREFACE

At the height of the Lebanese Civil War, which started in 1975, my mother, Efronia, and my old nanny, Lucin, fled from their apartment in Beirut to the airport in an armored vehicle, courtesy of a neighbor who belonged to the Muslim militia. Carrying only a suitcase each, they came to live with us in Stanford, California, where I was a member of the Faculty.

After a while, when it became clear the Civil War was not going to end soon, we rented them an apartment in Palo Alto close to where we lived. My mother was 81 years old. Lucin, who was a survivor of the 1915 Genocide when she was a child, was probably in her late sixties.

They made a remarkable adaptation to their new home and were able to do their own shopping at the nearby family run grocery store. We visited them almost every day.

My mother spoke a passable English, having been educated by American missionaries in Turkey, where she was born. When my wife, Stina, learned to speak Armenian, their bond became even stronger. Stina belongs to the Swedish speaking minority in Finland, and Armenian is her seventh language.

Even more importantly, our daughter, Nina, and son, Kai, who were teenagers at the time, developed their own strong bonds with their grandmother and Lucin. There was nothing my mother would not do for them. They got all the chocolate they could eat and even engaged their grandmother in games of volleyball with a balloon. Lucin knit them sweaters by the dozen. These years were to be some of my mother's happiest.

Nonetheless, my mother had a lot of time on her hands. There was only so much TV she could watch, only so many meals they could cook for us.

At this point, Stina suggested that Efronia write down some of the many stories she had told us. I am grateful to Stina for suggesting this project, which came to occupy the following three years of her life.

One summer they were visiting us on our island home in Finland. After the rest of the family had gone to bed, my mother and I would sit together and she would relate to me some of the events of her life. However, I sensed that there was something she was holding back. What this was became clear when some time later she handed me a voluminous manuscript and told me she was done.

That evening, I took the manuscript to bed and began to read it. The earlier chapters dealing with her family and growing up were already known to me. Then I reached a chapter entitled, “The First and Only Time I Fell in Love.” I knew right away that she was not referring to my father. He was a highly intelligent and cerebral man who came from a family of wealth going back to the 1800s. My mother had a great respect and affection for my father. But he was the kind of man that women (especially not a passionate woman like my mother) love to marry but do not fall in love with.

I was stunned at this heading. And as I kept reading, the central story began to unfold, revealing a love story she had kept secret all her life.

The next morning, when I went to see my mother, I put her at ease by congratulating her for her wonderful writing. She was now 87 years old, dying of pancreatic cancer. I promised her to have her book translated and published. But we ran out of time.

After Stina read my translation of my mother’s story, she wrote her own book, from a daughter-in-law’s perspective, entitled “Efronia: An Armenian Love Story.”

The present volume includes material covered in Stina’s book but also includes a great deal more material, thus representing Efronia’s memoir with additions of new material.

Memoirs are plentiful. However, it is one thing to write and translate one and another to have it published. In this case, that would not have happened except for the initiative and help of Vahram Shemmassian, for which I am most grateful. I am also grateful to Stina for suggesting that I undertake this project in the first place.

Herant Katchadourian¹

¹ My mother used her married name Khatchadourian, as did all other members of my father’s extended family. That is also the name I used until I became a student at the American University of Beirut. Since the student population belonged to many nationalities, the University used a system of transliteration that turned my name into Katchadourian, and that is the name I have used since – *H.K.*

MY FATHER'S FAMILY: THE NAZARIANS

My grandfather's name was Hagop, my grandmother's name, Doudou, their surname, Nazarian. I did not know them, nor do I remember the dates of their birth and death. They had died before I was born.

What I do know about them is what I was told later by my mother and my uncles. It was said that my grandfather's forefathers, three generations back, had come from Persia. They were three brothers on a pilgrimage to Jerusalem who, on their way, had wanted to visit a few cities in Turkey. So they had come first to Aintab.²

On Sunday, they asked their host to take them to church. The host led them through a ramshackle door into a courtyard on one corner of which stood a large hall which they called "the church." The brothers felt very bad that the many Armenians living in Aintab had no proper church. So they asked the priest to get together the leaders of the community to meet with them so as to get a better understanding of this problem.

The priest complied with their wish and called together the elders of the community. When they were asked why they did not have a church, they answered, "We can't afford it. Our people are poor. We have barely managed to put up this small church, which hardly looks like a church, and is but a large hall where we hold our services. We can barely manage to meet the expenses of the few schools we have. We have heavy government taxes."

This discussion preoccupies the minds of the three brothers, and they begin to wonder whether they should continue with their pilgrimage or instead use the money to build a small church. They decide to buy a large plot of land next to the land owned by the community, knowing full well that it would take years to complete such a project. They begin to make the construction plans, but because the community could not build a large church at the time, they decide to construct a smaller church first in one corner of the land and leave the rest of the plot for the future construction of a larger church. Then the brothers have their names inscribed on the large door at the entrance of the church.

The oldest of the three brothers decides to settle in Aintab because he likes the city very much. The second brother goes back to Persia. The youngest goes to Kilis, a town close to Aintab; he likes the town and settles there. Both brothers open goldsmith shops. The brother who settles in Kilis is called Hagop, and he often travels to Aintab. This is why he was known as "Kilisli Agop", Hagop of Kils.

Years later, a very large church was built on that land; I remember it very well. Its construction took many years, and it became a large and splendid

² Efronia, like other Armenians, used the name Aintab for the town where she was born, and that is the term used here. Others called it Antep. Currently it is called Gaziantep – *H.K.*

church with a huge cupola and a large steeple. It was very well furnished and had a very beautiful altar. The walls were decorated with paintings showing scenes from the life of Christ from his birth to his crucifixion. There were comfortable benches for the people to sit on and elevated platforms at several levels where people could also sit when the church was very crowded; the women in particular would sit up there. The church had only one fault. Its ceiling was so high that it echoed, and the sermons and the liturgical songs could not be heard clearly.

The memory of my grandfather's ancestors remained alive. The small church which they had constructed continued to be used as a gathering place for concerts and theatrical performances. And, as I said, the large church itself was built on the land which they had donated. When people from foreign lands came to Aintab, they unfailingly visited and admired the church. I recall with regret that in 1915, when the Armenians were deported, the Turks robbed the church of its valuables, and the building was converted to a jail.

My mother told me that my grandfather had been married twice. The first time he had married a young widow, called Sessouk, who had a daughter called Mariam. That marriage had not lasted long since his wife had died while giving birth to their first child, and the child, too, had died.

My grandfather had lived for a few years with his stepdaughter and then remarried with a young woman called Doudou, who was my grandmother. They had five boys and two girls: the boys were called Haroutune, Garoudj, Krikor, Kevork (my father), and Movses; the girls were Anna and Loucia.

My grandfather was a very strict man. His children kept absolutely still in his presence and were afraid to utter a sound. The children were not well educated because at that time there were no schools. They would hire a man who would get together a few boys and teach them how to read. They called such men "*khalifa*."

I knew only two of my uncles, Kirkor and Movses. They could barely read the Bible and managed to read and write a little. My grandfather had always been quite well off. He had bought a plot of land in the Turkish quarter and built a house. I was born, grew up, and lived in that house until I got married. It had three separate compartments. The upper story had two large rooms, each of which had its own staircase with thirty steps. In front of each room was a wooden veranda (*takht*) which was supported by wooden pillars. We slept there during the summer.

In one of the large rooms lived the widow of my uncle Garoudj, Mennoush Mama, and her two children. We lived in the adjoining room. On the ground floor, off the courtyard, another large room was occupied by my uncle Movses and his family. There was a large, shallow round pool in the middle of the courtyard. Opposite was a large kitchen with a side room where we stored our food. The roof of the main building was covered with red tiles, but the kitchen

roof was covered with compacted earth; during summers the family of my uncle Movses slept on it.

When my grandfather died, three of his sons divided up the house while their two other brothers, Krikor and Haroutune, bought another house with their share of the inheritance since there was no room for them in the same building. Since my uncle Movses was at the time a bachelor, he was given the downstairs room and continued to live there after he got married.

There were many stories told about my grandfather, but I only remember a few of them. He was apparently very fond of food and specially liked "*Keoftele Yakhni*" one of the famous and costly dishes of Aintab. One day he bought the ingredients for this dish and told his wife to prepare it. This dish was served with chunks of meat and pieces of bone filled with marrow. My grandmother served the food on a large tray, in the courtyard, and the family gathered around it for dinner. On top of the dish was the special piece of succulent meat with its bone full of marrow, which was my grandfather's favorite delicacy. When the family members closed their eyes to say grace, the boys spirited away the piece of meat. Their father opened his eyes and looked for the meat in vain; then, realizing what had happened, he had picked up the dish and dumped it into the pool, yelling at his sons, "You scoundrels; now you go and eat it."

MY FATHER KEVORK

I never knew my father. On November 5, 1894, when I was two months old, he fell victim to the massacres in Aintab carried out by the Turks.

He was the most handsome of all his brothers. When he went to work in the morning, Turkish women stood at their windows and doors to look at him as he passed. He was a shoemaker and owned two stores. In one he sold the materials for making shoes, which he usually brought from Aleppo. In the other, he had workers who made shoes. At that time there were no ready-made shoes; whoever wanted to have a pair of shoes made either had to go to a shoemaker or have one of the shoemakers come to his house and take the measure of his feet. My father's business had gone very well, and he earned a good living.

Once he had gotten his business established, my father's parents wanted him to get married at the age of 19. They looked at quite a few girls. Then they heard that Hagop Matossian had a very beautiful and only daughter called Ovsanna. So the parents went to see her and told their son, "Our son, we want you to get married so that we will see your wedding while we are alive. We have found a very beautiful girl for you, the only daughter of Hagop Matossian, of a good family and quite wealthy."

My father gave his consent saying, "Go and ask for her hand." He was apparently quite shrewd. When his parents went to visit the girl's family, he secretly followed them and learned the location of her house. Then he loitered around, waiting for the girl to come out so he could see her. And he managed to do so and came to love her.

My grandparents went back and forth several times to obtain the consent of the girl's parents. But each time, they would come up with some excuse and ask for more time to think it over. They kept telling my grandparents, "Our daughter is still very young; she is only 14 years old." And the mother would say, "I don't want her to get married young; I got married when I was very young and went through many difficulties as a result. I don't want my daughter to have the same fate."

My father learned of the situation from his parents and was unhappy about it. So he told his parents, "Go and tell them that I will be willing to wait for her for as many years as they wish and then get married to her." The parents relayed their son's proposal, and after thinking about it quite a bit longer, the girl's parents agreed. They had no idea that the boy had already seen the girl and was very fond of her and therefore willing to wait for as long as necessary.

At that time, both sides agreed that it would be best to exchange engagement rings. It was not the custom at the time to invite a lot of people to the engagement ceremony. Even when the rings were to be exchanged, neither would the boy come to the girl's house nor would the girl go to the boy's

house. But these two families were not so ignorant and conservative, so they decided that the engagement rings should be exchanged in the girl's house, in the presence of very close relatives of both sides, and that on this occasion, the young couple would get to see each other.

During the engagement, when my father sees his fiancé close up, he begrudges the fact that he has to wait for five years. But since he has promised to do so, he has to keep his word. During their period of engagement, my father was permitted to visit his fiancé's home, but only to meet with her parents. On one rainy day, when he once again had come for a visit, he took my mother by surprise on the landing of the staircase. As she tried to slip past him, he lowered his umbrella, caught her, took a good look at her face and kissed her.

My father then somehow managed to persuade both of their parents that on these visits he should be permitted to see his fiancé for a few minutes in the presence of the parents.

My mother never went to school. Her parents thought that she had a delicate constitution and were therefore afraid that she would get sick. Therefore, my grandparents had instead retained a tutor to come to the house and teach her privately. This is how she had learned to read the Bible, but she could not write.

The years pass and my parents finally get married. At the time my mother's father was apparently very rich. So they provide my mother with a very large dowry, and they fulfill in every way all of the customs that prevailed at the time, at great cost.

Eight days before the wedding, it was the custom to paint the girl's hands and fingernails with henna. This is a powder which is mixed with water and leaves a light brown or reddish stain. It was prepared by the groom's side, placed on a tray and one evening brought over to the bride's house by the groom's relatives to the accompaniment of drums and reed flutes (*davoul zourna*). The young women would then paint the bride's hands while the guests sang and danced for hours.

On the groom's side, there was the custom of "the groom's bath." This time the young men on the girl's side and the boy's side were invited to take the groom to the pubic bath, accompanied by the music of drum and flute. The cost of this evening's entertainment was borne by the godfather. The godfather at my parent's wedding was my father's younger brother, Movses.

It was also the custom that the girl's side would send the bridegroom and the godfather special presents. In my parent's case, they sent silk stoles embroidered with gold thread for each of them. These presents, too, were brought over to the accompaniment of music and singing. Through these ceremonies, they celebrated and banqueted day after day at great expense.

On the day of the wedding, the groom's side brought to the bride a finely embroidered veil topped with a small bouquet of flowers made of wax. This

ceremony too was carried out with music and singing. During the procession to the bride's house, the women would ululate, a way of uttering shrill undulating screams. It was said that some weddings went on for forty days and forty nights.

The wedding usually took place in the bridegroom's house, but in my parent's case, both sides had wished to hold the ceremony in church. Since the church was located at some distance, the guests had to walk there, each of them holding a lit candle.

After the wedding party returned home, a sheep was slaughtered at the feet of the bride and the groom, who then had to step over it. I remember seeing my mother's wedding dress years later; it was very beautiful and made of a shiny white material called *chitara*. My mother told me when she had trouble stepping over the slaughtered sheep, because of her long dress, my father volunteered, "Let me carry her in my arms and step across."

The sheep's meat was given to the poor. Meanwhile, numerous cooks had prepared the banquet for the huge crowd that came home from the church. It was a very fine wedding, and many presents were brought to them.

Prior to my father's marriage, my uncle Krikor was living at his father's house. Krikor then rented a house, and my parents moved into his place. For ten years, they lived happily. They had five children: two sons, three daughters. The oldest son was Yacoub, the second child, a daughter, Aroussiak; the third, a daughter, Azniv; the fourth, a son, Yervant; the youngest child, a daughter, me, Efronia.

My family had a photograph taken before I was born. My brother Yervant is sitting on my father's lap. As one can see in the picture, the two folds of my father's Turkish style *zouboun* are parted at his legs. When the photographer brought the picture home, my father turned to my mother and said, "That scoundrel was so busy looking at you that he had no time to straighten out my clothes."

My mother gave birth to her children with much difficulty and much too soon, one after the other. My sister Azniv's birth in particular was very difficult. My mother became ill, and they were forced to hand over Azniv to a wet nurse.

There were no certified midwives at the time; women who had gained practical experience delivering children performed that function. However, most of my mother's children were delivered by the wife of the famous American Physician Dr. Shepherd, and she had been trained as a nurse. Only Yervant and I were delivered by an Armenian woman called, Siphora, who was a very experienced midwife.

My father was quite healthy except for suffering from asthma (which at the time was called *yempeak*), for which he drank a special preparation (*sungur douzou*) every night.

My mother had a difficult time caring for her children since she had them in such quick succession. One day my father saw her condition and told her, "Ovsanna, I shall sleep next to the baby's crib tonight so that when he cries I will rock his cradle." My mother was glad to hear this and went to bed. It was not long before the baby started crying. My mother waited for my father to rock the cradle. But there was no sound from my father, who went on sleeping, so my mother had to tell him, "Kevork, the baby is crying; rock the cradle." My father answered, "You sleep in peace. The baby can cry during my turn to rock him."

Although my father was not well educated, he was well liked within the community. He was a member of the Community Council and served on the Board of Managers for the Armenian Protestant schools.

Unfortunately, this happy and joyful family turned into a family of misfortune and mourning. As I mentioned, my father had a shoe store. Several times a year he went to Aleppo to purchase the materials that he needed. He was once again to make the trip even though people told him, "Kevork Agha, don't go. Keep your money in cash, the political situation is not good." He did not listen to them and went to Aleppo, coming back with some 300 gold sovereigns' worth of merchandise. Most of his capital was thus tied down in the goods stored in his shops. Though he subsequently realized that the situation in town was getting worse, he continued to act without due caution.

Next door to us there lived a Turkish *mufti* who was a well-known religious leader. Many of the orders to the Turks came from him. One morning my mother told my father, "Kevork, last night the light in the mufti's reception room (*selamlık*) was on all night. I wonder what was keeping him up." As my mother was saying this, the mufti's son, Mehdi, came to us and told my father, "Kevork Agha, my father wants you to come over right away." However, my father had gotten ready that morning to go to town early since his widowed sister-in-law, Mennoush Mama, had asked him to buy her green peppers for pickling. Following the death of my uncle, my father used to do the bulk shopping for Mennoush Mama. On Saturday mornings peasants brought their produce to a place called, Arasa Bazar and sold them more cheaply, and that is where he was headed to now. So he told the mufti's son, "You go ahead; I'll be coming soon." But he did not go and told my mother, "I am not going to go because I know the mufti is going to order another pair of shoes, and he already owes me a lot of money.

When my father fails to show up at the mufti's house, his son Mehdi comes again, and my father gives him the same answer. My mother then says, "Kevork, why don't you go. Maybe he is calling you for some other important matter." But my father paid no attention and walked out the door. Mehdi went back and told his father what had happened, and his father said to him, "Run after him and call him to me now." The boy ran after my father but to no avail; my father walked away rapidly. When he shouted my father's name, my father

motioned with his hand for the boy not to follow him and called back saying he would come to their house in the evening.

My father arrives at the Arasa Bazar and begins to select the peppers. Then a disturbance breaks out, and a man attacks him with an ax striking him and chopping his head off. He is a butcher by the name of Abdul Laham. After my father is killed, the mob that has gathered loots both of his stores.

So this is the way my poor father died. My mother would often say, "His eyes sought his own death." Had he gone to see the mufti, he would have been saved, instead of getting killed at the age of 35 and leaving behind a 29-year-old widow with five orphans.

The massacre occurred on a Saturday, November 5, 1894. The previous night the doors of the houses of the Armenians located in the Muslim quarters had been marked to distinguish them from the houses of the Turks. But no one dared to touch the Armenians who lived on our street because the mufti had ordered that they not be harmed. So we were saved from the slaughter. But quite a few Armenians whose houses were located not too far from our street were killed.

There was a rich family, called Dellekian, with several beautiful daughters, whose house was attacked by the mob. It so happened that they had in their house several large jars of sulfuric acid. When it was clear that the mob was going to break through, they threw the acid from their windows onto their attackers, blinding some and causing severe burns on the faces of others. The mob fled, and they were saved from death. As soon as the situation in town had quieted a bit, the girls were smuggled out and then the rest of the family fled as well, eventually going to America. When the government came to arrest them, they found the house empty, and they set it on fire.

People were also killed and houses looted in other Armenian quarters. The house of the rich Babigian family was set on fire. But in other Armenian quarters, barricades were hurriedly set up and people defended themselves until order was restored, and they were saved from death. I do not know the exact number of people who died during this time, but we heard that some 300 Armenians from the Protestant community alone had been killed. The massacre began Saturday morning and lasted until late at night. But Armenians did not dare to leave their homes for some forty days. My poor mother waited for forty days with the hope that my father was perhaps hiding some place but finally gave up hope. During the nights when I cried while still a baby, the mufti would apparently get upset by my screams and send word to my mother telling her to make me stop crying. He had three wives; I remember two of them from when I was quite young. One was called Fatma and loved me very much. One day she told her husband, "Why didn't you send word to him and spare his life?" The mufti could not bring himself to tell her what had happened but would say instead, "Do not renew my sorrow; my conscience is already burdened."

This was the fate of my father. I shall have more to say about the rest of my mother's life later on. Let me only mention that the butcher, Abdul Laham, who killed my father did not live long. He was taken ill and taken to a hospital where he was operated on by a cousin, Dr. Hovsep, the chief surgeon. After the butcher had regained consciousness, the doctor bent over and whispered into his ear, "I could have saved your life, but I did not in order to avenge my uncle's death. Just as you killed my uncle with the blows of your ax, you are going to die under my surgeon's knife." When he heard this, the butcher turned to the doctor and looked at him with wide-eyed astonishment.

My poor father was killed by men with no conscience. And my mother at age 29 was left a widow with five orphans. She would cry and say, "I wish he had a grave where I could go and mourn him." People told her, "Stop nursing the poor baby while you are grieving and turn her over to a wet nurse; the milk you are giving your child will be like poison to her." But my mother would say, "No. I am going to nurse her even if she is poisoned by my milk. She is my dear husband's last memory. A two-month old baby was deprived of her father; I am not going to deprive her of her mother's milk as well." At the time, my aunt, Mennoush Mama, my uncle Movses, and my father's parents lived in the same house with us, but my mother's parents also moved in for a year so as not to leave us alone.

MY MOTHER'S FAMILY: THE MATOSSIAN

My mother's father, Hagop, was a tall, handsome man from the well-known Matossian family. I do not know who my mother's grandparents were, and I do not recall hearing anything about them from my mother. My grandfather had two brothers. Although I was very young at the time, I remember his older brother, Haroutune, and his younger brother, Matoss. The three brothers had lost their father when they were young. Their mother had remarried a man from the Kalfayan family and handed over her children to her deceased husband's parents. But a few years later her father-in-law had died, and the children were left with the mother-in-law. Her second husband was a very kind and rich man. He had seen that his wife was very concerned about her children, and therefore he took the three boys back into the family until such time as they would be able to take care of themselves. The couple then had two boys of their own, one called Nersess and the other Sarkis. All the boys grew up together like true brothers. When I was older, I asked my mother one day why two of my uncles were called Matossian and the others Kalfayan, and she explained the reason to me.

My grandfather was married at age 30, which at the time was considered quite late for a first marriage. He married a girl called Tervanda, aged 13, from the Sanjian family. I should tell the story of my grandparents' marriage because it is quite interesting. My grandmother came from Marash. Her family had a high regard for education, but there was no school for girls in Marash for their daughter to attend. So they sent her to study and live with relatives in Aintab. The trip from Marash to Aintab was at the time long and hard since one could only travel on mules. After this arduous journey, Tervanda had not managed to get much of an education in Aintab. She was thirteen years old at the time and a very beautiful girl. So it was not long before men came to ask for her hand. But her relatives told everyone that they could not take the responsibility of giving her away in marriage. Two of her suitors were rich men, and they had gotten into a conflict with each other over her. Tervanda's relatives were at a loss and feared that one or the other of her suitors might abduct her. So they sent word to her parents explaining the situation. The parents responded empowering the relatives in Aintab to make the decision. But since the girl was still so young, the relatives were at a loss as to who should make the final choice. So they explained this problem to the two suitors who suggested that they take the matter to a judge (*Kadi*) and let him resolve it, and whichever of them turned out to be the lucky man would marry the girl. My grandmother and everyone else concerned were brought before the judge. My grandfather stood to one side of Tervanda and the other suitor to the other. The judge says, "Tervanda, my girl, these two men want to marry you..." But before he can finish his sentence, my grandmother pipes up, "What does it

mean to get married?" The judge shakes his head and says, "You will leave your family and go and live with your husband . . .and later you will understand what it means to be married. So now take a good look at these two men, and tell me which of them you want to live with." My grandmother turns to one and then to the other and says in a loud voice, "I want Hagop." My grandfather was delighted while the other suitor hung his head and went away. Preparations for the wedding began right away. My grandfather offered to take care of all the wedding expenses. He sent Tervanda clothes, shoes, and gold jewelry. On the day of the wedding, members of the groom's family went over and dressed her up, placed gold ornaments on her, sat her down on a chair, and left. My grandmother was delighted with all these happenings. She fidgeted and fondled her fine clothes and jewels. But her relatives had told her to behave herself because the wedding party would be coming to take her to church any time. After waiting for a while, my grandmother turned to her relatives and said, "Why aren't they coming?"

Finally, the bridegroom's relatives arrived and took my grandmother to church. As the couple stood together during the ceremony, some of the children flocked around them, tugging at the bride's shoes until she exclaimed loudly, "Hagop they are pulling at my shoes," and the whole congregation broke up in laughter. So this is the way the marriage took place. My grandfather had no one else at home, so he had hired a maid to manage the house. And since my grandmother had nothing much to do all day, he bought her a doll and other toys to play with until he came home in the evening. Often, my grandfather would be late from work and would find my grandmother asleep in some corner when he came home. He would then pick her up and put her to bed. One of my grandmother's sisters-in-law, Khatoun Badji, loved her very much, and felt sorry for her, so she was helpful to her in many ways and doted on her as if she were her daughter.

My grandparents had two children. A son was born when my grandmother was 15, and a daughter, my mother, was born when my grandmother was 19. The boy died at age six, so my mother grew up as an only child. Her parents pampered her and did not send her to school for fear that she would get sick. As I said earlier, a tutor came to the house and taught her how to read until she was able to read the Bible. But she never learned how to write.

My grandfather was a successful businessman. He imported kerosene for lamps from Iskenderun and sold it in Aintab. He had several partners and built up quite a fortune. But then his partners cheated him, eventually leading to his bankruptcy. By the time I was of age, my grandfather was prematurely old and in great financial difficulty. Next to his bed there was a closet containing several metal boxes. One day my brother Yervant and I opened one of them and found it full of stones with a few gold sovereigns scattered on top. We asked my grandmother about it, and she said, "My dear, this box used to be full of gold. When he lost everything he began to console himself in this

manner. The weight of the box makes it feel as if it is still full of gold.” I recall that once a week my grandfather would go to court, but he was not able to get anything back from his partners. He did not have the necessary documents to defend his suit. On the days that he had to appear before the judge, he would put on his oldest and shabbiest clothes and smear his face with ointments so as to make himself look miserable and thus arouse the judge’s pity. He also had the habit of pounding his head with his hands and cursing those who had brought him to this condition. His nephew, Missak Efendi, was very helpful to him and took care of his living expenses. My grandmother also spun cotton thread, which she then had made into cloth which she sold. They owned the house where they lived. They lived in the upstairs rooms and rented the downstairs ones.

In earlier years, my grandfather used to be very jealous since my grandmother was so much younger than him, and so beautiful. Men were always trying to look at her. One day when my grandfather was home, my grandmother went out on the veranda to hang out the laundry. The family who lived opposite had windows that opened directly towards the veranda. So when my mother was out there hanging out the laundry, all of the men of that family came to the window to look at her. My grandfather realized this, went out on the veranda, pulled down his clothes, exposing his buttocks, and shouted, “Come neighbors; come take a good look.” They all fled from the windows. In his older years, my grandfather greatly feared my grandmother, who was quite hard on him. One day he took a bundle of her cotton thread, sold it, and bought himself a pack of cigarettes and a melon with the money. I happened to be at their house when my grandfather returned home with the melon in his hands and said, “Here, Tervanda, I bought a melon for us. Cut it up so that we can eat it.” He had barely finished his words when my grandmother, who realized what had happened, took the melon from him, smashed it against the wall of the house, and said, “Go and eat it.” The poor man could not open his mouth.

My grandfather also greatly feared his wife’s brothers; I don’t know why. So when they came from Marash to visit their sister, he would come running to our house and would tell my mother, “My dear Ovsanna, I am afraid Tervanda’s brothers are going to kill me at night, so let me sleep here.” He coughed all night because he smoked so much. One winter evening, my brothers and I were going to spend the night at my grandparents’ house. We were lying under the quilts, with our feet against the charcoal heater (*tander*) to keep warm. My grandfather was leaning against the pillows and smoking as he dozed on and off. His cigarette kept getting extinguished, to his annoyance, because my brothers would put it out by putting spit on its end when he couldn’t see. He then had to push off the quilt to relight the cigarettes, which irritated my grandmother. On another occasion, my brothers stuck the hose of the *nargilé* between his legs and blew air under his nightgown, which

made him complain, “I don’t understand this. My feet are warm, but my thighs are freezing.”

My grandfather did not die because of illness. One day I came home from school when my mother was not home. My grandfather then came for a visit and went upstairs, where there was no one. Suddenly I heard some noises and ran up. I saw my grandfather standing in front of a closet with his lips and tongue horribly swollen. He kept saying, “I did a stupid thing; I did a stupid thing.” He spoke with great difficulty. He had mistaken a bottle of lye for *arak*, which he was so fond of, and drank it. My mother used to keep some *arak* in that closet to use when taking cod liver oil so as to make it more palatable. But then she had put the *arak* away and put the bottle of lye, which we used to bleach our clothes in the wash. I did not know what to do. I gave him some water, but he could not drink it. So I immediately ran and called my grandmother. She came and saw the condition he was in, but instead of trying to console him with sweet words, she yelled at him and took him home. A few days later he died. His nephew, Missak Efendi, arranged an impressive funeral for his uncle at his own expense. When the funeral procession passed the Baleklek market, people wondered how such a glorious funeral could be held for that poor man.

My grandmother lived alone for several years. She went to Marash for a while and then came back. Finally, she sold all she had and came to live with us. I will return later on to what happened to her money. So this was the life of a man who started rich and finished poor. Shortly after my grandfather’s death, my aunt Lucia told her son Lutfi to come to our house and console us over the loss of our grandfather. Although we loved my grandfather dearly and we were sorry at his death, we happened to be munching on raisins and nuts and having a pleasant time when Lutfi came on his condolence visit. When he returned home, his mother asked, “How are they? Did you console them?” And he had answered, “I found no one there who seemed to be in need of consolation.”

MY CHILDHOOD

I was born in Turkey in the city of Aintab on September 12, 1894, on a Friday night. My father was to die two months later in the 1894 Turkish massacre in Aintab, leaving behind his twenty-nine-year-old, young and beautiful widow and five orphans: The oldest, my brother Yacoub, aged 10 years; my sister Aroussiak; my sister Azniv; my brother Yervant and me, the youngest at two and a half months.



Efronia in Kindergarten

Naturally I remember nothing of my childhood before the age of four. Based on what I have heard from my mother; I was sent to kindergarten at age four. It was not considered necessary in Aintab for all children to go to kindergarten. Actually, it was a matter of money. It cost one gold Turkish sovereign a year, which at the time was a substantial sum. So not every family could send its children; only the children of the rich could go. None of my brothers and sisters were able to attend. I was able to attend kindergarten through the generosity of the son of my father's sister, Dr. Hovsep Bezjian. He also took it upon himself to pay for my education through to my graduation at the girls' seminary.

Kindergarten was for two years. Beyond that the schools were free until college, but parents were expected to make a yearly donation to the church commensurate with their ability. We had no father and my mother was not in a position to pay, so actually the church helped us, especially since my father had been a member of the Board of Managers of the schools and he had also been on the Town Council. I started kindergarten in 1899 and finished it in 1901. The school was some distance from our house, so one of my brothers or sisters, but most often my mother, would take me there. I took lunch with me; since we were dismissed from school before the older students, my mother herself had to come back to take me home. Our kindergarten consisted of two classes, with two teachers. One of them, Rahel Karamanougian, was a tall, thin young woman with blue eyes and a cheerful face; the other, called Victoria, was a lovely girl with dark eyes and long black hair. The poor woman had lost her toes in her infancy. The houses in Aintab were heated with braziers (*tonir*) in which they placed live coals. When she was a baby, her feet had touched the fire and the toes had got burned. So the ends of her feet were round, and she wore special shoes. Teacher Rahel looked after the first class and Victoria the second. Our classes were held in a large hall at the back of which was another room for gymnastics and games. Teacher Victoria played the piano very well, and she was the one who taught us how to sing. I still remember one of the songs which we sang in Turkish while each of us held a doll in her arms and rocked it gently:

*Now your daddy will come home
And bring you candies sweet
He will exchange them with kisses
Sleep baby sleep*

I remember very well how I looked at the dolly's face one day and noticed that it wasn't my own sweet dolly. I began to cry saying that I wanted my dolly right away. Teacher Victoria stopped the singing and took me around to check the faces of each of the dolls until I found mine and took it away from the hands of the poor girl holding it, and then began to sing.

I was very smart but also mischievous. I did not know how to sit still in my place. I was constantly on my feet, moving about and pushing around my friends who were quietly and silently sitting in their places. My teacher got so exasperated that she tied me down to my little chair. I sat still for a while until I got bored and then realized that I could still get up with the chair tied to me. When my teacher saw me wandering around attached to the chair, she untied me, took me to the back room and left me there. The room was rather dark. I got bored and began to look around until I found a piece of rope. So I began to skip rope creating so much noise that the teacher came and scolded me saying, "Can't you even keep quiet here? You give me no peace and don't leave your friends in peace. You pinch them, pull their hair, make them talk when everyone is supposed to be silent. If you continue like this, we are going

to kick you out of the school.” But who listened to her? Even though I caused so much mischief, they still loved me very much. We had different tasks for the various hours of the day. We learned songs. We did gymnastics. We wove different patterns with long strips of shiny colored paper. Each of us had notebooks which were used like an album into which the teacher pasted the completed projects. When we finished school, these notebooks were given to us along with our diplomas. I had saved them until I got married, but then they were left behind in Aintab. I remember that one day while we were cutting these strips of paper with scissors, a girl called Beatrice Birejiklian had her arm pushed by the girl sitting next to her, and her scissors struck one of her eyes, which began to bleed. They immediately took her to the hospital, but they could not save her eye, so she became blind on one side.

Among the members of the Board of Managers, there was one man I remember very well, and did not like at all. He was called Haroutune Babigian and had an enormous moustache. Whenever he came over, his first task was to take me.

When I graduated from kindergarten, there was a year-end diploma ceremony for the parents and others who wished to attend. There were twenty-two of us, boys and girls. The girls were dressed in white, and the boys wore dark blue pants and white shirts. It was a very nice occasion. We danced and sang, and I recited poetry, and Albert, the son of Professor Zenop Bezjian, acted in a short play. Everyone applauded. We were good friends. He was a handsome boy and was still living when we were in Beirut. Whenever we saw each other, we would remember our kindergarten days. When the ceremony was finished, they gave us our diplomas and the albums in which we had pasted our handiwork. We returned home with our parents, feeling delighted. I will never forget that on that evening my mother had cooked *mujeddera* for dinner. Relatives came over to congratulate me and brought presents. My father’s brother Movses gave me a pair of small earrings.

I next attended the first four grades of elementary school. The school was off the church courtyard and was free, being supported by the church. We learned reading, writing, and some arithmetic. All the lessons were in Turkish. We had a reader where every picture on one page had its name written on the other. Thus the picture of the head of a boy on one side would have the word “head” on the other; a flat-roofed house with a roller on it, “roof.” The roofs on most houses were covered with earth, and when it rained, they pushed these rollers back and forth so as to press down the soil and stop the roof from leaking. I would learn all my lessons quickly. I was always the first in my class. At the end of the year the Trustees came to examine us, and I would always come out at the top of my class.

I do not remember well if we were in the third or the fourth grade when a trustee called Kevork Levonian came to examine us. (He had a wart at the tip of his nose.) We were by then also learning some Armenian from an Armenian

language text. So part of the exam was from that text. He turned to us and said, "I am going to give you a word in Turkish, and whoever knows the Armenian of that word is going to get a prize." We waited impatiently. Then he said, "Now tell me, what is the Armenian for 'midwife'? Raise your hands if you know." As soon as I heard it, I immediately raised my hand and pushed it forward so eagerly that my fingers were practically sticking into his eyes. Without waiting to hear what I had to say, he began to praise me saying, "Look everyone, Efronia was first in the exam, and she is also now going to get the prize." And other words to that effect. Then he turned to me and said, "Say it, my daughter." I immediately answered in a loud voice, "Siphora." He and the teachers began to laugh. Siphora was the name of a famous midwife in Aintab and was called "Siphora the midwife". She was the Shnorhokian's daughter, a fat, dark-complexioned, ugly spinster, who had delivered both my brother and me. They said at her death that she had delivered 2500 babies. There was no one left in town who did not hear about this and whoever saw me in the street would ask, "Efronia what is the Armenian for midwife?" After I got married and went to Aleppo, we were invited to dinner by a dentist called Sarkis Efendi. He too asked me laughing, "Efronia, do you know what the Armenian for midwife is?"

The last two years of elementary school were no longer coeducational, so the schools for the girls and the boys were in separate locations. Our school was on the upper floor of the kindergarten and was called, "The Niziblian School." A man called Haroutune Niziblian, who was among the wealthy notables of Aintab, had been the benefactor of the school. It had a large hall and five classrooms. The hall was also used as a gathering place by many organizations. We had three woman teachers: One was called Augustina and was a beautiful girl; the second Ovsanna; the third Ankiné. Augustina taught mathematics and Turkish. Ovsanna taught religion and Armenian history as well as the Bible. Ankiné taught English, drawing, and athletics. They were very good teachers and taught us very well. Augustina was very strict. At that time, they used to cane those who were lazy and rude. The cane was used mostly by Augustina. I do not recall ever being caned even though I was very naughty. When we graduated, there was a year-end diploma ceremony. There were eighteen of us in the graduating class, and all of us recited poems and sang. Our diplomas were given by Rev. Krikorian. People called him "Black Kirkor."

I graduated from elementary school when I was twelve years old. I then went to the Seminary, which was the highest level school for girls in Aintab. When I started there, a new building had just been completed. It was located on one of the three hills of Aintab: Depé Bashe (Head of the hill). The two other hills were Kayajeck Ustu (Rocky top) and Kurd Depé (Kurdish hill). The large American Hospital was opposite us.



Efronia with her graduating class. She is in the second row, fifth from the left

The old building of our school had burned down and been left in ruins. The new one was very attractive. It was on a large plot of land full of fruit trees and surrounded by flowers of many colors. On the grounds were basketball, volleyball, and tennis courts. It was a four-story building with two staircases on the sides. The ground floor housed the boarding students, since students came from many areas such as Aleppo, Ourfa, Kesab, and Hasanbeyli. The second floor was a large hall which could accommodate some 150 students. Individual desks and chairs for students had been sent from America. Two large heaters, on each side, warmed the room in winter. A corridor led from the hall to four classrooms and a special room for teachers. Further back were the apartments for the three American missionaries. At my time, the principal was Miss Forman, a tall, beautiful woman. Her assistant was Miss Blake, who was quite thin, and the third was the short Miss Morton. The third floor consisted of the dining room for the boarding students and a room set aside for the day students to have lunch; it had large lockers where they would keep their food. We were also permitted to eat outside under the trees. The top and fourth floor had the kitchen, the washrooms and three bathrooms. It was a well-constructed building in every way.

The old school building had burned down as follows: One of the boarding students, Takouhi Altounian, the niece of the very famous Dr. Altounian in Aleppo, was carrying on a secret correspondence with a young man. She had become afraid of getting caught and getting expelled from school. So one night she had gone downstairs, stuffed his letters into the stove, lit them and returned to her room. The fire had spread from there, and the building burned down. They had tried to put out the fire but couldn't, and the building had

become unusable. They could not figure out the cause of the fire at first. So they carried out various inquiries, and finally one of the girls from Ourfa told them in confidence that when she was still awake, Takouhi had gone down with a full bag and returned a while later with the bag empty. Since there were also some partially burned papers found next to the stove, the secret was discovered. Takouhi was obliged to confess the truth and was expelled from the school.

Miss Forman, the principal, and Miss Blake taught most of the classes that were in English. Miss Morton busied herself mainly with the boarding



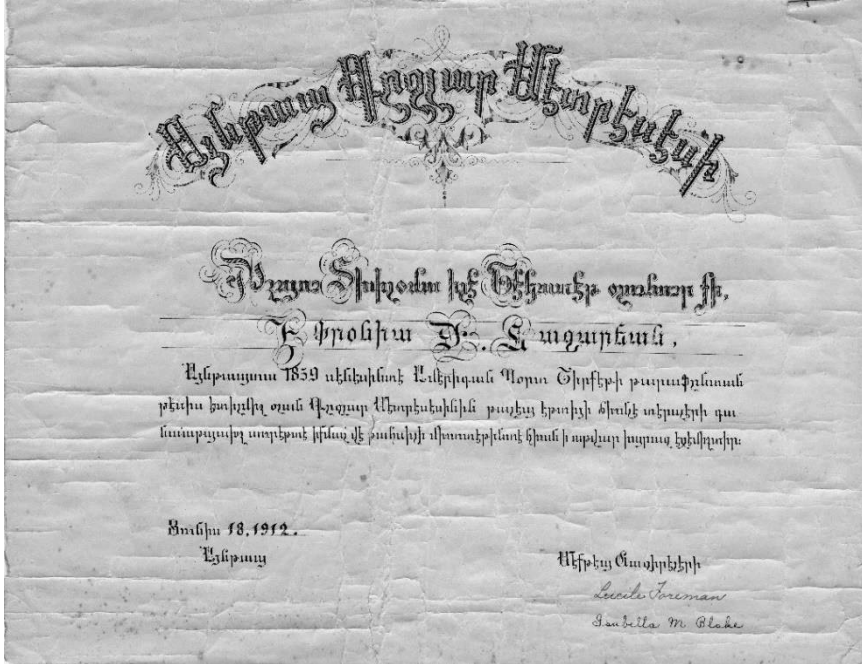
Miss Forman

students, with gymnastics and drawing lessons. We also had five Armenian woman teachers: Miss Vartouhi Loshkhajian; Miss Mary Mouradian; Miss Kalayjian; Miss Anitsa Terzian; Miss Khatoun Douzjian. Miss Vartouhi taught mathematics to all of the classes, in Turkish or Armenian, and to the top grade, algebra in English. Miss Mouradian taught religion and the Bible. Miss Kalayjian taught geography and sewing, and botany to the top grade. The course in botany was very interesting, and I liked it very much. Twice a week we would go to the fields to gather flowers and then study them. We dried and pasted them in large notebooks and underneath wrote their

names, where they grew, to what class they belonged, and other explanations. Miss Terzian taught Turkish reading, writing and grammar, and to the top grade she even taught the writing of legal documents (*senet*) pertaining to the lending and borrowing of money. Thus, if someone borrowed money from another, he would have to give a statement saying how much money and the man could not pay back his debt, the *senet* would be given to a lawyer who would go to court and recover what was owed to the man. Otherwise the debtor would be thrown into jail. She was a very severe teacher, and her lessons were very difficult.

I was very diligent in all of my courses. During the last two years they had a rule that whoever got a grade of 90 did not need to take the final exam, except for courses in the Bible and geography. Two days before the final exam, the teachers would write on the blackboard in the hall the names of those who had received grades of 90. There were four girls in my class who usually got grades of 90 in quite a few courses, but I got 90 in every course. So except for geography and the Bible, I never had to take final exams. I was very much loved by all of my Armenian teachers and the American missionaries even though I was mischievous. When I reached the final grade

and was 17 years old, I was still mischievous. Students were forbidden to speak to each other in hall, yet I could not sit still without talking and bothering my neighbors. There was a girl from Ourfa who used to sit in front of me and never said a word from morning till night. I used to squeeze her neck and force her to talk, so she would go and complain to the supervising teacher.



Efronia Nazarian’s Diploma of June 18, 1912, from the Aintab Women’s Seminary (Script is Armenian; the language is Turkish)

School finished at four o’clock, but twice a week I was permitted to leave at 3:30 to attend choir rehearsal in the church. I used to sneak away from the back of the classroom on my way out so that the teacher would not see me and ask how many times I had spoken without permission that day. This was because before school was out, the teachers would read out loud our names, and each of us had to confess the number of times we had spoken without permission. Occasionally I got caught. Once teacher Anitsa stopped me and asked some question. I said to her, “I have not kept track of it; write down whatever you like.” “Don’t you know this is going to affect your grade for ‘moral standing’?” she asked. “That’s all right; I don’t mind,” I answered. We got separate grades for our performance in courses and for “moral standing”. I always received the top grades (*ala*). Those who did not get as good grades complained to Miss Forman, “Why is Efronia’s grade so high even though she talks constantly and is so mischievous?” She told them in response, “Although what she does breaks the rules, her behavior has nothing to do with her morals.”

After four years, the day came for receiving our diplomas. The First Church was large, so that is where they held our graduation ceremony. It was completely full of people. We were all dressed in white, with white socks and white shoes, and filed into the church. The organist played nice pieces while we sat in special chairs. The ceremony began with Reverend Bulbulian's prayer. Then we sang a few songs, and some of us recited poems and read our compositions. I was among the latter and the subject of my composition was "The progress of women through the ages." My composition was quite long and everyone applauded. I also gave the valedictory address, which was an honor reserved to the most brilliant student in the graduating class. At the end of the ceremony, we all got up, and the people filed by, congratulating us. I will never forget the moment Professor Alexan Bezjian, the physicist, shook my hand and said, "My dear girl, I hope and I am certain that you, too, will one day become like the ladies that you spoke about in your address." Then we returned to school, where there was a reception in our honor and we had our picture taken. That evening, all of our relatives came to congratulate me and brought me presents. This is how I spent my life as a student.

OUR FAMILY AND OUR DAILY LIFE

As I mentioned, we were three sisters and two brothers. But by the time I was an adolescent, only my two brothers, myself and my mother lived at home. After my father's death, my grandfather and my grandmother had lived with us for a year, and then they had moved out, taking my sister Azniv with them. At the same time, my aunt Lucia had taken Aroussiak, my oldest sister, out of school and, against my mother's wishes, had placed her in an orphanage. My mother took this separation from two of her children very hard; she was especially upset by my sister Aroussiak's being in an orphanage. My mother had pleaded with my aunt, saying my sister could grow up at home like the rest of us, even if it meant that we had nothing to eat but dry bread. But my aunt would not relent and had prevailed over my mother with various arguments. This matter caused my mother much grief and many tears. One morning she had gotten up early to prepare our breakfast, when, apparently, she collapsed on the floor. We all woke up, frightened, and began to cry. My brother ran downstairs and called my uncle and Aunt Meriyé. They managed to put my mother to bed with much difficulty. Her mouth was twisted, and one side of her body was limp. They immediately called my father's nephew, Dr. Hovsep, who came and examined her and told us, "Don't be afraid; she has had a stroke, but it's not very severe; she will get better." My grandmother and my grandfather were obliged to move back in with us so as to take care of us.

My mother stayed in bed for a few months. A lot of people came to visit, and some of them brought us treats to cheer us up. Rev. Krikorian came at least twice a week. I remember how one day he was again seeing my mother when my brother Yervant and I began to quarrel outside the door. "He is my father." And I would say, "No, he is my father." We made so much noise that the Reverend came out and asked us why we were fighting. So we told him. He turned to us and said "My children, don't fight. I will be father to both of you." He then took out his handkerchief and dried his tears. This much I remember, that both my brother and I were always searching for our father, even though neither I nor Yervant had ever known him. On my way from school, whenever I saw a fine looking man, and if any of my friends happened to be with me, I would tell them, "That man is my father."

My mother finally recuperated although for a while she could only speak with difficulty. Even then, she still wished to have my sister brought back from the orphanage. But they persuaded her that she was being well cared for there and was getting educated. My mother could have her back any time, but it would be better to leave her there for a while. Every Saturday parents were permitted to visit their children. My mother always took me along when we went to see my sister. The orphanage was some distance from our house,

located on a hill called, Mardin Depé. It was in a large and well-constructed building owned by an English lady called Miss Phearson. She was the beautiful daughter of a lord and had been engaged in England to a young aristocrat. Sometime before the wedding, her mother had taken her aside and said, "Although I have no right to stand in your way, it is my duty as your mother to tell you that this young man that you are going to marry is an atheist." They were a Christian family, so when the girl heard this, she began to cry because she very much loved her fiancé. So she decided to leave him and not to marry at all, and to devote her life and her wealth to good purposes. With that goal in mind, she had come to Aintab and started the orphanage. And until her death, she financed its operations with her own money. Over the years, some 150-200 orphan boys and girls lived in the orphanage. Miss Phearson loved my sister very much when my sister was there, and when we went to visit her, Miss Phearson would speak to my mother and give me candy. On every visit, both my mother and my sister would shed many tears since life in an orphanage was not easy. The director who managed the place, a woman called Julia, apparently skimmed on the food to save money and ingratiate herself with Miss Phearson. So the poor orphans sometimes did not have enough to satisfy their hunger. Some of the parents brought this matter to Miss Phearson's attention, and she then dismissed the manager.

My sister was quite intelligent. She completed the classes at the Aintab seminary and was sent to Marash to attend the women's college there. Finally, both she and my mother got used to this arrangement even though my mother was never reconciled to the idea of my sister growing up in the orphanage and kept saying, "I should have taken care of her also, just as I took care of my other children. Why should she have been separated from her family? She already had no father; she could at least have enjoyed the love and the care of her mother. And she would have grown up more freely and with her own brothers and sisters. No matter what, life in an orphanage is very different, and she was always under somebody's orders."

My grandfather had been quite well off in the past, but he was cheated by his business partner and went bankrupt. So he was in no condition to help us, being in need of assistance himself. Though I was young at the time and could not quite understand any of this, I did learn when I grew up that we had only been able to live with the help of others. During the first few years after my father's death, my mother had gradually sold her jewelry. She had then sold the more valuable pieces of her dowry. And then pieces of the furniture. But when all of these means of support had been exhausted, a few of our relatives had begun to help us. My cousin, Dr. Hovsep, provided our yearly store of grain for the winter. The people of Aintab ate a lot of *bulgur*, particularly families like us who could not afford rice, which was very expensive. We could hardly get by with 200 liters of *bulgur* each year. We baked our bread at home.

Every family bought wheat and sent it to be ground to flour at local mills. Our wheat was brought by my mother's cousin, Dr. Haroutune Kalfayan. My uncle Movses bought us cheese. My cousin Yeprouhi helped us with clothing. But we still needed other things. Winters were cold. We needed fuel to cook and to warm the house, and kerosene for the lamps. For all these things, we needed money. So my mother was obliged to appeal to the church for work that she could do. But what could she do? They decided that she should become a "Bible woman" who would visit the poor families and teach their illiterate women how to read, and go to the hospital twice a week and read the Bible to the patients. My mother worked long hours so that often when I came home from school she would not have returned yet. She would get home tired and soaking wet in winter, and then start preparing our evening meal.

Although she earned very little, it was still better than nothing. She was paid three silver *mejdiehs* for teaching the women, and received one gold sovereign (worth five *mejdiehs*) from the hospital. As soon as she was paid these monthly wages, her first task was to buy half a liter of olive oil, a bag of charcoal, and a bag of firewood, which were the essential things. And with the rest, she had to take care of our other needs; but there would be so little money left that she had much difficulty making ends meet. She could only buy meat twice a month. More often we had meat dishes when our relatives invited us for dinner. Mennoush Mama, my aunt, lived off the same courtyard, as did my uncle Movses. But more than my uncle, it was Mennoush Mama who had us over for meals, even though she herself was not rich, being a widowed seamstress. She loved us very much, and whenever we heard that we were going to her house for dinner, we were overjoyed.

One evening we went to her house to have *sarma*. At that time, we did not eat at a table but sat on the floor around a large brass tray resting on a stool on which were placed the dishes. By the time we had finished our meal, we noticed that my brother Yervant had disappeared. When we returned to our room, my mother asked him where he had gone. He pointed to a small pile of *sarma* on a plate and explained that while we were having dinner, he had put away some of the food on the napkin in his lap, thus securing his lunch for the next day; he had left before anyone could notice what he had done.

One of the most difficult things for my mother was finding food for our lunches to take to school. What could the poor woman get for us since there was not much other than bread and cheese, and even the cheese often ran out before its allotted time. Sometimes she bought *halva*. At other times, she spiced plain bread with some oregano (*sahter*). We jokingly referred to mint leaves and red pepper rolled in bread as *Bezirgan Kebab* even though there was no meat in it. One day this is what my mother had given Yervant for his lunch. Apparently he often joined his friends at noon, and on that day they had decided to pool their food. So as they sat in the school courtyard, each had to first see what sort of food the other had brought along. When it was my

brother's turn he told them that he had Bezirgan Kebab. Assuming that this was a real meat kebab, they said, "Fine, we will save yours to last." The rest of them had then taken out their lunches and begun to eat. My brother, knowing the true nature of his food, had rapidly filled himself up with his friends' lunches. When it was time to share his lunch, he unwrapped his cloth bundle, and there was the plain spiced bread in its paper wrapping. But before his friends had time to ask him where the kebab was, a gust of wind scattered the paper wrapping. So when his friends asked him what sort of kebab it was, Yervant told them, "What can I do if you didn't have a chance to taste it. It was very good, but the wind blew it away." So all his friends laughed about it. That evening, when he told us this story, we practically fainted laughing.

My brother Yacoub did not suffer these difficulties. His education was paid for by my father's nephew, Hagop Bezjian, who bought his books and paid for his lunches in school as well and bought his clothing. So my oldest brother was in that respect very fortunate. Yet my poor brother Yervant grew up destitute. He could not afford to have his own books and would borrow the books of one of his classmates who lived nearby and then return them to him. Despite this, he was very diligent and was always the first in his class. Nonetheless, things were very difficult for him, particularly when he was attending college. My mother could barely scrape together enough to make Yervant's clothes, which he then wore until they had to be thrown away.

I remember one particular garment (*zouboun*), which had so many patches that it was hard to tell what cloth the garment was made of. Instead of shoes, he wore the red leather slippers called *yemeni*. That was fine in the summer but quite unsuitable for winter. When he got back home, his feet would be soaking wet. I will never forget my mother's tears when one time in winter he had put his soggy *yemenis* and socks on the heater (*tander*) to dry and then had forgotten them there; the next morning they had shrunk to such a tiny size that it was impossible for him to wear them. What could the poor woman do? My oldest brother had a pair of old shoes, so she had Yervant put them on. But they were too large for him, and he began to cry, saying that he would not wear them. Yet he had no other means of going to school, so he was obliged to wear those shoes until my mother was able to buy him a new pair of *yemeni*. My poor mother cried bitterly and was very badly affected by this incident. Yet in the midst of all these difficulties, my mother still tried to keep us happy. And, in fact, we actually lived quite happily and cordially with each other, being satisfied with the little that we had. She would often tell us about the poor people that she visited and ask that we thank God for the warm meals that we had, while those other poor people had nothing else to put on their bread but vine leaves sprinkled with salt.

While we compared ourselves with those who were less fortunate, we paid no attention to how the wealthy people lived, nor did we ever envy them. And "our eyes were full" because no matter what food we had at home, we never

placed it under lock and key. We had adequate supplies of raisins, dried figs, and the other special sweets that were made in Aintab. My mother would place them in an open box, and whenever we felt like it, we would have some. My uncle's family would buy them in larger quantities, and then my aunt would dole them out to the children, counting every piece. That is why they grew up to be stingy, and "their eyes remained hungry." And even though they had so much more, our more meager stores lasted longer.

My mother was a true Christian. She prayed regularly and had also taught us how to pray. We never ate without saying grace, nor did we go to bed without saying our prayers. Every morning, before we woke up, she would get down on her knees and pray. When I came home from school, I would often find her in prayer. She took us to church regularly, and when we were younger, we went to Sunday school. We went to church services on Sundays and twice a week in the evenings. She would light the lantern and walk with us to church even though it was some distance away. As we got older, we were not able to go to church during the week because we had too much to study.

These hardships and deprivations that we had to bear caused my mother much pain. But she concealed her feelings. And she asked no help from anyone but was content with whatever help was given to her spontaneously. She worked hard and was always eager to do more. Some years later, the college also provided her with some work. She would mend the socks of the boarding students, and repair their clothing and underwear. So we were neither hungry nor naked for a single day, neither sad nor complaining nor envying others. We always lived contentedly with what we had, and my mother never spared any effort to give us pleasure. She always celebrated our birthdays and made sure that the celebration took place on a Saturday or Sunday so that our friends could come to us. She would prepare whatever she could at home, but then also buy red candy. My and Yervant's birthdays were celebrated with our friends. Brother Yacoub, being older, celebrated his birthday with a nice dinner with meat in the evening. She would buy him a small present, and we congratulated and kissed him. On Christmas Eve, we hung up our socks, and she placed in them whatever presents she could afford to buy. It would have been worth seeing us in the morning when we happily emptied the stockings and our screams reached the neighbor's houses. For Christmas dinner, we were always invited to a relative's house, and on New Year's Day my grandmother would have us over to eat *herisa*. Since it was severely cold at Christmas time, all of our visitors were received at my uncle Movses' house on the ground floor and were offered coffee and sweets. The visitors for Easter were entertained at our house and in Mennoush Mama's house on alternate years.

It was the custom at the time that children went around during Christmas to their relatives' house to kiss the hands of their elders and were given presents of money; we thus collected a fair amount of cash. And during Easter,

we made the rounds with little bags in our hands and collected painted eggs. On New Year's Eve we went door-to-door to sing Christmas carols, and then we would say, "Merry Christmas and Happy New Year. Those who give us sweets will have a boy with dark eyes, and those who don't will have a blind daughter." And we returned home with our bags full.

I loved to play with dolls when I was young. One day I arranged a wedding for my favorite dolly. My mother invited all of my friends. There were some 15 of them, and each of them brought a wedding present for my dolly. Mennoush Mama made several dresses for her. We had lunch, and we played all sorts of games. And a miracle occurred on that day. One of the girls invited to the party, called Azniv, had fallen ill and then for the past two years had not even spoken again. As we were jumping about holding hands, her "tongue suddenly loosened up," and she began to speak. My mother, Mennoush Mama, and everyone else who was around came down to the courtyard and were delighted to hear her speak. Then her mother came over, lifted her arms to heaven to thank God, and took her home.

Despite all her difficulties and burdens, my mother tried everything she could to never deprive us of anything so far as possible. She never "broke our heart." Whenever we asked her for something, she would never say, "Where shall I get it from? You have no father. I have no money. Don't ask such things of me." Instead, she would mollify us with gentle words such as, "Don't be sad; I'll get it for you one day." We would then wait patiently, and she usually would get us what we wanted sooner or later.

My mother was a very hard working woman. She had no time during the day, so after she fed us, she would go down to the kitchen to clean up and do the laundry. On one occasion, she had washed our clothes, but she was not able to hang them to dry on our veranda (*takhd*) since it had gotten so old that it was not safe to step on it. So she was going across to hang the laundry on Mennoush Mama's veranda when she fell and hurt her foot; then Mennoush Mama took the wash from her and hung it herself.

Summers were quite warm in Aintab, so almost everyone slept on the veranda outside. But our veranda was in such bad condition that we could not step on it let alone sleep on it. My mother called a man to have it repaired, but he asked for more money than she could afford. So we were obliged to sleep indoors. One night my brother Yervant took his bedding and went onto the veranda. My mother shouted to him, "Don't go out; you will fall and get killed." But my brother would not listen to her and told her not to worry. He showed her a piece of rope which he had tied to his waist and told her, "Look, Mother, I am going to attach the other end to the iron grill, so if the veranda crashes down, I will be suspended from the window." He then lay down on his bedding under the window and went to sleep. When we heard this from the inside, we practically fainted laughing.

My two brothers were at the time on vacation, so they went around looking for a job. That summer they were rebuilding the women's college. So they worked on the construction for a month, brought back enough money to have the veranda repaired, and we spent the rest of the summer sleeping on it. My brothers would also work at other jobs during the summers. My oldest brother, Yacoub, usually worked in his cousin's pharmacy. Yervant worked in various places and gave my mother all the money he made. My mother then bought clothing and shoes for him with it. But Yacoub was very selfish and would not give all of his earnings to my mother. He loved spending money on his own person. The two brothers had very different characters. Yacoub began to smoke cigarettes very early. He smoked in secret, but my mother would catch the smell of tobacco on his breath and would scold him. She also found a pack of cigarettes in his pocket and threw it into the garbage can.

Our family life continued in this fashion until 1905. Difficulties were not lacking. My mother's concerns and worries grew as all of us began to get older. I, the youngest, was now 10 years old, and hence our needs became more numerous, and our demands increased. My poor mother made every effort to satisfy us as far as possible. She worked as much as she could and always sought more work. Our relatives and friends would try to convince her to take the two boys out of school and apprentice them to an artisan so that they could slowly start to help her. But it was impossible to persuade my mother. "I will subsist on dry bread, and I will feed them dry bread, but I will not take them out of school," she said. And she remained true to her word. She had not been well-educated herself and knew very well, therefore, the difficulties that created. Hence, except for my sister Azniv, all of us received the highest education available in Aintab at the time.

As I mentioned earlier, my sister Azniv lived with my grandparents. When she turned 15, my mother and her mother and father agreed that Azniv should come back to live with us. My grandparents were by then very old; my grandfather in particular was quite sick and it was hard for a young woman to live with him.

My grandparents had taken Azniv out of school saying what she had learned by then was enough for her. She had had some difficulty with school since she had no particular desire to be educated, nor did she have the ability. But when my mother brought her home, she sent Azniv back to school. It did not work out very well, and she was barely able to get an elementary education. My mother did not have the courage to send her to the seminary, particularly since that cost money. So Azniv was apprenticed to a seamstress for a year, but there, too, she was not able to manage very well. When she reached the age to be married and, being very beautiful, began receiving marriage proposals from all sides. My mother was opposed to her getting married when still quite young: "I will not have her married before the age of 20," she would say. But Aziv herself was quite eager to get married. Although

she had been glad to be living with us, it was not easy for her to reconcile herself to our standard of life. My grandparents were not particularly well off themselves, yet in their house Azniv was the only child, and therefore, they spent on her all they had. With her coming to our house, we became four children. Those who were helping us did not increase their support, nor did my mother find the means to make more money. So Azniv was obliged to live like the rest of us and to be satisfied with what we had. It did not take long for her to get married. Quite a few proposals came from young men, but my mother found one or another excuse to turn them down. Several wealthy young men from the Apostolic church asked for her hand, but my mother said no. At that time, the Protestants did not give girls to the Apostolics; nor did the Apostolics give girls to the Protestants, although of course that did happen once in a while.

These refusals of all comers did not please my sister. One day, members of the Arslanian family came to ask for Azniv's hand for one of their sons who lived in Izmir. They had brought along his photograph. My mother did not know what to do. They lived far from us at a place called Kurd Depé. They were not members of our church. Neither my mother nor our relatives knew them: what sort of people were they? What sort of man was the fellow? My mother did not know, nor did she have a way of finding out. She thought of turning them down outright, but then she said instead, "Give me a few days to think it over." "Fine," they said and went away.

My mother then asked my sister about it, and she told her, "You are turning down all my suitors; I am going to take this man. He looked quite presentable in his photograph." "I have heard that he has a large red birthmark on one side of his face, so they call him the 'purple boy'," said my mother, "He is thirty-five years old, and you don't even know him. How can you say that you want him?" But Azniv would not listen. So when a few days later the man's sister and brother-in-law, a well-known man called Yeghia Efendi, came to get my mother's response, she consented. But she would not permit the engagement until she saw the boy in person; there would be no placing of the ring until then.

They told her that engagement rings had to be exchanged so that the two families could begin to socialize and get to know each other. My mother could not argue against that. So the day was decided and invitations were sent to the relatives and close friends of both sides. The Arslanians were aware of our financial circumstances, so they took it upon themselves to pay for the entire cost of the engagement. In the presence of a large crowd, my sister stood up alone during the engagement ceremony, which was officiated by the minister, Rev. Krikorian, and with his prayers and best wishes he placed the ring on her finger. It was not long before her fiancé arrived. I remember very well the first time he came to visit us; I was eleven years old, and he told me, "Come pretty girl and give me a kiss." But I wouldn't go to him and ran away. I saw the red

mark on his face, and when he was gone, I told my sister, “If I were in your place, I wouldn’t take this boy. He is ugly and old enough to be your father.” She always remembered these words.

They remained engaged for a few months and then got married. They did not go back to Izmir but settled in Aintab, where he started a business and was quite successful. My sister Azniv had seven children: four boys and three girls. The boys were Antranig, Puzant, Edward, and Norayr, the girls Lucin, Alice and Sona. Antranig and Puzant were born in Aintab. Edward was born in Damascus during the deportations, and Sona and Norayr were born in Iskenderun.

Following my sister’s marriage, our family’s burdens increased. Although her husband was well-off and Azniv had the means to help us, she never did. She was uncaring and rather coarse in character. She never interested herself in our welfare and had no conception of helping others. She often came to us and was joined by her husband in the evenings. Despite knowing very well our circumstances, she never asked, “Mother, how are you managing? Here, take this money and spend it.” My mother would feed them and spend what was necessary on them, and then we suffered the consequent deprivation. Her husband should have hired a maid to help his young and inexperienced wife, but instead he expected us to provide all the help. My poor grandmother, and often my mother, had to take care of her chores. When she had her child, my mother stayed at their house for days. Azniv never thought of suggesting to her husband to help us a little. And if he wouldn’t give money, he could have at least given us a present. All their lives, they expected things from others.

My oldest sister, Aroussiak, graduated from Marash College the same year Azniv got married. My mother wanted Aroussiak to come home for at least a year so we could enjoy her company. Miss Freers loved my mother dearly and consented to her wish. When the leaders of the church heard about it, they offered Aroussiak a position as a kindergarten teacher with the monthly salary of one French gold sovereign. We very much enjoyed having Aroussiak at home that year, and she was helpful to us. She had a happy disposition and was witty. This sister, too, was quite attractive, although her beauty was of a different kind. She had a lighter complexion, reddish hair, white skin with ruddy cheeks, and pale brown eyes. Miss Freers had provided her with very attractive clothes.

When she came home, numerous offers of marriage began to come; it was as if people had been waiting for her to leave the orphanage. The first offer came from my father’s nephew, Hagop Efendi Bezjian, the brother of Dr. Hovsep. It was a wrongheaded and impossible proposition. He was very much older than her; he suffered from tuberculosis, and an abscess in his lungs drained to the outside. But he was also a rich municipal pharmacist. My mother did not know what to do and how to respond. The family was so indebted to him. He had paid for my brother’s education, his clothing

expenses, and for all his school lunches; he had employed him in his pharmacy during the summers. So she went to see his brother, Dr. Hovsep, and told him about the situation. On seeing her predicament, he told her, "Don't worry, Auntie, I will speak with my brother." My mother came home feeling a bit relieved. A few days later the doctor had dissuaded his brother.

Though Hagop Efendi did not pursue the matter, he nonetheless did not quite give it up and tampered with my sister's future as follows. In addition to contacting Doctor Hovsep, my mother had also felt obligated to see Miss Freers and related the situation to her. Miss Freers had told her "I have not yet spoken with either you or your daughter about this, but I have had Aroussiak practically engaged to the pharmacist Nersess, the son of the Geozelimians in Egypt. I have corresponded with him, and he is going to come to Aintab, to open a pharmacy and marry Aroussiak." My mother returned home delighted and gave us this news. But it was not long before Miss Freers called my mother back and told her that she had received a letter from Aroussiak's suitor in Egypt whereby he said that he very much regretted that he was obliged to cancel their engagement. We don't know how, but apparently Hagop Efendi had heard about this matter and written to the young man telling him, "You cannot come to Aintab to open a pharmacy since I have close relationships with high government officials who will prevent it. And give up all thought of marrying this girl since I intend to have her myself." We were very sad to learn this, but what could we do. Other offers came from wealthy young men, but since they were from the Apostolical church, they were turned down. One of them in particular was from a very rich family and quite a presentable young man. They were quite persistent, but my mother would not consent.

When the year ended, Aroussiak returned to live at the orphanage, since she was obligated to work there. She taught the students who were preparing to go to college. Miss Freers, who knew our financial condition and loved us very much, assigned my sister a salary, which she would then give to our mother.

One day Miss Freers again sent for my mother. My mother's cousin, Dr. Haroutune Kalfayan and his wife had come to see Miss Freers to ask for my sister Aroussiak's hand for his brother Elias. They had asked her to discuss the offer with my mother, with Aroussiak, and to think it over. My mother was very pleased and brought us the news joyfully. Elias had been engaged to the daughter of the well-known and rich Babigian family. I remember at the time that we had wished that they had chosen Aroussiak instead, but my mother had said, "The lantern's light does not fall right next to it." Later on, he had become upset for some reason and had broken the engagement. They had then thought of my sister.

My mother was willing from the first moment. Miss Freers also gave her consent and sent Aroussiak home for a few days so we could think about it and respond. When my sister was home, Elias, his mother and brother came

to us and opened the subject. My mother asked for time to think it over. She asked the opinions of my uncle and my grandparents. My grandfather in particular was very pleased and told my mother, "Ovsanna, we mixed the honey with cream." My sister gave her consent reluctantly. "What do I care if he is rich," she said, "He is poorly educated, and he is ugly. I could never harmonize my thoughts with his." But finally, since she was by then quite tired of living in the orphanage, she consented half-heartedly. I remember how after meeting with him she would take out her engagement ring and throw it away from her. None of her expectations and dreams were fulfilled. She got engaged reluctantly, she got married reluctantly, and she became unhappy. They were exact opposites: My sister was vivacious and full of life; she liked to dress well, was hospitable and generous. Her husband was opposed to all of this and was extraordinarily stingy, with no idea about how to live and enjoy life. So neither did he enjoy life nor did he allow my sister to do so. He used to even begrudge and argue over a cup of coffee offered to guests. She began life with bad luck, and ended it with bad luck.

After my two sisters got married, our family life changed somewhat, but our standard of living did not improve. Although both of my sisters now had husbands who were well off, they were not able to be helpful to us. My mother continued to do the same sort of work amidst all sorts of difficulties. Those who were helping us did not stop their assistance because my mother now had two well-to-do sons-in-law; this was because our helpers were close relatives and knew our circumstances. All three of us were now grown up. My oldest brother, Yacoub, was 21 and finished college the year that my sister Aroussiak got married. My brother Yervant was 16, and I was 13. My mother continued to experience all sorts of difficulties in sustaining us. My brother Yacoub in particular made constant demands on her with no regard as to whether his mother had the means to fulfill them. All the money he made working during the summers he spent thoughtlessly and on himself. And his spendthrift ways led him to the calamity of theft.

One day my mother was called to the college and was told that her son was going to be expelled. He had a very bad companion called Haroutune Demirjian. With this friend Yacoub had stolen a violin from the college, sold it, and divided up the money. Their friends had learned about it and told the Director. Yacoub and his friend were confronted with it and forced to confess the truth. At this time, he still had two years to finish college. After getting this news, my mother returned home with my brother crying and wailing. I can never forget that day. My mother scolded him, but what good would it do? What was done was done. My mother appealed, begged, and pleaded to many people, but it did not help. My brother was not able to go to school for a year. Then my aunt's son, Professor Lutfi Levonian, intervened. So they forgave him, took him back, and he finished college.

Yacoub was invited to teach high school, but my mother wanted him to continue his education at the American University of Beirut and study pharmacy. With a higher diploma in his hands, he could then work and be more useful to his family. She did not want him to be a teacher just so that he would be of more immediate help to us. My mother, who had already sacrificed so much for him, took on additional burdens as well. My grandfather had died six or seven months earlier, and my grandmother now lived alone. My grandmother and mother decided to sell the furniture of my grandparent's house and use that money to send my brother to study in Beirut. By law, part of whatever my grandfather left behind would have belonged to my mother anyway and the rest to my grandmother. Yacoub applied right away to the University. His grades were forwarded, and he was accepted. The course in pharmacy was three years, of which one year involved working in a pharmacy. My brother was exempted from that third year since he had already worked for many summers in my cousin's pharmacy. They also appealed to the school, saying that this family was not able to pay the entire tuition and that my brother should be given some work. That too was accepted, and my brother was given the job of waiting at the dinner tables of the boarding students. And he was also allowed to have his lunch there for free. All of these arrangements made my brother and the rest of us very happy. In truth, Yacoub turned out to be lucky in every way and did not grow up like an orphan. He did not suffer the difficulties that my brother Yervant did.

The summer before going to Beirut, Yacoub again worked at the pharmacy of Hagop Efendi, who paid him a more generous salary to help him along. Everything was now arranged. A few days before the university opened he left for Beirut and began his studies. He wrote to us as soon as school had started. He was very happy. We were very happy too and full of great hopes that when he became a pharmacist, he would be useful to his family, that my brother Yervant, especially, would benefit from him and be able to pursue his own education, and that Yacoub himself would attain a respectable position.

Let us leave the answer to these hopes to the future. He wrote regularly saying how much he missed us and expressing his respect and gratitude to his mother and grandmother. He told us how successful he was in his courses and how much he was liked at school. He finished his first year and returned home. The following summer he again worked in the same pharmacy, earning his pocket money as well as helping us. The following year, in 1910, he graduated, got his diploma, and returned. Our whole family and relatives were so glad that our financial difficulties were now going to come to an end. He began to think about where to work since he could not yet open his own pharmacy.

Our cousin, Hagop Efendi, had turned over his pharmacy to one of his relatives, Nersess Ishkhanian. He was now quite old and went to the pharmacy only occasionally to look over the accounts and not bother with the rest of the

responsibilities. There was another pharmacist in Aintab called “Lame” Baghsarian. He asked my brother to work for him, but my brother would not accept the salary he offered. Meanwhile, another offer with a more satisfactory salary came from the Khatchadourians, who had opened a pharmacy in Iskenderun.

The Khatchadourians were related to us since my uncle’s daughter, Mary, had some years ago married the second oldest brother, Yeghia Efendi. Years ago, three of the six brothers - Yeghia, Sarkis, and Aram - had established themselves in Iskenderun and through various enterprises had become quite wealthy. Iskenderun was not a big city but a profitable harbor town. Since there was neither a good physician nor a good pharmacy in town, the Khatchadourians decided to bring from Aintab a competent physician and a pharmacist to run the pharmacy which they were to establish. To this end, they had written to their older brother, Hagop Efendi, who still lived in Aintab.

The Niziblian family, whom they knew very well, had a son who was a graduate of the medical school of the American University of Beirut. Dr. Senekerim Niziblian was at the time working at the American Hospital in Aintab. Hagop Efendi made the proposal to him, and he agreed to it. He then asked the doctor if he knew of a pharmacist who would accompany him to Iskenderun. The doctor was married to the daughter of Hovsep Kendirjian, a very wealthy Armenian Catholic. (Let me mention that the doctor himself did not come from a well-off family. The Kendirjians had proposed to him that, should he be willing to marry their daughter, they would send him to study medicine at the American University of Beirut. Senekerim had married her, then gone to Beirut to study for four years, supported by his in-laws).

Dr. Niziblian told Hagop Efendi, “Yes, I do; my brother-in-law is a pharmacist. He just graduated and hasn’t opened a pharmacy yet. We can take him along.” Hence they both moved to Iskenderun into a ready-made clinic and a ready-made pharmacy. The doctor’s brother-in-law, Manuel, had worked there for a few years. But being the son of a rich man and getting tired of living in a foreign city away from his family, he had decided to return to Aintab. That very year, my brother had obtained his diploma and was looking for a job in Aintab. When the Khatchadourians heard about it, they invited my brother to work in their pharmacy at a satisfactory salary. My brother and the family were very glad that he had been able to find work right away. He responded to them immediately and accepted the offer.

Although we were sorry to see him go, my mother was left not only with the grief of his separation from us. Before his departure, he confessed to my mother that he loved a young woman and wanted to get engaged to her before leaving. She was Yester, the Karamanougians’ daughter. My poor mother had barely had a chance to rejoice and to enjoy for a while the fruits of the sacrifices she had made for him for years. There he was, about to be bound to

a girl my mother didn't even know. My mother did not know what to do and what to answer. She only told him, "My son, it would give me great pleasure to see you married. But it is not yet time. You are just starting a new job. You must now be like a father to our family, which has lived through so much hardship over the years; you must fulfill your obligations to those younger than you. I advise you to think well before taking this step so that you will not regret it in the future. I will not stand in your way so you won't say in the future that your mother was an obstacle to your happiness, but. I beg you only that you keep this between the two of you; don't tell her family that I know about it, because I am in no position to carry on the relationships required of a future in-law."



Efronia's mother at old age

When I heard about this from my mother, I was very upset. I told her, "What a pity that my brother is going to take this girl. She has been my classmate since Kindergarten, and we still have two years to graduate from the seminary. I have never liked her, never been her friend, nor do I want to have anything to do with her now because she does not have a good nature. Don't tell any of this to my brother. Let him only say to the girl that we know nothing about any of this. Let him not oblige us to deal with her." So my mother told him, "I have said all that I needed to say as your mother, and I leave the rest to you." A few weeks following these conversations, when his day of departure was set, my mother invited to dinner my two sisters and my uncle Movses with their families. We were both happy and sad at the thought of his leaving. The next day we parted from each other with tears.

My brother started his journey and arrived in Iskenderun in a few days. My cousin Mary and her husband, Yeghia Efendi Khatchadourian, had traveled to the nearby town of Beylan to welcome him. They were pleased to take him to their house, where they had a special room for him to stay in until he had found a room of his own. Our aunt, Mennoush Mama, who also lived there, took a

particular interest in him. After staying as their guest for a few weeks, my brother rented a room and moved out. The day after his arrival, the Khatchadourians handed over the pharmacy to him, and they promised that if he took charge of the business, and treated the pharmacy exactly as if it were his own, they would make him a partner after a while.

He wrote to us right away and gave us this good news. For a while he kept writing regularly, and each month he would send us the part of his salary that he did not need for his living expenses. A great burden was now lifted off my mother, and we were all glad that our problems in supporting ourselves had come to an end. Alas, it barely lasted a year. The next year, instead of by and by increasing his support, he began to reduce it. We heard that he was corresponding with his fiancé and that he had even sent her presents. But he could not carry on, and he wrote to us saying that he had broken his engagement. But he did not tell us what the reason was, nor did we ask. Nonetheless, the reason did not remain secret, and the news reached us and caused us much pain. He had asked for money from her brothers, and they had refused him.

When the Khatchadourians become aware of the kind of life he was leading, they checked the accounts of the pharmacy: no profits, constant loss. His salary having become insufficient for his expenses, my brother had been drawing from the revenue of the pharmacy. They got very upset and regretted that they had ever brought him over. So they told him that should he continue living in that manner, they were going to let him go. It didn't help; so they decided to throw him out. But then they reconsidered it and decided not to take this step right away since he was related to them. The Khatchadourians were very fond of our family and knew of all the difficulties that we had been through. My cousin Mary and her mother Mennoush Mama had asked, in particular, that my brother not be dismissed right away, that it would be a big blow to us.

Then they thought that maybe having his family live with him would help. So they proposed it to him, saying that it would be good for his family as well as for himself. My brother thought it over and agreed. He wrote to us and said that as soon as I had graduated (it was my last year) we should immediately get ready and join him in Iskenderun. My mother was rather reluctant. My brother Yervant still had a year left to finish college. Where was she going to leave him? It also meant leaving her two other daughters behind, leaving her house behind, moving out of her house, and going to a foreign town. But most of all, she had no confidence in my brother, knowing full well his character. The news of his life that had reached us and the indifference he had shown towards us had disappointed her even more. She thought about it a good deal, but she had no alternative. I recall my mother saying, "We used to live better when we were dependent on the help of others and my earnings than after my son became a pharmacist." And she was quite right because while we were

once again in financial difficulties, those who had helped us had ceased to do so, thinking that our problems were over. And my mother had thanked them and expressed her gratitude to them many times over, and said that she would never forget their goodness for the rest of her life. She had also stopped working. Yet the money that my brother was now sending us was not enough to live on. So what else could she do but consent to move to where he was. So she began to make the necessary arrangements. She rented out our house and separated the things that she was going to take along and placed the rest with others. My brother Yervant went to live with my sister Azniv. My school finished, I received my diploma, and a month later my grandmother, my mother, and I got on the road and five days later reached Iskenderun.

THE TEN MONTHS OF LIFE I SPENT IN ISKENDERUN³

In those days, one traveled either by mule or by covered wagons called *yayle araba* (carts with springs) which were drawn by two or three horses. There was a coachman in Aintab called *Katerji* (mule driver) Hagop. Apparently the Khatchadourians knew him very well and had suggested to my brother that he arrange for this man to bring us himself. He was a very trustworthy person who owned a number of wagons and employed several coachmen. His house in Aintab was far from us, and one evening he came to us and showed us the letters he had received from the Khatchadourians and my brother. He said, "Get yourselves ready, and in a few days I will personally take you to Iskenderun. I promised your son that I would myself drive your wagon although I don't ordinarily do this sort of work anymore."

It was a five days' journey. The roads were not safe. There were no hotels on the way, and one had to spend the night in local inns (*khan*). I was a young and attractive woman. We got ready and started one early morning. We spent the first night in Sareyarek, the second night in Kilis, the third night in Afreen, and the fourth night in Kerek Khan. The coachman hardly slept for four nights but stood guard sitting on a chair in front of our door. I sensed that he was trying to keep me out of people's sight. During the day, we had all of our meals inside the wagon, and we could take naps since they had spread some bedding and a few pillows in the wagon.

The coachman would occasionally fall asleep in his seat and the horses would stop moving. We would then wake him up and get going again. One day we stopped at a place full of lovely trees, had our lunch outdoors, and rested a bit. I began to collect some of the flowers when, suddenly, my middle finger was stung by a poisonous insect. The coachman went to a neighboring village where he knew a man who treated such wounds. The man came and squeezed quite a bit of blood out of my finger; he then put some ointment on it, and the pain got less. But my finger remained swollen.

We continued our journey and reached the town of Beylan. Waiting there to meet us were my brother and, next to him, a well-dressed, presentable young man. We were reunited with my brother and kissed each other. They were on horseback and accompanied us to Iskenderun. The views of the sea from Beylan to Iskenderun were most pleasant; I had never seen the sea before. We reached home, and my brother made some coffee. Hagop, the coachman, told him about our trip and said to my brother, "I will never again

³ Iskenderun is the Turkish name for what used to be called Alexandretta, the diminutive for Alexandria, the city in Egypt of Hellenistic origin. Currently called Eskendereyya in Arabic – *H.K.*

travel with an attractive girl. I haven't slept for four nights and had to stand guard all the time."

We unloaded our belongings. It was noon, the young man went and brought some kebab, and we had lunch. We noticed my brother and his friend were constantly whispering to each other. My mother got curious and asked my brother about it. My brother hesitated a little and then was obliged to say, "I will tell you what it is but don't be upset. The Turks have declared war on the Bulgarians, and they are recruiting soldiers from all over. I have also been called to duty as a pharmacist. So I must leave for the front in a week." I cannot explain how badly we felt. Suddenly my mother turned to my brother and said, "Don't untie the bags. I am not staying here for a minute longer and want to return to Aintab."

My brother was at a loss. What could he say? It was summer, and everyone had gone up to the mountain resorts. Our only relatives in Iskenderun, the Khatchadourians, were not in town. How was he going to leave us alone? We thought about it quite a bit. My brother tried to convince my mother to stay, and my mother was finally obliged to agree. Our house in Aintab had been rented. Where would we live if we went back? So they unloaded the bags and brought in our luggage. I remember my mother saying, "My dear Lord, has my journey to Golgotha not ended yet?"

A day later, my mother's cousin, Doudou Sevajian (born Matossian), came to see us with one of her sons. They had settled in Iskenderun a few years before. Her two sons had been quite successful in their business and gotten rich. My mother was very glad to see them. They consoled her and said, "Don't worry; we are here; we won't leave you alone." The oldest son, Setrak, was a light-complexioned, tall young man with a moustache. My brother turned to him and said, "I entrust my family first to God and then to you. Look after them as if they were your own mother and sister." Three days later my brother put on his officer's uniform and left us in tears.

All of the young men in town were called to join the army. But my brother's friend whom we had first met with him, Keshishian, was the son of a rich man, and he fled to Egypt. The Khatchadourian's younger brother, Aram, did the same.

We were left to ourselves. But the Sevajians did not leave us alone, especially their son Setrak, who would stop by to look after our needs practically every day. And his mother often visited us although she was quite elderly. So I was left in the middle of old women. I had just finished school. All of my friends were in Aintab, where I was a member of several organizations and sang in the church choir. I liked a social life. And here I was now, deprived of all my pleasures and imprisoned within four walls.

My mother realized the situation I was in, and tried to soothe me all the time saying, "My dear, don't worry. Should your brother's return be delayed,

we won't stay here a minute longer, and we shall return to Aintab." So we passed the days by consoling ourselves.

A few weeks later the Khatchadourians and the Niziblians returned from the mountains and invited us over to their house. But none of these visits gave me any pleasure. Dr. Niziblian, seeing my condition, suggested to my mother that we should try to get me a job in the school. I could thereby keep myself busy and benefit from it as well as serve the community. My mother was not keen on the idea since we were in a foreign city and I would have to come and go by myself. My brother had specifically told my mother not to let me go out alone. When my mother did not consent to my teaching school, I turned to her and said, "I am going to go to work. Why should a girl of my education go to waste? Work will keep me busy, give me satisfaction, and make me useful to my community." My cousin Mary and the doctor agreed with me, and my mother relented. So I began to teach mathematics and Armenian history.

Two months later the war ended with the victory of the Turks and the defeat of the Bulgarians. My brother returned home, and when he heard that I was working as a teacher, he got angry and threatened to take me out of the job. "Am I going to let my sister work?" he said. "It is impossible." I was very upset and cried, but it was no use. But then doctor Niziblian, my cousin Mary and other relatives argued with my brother that the reason I was working was not because I had to earn money but because it was a shame that with all my education I should be sitting at home and that by teaching I would be making myself useful to the community. I too pleaded with him, and he finally was obliged to satisfy my wish so I could continue working.

I very much enjoyed teaching, and my pupils liked me a lot. Their conversations were full of references to the comings and goings of the "beautiful teacher." I was glad to be free from confinement to the house. But this freedom and this joy did not last for long as my mother's predictions began to come true. Young men from all quarters began to pursue me and try to get close to me. Fears began to fill my mother's heart. But she had a lot of confidence in me. I wasn't one to be fooled easily; I was a bold and courageous girl. Since my younger years, I had given no thought to all those who were after me. I had no strong desire to get married. It mattered little to me whether I was dealing with boys or girls. I was scrupulous about my moral standards, the "owner of my own beauty." My constant wish was to be better educated. I had taken piano lessons for many years, and after I finished at the seminary, I very much wanted to go to Marash College. But I was not able to and hence was obliged to join my brother in Iskenderun.

While I was still a student in Aintab, two young men, among others, both from good families, asked for my hand. They had graduated from Aintab College and were going to the American University of Beirut, one to become a dentist and the other a physician. Each of them wanted to get engaged to me and then marry me after he graduated from the University. My mother and I

had turned them down although both of them had promising futures. My mother told them, "My sons, go and finish your education and start working. Then we'll think about it. We'll see what the future will bring." The ideal man I wanted to marry was to be handsome, the son of a good family, and have high morals, someone who would love me very much and would even be in love with me - just as I would love him and would fall in love with him.

My mother told my suitors, "I will not let my daughter get married before reaching twenty. Where will I find better men than you? So let us wait." With such hopes, they consented to wait and kept in touch with us.

As the proverb has it, "We fled from the water and fell into the fire." Before we had gotten settled down and gotten to know the people in Iskenderun, several young men came forth with marriage proposals. Two of them were Arabs: we refused them outright, and they gave up. But two others were another matter. One was related to my mother, namely Setrak Sevajian, the young man to whom my brother had entrusted us when going to war; the other was my brother's intimate friend, Mihran Keshishian, whom we had met on arriving in Iskenderun.

Setrak Sevajian and his mother looked after us like our guardians during my brother's absence. And I very much regret that the love and respect he showed towards me became the cause of his unhappiness. He began to court me by trying to get close to me and bringing me presents. When I sensed this, I tried to stay away from him and changed the times when I came home from school. One day he spoke to my mother and expressed his intention to marry me. My mother knew very well that I had no love towards him. Yet she promised him, nonetheless, that she would ask me. When my mother told me about it, I said to her, "Don't you speak to me about this again. It is impossible. I neither love him nor enjoy his company. If this is why he is coming to our house, let him stop. If he wants to come here as a relative, then it's fine." My mother kept quiet. So I added, "If you cannot say this to him yourself, I will personally tell it to his face." I sensed that my mother felt favorably disposed towards him; he was related to us and was not a bad boy. But she was sure that I did not want to marry him. So on his next visit, she tried to persuade him with gentle words to spare his feelings so that he would give up the matter. Setrak went crazy and begged her for an opportunity to speak to me personally and to express the love that he had towards me.

When my mother brought this proposal to me, I could not refuse and accepted it. He came, and we spoke at length with each other. I first thanked him for the love and respect he had shown and all that he had done for us during my brother's absence. I then added, "I do not want to deceive you by feigning affection. I love you as a brother, as a relative, but not as a fiancé or a future husband. If you are going to continue to come to us, come as a brother and as a relative and not with the intention of marriage. Otherwise, though I truly like you, you must stop coming to us as of this moment." He begged me

to think it over. He tried to convince me of the sincerity of his love and tried to persuade me with his sweet words and lavish promises, but he did not succeed. Feeling sad and hopeless, he left and did not show up for several weeks. His mother then came over and with imploring words told us about the state that her son had fallen into. It was of no use. Nonetheless, it seems he did not entirely lose hope. Although for a while he did not have the courage to come back by himself, he would occasionally come to visit in the evenings with his mother. And he continued to hope, but for me, the matter was closed.

Now, the second young man, Mihran Keshishian. As I mentioned, he fled from military service by going to Egypt. On his return, he immediately began to frequent our house and to pursue me. Their house was located on the way to my school, and every morning as I passed by there, he would be standing in front of the door, and on my way to lunch, and when returning home in the evening, he would be standing there until I turned the corner. But I went on my way without greeting him or looking at his face. A number of times I took another, longer route, but it was only a matter of a few days before he began to show up there as well. Since that was a more isolated road, I was obliged to go back to my old route. Not once did I encourage him to approach me and to open his heart to me, or to explain to me the reason for his pursuing me. Finally, he was not able to achieve his purpose in this manner, so he was obliged to send over his parents to see us.

One day we got word that his parents wanted to visit us in the evening. My mother sent word to my brother to be sure to come home that evening, since my brother was at the time quite unconcerned about us. He had no idea about what was going on. Many nights a week, he would not come home until the morning, and he went directly to his pharmacy. When we needed money, we had to go to the pharmacy and ask for it. On getting this news, my brother came home, and we had dinner together. In a while, the guests arrived, Mihran's parents, his older sister, and her husband. We knew why they had come, so after serving coffee and extending to them our hospitality, I withdrew to my room. They then revealed the purpose of their visit, and after discussing it for a while, my mother told them, "You are most welcome, and we thank you for your visit. But give us some time. We have just gotten to know each other well. Let us think it over, and we will let you know." As they were leaving, I came out and bade them farewell.

After they left, my brother called me and my mother and said to me, "These people, particularly the boy, had put it in their heads to make this proposal to you even before you got here, since Mihran had seen your picture in my room. On the day that you arrived, even though his family was in the mountains, he came to town to see you and to meet you with me. Although he is not a bad fellow, comes from a good family, and is rich, he is not quite right for my sister; he is not worthy of her. In one word it is impossible that I give her to him." He then turned to me and said, in a commanding voice, "Don't ever

encourage him (“give him face”) or become attached to him. You must know that I have to keep telling him that he has my consent, but that my mother and sister are opposing me. That I will try to persuade both of you. I have to do this because he is my close friend and I have a number of dealings with him that I must bring off. So you should continue raising obstacles, and so far as possible, put an end to their hopes.” When we went to our room, I told my mother, “My brother must think that I am a child. Not only will I not encourage him or become attached to him, I feel nothing but revulsion for him. Since he is my brother’s close friend, and I know the kind of life my brother is leading, I am sure that he, too, is living the same sort of life. If they did not have the same character and pursue the same life, they would not be friends. It would be impossible for me to marry such a young man.”

My mother and I decided to put an end to their hopes. Mihran, his mother, and his sister continued visiting us. One day when I was at school, his mother and sister tried to persuade my mother with all sorts of words and promises saying, “Ovsanna Hanem, you won’t regret it. Your daughter will be happy for the rest of her life.”

My mother responded, “Yes, you are a good family; he is a good boy. But I beg you to give up this matter. I came to this city temporarily and have children in Aintab. My daughter still wishes to continue her education, and she is still young to get married. You can be sure that no matter who asks for my daughter’s hand in this city, I shall not consent to it and will not have her get married here.” The poor mother gave up hope and went home. But on seeing the condition of her son - how he would not go to work, nor even go out - she was afraid that he would get sick. So she came back to my mother time and again to cry and to plead, but to no avail.

We didn’t know the Khatchadourians were responsible for the suspicion that had arisen in the Keshishians’ hearts. The Khatchadourians were putting up obstacles because they were intending to have me marry their brother Aram. They had no idea that while other young men were all agitated over me, Aram didn’t care that a beautiful girl had come into town, particularly someone related to them, and that he had not interested himself in me for a single day. On many evenings, we used to visit them. He would not even come into the living room to greet us, but would keep on working in a room enclosed by glass which they had converted to an office. The fact that guests had come and a beautiful girl had come did not concern him. Nor did the Keshishians know that I could neither admire nor love such a man. Nonetheless they kept asking my mother whether the reason for our refusal was because we were planning to have me marry the younger brother of the Khatchadourians. My mother kept saying, “Have no such thoughts. Although they have not asked for her hand, even if they were to, I would not consent. I intend to stand firm on what I told you earlier. We are going to return to Aintab, and I am not going to stay in this city. And my daughter is not going to be married here. So I beg

you not to trouble yourselves with this matter nor to trouble us with it any further.” Yet these people would not believe her and began to look at the Khatchadourians with a hostile eye. The Keshishians’ son-in-law, Giragos Efendi, was a lawyer and an important government official wielding much influence. Through him, they sent threats to Aram’s brother, Yeghia Efendi.

One day, as it was getting dark, Yeghia Efendi came to us with my brother. He was quite flustered and began to shout in his stammering voice, “You should either give your daughter to these people or leave this city right away. They suspect that the reason you don’t want to give your daughter to their son is because we are planning to have her marry my brother. I received a written threat today; if we don’t give up this prospect, they are going to shoot me. We have tried to persuade them that we have no such intension whatsoever. But nonetheless, please pity me because these people are capable of anything. I have a family to worry about.” Meanwhile, as my brother was lighting the lamp, it fell from his hands; the kerosene spilled on the rug and caught fire. We put it out with difficulty. They got Yeghia Efendi to sit down, and they calmed him with some cognac. My brother promised that he would meet with the Keshishians and persuade them that the Khatchadourians had had no part in this matter. It was only because my mother and I did not like this city, and that was why we did not want to have me settle in Iskenderun. With such explanations and promises, my brother took him home. He was a weak man, and his whole body was shaking.

When my brother returned home, he had dinner and then turned to me and said in an irritated voice, “You are going to bring a lot of calamities on our heads.” There was a lot I could say back, but I preferred to keep quiet. He then went to the Keshishians and told Mihran, “You are not going to solve this problem by suspecting others, sending them threatening notes, rushing things, and spreading fear. On the contrary, you are going to make my mother and sister refuse you. It would be better if you either give up this matter, or be patient, so that by interacting with each other and by understanding each other you can perhaps win her over. I should also tell you that neither I nor my mother can pressure my sister. I promise you nonetheless that I will do what I can to persuade my mother and my sister.”

That was a lie, and he had fooled them so that worse events would not occur. This conversation and the promises that my brother made helped to gain a bit of time. But Mihran continued to have the same attitude and persisted in pursuing me. He began to create opportunities to speak to me and to express his love for me. One of their relatives, who was a distant friend of mine, began to get close to me and try to cultivate a more intimate friendship. Although I knew very well that it was Mihran’s plan to use her, I nonetheless would occasionally go to the seashore with her, being sure that he would be waiting for us there. And as soon as we sat down on a bench, he would immediately join us. We would talk for a while but not stay for long.

Sometimes the girl would bring letters from him as well as presents. He would write asking for us to get together, but I would refuse all of his offers.

Nonetheless, I had promised my brother that I would not turn my face away entirely from Mihran. I felt sorry for him because he had fallen into such a state and taken on the appearance of a madman. I hoped that he would gradually give up hope. But on the contrary, his love for me became even fiercer in time. Seeing his condition, I tried to see if I too could generate some love in my heart towards him in response to his expressions of love and his promises. But it was impossible to awaken any love for him. My heart turned to stone so far as he was concerned. My conscience bothered me for his failing health and for his unhappiness. But I had done nothing to feel guilty, done everything possible to kill his hope.

I stopped my relationship with the girl who was acting as an intermediary. I even gave up going out on walks. I changed the hours of going to school, and I never went anywhere alone. Yet none of these things helped. He kept coming to us with his family once a week. One day his father and mother came alone to beg us, for the love of God, to satisfy their son's yearning. They wanted us to get engaged so their son could freely visit us, and then perhaps through interacting with each other, we could understand each other better, and I would eventually consent to marry him. We kept quiet. My mother then repeated that she did not want to have her daughter get married in and settle in Iskenderun.

My life now became unbearable. On one side were these people and on the other was my brother's intolerable life. There was no other way out than to leave. So my mother and I decided that we should start getting ready and that even before my teaching duties were over we should leave without telling anyone. We would inform my brother about our plans to return to Aintab only after we had made all the arrangements. We also decided to avoid, as far as was possible, all further contact with this family, without entirely cutting off all hope for the sake of the boy's elderly mother who felt such pain over her son's condition.

After my mother and I reached this decision, certain unforeseen circumstances occurred whereby I could not stand firm on this decision. Otherwise, as soon as my school finished in a few months, we had decided to leave Iskenderun once and for all. Though I could not tell my mother the reasons, I was obliged to say to her, "My dear mother, I have given up the idea of immediately returning to Aintab. There is no reason to decide this right now. Let my school finish, and then we can think it over." My mother looked at me perplexed. What reasons could there be that I should change my mind over a few weeks? All sorts of suspicions entered her mind. She spoke to me sweetly, she spoke to me harshly, but it was to no avail - she could not get the answer out of me. I was not able to restrain myself any longer, and I began to cry. Then I said I had a headache, and I went to bed. My mother brought me

coffee. I did not want to eat. She caressed my face again asked me saying, “What is it? Confess to me my daughter; I am your mother. Only I can be helpful to you in your sorrows.” I turned to her and said, “Mother don’t be upset; the time will come to talk.”

THE FIRST AND LAST TIME IN MY LIFE I WAS IN LOVE

Now, as I write my autobiography, this is where I have reached: the life I lived in Iskenderun and the adventures of love that I experienced in 1913. Then, above all, there was the sudden, unimaginable, real, yet hopeless experience of falling in love that came before my eyes like a caravan of camels. Now I remembered. I was moved and wanted to write it down. For days, I thought about it: should I write about it or not? Should I recall it in memory or not? Many times I started to write, but then set it aside.

“I gave it up”, I told myself. “It was a love that was lost and unfulfilled; it is better not to write about it, not to remember. I have kept it a secret so far; let it go to the grave with me.” But finally, I decided to write about it, because even though I lost my love during my life, I should at least remember it in my autobiography so that his memory shall remain alive. I remembered that a poet wrote, “When I die and grass grows on my grave, even though the grass dries up, I am still alive. But should the memory of me die, should I be forgotten, then it is that I shall truly die.”



Efronia at age 19

My pen is weak in my 84th year; so many days have passed, so many months and years. How will I recall and describe my undying and unforgettable love and the feelings I had when I was eighteen years old? How will I write about my

sweet dreams just as they were? Had I written all of this down during my younger years, it would have become a novel taken from real life.

I regret so much that I lost my love. And I also lost his letters, his poems, his presents and photographs. In 1939 after the Turkish occupation of Iskenderun I had to hide his letters, which I had kept for years like relics in a tin box. I buried the letters in an inconspicuous place with the hope that I would get them back. When we were unable to return, I lost his priceless memories as well. I pleaded with my husband to let me go back, but he would not let me.

HOW DID I FALL IN LOVE? WHO WAS THAT YOUNG MAN?

As I mentioned, my brother had rented a house on a good street. We had a few neighbors who were Christian Arabs. We almost never visited them. First, we did not know their language, and second there were young men who had come with marriage proposals which we had refused.

A few doors away from us, there also lived a couple that we often came across, a proper and gracious young husband and wife. They were Muslim, natives of Istanbul; the woman did not veil her face. Running into each other often, we became acquainted. We spoke to each other a few times in the street. One day I asked my brother if he knew this family. He said, "Yes, I know them well; they are my clients. The man is a high-level government official. They are decent people; we may see them socially."

One day I met the wife in the street. She expressed the wish to visit us with her husband. We welcomed them gladly, and they came over one evening. My brother introduced them to us: Shakib Bey and his wife. He then introduced us to them: "My grandmother, my mother, and my sister." We had a good time. They spoke Turkish. My mother was quite pleased. From that day on began our relationship, especially with the lady. My brother thanked them for their visit. And he asked the wife, Nouriyé Hanem, if she would treat me as a sister: "My sister," he said, "has almost no friends and feels very lonely." She, Nouriyé Hanem, turned to my brother and said, "It would be a great pleasure to get to know your sister; I will love her like my own true sister." They stayed a while longer, enjoyed our hospitality and left quite contented.

When one day I saw Nouriyé Hanem again, she said to me "There is a club here, and my husband and I are members. We can invite our friends, so I would like to take you some day. Would you like to come?" I was happy to accept. We set a time for the next day, and I went there with a few of her friends. I also made their acquaintance and was very glad that I had found such a good companion. Being bored at home and fed up with the atmosphere of the Armenian community, I rarely went out; this atmosphere now provided me with an opportunity to bring some change into my life and to pass my time pleasantly.

A week later Nouriyé Hanem invited me to the club for dinner. "My husband," she said, "has to go to Antioch in connection with his work and will not be able to accompany us." I got my mother's consent, and put on a very beautiful dress which had been made for me recently, and I went there. We were seated at a good location in the club, and I chatted for a while. Then we had dinner, and as we were having our coffee, a young man came over, approached our table, greeted us, and turning to Nouriyé Hanem, asked, "May I share your table?" Nouriyé Hanem smiled, looked at my face, and said, "You

are welcome.” She introduced us to each other: “Miss Efronia Nazarian, sister of pharmacist Yacoub Nazarian, recently arrived from Aintab.” She then turned to me and said: “Ramzi Bey, the son of the Persian consul Naamatollah.” We shook hands. Nouriyé Hanem asked him, “Have you had dinner?” “Yes,” he said, ordered a coffee, drank it and then wondered what he could offer us. Nouriyé Hanem asked me what I wanted, and we decided to have an ice cream.

It attracted my attention that he never turned his eyes away from me. His face seemed rather familiar to me, but I could not remember where I had seen him. We sat awhile, then I said, “Though I would like to stay longer, please forgive me, but I must go; I should not be late getting home.” Although I suggested that we leave, to tell the truth, I did not really want to part. Up to then in my life, I can even say until now in my life, I had never met such a noble, faultlessly handsome, gracious, and imposing-looking young man. His sweet looks, his mellow words - in one word the sort of man I had been dreaming of marrying for years. I cannot deny it; I cannot lie. I fell in love with him that very moment. My heart that had been so hardened towards the many young men who loved me and were mad about me now softened even before I had heard from his lips a single word of love - and without knowing if he too loved me or not.

We stood up. He came along, and when we reached where Nouriyé Hanem lived, he asked, “May I accompany the young lady to her house?” Nouriyé Hanem looked at me, smiled and said, “I will be grateful.” We thanked Nouriyé Hanem, wished her good night, left her home, and turned towards our house. When we reached there, he took hold of my hand and said, “Please forgive me, but may I have a word with you?” I looked at him and smiled. He felt emboldened. He turned to me and said, “I feel myself to be fortunate today. I have been wishing for months to see you close up, at least for a few moments, and to speak with you for a few minutes. I owe our meeting to Nouriyé Hanem, and I am grateful to her. My dear, do not think that I saw you only today and came to love you today; it has been many months since I first knew you and fell in love with you. No doubt you saw me only today, but I have known you for a long time. I have seen you every day. But unlike the other men who have been after you, I did not pursue you. I did not cross your path. I did not loiter around your house. But every day, I would wait hidden along the paths that you used. I would see and admire your lovely angelic face. I am tormented day and night with my love and longing for you. I could be patient no longer; I could not stand it. I did not want to express my love and affection for you through letters. I did not want to catch you on a street corner and open my heart to you. I searched for someone that I could trust, to whom I could reveal my secret, someone who would understand the state of a young man in love, who would show me a way and help me. I found Nouriyé Hanem. She is a very close friend of ours - decent, kind, and trustworthy - and opened my heart

to her. I begged her to help me, to create opportunities for me to see you. As I mentioned, it is to her that I owe our meeting. I shall not say anymore today. You must only know that I love you with a sincere and virtuous love. I am in love with you. Be certain that to be loved in return by you and to be united with you, I am willing even to sacrifice my life. I do not want to bore you any further. Good night.” He kissed my hand and waited for me outside till I opened the door and closed it behind me.

I entered the house where my mother was still awake. She asked what time it was. I replied to her and said it was half past nine when, in fact, it was past midnight. My mother asked some questions. There was no strength left in me to talk or answer questions. “Forgive me, Mother,” I said. “I feel very sleepy, and I have a headache. I will tell you about it tomorrow. Let me just say that I had a very good time.” I withdrew to my room and got into bed. But where was my sleep? Where was my rest? I sat up, took my head in my hands. I was in a state of confusion. My mind was not in my head. I could not remove from my eyes his handsome face. I could not distance from my ears his sweet voice and gentle words, his confessions of love during our parting moments. For a few moments I pulled myself together and began to think. I asked myself, even blamed myself, how could I love him at first sight and fall in love with him? But then I felt that falling in love is not a fault for a young woman, especially with such a young man. But when I thought, “Although he loves me and I love him, can our love ever be fulfilled? Could we ever get married? Ramzi, a Persian Muslim; I, an Armenian girl. I must use my head. I must try not to take a wrong step before this love has taken root.”

Although I thought about all this, how was I going to help myself? It was as if my vision clouded over. I remained silent for a while; then I lifted my tearful eyes and prayed, “I beg You, my almighty and loving Lord. My Father, why did you plunge me into this infinity? Why did you awaken this love which has no remedy in my heart? Why did you place this young man in my path? I beg You, just as You placed his love in my heart that You now take it away because, though I have fallen in love with him, there is an impossible bridge across the chasm. How are we going to cross that bridge? I beg You to take this cup away from me. I am a weak creature. I beg You and tearfully ask this of You. And if that is impossible, at least help me by showing me a way.” When finished this prayer, I felt limp, my eyes closed, and I must have fallen asleep.

Late in the morning my mother came to my room and woke me up to go to school. She saw the condition I was in and realized that I was not feeling well. She brought me a cup of coffee and asked, “My daughter, what is wrong? Did you perhaps drink something you are not used to last night at dinner?” I did not answer; I turned my face away and told her that I would not be going to school that day. I stayed in bed for a few hours then got up, washed my face, had breakfast. I had a fierce headache. I took some aspirin and spent the rest

of the day with my mother and grandmother. I had the feeling that there was something my mother wanted to tell me (“there were words in her mouth”) and was waiting for an opportunity to do so. She finally said, “Don’t be upset; though I can see you are not feeling very well, I must talk to you. I am fed up. As soon as your school finishes, we should turn our faces away and leave. Last night when you were not home, the Keshishians came back and once again brought up the same subject and talked and talked about it. I said nothing. They insist that an engagement ring be placed on your finger. His mother told me, crying, that her poor son is getting ill, to spare him and grant his wish.” I said to them, “Neither my son nor my daughter is at home. We have not yet been able to reach a decision. How can I give you an answer?”

Before my mother had finished her words, I got irritated and angry: “These people are quite right. It is easy enough to blame others, but the biggest fault lies with my brother and then the rest of us. We have been deceiving these people for months by giving them false hopes. Say, “My daughter does not want to and we have to put an end to this issue.” If you cannot say this to my brother, let me. I shall tell it to him openly, and I don’t care how upset he gets. He was the one who brought us over here - what kind of life have we had? He does not see our faces for days at a time and leads a dissipated life. He stays with the girls in the whorehouse and spends his money on them (“feeds them”). We are not obliged to fulfill his every whim. If he wants to maintain his good relationships with that young man by exploiting me, then I have had enough of it. He is tampering with my life.” My mother calmed me down. We had dinner, and I went to bed. I heard my brother coming into the house but kept quiet.

The following day I passed by Ramzi’s school; he was standing there, we greeted each other, smiled, and I continued on my way. He neither came after me nor tried to get close to me. The delicacy with which he dealt with me attached me even more to him. A few days later, Nouriyé Hanem came to our house, and with my mother’s consent she took me to their place for dinner. Shakib Bey had already had his dinner, so he excused himself and went out.

It was not long before Ramzi came and greeted us joyfully. He kissed our hands, and it seemed to me he had become even more handsome. “This meeting was a surprise for me,” he said. Although we already had drunk our coffee, Nouriyé Hanem called for more, and we spent a few happy hours together. As on the previous occasion, he accompanied me home, but this time we stepped into a side street. He held my hand and said, “The happiest hours of my life were the hours that I spent with you.” Once again he asked if he could speak to me for a few minutes. What could I say? “By all means,” I answered. He said, “First I want to express my happiness over our meeting this evening; it has given me hope and life. I pray to God that He fulfills our sincere love for each other and that He unites us until death. My darling, the flame of your love scorches my heart. I cannot live this life without you; you

can be certain of that. I beg you that we not keep our love secret anymore. Let us tell our parents, obtain their consent to get engaged and get married.” He talked and talked. He then turned to me and said, “My dear, why don’t you say something? Do you love me? Do you accept my proposal? Speak up and lighten the fire that is burning in my heart.”

I waited a while and considered for a moment making the impossibility of our ever getting married clear to him. But as they say, “Love is blind.” I could not do it. I felt at a loss. Finally, I turned to him and said, “Ramzi, my dear, just as you love me, I confess to you that I also loved you from the first moment that I saw you, and fell in love with you. Be sure that your hopes and wishes are my hopes and wishes too. But let us not rush and tell our parents yet. I am afraid that if we do not get their consent then we shall be completely deprived of seeing each other. Let’s not hurry. There are many obstacles to our union. You still have your education to finish and then to get yourself established. You are not quite old enough to get married.” I could not finish my words. He said, “None of the things you are telling me are obstacles to our getting married. I could be married and still continue my education. I don’t need money. My family does not need me. I beg you again and again to spare me this torment. Give me your consent and put me at ease.”

I turned to him and said, “I beg you not to go any further. Give me some time to reach a decision. Let us for now enjoy each other, find occasions to see each other, and to fulfill our longings for each other. Let us leave the rest for God to arrange as He sees fit.” He cut me short and said, “I must tell you that there is a fear in my heart. I hear you have many suitors, and many are after you. Do you promise that you will not marry any one of them?” “I swear to God with all my heart that I will not marry any one of them,” I said. “I will never exchange your love for the love of anyone else.” He looked happy. He kissed me, and we parted.

I entered the house fearfully. My mother was still awake. “My dear, you are late,” she said. “I was afraid your brother would get here before you and ask where you were.” We sat together a bit. Then I went to bed. I felt exhausted and overwhelmed. I told myself, “I wish that I did not have this awesome secret.” To love is to torture and to be tortured. We continued this relationship for some time. I did not have the courage to reach a decision.

There was not much time left for my school to finish. I had to keep going to school whether I felt well or ill, happy or sad. Preparing the final exams and helping with the year-end diploma ceremonies involved a lot of work although I was in no mood for it and my heart was not in it. Some of the teachers were busy every day. We met several times a week. As a result, I was not able to see Nouriyé Hanem as often as before.

One morning, on my way to school, Ramzi passed me and gave me an envelope. I took it and continued on my way. It was an invitation to dinner at

the club with Nouriyé Hanem. He had also written a lot of other things. I only remember, "I hope you will come with happy news and decisions."

Nouriyé Hanem and I set a time and went to the club the next day at six o'clock. Ramzi was already there and had ordered a table set up in a private room. First he thanked us for accepting his invitation; then he gave us the menu. We ordered our food and drinks and with joy and gladness had our dinner and drank our coffee. It was a very happy day. He told us about his final exams and invited us to his graduation ceremony. He informed us about his having been accepted at a university in London to pursue his education. Without much forethought, I asked him, "What field are you going to pursue?" He said, "I have a year in which to decide. But let me ask you, what field would you prefer that I pursue?"

I was very sorry I had asked the question and said, "The choice belongs to you. What field do you feel attracted to?" He said, "There are two choices: One is the law and the other the military. There is still time to decide." Quite a bit of time passed. "Excuse me, but it is time for me to go," I said. Although I was sure that my brother would not be coming home that night, nonetheless I whispered into Nouriyé Hanem's ear that should my brother change his mind and come home and not find me there, it was possible that he could come to the club, and I would not want him to see me with a young man he did not know.

Nouriyé Hanem said, "Don't worry. Should he come here, I can introduce Ramzi to him as my relative; it is still too early to go." I consented. We sat for a while longer. Then we thanked him and left. After we had left Nouriyé Hanem at her house and turned towards my house, we saw that the light was on in my brother's room, so we did not think it would be wise to linger there together. We said good night, he kissed me, and we parted.

I opened the door slowly. My brother was awake and, having heard my arrival, he came down from his room. "Are you coming from Nouriyé Hanem's?" he asked. "Yes," I said. "I was invited to dinner with one of her woman friends." "This friendship with Nouriyé Hanem turned out very well for you," he said. "Yes, my brother. God Himself must have arranged it for me."

I entered my room. He followed me in and a little later my mother joined us. Before I had got home my mother had already told him about the Keshishians' visit to our house and their latest engagement proposal. But my wise mother had said nothing to him about her having already told me all of this and the answers that I had given her. So she turned to me and, as if for the first time, related to me the Keshishians' visit and proposal. Suddenly, before she finished her words, I became irritated and said, "Brother, for the love of God, let us put an end to this problem. I have gotten fed up and disgusted with my life. We have been preoccupied with this issue since we set foot in Iskenderun. All this time, I have been patient for your sake, Brother. But I

have now become disgusted with feigning affection and engaging in false pretenses. It's enough. If you don't tell him and put an end to his hopes, I shall personally inform him that even if the whole world comes to an end, I will not marry him. Am I to be forced to do so? I don't love him. Let him give up all hope. Whether he gets sick or goes crazy is up to him." Without saying a word, my brother picked himself up ("took his head") and went to his room. And we retreated to our own room.

That evening, Ramzi was not able to talk to me. The next day on my way to work I passed by his school and saw him standing in front of the gate. I could not read his letter in school, so went home for lunch. I withdrew to my room and read the letter without being able to restrain my tears.

It is impossible to remember and to describe it since so many years have passed. Poor boy. There were no words of love left in the dictionary that he had not used. In summary, this is what it was about, so far as I recall: hopes for our union in the future; sweet dreams; proposals full of hope for our getting engaged and married soon; pleadings, yearnings, and fantasies. The whole letter was on such things. And he begged that we see each other soon.

When I read the letter, my mood was ruined. If his marriage proposal had had any likelihood of fulfillment, I would have been happy; I would even have considered myself the most fortunate girl in the world: a very handsome boy endowed with the best attributes, the son of a rich consul. He loved me with a sincere love to the point of madness, and I loved him in return. I wanted to marry him with all my heart. Where would I find another young man like him? But it was very sad that a chasm stood between us which was impossible to cross. I went through many difficulties. A storm raged in my head. I could not sleep at night nor rest during the day. I knew it was not right for us to continue our relationship. I knew for certain that by continuing to see each other the love we had for each other was going to grow deeper and have bad and unforeseen consequences.

I was tormented for days and finally decided to turn to Nouriyé Hanem and seek her help. But was I going to reveal my main difficulty and obstacle which stood in the way of my marrying Ramzi? Since she herself was Muslim, just like Ramzi, how difficult it was going to be to reveal this reason to her. Wouldn't she feel bad? Wouldn't she feel hurt? Wouldn't she take offense? But come what may, I decided to confront the problem. Yet I could not implement this decision.

In the midst of these worries, I felt sick while in school one day and went to bed with a high fever. The doctor said that I had malaria. He gave me some drugs. I was burning, as if on fire, and the poor doctor did not know why I had fallen sick. I stayed in bed for several days. Nouriyé Hanem had become worried. Ramzi, too, was concerned. He had told her that he had not seen me for several days and wondered if I were ill.

After that, Nouriyé Hanem stopped by our house and found me in bed full of worries. "I came since I had not seen you for several days," she said. "I came for your news, and I am very sorry that I've found you in bed." My mother offered her coffee and thanked her for her visit. "I will come again," she said, and left.

I could not get out of bed soon as I felt very oppressed and tired. I was especially bothered by an insufferable headache. My mother became very worried. My brother, too, during those days would come home both for lunch and for dinner. He slept at home, took an interest in me.

A few days later, Nouriyé Hanem came back to see me with a lovely bouquet of flowers in her hands. My mother had gone shopping. The flowers were placed in a vase on my table. She took out the card and gave it to me - it was from Ramzi. I read it and could not restrain my tears. Even though they were only a few lines, he had written such things as tore my heart in pieces. He wondered if he had hurt me with a wrong word or expression and pleaded that I put his fears to rest with a few lines. I felt obliged to write and Nouriyé Hanem also begged me that I do so. I wrote, "My dear, have no doubts. Just as you are tormented by your love for me, so am I by my love for you. Let us pray to God for help."

Nouriyé Hanem looked at me and said, "My dear sister it is now necessary that we open our hearts to each other. I understand you as I understand Ramzi, and I know the condition he is in. However, I promised Ramzi that before you and I have a serious talk, the two of you should have a chance to meet some evening, at our house or at the club." I could not say no. A few days later I was well enough to go to school. On my way, I took the same path and saw him waiting for me in front of his school. He approached me, expressed his joy at seeing me well, and thanked me for responding to his note. He wanted to see me as soon as possible. I told him that I had promised Nouriyé Hanem that we would get together on a convenient day. He was pleased. I went on my way.

On my return from school, I saw Nouriyé Hanem on the balcony of their house. She came down and asked how I felt. She reminded me of my promise to meet with Ramzi. "Let's go tonight," she said. I did not answer right away and told her, "Let's leave it for tomorrow. I will let you know tomorrow morning," and turned towards our house.

I asked my mother that evening, in the midst of some other conversation, if she had any objections to my going out. "No" she said, "Your brother also has told me that he is going to a party tonight and will not be coming home." As if he otherwise came home every night! I felt happy, and in the morning, when I saw Nouriyé Hanem, we agreed to meet at five in the afternoon.

I returned home from school, got dressed, and although I still felt a little weak, Nouriyé Hanem and I went to the club. Within a quarter of an hour Ramzi came. He looked happy. We sat together for a while until it was time

for dinner. He very much wanted us to be his guests. We accepted and ate and drank and talked happily. That evening they were playing some very nice music. Though there were a lot of people, there was no one I knew since it was mainly a club for Muslims. Ramzi asked Nouriyé Hanem to dance and then proposed that we dance. I demurred saying that I did not know how to dance well. When I came from Aintab, I did not know how to dance at all. But then a girlfriend had taught me some steps, and I did dance a few times during the parties that she gave. At any rate, I did dance with Ramzi a few times. He was a very good dancer. When I got up to dance, my legs felt as if they were trembling. We sat together for a long time and had a wonderful time. He told us that the following day was the twenty-fifth wedding anniversary of his parents. There was going to be a big party at his house, and he invited me to come along with Nouriyé Hanem and Shakib Bey. I thanked him and as a matter of courtesy wished long life to his parents.

We got up and as usual left Nouriyé Hanem at her house, and he escorted me home. We again went around to the back of our house and talked for a while. Ramzi said, "May God grant that we celebrate the twenty-fifth and the fiftieth anniversary of our own wedding." He very much hoped that I would come to their party as the guest of Nouriyé Hanem.

I said, "I thank you, but I cannot come." He turned and asked, "When will the day come when I will be able to see you freely?" I said, "Victor Hugo said 'wait and hope'." We kissed and parted.

THE MOST DIFFICULT HOURS OF MY LIFE AND MY CONFESSIONS

Several days passed before I saw Nouriyé Hanem. I would keep my word to talk things over. "Let us set up a time and get together," she said. We agreed to meet the following morning at her house. I sent word to school that I was not feeling well and would have to absent myself. I went to Nouriyé Hanem's.

She sat next to me and said, "Just as Ramzi opened his heart to me, you too must confess to me without holding anything back. Just as I promised Ramzi, I also promise you to do everything possible to help you and to share the burden of your difficulties. I realize you feel bewildered and buried in thoughts. Yet I can make no sense out of your situation. I understood from Ramzi that you are in a state of uncertainty. Whatever he proposes, you do not give your consent. You find obstacles, and you say that it is not the right time. Your answers to this situation are tormenting him a great deal. I think I told you already that while you have only known him for a few months, he has known you for much longer. He told me where he first saw you, how he found out who you were, how he fell in love with you and came to love you. He did not have the courage to tell his parents about it and has been tormented for many days: Whom to find? To whom should he open his heart? Who would help him? He came to me. We have been intimate friends of his family for a long time. Both he and his sister love me as another sister. He came one day having heard that I knew you and that we saw each other. 'My sister, please forgive me, I am in dire straits,' he said. 'I have no one else to whom I can reveal the grief in my heart. I have come to you for help; show me a way.'

"I asked him, 'Ramzi, how can I help you? How can I make my heart one with yours?' He then began to tell me how he had seen you and how he came to love you and had fallen in love with you. He had wondered who he could find who would introduce him to you and help him get to know you. After thinking about it for days, as I already told you, he appealed to me. I saw the state he was in and said, 'Ramzi, my dear, don't worry and do not torment yourself. I will try to do everything I can to fulfill your wishes.' There is no need to say more. I promised him and fulfilled my promise to introduce you to each other, and to create opportunities for you to get together. As I said, there is no need to repeat what has happened since then, since you yourself are well aware of it. Had I not known Ramzi and had I not had trust in him, it is impossible that I would have made that promise and fulfilled it.

"Look, my dear sister, just as I love him, I have also come to love you. I thought that to make young people like you happy and to help them get married would be a good thing to do. This conviction emboldened me to introduce you to each other and to create opportunities for you to get together

in the ways that you are already aware of. My dear, this is a great opportunity for you. I cannot praise Ramzi enough. Such a young man, in this day and age, is very rare. He is kind, the son of a noble family, very rich, very handsome, and most gracious. His father is but a consul here, but in Persia he is an eminent man. Since you have been seeing Ramzi for some time, you know how decent and highly moral a young man he is. There is no need to say more about him. I have also come to know you and to love you. Like Ramzi, you too are a gracious girl endowed with the best qualities. He, too, is fortunate. You deserve each other. I am sure that when his parents hear about it and get to know you, they will give their consent right away. He is their most beloved son, and because of their love for him, they will make every sacrifice necessary. Dear sister, do you think I don't know about the young men who are courting you? And the immoral fellows pursuing you? You can be sure that their only aim is to lay their hands on a girl like you. Look my dear, I've spoken my mind; now it is your turn. Talk to me candidly. Open your heart and confess to me your thoughts. As I said most sincerely, I will help you. Do not keep anything from me. Why are you not agreeing to any of his proposals? Why are you not satisfying his yearning? What are you waiting for and why are you tormenting him? I implore you time and again to open your heart to me and tell me about the obstacles that are stopping you from marrying him."

I looked at her and could not restrain my tears. I said, "My dear sister, everything you say is true. I understand very well. You are concerned about our welfare and happiness. You have done everything you could. I do appreciate it, and I am grateful to you. I will never forget in all my life what you have done. Yes, I will confess; I will open my heart to you. I have been thinking of telling you everything and calling you to my aid, but I have not had the courage. My dear sister, when I saw Ramzi for the first time, when you introduced us to each other, I loved him, and I fell in love with him. Just as Ramzi loves me, I too love him and worship him. I have never in all my life met as gracious a young man, one endowed with all the best qualities; I have not met such a man, nor have I ever loved such a man. I am sure that I will never ever be able to find, and I will not be able to love, another young man like Ramzi. I have always dreamed about marrying someone like him. When on that first evening he brought me home from the club and wanted to tell me a few words, I accepted gladly. He opened his heart to me and confessed the love that he has had for me over the past months. He expressed his wish to marry me. We stood silent and then parted.

"After I left him, I went to my room and went to bed. Instead of feeling happy, I was tormented for hours with a storm raging in my mind. I suffered. I could not push his image out of my mind for a single minute. I wished that I had never seen him, that I had never met him. I implored God to take this love out of my heart." Nouriyé Hanem cut me short: "But why did you have these thoughts? What is the reason? Speak to me; confess to me." I said, "How can

I confess? How can I speak when my tongue refuses to obey me? If I confess, will you feel hurt? Will you be offended?" I could not continue as my tears began to flow. She came closer to me, wiped my eyes, caressed my face, brought me some water to drink. "I promise you that I will not be upset no matter what you say," she told me.

I stopped and took a deep breath. Then I hugged her and said, "My mind feels numb. If it's not too much trouble, may we have some coffee so I can collect my thoughts?" Then I continued, "Dear sister, let me first beg your pardon; please forgive me for I am guilty. I must confess that when you introduced me to him, you told me who he was. When he brought me home and opened his heart to me and revealed the love that he held for me and expressed his desire and his decision to marry me, at that very moment I should have told him that it was impossible for me to marry him. But the very moment I saw him, I loved him so much that I was not able to think straight, and I was not able to speak up. Love is blind. Despite my problem, we began to see each other. We became attached. You know well, and you are well aware of our relationship over the past several months, how we have loved each other and how we continue to love each other just as much. Yet for all this time, a problem has been tormenting me; I am guilty, and my conscience condemns me. But now, no matter how difficult it is for me to confess, it is necessary that I do so. Dear sister, I confess to you with anguish and with tears that it is impossible for me to marry Ramzi because Ramzi is a Persian Muslim and I am an Armenian girl. There is a deep chasm between him and me with an impassable bridge over it. How are we going to be able to cross it? How can we remove this obstacle so that we can join each other in marriage? As I said, I should not have entered into this relationship knowing that this obstacle was present. We lived with hope and reached this state. How will Ramzi ever forgive me? How will you ever forgive me? I am guilty, and I am certain that God himself will not forgive me. Dear sister, what else can I say but to beg you to help me and show me a way."

Nouriyé Hanem turned to me and said, "Calm down sister; if this is the only cause, it is not hopeless, not beyond remedy. I know very well that several of Ramzi's relatives have married Europeans. Ramzi's own maternal grandmother is French. You, too, will be one of them. The Persians and the Armenians are very close to each other, and members of his family especially are like Europeans. All of their children are being educated in foreign schools. Ramzi himself first attended the Jesuit school and now studies at the Protestant mission school. They are very liberal minded in their views."

I interrupted her, "Dear sister, as I have said so many times, I do not wish to hurt your feelings or insult you. Ramzi's being Muslim is not a stain on his character. Every man's nation and religion are holy to him. Far be it from me to blame him for that. But I must confess that we Armenians are not like Europeans; our situation is different. The issue is not only one of religion. The

two nations have been enemies, and they remain enemies because under the Turkish government, Armenians have for so long been persecuted, tormented, slaughtered and plundered. I am so sorry that I myself am the child of one of those martyrs. During the Turkish massacres of Aintab my 35-year-old father was murdered, leaving behind his young widow with five orphans, the oldest of whom was 10 and the youngest, myself, only two months old. All his wealth was plundered. I ask you, how can I trample on this obstacle even for Ramzi's love and my love for him? Tell me candidly, how can I marry Ramzi when my family and my nation are full of revenge against the Turks? Will my family ever forgive me? What will other Armenians think of me? As I said to you, I wish I had never seen him; I wish I did not love him. I assure you that by rejecting his pure and sincere love I am going to be unhappy for the rest of my life. And for the unhappiness that I will cause him my conscience troubles me greatly. I am guilty, and I will beg your and his forgiveness with my tears. I am responsible for all that has happened. May God, too, forgive me. May He not count it a sin. Love made me blind; it made me dumb. Here then, dear sister, is my sorrow, my secret, and my guilt. I beg you to help me and to show me a way."

Nouriyé Hanem fell silent for a few minutes. Then she said, "My dear, I, too, now find myself in a very difficult position. The obstacle you have revealed does not seem insurmountable to me - as I said there are many girls who have married foreign men - but I do understand that your problem and its cause are different. And to some extent I agree with you. Do not blame yourself and do not torment yourself. Yes, although you loved Ramzi from the first moment, since you saw no possibility of marrying him, you should not have entered into this relationship. And you should not have kept Ramzi's hopes alive. And your own hopes likewise. But now the past is gone, and we should think about the present. How can we remedy the situation? How can we persuade him to give you up? I should tell you, nonetheless, even if you had expressed these reservations to him from the first moment, he would not have been willing to give you up. Now it is even more impossible, and it is going to be very painful. I have seen many others in love, and I too married my husband after I fell in love with him. Had circumstances been unsuitable though, we could have given each other up. But I have never seen anyone love and worship another like Ramzi. Especially since the matter has reached this point, what are we going to tell him? What reasons are we going to give him to separate him from your love? How are we going to prevail on him to give up the idea of marrying you? This issue is a settled matter for him. He is thinking of asking his parents' consent so that his parents will then obtain your family's consent for you to get engaged. And he wants to marry you before he goes to London. Look, my sister, it is very hard for us to think any further about this or discuss it in order to reach a decision. And it would not be right to do so for I can see and I can understand the state that you are in. If you like,

let us each think about this further. As of today, are you going to be able to abandon him? And are you going to be able to give him up? Everything is possible in life. Your decision is going to affect him a great deal.”

I remained silent and was unable to respond to her.

Then Nouriyé Hanem said again, “Let us not hurry, my sister. Let us not take a wrong step. Until we reach a definite decision, let your relationship continue.” “Yes,” I said. “I promised Ramzi that I would create an opportunity soon for you to get together. He is waiting impatiently for some news from you.” I said, “Saturday would be convenient for me. My brother is going to Antioch.” So, we decided to go to the club Saturday evening. I thanked her, asked for her forgiveness again, and returned home. It was noon. My mother thought that I had just come from school. She had already laid out the table. I remember very well that the dish was squash dolma. Lately my brother had been coming home more regularly for dinner and sometimes for lunch. He came, and we sat down to lunch together. I had no appetite, nor was I in any mood to put a single morsel in my mouth. I forced myself to eat. We had our coffee, and my brother suggested that we leave the house together. I told him I was not going to school that afternoon since I had no work to do. He left. I took an aspirin and went to bed.

Nouriyé Hanem and I, as I said, had agreed to meet at five o’clock Saturday afternoon. We went to the club and sat in a corner room. We had gone there a little early so we could have a chance to talk before Ramzi arrived. We could not reach a clear decision. We thought it would be best to do nothing further until Ramzi’s school and my school ended so that he would not be distracted from his exams and I from my duties. We only decided that over the next ten to fifteen days we would have no further meetings with each other and attend to our responsibilities with a calm mind. We would thereby also gain time to reach a decision.

Ramzi came quite late but appeared to be very happy. He spoke about his forthcoming exams, and he invited us to his graduation ceremony. He ordered drinks and the food that we wanted to eat. We ate and drank. When we got up to leave, Ramzi turned to us and said, “I hope we shall see each other again soon.” Nouriyé Hanem responded, “Ramzi, during the next ten to fifteen days both you and Efronia are busy. Let us postpone your next meeting for a while. When you receive your diploma, I am going to give a party for you in our house.” I sensed that he was not very happy with Nouriyé Hanem’s plan, but he kept quiet.

As on earlier occasions, we left Nouriyé Hanem at her house and turned towards our house. We talked for a while. He expressed his disappointment about Nouriyé Hanem’s depriving us of seeing each other over the next ten to fifteen days, especially since he had some other issues on his mind. He said, “For several days now my mother has become suspicious. I do not know why, but she keeps questioning me and saying that they will be willing to have me

get married, if I so wish, before I go to London. She says, ‘Although you are not yet quite of age to get married, I feel concerned that when you are in London, you may fall for an unsuitable girl. There are many good girls around. Whoever you choose, we will get her for you.’ I laughed and said to her, ‘Don’t be afraid, Mother; I will not fall easily into those temptations.’ Encouraged by my mother’s proposal, I wondered if I should perhaps tell her about my having fallen in love with you, introduce you to each other, and reveal my wish to marry you. But then, I did not want to tell her this without having gotten your consent. But look, my dear, this is now important. It is necessary that I inform my parents. We should not let time pass any longer.”

I said, “It does not matter; we still have time. The next ten to fifteen days will go quickly. Just as Nouriyé Hanem said, both you and I are busy, and we should not preoccupy our minds with this issue.” He agreed but asked that during these days I should pass by his school so that we would at least see each other. We said good night and parted. I did not let this issue preoccupy me any further; I left it to God, went into the house, went to bed, and slept.

A SURPRISE

I parted from Nouriyé Hanem with these decisions made and told her, "Sister, over the next ten to fifteen days, may God help us and ordain the best." But no one can foretell nor imagine what unexpected and sudden surprises can occur in life. As they say, "Man proposes; God disposes."

Some five or six days following my meeting with Nouriyé Hanem, her maid, Ayishé, came to our house and said, "My lady sent me to call you over for a few moments to see her."

I was perplexed. What could have happened? I got dressed and immediately went over. Nouriyé Hanem met me at the door and escorted me to their living room where I saw a lady sitting. She was a beautiful woman of medium height and rather plump. She got up and Nouriyé Hanem introduced me to her as "Efronia Nazarian, the sister of pharmacist Yacoub Efendi;" and her to me as "the wife of Naamatollah, Farouz Hanem." The woman looked at my face and said, "May God keep you; blessed be Allah; what wonders He creates."

We sat and talked. She asked me quite a few questions: Where did I come from? When did I come? When she asked me about my family, I said that I had a mother, two brothers and two sisters. She asked if I had no father; I said, "He died when I was only two months old. Do you know how? He was killed in 1894 during the massacre of the Armenians by the Turks in Aintab." The woman changed the subject and asked me some other questions, all of which I answered.

Nouriyé Hanem brought in tea - the Persians like tea very much. I sat there for a while, and then I excused myself and returned home. Although Nouriyé Hanem did not say that the woman was Ramzi's mother, nonetheless, I realized that she was. This visit preyed on my mind for a few days. I knew the two families were intimate friends and often visited each other, but I could not understand why Nouriyé Hanem should have had me come over so that we could be introduced to each other.

The next day as I was passing by Nouriyé Hanem's house, she saw me and called me in. She said, "The woman you saw yesterday was Ramzi's mother." "I guessed that she was. She is a sweet and fine lady," I answered. "After you left," Nouriyé Hanem said, "she opened herself to me and explained to me the reason for her coming to see me. This is what she said: 'One morning I entered Ramzi's room and saw that his bed had not yet been made. The maids make his bed every morning, and then I tidy things up further. I did not wait for them to make his bed, and when I was arranging his bedding, I found the photograph of a young woman. I first thought she was a movie star, but when I examined it more carefully, I became certain that it was the girl that I later saw here today. The next morning, I noticed that he had taken the photograph

away. I thought I would test him and see if he would reveal to me the identity of the girl. So, I said, 'My dear son, as I said to you recently, and let me repeat it, although you are not quite old enough to get married, you are going to study in London for three years. You are an attractive boy, and there are going to be many girls who will be after you. I fear that you may become attached to someone unsuitable. So, if there is a girl that you know, like and love, let us get you engaged to her, or even have you marry her, so that you can go together.' I noted that Ramzi's face brightened up. 'Is it true, Mother,' he said, 'that if I want to get married, you will consent to it?' 'Most gladly, my son, I told him.' He then took out from his pocket the same photograph which I had found under his pillow and said, 'Mother, if you can arrange for me to marry this girl, I won't hesitate for a moment to marry her.' So, I asked him if he knew her well, whether she was worthy of him, and if she came from a good family. 'Yes, Mother, you can trust me,' he said. 'I saw her five or six months ago and fell in love with her. I have not had the courage to tell you. I did not know whom to turn to and how to learn about her and get introduced to her and how to enter into a relationship with her. I thought Nouriyé Hanem could help me since they are neighbors and know each other. Do not seek further details from me but instead go to Nouriyé Hanem, who knows all about my relationship with this girl. You can learn directly from her.' When I learned this from Ramzi, I came to see you without saying anything to my husband so that I could first get more information from you."

Nouriyé Hanem had then told her that she had done the right thing by coming to her, that she herself felt an obligation to explain the matter and give her the information which she had not been able to communicate to her so far. She had asked her forgiveness for not having done so earlier and expressed her willingness to tell her all that she knew. She had then proceeded to relate to her all that had gone on from the very first day that Ramzi had come to see her: How on Ramzi's request she had introduced us to each other; how we had fallen in love; and how she had continued to arrange for us to meet. All this she had told Farouz Hanem in great detail.

When Nouriyé Hanem reported the last conversation I had had with her, Farouz Hanem listened to her and fell silent, looking confused. She told Nouriyé Hanem, "My sister, I find myself in a very difficult position. If the girl finds it impossible to marry Ramzi, why is it that from the very first day she did not say so but instead carried on this relationship with him? And why does she continue to do so? Ramzi has been living on high hopes; they have become attached to each other and have fallen into this difficulty. How are they going to part from each other? And when he leaves her, what will become of my poor son?"

"Farouz Hanem, you are right in everything you say," responded Nouriyé Hanem. "She should have at least revealed to me this problem at the time, and not months later. But do not blame her, and be certain that just as Ramzi has

fallen in love with her, she, too, is in love with him. She, too, is young and inexperienced. So she has not had the courage to speak to Ramzi. And it was only during our last meeting that she told me about the problem, and with many tears admitted being at fault. She repeated many times how she should have revealed the impossibility of her marrying Ramzi from the first moment and should not have entered into a relationship with him. Now she herself is suffering and is further in anguish at the thought of how Ramzi is going to feel when he learns about this problem. Her conscience is troubled. You can be certain that she herself would trample on this obstacle, but she is concerned about the reaction of her family and her community. I must also tell you, Farouz Hanem, that even if the girl had revealed this problem to Ramzi from the very first day, I am sure that Ramzi would not have been willing to give her up.

“Farouz Hanem was lost in her thoughts and feeling perplexed. She said, ‘My sister, when my son learns about this problem, what state is he going to fall into?’ I told her, ‘Farouz Hanem, do not be sad; God is great. There is still time. You think about it, as we shall think about it, and we will see what decision we reach. But for now, do not tell Ramzi about your having met the girl nor about your meeting with me nor about my telling you about his confessions to me. Let us not hurry.’ Farouz Hanem’s mood was ruined; she left looking sad and depressed. She bade me goodbye and said that we should meet again.”

I listened to what Nouriyé Hanem had to say. I still could not give her a definite answer. I thanked her and went home. We had decided that during these ten to fifteen days, she and I were going to reach a decision. Now Ramzi’s mother also joined us. I wondered what his mother was going to decide and was confronted by many uncertainties. Sometimes I found myself in such a state that no matter what happened, I thought I should tell my mother everything. Then over the next ten to fifteen days we would arrange matters so that, without letting anyone know, we would turn our faces and go back to Aintab. But I did not have the courage. Setting myself aside, I could not see how I could leave Ramzi in that state. My heart was willing; my will was very weak.

One Sunday I wanted to go to church, as I occasionally accompanied my mother. The assembly hall of Mr. Kennedy’s school was used on Sundays by the Protestants for their church services. After the service was over, Mrs. Kennedy approached us and gave us two tickets for the graduation ceremonies of their school on the following Sunday. This caused me much happiness. Although Ramzi had already invited me, I had not been able to accept. The fact that we were now invited by the school made it much better.

The following Sunday my mother and I went there. I noticed that Nouriyé Hanem was sitting next to Ramzi’s parents in the first row. A while later, the graduates filed in: eight girls and four boys, one of whom was Ramzi. He saw

me right away and smiled. He looked happy and radiant in his graduation gown. It was a very well organized ceremony. Each of the graduates read a composition. Ramzi was last and read the valedictory address. They were all applauded by the audience. At the end of the ceremony my mother and I went up to congratulate the graduates. Nouriyé Hanem approached us and introduced us to Ramzi's parents. Even though Ramzi's mother had already met me, his father had not. We congratulated them and parted.

A few days later Nouriyé Hanem's maid came to us and asked if Shakib Bey and his wife could visit us that evening. They often visited us. We accepted and sent word to my brother that we were expecting guests that evening and that he should come home. He came, and we had dinner. Shakib Bey and his wife came over. My brother was in one of his happier moods, so we had a very good time. We entertained them lavishly, and before they left, they invited us for dinner the following evening. Consistent with the custom of the times we thanked them, protested that they should not go to all that trouble, but finally my mother and my brother accepted the invitation. Shakib Bey told my brother that he had also invited Naamatollah Bey and his family and wondered if he had any objections to their being there with us. My brother had no objections whatsoever; on the contrary, he would be honored by their presence. "I have much respect for that man," he said. They left shortly after.

I went to my room feeling perplexed. Instead of reducing our interactions, Nouriyé Hanem was creating new opportunities to bring us together. The following day we took along a nice bouquet of flowers and went over at seven o'clock. Ramzi's family was already there. We were served drinks and then went to the dining room, where they had set up a lavish table with tasty dishes. Everyone was happy. Although I too tried to appear happy, my heart was bleeding. We returned to the living room where Nouriyé Hanem took me aside and suggested that I serve the coffee. She then said to me, "You recall that I promised Ramzi that when he got his diploma I was going to give a party in my house. I was obliged to change that plan; Farouz Hanem wanted a family gathering instead. She said, 'My husband wants to see the girl close up and to meet her family, although Naamatollah Bey already knows your brother.' I had to concede to her wish and accepted this arrangement."

At any rate, we had a good time. I expressed our thanks and returned home. When we got there, my brother said, "I was really pleased with this visit; we had such a good time. They are such gracious people; it is well worth socializing with them. And how graceful and polite their children are, especially the oldest boy, Ramzi, whom I had not seen for a long time. In the past he used to come to my pharmacy himself, but now they send his younger brother instead. What a handsome and presentable young man he has become."

While my brother was expressing these views, my mother's heart was full of recriminations against him. She had been waiting for an opportune moment

to speak her mind, and seizing this occasion, she let him have it. "Now you wish to interact with families like these. Where have you been for the past eight to nine months since you brought us here and closeted us in this house? Had you interested yourself with us, you too would have enjoyed our company, and we would have had social dealings with families like them. Let me tell you quite openly that I have regretted a thousand times ever coming to Iskenderun to be with you, and I am counting the days until it will be time for us to return. Why don't you see the kind of life that you have been leading? Does it become you? Isn't it shameful, and isn't it an insult to your manhood and to your position that you are in debt up to your neck? The Khatchadourians are not at all pleased with you and are complaining constantly. To get out from under your debts, you used your sister and forced her to feign affection to the Keshishians and give them false hope. We know very well that that boy leads exactly the same kind of life as you do and that he is a low character. I am glad that my courageous daughter finally lost her patience and flatly refused to accede to your wishes any longer. And she begged me that the next time they come to see me I tell them exactly where things stand. So when his mother came over, I cut off all their hopes and told her openly that she should no longer come to see me to pursue this matter. My daughter absolutely does not want it. Even though they have not been after her for some time, my poor girl is afraid to go out since there have been many threats made about which you know nothing. In one word you have not cared about any one of us. We left your poor brother in Aintab with his sister. He will be graduating this month. Have you interested yourself in him at all, as to whether he has any money or whether he needs anything? Do you ever think about him? Are you prepared to make the necessary sacrifices to send him to the American University of Beirut next year to study medicine? You know that we spent everything we had on you. We made every sacrifice possible, and here is the condition we are in, and here is the condition that you are in."

My mother could not restrain herself any longer and began to cry. My brother stood there like a statue. He was not able to give back a single answer. I went to my mother and wiped her tears, and said to her "Don't be sad mother; don't cry; God is great, and God will help us" and took her to her room. My brother, too, silently went up to his room. Following this conversation, he started coming home more regularly but to what avail since by then he had broken our hearts?

The time for our return to Aintab was drawing near. The days grew very warm, and I proposed to my mother that we rent a house at a mountain resort and stay there for two months before returning and thus have an opportunity for a change of air. Even though it was pleasant for me to stay in Iskenderun longer, my mother categorically refused to do so.

MY GRANDMOTHER'S ILLNESS

No one knows what each day will bring in life and what surprises may occur. After my mother's conversation with my brother, my mood soured even more. I reached a point where I felt like giving up on everything and turning my face away from this city. My mother was already getting impatient to leave. Although I had promised Nouriyé Hanem that in ten or fifteen days, when my school ended, we were going to get together and reach a decision, I was at a loss as to how to convince my mother to wait that long.

While I was lost in these perplexities, my grandmother suddenly became ill with typhoid, a dangerous disease. The days grew warm; sleep at night under mosquito nets became impossible. We fell into an extremely difficult situation. My brother saw our condition and asked the doctor if we could take my grandmother to the mountain resort of Sovouk Olouk. "Impossible," said the doctor, "she should not even move about in bed." He further cautioned us that the illness was very contagious and explained the precautions we had to take. We moved my grandmother to a separate room while my mother and I shared the other bedroom. My mother took primary responsibility for her care.

As the French say, "There is some good in every evil." Thus, our departure to Aintab had to be put off, which was my and Ramzi's wish. I thought that there must be God's finger in this.

Nouriyé Hanem had heard of my grandmother's illness and came to visit us. Although we forbade her to come back, she promised not to go into my grandmother's room during her visits and continued to see us. My aunt and cousin Mary also came frequently, and my aunt would often help us out in any way she could. But they had to go to the mountains soon, and a few days later they left, and we stayed by ourselves.

My grandmother's illness progressively got worse. The doctor said three weeks had to pass for her to be out of danger. I recall that at the time there was no effective treatment for this illness. They used a drug called Altazone, forbade all solid food, and would only allow liquids.

Nouriyé Hanem was now the only one visiting us; we had no one else. She told me on one occasion that Ramzi wanted to come to our house to visit my grandmother. I would not consent, using as a pretext the infectious nature of the illness. In that case she said, "Let me get your mother's consent to take you to our house tomorrow for a change." My mother was very pleased and said that my brother would be coming home the next day, so she would not be alone.

At ten o'clock the following morning I went to Nouriyé Hanem's house. We had lunch with Shakib Bey. Towards the evening she sent word to my mother informing her that she would be visiting one of her friends and wanted to take me along. My mind at ease, I felt happy. Ramzi came soon. We greeted

each other, and he expressed his joy at seeing me. "Let me go and bring a carriage to take you all to our house," he said. I would not consent at first but then realized that he had already made this arrangement with Nouriyé. It was almost dark when we got to his house. We were met at the door, and I was amazed at all the lovely furnishings; it was as if I had walked into a paradise. The entire family was present. Farouz Hanem kissed me and took me to her husband. Although we had met before, she again introduced me to him. He asked about my mother and my brother and expressed his regrets over my grandmother's illness.

We then went to the dining room, and I admired greatly the elegance and orderliness of everything. Several maids stood by, and there were many fine dishes on the table. The samovar was boiling on the side. I said to myself, "How I wish today were the day of my wedding to Ramzi. I do not want to leave this house and be separated from them." Sweet were these dreams, but was it going to be possible to realize them? Following dinner, we thanked them, bade them good-bye. Nouriyé Hanem and Ramzi escorted me home, where I found everyone to be still awake, my brother having just come home. He asked some questions about where I had been. I fabricated some answers, leading them to think that I had just come from the home of one of Nouriyé Hanem's woman friends.

From here on I am not going to write any more about the details of this matter; I will only dwell on the more important events. Whenever we had the opportunity, we went through the same sorts of meetings and talks. We always took care that our relationship should remain secret.

The more critical period of my grandmother's illness passed, and she began to get better. The doctor said that although the more dangerous days were over, she was nonetheless so weak that much care had to be taken to prevent a relapse. We did what we could. They were unbearable days.

Nouriyé Hanem frequently came over with news and notes from Ramzi. She brought flowers saying they were for my grandmother. One morning when she was visiting us, my mother asked us to stay with my grandmother while she went shopping. When we were alone, Nouriyé Hanem said, "My sister, I have a request from Farouz Hanem to meet with you. Although she has already spoken with Ramzi, she wants to personally meet with you as well."

"Sister, how can I meet with Farouz Hanem?" I asked. "She is going to make me all sorts of proposals which I won't know how to respond to." "It doesn't matter" she said. "Based on what she tells you, you can let her know what you think. Let her hear directly from you what she has already heard through me. I think this state of uncertainty is very difficult for both of you. Farouz Hanem is an intelligent woman, and I am sure that just as she is concerned about her son, she will be likewise concerned about you. You can

talk freely to each other. You can consult with each other. Tell her quite candidly about the problems that you face.”

“Fine,” I said. “I accept. However, since I was out of the house only recently, let a few days pass; I will then find some excuse and will come over to your house.”

We decided to get together in three days. These three days passed with great difficulty. My mind was constantly preoccupied: I wondered, what was she going to say? What proposals was she going to make? What was I going to answer? What could I possibly do? They know who my mother and brother are. I felt tired and oppressed. I prayed constantly and asked God to arrange the best, and to help me with my decisions.

The three days passed. Yeghia Khatchadourian Efendi, the husband of my cousin Mary, came to see my grandmother. He wanted to take me up to Sovouk Olouk for a few days so that I would at least have a change of scenery. I thanked him and said, “I will be happy to go next Saturday, but this Saturday I have promised a lady friend to accompany her to another resort.” After he left, I told my mother I had lied to him. I am actually going with Nouriyé Hanem to visit her sister.” Inside myself I hoped God would forgive me.

On Saturday morning I went to Nouriyé Hanem’s. It was as if my legs were trembling. Farouz Hanem was already there. She kissed me and made me sit next to her. She took my hand in her hands, smiled at me and said, “My very dear girl, the beloved of my dearest son. I have come here today to open my heart to you as a mother. You too, like a daughter, must reveal your heart to me candidly, without holding anything back. I do not wish to go over past events. I know for certain that just as my son has fallen in love with you, so have you fallen in love with him. And you have become attached to each other. We, as parents, have no objections whatsoever to your union. We have come to love you and think of you as a girl worthy of our son, and we are very happy. We have no reason to want to separate you and to deprive you of each other. Both his father and I want to fulfill the longing of our dear son to marry you. You should attain what you yearn for, and we shall rejoice in your happiness, but in order to fulfill this goal, you must make a decision. Your relationship and your get-togethers are meaningless if you are not going to marry each other. It is not right. And just as you have already told Nouriyé Hanem, you should also tell me your obstacle to marrying Ramzi. We shall do all we can to resolve all difficulties so that you can get married.

“I have already met with my son. He revealed to me all that he has had in his heart from the first moment he saw you until today. There is no need to talk at length. He loves you with all his heart, and he worships you. His whole wish is to be married to you. Seeing the intensity of his desire, I was unable to tell him quite openly what you had told Nouriyé Hanem about the obstacle to your marrying him. I could not do that since I felt sorry as a mother for my most beloved child. I did not have the courage to cut off all hope and lead him

to despair. I did not want to put him in that difficult position. Look, my dear, what you see as an obstacle has no significance for us whatsoever. We are not like the Turks living with you in Turkey. We are Persian. We are very close to Armenians, and we have never had any animosity towards Armenians at any time. We always lived with each other in love and peace. My daughter, I would have agreed with you if we were one of the Turks that you know. I am sure that you have no idea who the Persians are. Nouriyé Hanem has already told you that there are two or three European women who have married into our family. My husband's mother is French. You will likewise be our Armenian bride. Rest assured that by becoming our bride and by marrying my son you will be most fortunate. And my son, Ramzi, will also be fortunate marrying an educated, beautiful, and gracious woman like you, whom he loves so much. My dear, is this enough reason to deprive yourself of such good fortune. I am sure that, should you separate, both you and my son are going to be most unhappy." She then turned to me and said, "My daughter, why are you silent? Have the courage to speak and to express yourself. I, too, am your mother."

I looked at her face: "Dear Farouz Hanem," I said, "I very much appreciate your kind thoughts for our good fortune and your reassurances. I am most grateful. I know you are prepared to make every necessary sacrifice for our coming together and for our happiness. Let me in turn assure you that, at this very moment, I am ready to marry Ramzi. If I do not marry him, my world is going to be plunged in darkness. But..." I began to cry. "With my tears I beg your forgiveness; I can hardly look you in the face for I feel so ashamed. How am I going to express myself to noble people like you and to my beloved Ramzi, whom I worship? My tongue refuses to obey me, yet I must confess. Differences of nationality and religion make no difference to me just as they don't to you. We all worship the same God. But my difficulty is this: Will my family ever consent? If I get married independent of them, will they forgive me? How will my community look at me? You are a wise woman. Just as you have understood your son's condition, likewise, help me and show me a way." My voice was drowned by tears.

Farouz Hanem saw the state I was in and embraced me. "Calm down, my dear; do not cry," she said. "I believe almighty God will help you and will unite innocent lovers like you. Trust in God; trust in us; we shall find a way out of your difficulties. And we shall lead you to the fulfillment of your longings." She dried my tears. Nouriyé Hanem served us coffee. We drank it. I bade them farewell, asked for their forgiveness, and came home.

I entered the house feeling very moved, upset, and with my head in turmoil. I could not decide what to do or what to think. My mind had stopped. My heart was bleeding. My difficulties depended on my own decision; I should have made up my mind not that day but long before. Neither would I have been tormented nor would I have made that poor boy suffer. But I faced such an

obstacle; not only my community but my whole family - my sisters, brothers, all my other relatives - would have come out against me. I was in an impossible position. I stopped and thought. I brought before my eyes the prospect of our return to Aintab. What was waiting for me there? My mother had told me several times, "Upon our return, my uncle's son will have received his medical diploma. I am going to keep my word, and you should be persuaded. He is a good boy. He is a doctor. I will marry you off to him. I will be free at last of the problems of your marriage."



Efronia in Iskenderun

When I thought about these things - about having to give up Ramzi and marrying instead someone I did not like and did not love, about being in love with Ramzi but instead being given to this other man - all of this passed in front of my eyes like a caravan of camels, and I felt as if I had been struck by lightning. I fell on my bed and began to sob. I lifted my eyes to God, prayed, pleaded, asked for help. Then, as if some strength entered into me, I decided that I would rather die than give up my beloved, and that no matter what happened and whatever difficulties I faced, I was going to marry Ramzi. And if necessary, I would wander from one country to another and reconcile myself with my fate. I decided to meet with Ramzi and talk it over with him. When I came to this decision a sense of lightness came upon me.

My grandmother gradually got better; it had been a month since she fell ill. By and by she got out of bed. She began to eat light and harmless foods but still felt very weak. My mother asked the doctor when she could travel and was told that we should wait at least for another three weeks or a month. Had we been able to go to the cool mountain air, she would have recuperated faster because the heat in Iskenderun was unbearable. But at the time the only way to travel there was on horseback. No carriage or car could get up there - and there were no cars at that time anyway. Very few people were left in the city.

Ramzi's family had also gone up to the mountains. Nouriyé Hanem was preparing to go to Antioch in August. Sometimes with Nouriyé Hanem and sometimes with my brother, I used to go to the seashore and sit there until the

day cooled. I managed to pass the days one way or another, but the nights were unbearable.

I had promised my cousin's husband, Yeghia Efendi, to go to the mountains with them on Saturday. In the morning he came and took me there, and I stayed through Sunday night and returned with him on Monday morning. They very much wanted me to spend a whole week with them, but I did not want to. There I had the opportunity to meet Yeghia Efendi's younger brother, Aram. Even though we often went to their house, I would see him very seldom. Finally, I managed to meet him. He was a serious-minded and intelligent young man. It was pleasant to talk to him.

When I got back home my mother told me that Nouriyé Hanem had asked for me several times and had been told that I would be returning on Monday. She told me I'd better go and see her soon. I was already looking for an excuse to get news from Ramzi. The following morning I went to Nouriyé Hanem's house, and she welcomed me with a smiling face. We sat together for half an hour and had a coffee. She gave me news of Ramzi, then she said, "Sister, I've just sent the maid to call Farouz Hanem here. She has come down from the mountains for several days and sent word to call you over to our house since she wishes to meet with you again."

Soon after, Farouz Hanem came in. We greeted each other, and she kissed my face. She asked about my grandmother, and after I had answered her questions, she turned to me and said, "Look, my dear, I came down from the mountains two days ago and did not go back so that I would be at home. Just as I met with you and we talked without leaving any secrets between us, I also wanted to speak with my son and reveal to him openly what you told me about the difficulty that you have in marrying him and how that problem is against your will. I thought that keeping this matter a secret from Ramzi any longer was going to make things even more difficult. I had thought of keeping him in his state of uncertainty for a while but decided that no matter what happens I should make everything clear to my son. So, I called him to me and began to tell him about our meeting and what you had said about the difficult situation tormenting you and standing in the way of your marrying him.

"He cut me short impatiently and said, 'Don't hold anything back; tell it to me right away. What is this difficult situation that she has kept a secret from me for so long?' I said, My son, I have decided to tell you everything quite openly. Here is the reason - you are a Muslim, and she is an Armenian girl.

"When he heard this, he seemed to change into a statue. He could not say anything but bent his head and was lost in thought. I told him, 'Do you wonder why she has kept it a secret from you? My dear son, do you think that the poor girl was able to bring up this problem and confess it to me easily? I insisted so hard that she was finally obliged to tell it to me with tears, apologies, and embarrassment. My son, the girl is willing to marry you even today. But how can she set aside her people and convince her family? If she were to take this

step without their consent, how would they ever forgive her, and how would they look at her? Dear son, here is the cause, and this is her confession. His eyes filled with tears. I felt sorry for him and said, do not despair, my son, do not lose hope. Nothing is impossible on the face of this earth.” She then turned to me and added, “Just as I told my son, I am also telling you, my dear girl, not to despair, not to lose hope. I am certain that God will help innocent and decent lovers like you and will open up some way to fulfill your yearning. When I gave these hopes to my son, he turned to me and said, ‘Dear Mother, only death will separate me from my beloved. I am grateful for your advice.’”

“As I explained to my son, I had felt duty bound to discuss these things with my husband first. He has already been aware for some time of your relationship and your being in love with each other. So, I told him about my having met with you and your reasons for finding it impossible to marry Ramzi. My husband thought you were very wise, and he agreed with you. We thought of seeking out your mother and brother to talk things over with them and to reveal our son’s wish to marry you. But we gave up that idea. We thought that the time was very short and unsuitable because of your grandmother’s illness. As I also understand from Nouriyé Hanem, your poor mother is in the midst of a lot of trouble because of you and your brother, that she is trying to return to Aintab as soon as possible to be rid of these problems. So, this did not seem like a good time. We were concerned that should we come with a marriage proposal in the midst of all their difficulties, they would be sure to turn us down. The problem then would become even more difficult. Ramzi’s father told me to say to both of you to continue your relationship but not rush things, that with the help of God, he would do all he could in due course and think about every conceivable means. Through means that would be acceptable to your family, we will see to it you are united and attain the fulfillment of your wish. This is his father’s message. So, my dear, just as I told Ramzi, let me also repeat to you to wait and to place your trust first in God and then in us. Just as my son loves you, and worthy as you are of his love, we too love you. I pray to God to fulfill our wish that you be joined in a happy marriage so, we can share your happiness and rejoice with you.”

She again embraced me and kissed me. I kissed her hand in return and thanked her. I said, “I am grateful that you are concerned about me just as you are concerned about your own child.”

Finally, she said to me, “Look, my dear, you must have a last meeting with each other. If you both agree that you will wait while remaining faithful to each other, you should take an oath before God, and as a sign of your oath, you should place a ring on each other’s fingers and leave the future to God. Ramzi is going to travel soon. You too will be going away. From here on your relationship will be through corresponding with each other. My husband has a niece who lives in Aintab, and Ramzi can spend at least a month of his summer vacation with her. You can then see each other at her house. God is

capable of all things. As days, months, and years pass much can change. So, I pray for you and wish you success and happiness.” She then turned to Nouriyé Hanem and said, “I will never forget all that you have done. Could you create another opportunity so they can see each other again?” Nouriyé Hanem consented gladly.

I came home. As I already mentioned, I had almost reached a decision the previous night that no matter what happened, no matter what difficulties existed, I was going to try, and with the help of God, I was going to succeed in marrying Ramzi. I awaited Nouriyé Hanem’s arrangements for the meeting we all had agreed to. I did not have to wait for long. A few days later, she sent word that we were to meet at her house. I went over. Ramzi was already there. He stood up and greeted me. I sensed that he was not quite happy and not in a good mood. He kept his head bent. Nouriyé Hanem sat with us for a while then left.

He turned to me, looked at me, and knelt in front of me. He took my hands in his hands; his eyes were on my eyes. I cannot describe that scene – all that he said during that hour, his confessions, his promises. I just do not have the ability to describe all that happened. And I am not going to try to remember it because I cannot. It would take a poet to write down all of the poor boy’s expressions of love to me. How can I remember when so many years have passed? How can I possibly remember? But I will repeat his last words: “My beloved and adorable angel, only death can separate me from you. I am willing to become a Christian for the sake of your love. I will go to your church, and in front of God and in the presence of your people, I will make my confession and be baptized. I beg you not to refuse me, not to abandon me.”

When I saw him in that state, I took him by the hand and made him sit next to me. I looked into his eyes and said, “My darling, I too swear to God that only death will separate me from you; I will not abandon you, and I will not be separated from you. I do not want you to change your religion for my sake or to deny your own faith.”

We parted with happy hearts and with promises to remain faithful to each other and left the future to God. In the worst of situations, we would run from one country to another. We held each other’s hands and gave our word to each other before God. He joyfully called in Nouriyé Hanem and told her the promise we had made to each other. Then all three of us agreed to fulfill his mother’s wish and exchange rings as a symbol. And we decided to do so four days later at the club.

Those four days passed very fast. We went to the club. His mother, Farouz Hanem, had come along. In the presence of his mother and Nouriyé Hanem, we placed the rings on each other’s fingers. They were lovely rings. The stones were turquoise and were brought from Persia and very valuable. His mother and Nouriyé Hanem kissed our cheeks and wished us a happy wedding. His mother wanted us to have dinner there, and so we ate and drank happily. Then

we took Nouriyé Hanem and his mother home, and then he escorted me to my house. We felt very happy; we kissed each other and parted full of hopes for the future. My mother had been told by the maid that I would be having dinner with Nouriyé Hanem. When I went in, my mother was still awake.

When I got up in the morning, my mother had already packed quite a few things. I helped her with the rest. In the evening, my brother came home, and we decided to leave on Saturday, the 23rd of August, after nine o'clock in the evening. Five or six days had passed since our dinner at the club. Most people had already left for the mountains. Only a few friends and my mother's relatives, the Sevajians, were still in town. We went to bid them farewell. The boy who wanted me was at home; the poor fellow suffered a great deal. Since they were related to my mother, we had not severed our relationship with them entirely. My mother also wanted to pay a farewell visit to Nouriyé Hanem. We sent word and she invited us for the following day. We went over the next day; Ramzi was there. My mother realized later that he had been sent for. We greeted each other. My mother asked him how his mother was. Then she expressed her many thanks to Nouriyé Hanem for the love and friendship that she had shown to me. We said farewell, wished them well, and returned home. I sensed a suspicion had arisen in my mother's heart on seeing Ramzi there at such an unexpected time. But she said nothing.

OUR RETURN TO AINTAB

On the evening of August, the 23rd, at nine o'clock, two covered wagons arrived in front of our door. The coachman was a reliable employee of Katerji Hagop, the friend of my brother who had brought us from Aintab. The man loaded up our belongings in one of the wagons. In the second, they spread some bedding. We took along sufficient food and other necessities for four days. We bade my brother farewell and started on our way towards Beylan. We were to spend that night in Beylan at the house of a family friend, Dr. Bezjian, the father of Vahidé Hanem Baghdigian, because traveling at nighttime beyond Beylan was dangerous; there were robbers and highwaymen.

We went on for a while and got close to Beylan when suddenly the wagon lurched to the side. One of the wheels had fallen into a hole and got stuck there. The poor fellow got down, and no matter how hard he tried, it was impossible to get it out. He regretted that he had sent the first wagon ahead of him. We spread a piece of cloth on the ground and made my mother and grandmother sit on it. The man didn't know what to do. He needed to go on to Beylan to get someone to fix the wheel and help him get the wagon out. But how could he leave us alone in the middle of nowhere?

While we were in this dilemma, we heard the galloping of a horse in the distance. I had an immediate presentiment that it was Ramzi. He came close to us, stopped his horse, and dismounted. It was as if an angel had descended from heaven. It was a sight worth seeing: With his riding boots and uniform he looked doubly handsome and distinguished. He asked the driver what had happened and asked if he could be of any help. The man was glad to see him. "My boy, God Himself must have sent you," he told him. After explaining what had happened, he said, "Even though the place where they are going to stop for the night is fairly close, these two ladies cannot walk there, and how can I leave them here alone? I must go to town to bring another wagon for them and then have someone to help me fix the wheel and get it out of the hole."

Ramzi said, "I am going to Kerek Khan, but I can go there later. I will stay with them until you come back. The man was pleased. He mounted one of his horses and headed for town. It was unbelievable that we should meet again. We told each other that the hand of providence must be in this. We renewed our hopes that God would unite us for sure. He spoke with my mother in Turkish at some length, and with me in English. It took over an hour for the other wagon to arrive. My mother and grandmother sat in it while Ramzi and I walked about and talked. Then the coachman returned with the fellow who was to fix the wheel. We left him there while the coachman took the rest of us to the Bezjians.

We knocked on the door. They had been waiting for us and welcomed us cordially. Ramzi came in with us. We told them what had happened and how Ramzi had come upon us and helped us. When Ramzi had introduced himself, the doctor realized he knew his father and said, "Give him my regards. Your father is a great man; I have much respect for him." They asked us if we had had dinner, and we said that we had. They offered us coffee, after which Ramzi stood up to leave. As I accompanied him to the door, he told me softly, "Get yourself into the room facing the street so we can see each other for a few more minutes and talk through the window." The doctor and his wife noticed that we were very tired and led us to two bedrooms, into one of which went my mother and grandmother, while I took the other. When everyone was inside, I stood at my window. Ramzi came around, stood on the other side, took my hands through the bars, and kissed them. We talked for a little while and said goodbye. He told me not to delay writing to him and left. I stood there until I could no longer hear the hoofs of his horse.

We got up early in the morning and had breakfast. The coachman had brought our wagon in front of the door. We thanked our hosts and started on our way. When we were in the wagon, my mother said, "This calamity must have fallen on our heads because the Keshishians have cursed us." We traveled for four days and spent the nights in khans. The poor driver stood guard in front of our door, hardly getting any sleep. On the fourth day we reached the village of Beshgeoz (five eyes/five springs) near Aintab. My brother Yervant, my uncle Hovhannes, and my sister Aroussiak were there to meet us. We were happy to be reunited and embraced each other. We reached home and found waiting for us Aroussiak's family, my other sister, Azniv, with her family, and my uncle Movses, who lived on the same courtyard. He invited us to dinner that evening. When the dinner guests left, we went to our room. My brother Yervant had lost a lot of weight. We felt tired and immediately went to bed.

When I woke up, I realized that I was back in our old house. I sat in bed for a few moments and thought about the eleven months we had spent in Iskenderun; all of those events and circumstances came and passed before my eyes. I remembered and imagined so many things; they were like dreams. That morning we had a lengthy conversation with my brother. He told us about the days he had spent during our absence - his life at college, how he had received the highest grades in his class and graduated with honors. And he told us how hopeless he felt about his future. After finishing college, his brother Yacoub had gone to the American University of Beirut and had returned two years later having obtained his diploma as a pharmacist. He had been able to do this through the sacrifices of our mother and grandmother.

Now Yervant hoped that his brother would do the same for him. But while we were still in Iskenderun, he had written to Yacoub several times and his letters had gone unanswered. Finally, Yacoub had written to him, telling him

openly that he could not help him. When Yervant related these things to us, his eyes filled with tears. But what could my poor mother do? While we were in Iskenderun, my brother Yacoub had looked after us in a fashion. Now we too had little hope that he would send us money anymore for our support. My poor mother, feeling very disappointed, nonetheless consoled my brother saying, "My son, rely on God. I pray to God that He should open a door for you." Having given up all hope of getting help from his brother, Yervant had already accepted an offer to teach in a local high school and could count on a decent salary. He was to start his duties on September 5.



Aintab Sunday School Teachers. Efronia at the top row. 1912

For a few days we busied ourselves getting resettled. We unpacked our belongings and tidied things up. All of our relatives and friends then started coming to pay us welcoming visits. So, we resumed our old life. Despite all the difficulties, my mother was happy. She kept repeating how she felt liberated from Iskenderun. She kept saying that never again would she go back to Iskenderun for the rest of her life. As for me, when I had finished school in 1912, my whole wish had been to go to Marash to continue my education. To finish college in Marash meant at the time receiving the highest education possible for girls. My sister Aroussiak had graduated from that college with the help of Miss Phearson. I thought of revealing my wish to my mother, but what good would that do? Who had the money to help me? Although both of my brothers-in-law were wealthy, neither had any conception of what it meant to help others.

The schools had opened. Even if I wanted to teach, it was too late, and there were no vacancies. After a few weeks, my mother informed the church that, should there be an opening, I would be interested in working. Then we suddenly got word that I was to be offered the position of the fourth-grade teacher. The woman in the job had received an unexpected offer of marriage,

and she was going to resign. I was very happy because this was going to be better than sitting at home empty-handed. Now, I too, would be earning some money, and the burden of the house would not be entirely on my brother Yervant. I accepted and began to work right away. The school was some distance from our house at a place called Soghanle Boujaghi (Onion Alley). I went there every morning with my lunch and returned in the evening. My aunt Lucia lived close by, so often I went there for my lunch. I resumed my old life. I was a member of the Educational Society where I had very good woman friends. It was co-educational and my brother, too, was a member. We participated in all of their projects. I was a member of the church choir and would also attend the rehearsals with my brother. These two activities kept me busy and happy.

We lived our regular life and felt comfortable and contented. But I had other concerns, my “brain and mind” being on Ramzi. What made it most difficult was that since we had left Iskenderun, I had been separated from him. I had not yet received a single letter since I had not been able to give him an address where he could write and where his letters would safely reach my hands. On the other hand, I could send him letters myself after I returned to Aintab. I had his London address, and I wrote to him not to be upset and to hold off writing to me until I could send him an address. So, I had to find a way. My sister Aroussiak and I loved each other dearly. She was liberal, indeed trustworthy and educated. I thought of meeting with her and revealing all of my secrets. I felt sure that she would empathize with my sorrows and could be helpful to me. She had lived with dreams of marrying a kindred soul, an educated man, someone she could love. Yet, to the contrary, she had been forced to marry a rich, stingy, and ignorant man and had been unfortunate (and she remained unhappy for the rest of her life). I was sure that her heart would be “one with mine” and she would be able to help me. I went to her and found her alone. I made her promise that she would tell no one anything about what I told her. I just wanted her to share my anguish and to help me.

“My dear sister, tell me all of your sorrows and your secrets without any doubts and without any fear,” she said. “I will try to help you in any way I can.” I took courage, opened my heart to her, and told her everything about my falling in love with Ramzi, our pure and virtuous relationship, the hardships I had passed through, the difficult position in which I had placed Ramzi, and finally, our decision to get engaged to be married when Ramzi finished school. I was moved, and tears came to my eyes. She looked at me and said, “Sister, do not lose hope; do not cry. Have confidence in me that I will do everything I can for you. Rather than be unhappily married, I would prefer that you marry someone you love no matter what his religion.” I became happy. I took down her address and immediately sent it to Ramzi. His letters began to come. My sister would keep them with her and give them to me when

she saw me. His letters were full of joy and hope. I also wrote to Nouriyé Hanem and gave her my sister's address. She too began to write.

Nouriyé Hanem wrote to me in Turkish as I did to her. But she wrote my sister's address on her letters in English so that my brother-in-law would not be suspicious, in case the letters fell into his hands, and wonder who this person was writing to my sister in Turkish. Since my sister received many letters from her school friends who wrote to her in English, that would raise no suspicions in his mind. Everything was now in place. We thanked God a thousand times that we were now in such a comfortable position. The money that my brother Yervant and I earned was ample for our needs. My brother also tried to set aside some money. After he had finished college, and before we had arrived, he had already made some money by working in the pharmacy of our cousin Hagop Efendi. He thought that he could do the same the following summer. So partly with what he would then have saved and partly by borrowing some more, he hoped to have enough to study at the American University of Beirut for at least a year. As I said, we felt very comfortable and happy. But it did not last long. One never knows what surprises the days will bring.

FEBRUARY 1914: MY BROTHER'S RETURN FROM ISKENDERUN

It had been some three months since we returned from Iskenderun, when we suddenly received a letter from my brother Yacoub saying that he would be coming back to Aintab in three months: "The Khatchadourians are closing down the pharmacy," he wrote. "There are quite a few things to take care of; as soon as they are done, I shall return." It did not take long before my mother received a letter from the Khatchadourians: "We became obliged to close down the pharmacy. We are very sorry. There are a few tasks to attend to, following which your son, Yacoub, has no further business here and will be returning to Aintab. Let alone making a profit, he has plunged us into debt. You must have been aware of the kind of life your son was leading during your eleven months here. We waited patiently for two years, for your sake, and to be helpful to him. We tried, but it turned out to be impossible. In the end, after you left, he became embroiled in a fight in the brothel and then went back to set fire to the building. They imprisoned him. After much effort and pouring in a lot of money, we got him out." When we read this letter, I cannot explain the state we were in. Our joy turned to tears. My poor mother cried bitterly. She said, "I am going to write to him not to return to this area; let him go wherever else he wants to. Let my face not see his face anymore. But she was not able to write it since, after all, he was her son.



Efronia's family in 1914.
From the left, Yervant, Azniv, Efronia, Ovsanna, Aroussiak, Yacoub

It did not take three months; he was back in two. He had lost weight and looked sad, as if he was ashamed to look us in the face. Not a single penny in his pocket.

As Yacoub was almost constantly ill with the malaria of Iskenderun, my mother sent word to my cousin, Dr. Hovsep, who treated him for some time. Yacoub barely left the house, and finally he recovered. My poor brother Yervant saw the condition he was in. He had a little drawer where he kept his money. He would leave it unlocked so that his brother, who had no money, could take what he needed without having to ask for it.

Yacoub passed the winter in this state. What was he going to do? My mother went to see Hagop Efendi and begged him to employ him in his pharmacy. As I have mentioned before, he was the man who had helped pay for Yacoub's education and taken care of all his needs. He had, by then, practically retired and had entrusted the pharmacy to one of his relatives, Nersess Ishkhanian, who was a pharmacist and worked there. Hagop Efendi told my mother, "Dear aunt, how can I now dismiss Nersess and hire Yacoub in his place? He too is my relative." However, he promised her to inquire at his other pharmacies and see if they needed a pharmacist. My mother returned home with her hopes dashed.

Hagop Efendi owned several pharmacies, but none of them needed a pharmacist. A few months passed. There is a saying, "His eyes are blind, but his luck is open." Nersess, the relative of Hagop Efendi, was a handsome fellow and did not come from a prosperous family. He had been educated through the help of others. One day he comes to Hagop Efendi and says, "I have received a proposal from a well-known wealthy family. They say that if I marry their daughter, they will open a pharmacy for me." When Hagop Efendi heard this, he told him not to hesitate for a second and tell them he has accepted their proposal. So, the couple got engaged and got married. A few months later, Hagop Efendi hired my brother Yacoub with a salary. It looked like he had finally come to his senses.

ANOTHER SURPRISE

We could now feel at ease about my brother. And I had good news - I would be able to continue at my school and receive letters from Ramzi regularly. Sometimes I received two letters for each letter I wrote to him. One day I got a letter from him informing me that once he was finished with his studies, he was coming to Aintab to see me. He could no longer wait. He would first go to Iskenderun to be with his parents and then come to Aintab.

“I planned to be with my parents for a month, then on my way I would visit a friend. But I had to change my mind because I had a friend in school who told me a secret. His father is a general in the army, and one day he overheard his father speaking with someone in his office and saying that within a month a world war was going to start. Therefore, when my school ends on June 5, God willing, I am going to get going.

“When you were in Iskenderun, my mother already told you that my father has an uncle in Aintab who wanted me to visit them during the summer. As I wrote to you, as well as to my cousin Meunever, when my school ends, I am going to their house. Her husband’s name is Osmanli Zade Midhat Bey. They are a well-known family. You can ask anyone, and they will show you their house. You should go to their house first.” I read his letter and was very happy but also astonished. I immediately went to my sister and explained the situation. My sister, who is clever and thinks clearly, said, “Don’t worry. My brother-in-law, Dr. Hovsep, is the physician of all the well-known Muslim families.” He turned out to also be the physician of Ramzi’s family and said that they were a well-known wealthy family and lived in a nice large house. (Secondary details.- We went for a visit and were well received. Meunever Hanem told us that her maid would go to our house to see where it was so that when Ramzi returned, he could come and visit us).

By now, Ramzi had been gone for eight or nine months. My school year was also going to end in two weeks. “My eyes were on the road”, waiting for him eagerly. The days went slowly during my vacation. Finally, my sister told me that Ramzi was arriving late at night, and they were hoping to see us the next morning. How happy I was, but also sad, as we were then going to be separated again.

The next day, I put on a dress that he liked very much. I told my mother that I was going to my sister’s house and that we were going to visit a friend. We went there, and he met us on the way. He kissed and held my hand in his hand. It looked like he had gotten taller and even more handsome. His aunt, Muzefer Hanem, came, and he introduced me to her. Meunever Hanem introduced my sister to her. The samovar was on the table with many cakes and delicacies. We drank our tea, and he gave us news from London and about his school.

A while later, he asked my sister for her consent to take me down to the garden. We talked about so many things and many remembrances. He then took me upstairs to show me the house. It was like a palace and furnished in the modern style. We saw his bedroom. On the table there was a box which we took to where my sister and Meunever Hanem had been sitting for over an hour. He opened the box and took out a beautiful gold locket which opened and showed my photograph on one side and his on the other. It was meant for me to wear around my neck. We thanked them profusely. A lot of time had passed, and it was lunch time. Meunever very much wanted us to stay for lunch, but my sister said that her children were alone at home and that her husband would be coming home for lunch. She also told Ramzi that he looked tired and that he should use the rest of the day to rest. But Ramzi turned to her and said, "Dear lady, I beg you, I am going to be here for barely fifteen days and want to spend those fifteen days with Efronia. I realize there is no place here where we can meet during the day or in the evening on our own. I cannot come to your house, so how are we going to see each other."

"My dear brother, do not worry I will find ways for you to see each other every day," answered Meunever Hanem. "My house is open for you to meet freely." She then told my sister, "You and I should do our utmost to make it possible for these sincere and virtuous lovers to enjoy each other." And she made my sister promise to let me visit them the next day when the maid would come and fetch me from her house. My sister consented.

We returned to my sister's house and sent word to my mother that I would be staying for lunch. I felt very nervous. My brother-in-law came home, and I sat at the table even though I did not really feel like eating anything as we had had quite a bit to eat earlier. My sister told me to go upstairs and rest; we would talk things over later. I lay down and slept like a drunk.

When I woke up, my sister brought me coffee and began to sing Ramzi's praises: "In all my life I have yet to see such a fine, handsome young man, serious-minded, sincere and honorable in all he says. My dear sister, I am certain that having gotten to know this young man and having come to love him, you are not going to be able to love anyone else nor marry anyone else. I pray to God that your longing be fulfilled and a means be found for you to marry each other." With tears in my eyes, I embraced her and thanked her. She promised to help me, and I returned home.

My sister had promised to send me to see Ramzi the next day. Once again, finding an excuse, I left the house. I had wrapped up the fine dress I was going to wear later so as not to arouse my mother's suspicions. My explanation was that our association choir was preparing a concert and that I would be going to rehearsals twice a week. My brother Yervant was no longer singing in the choir since his work in a pharmacy left him very busy. With this excuse, my mind was at ease. I went to my sister's house. The maid was already there waiting for me. I immediately changed my clothes, and we went on together.

Ramzi met me and was happy. We sat together for a while and talked. Meunever Hanem's husband came home at noon. Ramzi introduced us to each other: "My cousin's husband, Midhat Bey; my beloved fiancé, Efronia Nazarian." We had lunch and talked with Midhat Bey at some length. He was a gracious, handsome man.

It would be superfluous to describe the happy, pleasant times that Ramzi and I had for the next fifteen days. We were together almost daily. Meunever Hanem had her personal carriage with a coachman waiting constantly at the door, and she placed the carriage at our disposition. Sometimes with Meunever Hanem, at other times with my sister, but often on our own, we went on excursions. On the outskirts of the city they had a summer house surrounded by gardens. We often went there; it was just the sort of place for lovers to be with each other in private. We owed all of this to Meunever Hanem and to my sister, and we were grateful.

I thought that I, too, should get a present for Ramzi to remember me by. There was a goldsmith whom I knew very well, so I went to him and said that I wanted to buy a present for a young man. He was making a gold key chain and showed me the model. I liked it. Several days later I gave it to Ramzi. He was very pleased and said, "It is just the present I wanted."

I went to Meunever Hanem's house virtually every day, as I had promised, sometimes alone and at other times with my sister. One day when we were sitting in the garden by ourselves, he said to me, "Look, my dear, these fifteen days are much too short for us to satisfy our longing for each other. I would have liked to spend the whole summer with you. I am very sorry, but I will not be able to stay any longer. I received a letter from my father yesterday. He writes that I should not delay my return to London any longer but should, preferably, go to Iskenderun first to be with them. My father, as a consul, has news that war is going to explode any day. For that reason, he says, 'My son, although the longer you stay with your fiancé the happier we will feel, the Turks are going to enter the war. It is possible that the roads may be closed, in which case you will be deprived of attending school, and we will be in a state of constant worry. So your mother and I think that you should meet with your fiancé's family and reveal to them what I am writing to you in secret then, having gotten their consent, take her with you to London. This war is going to be very bad for the Armenians. Let them take pity on that angelic girl, for I fear that many calamities may befall her. Convey to them my greetings; it makes no sense to keep your relationship a secret from her family any longer. It is not essential that you be married right away. Tell them that you will take her with you as a sister and place her in a school. Let her continue her education. As I have always told you, we can leave the future to God.'" Ramzi then said to me, "Look my dear, I have just told you my father's wish; it is also my wish. Think well."

I said, "What can I possibly do? What is there for me to think about? I am ready to go not only to London but to the end of the world this very day. If you find it appropriate, meet with my sister first and let us see what she advises us." I promised him that either the next day or the day after I would return with my sister. It was late. I got home, but "my mind was not in my head." No sleep closed my eyes that night. How shall I think it through? How shall I decide? Everything was easy so far as I was concerned, but what was I to tell my family? How would I make them understand?

The next morning, I went to my sister and relayed everything to her: The letter that Ramzi's father had written and what he thought, likewise, Ramzi's thoughts and wishes. I told her all. My sister looked at me; what could the poor woman say? What could she do? "Dear sister," she said, "I think it is not right to keep this problem a secret from Mother any longer. I feel obligated to let her know everything. Let her come over especially, since our brothers don't come home for lunch anyway. Let us tell her everything and hear what she will say. Otherwise, what is the use of my meeting with Ramzi before I have met with Mother?"

"Fine," I said.

She sent the maid and my mother came asking, "What is the matter? Why did you send for me suddenly? I hope you are going to give me good news." "I have no good news, Mother," said my sister. "We asked you to come so we could tell you about the difficulties, the sufferings, the secrets, and the anguish that your daughter has been going through for months. We hope that as her mother you can alleviate the sufferings and wounds of her heart. Look, dear Mother, my sister, and your daughter, has fallen in love with a young man in Iskenderun and has been carrying on a relationship with him and seeing him. They are very much in love with each other. She has sworn not to marry anyone other than this young man. They both say that only death will part them. The boy is now here. He has been studying in London and has come to see her. Mother, what a young man! I went with her to see him. In all my life I have never seen such a handsome and gracious person. His conversation is so sweet. It is obvious that he is a fine and highly moral young man." My mother cut her short, "So tell me who this young man is." I had kept quiet until then, and now I said, "You know him very well, Mother. He is the son of Naamatollah. You saw him at Nouriyé Hanem's house, as well as on the day of his graduation."

She stopped and thought. Then she remembered and said, "So far as I recall, the boy is a Persian Muslim." Then she turned to me and said, "My suspicions proved true. My daughter, you are an Armenian. How could you fall in love with a Muslim and wish to marry him? You kept going to Nouriyé Hanem's house day and night and accompanied her to the club. So this was underneath it all." I interrupted her saying, "Mother, don't get angry or blame me over this matter; I do not have the heart to bear it. Yes, I love him. We fell

in love, and I want to marry him. He is such a decent and saintly boy that there is not one like him among all your Protestants. I have known him for eight to nine months. Not once did an immoral word come from his mouth, nor did he ever hold my hand with bad intentions. He has dealt with me as he would with his sister. He is an angel. Let me make it short: I swear before God and before you that only death will separate us from each other. I will either marry this young man or will not marry at all. I will become a Catholic nun.” I began to cry. “Don’t say anything more and don’t ask me any further questions. Think about it. My sister already told you what his father has written. I fear that things you will come to regret may happen, but it would be of no avail at that point. I beg you to send me with him to London. Who is going to find out that I have gone there with a young man? To those who ask, simply say that you have sent me to study. It would not be a lie since his father is more than happy to let me study in London. Be certain that he will take better care of me than my own brothers. He promises to take care of all my expenses. We will each pursue our education for a few years, and then we shall see what God ordains. I shall not say another word. You should only know that if you do not give me your consent, I will be unhappy for the rest of my life and your conscience will torment you. Do you think that I am really going to marry your cousin? What right did you have to promise me to his mother on her deathbed when I was still young and without having taken my consent. I heard that he has returned from Beirut with his diploma; it will not be long before they come with their proposal. I am sure of that. Let me tell you right now that it is impossible that I should marry him, even if God takes my soul away.”

I cried so hard that my sister felt sorry for me as well as for my mother and said, “This is enough for today. Let mother have a chance to think about it, and we shall meet again.” I did not go home but stayed at my sister’s house. I had promised to see Ramzi the next day. There was no longer any need to keep my visits a secret from my mother.

When my sister and I got there the next day, he was as usual waiting impatiently. Meunever Hanem sat with us for a while and then left us alone. My sister told Ramzi about our meeting with my mother, what my mother had said, and my reactions to her. Then she added, “I am very sorry that I was not able to be helpful to you. But my son, do not lose hope. Both of you have promised that only death can separate you. I trust that God will join you and grant you your wish. I agree with your father’s and your wishes, and I shall do all I can to send my sister to study with you. By the time both of you complete your studies, who knows what surprises may occur and what changes may take place. God is great. Go joyfully, and may God be with you.”

Ramzi answered, “Dear *hanem*, I have found you most thoughtful. I am very grateful for the respect you have shown me. You have shared in our sorrow. I am now certain that you are in favor of my marrying your sister. I should tell you that much as I love and worship your sister, and shall continue

to worship her to the end of my life. Be sure that during our entire relationship I have behaved myself towards her as I would towards my sister. Had I been an immoral youth, there were many opportunities in Iskenderun to elope with her and to abduct her. But I was never tempted to bring shame on her family or on my family. I did not want to sink so low.” He said nothing further. It was evident that he was sad and very moved. Meunever Hanem came in with her maid and offered us coffee. She very much wanted us to stay longer. She wished in particular that I should stay since there were guests coming to see Ramzi and she wanted me to meet them. I thanked her but said that I did not wish anyone to see me. We bade farewell. Ramzi accompanied us in their carriage to my sister’s house and then went back.

My sister took me home since I was very angry with my mother. I would say nothing. My sister told her about our visit to Ramzi. She brought up the issue again but found it impossible to convince my mother. Finally, my mother said, “If you wish, and if both of you find it suitable, let me discuss it with my sons. Whatever happens, it is possible that one day they will hear about it and may be upset with me that I did not discuss it with them.” I did not want her to. “Ramzi also asked that he speak to you and to my brothers, but I would not let him,” I said. “I know very well how unreasonable they are, especially my oldest brother. I am afraid they would say all sorts of foolish things and throw in his face the fact that he is a Muslim. I don’t want him to be hurt and to be upset. I will leave it to God to ordain the best.”

The fifteen days had gone by very fast. They wanted us to spend the last day together since on the following morning Ramzi was going to start his journey at eight o’clock. We decided that he should come to my sister’s house. We spent the whole day together. Although we were both trying to look happy, it was impossible. The pain of separation was in our hearts. That day Meunever Hanem’s husband came to lunch, and we ate together. Later Ramzi took me to his room, where he had packed everything for his departure. He brought up again my mother’s refusal to let me accompany him. He said, “My love, my mind is not at ease as I leave you. I am going to worry about you day and night. Your mother is taking a very wrong step. When war breaks out, how is she going to safeguard you here? Who knows what calamities the Turks are going to bring on the heads of the Armenians? I pray to God that He keep you from mishaps and save you from dangers.” I turned to him and said, “My dear, how many times have I said that I would come with you in a moment, but what can I do? May God also keep you from getting ill and from ailments and accidents. May He take pity on the goodness of your heart and on my heart and unite us once again.”

He picked up a pair of scissors from the table and cut off a lock of my hair. He had two boxes with velvet lining. He put my hair in one of them and asked me to cut off a lock of his hair, which he then placed in the other box. In the evening he took me to my sister’s house, where I spent the night.

Early in the morning he came and took me back to his cousin's house. He was going to Aleppo first, then taking the train to Beirut, and from there sailing to Iskenderun. The carriages were ready. Meunever Hanem and her children got into their carriage while Ramzi got into the carriage in which he was going to travel. We went together to Beshgeoz, where we sat at a café and had a cup of coffee. As he was getting back into the carriage, he looked into my eyes. As his eyes filled with tears, his last words to me were in English: "My angel, will I ever be able to find you again?" he said and embraced me. My eyes also filled with tears. He took out his handkerchief and dried them. Until he could be seen no longer, he waved his handkerchief at us. As I stood there, at that moment, I had a presentiment that this was to be our last meeting.

Meunever Hanem dropped me off at my sister's house and made me promise that I would visit her. She consoled me and promised me that she would receive me like a sister and share the burdens of my heart. Thus passed those fifteen unforgettable days. For years to come, his last words did not desert my ears.

WORLD WAR: AUGUST 15, 1914

After the fifteen unforgettable days spent with Ramzi, and after my separation from him, it was as if the world was plunged into darkness. The sun lost its light for me; life lost its value for me. Because we left each other with neither of us having any hope of reuniting in the future, I was even less hopeful because I felt certain that my family, especially my mother, would oppose our getting married to the very end. I fell into a state of sadness and despair. I always tried to show myself happy to my brothers, but I was no longer concerned about trying to hide my true feelings from my mother since she already knew everything. Day or night, Ramzi's honest face would not go from before my eyes, nor his sweet voice from my ears. How could I forget? How could I not remember that he never hurt my feelings? It was impossible to forget; my only consolation was that he wrote to me from everywhere he went.

As if what I suffered in Iskenderun were not enough, now I fell into further difficulties. New offers of engagement and marriage began coming from several young men. A number of them had wanted to get engaged to me while we were both still in school. But my mother had refused, saying that we should finish our schools and receive our diplomas, and then we should see. Based on this hope that my mother had given them, they now began to press their proposals. I turned them all down. I sensed that my mother was quite pleased at this. As I mentioned earlier, when I was still young, she had promised to her uncle's wife on her deathbed, she had actually sworn to her, that she would give me in marriage to her son Garabed Kalfayan. She already knew, even before Ramzi left, that the young man had returned, having received his medical diploma from the American University of Beirut. He had been invited to join the staff of the American Hospital and was already working as a specialist in surgery.

Though I had a feeling that he had already come forth with a marriage proposal, my mother had not had the courage to relay it to me in view of my relationship with Ramzi. I do not know how, or by what excuse, she managed to dissuade him from pressing his offer and openly frequenting our house. He nonetheless would visit us occasionally since we were relatives. After Ramzi left, my mother finally broached the subject. I looked at her face in stunned silence, as if struck by lightning, and said, "I have a headache now; let us leave this matter to another day," and went to my room. My poor mother was now caught between a rock and a hard place, my refusal and her oath. But I decided to irrevocably refuse him no matter what happened. I had already told her what my answer was going to be, and I felt fully entitled to it. Why had she made a promise on my behalf when I was only thirteen or fourteen years old? Why had she taken an oath?

One day, his older brother, Hagop, came to us. He and my mother secluded themselves in the upstairs room. I went up, welcomed him and served coffee. He stayed for a while and left. My mother approached me and asked, "Do you know why he came?" "One need not be a prophet," I said, "to know that he came in connection with his brother's request and to remind you of the oath you took years ago." "Look, my daughter, think it over carefully," said my mother. "They want to settle this matter although I told him that they should not hurry; they consider this matter a settled issue. They have sent word to his sister Anitsa, who lives in Egypt, and she will be coming here soon. But I told him again, My son, do not rush. Although I did give my word years ago, I did it without thinking ahead. Now realize that I must ask my daughter about it and get her consent. I must also tell you that this girl is not one to be persuaded by the words of others. She must choose for herself who she is going to marry and will give her consent accordingly. Give us time for a few days. Your brother is already coming and going to our house. Let him continue to come and go; it is better that they should come to understand each other." Having heard my mother's words, he had left saying he would return in a few days.

The visits of the young man to our house now became more frequent. I was in a difficult spot. He gradually began to approach me and drop hints. But the closer he got to me, the cooler I felt towards him. Ramzi kept coming before my eyes; even the boy's visits to our house made me feel I was being unfaithful. There was no comparison to Ramzi. He was old-fashioned. He did not even utter a word of love to win me over. Days passed; his sister's arrival was delayed. I was glad, and kept praying that God would create an obstacle to settle this matter so I would not hurt my mother any further. Beyond having given her word, the fact that she had taken an oath was tormenting her. Finally, we got the news that his sister had come. To celebrate her arrival and in honor of his graduation from medical school, they held a banquet. Naturally, as their relatives, we too were invited along with all of the Kalfayan families. I could not very well refuse to go. What excuse could I put forth? So we went. It was a lavish banquet. We ate, drank, and returned home. My mother sat with me for a while. She then brought up the subject very gently and began to try to persuade me: "Look, my dear, you saw with your own eyes what a fine family they are. They all love you. Their son is a fine man. These days a doctor could ask for the hand of anyone and her family would immediately give her to him. He has been visiting us now for some time. What do you think? Have you at all changed your mind?" Etc., etc. I said nothing. Everything she said went in one ear and out the other. My mother did not realize that the more I had seen of the young man, the cooler I felt towards him. But I did not want to hurt my mother again by restating my decision. My mother had asked his older brother for more time. The banquet was held on a Saturday. On Sunday, they sent word that they had waited long enough and that they wanted to come to our house the next day.

On that same day, the women in the church choir were going on a picnic to Kavaklek. So on Monday morning I got dressed early and left the house. My mother told me not to be late since the Kalfayans were coming that evening. Since we lived on the same street, I had to pass their house. I noticed that the older brother, Hagop, was standing in front of the door. As I approached, he asked me, "Where are you going this early in the morning?" I said, "The church choir is going on a picnic. We are to gather at the church." He turned to me and in a peremptory manner told me to immediately return home and exchange my white shawl for a more modest black one. When I got home, I angrily told my mother, "You insist that I marry their son, and his brother is already ordering me around." I changed my shawl and stomped out. When I reached the church, they were all waiting for me. I apologized. The carriages were already there. We immediately loaded them, got in, and got on our way.



The Choir of the Aintab's Second Protestant Church. Front row on the left, Efronia and Yervant. In the fourth place is the Conductor, "To" Levon

Kavaklek is a delightful place. The ground is covered with greenery; there are beautiful trees and flowing waters. We immediately started preparing the food. We ate, drank joyfully, and near evening the carriages came back, and we returned home. There was some commotion in town. We did not know why. In the evening when my uncle and brothers came home, we learned that the world war had been declared, and the Turks were going to take part. As I said earlier, the Kalfayans were going to come to our house, but they sent word that they would not be able to that evening. I was glad.

When we got up in the morning, chants of *Allah Ekber*, *Allah Ekber* (God is great), came from the minarets. The town criers in the street were calling on all young men of military age to turn themselves in. They shouted and yelled, "Compatriots, long life to you, brother Turks; arm yourselves and march against the enemy". Our people went into mourning. Although they were not

recruiting Armenians as soldiers, Armenian physicians were called up and put in officer's uniforms. They were ordered to report for duty in two or three days.

A few days later the Kalfayans sent word again that they were to visit us. We said they were welcome. Garabed was in military uniform. The older brother opened the subject: "Although we very much regret that my brother must go in a few days, we would like to settle this matter before he leaves, and place the engagement rings on their fingers." My mother refused. "We waited all these years, and I intend to stand by my promise," she said. "But under these circumstances I would not want to bind them to each other by the placing of rings." Turning to the boy, she added, "My son, you are going off to war. Who can tell what may happen in a time of war? How are you going to feel, and how are we going to feel? Should you become attached further, you will fret constantly about each other. When letters fail to arrive, you will get worried. God willing, the war will not last very long; you will return safe and sound, get engaged, and be married." Their mood soured. Garabed in particular became very sad. His sister Anitsa, who had expressly come for this occasion, got very upset: "Ovsanna, my sister, you are very wrong to think this way," she said. She came back the next day, but once again my mother refused and mollified her with "God willing."

On the day that he was going to leave my mother suggested that we go there to say goodbye. I did not refuse, so we went. He bade all of us farewell. His brothers and sisters parted from him in tears. Although my mother was not showing it, I sensed that she was rather pleased that the problem had been resolved at least for the moment. We would trust the future to the greatness of God. I felt especially happy because, although my decision was firm and I was absolutely set to refuse him, we were going to face a lot of difficulties nonetheless, and I was going to cause my mother more grief whether I wanted to or not. Also my brothers were going to inquire into the reasons for my refusing such a young man, and my secret was going to come out. I was certain that I would then hear many reprimands from them. I thanked God that I had passed by this Golgotha easily, that my prayers had reached Him and had been answered.

It was near the end of August. After the soldiers left, the city gradually calmed down and life went on. The schools opened in September. My brother Yervant and I began working in our respective schools, as before. But later the school trustees decided that I should teach a higher grade instead of the fourth. There were thirty students in this higher grade, all of them boys, with fifteen students per class. They were fairly grown-up, but they gave me no difficulty. They all liked me and obeyed me. In the same courtyard there was another class taught by Azniv Krajian, a tall, pretty girl with blue eyes. We became very good friends and spent our days happily. Later, when I became more intimate with her, she revealed to me her sorrow. The younger son of the

wealthy Barsoumians and she had fallen in love. But the boy's family opposed the match because her family was not of the same class. The poor girl would cry, and on occasion I would notice that the boy would come to see her at school. She did not know that I had worse difficulties than her, but I revealed nothing to her.

During September Ramzi's letters began to come from London. He was very successful in school, but he always wrote that he was not happy and was constantly worried about me. There is no reason to repeat that he always mentioned in his letters the coming of the war, the bad days ahead, and my mother having prevented my going with him. What could I say? The poor boy and his father and mother were quite right in what they thought. But my mother's forbidding my going, I was sure, was something she was going to regret.

1915: THE YEAR OF THE ARMENIAN GOLGOTHA

Until 1915, we lived in fear of the war. We felt that the Armenians were not well regarded by the Turks. We heard about the massacre of Armenian villagers, the looting of their belongings, and their deportation. However, where we lived, life went on more or less as usual. Men worked at their jobs. The schools were open. But it wasn't long before it all changed. Young Armenian men were conscripted into the army. Those who had the means bribed the officials to save their children. Those who could not afford to turned themselves in. The Armenians fell into mourning and fear. The schools closed down. Armenians were forbidden to leave town, and all contacts with the outside were forbidden. The writing and receiving of letters was stopped.

The deportations started in the middle of that cold winter from Zeitoun, Marash and the other towns and villages of the region. The pitiful Armenians left their belongings behind and carried what they could. Some of them walked into Aintab with no idea where they would be going next. Tents were set up outside the city in an open field. We went to see them. They had been there only a few days, but their condition was pitiful. It was impossible to describe their situation, the young, the old, the sick. How were they going to continue their journey? Men called on God to help them. The people of Aintab, not knowing what their fate was going to be, wanted to take in women as their maids. Those who had no children wanted to adopt them to save their lives.

This went on for a few weeks, and it was followed by the deportation of the people of Aintab itself in April. The Apostolic community was the first to go. They were followed by the intellectual classes and the wealthy. Word went out to families telling them to be ready to leave in a few days. People tried to sell their belongings very cheaply. But who was to buy them? The Turks knew very well that sooner or later all of the belongings would be theirs. Town criers told the Armenians not to worry, to lock their doors, put their money in banks or give it to Turkish friends for safe-keeping. It would not be long until they returned. The government would secure their belongings. But who would believe them? And what could the Armenians do?

Then caravan after caravan left town escorted by a few policemen. There was a rumor that the Protestants were not going to be exiled, but it turned out to be false. They too were exiled. I can never forget the sense of despair we felt at the Sunday service the day before the last Protestant caravan was to leave. Our choir sang a few songs, and the entire congregation broke down in tears. At the end of the service, those who were to leave the next day said their farewells, kissed each other, and parted, crying.

Right after the church service we went to my sister Azniv's house and spent the night there because they were in the caravan that was to leave early the next morning with their three children, the youngest of whom was six-month-

old Lucin. We had gone some distance when we realized that Lucin had been left at home in her crib. My brother immediately went back and brought her in his arms. This was one of the largest caravans, having two thousand people. It is impossible to imagine the confusion. This caravan was sent to Arab villages. The Armenians were fortunate to be able to settle there, and the Arabs treated them well. Some people went all the way to Damascus. My sister's family had relatives there. In fact, my uncle's brother, who had a position in the government, had them brought to Damascus, where they remained until the end of the war.

As I said, this convoy with both Gregorians and Protestants turned out to be the luckiest group. Following them, all of the other convoys that left Aintab were driven into the desert near Deir Zor, and virtually all the people were massacred in the midst of unbelievable, unimaginable tortures.

It would be superfluous for me to write about the Armenian deportations since many books have already been written on this subject, and more books keep appearing so that by now every Armenian and others know about it. Very few of our own families were sent away since each one found some way of escaping deportation: My brother Yacoub was a municipal pharmacist; my brother Yervant deserted the army and went into hiding at home; my sister Aroussiak's husband, Elias, had a brother who had gone to the front as a physician, so he was assigned as an orderly to look after the doctor's family. My uncle Movses became his nephew's, Dr. Hovsep's, orderly. My uncle Krikor, who was a jeweler, was spared from deportation as were other master artisans.

The evacuation of the Aintab Armenians took several months. The families of those who were in government service lived confined to their homes. People did not easily leave their houses, and Armenian women veiled themselves like Turks. My brother Yervant was like a prisoner at home. All of our neighbors were Turks, and they were very fond of us.

My brother Yacoub traveled to and from his pharmacy without fear. He cultivated many friends among high-ranking government officials, especially military officers, whom he often brought home for dinner. On those occasions my brother Yervant and I stayed out of sight; only my mother and grandmother served the guests. We got used to this life, and we thought that things would go on in this fashion to the end of the war. No matter what difficulties we encountered, we did not mind them in view of what we heard was happening elsewhere.

It is often wrong to ascribe to fate the misfortunes of life. More often, a man brightens or darkens his fate with his own hands. My foolish brother blackened his fate with his own hands, but God helped and saved us. He took such a foolish step that only God first and then my cousin, Dr. Hovsep, could save us. Otherwise we would have drawn our last breath in Deir Zor.

As I mentioned earlier, before going to Iskenderun, my brother Yacoub had become engaged in Aintab to the Karamanougian's daughter Yester, but then had broken off the engagement a few months later. The three sons in this family were experts in the making of a cotton fabric called *alaja*; they were famous for their work. The Armenian artisans who did this work in Ourfa had been deported, so no one in town was producing this material. Knowing this, the government sent the Karamanougians from Aintab to Ourfa. They were glad to learn that they were being sent to Ourfa since this meant continuing their business there. But they had an unmarried sister and were afraid that she would be taken from them.

They called in my brother and offered him 150 gold sovereigns if he would marry her. He was persuaded without thinking ahead of the consequences. He came and told my mother about it, and my mother sent him to Dr. Hovsep. When he learned about it, the doctor would not consent to it and told my brother that he had better not take this step: first, because the girl was not a suitable match for him, second, her being the daughter of a family that was to be deported could cause trouble. But having heard about the money, my brother would listen neither to my mother nor to Dr. Hovsep. So he went to the girl's house, married her, and brought her home. Her family left for Ourfa the next day. When they came home and we saw them, it was as if we were struck by lightning. Was this a time to get married? And couldn't he have at least gotten married quietly? As if these were normal times, and forgetting that he was an Armenian, he had a phonograph playing loud music as at an ordinary wedding.

A few days later, on a Sunday, some of our friends and relatives who were left in town came to congratulate him. Suddenly there were knocks on the door, and some thirty armed soldiers came in. My brother Yervant immediately ran to his hiding place while I went onto the roof to hide myself. A few of the soldiers came upstairs from the courtyard. They searched the men, then tied my brother's hands, took him away, and threw him into jail. It is impossible to imagine that scene. My mother and my grandmother were crying. The new bride was tearing her hair out. Dr. Hovsep came over and, seeing the condition we were in, began to shake his head. He got quite angry over this wrong step my brother had taken, but what was the use? What was done was done.

Two days later we received orders that our entire family should get ready to be deported to Deir Zor, the men and the women separately. We shed tears day and night. We knew for certain that we were going to our deaths.

Following the evacuation of the Armenians, the governor (*vali*) was replaced. The new governor was a tough, evil man who spread awe and terror all around. There were some Armenians who had bribed government officials and had been left to hide in their homes. He had their houses searched door-to-door, ferreted them all out, and deported them. This man was an army

officer who had fought in the war and had been shot in the kidney. Since he was an able man, they had discharged him from the military and appointed him governor of Aintab. Though he had already had surgery when he came, his wounds still needed dressing and care. Having heard that there was a famous doctor at the American Hospital, he had sought the help of Dr. Hovsep, who from then on treated him. The governor was very pleased with Dr. Hovsep and very fond of him. After this calamity burst on our heads, the doctor went once again to dress the governor's wounds. When he was done, he said to him in a very sweet voice, "My Bey, I have a favor to ask of you."

"Doctor," interrupted the governor, "you had better ask of me something that I can or would want to do." "I am sure you remember," said the doctor, "how angry and upset you were, and rightly so, when a few days ago you had a young man arrested and ordered his family to be deported. They are my uncle's family. Their son has taken a wrong step, and you are entitled to punish him. But I beg you, for the love of God, to take back your order to deport." The man turns around and says, "It is bad for me to take back an order. But as a favor to you, I will do what I can to save the family from deportation. But as soon as he gets out of jail, he will have to be sent away." The doctor expressed his thanks and then came to us directly to give us the news. We were sorry to hear about my brother having to be deported, but we were glad that the whole family was saved from the deserts of Deir Zor. The governor ordered my brother to be sent to the nearby region of Roumelly, only a few hours from Aintab. We decided that my grandmother should go along to look after him. So the poor woman, in her old age, got herself ready. When my brother got out of jail, the mules were brought over immediately, and they left. As if the troubles he had caused before were not enough, this now added salt and pepper to it all. And our own sorrows aside, we also had to listen to the crying and wailing of his bride all day long.

Barely fifteen days had passed when, in the middle of the night, we heard a knock on the door. My mother opened it, and there was my brother. We all ran downstairs. He had left my grandmother behind and had come home to stay for a few days. Word of his absence had already been sent out. Dr. Hovsep had heard somehow and came running to our house. He scolded him. A while later we noticed that my brother had begun to vomit. When he had heard that word had reached the government about his escape, he had gotten so scared that he had gone to his room and taken poison. The poor doctor stayed with him until morning and treated him in various ways. He made him vomit, fed him yogurt, and after all sorts of other treatments, Yacoub felt somewhat better. Early in the morning, before sunrise, they put him on his horse and sent him away. The police came to arrest him later in the morning, but they looked and searched and couldn't find him. We told them that they must have gotten the wrong information. "He never came here," we said.

Some four or five months later the governor changed again. Our cousin, Hagop Efendi appealed to several government officials, saying that he needed my brother in his pharmacy. As I mentioned earlier, it was a municipal pharmacy. So my brother was given a pardon, returned home, and went back to work.

These calamities and fears oppressed us very much. At the same time, our daily lives became increasingly difficult. My brother Yervant was confined at home. Four of us were now dependent on my brother Yacoub and his wife. We began to realize that my brother's wife did not look upon us kindly. We already knew very well who she was and what she was like. As I mentioned, she had been my classmate, I had never liked her, and I would have nothing to do with her. When she first got engaged to my brother, I was very upset; when the engagement was broken, I was very happy. But of what use since she had now reappeared before me, and I was obliged to live with her?

We often heard that her mother made life very difficult for her daughters-in-law, which Yester was in our case. There was a vast difference between our family and her family. The members of our family, I can even say our entire lineage, dealt with each other with modesty and civility and lived together with love and respect. In her family, there was fighting and commotion as if they were each other's enemies. She had three brothers, all of whom were married, and none of their wives had peace for a single day. I recall that later, when their mother got sick in Aleppo, the sons had her moved to a shack where she died with much suffering. On one occasion, years later, I asked one of the sons why their mother had ended her last days in such misery and why they had not cared for her. He said to me, "Yes, she was our mother, but we suffered so much at her hands that neither we, her sons, nor her daughters-in-law wanted to look after her. She deserved to die like that."

I very much regret that my sister-in-law continued to follow that same pattern of life and made our family unhappy. She had no respect for young or old. When it was time for my brother to come home, she would get dressed and fix herself up. And with such empty means, she would try to win my brother's love. My brother started to drink; she would try to turn him against us by complaining about us. Although my brother knew her very well, he had no clear judgment when drunk, and she was his wife after all. So with her false words and for no good purpose, she would create misunderstandings. But no matter what she said and what she did, there would be only silence and patience on our part. We did not want to have discord in our house. But remaining silent and being patient was of little use. As they say in Turkish, she "turned the food we ate to poison."

My poor brother Yervant would see all this and get very perturbed. We would sometimes consider separating from my brother and his wife so that even if we were to live on dry bread, we would at least be free of being dependent on them. But we were not certain that we could manage even that

since life had become extremely expensive. Yervant had saved several gold pieces, and so had I. But as we made our calculations, it was clear that we could live on what we had for barely three months, following which we would be obliged again to bend our heads to them.

Finally, Yervant became so fed up and disgusted with living at home that he turned himself in and was assigned to Aleppo. We were very saddened by this separation. Yet, at the same time, we were glad that he would no longer have to witness the plight of his family; even in the midst of poverty and helplessness, I had managed to live happily in the past. When he was about to leave, he turned his tearful eyes to us and said, "I am going to be very worried. I know life is going to be a torment for you. But don't be sad; I hope to return safe and sound, and support you comfortably, and shall leave you to God."

A few months passed. There was very little communication with the outside, particularly for the Armenians. One day my brother Yacoub came home looking very sad. He went upstairs, called my mother and told her, "I am leaving for Aleppo right away. My brother is sick with typhus and has been hospitalized in very serious condition." The Khatchadourians at the time were in Aleppo, and they had cabled him to "come right away, your brother's life is in danger." As he was getting ready to leave, my mother, who raised lovely flowers, gave him a large bouquet of carnations and told him tearfully, "Take these, my son, and should he die, or if he is already dead, place them on his grave."

I can never forget those hours, how we cried and how we wailed. We prayed day and night. It was not even possible to get any news readily. Eight to ten days later, thank God, we got word that he was out of danger. My cousin Mary and Mennoush Mama had told Yacoub, "Go home with your mind at ease. We will all do everything we can; we will visit him every day and take care of all his needs." Yervant had to stay in the hospital for over two months. Yacoub returned home.

We were glad to get the news of my brother Yervant getting better. But our life at home was intolerable; we had lost all our freedom. My life, which had already been unbearable, now became even more so under these circumstances. From morning until night we were busy with housework. We were constantly under the command of my sister-in-law. How difficult these conditions were for me! But I was obliged to bear them. After the evening meal, Yacoub and his wife would go up to their room, and we retreated to ours or went over to my uncle's house to spend some time with them. They could see what we were going through, felt very bad about it, and tried to console us. My uncle would say, "I must have a few words with Yacoub," but my mother would not let him say anything about us.

Even though we lived with them, and my brother supported us, we still had many other needs. They neither thought about these needs nor ever asked. My mother knew how to spin cotton and had a spinning wheel. She began to buy

cotton, spin it, and sell her work in the market place. The peasants wove a special cloth (*bez*) from the cotton thread, with which they made their underwear. She thus made some money as well as finding something to distract herself. I decided that since the schools were closed, I should gather the children of the nearby families who were still in town and teach them. So I sent word to our neighbors and got twelve boys and girls aged 8-10 to teach. I earned twelve and a half *ghouroush* which was the equivalent of half a *mejidieh*. At the time, that sum amounted to something; one gold piece was worth five *mejidiehs*.

I held my classes in the morning. I felt some satisfaction even though I had little enthusiasm; it also allowed me to forget myself for a while. God ordains everything for each day, and in every difficulty there may be some good.

One day, we had a visit from the wife of Doctor Haroutune Kalfayan, Flora Hanem, who was the sister-in-law of my brother-in-law Elias. Her second daughter was one of my pupils. She said that the wife of the Persian Midhat Bey had come to visit her the day before; as her husband was their family physician they met each other socially. During the conversation, the issue of schooling had come up, and the wife of Midhat Bey had said that she was looking for a tutor to teach her eight-year-old boy at home.

"I don't know anyone who could come to your house as a tutor," Flora Hanem had said, "but my second daughter is being taught by our relative, the Nazarians' girl, who lives nearby and teaches quite a few pupils in her home." The woman immediately realizes that I am the person in question and says, "Would you please find out from her if she can give my eight-year-old son Turkish lessons." Flora Hanem promises to find out and let her know. When she asked me, "Yes, I will teach the boy," I told her without giving any indication that I knew the woman in question. A few days later Meunever Hanem, who knew me as intimately as a sister, came to our house with her eight-year-old son. When I saw her, it was as if I had discovered a treasure. I was sure that now I would be able to get news of Ramzi from her. We pretended not to know each other. I gave her the name of the textbook which she would need to buy for her son. They sat for a while, and she left taking the boy along.

The following day they came back with her maid. She now took me aside and longingly kissed my cheeks. She said, "How happy I am that you have not been deported. I was sure that you too had been sent away with all the other Armenians. I was so terribly worried about you since I could not get any information. When I heard from Flora Hanem that you were here and had not been deported, I was so delighted." She then opened up the subject of Ramzi. "Are you getting any letters," she asked. "No," I said. "I used to get them earlier, but now it has been months since I have heard from him." "I must write to Ramzi as soon as possible," she said. "It looks like his letters are not reaching your hands." She asked a lot of questions about me and told me to

write to Ramzi; her maid would then pick up the letter when she brought the boy over, and then Meunever Hanem would mail it along with hers.

She could only send her son three times a week since they lived far away and their carriage could not get through our narrow streets. Either the maid or she herself would have to bring the boy personally. "My sister, I do not wish to renew your sorrow," she said in parting, "but your mother took a very wrong step. The poor boy tried so hard to take you with him since he knew through his father of the calamities that were to befall the Armenians." I could not restrain my tears and said, "Dear sister, what could I do? I was willing. No matter how much I begged my mother, she would not consent. My poor mother now sees how unhappy I am with my life and how I suffer." I unburdened my sorrows to her, and she comforted me and gave me hope. She told me to have my letter written and ready soon and promised to come back.

After she left, it was as if there was no strength left in me. My sorrows were renewed. Yet at the same time I was happy to have gotten Ramzi's news. I was in no mood to busy myself with the children. I took my pen in hand many times to write a letter, but I could not. Finally, over several days, I wrote the letter, and when she brought the boy, I gave it to her.

1916: THE SECOND YEAR OF THE WAR

The war continued with the same momentum. Although the town criers proclaimed daily the news of Turkish victories, it was clear that instead of winning, the Turks were getting weaker by the day and losing large territories. Our lives were almost the same. There is a Turkish saying, "Should you suffer deprivation for 40 days, you get used to it." Our situation too was like that. We got used to living with it all and managed one way or another. We were thankful to God for not being deported. My teaching the children turned out to be a very good way of keeping myself busy. We did not feel alone in the house as we shared the courtyard with the family of my uncle Movses. He had three daughters who were like sisters to me. We lived together most amicably. We rarely saw our bride's face except for meal times; otherwise she sat by herself in her room. On our street, close to us, there were two other Armenian families, the Chamichians and the Arslanians, who were Catholic. Both wives were still quite young. One had two children and the other three. Their husbands were physicians and had been sent to the front. We had a very close relationship with them. In the evenings, especially, we got together and played cards. With whatever money accumulated in the pot, we sent out for things to eat.

Mrs. Chamichian was known to me from school, and we were fond of each other. She played the piano very well. One day she offered to give me piano lessons, if I was interested. I had studied the piano for two years in school and accepted her offer gladly. I would go there once a week for lessons and another time to practice. I was rather talented at the piano, and it gave me much joy. I offered to pay her, but she would not accept. Years later, when I was visiting her in Aleppo, I gave her a pair of gold bracelets. My piano lessons and my teaching the children were both good ways of keeping myself busy.

A year had passed since my brother Yervant's departure. He wrote to us that he was going to be transferred out of Aleppo to elsewhere. He had obtained fifteen days' leave and was coming to see us. We were so glad. When he arrived, we found him much changed. While he was already quite good looking, he had now become even more handsome. He had grown a small moustache, and the military uniform suited him very well. We enjoyed his presence for fifteen days. He questioned us about our family life. We did not want to upset him or send him away worried, so we said that we were fine and had no special complaints. The days passed very fast and our separation was very difficult. But we were glad to see him well and grateful that he was no longer confined to the house.

The longer the war lasted, the more difficult our life became. We were confined to our homes and our previously happy existence had changed completely. No one came and went, a monotonous life. Having given up

everything, I wished we at least had a pleasant life at home; we could have consoled each other in the midst of all our difficulties.

Quite a few refugees began to drift back to Aintab. They were all women and in a most sorrowful condition. Many had lost their children and lost their husbands. Their daughters had fallen into the hands of the tormentors, Arabs, and were lost in the deserts. One woman told us that her two lovely daughters had thrown themselves into the Euphrates River so as not to yield to the bandits. Many came begging, but we could hardly give them anything since we had so little ourselves. They would empty the garbage cans and eat whatever they could find, be it clean or dirty. They would cry while telling their tales and make us cry. Seeing them, we thanked God that we had not been deported and fallen into these difficulties. Many of these women found work in Turkish or Armenian families. The ones we met were mostly from Istanbul and Sevaz. They had been driven into the desert and then, one by one, had found their way to our region, one way or another. It was evident that they came from educated and well-off families.

My brother's wife was pregnant. They wanted to get one of these women as a maid to help her. The poor woman that they chose was so happy. Though her looks were spoiled through all that she had suffered, it was still evident that she had been quite beautiful. She loved us very much, and my mother took care of her like her own daughter.

A few months later a great change came about in our family: Our bride, gave birth to a daughter. We were so delighted. My mother was so happy that she had lived to see her son's child and have a grandchild. They wondered quite a bit what to call her. Miraculously enough, they asked me. I had an intimate friend in school, Reverend Papazian's daughter, who was called Laura, so that is the name I suggested. They accepted it and named her Laura. She became a happy occupation for us. Her mother did almost nothing other than nurse her. We took on all of the baby's care. She was a very sweet child and grew up to be a kind, good-natured girl and woman, and remains so to this day. She was attached to us, particularly to me. I loved her like my own daughter.

So we finished the year 1916. There is nothing more worth mentioning - the same life, the same worries. Although we had a lot of problems and difficulties it is not pleasant to dwell on them and to write about them. As I said, Laura's birth brought about a big change in our life, and in the midst of the sorriest times, her presence was a source of joy for us. Laura's birth was not only a source of much happiness, it also turned out to be a good omen. One day my brother Yacoub sent word from the pharmacy that he was bringing along a guest for dinner. We prepared a nice meal without knowing who it was. Had it been a Turk, he would have alerted us so that I would not be present. In the evening a presentable young man showed up. I remembered him from Iskenderun as the younger brother of my cousin's husband; he was Aram

Khatchadourian (my future husband). Dinner was ready. Though our guest did not usually drink, he had a glass in order to keep my brother company. I remember very well that we served eggplant *doghrama* and pilaf. Following dinner, my brother and he secluded themselves upstairs for a few hours. When Aram was preparing to leave, my brother invited him to spend the night at our house. "I cannot," he said, "I have promised my cousin Kevork that I will sleep at their house; he will be waiting for me." He thanked us and left, telling my brother that he would return the following evening and they would take care of the rest of their business. My brother appeared to be very happy. We learned afterward that Aram had obtained a large commission from the government in Aleppo for provisioning the army. Several people had submitted bids, but his offer had been accepted. In order to start the work, he needed large numbers of camels, carts, and mules, as well as fifty to sixty men. He had obtained the necessary work permits and had come to Aintab to hire the men from among those who had stayed behind or escaped deportation. They would be working in the vicinity of Aintab, Marash, Islahiyé, and Rakka. Yacoub had many local contacts in Aintab who were willing to pay twenty-five gold coins each for the permits.

The following evening Aram came back, and this time he stayed with us for several days. They found the men and sold all the work permits; even more of them could have been sold, had they had any, since having one of these work permits meant being exempted from military service and deportation, and earning money as well. Aram got the men together and went to Marash. He gave part of the money he had made to his brother.

During the several days that Aram stayed with us, I found him to be the same unemotional young man that I had known in Iskenderun. I am sure it never crossed my mind that I was to become his wife in the future. He was not the sort of young man that I dreamed of marrying although he was quite presentable, his conversation and demeanor pleasant, and he was quite intelligent. At any rate, there was no room for love in my heart for anyone other than Ramzi.

1917: THE THIRD YEAR OF THE WAR

Three years had passed since the start of the war. By then, everyone's patience was exhausted. Just as the remaining Christians were sad, so were the Turks because they were growing weaker by the day and losing immense amounts of territory. Terrible news kept coming in from the refugees. Many of them came to Aintab from all over. There were virtually no men among them; in fact, there was not a single one. Nor were there any children or youths. They were almost all women who had become skeletons. They came begging, but what could we give them since we could barely find any bread? They emptied the garbage cans and ate what they could. Although I felt like I was imprisoned at home, the children I taught kept me busy, and I closed my eyes to all of our difficulties. Especially considering the condition of the refugees, I gave thanks to God a thousand times that we were spared these torments.

My greater joy was in receiving letters from Ramzi. He was very worried about us, but grateful that we had not been exiled and massacred, and again full of hopes. I also was full of hopes. He was going to graduate this July, but in what conditions in the world? Was the war going to end? Was he going to be reunited with me? Where were we going to settle down? With my heart full of these thoughts, I wrote to him encouraging and begging him to be patient. God is great. We would trust in Him.

It seemed like my Golgotha had not ended. One evening, I had an unexpected visit from my cousin, Dr. Hovsep. He met with my mother and then called me in. They still said nothing, but I could tell from my mother's expression that there was bad news for me. My mother turned to me and told me to get ready to go with Dr. Hovsep to their house. I asked why, and she said to spend some time with his girls. As you know, Alice is very sick and she would like to be with you. I did not believe her, but I did not say anything and got dressed, covered my head, and left with Dr. Hovsep. I noticed that there were two soldiers waiting outside. He told me to walk with them. Our house was quite far from theirs, but finally, we got there. The soldiers left, and I finally understood that these were not soldiers but two young Armenian men dressed like soldiers to make sure that no one would approach me. It was dinner time; we had dinner, and nothing further was said about it.

From when I wrote about my uncle's family, the reader will remember that their second daughter had tuberculosis and lived separately. The house next to them was vacant, so they renovated one of the rooms for her to live in because there was a danger that her sisters would be infected, especially since an older sister had died from the disease some years before. They also had me stay in one of the other rooms off the courtyard, where I would live when staying with them. I could not understand why they had brought me there, and it kept me

awake all night. They said that when I woke up, I should go to their house to have breakfast with them.

The doctor's wife called me to her room and explained the situation. Two streets away from our house lived a Muslim family. Their son was a municipal physician who had fallen in love with me and wanted to get hold of me and marry me. For a while, he did not have the courage to bring this about. Now that the Armenians were being persecuted, he thought this was an opportune time to own me and, if necessary, abduct me and take me I don't know where. Once they had become aware of this situation, they had decided to bring me to their house and find an opportunity to help me to escape to Aleppo. When she told me all this, I could not hold back my tears. I closed my eyes and said, "Dear Lord, are my sufferings not sufficient?" The lady consoled me and said that no one could easily take me away from them. "But you have to pay attention. You should never open the door. And when you are in our house, when you see a man and a woman, go upstairs and hide. We have a relationship with this family. Sometime, mother and daughter come to us." Actually, one day they did come, but I was upstairs in my room.

Not to drag it out, I lived under these conditions for two months. Every morning I got the news about my uncle Movses from their servant. Sometimes my mother would also come. One day my mother came with him, and we had a lengthy conversation. I asked about Meunever Hanem. She had come twice and asked about me. My mother had lied and told her that I was very tired and that they had sent me to stay with relatives in Aleppo. The fact that she had lied had put my mother in a confused state. I wondered how Meunever Hanem would feel having heard this news. Not knowing where I was, how was she going to give me the letters that Ramzi would have sent? What could she write to Ramzi? My mother said that actually Meunever Hanem appeared not to believe what she had been told. Because, how could I have gone to Aleppo in the middle of the persecutions and the dangers attendant on travel?

These thoughts made me feel like my head was about to burst. I decided that when I saw my mother, I would have "some words" with her. It did not take long, and when I saw her, I poured my heart out to her with flowing tears and told her, "My dear mother, don't you regret under these circumstances that you did not let me go away with Ramzi and instead be sent to Deir Zor to be eaten alive by hyenas or become the wife of a Bedouin? If we are spared from that, I still have to face the prospect of having a young Turkish man take possession of me. Don't you pity me?" My mother remained silent. She looked at my face with tearful eyes. I took pity on her and did not continue. "It is alright, dear Mother," I told her, "I am certain that God is capable of everything. I trust Him to save me from all these calamities." My mother only said, "My dear daughter, it is as if what you have already suffered being in this house was not enough; this now has added pepper to your wounds. May God reach out and save you!" With tears in her eyes, she kissed my face and left.

When I was with Dr. Hovsep's family, their daughter Alice's illness got worse. There were no drugs or remedies to help her. She had been bedridden for a year and a half, and she had lost so much weight that she looked like a skeleton. Her parents were very sad. They had lost all hope and were waiting for death. She kept thanking me for staying with her, but instead of being repelled by her illness, I sat with her for hours. When she spoke with grief in her words, my heart would break into pieces; I could not hold back my tears and could not find words to console her. She was engaged and her betrothed came to visit her occasionally for a few "cold" minutes. He spoke to her, offered a short prayer, and went away. Occasionally, she would open her heart to me. One day she said to me, "My sister, even though I am sick and condemned to die, I have never heard a sweet word of love. It would have been a consolation to know that there was a young man who loved me."

It was not long before the parents' fears were realized. One day when I was sitting next to her, she closed her eyes and uttered some strange sounds. I immediately ran to alert them, and they came right away. It took less than an hour until she closed her eyes for eternity. The next day, the funeral ceremony took place at their house. There was no church or minister. Her betrothed read from the Bible and prayed. Then they buried her at the age of twenty-four. For quite a while, their friends and notable people came to offer their condolences. I never went out, and after Alice died, I did not want to go to their place. I continued to sleep in the same house for about three months. It felt like being in prison.

One day my cousin came to the house and said he had some good news. I no longer needed to be secluded or be afraid. The young man who had been pursuing me had been transferred to another town and would be leaving in a few weeks. "I think his mother and sister will also be leaving with him," she said. I thanked the Lord for saving me from this calamity also. When I returned home, my mother wanted me to stop teaching the children. She said, "Your exertions and torments are enough for you." She was right; she saw the condition I was in. Actually, I also no longer had the heart for it. However, I thought that if I stopped gathering the children, Meunever Hanem would also stop sending her child. Moreover, my mother's lie would come into the open, so I refused to do what my mother wanted me to do, and I did not send word to Meunever Hanem. A few days later she brought her son. I kept it a secret from my mother and told her about my mother's having lied about my being away. She told me not to worry, that she understood, and I had done the right thing.

Meunever Hanem gave me two letters from Ramzi and watched as I read to learn what he had written. I told her that he had written about the surgery he had had for his blind eye (I had no idea what this was about), that he had stayed in hospital for quite a while, that his mother had come to visit him, and that she had told me about his being ill. This is the only part of his letter I told her

about. She saw that I was very upset, and she said not to worry since he had gotten completely well. After she left, I read the rest of his letters. Before I left, she told me to write a letter and that she would come and get it from me.

Reading his letters, it became impossible for me not to be moved and not to cry. In bed in the hospital, he had been thinking about me, and about his dreams of longing. The only good news was that after his school finish in a few months, he would get his diploma. Before I left Meunever Hanem, I made her promise that she would write to him about the calamities that had befallen me.

That year, the winter was very severe with frequent rain and snow. It became very difficult for me to be in my room. Charcoal and firewood were very expensive. The Turks would go into the vacant houses of those Armenians who had been exiled and tear off the doors, windows and anything made of wood then burn or sell them.

During this severe winter, my uncle's wife got sick with pneumonia. She was already quite thin, had stomach ailments, and was unable to eat many kinds of food. The room in the basement was damp and hardly saw any sunlight. The doctor said that in this damp house with so much snow around, it would be very difficult for her to survive the illness and he feared that she would develop tuberculosis. She should be moved into a sunnier room. What was my uncle to do? Where was he going to find a better room? My mother told her brother that she would have her stay upstairs in her room and that she would do everything possible for her. It was a very wrong step since this was a very contagious illness. But my mother, despite every difficulty, took her to our room and put her to bed. My brother and his wife were very upset, and they had every right to feel that way since they were both young and had a little girl. There was a door between her room and the rest of the house. They locked the door and cut off all contact between us so that we never met with them nor had our meals together. Little Laura would knock on the door and say, "Grandma and Tantig Efronia, open the door; I want to be with you."

My mother cooked our meals, and they would come to the kitchen and take their share. We ate separately in an empty room that served as a dining room. I would meet with my students in a room downstairs. We passed a month this way. Dr. Hovsep almost lost hope, but it is God who gives life, and she passed the danger point and gradually resumed eating. She gradually regained her strength, and we moved her to my uncle's room. They expressed so much gratitude for all we had done and sacrificed. With God's help and our efforts her life was saved. We survived the winter this way or that way and thanked God for keeping us safe. The recovery of my uncle's wife made us rejoice and gave us much satisfaction.

THE NEWS OF RAMZI'S SUDDEN, TRAGIC DEATH IN APRIL 1917

Until February, although I was not receiving letters regularly, I did get some occasionally. Rasmzi, too, wrote to say he was glad that I, too, was receiving his letters. After that there were no letters. I got worried but told myself that these were not normal times and maybe they were being lost. I continued to wait and thought that Meunever Hanem would come to see me, but she did not show up. She sometimes sent her son with the maid. When I asked the maid why Meunever Hanem was not coming to see me, she said she was very busy. Weeks passed, and I got the same answer. When the maid came again, I took her aside to a corner. I spoke to her with sweet words to find out more about the situation and then insisted that she tell me; she started to cry. I gave up trying to get anything out of her. But my mind became perturbed. I wondered if husband and wife were having a disagreement or had heard some bad news from relatives. The next day the boy came with the coach driver instead of the maid. I did not ask any questions, thinking that I would get the same answer.

The next time the maid brought the boy, I asked her to tell Meunever Hanem that next time she should bring the boy herself so that I could see her since I missed her very much. The next time the maid came she said, "Meunever Hanem also misses you. On Saturday, she is going to send the carriage to your sister's house since your street is too narrow for it. He will then take you and your sister to her house." I said, "Fine." When we got there, Meunever Hanem was waiting for us. Dressed in black, she embraced me for a long time. I sensed that she was crying; she moistened my cheeks with her tears. We sat silently for a while until I said, "My sister, why have you stopped coming to our house? Have there been no letters from Ramzi? I am very worried. He has never taken so long to write to me. What is the reason? Has his illness returned?" She looked at my face, started crying, and said, "My dear sister, what shall I say? How shall I reveal the truth? Our and your much beloved" I cut her off and begged her to tell me quickly what had happened.

She got up, sat next to me, took my hands in her hands, embraced me again and told me with flowing tears, "Our and your beloved Ramzi, precious, incomparable, still in the flower of his youth, has been lost to us. One night when returning home, he had a terrible accident and was struck on the head. He was in the hospital for two days, unconscious, and finally died. It had been impossible to save him. His father and mother went and obtained permission to take his body to Persia to their family mausoleum. Two months later his parents were going to go for his graduation but now, instead, were crying on his coffin." I don't know what happened suddenly. It was as if I had been struck by lightning and the world became dark. I raised my head with difficulty and,

with flowing tears, I said, “My Lord. Why did You not take pity on this angelic young man? Why were You so cruel? We had put all our hopes and dreams in You.”

I had hardly uttered my last words when I fainted. I think I was in that state for an hour or so. When I opened my eyes, my sister and Meunever Hanem were trying to revive me by splashing cold water on my face and holding smelling salts to my nose. I could not utter a word. Meunever Hanem caressed my face and hair, dried my tears, and said, “I have neither the words nor the strength to console you. May God give you the peace and consolation you need.” We sat for a while. The maid brought coffee. I looked around the house. The days we had spent here together came before my eyes. I thought he would walk out of one of the rooms, his erect body and handsome face smiling at me, and come to where we were. It was a dream and remained a dream. The world became a dark place for me. The sun and the moon no longer shone for me.

We sat together for a while. Then my sister and I got up and with tearful eyes said farewell to Meunever Hanem. As we were parting, she said, “Dear sister, be sure that I will never forget you. You are part of our memory of our beloved Ramzi, and I will love you like I loved Ramzi.” We got up and parted from Meunever Hanem with difficulty. The carriage driver took us to my sister’s house. My sister sent word to my mother that I would be sleeping there. I immediately went to bed. My sister had dinner with her family then she came to my room. She tried to console me. I begged her to let me be alone, by myself. The locket that Ramzi had given me with our pictures was around my neck. I looked and looked at it and drenched it with my tears.

I shall not write anything more on this; let the reader imagine the rest. I am writing these lines when I am eighty-eight years old. I am incapable of writing and describing my falling in love years ago when I was barely twenty years old. And I will confess that even after the passage of all these years, when I was writing these lines, his angelic face was before my eyes and his sweet words of love were in my ears. So this is how my first and last unimaginable and immortal love ended in sorrow. Years later I read the love story of Romeo and Juliet, and I watched the film in tears. Just like our love. But they were fortunate to die together and to be buried together. My beloved was separated from me, leaving me disconsolate. Only his memory lives on.

OUR UNHAPPY LIFE AT HOME

The rest of 1917 turned out to be an intolerable year for me because of mishaps and our unhappy family life. Although my brother did not let us go hungry, the bread that he provided for us to eat consumed us instead. Yet we could not even tell him what we were going through, for we were certain that instead of opening his eyes to the reality of our suffering and coming to our aid, instead of noticing his wife's attitude towards us despite all that she was doing to us and all the difficulties that she was causing us, and instead of counseling her to do otherwise, he would get drunk, get angry at us, and blame us. I must say, with much regret, that my oldest brother, throughout his whole life, brought no honor to his family nor made himself useful to us. He exerted no effort to make his family live in comfort and happiness. Even during our most difficult years, he was fortunate and enjoyed himself in every way. Yet he did not deem us worthy to share his joy. Especially through his unsuitable marriage, he spoiled our family's happiness. All the hopes that we placed on him and all of the sacrifices that we made for him bore no fruit. I do not want to detail all that we suffered during the four years of the war that we lived with him and his wife since, after all and despite everything, he is still my brother, and she is our bride. I will only relate one unbelievable and unforgivable event. I think that the reader will then understand his attitude towards us and the injustices he committed against us.

As I mentioned earlier, my grandmother had moved in with us following my grandfather's death so she could be more helpful to us. She had no children other than my mother. My grandmother sold all of the furnishings of her house. She gave part of the money to my mother, and with the rest she supported my brother Yacoub during the two years that he studied pharmacy in Beirut. She made this sacrifice with the hope that she would be useful to us, would live with us for the rest of her life, and enjoy us. But unfortunately neither my grandmother nor we were able to benefit in any way from my brother. Let me again say that by his premature and untimely wedding to someone who was unsuitable for him, he created many difficulties for us. I am sure that had he married an intelligent and good-natured woman, his life, as well as our lives, would have been quite different. A man often makes his life unhappy with his own hands.

At that time, the houses in Aintab had no baths. Everyone, man or woman, went to the public baths - the women during the day and the men in the evening. There were some ten to fifteen such public baths in Aintab, which were frequented by Turks and Armenians alike. They were always crowded. We could go barely once a month, so often we had to heat water at home and wash ourselves in the kitchen.

One Saturday morning the bath was unusually crowded. With some difficulty, my mother and our bride bathed my grandmother then bride and grandmother went home. My mother and I then bathed ourselves with some effort and returned home very tired. The next morning being Sunday, my uncle's family and we were sitting around the courtyard pool. Our bride came over holding a pitcher of *miyan sherbet* (a delicious drink made with licorice) and poured it into the drain at the side of the pool. When my grandmother saw this, she told her gently, "My daughter, when we came from the bath yesterday and were feeling so warm, and you sent the maid to bring this sherbet, I wish you had offered me some of it instead of now throwing it away." Yester said nothing and went back upstairs.

That evening, my brother asked my mother at dinner to come up to their room after the meal. My mother went up and was quite late getting back. When she returned, it was obvious that she was very upset, and her eyes were full of tears. We asked her, "Why did my brother call you to their room? What did he tell you to get you upset like this?" She waited for a while then said, "I don't know how to tell it to you without upsetting you also." Finally, she turned to my grandmother and told her, "Mother, you have hurt our bride's feelings very much by what you told her this morning, especially since it was said in front of others. That is why they called me upstairs. I told Yacoub many times, 'My son, it doesn't matter; she is your grandmother. She has gotten on in years and loves you very much. You must forgive her.' But it was to no avail, so my patience ran out and I asked, 'So what are you going to do about it?' He responded with much difficulty. They have proposed three alternatives, Mother, as your punishment: First choice, you go and kiss their hands and ask for their forgiveness; second, you leave the house; third, you no longer sit at the same table with us but eat by yourself."

I can never forget how upset we felt. We were at a loss as to which alternative to choose. How could my seventy-five-year-old grandmother go and kiss their hands and ask for their forgiveness? How was she going to leave the house? She had no other close relative to live with. So we were obliged to accept the third alternative. "Mother," I said, "let my brother and his wife have their dinner first, and then the two of us will eat with my grandmother separately." "My daughter," she answered, "I already proposed that to them, but they would not accept it. If we insist on it, there is going to be a big row." My poor grandmother said, "My dear daughters, it doesn't matter. God is great. Let it be so. Don't be sad."

So starting that day, we would go upstairs for dinner, feeling awful, while my poor grandmother would be sitting on the steps with her head bent. After we were finished with dinner, she would come and eat by herself. Although my grandmother was a Christian, this blow was so hard to bear that I am sure she cursed them in her heart. She only said, "They too have a child. I only ask God that their children treat them the same way they have treated me."

There are many people on this earth who do evil and are not punished while they are alive. But my brother and his wife were punished. I remember with sorrow what I saw with my own eyes, and I came to believe that if an innocent person, especially a parent, does not receive from her children the respect due to her and does not enjoy their love, she is going to curse them in her heart whether she wants to or not. The curse will unfailingly reach them, and they will be punished. I will return to this later. The Bible says, "Honor your father and mother so that your life will be long." God has made this promise and fulfills this promise.

THE ARMISTICE: 1918

By 1917, the war had lost its momentum through the victories of the Allies and the defeats of the Turks. The Turks were in very bad shape. They had lost much territory and many cities. Their ports on the Black Sea were occupied by the Russians; the Turks already feared the Russians most of all (they called them "Blind Moskoff"). From Erzurum, Van, and Bitlis, where many Armenians used to live, the entire population had been deported. The English entered Palestine and occupied Damascus and Syria; the French took Cilicia. Seeing all this, the Turks were fearful and began to treat the Armenians more kindly. The Armenians took a deep breath.

General armistice. When the British entered Aintab and occupied the surrounding towns in 1918, the Armenians rejoiced over the end of the war and the presence of the British. In particular, those refugees who had come from other towns and had sought refuge in Aintab were glad that they would be able to return home soon. There were no men or children among them; all of them had been massacred or kidnapped. The British Army began to move in with their troops during February. Most of the soldiers were Indian; they surrounded the city and occupied all of the government buildings. Their first task was to get rid of those government officials who had taken part in the deportation of the Armenians. Gradually, those who had been deported to the various parts of Syria began to return to Aintab and to the neighboring towns. But virtually no one returned from the deserts of Deir Zor; thousands of people, old and young, had perished. We only knew a few who had escaped from Deir Zor. They had remained alive by hiding under the bodies of the dead and had then walked during the nights to Aleppo. When they returned to Aintab, the stories they told were impossible to bear or even to believe. I think all Armenians have read about the incredible torments of those who were massacred in the deserts of Deir Zor.

But for those who do not know, let me write some accounts that I heard at the time. The British formed committees which included survivors who knew the locations where people were annihilated. They found quite a few Armenian children who had either been kidnapped or adopted among Arab nomadic Bedouin tribes. Many mothers had willingly given up their children to them so as to save their lives. Some of these children remembered their being Armenian and how they had been taken by these Bedouins. Those who were younger than five remembered nothing and had become just like Arabs. The faces of the girls had been tattooed. I do not recall the exact numbers, but hundreds of these children were gathered and brought to Aleppo, where they were sheltered in orphanages set up for them.

There were quite a few children who had to be forcefully taken away because they had been very young at the time and had grown very attached to

their captors. Similarly, quite a few young women who had been kidnapped by the Turks, Bedouins and Chechens had married them and had their children. Some of them left their new families and returned to their former homes; but others refused to be separated from their new husbands and children. They said, "They killed our own children in front of our eyes; we now have no one left. Where are you going to take us? Who will receive us? Who will look after us? Who will marry us? We are sure that we will be able to do nothing other than work as maids. We prefer instead to remain reconciled with our fate and to stay with our husbands and children."

I personally know quite a few of these women who did return and were subsequently sorry since they ended up working as maids. They said, "What did we gain by staying Armenian?" I knew very well a woman called Zabel; all of her family had been massacred and not a single person intimate to her had been left. She returned only to remain an Armenian. But she very much regretted it because all she could do was to work as a maid. She often cried and remembered her husband, who was a Bedouin, and her four children. She would say, "He was a man who really appreciated me, and my children were so sweet." There were quite a few people like her among those who returned. Some other women, despite all their torments, still retained their looks and were able to get married. Others went to America to live with their relatives. When I came to America in 1976, I attended a meeting of an Armenian ladies' organization where I met some sixty elderly women, some of whom were survivors of the 1915 massacres. Quite a few of their daughters were also there. Those who are interested in the stories of such survivors, should read *The Revenge of an Armenian Woman*.⁴ After I came to America, I sent for it from Boston.

Very gradually, Aintab began to be set to rights again. The Armenian population began to grow as deported families returned from the Arab regions. Many of them found their homes destroyed or occupied. They appealed to the government, and the occupied houses were returned to their owners. Those whose houses had been looted and damaged were not able to repair them right away, so they moved into other empty houses and gradually fixed up their own. Many Armenian families had left their valuable belongings with Turkish friends, who now returned them to their rightful owners. Thus, quite a few people were able to recover their goods more or less.

I recall that in Kayajek Depé, where almost no Turks lived, two rich Armenian neighbors, the Krajians and the Jebejians, had adjoining houses. The Jebejians had pulled down one of the common walls, concealed their valuables and money, and rebuilt the wall with the same stones, concealing what was behind. When their son Dikran came back, he recovered the valuables. One of their neighbors told them how the Turks had come when they left with the hope

⁴ Hrach Tarbassian, *Hayuhiyin Vreje*. It was reprinted in Beirut, in 1974, by the Hamazkayin Publishing House.

of finding much loot and, unable to find anything, they were astounded as to where they could possibly have concealed their belongings. There were also dry wells in Aintab where others had concealed their valuables. Some people even had special hiding places to which they had retreated to conceal themselves during dangerous times. When the deportation of Aintab began, the first to be driven away were the Tashnags (members of the Armenian Revolutionary Federation Party). They had all armed themselves earlier with the intention of protecting the community during dangerous times. However, I very much regret that they served no useful purpose and instead created suspicion among the Turks, making them more hostile towards the Armenians.

When the deportation began and Armenian houses were being searched, to conceal their weapons the Tashnags put them in a coffin and, led by a priest with a Bible in hand and some mourners following the coffin, they went back and forth to the cemetery and buried their weapons. They took this very wrong step at the time and were blamed for it by many. We heard at the time that the people of Zeitoun, Hadjin, Karahisar, and Ourfa had fought against being deported. They had resisted for many months, had killed and gotten killed; but they had bravely preserved their women's honor and had not surrendered to the militia, the murderers and the hyenas. When, finally, they had realized that they were not going to be able to resist any longer, they had set fire to the Armenian quarters and burned themselves to death.

When these Tashnags returned from exile, we had heated arguments with them. They were told, "If you were not going to use your weapons at a time like this, what was the point of arming yourselves? We were persecuted by the Turkish government, and you provided pretexts for their massacres. Innocent people in the hundreds were driven away, led by a few policemen, and herded into the deserts to be massacred there after all manner of tortures. Innocent virgins, lovely women fell into the hands of hyenas and were dishonored. Would it not have been better if you had rebelled, killed, and gotten killed yourselves?" They answered, "We did not know that all of the Armenians were going to be massacred and annihilated." Although these weapons were not used at the time, they nonetheless proved to be useful later on. Those who returned dug them out of the graveyard and armed themselves for future dangers. So in 1920, when war broke out in Aintab, they were able to protect themselves for months under the leadership of the Protestant Adour Levonian and, from the Apostolic church, Kalemkerian and Father Tavoukjian. I think the books that have been written on the self-defense of Aintab have already been read by all Armenians.

Just as the entire community was happy, we too were happy that we were going to be free of further confinement and would be able to live without fear. My brother Yervant was now able to return, and my brother Yacoub was very glad. Quite a bit of money had come into his hands through Aram Khatchadourian. As I mentioned earlier, he had had an agreement with the

government to provision the troops in the area. He saved many families from deportation by selling them work permits. And he made a lot of money in the process.

After the British retreated from Marash and the places where he worked, he came to Aintab and collected a lot of the debts that people owed him. I do not quite remember, but I think he gave my brother some hundred and fifty gold pounds, which was a substantial sum of money at the time. Virtually all of those who had survived the deportations managed to return. Some families had been sent to other cities to work because they had valuable skills. Among those were the three Karamanougian brothers, the brothers of our bride, about whom I wrote earlier. When the British occupied Ourfa, the brothers were free to leave, but they stayed another year to carry on their *alaja* business and made more money. Only their mother returned in response to her daughter, Yester's, wish. Because she was pregnant and about to give birth, the mother came and stayed with us for a while. When she saw how comfortably settled her daughter was and met her first grandchild, she was very pleased. But we were not particularly pleased to have her because we knew very well that mother and daughter had the same character. Yet, I must say that the mother was quite intelligent, and she showed much love and respect towards us.

A week after her arrival, she came to our room one day. She was puzzled by something but could not get a straight answer from her daughter. She had then decided to find out from my mother why it was that my grandmother did not sit with us at the table during our meals. After making some conversation, she turned around and said to my mother, "I am going to ask you something, and you must tell me the truth. I have noticed since I arrived here that Tervanda Hanem does not sit at the table with us but instead eats alone after we have left." My poor mother didn't know how to answer her, so she said, "As you see, my mother is old, and they are young. She eats very slowly and feels awkward about it. So she wanted to eat by herself and more freely after everyone else." "In-law, this explanation does not make sense to me. This can't be the real reason. Tell me the truth," she insisted. So my mother became obliged to tell her the truth. When she heard it, it was as if she turned to stone. She shook her head, got up and left.

A few days later she came back to see my mother and asked that my grandmother rejoin the family at table from now on. My grandmother was not reluctant to let others know how she felt, be it good or bad. So she turned to Yester's mother and said, "I cannot accept your offer. It is impossible for me from now on to sit at the same table with them. I will never forget to the day I die what they did to me in this regard. I cannot easily forget or forgive it. If I had had the means or someone else close to me, it would have been impossible to keep me in this house for a day longer. Please don't talk to me about this matter again." "It is all right, Tervanda Hanem," said the bride's mother. "It is for the young to offend and for the elderly to forgive." "May God forgive

them,” said grandmother. “But it is written in the Bible that one must love and respect one’s parents so as to have a long life. Let them open the Bible and read it for themselves.” Having said this, she got up and went downstairs.

For a few months we too tried to persuade her, but it proved impossible. She would often go to the kitchen before us, take a plate of whatever was cooking, then go up to her room and eat there alone. A few months later, on August 25, 1918, my brother’s second daughter was born. He was very disappointed and upset because he was expecting a son. I, too, was disappointed because he had promised me that if he did have a son, he would present me with a nice ring when I gave him the good news. It had been towards evening when the English woman obstetrician from the American Hospital, Dr. Hamilton, came to deliver the baby, who was born early in the morning. My brother was asleep while I waited for news from my mother. When my mother gave me the news that the baby was a girl, I felt reluctant to tell him about it. But I went, nonetheless, and said, “Congratulations, Brother, you have a baby daughter. Thank God both your wife and baby are well.” He looked at my face, did not say a word, and pulled the quilt over his head.

Following the delivery, Yester became very ill. The entire burden of her care was on us. Although her mother was staying with her, she was quite old and was unable to do all that was necessary. The doctor had suggested that once a day we should have Yester sit in a warm bath. It was so difficult. There was no bathroom in the house and no running hot water. We heated the water in the kitchen, and then I would carry it up twenty-five long steps to her room. We had a large container in which we would make her sit, and as the water got cold, we kept adding hot water. Then everything had to be carried back downstairs again. This went on for four to five weeks, and she got much better. Her mother could not stay any longer and returned to Ourfa.

At the start of the war, eight Armenian physicians had been sent to the front. Six of them returned safe and sound; two of them did not. One of them was Dr. Bilemjian. Word came to his family that he had become ill and died; he was a bachelor. The second one was Dr. Garabed Kalfayan, the son of my mother’s uncle. He is the person about whom I wrote on earlier. When the war ended, his family tried everything possible for many months but were not able to get any news of him. So they began to suspect that he must have died in some remote and unknown place, or that he had been taken prisoner to some place from where he was not able to send any news. His brothers and sisters felt hopeless. They were expecting that once the war ended, he would return, reunite with them, and then marry me. Though this was a very heavy blow for them, I must confess that I felt glad. I was certain that otherwise my difficulties were going to be renewed.

My sister Azniv and her family, who had been deported, returned safe and sound. She had at her bosom a cute baby, her son Edward, her fourth child, who was born while they were away. They had nowhere to stay, so they came

to us. The room on the ground floor of our house was vacant, so we settled them there. My uncle who used to live there had moved to his sister-in-law's house since her family had been exiled to Deir Zor. Of the eight members of that family, all but one had perished; only the third son, Dikran, had returned to Aintab after hiding underneath dead bodies and making his way to Aleppo, as I described earlier. Their house had been taken over by the Turks, but he was able to have the occupants evicted and moved in. But rather than live alone, he wished to have his aunt and her family stay with him. In this way, my poor uncle was saved from living in the damp downstairs room. Although during the war he had earned a fair amount of money and could have bought himself a house, he decided not to hurry and wait for the city to settle down under the British occupation.

A month after the British came to Aintab, my brother Yervant returned. While he had always been handsome, he was even more so now, having grown a small moustache which was very becoming on him. Following his return, it was not long before we sensed that my brother Yacoub wanted to separate from us and move to another house. Although they did not say anything about it openly, we learned that they were looking for a house. Finally, one day my brother opened up to my mother and said, "Mother we are now four persons, and this one room is not enough for us. We must, therefore, move out of this house. We have rented the house of my cousin Hagop Bezjian, and we will be moving in a few days." What could my poor mother answer? "I don't want to stand in your way," she said, "nor can I stand in your way since you have already made up your mind. But have you given any thought as to how we are going to live? Your brother has only just returned." In response to this my brother said, "Don't worry; my brother can work in my pharmacy since it now belongs to me. I will give him a good salary, and if necessary, I too will help." Although we were perturbed, at the same time we were also glad that from now on we would be free from our burden of indebtedness and all of our other difficulties. But my brother Yervant was rather upset that they had made this proposal as soon as he had arrived. But anyway he didn't expect anything different from them.

The city more or less returned to normal. Although the Armenian population had greatly diminished, everyone went back to his business and making a living. The members of the Apostolic church and the Protestants got together and opened a few of the schools. Most of the buildings of the old schools had been destroyed, but the houses of two wealthy families who had been deported stood vacant. The houses of the Nigoghossians and the Nazaretians each had five to six large rooms which could serve as classrooms. So they divided up the boys and girls aged ten to twelve, assigned them to classes, and hired a male and a female teacher for each group. The schools opened in September of 1918. Among others, they also invited me and my brother to teach. I accepted. What was I to do staying at home? Besides, the

pay was good at one gold pound a month, which at the time was a good sum of money. I needed to help my family. But Yervant did not want to teach and preferred to work in his brother's pharmacy since he intended to become a pharmacist himself and hoped to study at the American University of Beirut as soon as he could.

The higher level schools could not be reopened. The American College was occupied by the British, who had converted its rooms to offices. And anyway, there were very few young men of college age. The same was true for professors. The American professors had returned to America while the four Armenian professors who were deported did not return; they had been killed. They were Babigian, Matossian, Hasserjian, and Baliozian. Only my cousin, Professor Lutfi Levonian, and the college president, Dr. Merrill, were in town. Levonian was appointed the principal of the reopened schools, and Dr. Merrill was given a job by the British.

I want to relate here an unforgivable act committed by Dr. Merrill, which I should really call a crime. At the time of the deportations, twenty-five of the young men who were boarding students at the college were not able to return to their cities and stayed on at the college. When the government had the college searched for deserters, they asked Dr. Merrill if he knew of anyone hiding there. And the criminal dog - only this title suits him - said, "Yes, there are twenty-five young men who are not able to return to their cities and are staying here." So he personally had turned them over. The students threw themselves at his feet and begged him not to hand them over, but he told them, "I cannot lie, and therefore, I must turn you in." I wish these young men had attacked him and killed him; such a false Christian became responsible for the deaths of twenty-five young men.

The seminary for women also did not reopen for similar reasons. The missionaries, Miss Forman, the president, and her two assistants, Miss Blake and Miss Morton, had returned to America.

Our family life found its former peace. It was as if a heavy burden had been lifted from our shoulders and we had been given a new life. My brother Yervant and I would go to our jobs in the morning and get together again at the end of the day. In the evenings, we often went out or entertained people at home. My sister Azniv's family now lived off our courtyard. When my brother separated from us, my sister took over his vacant room, so the room downstairs could now be used as a dining area.

After a few of the schools reopened, it was necessary to also open at least one of the churches. The Protestants of Aintab had three churches: The first church was in Kayajek Ustu; the second church on Heoyik Street; the third, church on Rahan Street, which was very far away and in the middle of a Turkish district. Most of the Armenians who used to live there had not been deported but, nonetheless, had been almost annihilated. The second church, to which we belonged, had been converted by the Turks into a stable for horses and much of our congregation had been deported and lost. The furnishings of the church had been stolen. So they thought it best to reopen the first church. Although that building, too, had been damaged, and not a single one of its chairs or benches had been left behind, they repaired it fairly well, got together the necessary furnishings, and invited Reverend Bulbulian from Aleppo to be its pastor. The choir leader of the second church, Levon Levonian, organized a new choir and services began to be held every Sunday in the morning and in the afternoon. The elders of the church wanted to have the choir members of the Protestant and the Apostolic churches get together and present a concert to which would be invited the British officers and part of the congregation. This proposal was accepted and rehearsals began. For this concert, the professional musician Uvezian was invited, to be assisted by Levon Levonian. We had little hope that sufficient numbers of young men and women could be found, yet indeed, enough of them turned out to form the choir.

It took a month's hard work to bring off this venture. The British accepted the invitation cordially. The large hall in the courtyard of the Apostolic church was chosen as the most suitable site for the concert. The Turks had converted the main church building into a prison, and all of its contents had been looted, but the building had been left intact. Even though the large hall in the courtyard had also been emptied, the organizers spent a fair amount of money and got the necessary furnishings. So that is where the concert took place, and it turned out to be very successful. The British guests appreciated it very much. We sang songs in English and Armenian, including some of the hymns from the liturgy of the Apostolic church. They all came forth and congratulated Uvezian, Levonian, and the rest of us.

As I said, our family was quite content, and my brother and I were busy with our jobs. Yet, without saying anything to each other nor revealing anything to our mother, our hearts and minds were preoccupied with thoughts and plans for the future. My brother would sometimes open his heart to me because his thoughts did not involve issues that had to be kept secret; they were not insoluble problems. The future appeared bleak to him. He had put all his hopes on his brother, but now he was very disappointed with him and found it hard to take. Also, he carried a grudge in his heart against him, and for good reason.

My mother and grandmother had spent everything they had on Yacoub, depriving the rest of the family of a lot of things, with the hope that he, in turn, would take care of his brother. But instead of being useful, he made his family unhappy. The life he had led in Iskenderun is already known to the reader. He returned to Aintab without a penny. He became dependent on his brother for his pocket money. My poor brother Yervant remained confined to the house for the four years of the war while those who had finished college with him had fled to Beirut as soon as the war began. So, by the time the war ended, they had already completed their studies and returned as pharmacists and physicians. He could not continue his education even when the war ended. When he had given up hope, he still turned down the teaching offer and preferred to work in his brother's pharmacy with the remote expectation that he could perhaps gradually prevail on his brother to help him. But I regret that all of his hopes came to nothing. He asked Yacoub time and again, but his brother turned a deaf ear, and he told him, "I cannot both pay for your education and support my family." Yervant was very disappointed and searched desperately for someone who would lend him the money, but he could find no one. He even proposed borrowing money from his own brother and was refused. He felt very sad and utterly hopeless. My poor mother consoled him and kept saying, "My son, do not despair. God will open a door."

As for me, I had given up all hope about the future and my life. I was in a state of bewilderment and felt as if I was living in thin air. The world had turned bleak for me, and I had given up on life. I was an unhappy person. Nothing gave me joy. Though we both kept quiet about it, I knew that my poor mother constantly worried about me. She was aware of all my secrets, and she knew very well the decisions I had reached. My brothers had no idea. My mother had kept everything a secret from them. Sometimes my brother Yervant would joke saying, "Come on, Sister; marry a rich man and pay for my education." He did not know that his sister had given up on all thought of getting married. After the death of her beloved, she had turned her face away from the world. Even if a king had asked for my hand, it would have been impossible that I marry him. So I was in a more difficult position than he was.

It is as if God had heard my brother's voice. We learned that Elias Norian had returned from America. A close relative of my brother-in-law, Elias had

gone to America before the war and had become very wealthy. Now he had come to Aintab to get engaged, to get married, and to return.

One day I returned from school and found my mother very worried. I knew that something important was on her mind. I did not ask any questions and went up to my room. I changed my clothes and sorted out my students' papers on my desk to prepare them for the following day. In a little while, my mother came up with a tray in her hands and two cups of coffee. "My dear, I waited for you to come down, as you always do, to drink your coffee before settling down to work," she said. I thanked her. We drank our coffee and talked for a while about the events of the day. Then she turned to me and asked, "My daughter, do you know who came to visit us today?" "Who?" I asked. "I think you remember. He had gone to America before the war, a close relative of your brother-in-law Elias." "They used to be called Boshgezenian, (the wanderers) but now have changed their name to Norian (new). He was always a very good looking young man but now has become even more handsome and fashionable, even though he has put on a lot of weight. After you had left for school this morning, he came to see me. When I welcomed him and asked how his mother and father were doing, he said, 'You know, Ovsanna Hanem, I have come to you about an important matter. I have a request. Even before I went to America, I had made up my mind to ask for the hand of your daughter Efronia, but I was not able to. I went to America, the war started, so I was obliged to remain there. When the war was over, I returned right away to reveal this wish to you. I hope you won't refuse me.' He told me quite a bit about his business, how very successful he has become, and so on and so forth." "Fine," I immediately cut my mother short. "So what did you answer him?" "I told him, 'I can't give you an answer before I discuss this matter with my daughter. She may or may not remember you. I don't know.' 'In that case,' he said, 'shall I come back on a day when she is here and we can talk again? Meanwhile you can tell her about my visit today and my hopes and wishes in this matter.' And he left."

When I heard this, it was as if lightning struck me. I didn't know what to say, so I turned and told her, "Dear Mother, I do not want to hurt you, but are we now to reopen these old accounts? Am I to repeat over and over again what I have already told you and thereby get hurt and hurt you? My whole life and all my secrets are clear to you. I am going to be obliged to tell you for the last time that I am not going to get married. There is going to be no wedding for me on the face of this earth. You must surely know that before or after the death of my beloved Ramzi, whom I worshipped, there could be no other suitor for me, no matter how rich, no matter how handsome, that I would be willing to marry. There is no man on this earth who could replace his love and take his place for me. Though he died and his painful death separated us from each other, it is you who separated us in the first place. You should know that until my death, his eternal love and his sweet memory will remain in my heart.

I shall remain faithful to him and will be consoled by that fact. He died with my love and with my sorrow; so shall I. You should know, Mother, and if I have hurt your feelings, I beg your forgiveness, that my life means nothing to me anymore. The pleasures of the world do not interest me any longer. He died like an angel, without attaining what he yearned for, and entered his tomb, and so shall I. From now on, I have decided to dedicate my life, to sacrifice myself to care for the sick, the injured and those in need of help. All my thoughts, night and day, are on how to fulfill this wish and to put into practice these decisions. I beg you, my dear mother, if you love me and do not want to torment me, no matter who comes to ask for my hand from now on, refuse him and do not tell me about it. Take pity on me for what I have suffered all these years.”

My mother, my poor mother, left the room without saying a word. It was already dark. I took in my hands the locket with our pictures that Ramzi had given to me and the handkerchief with which he had wiped my tears on our last separation. I pressed them to my bosom. I knelt down and begged God with my tears to help me and to show me a way to achieve my purposes. I did not go downstairs; in a while, my mother brought my dinner to my room. We said nothing to each other, and she went down.

The following day was Saturday. I had no school, and I did not get out of bed. My mother brought in my breakfast and sat next to me. I could sense that she was troubled. With a mother’s love, she caressed my cheeks, and implored me to listen to her. She said: “I know that you don’t have the heart to listen any longer to these things. But as your mother, I have certain obligations. So listen to the counsel of your mother, who always thinks of you and your future. Please, my dear, you must give up these ideas. It is time for you to get married, and you must consent to marry some suitable young man. You are now more mature to think and to decide. My dear, who are you counting on? You have no father, and we have no money. Your oldest brother has turned his face away from us. Your other brother is in dire straits himself. The poor boy is working day and night to set aside enough money to go to school for at least a year. He is then going to work the following year, and then finish his schooling and secure his future. How are you going to support yourself? If you remain firm in your decision, how are you and how am I and your grandmother going to live? Take pity on yourself and on us and get married. All your suitors are rich and well established. None of them are men to be scorned or refused.”

I could not contain myself and said to her, “I beg you, Mother, that you, too, have pity on me. It is enough. You are pouring fire on my wounds.” My mother saw the condition I was in, and without saying another word, she closed the door and went downstairs.

I stayed in bed for the rest of the day. I was lost in dreams and somber thoughts. The life I had been through over the past few years passed in front of my eyes like a caravan. The flower of my youth had been spent in the midst

of war, family turmoil, and my own sorrows. And now my future appeared bleak, hopeless, confused, and helpless. I gathered my thoughts silently, and feebly pulled myself together. I realized that these thoughts were going to make me even less hopeful and were not going to put into practice my decisions. So I decided to gain control of myself, to restrain my emotions, and to get to work right away. I was certain that offers of marriage were going to keep coming one after another.

Settling the Norian affair turned out to be very difficult. My mother had to finally tell him openly, "Don't come to see me anymore; the matter is not in my hands. Go see my daughter, and if you can convince her, do so." Prompted by my mother's words, he started to come to us unannounced during those times that I would be there. I turned him down several times, but he would not give up hope. When he came to see me for the last time, he begged that I listen to him and think it over. He promised to make me happy in every way possible. He revealed to me the sincere love he had had for me over the years. Let me only say that it all went in one ear and out the other. At any rate, not to drag it out any longer, I made him understand on that last occasion that there could be no marriage with a one-sided love. "I am very sorry that I have not been able to love you." He was upset; he left without saying goodbye, and he never came back. We heard that he had gotten engaged to the daughter of the wealthy Ashjian family and that they planned to get married right away and leave.

Since I was sure that other marriage proposals were to follow one another, I thought it would be best to try to implement my decisions as soon as possible. If I were to succeed in my plans, then I would have some tangible excuse to refuse my suitors more easily.

My first intention was to become a nurse. I knew two nurses who worked at the American Hospital. I went to see them. They had gone to the American University of Beirut during the first year of the war when the roads were still open. The war then had made it impossible for them to return to Aintab, so they had stayed in school. Since it was impossible for them to get money from their parents, the school had allowed them to study for free on the condition that they would, in turn, work at the hospital until they had paid back their debt. They had then returned to Aintab to continue working in the local hospital. I spoke with them at length and got some information. They gave me an address to write to, and they promised to write to the school about me as well. But they did not have much hope since so many young men and women had been educated free during the war that the school was no longer in a position to accept students who could not pay. Yet they promised to write nonetheless. I immediately wrote to the school, begged them to accept me, and promised to do whatever was necessary in turn. While I waited for a reply, the marriage offers multiplied. It would be superfluous to write more about them: the same story, the same problems. The most difficult part was that my repeated refusals created a great deal of discord in our family. We had

arguments. My brothers exerted more and more pressure on me. They began to inquire into the reasons for my behavior. My brother Yervant, especially, kept asking me for explanations. I said to him, "What reasons do I need to have? Marriage does not interest me. I want to go to school and get more educated. I wanted to go to Marash College even before the war, but I couldn't." He thought this was all nonsense and insisted that I tell him my true reasons.

I remained silent.

"You cannot fool me," he said angrily. "Surely you must have some serious reason. I suspect that you love someone and are keeping it a secret from us. Tell me the truth; if you love someone and if he loves you and wants to marry you, why are you keeping it a secret from us? Let him come, so we can see him and get to know him. If he is someone suitable for you, we will get you engaged and married to him." I immediately realized that my mother's finger was in my brother's questions. It became impossible to hold back or to lie any longer. "Don't stay silent, answer me right away," he insisted. I could restrain myself no longer. I clung to his neck and said, "I beg you, my dear brother; don't torment me anymore. I promise you, I promise to tell you everything. Yes, I loved someone and wanted to marry him, but my mother, oh my mother, would not consent."

"Fine," he said, "so where is he now? Tell me, and I will help you." "Oh dear brother, he is not alive; he died most painfully. He did not attain what he yearned for and left me disconsolate. Although he died - forgive me my brother - and years have passed, his love is still in my heart. My memory of him is unforgettable and his loss irreparable. We had promised each other that only death could separate us. His death did separate us, but I shall stand firm on my promise, nonetheless, not to get married to anyone else and to remain faithful to him. There is no one like him. He was an angel." I got up and brought the locket with our pictures in it and said, "Tell me, Brother; tell me the truth. How can anyone replace this peerless young man, this handsome young man endowed with all the very best qualities? It is impossible. So I beg you, my brother, leave me to my sorrow. Just as he did not attain what he yearned for and went to his grave, so will I go to my grave..." I could continue no longer. Tears began to stream from my eyes. I held my head in my hands and begged him to consider it enough for today. He was very moved, took my hands, and we went downstairs since it was dinner time.

As the days passed, my dear brother began to treat me very differently than before. He took a greater interest in me. He turned away many of my suitors before they even got to me by making up various excuses. When he saw that I was sad, he tried to change my mood. I became convinced that I could open my heart to him and that he would understand me, empathize with me, and help me.

It so happened that our church choir was invited to sing a few songs during a public event. Since the men were busy during the day, the rehearsals were held in the evenings. One night, on our way home following the rehearsal, my brother asked me to have a cup of coffee with him at the Educational Club. Taking advantage of the occasion, he turned to me and said, “My sister, I want you to open your heart to me today and to tell me all that happened. Who was this young man? Whose son was he? Where and when did you meet? Tell me about your falling in love with him and your relationship with each other. You should tell me everything without keeping anything secret.”

Although I did not feel like it, since I was obligated by my promise, I agreed to do so. I had no wish to renew my sorrows, but as I said, I was obliged. So I began to tell him about all the events from the time we went to Iskenderun until Ramzi’s heart breaking death: all the difficulties I went through; the sort of person he was; whose son he was; his last visit from London to Aintab, where he stayed for fifteen days; the wonderful days we spent together; what his father had written during his Aintab stay about the dangers of the war, and how the war was going to be disastrous for the Armenians; his father’s request that Ramzi persuade my family and take me to London with him; how they wanted me to go to school at their expense while he himself finished his own education.

I do not need to repeat in detail all that I told my brother since the reader already knows about it. And my brother, too, now got to know everything. He listened and listened and then said to me, “Sister, I have listened to you and understand your sorrows. You are quite right in every respect. But the past is past. Everything would have been possible had he been alive. Let me only say that my mother made a serious mistake by keeping all of this a secret from us. She should at least have told me about it. If during the deportations we had not been saved, first by the grace of God, and then through the help of Dr. Hovsep, who knows into whose hands you would have fallen anyway and which of the murderers would have abducted you. But that is now all in the past. God spared us. I must nonetheless tell you, dear sister, that even though you were bound with a sincere love, the fact that the young man did not belong to our community was a big obstacle; it would not have been a suitable marriage. The entire Armenian community would have blamed us, and we would have been ‘chewed up’ in every mouth. Look, my dear, I realize that he was worthy to be loved in every way, and I am very sorry that such a person had to die through such an unfortunate accident. Though I never met him, just looking at his picture has generated sympathy towards him in my heart. May God illuminate his soul! My dear sister, do not forget him; keep his memory in your heart. You fulfilled your promise and have not married anyone else since his death. But now years have passed. You are wasting your life. I am sure that if he could know in his grave the course you have taken; he would not consent to it. And he would not want your love for him to stifle your heart.

Listen to the words of your loving brother who has now learned your secrets and whose heart is one with you. It is a pity. You are young. Marry someone suitable you can come to love and be happy with.” We talked long into the night; then we got up and returned home.

After I had spoken to my brother and revealed to him all of my secrets, it was as if I felt a lightness in my heart. I drew strength from him and became certain that he understood me, that he would sympathize with me and would help me. But these conversations and my brother’s counsel did not turn me away from my plans: I was going to exert every effort to become a nurse or a nun.

Several weeks passed. I heard nothing from the school of nursing. I wrote to them again. Meanwhile, we had guests. My aunt Mennoush and her son, Haroutune, came to visit. They had stayed with her daughter Mary and the Khatchadourians in Aleppo for the duration of the war. Haroutune had worked for Aram and made some money. Before the war, he was engaged to the Yenikomshian’s daughter in Kilis, but when the war broke out, they were not able to get married. So he had now come to Aintab with his mother to get married. While staying with us, they looked for a house. The room where my sister Azniv was living actually belonged to them. So they could have asked her to leave, but they now needed two rooms since he was going to get married. Finally, they found a house which they furnished fairly well and readied themselves for the wedding.

When all the arrangements were made, his sister, Mary, came from Aleppo with her oldest daughter. A letter was sent to the bride’s family to get her ready. Word came back that she was ready, so they decided on the day of the wedding and the location. The mother-in-law of Mennoush Mama’s brother had a large courtyard which was quite suitable for the occasion. So when everything was decided, a few people went to Kilis and brought the bride to Aintab. It was a very nice wedding. Quite a few people were invited. The Rev. Bulbulian officiated. I played a few pieces on the piano and sang. We were well entertained.

Finally, I received from Beirut an answer to my letter. Just as my friends had predicted, my request was turned down. They wanted me to pay at least the first year’s tuition. I felt very discouraged. Where was I going to find the 35-40 gold pieces which they wanted if I was going to be a boarder. If I lived on the outside, I would still need 20 gold pieces. I figured that by the end of the year I could save only five gold pieces since I had to help with the household expenses. Even if I could borrow 20 gold pieces, where would I go? Where would I live? Where would I eat? I had no relatives in Beirut. I was in an impossible situation. My sisters and my brother Yacoub had the means to help me, but how could I tell them my reasons? Not only would they not have helped me, but they would have gotten angry at me and given way to many harsh words. Nor could I have spoken to my brother Yervant since he

would have opposed it; besides, he himself was struggling to find money for his own education.

I next thought to explore the possibility of becoming a nun. The family of Dr. Niziblian's wife was Catholic. We knew them well. I had been quite close to their daughter while we were in Iskenderun, and they loved me very much. So I went to them one day, and I was cordially received, but it was clear that they were quite astounded by the purpose of my visit.

The Niziblian's sister, called Kendirjian, was a nun, and as my luck would have it, she happened to be there. So I also spoke with her and told her the purpose of my visit. The girl stared at me with an incredulous look on her face: Why would a Protestant girl ever want to be a nun? But she said nothing except that we would need to see the Mother Superior and discuss the matter with her. "She has gone to Aleppo for fifteen days. As soon as she returns," she said, "I will make an appointment and take you to her." I thanked her. She then added, "Sister, think well. The life of a nun is not an easy life."

I returned home and waited for the answer to my second wish. It was not long in coming. As soon as the Mother Superior had returned from Aleppo, Sister Kendirjian sent word that she had made an appointment for me. I went to their house, and we went on together from there. The Mother Superior received me with smiles and wanted me to reveal to her the reasons for my wanting to become a nun so that she could then decide accordingly. I was obliged to tell the truth. So I briefly told her my story. I was moved and begged her not to turn me down. She stood silent for a while and then looked me in the face and said, "I am very sorry, my daughter, but I cannot help you at all, and do not recommend that you become a nun. Although it would give us much joy to save a soul by having you become a nun, you will not be able, my dear, to sacrifice your whole life to that purpose. An attractive girl like you cannot become a nun. We tried it with a few others, and they gave up before a year had passed. And we were not able to stop the secret visits of the young men who were after them and in love with them. It became a headache for us." I looked at her and begged, "Dear Mother, I have confessed to you that my beloved is dead, and there will be no one to bother you." But she shook her head and cut me short.

I bowed my head. Tears came to my eyes, and all my hopes vanished. I went home feeling hopeless and very troubled. When I reached home, I revealed nothing. I went up to my room, held my face in my hands, and sat silently for a long time. During the evening meal, my mother told us that our bride had come and invited us for dinner on the following day. My brother and I were surprised since she rarely thought of us or invited us for meals.

The following evening, we went there. My brother Yervant had gone there directly from the pharmacy with his brother. Some other guests, whom we did not know, had also arrived ahead of us. They were Yester's uncle Soghomon Soghomonian and his family, consisting of his wife and three children, one

daughter and two sons. We were introduced to each other. They had gone to Jerusalem before the war and had lived there for quite a while. The uncle, a dentist, had opened a clinic there, but now they had all returned to Aintab. The oldest boy, Levon, had gone to Paris to become a dentist and then had rejoined his family. He was a bachelor. We said we were pleased to meet him. Levon was handsome enough to attract attention. He had blue eyes; he was tall, blonde, and unusually well-dressed. They had a few drinks; then we had dinner, the time passed, and we returned home.

It seemed that my journey to Golgotha had not yet ended. Barely two days had passed when word came that they wanted to visit us. We all suspected that they were coming for me. He had barely taken his eyes off me during that evening. My brother Yervant told my mother, "They are coming for my sister. Don't invite them. This time I am going to be the hurdle; let's just leave my sister in peace for a while."

My mother would not agree. She said, "My son, we don't really know why they want to visit us. Whether it is a simple visit, or with regard to your sister, we cannot refuse to accept them. After all, we have to think of our bride and your brother; we would hurt their feelings. Won't they ask us why we refuse to see her uncle's family? For what reason? It will cause a lot of commotion."

We agreed that my mother was right. So they came the following night. After we had sat for a while, they brought up the subject. My mother and brother had agreed beforehand how to respond to them. My mother said, "You are welcome, a thousand times welcome. But we cannot give you an answer right away since we have just gotten to know you. And to tell you the truth, my daughter has decided to go to Beirut to further her education. She has applied and has been accepted and is planning to leave towards the end of the summer." They sat for a while, made all sorts of offers, and tried to persuade us, but my brother and my mother stood firm on their word. I very much regret that the matter did not end this way; I had more to deal with. But I gave no further serious thought to this matter. My brother and my mother had already given their answer. The young man very much wanted to meet with me in private. I had neither the inclination nor the strength, so I refused. I am not going to write at length about this. It lasted for months. He exerted every effort until he gave up hope. To the very end, he kept sending letters and presents. My sister used to go to his father to have her teeth fixed, and they persuaded her to act as an intermediary. So she began to bring me letters, flowers, and presents from him. I got angry at her, refused to accept any of it, and told her, "From now on, if you bring anything else from him, I am going to be angry at you." My sister was so taken by his love for me that she would sometimes blame me, as did all of my girlfriends, who could not understand how I could turn down such a young man. But it all went in one ear and out the other. Similarly, our bride and my brother were upset with me. One day she said to my face, "You go and find a better man and marry him." I did not answer.

School closed on the 28th of June following the graduation ceremonies. The political situation was not good. There were rumors that the British were going to withdraw, but it was unclear who would replace them. Although the Armenian community did not put much faith in these rumors, yet they felt fearful. When the British had occupied Aintab, the Armenians had held jubilant demonstrations. The Turks were not pleased at this and told them openly, "Do not rejoice. They are going to withdraw for sure, and you and we shall remain together."

Mrs. Marie did not return to Aleppo right after her brother's wedding. We learned that her two brothers-in-law, Aram and Haroutune, were coming to Aintab to get engaged and get married. Aram's younger brother came first. He got engaged to Beatrice, the daughter of his cousin Sarkis. As relatives of my cousin Mary, we too were invited to the engagement.

Before long, Aram had also arrived with the wife of his older brother, Sarkis Efendi. My cousin Mary, who visited us frequently, told us one day that her brother-in-law Aram had come, and she knew that her sister-in-law, Mrs. Maroom, was trying to set up one of the daughters of her relatives for him. "But," she said, "I don't think she is going to succeed. I am sure Aram is going to take the girl that he has set his mind on." Neither my mother nor I said anything. And we did not ask who that girl was. But I had the presentiment that I was the one he had decided on, and fear entered my heart.

On another visit, Mrs. Marie again brought up the subject of Aram. So as not to offend Mrs. Maroom, Aram had visited a few of her relatives and also met the daughters of two rich families. But in each case, he had rejected them for one reason or another. Mrs. Marie then turned to my mother and said, "Sister Ovsanna, I would like to stay over this evening for dinner. Mrs. Maroom and Aram are also going to come later. Send word to your son Yacoub to be here."

One need not be a prophet anymore - it was clear that they were coming to ask for my hand. When Yervant came home, he went to get his brother after dinner. Then Aram and Mrs. Maroom arrived. I shook their hands, offered them coffee but, without staying with them any longer, went downstairs.

Mrs. Maroom opened the conversation and declared the purpose of their visit. She conveyed Aram's wishes to marry me. My brothers kept silent. My mother said, "Your visit is most welcome, but I cannot give you an answer now. You are not strangers to us. Both we and my daughter know you very well. I shall speak to her and get her opinion. Unfortunately, I must forewarn you that there have been quite a few suitors; there is no lack of them now, yet she has refused each of them and continues to refuse everyone. She says she does not yet wish to get married but instead wants to pursue her education for a few more years. She wanted to go to the Marash College before the war but could not. Nonetheless, give us some time to think it over, and I will let you know."

My mother called to me upstairs. I had already prepared what we were going to offer them. They enjoyed our hospitality, got up, and left.

My fears had come true, I realized. After they left, my brother Yacoub stayed behind. They wanted to talk to me, but my oldest brother's opening words were preemptory. Quite rudely, he turned to me and said, "Let me see you refuse this one also. Come to your senses. We cannot refuse someone like Aram, and you are not going to reject him. Speak up right away, and give us your consent." I lowered my head and made no reply. My mother knew the difficulty I was in. She turned to my brother and said, "Marriages are not forced. We pressured your oldest sister into marriage, and she became unhappy and remains unhappy to this day. Give her time; let her think about it." My brother got up and left, murmuring and muttering.

The next day, Aram came to us without forewarning. Although I had no school, there were various and sundry tasks which I needed to attend to, but I could not leave the house. My mother and I welcomed him. He asked my mother if he could speak with me in private. My mother agreed, and we went upstairs.

"Look here, Efronia," said Aram, "although I came here last night with my two sisters-in-law, I only did so for the sake of civility. I don't need intermediaries. They have no share in my decision and in my proposal. I don't want them to get involved in any of this, although I am sure that they both love you very much. This is a matter that belongs to you and to me. It is we who should agree with each other. It is we who will love each other. It is we who will get married and form our family. I have long admired you and loved you. When you came to Iskenderun, I used to hear that you had many suitors whom you turned down, but I expressed no interest at the time and made no offers. This was because, although I was not very young, I had not yet readied myself to get married. I worked for my brothers. I wanted to attain a certain position first and then get married. But the Great War intervened. Though you probably know all this, let me tell you briefly my and my family's circumstances during the four years of the war. Since Iskenderun was a seaport, it was shelled very heavily from the very start of the war. The inhabitants fled, and we, too, were obliged to send our families to Aintab. We made a serious mistake by not sending them to Cyprus instead. When the deportations from Aintab started, they managed to escape to Aleppo. I stayed by myself in Iskenderun. I sold all we had and placed the money in the bank, thinking it would be safe there. We had a lot of wealth. Our stores were full of goods, and the houses of my two brothers were full of their belongings. I took along only 1000 gold pieces and went to Aleppo, thinking the war would not last long and we would return. I was badly mistaken. When I arrived in Aleppo, I found out that the money my brothers had taken with them was almost gone. They had large families, and life was very expensive. When I saw their situation, I immediately got down to work and obtained the

commission to provision the regional army. I went fearlessly to the area of Marash and Islahiyé. I think you know about my life and work at the time. I often came to visit you, and your brother profited quite a bit from working with me. Quite a few others likewise benefited and made money. I worked hard and made a great deal of money. Now, as you know, my brother Haroutune is here and engaged to be married soon. My sister got engaged in Kilis, and she, too, will be getting married. Although I had given them their share of my earnings, I have taken on, nonetheless, all of their wedding expenses. Now that I have discharged my obligations, I have decided that I should also get married. And as I confessed, I have chosen you. I confess to you that I love you most sincerely, and I want and beg you not to refuse me. Trust me: I am prepared to love you, respect you, and devote my life to making you happy.”

He expressed himself with such affection and sincerity that I admired his sweet words and intelligent thoughts. Let me say no more. He turned to me and said, “If you have any questions, don’t hesitate to ask me. I will answer them.” “Thank you,” I said, “but please forgive me; give me a few days to reconcile myself to the idea of getting married because I have not been able to give any thought to marriage so far. If I accept your offer and if I have any questions, I will put them to you.” “Thank you. By all means,” he said, “but I beg you not to delay your decision since I will not be able to stay here for long. I have a lot of business to attend to. I will not even be able to attend my brother’s wedding. Let us decide and get engaged; then a few months later we will get married. Since my brother Sarkis is going to return to Iskenderun, he wishes to be present at our wedding.”

My mother came upstairs with coffee. He sat with her for a while, expressed the hope that we would meet again soon, and left.

I fell into deep thought. My hopes were shattered on all sides. My brother Yervant was going to go to Beirut in September to study. I would be left with my mother and grandmother. They said the political situation was not good. The British were expected to be replaced by the French. It was feared that the French would not be able to stand their ground and fighting would break out with the Turks. I wondered to myself what would become of me if these difficulties came about. If the schools did not reopen and I was not called back to teach, how were we going to live? That became my biggest concern and fear. If war broke out with the Turks, what would be the fate of the Armenians? The prospect of more massacres was particularly horrifying to me. I decided to talk things over with my brother Yervant. He already knew about all of my secrets. But for various reasons, I could not immediately get together with him. I felt most impatient since my worries weighed on me most heavily. I was like a bird with broken wings. I needed help to fly and to reach a decision.

A day later, before Yervant left for the pharmacy in the morning, I said, “Brother, do not plan to go out this evening after dinner. I need you.” When

he came home in the evening, we had dinner and went upstairs. I told him about Aram's visit, about his proposals, his words, and his promises. My brother listened to me in silence and then asked, "Well, Sister, tell me, what sort of impression did he make on you? Answer me truthfully." "Brother," I said, "I can tell you honestly that I was positively impressed by him. I became convinced that he is wise in his thoughts and sincere in his expressions of love towards me and his wish to marry me. He did not try to sway me with empty words." "That is all well and good, Sister," he said, "but the most important thing: have you decided to accept his proposal and to marry him gladly?" "Yes," I said, "but there is still a struggle in my heart. Will I be able to love him? Will I be able to marry him? Will I be able to forget my old dreams and my old fantasies? Will I be able to reconcile myself, or will I keep remembering them, and make myself unhappy, and make him unhappy?" I could not continue any longer, my tears began to flow. My mind and my brain stopped functioning.

My brother saw how I felt and came to my aid, "My dear sister, I understand you very well. You are quite right. But I ask you, I beg you, and as your loving brother, I implore you that you set aside from here on your old memories and your old dreams. You are intelligent; try to forget. In due time, you will also be able to love this man; you will be able to respect him and marry him because he is a worthwhile man. From now on, you must think about yourself for you have suffered enough. You must think about who you can live with happily, who you can live with comfortably. You were quite wise not to be duped by Levon Soghomonian no matter how ardently he pursued and continues to pursue you. You were not taken in by his being handsome and his being madly in love with you. Good looks and wealth are transient, but the intelligent and worthwhile person remains worthwhile even if he loses all he has. Aram is such a person. My dear sister, have no fear; I am sure that you will not regret marrying him." He spoke so sweetly, so sincerely, and so well that I said, "My dear brother, I will spare no effort; I will conquer all of my difficulties. Yes, I promise you to accept his offer."

My brother embraced me and said, "Thank you, dear sister. Your decision is going to solve your problems and ours. I will send word to him to come here so you can tell him you've accepted his proposal."

We separated from each other joyfully. Although my heart was not at rest, it was as if a big burden had been lifted off me. I went to bed; I took out Ramzi's locket; I took it in my hands; I pressed it to my bosom. I knelt down, lifted my eyes, and prayed to God that He would help me not to regret my decision and ordain the best. I looked at Ramzi's photograph, kissed it tearfully, begged for his forgiveness, and promised him that his memory would remain forever in my heart. Having heard from my brother, Aram came to us the following afternoon. When I told him my decision, he became very happy. "I thank God that He has fulfilled my wish," he said. "I hope and feel

certain that throughout our entire life, we will live lovingly, and we shall form a happy and joyful family.”

The next day, he came back with Mrs. Marie. It was the custom in Aintab at the time that the final consent had to be obtained from the head of the family. So we decided to invite my brother Yacoub and his wife, my sisters and their husbands, and my uncle Movses and his wife. My uncle had acted as the head of our family and had been like a father to me. On their side, we invited Mrs. Maroom, Mrs. Marie, Aram’s brother Haroutune, and Aram. When they had all come, Mrs. Marie opened the subject, she turned to my uncle and said, “We have come over tonight to ask for the hand of Efronia for my brother-in-law, Aram. What do you say? I hope you shall not refuse us.” She had barely finished her sentence when my uncle blurted out, “I will not only give him Efronia but my four daughters as well. He has only one fault - he does not drink arak.” Everybody laughed. Aram went to him and said, “I promise you that I will drink whenever I am with you.”

During these conversations, as the girl, I would not be present. So when the discussion was over, my sister took me to where they were. It was the custom that on the day that the “words were tied” (the Turks call it “taking the word”), the boy’s side would bring a red apple by a way of congratulation. Apples were very hard to find in Aintab. The village where they could be found was two hours away. The apples were brought in on a large tray. Aram gave me one. (I put this apple in my drawer, and gradually it dried up without rotting. When, years later, we came to America in 1978, it was in a box with our other belongings, and it is still with me). They had also brought along all sorts of sweets and fruits. They ate and drank, congratulated us, and left.

A day later Aram and his two sisters-in-law, as well as my brother and his wife, came to lunch to decide the day of our engagement. There were many arrangements to be made: Who was going to be invited? Where was it going to be held? Who was going to officiate? The date was set for July 15. The location was going to be Aram’s grandfather’s old house, which had been sold to the Kurkjians. It was a large house with a big courtyard with a large pool in the middle. My brother Yacoub took it upon himself to see the owners and obtain their consent. Then Aram came up with a surprise proposal: “In these circumstances,” he said, “to give you your due, I want the engagement to belong to you; hence a Protestant minister should officiate at the ceremony and place the rings. The wedding will belong to us, and the Archbishop with his priests will marry us.” We were very pleased. “Furthermore,” he said, “I will pay all of the expenses of the engagement but will leave the arrangements to you.” My brothers immediately got to work. They had to hurry because Aram had very little time. They went to see the Kurkjians, who cordially agreed to lend their house. A dress was ordered for me - it was of pink silk and very beautiful. Word was sent to the Protestant church and Rev. Bulbulian

accepted gladly. And they asked that the church choir under L. Levonian should sing a few songs.

On the day of my engagement my brother Yervant did not go to the pharmacy. He busied himself with the remaining arrangements. There was no electricity at the time and lanterns were used for illumination. For this occasion, numerous lanterns were strung up. One hundred and fifty guests had been invited, so many chairs had to be rented. Aram had sent cases full of sweets, candies, and nuts; he had also hired two waiters.

At seven o'clock the guests arrived. An organ had been brought over, with two violinists. It was a very lovely engagement party, and everything worked out perfectly. The reverend spoke very well. The choir sang three or four songs, including a liturgical hymn (*sharagan*) while we were exchanging the rings. Everyone congratulated us. The minister took the Bible that he was to present to me, and said, "Dear ones, let this book guide you in your life." Dr. Hovsep and Dr. Jebejian got up and said a few words. They said, "We know both families well; we know the engaged couple well. They are well suited to each other. May God bless them and make them happy." The guests were all in a good mood. They ate, drank and danced until late at night and then took their leave.

Aram stayed for barely fifteen days following our engagement. He could not stay any longer since he had business concerns to attend to and arrangements to make for our wedding. During these fifteen days, we were together virtually all the time. During Aram's stay, many of our relatives invited us to dinner. He, in turn, held two large banquets. One was for our relatives. Aintab has a very nice picnic site called Kavaklek, which is full of trees, bushes, and flowers and has a stream which flows through it. That is where he invited us. He had hired a special cook who prepared all of the food on the spot. Two lambs were slaughtered and made into various types of kebabs. There were also other different dishes. We had both lunch and dinner there with some fifty to sixty people. The other banquet was on the occasion of his brother Haroutune's wedding, which was held at a site where there were waterwheels. More or less the same guests attended.

Aram had ordered gold jewelry for me from Aleppo, so when it arrived, he brought it over. After he returned to Aleppo, the jewelry that he had ordered from Istanbul arrived, and he also sent it to me. It is not necessary to describe one-by-one all the things that happened during those fifteen days. Many young women and their families were envious of me, but I took everything for granted and did not derive much pleasure from it all. Aram was trying to please me in every way possible. He hired a carriage so we could go for rides, and after he left, he placed the carriage at my disposal until our wedding.

The fifteen days passed. Mrs. Marie had stayed with Aram in Aintab, but Mrs. Maroom had returned to Aleppo. On the day of his departure, Aram came with a second carriage. So that I would not be returning alone, we had Jemilé,

my uncle's oldest daughter, join us. Jemilé and my cousin Mary got into the carriage that was going to transport them, while Aram and I took the carriage that was going to stay with me. We went on to Beshgeoz, which is an hour's journey from Aintab. It was impossible not to remember. Those who read these lines will recall that this is the same location where, four years earlier, we had accompanied Ramzi when he was returning to London after his fifteen-day visit to Aintab. It was there that we had parted, not knowing that our parting was going to be forever. We went into the same coffee house and had coffee. Then they got into their carriage and left while Jemilé and I returned home in our carriage. On the way back, I could no longer restrain my tears. Jemilé laughed at me saying, "You are crying because your fiancé went away. Shame on you. What is there to cry about? You will be reunited with him very soon." The poor girl had no idea why I was crying, what memories had awakened in my heart.

Soon after their departure, I received a letter from Aram. They had had a comfortable journey and had found everyone to be well. His brother, Sarkis Efendi, sent his greetings. I also received from him separately a congratulatory card. Sarkis Efendi had asked that our wedding not be delayed since he was planning to take his family to Iskenderun and wanted to be present at the wedding. They wanted to set the date for early November, before the weather turned cold. So Aram was asking us if we thought November 7 would be convenient for us. We responded that it would be.

Now that our wedding date was set, we began to get organized. First, it was necessary that we prepare a trousseau, at least the essentials. We were in need of money. I had saved barely four to five pieces of gold. My brother Yervant could not help; he was working day and night to save enough for his tuition for at least a year. He had wanted to become a physician, but he had had to give that up since it required four years of study - where was he going to find the money? So we pondered the matter at some length. Yervant had told our brother Yacoub that he should help a bit with my trousseau but had been told that he couldn't. We thought of borrowing money from someone, but who could that be? My brothers-in-law were not the helping sort. We thought of selling my share in our house; the most suitable buyer would be my oldest brother, should he accept the offer. We called him over and my mother had a lengthy conversation with him. Finally, he accepted and bought my share in the house for 15 gold pieces.

With the money in hand, we immediately got to work. I should mention that before he left, Aram had offered to give us whatever money we would need. But my mother had not accepted it since it would have been embarrassing to take the money while she had a son who was a pharmacist. My brother-in-law Elias was going to go to Aleppo on business, so we asked him to buy a number of things for us and paid him back. Aram had sent word that we should not trouble ourselves with making a large trousseau and that

he would be sending quite a few things himself from Aleppo. We couldn't have prepared a large trousseau anyway. Mennoush Mama and my sister Aroussiak were very helpful to us. Mennoush Mama had been a very accomplished seamstress; also her sister Gullu Baji (rosy sister) had come to Aintab from Kilis, and she, too, was handy with the needle. They cordially offered to come to us and to help us. So for the next fifteen days, both of them would come in the morning and leave in the evening. Sometimes when it got late, they would sleep over.

Over fifteen days, almost all the preparations were made. Aram had sent enough material from Aleppo for several formal dresses, and this we gave to a competent seamstress. My measurements had been sent to Aleppo, and four expensive dresses that were made in Aleppo now arrived along with my wedding gown, which was magnificent and admired by all who saw it. And there were many other presents: shoes, handbags, perfumes, and very beautiful gold jewelry. So one way or another a fairly attractive trousseau was put together.

Although a big burden was now lifted from us, we still had another problem to deal with and didn't know how. It had to do with my grandmother and my mother. My brother Yervant was going to leave, and I too would be moving to Aleppo in several weeks. Where were my two mothers going to stay? How were they going to live? Who was going to take care of them? After giving it much thought, my brother Yervant and I decided that we should propose to my mother that she go to Beirut to be with Yervant after my wedding and my grandmother should stay with my sister Azniv. When we told them about this arrangement, my mother accepted gladly, as did my grandmother, though she found the prospect of separating from my mother rather difficult. She said, "You are all going to leave; it is going to be difficult for me. But I must reconcile myself to whatever is most convenient for you. I do not want to cause difficulties."

Our cousin, Levon, had graduated from college with my brother. He, too, wanted to become a pharmacist, and they, too, were not well off. When both of them decided to go to the American University of Beirut, they agreed to rent a room together so as to save money. When Yervant informed Levon that, following my wedding, my mother was going to go to Beirut to stay with him, he proposed that they rent a larger room so the three of them could live together, eat together, and split their expenses three ways. Levon accepted gladly and was very pleased. So both of these problems were solved, and our minds were at ease.

My mother in particular was very happy. We thought that during her absence we should try to rent our part of the house. But it was not easy to find tenants in Aintab (since both rich and poor had some place of their own to stay). We sent word to various quarters and a few prospective renters came. One couple from Kharpert with a three- or four-year-old girl turned out to be

the most suitable. They liked the house, and we found them to be decent people. We asked for fifty *mejidihs* and they accepted. (That year one gold piece was worth five *mejidihs*). We promised them not to empty the house completely and leave some of the furniture for them to use. They were very pleased. We agreed to turn over the house to them on October 20.

The day of my wedding was getting close. My brother Yervant was going to leave on October 15. When my brother Yacoub heard about all this, he proposed that after Yervant left, we should move in with them so that I would leave as a bride from their house. My mother told him we would think about it and let him know.

I have lived all my life trying to be agreeable, and in all matters, difficult or easy, I have looked at the positive side of things. But it was impossible for me to accept this offer from my brother. We had lived with them for four years, and we had suffered through so much, in silence, by closing our ears and mouths. They had separated from us and left us on our own. We had had to live on my brother's and my earnings without any help from them. They had not worried about us for a single day. They had taken no interest in us. I had got engaged, and there had been no money for a trousseau, yet he had not asked once if I needed anything. He had never thought of helping us. He had bought my share of the house with much reluctance. Not once had he done anything for me as his sister. I told my mother that I would not go to them. My mother said, "My dear, let's just go for a few days. When we hear from your fiancé that they are ready to take you, we will leave their house when your brother is not at home and go to your sister's house. Let us not meanwhile create quarrels and arguments." I felt sorry for my mother and consented. We got a porter and sent ahead part of our goods to the house of my sister Aroussiak. My grandmother said, "I will not go to Yacoub's house for a single day." So she went to my sister's house also. They had an empty room, and my brother-in-law wasn't home, having gone to Izmir on business.

On October 15, my brother Yervant went to Beirut with Levon. We had packed the rest of our belongings, so we brought a porter and sent them to Yacoub's house. While we were staying there, many of our relatives invited us for meals and gave me presents. The few days that I spent at my brother's house felt like years. I could not stay there for very long. Eight to ten days later, when my brother left the house in the morning, I called a porter and sent our belongings to my sister's. My mother and I got ready and said goodbye to my sister-in-law. She looked at us astounded. She turned to my mother and asked why we were leaving. I had already instructed my mother to say that this is what I had wished to do. My sister-in-law then turned and looked in my face. She obviously remembered all that she had done to us. She remained silent, and I said nothing. I had decided to use this occasion to unburden my heart of all the things she had done to us, but then I didn't want to confront her and tell her these things.

When my brother came home that evening, he looked around and realized that we were not there. He found out from his wife what had happened and became very upset. Following dinner, he came to my sister's house and began to talk haphazardly. He had had quite a bit to drink, which is what he did when he was angry, and wanted to quarrel. He seemed quite upset, and finally he brought up the subject and asked abruptly why we had left their house. My mother kept quiet. I turned to him and said, "Brother, don't get angry or upset. Whatever you have to say, say it to me. I am the one who wanted to get out of your house unannounced. I stayed those few days to satisfy my mother's wish. I would rather not have said anything about my reasons, but I am now obliged to tell them to you. I do not want to leave from your house as a bride. Until now, which of your obligations towards us have you fulfilled?"

"Think back and remember Iskenderun, the circumstances under which you returned, your marriage, the intolerable conditions we suffered through while living with you for four years. Let me only ask you to think about your behavior towards your grandmother and towards your own mother, who had sacrificed everything for you. Think of your brother and think of me: Which of your obligations as an older brother and as a father did you fulfill? You left us alone and moved to another house. Did you interest yourself in us for a single day? I got engaged, and you did not spend a single penny on me. Now that I am going to get married, did you ever ask if I needed anything? We asked for your help, and you said that you could not give it to us. You bought my share in the house under pressure. In one word, you did nothing to make me forget that I was an orphan. In short, we went through so many difficulties, and you did not fulfill a single one of your responsibilities. Do you think that now, by having me leave your house as a bride, you will be fulfilling your responsibilities? I don't want that. I don't accept it. I grew up as an orphan, and I shall be married as an orphan. Let them come and take me from my sister's house. I still love you, and I forgive you."

He did not utter a sound; he closed the door after himself and left.

Meanwhile, the Aintab Armenians once again went into mourning. The British began to withdraw gradually. Although it was decided that the French were going to replace them, there was much fear that hostilities would break out between the French and the Turks after the withdrawal of the British. This was likely to be very bad for the Armenians. The poor people who had just returned from exile! After the torments they had been through, the many victims each family had suffered, the entire families that had been massacred while they alone had returned miraculously, in a terrible state. They had barely gotten resettled, and now, once again, they faced war.



Aram and Efronia in 1923

MY MARRIAGE IN ALEPPO ON NOVEMBER 7, 1919

After my brother Yervant left on October 15 for Beirut, we got word from Aleppo that on November the third my brother-in-law, Sarkis Efendi, and his wife were coming to Aintab to take me to Aleppo. Aram had written that we should bring along anyone we wanted to be guests at our wedding. We decided that my mother should accompany me since a few days after the wedding she was going to leave for Beirut to be with my brother. My sister Aroussiak and my cousin Anitsa were also to come along. We invited them, and they gladly accepted.

My brother-in-law and his wife arrived on the expected day and were accommodated in my brother-in-law Haroutune's house. They stopped by at our house in the evening, and we met briefly. They told us that we would be leaving in two days. Everything was already ready. My brother Yacoub invited them for dinner the following evening, along with my brother-in-law Haroutune and his wife, my sisters and their husbands, my two uncles with their wives, Mennoush Mama, and her son Haroutune and his wife. It was a well prepared dinner. I don't know how he ever thought of making this invitation.

At that time, there were no means of travel except for carriages. Only the British Army had cars. Sarkis Efendi exerted considerable efforts to rent a car from them. The Red Cross had a number of ambulances, and through the intervention of an influential friend, he was able to rent one of them for 18 gold pieces for our trip to Aleppo.

On the morning of November the 3rd, they came to take us. They loaded up our belongings, and we started on our way. Until Kilis, we traveled with the last retreating British convoy. It was a large contingent consisting mainly of Indian soldiers. When we arrived in Kilis, we rested for a few hours at my sister-in-law's house. Then we took her with us and headed for Aleppo. Within an hour of arriving there, we saw seven or eight carriages that had come to meet us. We got out of the car, and I joined Aram in one of the carriages, while the rest of them made themselves comfortable in the others. One of the young

men who had come to welcome us, a relative, got into the car and went ahead with our luggage while we followed in the carriages.

In Aleppo Aram had rented a nicely furnished house with a long flight of stairs. They had set aside one of the rooms for us to rest in. Then they dressed me in a very beautiful dress which had been made in Aleppo, and we went to the living room. They had set a table in the dining room with all sorts of dishes, drinks, sweets, and fruits. We ate and drank until late, when the guests left, and we went to bed quite tired. The following day, after we had rested for a while, we moved my trousseau into the large closet that had been set up in our room. We spent the day with such preparations. The following day, Friday evening, our wedding was to take place.

Although the family lived in a large house and had two maids, they had decided to hold the wedding reception in a hotel. They had rented a very nice hotel called "Iskenderun" for fifty gold coins and had left all the arrangements to the staff. On the day of the wedding the woman who was to dress me and do my hair came over in the evening. I put on the magnificent dress with a veil on my head held in place by a crown. I had a long train made of tulle. She also dressed six beautiful girls in light blue silk dresses, with blue ribbons in their hair and bouquets in their hands; they were to walk ahead of me. And two other girls were to follow me and hold up the tulle.

At six o'clock all of the members of the family went to the hotel. The guests were to arrive at seven. I and the girls stayed behind along with my brother-in-law, who was going to stand next to me during the wedding. At seven-thirty a carriage which had been decorated with ribbons and flowers took us to the hotel. We went up to the hall, which was very large and full of guests. Everyone was dressed very elegantly with many of the men in tuxedos and the women in long dresses. They were all distinguished people. At the head of the room, on a platform, two large armchairs had been placed for the bride and groom. On one side was the orchestra of the Nalbandian Brothers with their musicians and singers. Part of the floor had been left vacant for dancers. In another area there were two large tables, on one of which were placed various dishes and on the other sweets, fruits, and nuts.

When we entered the hall the orchestra began to play. Aram came forward and took my arm. The Archbishop and four priests, dressed in their brilliant gowns embroidered with gold thread, were waiting for us on the platform. We stood in front of them hand-in-hand. Khatchig, the son of my brother-in-law Yeghia (who had died a few years before), was at the time twelve or thirteen years old; he was the godfather and held the cross. It was a glorious wedding.

At the end of the ceremony, we remained standing in front of our chairs. Mrs. Maroom came and placed a pearl necklace around my neck. My pearl earrings had already been put on earlier. Everyone came to congratulate us. My brother-in-law, Sarkis Efendi, put a pair of gold bracelets on my wrist. Other close relatives also gave me gold jewelry so that after a while there was

hardly room to place anything more around my neck or on my arms. When Mrs. Maroom was putting the pearl necklace on, I don't know how it happened, but my veil brushed against her face. When I tried to adjust it, my hand brushed against my ear, and I noticed that one of my earrings wasn't there anymore. My mood was disturbed. I had a bad presentiment. My mind was already full of old memories which kept coming before my eyes. I kept trying to look happy. But when this happened, it was impossible not to be sad.

I told Aram about it, and he said, "Don't make it known; I will buy you a better one." But he noticed that it did not help my mood. So he called Sarkis Efendi, and they spoke softly. Someone was sent to search the carriage that had brought me to the hotel. Someone else was sent home, but it was not to be found there either. I felt very bad, not because of the loss of the earring itself, but because of the bad presentiments that it made me feel.

The celebrations went on until late at night. The guests gradually left, and we returned home. When I woke up in the morning, I noticed that the girl who had come to dress me had placed my clothes on the sofa. I picked them up to hang them in the closet, when something fell to the floor, and I saw that it was my missing earring. Apparently it had gotten hooked onto the dress. I was cheered up.

On the Sunday following my wedding, I again put on my gown and my bridal veil with the crown, and lots of people came to congratulate us. For several days, wedding festivities continued. A week later, the guests who had come from out of town began to leave. My mother went to Beirut to be with my brother, and my sister and cousin Anitsa returned to Aintab. Eight days later my brother-in-law, Sarkis Efendi, his wife and their youngest daughter, Arsiné, went to Iskenderun. Their two older daughters, Aghavni (Dove) and Verkiné, as well as the daughter of their oldest, deceased brother whom they had adopted, were placed in a boarding school run by Catholic sisters in Aleppo. Mrs. Marie's oldest daughter, Arminé, was also placed there. So those who were left at home in Aleppo were Mrs. Marie, her son Khatchig, her younger daughter, Alice, and the two of us. The house felt empty. But every Saturday and Sunday the four girls came to visit us, and we had a lot of fun with them. Although our days passed pleasantly, life was also quite fatiguing. During the month of November there was a constant stream of guests who came day and night. The weather was fine. In other years it got cold in November.

Barely a month had passed after our wedding when terrible news began to arrive from Aintab. The Turks had attacked the Armenians and the French. The entire Armenian community was in a state of fear. Those who lived among Turks had fled into Armenian quarters. Once again, leaving everything behind, they had sought refuge with their relatives or had rented homes. It is unnecessary for me to write about the Aintab war since newspapers and books have been filled with those accounts.

When we heard about the fighting in Aintab, my mood was completely changed, especially since my sisters, brother, and all our other relatives were there. We were in the process of arranging to have our wedding portrait taken, but got so upset that we couldn't go through with it. We heard that they were in need of everything. Many of them had not been able to move their stores of food for the winter. Convoys of French soldiers came to Aleppo for provisions. With each of them we would send back to Aintab packages of food, but how much could we send to the many families there?

In this connection, let me mention something. There was a family in Aleppo who were intimate friends of Aram. All four brothers were musicians and singers. They were the ones who provided the music for our wedding. The oldest brother, Kevork, had gotten married two or three months before us. They often came to visit us, and one day when the bride and her mother-in-law were at our house, the conversation turned to the war in Aintab, and I began to cry. The mother-in-law bent over and whispered something to the bride. Mrs. Marie was very curious, so she began to question the woman as to what the whispering was all about. The woman did not want to tell us, saying that it was some unimportant issue that had crossed her mind. But Mrs. Marie was not satisfied with this answer and pressed her further. Finally, the mother-in-law blurted out, "What can I say, Mrs. Marie. Since your bride came here, our bride has been creating all sorts of difficulties at home with her complaints. She is very envious of your bride and says that if one is going to get married, that is the sort of good fortune one must have in marriage. When I saw your bride was crying, I whispered into my daughter-in-law's ear. 'There! This bride, too, has her sorrows which make her cry'."

Several months passed in this manner. Rumors began to spread that the British were going to withdraw from Aleppo as well. We weren't planning to stay in Aleppo beyond the winter anyway. When we had got engaged, I had asked Aram where he was planning for us to settle. I had told him, "If you are going to go to Iskenderun, it will be impossible for me to live there." And he had said, "Under no circumstance will I go to Iskenderun. You can be certain that we are going to settle in a large city, either in Izmir or in Istanbul." That had set my mind at ease, since I did not want to go back to Iskenderun at all and reawaken my old memories.

The rumors about Aleppo began to come true. Aram did not want to stay there any longer. He said, "Let us go to Beirut temporarily, and we can decide there where to settle." I repeated again that he should never be tempted to return to Iskenderun. He said I could rest assured that he was going to stand firm on his promise. We began to get ready gradually. He had made a serious mistake in buying all that fine furniture for the house since we had no intention of settling in Aleppo. I asked him once, "Since your intention was to settle in another city, why did you spend so much money furnishing this house?" He said, "A man gets married only once. It doesn't matter; we will sell what we

can, and all the enjoyment we have gotten through its use will be our gain.” We sold quite a few of our things. Dr. Niziblian’s family wanted to buy our living room furniture. We knew that they were in no position to afford it since he had just returned from the war, so we gave it to them as a present in addition to other things.

Our first task was to take the girls out of boarding school. One day Aram asked me, “What do you wish? Shall we take along Mrs. Marie and Sarkis Efendi’s daughters to Beirut with us, or should I first take them all to Iskenderun, and then return and take you to Beirut to decide where we are going to settle?” I thought for a moment. Although I was not pleased with having this crowd follow me, a kind heart cannot think evil. I was sure that Mrs. Marie did not want to be separated from us and wanted to come along. So I turned to him and said, “It doesn’t matter; we can all go together.”

Of all the mistakes I have committed in my life, this was the biggest. I regretted it later, but it was too late to be of any use. It became the cause of many difficulties in my life. I lost my happiness on many occasions. One never knows where a false step will lead a person. When we had finished our preparations, we headed for Beirut by train. It was a rather difficult journey. We were settled in a separate compartment. We were all young, attractive women and stood constantly in front of the windows looking outside. In an adjoining compartment, there were several young men who were constantly eyeing us, making comments. In the evening, these young men entered our compartment and said that they were going to sit there. Aram got angry. He tried to get them out, and they started to fight. He was one against several of them. We tried very hard but could not restrain him. Then the train conductors heard the commotion and came over. We told them what had happened. They threw the young men out, but of what use was it? Aram’s head and face had been bloodied. A physician came and dressed his wounds. Our mood was ruined. Both Aram and Mrs. Marie were also mad at us for having provoked this.

Finally, we reached Beirut in this condition and went to a hotel. Aram stayed in bed for a few days. We realized it was not going to be easy to stay in a hotel with so many people, so we rented a furnished house. After he got well, Aram began to correspond with his brother, Sarkis Efendi. Aram wanted to send the girls with Mrs. Marie to Iskenderun or to take them there himself. Then he and I would decide in Beirut where we were going to get settled.

I was very pleased with this plan. But then his brother began to write back one letter after another that the plan was not to his liking. He tried to convince Aram to return to Iskenderun because there were many business opportunities and he should not think about going elsewhere. Aram knew very well that his brother couldn’t manage the business without him. So the real reason he wanted Aram back was for them to work together. Throughout the war, he had lived comfortably in Aleppo with his family, passing his time in cafés while

Aram was working frantically and amassing a fortune. Not only was Aram supporting the large families of his brothers but was sharing his profits as well. He had already given their portions to his brother Haroutune, to his sister, and to Mrs. Marie.

After thinking about it for a while, he decided to go to Iskenderun by himself to talk with his brother. He knew for certain that his brother and sister-in-law were not agreeable to Mrs. Marie's return to Iskenderun, since they did not want to take that burden upon themselves. Although Aram had been supporting them, I had heard that the two sisters-in-law could not live with each other in peace.

When Aram told me about his decision to go to Iskenderun for a few days, I was saddened and told him my fears that once he got there, his brother would convince him and then he would come and move the rest of us there as well. "Don't be afraid. I will stand by my word," he said. Finally, he left.

It did not take long for him to go and return - he was back in barely seven or eight days. Although he said nothing to me right away, I sensed that he had changed his mind a bit. When he finally opened up to me, I realized that he had actually reached a decision. "Look, my dear," he told me, "I don't want you to be upset. I have decided to go to Iskenderun temporarily, but as I have promised you, we are not going to settle there. There is a very good business opportunity at the moment. Several people have tried to take advantage of it but have failed. I found out that it's the sort of business that I know a good deal about, so we put in a bid and got the contract. For this reason, we should immediately go there. My brother cannot run the business without me, and he will not be able to handle this job on his own."

On hearing this, I left the room, went outside, and began to cry. He followed me and said, "Don't cry; it's a business that will last only three to four months. As soon as we are done with it, we will go wherever you want. We will leave Mrs. Marie and the children in Iskenderun." He tried to convince me with many such promises, but I would not be persuaded. I begged him, saying, "I won't go. You take everyone and go while I stay with my mother and brother. When you finish your business, come back, and we will either settle here or go to another city."

It was such an opportune time to emigrate to America; the door to America was open, with no difficulties in the way. After our marriage, Aram had not yet gotten involved in any business. His pockets were loaded. My cousin Levon, who had been living with my brother and mother in Beirut, left for America with his family. They went with very little money; his uncle, Dr. Douzjian, had to pay their travel expenses. Levon had one year left to finish pharmacy school, so he completed his studies in America and got his diploma. How I pleaded, saying, "Aram let us also take my mother and my brother and go to America."

He would not agree. "I don't like America," he said. "You go there, and you have to work relentlessly." He was a bit stubborn. In life, many a false step will change your destiny, and you will fall into difficulties. You will regret it later, but the opportunity will have gone by. Yet he was not one to regret things. He did not yield to any of my suggestions and pleadings. He would gather the whole family together, and without thinking of me, would take the entire responsibility for them upon himself.

We spent several difficult days. He was not able to convince me. But since he had given his word to his brother, he now found himself between a rock and a hard place. The situation got so upsetting that I realized what a difficult position he was in, and believing the promises he was making to me, I finally consented. I regretted it later a thousand times, but what was the use?

We got ourselves organized in a few days, boarded a ship, and turned our eyes to Iskenderun. It was only a night's journey. That night, I did not go to bed and left our room while Aram was sleeping. The sea was in turmoil, as was my heart. I sat on a chair.

We arrived in the morning. It was the hottest month of the summer. Sarkis Efendi and numerous other close friends had come with boats to welcome us. We disembarked from the ship, and settled in a boat, and all of us headed for the port. The boats were tied up to the jetty, and we walked to the carriages, which took us home. Although it is hardly worth mentioning, the first person that I saw on the jetty was Mihran Keshishian, the man who gave us so much difficulty in 1913 in Iskenderun trying to win my heart. I don't know how he had heard about our coming. He got close to me, but I would not even look at him.

The jetty awakened so many unforgettable memories. It was also used by people who took walks there to watch the sunset over the sea. I remembered the evenings when Ramzi and Nouriyé Hanem would walk there on moonlit nights. I remembered, and I was moved. I thought my eyes could no longer see my surroundings. Aram was holding my arm, and I felt my arm was trembling. "What is the matter? Are you ill," he asked. "I am a little tired," I said with difficulty. I must confess that at that moment I wished that I would fall into the sea and the waves would take me to my death. We got home, where Mrs. Maroom welcomed us. She was very glad to see her children. It was almost noon, and after resting for a while, we had lunch. I excused myself, saying that I had a headache, retreated to the room that they had for us, and slept.

Two days later they held a reception for people who wished to welcome us and those who wanted to congratulate us on our wedding. We got dressed again like newlyweds and welcomed them. A very lavish table attended by two waiters was set. Tasty dishes had been brought in from the outside, along with cakes, sweets, and all sorts of drinks. The visitors had all come with presents and flowers.

Everything was fine except for me. Aram sensed that I was indisposed. He came to me many times and asked and pleaded that I change my mood. He took me to the table so I would eat something. I knew that my behavior was unforgivable, and that was not going to leave a good impression on others. So I pulled myself together and considered the sorts of interpretation that people were going to attribute my behavior to. As seen from the outside, I was an enviable bride. God had created me perfectly beautiful, and I had married a presentable young man who was rich and intelligent. I was covered in gold and diamonds. What could I possibly lack?

I knew all of this, but I could not help it. None of these things meant anything to me. But I had to reconcile myself to my fate. At any rate, I tried to do the best I could and to show myself in a good mood. But in my heart, I wished they would all leave as soon as possible so I could withdraw to my room. Poor Aram kept circling around me ascribing my state to my having come to Iskenderun against my will. He did not know what unforgettable and sad memories had been awakened in my heart. At any rate, sadly and gladly the evening passed. The guests left, and we retreated to our room. He tried to cheer me up with many sweet words and promises. He begged me to be happy and patient for the next several months so that we could then immediately go to where we wanted to live. I said nothing. We slept.

A few weeks following our return, they opened a new office and converted their old office to a warehouse. It was a very fine office on the seashore, which they furnished very nicely. Seeing all these arrangements, I asked Aram one day, "You persuaded me and brought me here saying that it would be only for a few months, to complete the project. Don't be angry, but now I see that you deceived me, and that these arrangements are for staying here permanently." He turned around, looked in my face and, without answering me, left the room. I then decided not to bring up this subject again. It was not going to help anyway, and I did not want it to be the cause of disagreements and hard feelings between us. I did not want to exploit the love, respect, and care that he was showing towards me. I left it to God.

As I mentioned, it was in the warmest month of the summer that we came. Iskenderun was very hot and humid; it had an oppressive and unbearable climate. Large segments of the town bordered on swamps full of mosquitos. We were obliged to sleep inside mosquito netting during those warm evenings. Even during the daytime, we were not free of mosquito bites. People suffered badly from malaria; they were bedridden for days with a high fever, and those who got the poisonous variety would die in a few days; there was no drug or treatment for it.

Iskenderun had very lovely summer resorts, some four or five Armenian villages on nearby mountains with very beautiful natural views: Sovouk Olouk, Nargizlik, Djizmeli, Atek. Sovouk Olouk was the most beautiful and the most populous. It was located on a high mountain and could be seen from

virtually every house in Iskenderun when the weather was clear. In these villages the weather in the summer was usually foggy, and it rained occasionally. The months of July and August were splendid in the mountains, all of which had their natural beauty. Sovouk Olouk was full of lovely orchards, and many of its houses had spacious gardens. It was famous for its pear, peach, and apple trees, its vineyards and vegetable gardens. Nargizlik was best known for its vineyards and Djizmeli for its fruits, Atek for its water. Many people took their drinking water from Atek.

When we arrived in Iskenderun in 1920, a large segment of the population had already gone to the villages, where they stayed for several months as it was very difficult to live in town during the summer. It was awfully hot and so humid that you could not see the face of the sun for days. Most people did not own summer homes but rented them from the villagers. The roofs were covered with earth and inside the rooms were lined with wooden planks (*chardak*). The beds were elevated platforms on which were spread the bedding. Only a few houses had small kitchens; most people cooked their food in their rooms. The villagers rented the rooms where they lived during the winter, and they themselves took out their cows and horses, cleaned the stables and slept there. The animals lived in the gardens under shelters.

There were no easy means of getting to these villages. There were no cars. The carriages in town could not go up the mountain roads. The sole means of transportation for everyone were mules and horses. The villagers would bring down their mules, then loaded them up by suspending the goods on both sides and placing the passenger in the middle. The children rode in boxes which were tied to the sides of the mules. The poor villagers accompanied the passengers on foot. It was a difficult journey.

Most of the Armenian villagers who had been deported to other areas had returned. It was fortunate that they and the Armenians of Iskenderun had been sent to Arab towns around Damascus, and they had hardly suffered any loss of life. The Iskenderun seaport had been severely bombarded during the war, and the majority of the people there had fled to either Cyprus or some other city. Following their return, these villagers had repaired their houses and tended their gardens, which they had abandoned for four years.

The summer that we came, a lot of people had not had the courage to go up to the mountains because, although the French had occupied that region, the Turkish bandits had not been cleared out of the mountains and were attacking travelers. So we, too, were obliged to stay in that hell. But then we were forced to take the risk and go up because Aram could not tolerate the heat and developed boils all over his body. The doctor suggested we leave immediately for the mountains. We sent word to one of the villagers whom he knew very well, Hagop Dada. We rented his room, and he came down and took us there.

We stayed there for a month. We would hear the sound of distant gunfire, but Sovouk Olouk was quite far from the Turkish villages where there was fighting. Aram's skin condition got better; the city became cooler, and we returned. For the first several weeks after we got back from the village, we were obliged, as before, to live with our large family. Although there were two buildings off the same courtyard, one had been rented. Our families occupied the larger unit, while in the rented house lived the pharmacist Vahram Papazian with his wife. A few weeks later, they were asked to leave, and we moved into the two upstairs rooms. We converted one to be our bedroom and the other to be a living room. There were two rooms downstairs and a kitchen. Mrs. Marie and her children moved into one of the downstairs rooms; the other became our dining room. It was a comfortable and airy house although one had to climb twenty-five steps to get to our rooms.

After a while, I gave up all hope of our ever moving out of Iskenderun for two reasons. First, it had been Aram's intention to settle in Izmir or Istanbul when both were occupied by the Greeks. But just as the British withdrew from the areas they had conquered, so did the Greeks. But while the British left of their own free will, the Greeks fought with the Turks and were defeated with great losses. So now Aram gave up the idea of moving to either city. The second reason was that their business was going so well that he completely turned his eyes away from other cities. It caused me much anguish, but I was obliged to acquiesce.

Iskenderun was changing day by day and was making progress through the efforts of the French. First, they drained the swamps and eliminated the breeding places of the mosquitos, the cause of malaria. They built a wide avenue on the seashore and called it the "boulevard." It was for people to go on walks and was closed to carriages and horses. On both sides of the avenue attractive coffee houses were built and two clubs were opened.

The population of Iskenderun was mixed. There was almost no group with a majority: the Turks, the Greek-Orthodox Arabs, the Armenians, and the French were all inter-mixed. They all interacted with each other and lived together cordially and peacefully. So, although Iskenderun was a small city, it became the sort of place where one could live. The French liked it very much even more than their own cities, and called it "little Paris." They said that the life they lived in Iskenderun they could not live in Paris.

Before we had ourselves fully settled down, Aram's and my relatives who had fled to Aleppo after the evacuation of Aintab began to come to Iskenderun. Only my sister Azniv's family came from Beirut. During the Aintab war, her husband had gone to Izmir and was unable to return to Aintab, so he had gone to Beirut and sent for his family, who meanwhile had fled to Aleppo. Since my mother and brother were in Beirut, my brother-in-law had left his family with them and come to Iskenderun to see if he could start a business there. He stayed with us for over a month. He had no particular trade. In Aintab, he used

to employ weavers who made kilims, which he then sold in town or sent elsewhere. He made good money, but during the deportation he had lost almost all he had. He searched about for a few weeks and could find no opportunities to restart his business. So he decided to become a moneylender. He expanded his meager capital by borrowing from Aram and set up a box in front of Aram's office, where he lent and exchanged money. He then rented a house and brought over his family, who stayed with us for several days. Since there were already quite a few of us, they could not stay with us any longer and moved to their new house. He was barely able to support his family, so he began to also busy himself with other minor jobs with Aram's help.

They were the first to come. Then, one by one, Aram's and my brothers and sisters began to move to Iskenderun. For most of them, this was a wrong step since Aleppo was a larger city, and it was a place which they knew well and where they could have resumed their former Aintab businesses.

Aram's brother Haroutune and his cousins Khatchadour and Manuel had a store in Aintab where they sold material for clothing, and they made good money. When they left Aintab, they were able to take most of their goods with them and immediately got re-established in Aleppo, where they were quite content. But his brother Sarkis would not leave him alone, wrote to him over and over again, and persuaded him to move to Iskenderun. Aram very much opposed it, but they would not listen to him. He pointed out to them that, apart from the nice profit he was making in Aleppo, the weather there was better; moving to Iskenderun meant starting all over again, and since he could not carry out a business on his own, he was going to be hard-pressed to find partners as compatible as his two cousins. But Sarkis would not listen.

Their sister's husband was a tailor, and he, too, had started a business in Aleppo. Sarkis Efendi convinced them also to move to Iskenderun. Both of them sent their wives ahead of them, each with a child at her bosom. Sarkis Efendi was the cause for their moving. But do you think he received them in his house and took care of them? He left them to us. We gave them the upstairs living room to sleep in. The noise of their children disturbed our peace all night. It took two to three months for their husbands to come. When my sister-in-law's husband, Toros, finally came, he rented a house right away and moved in with his family. But in the case of Haroutune, as if his family were not enough; he also brought along his mother-in-law, Rahel, and his brother-in-law, Stepan. So we became a large family: five of them, four in Mrs. Marie's family, and the two of us. All in all, eleven persons lived together for a number of months.

I really got fed up. When summer approached, Aram rented a house in Sovouk Olouk and sent them all there. The family of Aram's sister Hripsimé did the same thing. Not only did their coming to Iskenderun become a burden on our heads, but turned out to be disastrous for them as well. Before seven to eight months had passed, her husband, Toros, developed "poisonous" malaria

and died in a few days. He left behind, penniless and helpless, his widow who was pregnant, their little girl, and his old mother, Sister Doudou. If I were to write their full story, it would fill an entire book. We, who were already burdened with so many widows and children, now had these two added onto them. My husband truly became “the father of widows and orphans.”

As I mentioned earlier, my brother Yervant was in Beirut. When he finished his first year of study, he worked in a pharmacy during the summer. My mother was also with him. When my brother Yacoub went to Aleppo from Aintab, Yervant sent mother to Aleppo to live with them and became a boarding student during his second year at the American University of Beirut. Partly by working at the university and partly counting on help from Aram, he resumed his studies.

My brother Yacoub remained in Aleppo for two years. He opened a pharmacy on the best avenue, called Khandeck. He had been able to bring out most of the important drugs from his Aintab pharmacy. He also had some money. There were now five in his family: the two girls, Laura and Elvira, my mother, and the two of them. His pharmacy was not doing badly, and he was able to support himself. It should have been enough, but he, too, wanted to come to Iskenderun. It is as if we were a magnet which attracted our relatives one by one. They wanted to be where we were, even though they used as their excuse rumors that the French were going to withdraw from Aleppo. At any rate, he too came to Iskenderun and opened a pharmacy.

My brother Yervant received his diploma a year later and was invited to work at the university pharmacy. It was a good opportunity for him. But his usual bad luck pursued him again. He fell ill with typhoid and had to be hospitalized. When he had recovered somewhat, he wanted to come where we were. They had told him to stay where he was and rest, and then start in his job. But he had refused, saying that he wanted to go to his sister and needed help. So he came to Iskenderun rather than go to Aleppo, where his mother was at the time, because it would have meant staying at his brother's house. When he came to us, he had lost a lot of weight, and it was summer. So we took him to Sovouk Olouk, where with proper care and in the cool air he recuperated. He then began to look for a job and applied to various places. He got an offer from the Sudan with a good salary. He chose to go there so that he could save some money and then return to Iskenderun. He left in September and wrote back saying that he did not like the city, he did not like the people, but he was going to stay there for a few years and endure it.

The last ones to come to Iskenderun were my sister Aroussiak's family. They, too, took a wrong step. Her husband, Elias, knew Aleppo well and had had some cash in hand. When they had arrived there, he had opened a small store, but it had just dragged on for a couple of years since it was not located on a well-traveled street. He had not been able to earn enough to support his family and decided to move to Iskenderun to satisfy my sister's wish to be

with her mother, brothers and sisters. They first wrote to us about their intentions. Even though she was my sister, I did not think it was a wise move. The town was small and already had lots of shops similar to what he had in mind. The weather was unbearable in the summer, making it necessary to go to the mountains - all of these things needed money. He had been quite well off in Aintab, where there were no stores like his own; he owned quite a bit of property in the neighboring villages, and they had a nice house and vineyards. Yet he had not been able to accumulate much cash because during the four years of the war he had not been able to work and had lived on his capital; so now they had very little money. But like the others, they knew very well that we were rich and so all of them were coming to Iskenderun to benefit from us. And truly, without exaggeration, all of them ended up needing Aram's help.

Finally, they arrived and rented a house. The three boys and the two of them made a family of five. The oldest boy, Albert, was thirteen years old, Vahram 10, and Yorgi 5. My brother-in-law was not able to start his business, so he, too, like my other brother-in-law, became a money changer. He was not shrewd; he had had no education. Handling money required that one be sharp and have a way with figures. In short, they managed to drag on for several years until his money ended. Albert was not a very gifted student, so they took him out of school and apprenticed him to a tailor for a negligible weekly sum. But he was able to learn and became quite skilled at the work. They put the two other boys in the French school. Part of their tuition was paid by my brother Yervant, and Aram helped with the rest. My brother-in-law got a job as a guard for a building. Finally, one way or another, Vahram and Yorgi graduated from the French school. Vahram went to Aleppo to study drafting at another French school. By this time, they had decided to return to Aleppo. Albert opened a store while Vahram got a job with an engineer. Yorgi, too, got a job in a cooperative. Aram bought a machine which knitted socks for my brother-in-law, but he wasn't able to work it, so he sold it and spent the money. They endured much misery. But finally they were able to have a comfortable life. Their sons, particularly Albert, took very good care of his parents.

During the first years of my marriage, I was not able to lead a free and peaceful life with my husband. From the very first day of my wedding, I went into a large family in Aleppo. My brother-in-law Sarkis Efendi and his family were there. My widowed sister-in-law, Mrs. Marie, with her three children and their oldest brother's daughter Lucin were also there. When Sarkis Efendi left for Iskenderun, their two daughters, Aghavni and Verkiné, as well as Lucin, were left with us to become boarding students. But even after the schools opened we were responsible for them, and they spent every Saturday and Sunday at our house. Though I was still a new bride, we passed six or seven months in this fashion.

When we returned to Iskenderun, Mrs. Marie and her three children lived with us. From the moment that she became a widow, Aram had taken over

their support. He had already been living with them when we were engaged, and he took my consent that we would continue to do so after our marriage. Out of the kindness of my heart, I took this wrong step, and it became the cause of my suffering many difficulties so that I regretted a thousand times that I had given my consent. From the very first day, when Sarkis Efendi was going to Iskenderun, they should have gone with him. Then our life and our future would have been very different. Had it just been the two of us, I am sure that we would not have returned from Beirut to Iskenderun and tied down our future there. A Turkish proverb says, and it is very true, "In order to live well, one should think well before deciding and should take the right steps."

When we returned to Iskenderun, I endured every difficulty for two or three years. I concealed many of these troubles from my husband and endured them with love. I used to pity my sister-in-law, who had been widowed while still young and had three orphans. Yet I can never forget those first years when we lived together and all of my and Aram's close relatives came to Iskenderun with their families; we had to take all of them in and live with them. I suffered a great deal.

Life was particularly difficult for me since my husband would leave in the morning and return in the evening. I was the one who was obliged to spend the entire day with them. However, knowing the circumstances, I did not make my voice heard. While I went on enduring in this manner, I was left with no strength and no patience, but after all, God came to my aid. On the eve of Easter an event took place while my husband happened to be at home. When he came on the scene, he was able to see with his own eyes and hear with his own ears what was going on, particularly when he saw my tears. He raised his voice and told my sister-in-law, "Enough! You have exploited my wife's good nature. At this very moment I have decided that we are not going to live with you anymore, and we are going to leave this house."

I am very glad that he found out about the conflict by his coming on the scene rather than as a result of my complaints. He took me upstairs, and we did not go down to dinner. The maid brought the food to our room. We spent the Easter holidays in this manner. Aram's decision was very difficult for my sister-in-law to accept. She never expected that Aram would ever do that to her. He had lived with them since he was a young man. She thought of him as a brother and not as her brother-in-law. They had lived together all these years, and now she needed his support as a young widow with three orphans. Aram stayed firm on his decision. And although there was still a month left before it was time to go to the mountains, he told his brother Haroutune and to his sister Hripsimé that they should take their families and immediately go to Sovouk Olouk. A few weeks later they had all left; we could now breathe more easily.

A month later we, too, went to the mountains and decided to spend the summer together. This is how the summer passed. On our return to town, we began to look for a house. When Sarkis Efendi learned of our decision, he did

not approve of it and begged us that we not leave the house. Since he had three daughters, he did not want strangers to live off the same courtyard. Although we could anticipate all of the difficulties ahead and we would have preferred to live by ourselves, neither of us could hurt their feelings; obeying our elders and doing as they wanted had become our nature. So we consented with the hope that we would not be staying in Iskenderun, or settle there anyway. But as I said before these hopes turned out to be impossible to fulfill.

Even in the midst of the happiest times in life, there are inevitably reasons for feeling pain and deprivation. Following my marriage, although outwardly I was an enviable person, married to a splendid, intelligent, rich man who catered to all my wishes, I must nonetheless confess that for a few years I was not going to enjoy my life due to a number of circumstances. Though I did not show it outwardly, I was not happy inwardly. All that took place around me gave me no pleasure. The main reason, as I have mentioned several times, was that I did not find the ideal I sought in marriage and my wishes and dreams did not come true. I could not feel satisfaction. There is no reason to repeat it; the reader can well understand the circumstances under which I got married; I could not forget my old memories.

My husband, as I have said, was a very good husband. But he was a businessman with no taste for social life. In this regard, too, we were not of one mind. He went to work in the morning and came back late in the evening. He had dinner at home, and then often worked some more. He gave no thought to going on visits or going out to have a pleasant time. He didn't even think of returning the visits of those who had come to see us. This issue made me sad and regretful because I had always been a girl who liked social life and took part in it. Even more so than many rich girls in Aintab, be it in school, in church, or in other organizations, I took part in various activities and had a certain presence. My brother Yervant and I were members of the church choir, where twenty-five young men and women spent time together as brothers and sisters. Furthermore, I always took part in the concerts, public events, and dramatic productions of the Educational Association. In short, I loved social life.

Although I more or less knew Aram's character, I thought, given our circumstances, I could disregard these points in marrying someone who had so many other advantages. I hoped that by living with him I could gradually bring about changes in his way of life, and eventually that is exactly what happened. Though I felt deprived for a few years, I did not lose hope. Nor did I make a nuisance of myself by constantly complaining and pleading with him. Instead, with patience, I began slowly to think of ways of changing him and began to implement them. My first task was to get him accustomed to going on visits. A great many people had visited us, but we had not reciprocated. I began to cultivate relationships not only with relatives but also with people of high social standing by inviting them to our house and by accepting their

invitations. And just as I hoped, Aram changed quite a bit over a short period of time and began to enjoy this life.

When I was in Iskenderun in 1913, there was a club which I used to go to with Nouriyé Hanem to meet secretly with Ramzi. The French had now taken over that club and made many changes. On one occasion, a high ranking Arab official, Nejmeddin Bey, came to confer with the French. A banquet was given in his honor, and notables from every community were invited. We and a few other Armenian couples were asked to go. When we returned home that night, Aram suggested that we join the club as members if I so wished. I accepted gladly. Yet I was sure that every time I went there, my old memories were going to torment me, but also consoled myself that at least once a month my visits there would keep my memories alive in my heart. We enrolled in the club. There were very few Armenian members. The majority were French along with some Greek Orthodox Arabs and well-known Muslims with whom we already had social relationships. The director of the bank, Alameddin Bey, and Dr. Midhat Bey were particularly gracious people. And their wives were educated, refined women. We became good friends. On many days, we would go to the club together at five or six o'clock. Then our husbands would join us, and we would have dinner there. We played cards after that, and then returned home.

My dear friend Nouriyé Hanem had left Iskenderun two years earlier for Ankara, where her husband's business had been transferred. She had also been the friend of these two ladies. Sometimes I very much wished that Nouriyé Hanem, too, were with us so we could remember the times we spent together and fulfill my longing to talk with her. My friends said they were hopeful that Nouriyé Hanem would return before long. I was glad to hear that at first, but then, thinking about it, I thought her coming would bring me more difficulties than joy. It would be impossible not to resume my friendship with her, she who knew all my secrets and had helped me throughout the period that I spent with Ramzi, creating all those opportunities for us to meet. In one word, she was my true friend, who knew all about me. How could I now sever my relationship with her. It was going to be impossible not to think back to the days we had spent together and not to revive all those memories. These ruminations troubled me quite a bit. I prayed to God and hoped that they would not return to Iskenderun.

Yet it was not long before Nouriyé Hanem returned. A few weeks after I had heard that she would be coming, Alameddin's wife, Nabilé Hanem came to us and said she had happy news for me: Nouriyé Hanem was coming in a few days. The poor woman had brought me the news to make me happy, without knowing that it made my heart bleed. I was obliged to show myself to be pleased. She turned to me and said, "We are going to meet them and then bring them over to our house that evening for dinner. We are inviting all her

friends, so I want you to come too.” I thanked her and said that I would speak to my husband about it, and I would send word to her.

That evening, when my husband came home, I spoke to him about it. He said, “I know Shakib Bey quite well, but I have not met his wife. We have no reason not to go.” So I sent word that we would be coming. We met them on the evening of the dinner. Nouriyé Hanem and I greeted each other, embraced, then both of us began to cry. Everyone said, “You cry when you separate; you laugh when you reunite.” Nouriyé Hanem responded, “Often reunions also bring on tears. We love each other so much, and we are crying out of joy.” At any rate, it was a very fine reception; we thanked them, welcomed Nouriyé Hanem once again, and parted. When we were leaving, she said that she would find our house and come to visit me.

Nouriyé Hanem now began to visit me often. Neither of us ever mentioned the past, and we were most careful. In a few weeks, she invited all of us to the club for dinner since they had not yet furnished their house. We went there; it was the same circle of friends: we ate, drank, played cards and returned home. Then we invited everyone to our house. We were now four close friends: Nouriyé Hanem, myself, and the two other ladies. I was very glad that there were virtually no Armenians among our circles in Iskenderun. It was a small town, and there were some who envied me and gossiped. We paid no attention to them.

Life went on in this manner. My greatest joy was the satisfaction I obtained from my social life; it gave me great pleasure. But I very much regret that it only lasted a few months. There is a true proverb that says, “Boiling water does not stay in the pot; it sooner or later explodes.” That is exactly what happened as our pot, too, exploded.

One day, Nouriyé Hanem and I were talking about past events. She turned to me and said, “My dear friend, please forgive me and don’t be upset with me, but in this matter you took some very wrong steps. Your family, in particular, should have accepted Ramzi’s proposal, especially at a time when the Armenians were being persecuted by the Turks, when they were being murdered, deported to the desert, tortured, and their young and attractive girls were being abducted and dishonored. Ramzi’s father knew that he was in love with you with all his heart and wanted to marry you. He wrote to Ramzi so many times: “Bring over your fiancé to where you are and save her from these dangers. I am certain that terrible things are going to happen to the Armenians, and they are going to be annihilated. My son, write to her and say that your father wants her to go to school until you yourself finish your education and that all her expenses will be borne by me.” She went on for almost an hour. I began to cry and said to her, “Do you think that my whole family knew about my relationship with Ramzi and my having fallen in love with him? Only my mother and my oldest sister knew. My mother did not agree to it; only my sister did. It was certain that my brothers would have scolded me, blamed me,

and created difficulties for me. It was necessary that I bear this cross to Golgotha by myself. They were all going to dwell on the fact that I was an Armenian and Ramzi was a Muslim, without knowing that Ramzi was prepared to bear every sacrifice, even change his religion and be baptized into our church. My dear friend, I lived confined to the house for four years with my heart on fire - the days and the nights we passed! We were saved miraculously; otherwise we would have been exiled to Deir Zor, our entire family would have been lost, and I would have ended up as the wife of one of the hyenas. You know Meunever Hanem who is a close relative of Ramzi's. She knows all my secrets. "She was in Aintab at the time, and I used to teach her boy at my house. We became friends."

I was sure that Nouriyé Hanem did not know about our last reunion; about Ramzi's coming to Aintab during those turbulent days and staying with Meunever Hanem for a fortnight; about those happy days that we spent together; about his having come specially to persuade my family to let him take me with him; about my mother's refusal. I told her all that had happened. When she heard all this, she was very moved and turned to me and said, "It was a great pity. He did not deserve to die at such a young age. He suffered much. He did not attain what he yearned for and became a victim of your love. Meunever Hanem must have told you the circumstances of his death." "No," I said. "She only gave me the sad news of his death but did not tell me about the circumstances."

Nouriyé Hanem then told me that Ramzi had had a minor operation and in connection with that had become used to taking morphine. He had then become addicted, no doubt in order to overcome his worries over me. One day, when driving a car, he had a terrible accident. He was taken to the hospital. Word was sent to his parents, who had come as soon as possible. He lived for only a few days after their arrival; he had not been able to recognize them and had then given up his soul. When they took off his bedcovers and undressed him, they found your photograph on his chest. His father took it, looked at it, and said through his tears, 'My dear son, my beloved son, you have fallen victim to the love of your beloved girl'. When I heard this, I almost lost myself. Meunever Hanem had told me about the rest but not this. The words I had just heard affected me terribly.

Nouriyé Hanem saw how perturbed I was; she asked for my forgiveness saying, "I was wrong to do this. Ramzi died, and all his dreams died with him. You are alive and are being tormented by your dreams and the loss of your love for him. By reminding you of these things, I've renewed your sorrows. Let us try, dear sister, to forget these things from now on." "I cannot forget," I said. "I will remember it to the end of my life. But for my husband's love, I am not going to disturb our life together."

I left her and was lost in my thoughts. I regretted a thousand times our return to Iskenderun. Then I told myself, "I cannot go on living this way. My

husband should have considered my not wanting to return to Iskenderun, and in order to please me, he should have been willing to stay in Beirut at least. But now this has turned out to be impossible. I should use my head. I should find things to do so as not to rekindle these memories in my mind.”

Since I had two maids, there was not much for me to do in the house. I busied myself with various things, read occasionally, and visited my sisters-in-law. I thought about taking piano lessons. My husband thought it was a very good idea and that I should look for a teacher. He promised to order a new piano for me. Arminé, the daughter of Mrs. Marie, was a student at the nearby Armenian Catholic school. When I spoke to her, she said that there was a nun who was a very good piano teacher and that we could speak to her whenever I wished. We met with her promptly. She was a very beautiful nun, and I had the presentiment that she too had lost her love like me, or that her family had not consented to her marrying him. Later on, I learned that she had passed through the same torments that I had and then had become a nun and turned her face away from marriage. I wished I, too, had not ever been married. I wished I, too, had become a nun and turned to God. After Iskenderun was given to the Turks, these nuns were transferred to Beirut. When we, too, moved to Beirut, I used to visit her. She then fell ill and died while still quite young.

During our meeting, she made me play a few pieces and said that we could start the lessons right away. The piano my husband had promised me arrived from Germany. I began my lessons, and they became a pleasant occupation for me. She was very pleased with me, as I was with her.

There is no perfection in life. My husband got used to a more active social life; I found good friends with whom we had pleasant times. In a word, I had an enviable life. But I came to realize that even in the midst of the happiest life, there is always something that causes you distress, something that troubles you. And I began to be troubled by the fact that I was not able to have children. All of my sisters-in-law had children and continued to have more children. I envied them while wishing them well. On getting married, we had decided not to have children until we had settled down. But in Aleppo, I had an unplanned pregnancy. Through a careless mistake, it ended in a miscarriage at three months. I was not particularly perturbed by it because I thought I could get pregnant again. But as the years passed, both my husband and I became more conscious of our childlessness. And what people said about it began to trouble me more and more. A few women actually said to my face that while I was fortunate in so many ways, it was a pity that I had no children.

One day, I was feeling bored at home, so I went for a walk. There was a lovely spring in Iskenderun, some distance from us at a place called Spring Hill, where we often went for picnics. It had lovely greenery and a nice coffee house. I had a cup of coffee there and headed back home. On my way, I passed the house of our friends, the Shamlians. The wife was outside the front door.

She invited me in for coffee. I thanked her and said I had to get back home. She then turned around and asked, "Why? Are your children waiting for you at home?" I did not answer her and walked away. But her comment hurt my feelings and tears came to my eyes. There was a church nearby. I went in and knelt in front of the portrait of the Virgin Mary at the altar. I begged God through my tears to give me a child.

When I reached home, I went to my room. Later that night, my husband found me there feeling very sad and realized why. He turned to me and said, "My dear, don't worry. Let me put my affairs in order, and we will go to Beirut and see a specialist who, I hope, will find a remedy if there is anything wrong with us."

A few weeks later we went to the American University Hospital in Beirut and asked for the specialist in women's illnesses. We were told that it was Dr. Dorman, so we took an appointment to see him. He examined both of us, and asked me if I had had a miscarriage. I told him yes, I had at three months. He then told us that neither of us had any problem to prevent us having children. It so happened that, following a miscarriage, sometimes it took years until a woman got pregnant again. He hoped that sooner or later we, too, would succeed in having a child. We returned home, full of hope, and waited with prayers and patience.

ELVIRA'S COMING TO OUR HOUSE AT AGE THREE AND A HALF IN 1922

As I wrote earlier, when my brother Yacoub had his first child in 1915, we were very happy since she was the first grandchild in our family.

A year and a half later, on August 25, 1918, my brother had a second child, also a daughter. For days he did not smile since he had been hoping for a boy. He had promised me again that, should he have a boy, when I went to "pull his ear" to give the good news, he would give me a ring, and he actually showed me the ring. But when he had a daughter, he did not give it to me. Nonetheless, they named the baby Elvira at my suggestion. Dr. Niziblian had a daughter by the same name, whom I loved very much. So even though they did not fulfill any of my other wishes, in this case they gave me satisfaction. Although Laura was very young, she was quite jealous of the baby, particularly when I held her on my lap and fondled her.

When Elvira was born, her mother became seriously ill and stayed in bed for months. We went through a lot of difficulties. I looked after her and also took care of the baby. My mother and I once again had to bathe Yester in her room, which meant taking warm water up twenty-five steps and then down again.

When Yacoub's family came to Iskenderun following my marriage, Elvira was three and a half years old. Though I loved her dearly, I still loved Laura more. I often brought Elvira to our house, where she stayed for days at a time. I had nice dresses made for her and fulfilled all her wishes so that she began not to want to go back home following these visits.

In 1921, when we were in Sovouk Olouk, my brother had his third child on July the 14th, the French National Holiday. This was a son, and he went out of his mind with joy. He celebrated by firing guns into the air. My mother was very happy with her grandson, and at her request they named the boy Kevork, which was my father's name. That summer, my brother's wife, my brother-in-law's wife, and Dr. Niziblian's wife were all pregnant, and all three of them were hoping for boys. My brother had two daughters, my brother-in-law had three daughters, and Dr. Niziblian had three daughters. My brother and my brother-in-law got boys, but the poor Niziblians had another girl, which was most regrettable, and they were very upset.

All of our relatives were glad, but we could sense that Elvira wasn't. We all loved the newborn baby and carried him around in our arms. We still loved Laura very much because she was the first grandchild, so envy entered into Elvira's heart, and she began to cry over every little thing. Her mother would get angry at her and sometimes strike her. One day she discovered that Elvira had gotten to the baby's crib and plugged the baby's nostrils with chickpeas

so that he was breathing with difficulty. Her mother gave her a severe beating and locked her up in a room.

After that Elvira started coming to our house very frequently. We lived close by, and after every visit I had a harder time sending her back. She would cry, say that she did not want to go home, and had to be taken back by force. She would tell me, "Auntie, I am not going to go back to my house anymore, and I am going to become your daughter." This went on for several weeks until one day she cried so hard that I pitied her. I took her on my lap and told her, "You go home now, and when we return from the mountains, I will bring you over here, and you will become my child." I then held her by the hand and took her home; it looked like she was persuaded.

One afternoon following lunch, I was resting on my bed when I sensed that someone was at my back and clinging to me. I looked around and saw Elvira. She had put on her red dress, packed everything she owned in a little bundle, and come over by herself. I asked her, "Why did you come?" She said, "I came and I am not going to go back," and began to cry. I sent word to her mother that Elvira was at our house. She came over but could not persuade her daughter to go home with her. Elvira kept running to the corners of the room and then would cower and cling to my neck. So her mother left. That evening my husband came home, and Elvira went and clung to his neck. I told him the situation, and he said, "Let her stay. She will begin to miss her mother and father in a few days and will go home." Days passed, but she wouldn't even go to the vicinity of their house. It became time for us to return to the city from Sovouk Olouk. Once again we tried to persuade her to go home, but it was impossible. So when we returned to town, we bought her a bed, and she began to sleep in our room. Years passed, and we became very attached to each other.

The family of my brother-in-law Sarkis and we lived in the same house. Their son, called Jirayr, was born the same year as Kevork, my nephew. When Elvira was seven years old and Jirayr was three or four, they used to play together and liked each other very much. After Elvira turned seven, we placed her in the Armenian school. With Elvira's coming, my yearning for a child diminished a bit. She was a cute, talkative girl who loved us very much, and we loved her in turn. She became so attached to us that she became like my own child. It was a good way of keeping myself busy. My husband also loved her and was glad that Elvira gave me so much satisfaction. (I will return to the details of Elvira's life later on.)

Although we had returned from Beirut to Iskenderun temporarily and our hopes of resettling elsewhere had not been fulfilled, I began to get much satisfaction from the fact that my husband's business kept improving all the time and from the changes in our style of life over time. Our families lived off the same courtyard cordially and happily.

Unfortunately, this life lasted for only two or three years. A disagreement arose between the two brothers. One evening Aram returned home by himself

while usually the two brothers came together. He was sad. I did not ask him why. We had our dinner and went upstairs. When we were alone, I asked him why he was sad and so burdened with thoughts. He was silent for a few moments, and then told me, "My brother and I had an argument today; there was an issue over which we could not agree. After arguing over it for a while, I tried to persuade him patiently and gently, but it was to no avail. He kept interrupting me and yelling at me and threatening to break up our partnership on the spot. Finally, I could no longer put up with his uncalled-for words; I began to talk back to him." They were both hot-tempered.

His brother had proposed that they split up the business and Aram go to another city, leaving the Iskenderun business to him. "When I heard this," said Aram, "my blood rushed to my head, and I was obliged to tell him now what I had so far avoided confronting him with. So I said to him, 'You spent the entire war living comfortably with your family while I faced a lot of danger, being a bachelor, and worked with the military. I went to the most dangerous areas and rushed about on horseback making money and supporting the many members of our family. People at the time could hardly find bread to eat, but I sent you camel loads of food. And instead of pocketing all the money I earned, I gave you your shares. Whatever sum I kept myself, I gave the same amount to you - remember the 5000 gold pieces that I gave you. At the time you even thought this was not fair and told me, 'Brother, my share does not amount to this much; you should take more of it yourself.' I was planning to settle down in some other city, and my wife begged and pleaded with me not to return here. But to please you and to be helpful to you, we came to Iskenderun. We started this business and began to make good money. I can no longer turn this business over to you. Let us place a price on it; whoever is willing to offer more will take over the business, and the other will leave.' When I told him this, it gave him pause. He said we should drop the matter now, and then think about it later. I knew very well that he would not accept this proposal."

Aram and I discussed this problem for a while. He was very upset, and I tried to calm him down. It was getting late, so we went to bed. It now became very unpleasant to live in the same courtyard after this quarrel. My brother-in-law did not go to the office for several days. His eldest daughter, Aghavni, was ill with stomach pains, so he took her to Aleppo before they had reached a decision and without his having gone back to the office. When they returned from Aleppo in ten days, I suggested to Aram that we pay them a welcoming visit since he was the younger brother. He was persuaded, and we went over. His brother gave us a cool reception. When we returned home, my husband's nephew Khatchig came and scolded me saying, "Does my uncle have no honor? Why did you take him there for this welcoming visit? I was present during their argument, and heard all of the insulting things that were said. How did my uncle Sarkis dare to say all those words and with what right?"

“It doesn’t matter,” I told Khatchig. “We fulfilled our responsibility to him as the older brother. Let him be ashamed of himself.” Several friends heard about this issue and offered to mediate, but Aram would not accept. He said they should solve their problem among themselves. So for several days, the two brothers had more arguments. Finally, Aram set a value on the business, but Sarkis Efendi did not accept it. He said he could not afford to pay so much. Hence, he decided to leave the business to Aram and go to Beirut.

Here was another opportunity for me to leave Iskenderun. I tried very hard and begged of my husband that he should leave the business to his brother at a price he could afford and that we should go to Beirut ourselves. I told him, “We have no children and no important piece of property. Beirut is a larger city, and you will find greater success there.” I tried to convince him with my tears, but it was useless. He was so angered by his brother that he turned to me and said, “Don’t exert yourself in vain. It is impossible.” As if with a presentiment, I said, “Aram, you know very well that your brother cannot manage a business without you. He will use up his money in a few years and then become dependent on you again.” And this is exactly what happened; it was not long before he had used up his money and was obliged to appeal to his brother.

Their departure to Beirut was decided, and they began to make the necessary preparations. The girls were taken out of school. Whatever they could not take with them they began to sell. I was very distressed by the two brothers being angry with each other. So I suggested to Aram that he should invite his brother to be our guest while they were making these arrangements. Aram was quite stubborn but had a good heart. He never wanted to hurt anyone unjustly, and he did not like to quarrel. Although he was entirely in the right in this matter, I managed to convince him. We asked them to eat with us during the rest of their stay, and they accepted. For the next fifteen days, we hired another maid and retained a cook - a man called Iskender from Dortyol - so they had all their meals with us. When they were ready to leave, we took them to the ship and parted cordially. Even more than Aram, my heart felt at peace, and I was satisfied.

OUR CULTURAL ACTIVITIES IN ISKENDERUN

When I came to Iskenderun, I was soon invited to get involved in the Protestant and Apostolic church organizations. The Protestant Church was very small. They met at a small, rented hall, had a rather limited group of people, and the pastor was Hagop Shnorhokian. I told them, "I will come to the worship service every Sunday, but I don't want to take any responsibility."

My husband was Apostolic but open-minded. Had he been like his brothers, I would not have married him. We never argued about religion or church. Dr. Niziblian's wife was Catholic; she never went to the services of the Apostolic church and had frequent arguments with her husband over these issues. I went to church both morning and evening every single Sunday. My husband was so respectful of my commitment that he used to ask our guests not to visit us on Sunday. In appreciation of his respectful attitude, I also went to the Apostolic church and asked him to come along. In fact, I liked the *sharagans* a lot.

There was a huge lot belonging to the church. They built a large wooden hall and a separate room for the young adults. Around 30 young women and 20-25 young men became members of the organization, the League. Asadour Armadouni was elected as chairman and Miss Vrtanesian as an assistant. Both of them were offered a good salary.

The Apostolics invited me to join the board of their charity organization. Even though I was very busy at home, and I liked being a homemaker, those tasks did not give me a sense of fulfillment. When I was 16-17 years old in Aintab, in addition to school, I had made time to serve in two organizations called "Ousoumnasirats" and "Ashkhadasirats." I was also a member of the church choir, which met once a week to practice the Sunday anthem. I wanted to attend some of the Apostolic meetings first, if they didn't mind, before joining the board. My intention was to take a look at the women who were members of this group. After attending their meetings a few times, I found the group to be quite congenial. They were gracious ladies and gentlemen and very well organized. I liked the organization and decided to become a member.

They were organized in such a way that the women and the men would meet separately every week and all members would meet jointly once a month. Each member paid 10 liras per year. We had a good number of members, and we always wanted to grow. In addition to one or two fundraising banquets each year, we collected donations from stores and residences. We made a good sum of money and sent it to the AGBU center in Beirut.

During one of our joint meetings, we decided to propose to the central office that we retain half of the money we raised and allocate it ourselves locally. We were told that this was a good idea but that it would be better if we let the central office know what money we needed and they would send it

back to us. Our portion of these centralized funds was sent to us to cover scholarships and books for needy students and to financially support nursing homes. We also reached out and helped children and the elderly who lived at home. This was a very effective organization until 1939, when the Turks took over Iskenderun.

We started giving the girls a sewing course to equip them with a useful, money-making skill. Miss Vrtanesian's sister was a skilled seamstress, and she gave lessons twice a week to those who wanted. The schoolgirls came on Saturday and a weekday evening. Those who didn't go to school came twice a week in the morning. Many of those young women became successful seamstresses. Years later when I met some of them in Beirut, they expressed their appreciation and gratefulness to me for the opportunity given to them to learn this skill.

Besides this, we started teaching language courses, especially English. Mr. Asadour had a very good knowledge of English, and he taught it twice a week to those who wanted to learn. At the same time a choir was formed with those who had a good voice, and Mr. Asadour conducted it. The choir was so well organized that it became a blessing to the people. There was nothing like it in other organizations. Every Sunday at 11 a.m. there would be a lecturer, and the choir would sing a few songs. Most of the congregation would come to those events.

Our activities grew every year. We started a theater for talented young boys and girls. When we had a larger play, we would rent the local movie theater. One year the actor Apovian came to Iskenderun, and our boys and girls acted with him. It was a very profitable show.

Mr. Levon Zenian came from Beirut to Iskenderun several times. He was very pleased to see our activities. Many people were jealous of us, including the Tashnags and the Henchags.

April 24 was approaching. We wanted to commemorate it with an outstanding program, so we started organizing. The choir practiced twice a week in the evening or at nighttime. Those who had good voices prepared for choir or solo performances, and I played the organ. They prepared beautiful pieces for the band with the violin and other instruments. We invited Professor Aharonian from Beirut to deliver the message.

One day the Tashnags called Mr. Asadour and me for a meeting. They suggested we commemorate April 24 together. For a few moments I remained silent. I thought April 24 was approaching, and we had done all the preparations. We had invited the lecturer from Beirut. Why would we commemorate it together? We had put so much effort into organizing it. I made a decision and said no. Mr. Asadour didn't say a word. They asked, "Why?" I said, "Your organization is different than ours. We do not have Tashnags among us. Let us leave the people alone. Let them decide where

they want to go.” I said that and stood up. Their faces changed, especially that of their leader, Mr. Haig Balian.

We commemorated April 24 with an outstanding program. The hall was packed. Aharonian gave a very emotional speech. The songs were touching and beautiful. I stood up and said a couple of words and thanked everyone for coming and appreciating our work. I asked everyone to stand up for a minute and pray in memory of those who were martyred in 1915. During that time Miss Vrtanesian sang in her beautiful voice. Everyone was pleased and moved to tears. I thanked all the participants before dismissing them. A few days later I heard that the Tashnags commemorated in the church. I also heard that Mr. Haig stood up unashamed and said, “We decided to commemorate the day together with the League, but Mrs. Khatchadourian refused.” I heard this, and I didn’t care.

The French people and the Arab Christians had their own charity organizations. They too were well organized. They had a larger, wealthy population, and were able to support their hospital, nursing home, and the poor.

One year, these charities decided to have a joint banquet. A planning committee was elected. Mrs. Tosbat, Mrs. Mamalian, and I represented the Armenians; the French were represented by the wife and daughter of the French Delegate; then there was the wife of the British consul; and the Arabs were represented by two ladies from the wealthy Sayegh family, the lady of the Balid family and her three daughters, as well as three young men. We met several times to organize the banquet. It was decided to hold it at the restaurant of the Pounar Bashi picnic site, at the entrance of Iskenderun. The tickets were priced at 25 Syrian pounds each, which was a large sum of money at the time. The turnout was great. We wore aprons and served the tables, and the young men served the drinks. It was very successful; after covering all our expenses, we had a profit of 15,000 pounds. All of my friends attended this banquet.

1924: THE VISIT OF CATHOLICOS SAHAG OF CILICIA

I still remember how Catholicos Sahag visited Aintab when I was young. The entire Armenian population welcomed him with horses and music bands. The streets leading up to the church were covered with rugs; so were the balconies. People stood on their roofs and the balconies to see him. I remember my mother and I went to the Levonians, who lived near the Apostolic church, to watch the event.

Many years had passed since that day, and the Catholicos had visited numerous towns and cities. He had always wanted to visit Iskenderun, Antioch, and the surrounding Armenian villages of Mousa Dagh. When the news arrived that this was going to happen, the church parish priests and the council had a meeting to organize the details of the event and assign responsibilities. My husband, Aram, was the Chairman of the church council. He took on the biggest share of the responsibilities and offered to host the Catholicos in our house since we had all the conveniences.

Before his arrival, Catholicos Sahag had sent a letter highlighting the details of his upcoming visit. The trip would last 15 days: first Iskenderun, then Antioch and all the Armenian villages, especially Yoghoun Olouk, Kheder Beg, Haji Habibli, and Bitias. He was also going to pay short visits of 1-2 hours to the other small villages along the way.

A few days after receiving this letter, we heard that the Catholicos had started on his journey. The committee made all the arrangements to welcome him. A group of priests, government officials and community leaders went all the way to Kerek Khan to meet him there. The people living between Kerek Khan and Beylan also made him welcome. Upon his entrance to Iskenderun, the Catholicos went to the church first. Rugs covered the road, and the church bells rang. The people decorated their balconies with rugs and flowers. The Catholicos entered the church, gave a short message, and conveyed his blessings to the whole congregation. Those who accompanied him were invited to our house for dinner.

To organize a reception for 2-3 days we needed two maids and a chef. Even though our dining hall was quite large, it would not accommodate 50 guests. We prepared the table outdoors in our yard and decorated the place with flowers. Since there was no electricity yet, we lit a few kerosene lanterns. Everything looked perfect. There were all kinds of drinks and delicious foods. The Catholicos blessed the table before dinner. We had a very enjoyable time.

My mother and brother lived on the upper floor of our house. We decided to offer their bedroom after rearranging it properly. The Catholicos slept there, while my mother and brother came down to our house to sleep.

We hosted many guests during that time, even from other towns. A few days later, when it was time to visit the other areas in Antioch and the surrounding villages, people from each village would pick him up every morning. Two priests and two bodyguards (*kavas*) accompanied him every day.

The whole visit lasted 15 days. When the Catholicos finished the trips to the towns, he was exhausted. He rested for a few days, then he thanked and blessed everyone and set out on his return journey. A group of priests and other men accompanied him to Kerek Khan to bid him farewell.

MY FINAL GOLGOTHA

Nouriyé Hanem had gone to Antioch a few weeks earlier. They were planning to build a large house in Antioch and get established there. I waited impatiently for their house to be built and for them to move to Antioch. Although I loved her very much and she had helped me under many circumstances, yet I did not wish to continue to see her since, whether I liked it or not, my old memories kept coming back to me as a result. I had come to feel that by continuing to remember the past I was being unfaithful to my husband. So I decided to put these memories out of my mind. Yet I could not forget Ramzi. So I told him in my mind, "My dear Ramzi, although death separated us from each other, I promise in front of God that till I die, your sacred memory shall not fade; it will not die in my heart. Yet at the same time I am going to be faithful to my husband who loves me and respects me so much. And I will not disturb his happiness." From then on, I fulfilled that promise.

It was not long before Nouriyé Hanem returned from Antioch. She first came to visit me and showed me the plans of the house they were building. It was going to be a very large house and cost a good deal. Before she left, she proposed that we go to the club at six o'clock and have dinner there together. When my husband came and I asked him, he agreed, and we went. She had already arrived there with her husband. We had a good time. A few days later she came to see me. After sitting for a while, she turned to me and said, "My dear sister, I am going to propose something to you. Yesterday Ramzi's mother, Farouz Hanem, came to us. They had gone to Persia and then returned sometime after we returned from Ankara. She brought up the subject of you. They had heard some time ago that you had gotten married and moved to Iskenderun. She very much wants to see you and to fulfill her yearning for her son through you. But she has not been able to bring herself to visit you. Since you are living in the same house with your sisters-in-law, she was concerned that on meeting each other both of you would be moved and unable to restrain yourselves; you would embrace each other and cry. Your sisters-in-law, having no idea about the circumstances of your past relationship, would be astonished. So she hasn't had the courage to come to you so far. She said to me, 'Now that you are here, you must create an opportunity for us to meet. I beg you to bring Efronia over one day so I can see her.' She pleaded so much that I was not able to say no. Yet I could not agree to do it before getting your consent. I have now come to ask you if you would like to visit her some day." I turned to her and said, "This puts me in a very difficult position, but for the sake of Ramzi's love, I will go and fulfill her wish." She was pleased and said, "I will send word to you when we decide on a day." And we parted.

I was left with my thoughts. Once again, the old memories were going to be awakened, and I was going to find myself in a difficult position. But I promised myself that, no matter how hard it was going to be, I was going to go through with it. At worst, we were both going to be upset by seeing each other. No worse than that.

Nouriyé Hanem did not take long to get back to me. She said, "Farouz Hanem was very glad that you accepted. She will be waiting for us tomorrow afternoon at three o'clock." We went there the next day. She welcomed us, clung to my neck, and kissed me over and over as both of our eyes filled with tears. We went to the living room, and the tea was already ready. Persians drink a lot of tea. Whenever you go to their house there is a boiling samovar on the table. They serve the tea in very small cups. I had two cups and left the spoon in the cup so they would not refill it.

They were still living in the house where I had visited them in 1913. But I noticed that they had made quite a few changes. She talked about their travels and said that, "We are not going to stay in Iskenderun much longer and will be returning to Persia. My husband is going to retire from his business since he has had heart disease for a number of years. My daughter got engaged to a very wealthy young man and is about to get married." And so on and so forth. Nouriyé Hanem in turn talked about the four years that she had spent in Ankara. I said nothing and remained silent.

After we had been entertained for a while, Farouz Hanem proposed that we go out into the garden and visit the rest of the house. After spending some time in the garden, we began to go through the rooms. Finally, we came to a room located right opposite the living room. Its door was locked, so she took out a key and unlocked it. We entered it, and right there in front of my eyes was an enlarged photograph of Ramzi and me. It was our last picture. We were holding each other. They had placed over Ramzi's head an embroidered cap which the Persians wear at their wedding and to my head was attached a veil covered with flowers. I stared at it for some minutes. Then I saw Ramzi's bed on which were placed his silk pajamas; his morning robe was hanging at the side. Then, I have no idea what became of me. I must have fainted.

I do not know how long I was unconscious, but when I opened my eyes, there was my husband with the doctor hovering above me as I lay on a couch in the living room. Farouz Hanem and Nouriyé Hanem were standing aside with sad faces. The doctor said that I must have felt faint or become very emotional, to which Nouriyé Hanem responded, "She was in a very good mood. For several hours we were eating, drinking, and having a pleasant time." What else could the poor woman say? They got me up with some difficulty, held me by my arms, took me to the waiting carriage, and drove home. I stayed in bed for a month. I passed through this Golgotha, too, but I suffered very much. The poor woman kept coming to see me with flowers; she came with Nouriyé Hanem.

After this event, I continued to see both of them, but neither Nouriyé Hanem nor Farouz Hanem reminded me of the past any longer. Farouz Hanem would often stop by our house and try to appear happy, but I was sure that she was there to satisfy her longing for her son through me. I treated her with much respect. And although I wanted to visit them very much, to fulfill my yearning to enter that room again, I could not bring myself to suffer through the same Golgotha. Instead Farouz Hanem would come to us or we would meet in Nouriyé Hanem's house. It was not long before both families left Iskenderun. Although I loved them both very much, I was also glad at their leaving because by constantly seeing them, particularly by seeing Ramzi's mother, my old memories were renewed constantly.

When Farouz Hanem and her husband were about to leave for Persia, Nouriyé Hanem invited them and me and my husband for dinner. I sensed that Ramzi's mother and father both were very moved by seeing me for the last time, but they concealed it. I then found an opportunity and went back with Nouriyé Hanem to see Ramzi's room one last time and said goodbye with my tears. Thus ended my last trip to Golgotha.

1926: LUCIN JOINS OUR FAMILY

In 1915, during the First World War, all of the Armenians living among Turks were expelled from their homes and sent to the deserts, where most of them died from starvation and illnesses while others were massacred by murderers and annihilated.

After the war was over, Armenians formed groups who went to the villages and encampments of Arabs and Kurds who had abducted women, girls and children, and so far as possible, collected them and placed them in orphanages in Aleppo and Beirut. Very few were able to rejoin their families. For a while Americans kept these orphanages open.



Lucin as a member of the family, Herant's nanny and Efronia's companion

After running these orphanages for a few years, the Americans decided to place these boys and girls in families as adopted children or servants. When we heard about this, we decided to take in one of them even though we had no need for additional servants. We already had a woman servant and a man who was a cook.

The reason we had hired them was because we had many guests and our servant, Marta Baji, was an elderly woman who often worked in the kitchen and would come out into the living room bringing coffee to the guests. It bothered us that someone older than us was serving us and we decided to bring one of the girls from the orphanage. We wrote to the Director, Mr. Terzian, and informed him about our family circumstances and requested that he send us a presentable twelve-year-old girl whose task would be to open the door for guests and invite the guests into the living room, bring them coffee and attend to them more generally.

We waited for quite a while but heard nothing. So I decided to go and choose someone personally and bring her over. I went to Beirut and found the

orphanage but was told that the Director, Mr. Terzian, had taken fifteen girls to Iskenderun and they wished that I had come a few days earlier.

When I returned to home to Iskenderun, I knocked the door and Marta Baji opened the door and said, “Mr. Terzian brought us this girl. She speaks Armenian but I don’t understand her, neither does Iskandar (the cook). We were confused. We were waiting for Aram Efendi to come. Meanwhile, she is sitting like a dumb person.” I asked her to come to me. She stood in front of me. She was ugly, short, and her eyes looked strange. The Arabs had either found her or taken her, and tattooed her chin and forehead with their tribal markings.

In one word, I was disappointed. She was not the girl I was looking for. I went to Mr. Terzian the next day and said, “I want to look at the other girls and choose another one”. He turned to me and said, “Not only is she ugly; she is also sick. Having heard about your family, I can only entrust her to someone like your family. For the sake of God, take care of her as your own daughter”. When I heard these words, I fell silent and regretted what I had said.

When we came home, I called her to me and kissed her. She clung to me and cried. Then she asked if she could call me mother. I said to her she could. She could also call my husband father. And she would be an obedient daughter. She was happy and promised to be an obedient girl. She had a severe cough. Her knees hurt. Her coughing kept us awake even though her room was far from ours. She was under Dr. Niziblian’s medical care. Even though she had many issues, she was very tidy, and hardworking. When she arrived, she had a small box in which she had placed her belongings. Everything in the box was so perfectly laid out.

She dealt with her many ailments patiently and stoically. Her irritability and temper tantrums continued to upset me, but I forgave her, given her tragic early life. She had been deprived of the love of her parents and her family. She had lived under harsh circumstances. Even though I was still young, I thought I had to be patient and accommodating. Lucin gradually changed and she won our hearts by her love and her commitment to us. We have lived together for 54 years. I have forgotten the past and I am enjoying her love and care for me. She was deeply grateful to God for making her a member of our family. She says, “All the girls like me became maids, but you made me your own daughter.”

When my son Herant was born, Lucin was eighteen years old. I told her that from now on, taking care of him would be her job. Lucin loved him like no one else.



Aram, Efronia and Elvira with
Palestinian costumes during
pilgrimage to Jerusalem

1930: OUR VISIT TO JERUSALEM

Aram loved, respected, and appreciated my mother very much. He always said, “When she dies, I will have the following written on her tombstone: ‘Here lies a heroic mother, Ovsanna Nazarian.’” Aram had heard about our family situation following my father’s death during the Aintab massacres. Even though Aram was only 7-8 years old at the time, he had heard about my mother, how she raised her orphan children without any money, how she sent them to get a quality education, and how hard she worked at such a young age. As Aram grew up, he saw the sacrifices she made.

Aram and I sometimes spoke about my mother, and he used to ask me questions about her. One day he said, “Efronia, I’m thinking of taking your mother to Jerusalem. I am sure she will be very happy.” In those days, if a mother and a father sacrificed a lot for their children, people would ask them, “Are your children going to take you to Jerusalem?” Aram said, “Let’s show all those people that such a selfless mother has a daughter and son-in-law who will take her to Jerusalem.”

The trip from Aintab to Jerusalem used to take a month on horseback. It didn’t matter if it took less time from Iskenderun. The purpose was the same. We decided to go, and we conveyed the news to my mother. She was very happy to hear it.

That year’s Easter Day was in the middle of April. Pilgrims used to go during Easter to participate in the rituals of Christ’s crucifixion and resurrection. There would be services in every Christian Church. I think it was April 15 when we started our journey. We planned to stay in Beirut for 5-6 days to visit my sister-in-law’s family. My brother Yervant and family were still living with us in our home. Right after their marriage they had had a sweet baby girl whom they named Nora. My brother wanted his wife, Negdar, and the one-year-old baby to come along with us. Negdar wanted to go to Beirut to see her parents. So, the five of us left in the evening and arrived in Beirut in the morning. Negdar and my mother stayed at her parents’ home, and we stayed at my brother-in-law’s for 5-6 days. One day we were invited to

Negdar's parents' home for lunch. While we were there, Nora took her first steps!

Five or six days later we boarded the ship to go to Jerusalem. We arrived in Haifa and went to Nazareth, where we stayed the night because I felt sick and needed to rest. In Nazareth, we went sightseeing. When we arrived in Jerusalem, we went directly to the monastery. They greeted us and asked us to check the rooms and find the one we liked. We looked around in the monastery, but we did not like it, especially when we heard that they would close the gates after dark and wouldn't let anyone out. Aram said, "I'm sorry, but I cannot stay here."

We left the monastery and went to visit Father Tourian with a person who guided us to his place. He greeted us very graciously and said, "I have heard about the Khatchadourians. Why don't you stay in the monastery? They will do their best to please you." Aram thanked him and said, "I don't want to stay there because I want to go out at night. I have relatives I want to visit." Then he gave a 20 £ gold coin as a gift to the monastery. The Father thanked him, blessed us, and asked us to visit him again.

We looked for a hotel near the church, and we found one that belonged to a Jewish person. We booked two rooms, one for my mom and Elvira and another one for us. With the currency of the time, each night was a one £ gold coin, exclusive of food. We planned to have breakfast at the hotel but go out for lunch and dinner. There were many good restaurants.

Dr. Yaghlian, whose wife was my sister-in-law Alice's Haji mother's daughter, lived in Jerusalem close to the church. When they saw us, they wanted us to stay at their place. We thanked them and said we had reserved two rooms at the hotel. They said, "Then come for dinner every day." We did go a few times.

The next day when we went to dinner to their house, we met a young man, the doctor's brother, who was Father Tourian's driver. He mentioned that he was not busy at this season of Easter because the Father was always busy in the church. He said, "I would love to serve you." Aram replied, "Rent us a car and take us around Jerusalem." A couple of days later when we went for lunch to the doctor's house, this young man came and brought with him a beautiful car he had rented for 10 days. We liked it a lot. After lunch he drove us to the hotel.

This was a great arrangement. Whenever there was a special religious ceremony, we went to church. For example, Tuesday of the Holy Week is the day of the Ten Virgins. On Thursday before noon they do foot-washing and in the afternoon the opening of the altar. (We made a good donation on that occasion, and Elvira opened the curtain with the help of another girl). The same evening there is the enactment of Jesus' arrest in the Church of Gethsemane and on Friday his crucifixion. On Friday night they turn off all the lights, they read the book of Daniel, and the people pray. On Saturday they

celebrate light shining on Jesus' tomb (*Jerakalouyts*). This service happens in the Church of the Resurrection. A great many people would wait in the courtyard for the opening of the church gate. Traditionally, the Armenian priests open the gate that day. You wouldn't be able to find any room in the courtyard, and lot of people would be caught in a stampede. It would also be impossible to find room inside the church. Nonetheless, they usually make special room for the pilgrims, and they did for us. On Easter Sunday they celebrate Jesus' resurrection, and on Monday women visit the empty tomb.

These services are very long.

There was no time to go sightseeing until the Holy Week ended. Aram then took us to places not many tourists have been. We went to the Mountain of Temptations on a difficult and dangerous road. We even saw monks living among the rocks. We spent a day in Tel Aviv, and we took with us Mrs. Alice and her son Aram who was seven years old. It was a beautiful city filled with Jewish people who looked European. We had lunch in the garden of a wonderful restaurant. When we returned, Alice's brother, Mr. Levon, had arrived to visit for a few days.

We stayed in Jerusalem for 10 to 15 days. We went shopping and bought gifts for many relatives and friends. We also bought a big crystal chandelier for the Church of Iskenderun. Before leaving Jerusalem, we sent a telegram to Iskenderun to share the day and time of our arrival.

On our way back we decided to drive through Damascus. It was a very pleasant trip, but we could not see the road because of the locusts. We couldn't open the windows. We passed through Damascus, Hama, Homs, and Latakia, where we spent the night.

We left Latakia pretty early, and after a few hours we reached Kerek Khan. A large crowd of relatives and friends was waiting for us. When we reached Iskenderun, they took us to the church. They rang the bell, and Father Krikor spoke. They sang beautiful *sharagans* (hymns), and the priest blessed us. This was a special honor for us even though there were others who had undertaken that pilgrimage. Aram was very much involved in the church and used to give a good amount of money. On this occasion we donated the chandelier.

After church, we went home with our family, and we realized that more people would come for dinner. We had some coffee, changed our clothes, and rested for a while.

A lot of preparation had been made in our yard. A long table from one side of the yard to the other was decorated with flowers. Soon a good number of people started showing up, about 50 of them. My older brother came from Antioch. Adour Levonian and family came from Kerek Khan. Everyone sat down and started drinking. In the middle of the table there was a big roasted lamb which my brother-in-law Hovhannes had ordered. There were many other kinds of food followed by fruit and dessert, all of which we enjoyed until late at night. The musicians from the League played constantly. Some people

remained around the table while the younger men and women danced until late at night. I wore a beautiful dress I had bought in Jerusalem (which I later gave to my daughter-in-law Stina). It was a unique outfit, and everyone marveled. The guests left after having a great time eating, drinking, and dancing. The next day our close family came for lunch, and we gave them all the gifts we had brought.... So this is how we went to Jerusalem and returned. It was a very, very happy time. The trip lasted exactly one month.

After our return from Jerusalem, we decided to move to a new house. As I mentioned earlier, Aram was not only a merchant but also a commission agent and a money lender. In the Greek quarter, we found a Christian Arab who had built a large new house much better than the others in Iskenderun. It had been built less than two years previously, but after its construction, the builders had had some trouble in their business and needed to borrow a large sum of money from Aram. Eventually, they could not complete the project and asked Aram whether he would buy it. Aram accepted the offer and bought the house. It was a two-story structure on the main street. Each floor had 6 rooms, 3 bedrooms, a large salon, a dining room, and an extra guest room. There was a long hallway leading to the kitchen. There was also a large room near the kitchen to store food and other things. Later we divided that room into two and made a bathroom. The laundry room was downstairs.

The first year when Adana was vacated, the wealthy Khoubeserians came to be our guests in the new house. We bought their piano and rented our property to them for 100 gold coins. When we decided to move in, we asked them to empty the place in a month.

After we made this decision, we received news from the Prelacy of Aleppo that Father Ardavazt was going to visit Iskenderun. The church council tried to find accommodation for him, and the decision was made that he would become our guest. Father Krikor and a few others would make all the arrangements, especially regarding church services.

1931: FATHER ARDAVAZT'S VISIT TO ISKENDERUN, MY PREGNANCY AND OTHER EVENTS

As Easter came closer, we prepared a room for Father Ardavazt. Along with him, we were expecting his bodyguard (*kavas*) and four priests. We made arrangements for the priests to stay in other homes, but lunches and dinners were going to be served at our place. Even though I had a maid, I had sent our cook away because he used to drink a lot; we needed a cook. So we found a good cook for 15 days. On the day of the Father's arrival a lot of people went to greet him. In the evening they all arrived at our place, 25 to 30 people, and we had dinner.

The Father was a tall, dark-eyed, handsome man. He had a very strong personality and was very demanding. The poor priests trembled around him. He would scold them for every little thing. Our cook made such amazing dinners and lunches. There would be 3-4 choices for lunch and 3-4 choices for dinner. He would also serve the food himself, wearing a white apron and a chef's hat. One day he made *beoreg*. When the Father ate it, he said, "I have been all over, and I have eaten a lot of food, but I have never tasted anything like this. Save a piece for me for dinner."

I knew Father Haroutune very well because he was from Aintab and a neighbor of my grandmother. After lunch he came to me and said, "The food we are having here I have never had in my entire life. But you know *Aintabtsis* like *bulghur*. Let's have *chikufta* one day." The next day I said to Marta Baji, the maid, "Make us some *chikufta*, and let's put it in the middle of the table. Let's not serve it. Whoever wants it, let them self-serve." Marta was from Dort Yol and made good *chikufta*. When Father Ardavazt came to the table the next day, he stopped for a moment, looked at Father Haroutune and said in a loud voice, "Haroutune, I know you did this!" I immediately said, "Excuse me, Father. I had it made. I thought people would like it." After lunch Father Haroutune came to me and said, "Thank you so much. I enjoyed it a lot." And he ate a few more pieces!

Earlier, when Sahag Catholicos had stayed for 15 days; his presence had been very pleasant. He was a simple person, and he smiled a lot. This was a different man. Many people used to come to him with their problems. He used to yell at them and send them away! One evening when we were sitting together, he called Elvira and asked her, "What is your name?" Elvira replied. He said, "From now on your name will be Satenig." He looked at us and said, "Why don't we use Armenian names? Why didn't God give you a child? I am pleading with God to give you a child."

We had many guests. Almost every evening we had 15-20 people for dinner.

After 15 days, Father Ardavazt thanked us for our hospitality and said, “I will never forget this, and I want to come back again.” A group of people accompanied him to Kerek Khan to send him off. He came back 2 years later while on his way to Antioch, and stayed a few days.

During the time Father Ardavazt was our guest, Aram shared with him his plans about building several houses. Father Ardavazt warned him and told him never to execute those plans. He told Aram the French army would retreat immediately after completing their 25 years of mandate in the area. The same opinion was given by my sister’s son Vahram, who used to work in Aleppo, where he had connections. He wrote to Aram, “Dear Uncle, please think it over. I need to inform you that the French are preparing to retreat from Iskenderun.” Aram never believed what Father Ardavazt or Vahram said to him, neither did he change his plans about buying these properties and building the houses.

When Father Ardavazt left, we couldn’t immediately move into our new house. To be honest, I did not want to. Even though the place was ready, I wanted to have some new furniture made. We probably had good pieces of furniture, but they were not appropriate for that big house. I wanted to go to Aleppo and meet with the famous furniture maker Ghazar Bedigian. Aram agreed. I went to Aleppo and stayed for 10 days during which I ordered a very beautiful mahogany 10-piece set for our salon. The fabric was light brown silky velvet. I also ordered drapes from Greece for five windows.

I met with our good friend the musician Hagop Uvezian, and we ordered a Schiller piano from Germany. It was of the same mahogany color. The furniture maker promised to have everything ready in two months. When I returned home, we postponed our move until the furniture arrived. Aram bought two gold-colored beds, each for 18 gold coins.

When we decided to move, my brother decided to move out too. Sarkis Efendi and Mrs. Marie, who owned the house, were planning to rent it to other people, and my brother did not want to live with strangers.

The hot summer was almost here, and it was time to go to the resort town in the mountains to enjoy the cooler weather. We considered moving to our new house before summer, but I was not feeling well. I’d had this extreme headache for several years, and no doctor knew the cause nor the treatment. It would last for four days. I used to go to my bedroom, lie down, and did not want anyone to come into my room. I could not eat or drink. The pain was so severe that I used to think I was going blind. That summer, after I’d suffered several days of extreme pain, we went to our new home, cleaned it, and moved in. When that was completed, we went up to the mountains to the summer resort town of Sovouk Olouk.

For several years we rented a home from the villagers. One year we rented the property of Hagop Dada, who was a good man. Aram thought it would be good for us to pay him and ask him to build us a house. We would use it for

several years without rent, and then we would leave it to him. The man agreed. There was a large area and a nice pond in front of his house. He was going to build for us two bedrooms, a living room, and a kitchen.

The next year the house was ready. We used our old furniture, including 2-3 beds and the living room set. It turned out to be a very comfortable place for us. That year we had so many guests from Aleppo that we and our maids couldn't rest at all. Dr. Hovsep Yenikomshian, who was newly married, came to visit and stayed with us. Then came my brother-in-law Sarkis Efendi with his daughter Verkiné, who was just married and was going to America in the next couple of weeks. We only rested one or two weeks before the end of the summer, but my headache came again, and I suffered a lot.

Every summer Dr. Altounian and his family, including his son Dr. Ernest and family, would come to Sovouk Olouk from Aleppo. They had a beautiful house on the hill, where we used to visit them. One afternoon, although that year the father was not there, they invited us for tea. They had a beautiful table set for us. Aram told the son, Dr. Ernest, about my headache. He said he would run all kinds of tests to know the cause and find a treatment for it. We decided to go to Aleppo immediately after going back home.

As soon as we arrived home from Sovouk Olouk, we left for Aleppo, and we stayed at the home of my sister-in-law's Haji Mama. We were planning on going to Aleppo anyway because my uncle Movses was going to move to Brazil in South America. His daughter Anita and son Yacoub were over there and wanted the parents to join them. Their two daughters, Lucy and Zabel, were going with them. The two other daughters, Jemilé and Rosa, were in Boston.

First, we went to Altounian Hospital to see Dr. Ernest. We had made an appointment with him, and he ran many tests in his clinic. First, he thought it was my appendix; then he realized that my uterus had an issue that caused an extreme headache. He suggested I have a small surgery and wanted me to be admitted in the hospital immediately. But since my uncle was going to leave in the next two days, I asked him to delay it for a couple of days until my uncle's family left. The doctor agreed. When they had left, I entered the hospital and stayed there for three days. I felt better, and we returned to Iskenderun.

On every happy occasion something sad happens. My brother Yacoub had gone hunting and brought back a few ducks and geese from a lake in Antioch. We cooked and ate them with pleasure. When Aram came back home in the evening, he felt sick. He went to bed with a high fever. We gave him tea and several other drinks, but it didn't help. In the morning, we called Dr. Jiyerian who gave him some medications. Nothing seemed to help. The doctor came in every day but was not able to diagnose the disease. He suggested having a consultation with other doctors. So, a French doctor and an Arab Christian doctor by the name of Dr. Sayegh and Dr. Jiyerian examined Aram and

concluded that it was typhoid. They started treating him, but the fever didn't go down. For almost three weeks Aram stayed in bed.

I was exhausted; I never slept day and night. Thinking it was contagious, we didn't let anyone enter his room. We hired a nurse to help. Even though she was very kind, Aram didn't let her go near him. He wanted me to serve him and do everything for him. The poor girl sat, sleepless, on the couch with a lot of mosquitoes around her. She finally said, "I will leave. He doesn't want me. I am sitting here doing nothing." We paid her and let her go. Aram couldn't digest even the lightest soups I made. Eventually, the French doctor, Dr. Daher, gave him a digestion medication. He started digesting better, and the fever went down. When he had fully recovered, he heard that the typhoid microbe lasts for months, so he decided to go to Aleppo and get tested at Dr. Altounian's hospital. He went there and got tested. Dr. Altounian told Aram that he never had typhoid; what he had was intestinal flu.

When we moved into our new home, my brother rented a house nearby. Seamstress Vahidé Avedikian lived close to us too. Her daughter, Josephine, loved me (she does until now). She liked sleeping at our house, and she used to say, "When Aram Efendi is gone, call me, and I will come stay with you." Aram traveled several times every year to Aleppo or elsewhere. Josephine gladly came and stayed with me. One day she came and said, "I had a dream last night. An angel came and gave me a beautiful baby. I told him, 'What will I do with this baby? I have a dear friend who doesn't have a child. Give the baby to her.' "So," she said, "the angel gave me the baby." She concluded, "You're definitely going to have a child." "Everything is possible with God," I said. "I will pray and believe that He will give me a child." I spent my days believing and praying. After the surgery, my headache was lighter but not completely gone. I often had to lie in bed due to pain.

Malaria in Iskenderun subsided. The swamps disappeared; the mosquitoes decreased in number, but malaria didn't go away. Since the bug was in our blood, many people experienced relapses. Aram and I suffered from it very often. We always used quinine and took the shots. One springtime I got malaria again, and the symptoms were very harsh. No medication helped reduce my fever nor my vomiting. Our family physician, Dr. Ejdeherian, came almost every day. One day he suggested Aram take me to Sovouk Olouk. It was in May, one month earlier than our usual time to go to the mountains. We decided to go along with my maid, Mariam. Aram came every night, and the doctor came over two or three times a week to give me quinine shots. My fever subsided, but the vomiting didn't. I had such a severe headache that I couldn't lift my head from my pillow. I didn't say anything to anyone, but I thought to myself, "This is a different sickness. I think I am pregnant." The doctor started suspecting it and asked me questions. He decided to bring along Dr. Niziblian's eldest daughter Adriné, who was a midwife. Next day they came together, and they confirmed that I was one month pregnant. I can't explain

how happy we were, not only us but all our relatives and friends. We praised God for hearing our prayers. The doctor and Adriné were astonished how the malaria medication quinine shots did not harm the fetus. "This is God's miracle," they said. The doctor recommended that I stay in bed most of the day.

People gradually started going up to the mountains in the summer. My brother had rented a house near ours. His wife, Negdar, was pregnant with their second child. She had a daughter even though they were expecting a boy. My brother was not very happy. But what could you do if God gave you a girl? They named her Zabel, after Negdar's mother. When my older brother heard the news, he came with his family to Sovouk Olouk and brought a lamb. Despite my situation with the pregnancy, and with the help of my mother and the maid, we stuffed the lamb and baked it in the oven in our yard. Fifteen to twenty people came over for the celebration. My brother and his family stayed for two days and returned to Antioch.

On September 15, when the weather cooled down, we went back home. I was five months pregnant. The house was clean and well-furnished, ready for us. We were all so happy and pleased. As I said earlier, in every joyous occasion, there will be an event that causes worry and discomfort. Soon enough we received a letter from Beirut from Haig Balian, who is the son-in-law of my brother-in-law Sarkis Efendi. The letter said that Sarkis Efendi was in a very difficult financial situation. He had run out of money. When he went to Beirut, he partnered with the Gulesserian tailors, who had a big business in men's clothing. They not only tailored but also sold fabric. Instead of sharing the income, they claimed that the business lost money. Sarkis left the partnership having lost all his money. When Aram read the letter, he was saddened. He immediately wrote back to Haig and Sarkis and invited the latter to come to Iskenderun. Soon enough he came. The two brothers talked for a long time. Aram encouraged Sarkis and told him not to worry. He would do anything to help him. Sarkis thanked him and said, "You have always helped me, and you will now."

A few days later after lunch, Aram brought 150 gold coins from the home safe and gave them to his brother. A few months before, Aram had partnered with someone in building a road from Kerek Khan, and his share in the profit was 150 gold coins. Sarkis did not want to accept the gift. He said, "Brother, you have earned this; I don't want you to give it to me." "Brother, I heard that your friends robbed you," Aram said to him, "You have to accept this." Sarkis was so touched that he stood up, hugged and kissed his brother. "Brother," said Aram, "I am involved with the Bayramians in a contract to build a road beyond Aleppo in the town of Bab. Would you like to work there? If yes, I will give it to you. The profit is yours, and the loss is mine. However, I think it will be hard for you to be away from your family for several months. I wish it was in Aleppo." Sarkis replied, "It doesn't matter. As long as I have a job,

it doesn't matter whether I live in Aleppo or Bab. It won't make a difference. Thank you so much. May God reward you." He stayed for 8-10 days and returned to Beirut.

Aram wrote a letter to the Bayramians informing them that he was appointing his brother in his place. "I will send you the amount of money you need. My brother was here. He went to Beirut, and he is planning on coming to see you immediately. I do hope you will like him and the project will be successful."

A few days later Sarkis went to Aleppo to meet with the Bayramians. They went to Bab to start the project. Everything went well, and Aram's share of the profit was 800 gold coins. Aram didn't take a penny; he left it all to his brother. When in Bab, Sarkis dressed exactly like the local people of Bab. He sent us pictures of himself wearing an *abayé* and with a *kafiyé* on his head. The photo is among those sent to us in America from Beirut.



THE BIRTH OF MY BELOVED SON, HERANT: JANUARY 23, 1933

The date of delivery got close. One evening before the end of nine months my labor pains started. The French physician, Dr. Bruce, who was taking care of me, was called to our house. He said I should be taken to the hospital right away and offered to drive me and Aram there in his car. The hospital doctor said I still needed two more weeks, but that was not a problem since this happened with first deliveries. Word was sent to Mrs. Marie, my sister-in-law, to come and stay with me in the hospital. This meant that we had to provide food to the other members of her family since

they were busy with work and could not cook. My mother could not stay with me because of her other obligations at home.

When the doctor examined me in the hospital, he said he hoped that I would have an easy delivery. But that hope was not realized. I had a good English friend called Mrs. Watt. I told her I could no longer endure my pains, and she went to ask the doctor to find a way to help me. She was told that the alternative was to deliver the baby by surgery. But he said he was afraid we might lose the baby, so we needed to have my husband's consent. When I heard this, I begged them to say nothing to my husband about this and to go ahead with the operation. Soon after that, they took me to the operating room. Aram asked if there was any danger involved, but he was told that there was none for me although there were concerns about the baby. As Mrs. Watt held my hand, they put me to sleep. I don't know how long all this lasted. But as soon as the baby was born, he started crying. The doctor congratulated Aram for having a baby boy. Aram started crying, and when asked why, he said, "If the baby is alive it means that my wife must have died. The doctor reassured him that both mother and child were fine and that he should rejoice.

I could not open my eyes for two days, but finally I saw my baby's face. Unfortunately, I did not have enough milk to nurse him, and milk had to be brought from the outside. While I had been in labor, our house had been full of relatives waiting for news. Finally, my nephew Puzant had raced from the hospital on his bike, flung it aside and run into the house, yelling, "It's a boy".



Nora, the daughter of Efronia's
brother Yervant

Lucin was standing at the top of the stairs with a tray full of cups of Turkish coffee. She became so flustered that she dropped the tray, sending the cups scattering down. Women rushed to hug her saying this would bring good luck.

I stayed in the hospital for forty days. I was getting a bit better when I developed pneumonia. The physician said it was a mild form and that I would be better in eight to ten days. However, the baby was taken to another room as I recovered. The birth had to be reported to the government, but we had not decided on a name yet.

Two weeks later, Mrs. Marie returned home. I very much wanted my mother to come to stay with me. However, my brother Yervant's wife, Negdar, had developed tuberculosis and had to be

hospitalized in Beirut. A year later, she was well enough to join her parents and with the younger daughter, Zabel, emigrated to Montevideo in South America. Yervant kept her four-year-old daughter, Nora, with him, and she lived with our old mother. I'll never forget my brother shedding tears over the breakup of his family and cursing his bad luck. I spent years trying to help them bring up Nora.

Despite the calamity that had befallen my brother, the year ended with our gratitude for the healthy son God had granted us to bring joy to our family. Our next joyful task was to have Herant baptized in the Orthodox church. The priest agreed to do the baptism at home, and my cousin Khatchig became the godfather. The daughter of Mrs. Marie had made such a beautiful dress that it attracted everyone's admiration. We saved it, and both of Herant's children also wore it for their baptisms.

1935: THE BUILDING OF OUR NEW HOUSE

Even though the house we were living in was spacious and well-built, Aram wanted to build another one. Until Herant's birth, he had hardly any properties of his own. Aram and his brothers shared the ownership of several properties near the port. But once we had a child, Aram felt safer, and wanted to make sure he would leave his wealth to his own son. He started building this house, in addition to buying a hotel with five attached stores. He also bought a four-room house in Chay Mahallesi, a lot overlooking the shore, and another one near the customs house, etc.... Earlier in Sovouk Olouk, he had bought two houses from the local villagers. Later he bought Soukias Efendi's home on a beautiful hill. This house had two rooms, a corridor, and a pond. Lastly, and in partnership with the owner of Aleppo's Hotel Baron and Naamatollah, he bought a piece of land at the entrance of Sovouk Olouk. The other two men built beautiful houses, but Aram postponed building his own because he was busy with the new home in the city. After completion of that project, the foundations were laid, and the walls started rising. This was never completed because Iskenderun was given over to the Turks in 1939.



Aram and Efronia's house in Iskenderun. Built in 1935. The family lived on the upper floor. The lower floor was rented to Turkish diplomats

In 1935, Aram and the engineers started designing our two-story house. At the end of the year, the ground floor was ready, in addition to the stone walls of the second. We immediately moved in because it would be easier for Aram to supervise the project. They were still working on the second floor and the

garden. After living on the lower floor for a year, I realized the upper floor was more luminous and had a better view of the sea. I really wanted us to move to the second floor and rent out the first, but Aram disagreed. He said, “We need to live on the ground floor to be able to enjoy the garden. Otherwise, the tenants will enjoy it.” When I insisted, Aram found a perfect solution to please me. He had a staircase made from the second floor to the garden and to the laundry room.

This was an amazing house, the best in all of Iskenderun. All the terrace iron railings and the front gate had his initials A.K. painted in a gold color. We bought whatever we needed and decorated the house beautifully. The gardener worked every day until late evening, while Aram joined him every morning till 9 a.m. Not only we, but all our friends and relatives enjoyed the garden and the green benches and table. Very often they came over for breakfast and had tea, coffee, and cake. We lived a perfect life. People were jealous of our lifestyle. There were no other Armenians who wore what I did as most of my clothes were imported from Paris. I ordered only a few from Beirut or went there to have them tailored. I spent money lavishly, and my husband wasn't bothered at all. In fact, he was pleased.

A year after moving into our new house, we gave the engagement party for Aram's sister Hripsimé's daughter Araxi. She was 18 years old. The man was from the Attarian family who lived in Aleppo and were originally from Kilis. Since Araxi's father, Toros, was also originally from Kilis, the families knew each other well. Antranig, the suitor, and his father came to Iskenderun to ask for Araxi's hand. Antranig was a tall, handsome man who worked at the police station on the border near Aleppo. His job was to confiscate illegal goods and capture those who committed such crimes at the border. This was a high-risk career.

Araxi was not ready to enter into this relationship; she was still in school. However, her mother influenced her and almost forced her to marry the guy. She asked our opinion too, and neither Aram nor I was in favor since Araxi was a beautiful 18-year-old. However, we didn't want to stand in the way. When her parents expressed their approval, Antranig and his father wanted to give Araxi a ring. Antranig's mother, sisters, and brothers came to Iskenderun for the engagement. We invited our relatives and close friends to the engagement party in our house. It was a wonderful party, and they stayed over for several days, some at our house and the rest in a hotel.

Since it was inconvenient to commute from city to city, they didn't want the engagement period to be very long and wanted to set the wedding date. We agreed to have the wedding in a few months. Aram gave some money to his sister to start preparing the trousseau. His sister did some of the sewing herself and gave some to a seamstress. After a few months, they came to take the bride-to-be to Aleppo, and Araxi's mother and brother Souren went along to attend the wedding.

The groom was not rich, and he had to work several nights every week. However, they loved each other, and they had a good life. Araxi became a good homemaker, raising four sons and a daughter. They faced many challenges with patience and endurance. The boys didn't graduate from school; they went to work. But her beautiful, smart daughter graduated from the best school in Aleppo. I heard just this year (1981) that she has married a good young man. The oldest son, Koko, became a good craftsman and was committed to his family. I heard that he bought a very good house for his parents, and one for himself and his family.

We had a second engagement party, that of Alice our niece, the daughter of my sister-in-law Marie. Her older daughter was already married to Herant Devejian and settled in Aleppo. Alice, who was a teacher in Kerek Khan, had several suitors from Iskenderun, but none of them was a good match. Eventually, the Aintabtsi Baghdasarian family from Beirut asked for her hand for their son Hovhannes. This was a suitable match. The man and his sister came to Iskenderun, made a promise, and they got engaged. We were not able to have this engagement party at our house because my son Herant was sick with a 39-40-degree fever. The engagement took place in their home, which was close to ours. Aram attended but I couldn't. A few months later, when they came to take the bride-to-be to Beirut, we invited those who came from Beirut, also our relatives and friends, and gave a very nice party.

Herant had a high fever for 5 or 6 days, and the doctor came to see him every day. They suspected measles, which was going around among children. I was very worried because I had heard that measles would show after three days of fever. However, seven days had passed without any symptom of the disease. On a Sunday morning, I was sitting by Herant's bed, very worried and sad. I turned to Aram and said, "This is not working. We need another doctor." I was not even done speaking when I suddenly saw red spots cover his entire body in a couple of minutes. The doctor came and said, "This is a harsh case, but there is no reason to be afraid." For almost three nights we stayed awake. On the second day, when he was drinking some milk, he had a severe nosebleed. The quantity of blood was so great that the container I brought was almost filled. We called the doctor, who said this was a good sign. "He will get better now," he said. In fact, Herant started getting better and better. I had heard that those who have measles will have three days of fever, three days of rash and three days of healing. In Herant's case the fever lasted 6-7 days.

When Alice went to Beirut to get married, the groom-to-be invited her mother and brother to go along with them. At that time her sister Arminé had moved to Beirut too. When Khatchig went to Beirut, Yervant Demirjian offered him a job with a good salary as a clerk. He thought for a while without making any promise and told them, "I will go meet with my uncle and let you know." When he met with his uncle Aram, the latter said, "Do as you wish if

you see a better future over there. I will not stand in your way.” As a result, Khatchig and his two sisters decided to settle in Beirut. “Uncle,” he said before he left, “I heard the French are going to retreat, so I will take this job. If the French retreat, I will have to leave anyway. So it’s better to leave now since I have such an employment opportunity.” “I don’t believe the French will retreat,” Aram said, “but if you want to go, I will not stand in your way. The salary they offered is better than what I was paying you.” When Khatchig decided to leave, Aram found another clerk who got trained under Khatchig for a few weeks. Mrs. Marie started preparing for the move; they put their house up for rent and left.

Elvira was already 18-19 years old. After sending her to the Armenian school for several years, we sent her to the Armenian Catholic school to learn French and take piano lessons. According to the custom of the time, she had reached the age of marriage. A few men from Aleppo were interested in her, but none of them was a good match. In addition, she didn’t want to go to a place foreign to her. There was no one in Iskenderun for her. Several Arab Christians asked for her hand, but that was impossible! Some Armenian men were interested too, but none was suitable.

One day when Aram came home, a unique thing happened. A young man came in person and asked for Elvira’s hand. As far as I knew, it was the man’s family who asked for the woman’s hand. This was unusual. When I told him so, he said, “This is the new trend.” His name was Khatchig Armadouni. Even though we had a relationship with his family, and we knew them very well, he was not someone we thought about. I felt he had an eye on Elvira, and she liked him. We started thinking about it. He did not come from a wealthy family, but a good, middle class one. He was handsome and had a good position, a salaried job in Catoni’s office. We didn’t much like that.

We thought we needed to inform Elvira’s father in Antioch. He came to see us, and he, too, wasn’t too pleased about it. He said, “He could be a good man from a good family, but Elvira is used to living a lavish life with you. She has enjoyed luxuries and clothes like no one else has. How would she be willing to live with someone with a limited income?” I thought, “Let us call my brother Yervant. He is good friends with them.” We called Yervant and said, “You are Elvira’s uncle. What do you think?” “I want to express my approval,” he said. “I have been close friends with this family for years, and I like him a lot. He takes care of his entire family. He is a physically healthy young man, and he has enough money to get married. He doesn’t have to be rich to get married. There’s another factor we need to consider – whether Elvira loves Khatchig. Let’s ask her to come.”

We called her to ask for her opinion. At first, she said, “You decide.” When we asked her if she liked him, she said, “Yes.” After a long discussion, we thought there was no better suitor in Iskenderun. Aram said, “If money is the issue, I will help. I have money; I have a business; I can definitely employ

him. (If we had only known we would leave Iskenderun for Beirut, we wouldn't have offered him a job. He would have had better opportunities in a bigger city like Beirut). We finally decided and promised to give Elvira away to Khatchig. We never regretted doing so. Elvira was very happy in her marriage. Years later she used to tell me, "Mom, if you had given me to a millionaire, perhaps I wouldn't be as happy." He was a polite and enjoyable man.

Even though we gave our promise to Khatchig, we also wanted to meet with his family. One evening they came, and both families expressed their approval. The engagement was to happen during the Christmas break, when Elvira's siblings would be on their school holiday. So the date was the last day of Christmas in 1937.

We started preparing for the engagement party. The stores did not have everything as they do nowadays. We ordered desserts from Aleppo and some cakes from local stores. The rest was made at home. We divided the invitees into two groups. First, from 7-9 p.m., Khatchig's co-workers from Catoni's office were invited and after 9 p.m. almost 100 relatives and friends. We had a huge house, so there was no issue with space. We sent written invitations to everyone. My brother's eldest daughter, Laura, came from Aleppo with her husband, Sahag Paylian, and their little daughter.

The engagement party was very pleasant. Father Krikor Minassian of the Apostolic church performed the ceremony. He placed their rings and blessed them.

To the first group of invitees we offered champagne, desserts, and cakes. We had hired two waiters for the event. The people ate, drank, and danced happily until 9 p.m. and left after congratulating the couple. The second group of invitees started arriving. We had a beautiful buffet set up in the dining area. There were all kinds of meat dishes, *beoregs*, desserts, fruits, and drinks like whiskey and wine. Everyone was dressed so well. The street and the garden were decorated with colorful lights. We had flowers all over the place in addition to the flower baskets the guests brought. The house looked like paradise, and the party lasted a long time. People ate, drank, and danced until 4 a.m. and departed after offering their best wishes. My brother's family stayed for 15 days until the end of their children's holiday, but Laura and her family stayed less than 2 days and returned to Aleppo.

THE DECREE OF ATATURK (MUSTAFA KEMAL PASHA) AND OUR RETREAT FROM ISKENDERUN

In 1915 when Ottoman Turkey lost the Great War, Mustafa Kemal Pasha took over the government. His first job was to take over the lands that the British and the French had occupied. He massacred most of the Greeks who lived in the areas around Izmir. Similarly, the French troops retreated from Cilicia, and no Christians were left there. Syria was still under French rule for 25 more years, and they had the right to keep it under their mandate for a further 25 years. Iskenderun was a very important port city. When the mandate ended, Ataturk threatened the French and told them to leave or else he would go to war. The French wanted to renew the mandate and not leave, but Ataturk did not accept that.



Efronia and Aram dressed for the last ball in Iskenderun before the withdrawal of the French troops

The population of Iskenderun was mixed, without a particular majority. It was agreed to take a census and accordingly decide which way to go. Roger Garo, a Christian man who was the mayor of Iskenderun at the time, called all the important people in town and told them to do their best to win. All the Christians worked very hard. They made sure the people of Antioch who lived in Beirut, Aleppo or all the surrounding villages came to be registered, even paying their travel expenses. When the results came out, the Christians were the majority. Roger Garo called the leaders and told them the good news. However, the joy was short-lived. Roger Garo called a few Christian men, including Aram and Haig Balian, and told them, "I am sorry. Even though we won, Ataturk did not accept it. Iskenderun is a very important port for him,

and if we won't give in, he will take it by going to war. We've given it a lot of thought, and we've decided that we won't shed blood for Iskenderun. We will have to retreat." When the men heard this, they just froze. Aram came home extremely distraught; he looked pale. He said, "Our efforts were in vain. They told us that the French will retreat at the end of summer. They also told us to make our arrangements to leave."

For the Christians, and especially for the Armenians, hearing the news was very tough. Many people had escaped Cilicia to find shelter here. The people of Hadjin had escaped from the massacre and were trying to settle here. All the people of Mousa Dagħ mourned. They were just trying to get back on their feet again when they heard this news. What Father Ardavazt had said earlier to Aram and what Vahram had written to him became a reality now, even though Aram did not believe them at the time. But what can you do?

In this troubled situation, the French government gave a huge party, a ball, for the Turkish and Christian dignitaries under Roger Garo's leadership. We didn't feel like going, but we had to. It was an enormous party. Almost all the French leaders were there with their families. In his speech, Roger Garo expressed his regrets. He also thanked the French government for their care for the Christian population during their rule. He also mentioned that we wouldn't shed blood for Iskenderun. We would leave by the end of summer. After the party, instead of returning home happily, we returned sad. They had sold us to the Turks.



Efronia and Elvira

ELVIRA'S MARRIAGE, JUNE 1938

When Elvira got engaged, we thought the couple would stay engaged at least for a year so Elvira could leave her school and learn some homemaking skills. However, due to the circumstances, we had to make plans to arrange the wedding in a few months. The main reason was the retreat of the French from Iskenderun. We didn't know when the Turks would invade, or whether we would even be able to remain in Iskenderun. The Armenians were fearful. With these thoughts in mind, we preferred to have the wedding before going to the summer resort. The groom's side approved the plan.

My first job was to prepare the trousseau. I had to go to Aleppo and make all the arrangements. Even though there were good stores in Iskenderun, we couldn't find what we wanted. I went to Aleppo by myself; I didn't take Elvira with me. My goal was to order embroidery as soon as possible. During my 10-day stay, I met with a woman who was famous for her embroidery. I bought the most expensive fabrics and ordered some handmade bedding and table cloths. When I asked the woman how long it would take to make them, she said about three months. We had enough time. I also bought some other fabrics to give to the seamstresses in Iskenderun. I realized I needed to come to Aleppo one more time with Elvira to buy her clothes. After making all these arrangements, I returned home.

A few months passed without much change. People's lives were not disturbed by the possible upcoming invasion of the Turks; they went on with their normal lives. People always live with hope, don't they? At the same time, we noticed some secretive preparations going on, though we couldn't believe anything bad would happen. We thought, "Let them invade. So what? We have always lived with them anyway. Even though we have seen a lot, we realize that with Ataturk things are going to be different." People thought Ataturk was not like those Turks who committed massacres. He had brought in numerous reforms. Women used to cover their faces and never associate with men other than their husbands and family members. Polygamy used to

be prevalent. Atatürk had banned all these practices. We comforted each other with these thoughts.

When the date of the wedding was decided, Elvira and I needed to go to Aleppo for a minimum of 15 days. We thought that would be a long time to leave our son, Herant, at home. Therefore, we decided all of us would go together with Lucin, too. We traveled together and stayed at a hotel. Upon arrival, we immediately went shopping. First, we met with a very famous seamstress and asked her if she could finish all the dresses in 15-20 days. She said she would do her best. We bought the highest quality fashionable fabrics available. We also met with another seamstress called Mrs. Hindi, who was my niece Lucin's friend. This woman was not only a seamstress, but she also imported merchandise from France. We bought some great fabrics from her and granted her desire to make those dresses herself. Of utmost importance was the bridal dress. Therefore, with the two seamstresses and the embroiderer, we were able to accomplish everything in 15-18 days. We spent a lot of money but returned to Iskenderun with a very beautiful trousseau.

The wedding was scheduled for June 28. People wanted to come to our house before the wedding and see the trousseau so we hung everything all around our large salon. According to the tradition, we bought valuable gifts for the close family members of the groom. The women started coming to see the trousseau, and they were stunned. They said they had never seen anything like this and offered their best wishes for the couple.

The groom's family sent wedding invitations to the family and friends. It was an accepted fact that only the closer family and friends would be invited to the dinner after the ceremony. On our way back from Aleppo, we had brought with us wedding candy boxes to be distributed to all the invitees. It was a special thing that not many people used to do at the time. Everything went very well as we had planned.

Even though everything was arranged well and we were very pleased, I am sorry to say that our happiness was disrupted with some bad news. We heard that on the day of the wedding Turkish soldiers would be entering Iskenderun. We were very fearful about possible disturbances. Before changing the date, Aram and Khatchig, the groom, went to see Caroni the Consul and asked for help. Together they went to the French delegate Roger Garo to express their concern. After listening to them, Roger Garo said, "Never be afraid. We are still here until we make all the arrangements to leave Iskenderun. With our permission, they are coming and settling in a military center outside the city near the seashore. We have made an agreement with them that no disturbances will happen. Do not fear and do not change the date of the wedding."

The wedding happened on the assigned date. The ceremony took place in the Apostolic Church, and it was a stunning wedding. The church was decorated with flowers and ribbons. The bride and groom looked fabulous. It was the happiest day for the parents. However, I need to confess that we were

as sad as we were happy. The entrance of the Turks into the region of Iskenderun and the upcoming occupation were going to be a huge loss for the Armenians and the Christians. All the people were sad and deeply worried. Anyway, they congratulated the couple and departed after expressing their good wishes. Those who were invited to the wedding banquet went to the hotel. The dinner tables were overflowing with numerous dishes and drinks. Everyone ate and drank the whole night. The bride and groom greeted and thanked everyone before leaving for the honeymoon. The plan was to go to Aleppo on their way to the Massabki Hotel in Chtaura. After they left, the people stayed a while longer and eventually went home. My brother's family from Antioch and Laura's family from Aleppo stayed for a few days before going home.

We heard that when the bride and groom arrived in Aleppo, Khatchig's cousin Asadour gave a party in their honor. The relatives and friends who lived there were invited. It was like a second wedding as the bride and groom wore their bridal outfits. The joyful party lasted until late at night.

Their trip lasted for three weeks. Upon their return it was time to go to the summer resort town in Sovouk Olouk. We offered them our 2-room house, and we settled in our old house.

THE WITHDRAWAL OF THE FRENCH TROOPS

We were still in Sovouk Olouk when we heard that the French troops had started gradually withdrawing and Turkish soldiers were occupying the barracks left behind. Some Turkish army officers had rented homes in Sovouk Olouk. The apartment below us was empty. The Turkish commander Jelal Bey came to rent it, and lived there with his wife.

Even though the French encouraged people and recommended that they stay, it didn't help. The Armenian people became nervous when they annexed Iskenderun to Turkey and changed its name to Hatay. People totally gave up and started slowly moving away. The first to do so were the people of Hadjin, because a few years after the deportation of 1915, they had gone back home only to be attacked by the Turks when the French withdrew from Cilicia. The people of Hadjin had resorted to self-defense, but eventually had surrendered; many were massacred, and only a few had survived. Those survivors had fled to Iskenderun. These memories were still very fresh in their minds. Within a few weeks they all fled to Beirut. The French government of that time gave them free plots of land in the city of Tyre, where they settled. This was followed by the people of Mousa Dagh who lived in the mountains of Antioch. The people of the villages around Iskenderun who were sure that the Turks would take revenge against them went to Tyre as well. There they owned properties and built homes, and until their repatriation to Armenia, lived comfortable lives. When the repatriations to Armenia started, they sold their properties for good prices and emigrated. However, they later regretted doing that as they lived a very difficult life in Soviet Armenia, even to the extent of going hungry. There is no need to write about this because the whole world knows.

Almost all the Armenians of Antioch fled. My eldest brother with his family left for Aleppo. He emptied his pharmacy in Iskenderun, took along whatever merchandise he had, and opened a new pharmacy in Aleppo. My brother Yervant had sent his wife Negdar to Beirut when she got sick. Even though she got better after a few years, she did not return. My brother did not have the courage to bring her back, and she did not have the courage to come back to her family. She went instead to her parents' home in South America. Therefore, my brother sent his daughter, Nora, and my mother to our sister Azniv's home in Aleppo, thinking he could stay in Iskenderun a little longer.

Almost none of the wealthy people were left in Iskenderun, but Aram would never leave. He started developing relationships with the new officers of the Turkish army, who encouraged him not to move away. They told him, "You don't belong to any political party; you are liked here. We all heard that you have stayed here. So don't be afraid." He was deceived; he could not leave behind all the wealth and properties he owned. I wanted to dissuade him, and

I tried, but in vain. Also, his Armenian friends suggested, “Aram, think it over. You have a young, attractive wife and an only son. Don’t hope and trust in these people.” That didn’t help either. I tearfully begged him several times, saying, “Keep some of the properties and sell a few others.” So many clients wanted to buy his properties, but Aram would not sell them. My brother Yervant told him, “You are such a wealthy person; you have loaned money with interest to the Turks. They could harm you.” Aram was stubborn; he didn’t change his mind.

Enmity against Aram soon started. He received an unsigned letter with a skeleton drawn at the bottom of the page. The letter demanded an amount of money to be put on the first bench near the barracks by the seashore. Otherwise our only son’s life would be in danger. Aram informed the soldiers who were close to him, and they sent a detective to our house to keep us safe. At the same time, he sent the required 200 gold coins to be placed under the bench near the barracks. He also arranged that several soldiers stay around and spy. After a while, two women came to the seashore and sat on that bench. One of the women accidentally dropped her purse and bent down to take it back. Immediately the spying soldiers arrested them. Eventually it turned out that they were the wife and daughter of a well-known doctor called Muhammad Bey. They had nothing to do with the issue; they were just out for a walk. So, the thieves realized that they were being watched, and their plan failed. The detective stayed and ate with us for three months. This threat did not scare Aram. He didn’t pay attention. We could not let my poor son go out to the street on his own.

We lived through the winter comfortably. We made friends with high ranking army officers, ate together at our home and theirs as well, and played cards together. The highest-ranking general used to come to our house. He would take off his foreman pistols and sit comfortably saying, “I feel like this is my brother’s home.” They were cultured people, just like the Europeans. The wives of most of them were Europeans - German, English, Bulgarian - and the others were Turks, but very educated. None of them knew about the enmity between the Armenians and the Turks. They were completely unaware that the Turks had deported one million Armenians during the Great War and committed a genocide.

Let me tell you about an incident on one occasion. One night we were expecting a few families to play cards at our place. The officer Nazih Bey and his Bulgarian wife arrived early. Aram was running late. During our conversation, Nazih Bey looked at me and asked, “Why did almost all the Armenians leave when we arrived? What did they fear? We are not Ottoman Turks. We and you are the children of the same parents.” He went on talking about Biblical stories. Abraham did not have any children from his first wife Sarah, so Abraham had a child whom he called Ishmael with his slave-girl, Hagar. Then God gave Abraham and Sarah a son whom they called Isaac.

“These two are brothers, the children of the same father,” Nazih Bey went on, “just like you and us. We are Ishmael’s descendants, and you are Isaac’s.” He spoke at length and eventually ended up talking about Aram. “Why was he unable to stop the Armenians from leaving? He is one of the leaders of the Armenian community.”

I could take it no longer. I looked at Nazih Bey and said, “Nazih Bey, even though what you said is true, our Armenian nation has always seen the enmity of the Turks. Excuse me, I am going to speak like a sister to a brother. The first ones who left as you came in were the people of Hadjin. The reason is that during the Armenian genocide in 1915 the Armenian people were driven out of their towns into the deserts. The survivors among the people of Hadjin went back home to rebuild their homes and restart their lives under the care of the French. But when Ataturk arose and ordered the French army to leave, the same Turks grabbed the opportunity to attack the Armenians. The Armenians resisted as much as they could, but eventually surrendered. Most of them either died or got robbed. The remnants of the people of Hadjin fled to Iskenderun. When they heard that the Turks were taking over Iskenderun, they were terrified and were the first to leave.”

I looked at the Bulgarian woman and realized that she didn’t know what a massacre was. I asked her, “Mrs. Leyla, do you love Nazih Bey?” “Yes, yes, I love him very much. He is my whole life,” she replied. “What would you feel if someone attacked him and slaughtered him on the knees of his mother or wife? Or if someone slaughtered your dear husband, wife or child? If you hear the same Turks have come, would you still stay there?” The poor woman turned pale. “How could I believe that they slaughter people like animals?” she asked. Turning to her husband, she said, “I urge you, Bey, let’s leave. I am not feeling well.” “Please forgive me, Mrs. Leyla,” I said. “Nazih Bey was deeply opposed to the Armenians’ leaving, so I had to speak. I couldn’t hide the truth anymore. Look, we are not going to leave. We will stay here.”

Right at that moment Aram arrived, and he frowned at me. He said, “There is no need to remember the past. Until everyone else arrives, let’s start playing. Eventually, everyone arrived, played for a long time, and had some food before leaving. After they all left, Aram said that he was upset. I said to him, “I’ll never regret what I said. I am sure that sooner or later we too shall leave, and I am certain that you will regret not leaving sooner.”

A month later it was Herant’s birthday. We invited everyone and set up a beautiful buffet. Everyone was happy except for us; we just had to pretend. Aram thought we would win over the Turks, who ate, drank, and danced until late. I too had to dance. Mennoush Mama was invited too. She called me and said, “My daughter, don’t dance with these people. Remember they killed your father, and they made you an orphan at two months of age.”

After this party, a very sad event befell the Turks. They heard of the passing of Ataturk, their liberator. It felt like ashes were falling on their heads. When

the funeral was being broadcast on the radio, our friends came to our house to follow the ceremony because they didn't own radios. They cried and mourned saying, "He was our liberator, our savior. He saved us from the old, strict rules of our nation." Elvira and some other Armenian friends and relatives were there as well. As the Turks cried, we pretended to cry and wiped our fake tears. The Turks mourned the death of Ataturk, and they were deeply grieved. Our poor Armenians thought, "We wish he had died 3-4 months earlier. The plan of annexing Iskenderun to Turkey wouldn't have succeeded, and the French wouldn't have withdrawn." But what's the use? Whatever happened happened.

As I mentioned earlier, the winter somehow passed. Gradually some more Armenians left. Khatchig sent his mother and sister to Beirut and Elvira and her 6-month-old daughter Lena to Aleppo.

In June the weather got very warm, and we had to go to Sovouk Olouk. In addition to several houses which we rented out to Turkish families, we owned two more homes on the same hill. We lived in the one we used every summer and offered the other without rent to a Turkish officer called Nasib Bey. We were close friends with him. One evening his wife, Perihan Hanem, and I went on a walk towards Kinali Depè. She started talking to me and criticizing the Armenians who left, and she expected to hear my response. I told her, "Look, we haven't left, and we are not planning to." She turned to me and said, "I don't believe that. I know that one day you will. That will not be the right thing to do. We love you very much and want to give you some advice. If you must leave, don't go to Aleppo. We have drunk the juice of Aleppo (meaning we will take it over). It's going to be ours sooner or later. Go to Beirut, and even better, go across the sea (ocean)."

When I returned home, I told Aram what she had said to me. He shook his head and said, "Don't believe that." The head of General Security, Hasan Bey, lived close to us. One evening we went for a visit, and most of the time the conversation was about the Armenians who had left. Hasan Bey turned to me and said, "We listen to you every night. You always insist to Aram Efendi that you should leave. That's a wrong step to take. You are going to make Aram Efendi commit a big mistake." He went on and on. If Aram had been absent, I would definitely have responded to him, but I just remained silent.

There was also a man called Zeki Bey, who was a hypocrite. With his sweet talk, he befriended Aram.

As the weather cooled down and it was time to go back, World War II started. We received the news of the Germans winning all over. Even though the Turks were not in the war yet, the memories of 1914 and the barbarism of the Turks against the Armenians haunted us. I was much more frightened than Aram was. I pleaded with him day and night, asking him to leave as soon as possible. "My dear wife," he said, "how can we go? How can we leave behind all these properties and wealth?" I grabbed the opportunity and said, "I know

it is very difficult, but you can sell a few very valuable properties even though they will not pay you a fair amount. At least you will have some money. This new house which you watched being built for two years and we have enjoyed for four years, we could ask your brother's daughter Lucy to come and live in it since they are not planning on leaving. You can write the deed in her name. One day we might come back and live here, or they will sell it and send us the money. Sell all the other buildings. Why don't you sell the hotel and the stores on the ground level? They are estimating them at 500 gold coins (quite a good amount at the time). Likewise, the farm house; they are estimating it at 300 gold coins. Leave the others behind. I don't think anyone will buy the empty lots anyway. He listened and replied, "I am not selling anything. I am not going anywhere." "That's a mistake, Aram," I replied. "Do you think they are going to allow you to live if you stay here?" I spoke a lot but to no avail.

When the news of the war arrived, we decided to go back from the mountains to Iskenderun. We put all the furniture in two rooms, secured the doors, and left. Only a few days later we heard that the doors had been broken and the entire house looted.

As the war escalated, and our house got looted, I realized that Aram might be changing his mind. I took the opportunity and said, "Whether we leave or not, let's send our most valuable possessions to Beirut. If we stay, can't we decorate our home again?" I thought I had convinced him. He replied, "Where and to whom would I send all this? Who has enough space to store our valuables? What happens to all our properties? If I have given up all the money I lent with interest, let your furniture stay right here." One day I secretly filled a box with very valuable things, mostly those made of silver. Aram came, saw it and said, "Don't waste your time. Even if I leave, it will be temporary. I will be back here soon." After that event, I realized nothing would change his mind; I gave up trying to persuade him.

Finally, Aram decided to send Herant, Lucin and me to Aleppo. I stayed quiet. With tearful eyes I prepared a suitcase for each one of us. We rented a car along with Elvira's sister-in-law and her family. Just before we left, Aram decided to join us and help us settle. When we arrived in Aleppo, we stayed at a hotel for a few days. My sister Azniv had arrived from Antioch and rented a big house. My mother and Nora were with her too. Aram moved us to their place, and we paid them what we were paying at the hotel.

After staying in Aleppo for a few days, Aram returned to Iskenderun. Our citizenship was valid for four more months. He could have made many arrangements; he could have sent a lot of things to Beirut. He had tons of steel just imported and stored in the warehouse and 20-30 big containers of metal hooks purchased for one piaster (*kurush*) each. Later we saw the same thing at the Demirjian store in Beirut, each one was valued at 2 ½ Lebanese pounds. Our house was full of things. He sent nothing to Beirut, hoping he would be back.

When Aram returned from Aleppo to Iskenderun, our brother-in-law Khatchig and my brother were still there. Instead of making more useful arrangements, Aram called Zeki Bey and handed him all his properties, houses, warehouses, and gave him all the keys and the deeds he owned. Not only that, but he did not let Khatchig send the furniture of his own house to Beirut. He gave it over to Zeki Bey. I can't understand how my husband, who never trusted anyone, trusted this man with everything. There is a saying, "God first takes your brain and then your belongings."

...Eventually Aram arrived in Aleppo along with Khatchig, empty handed. After staying there less than a month, we reluctantly decided to go to Beirut along with Elvira and her baby.

In Beirut, Khatchig invited us to stay with them. His mother and his sister Arminé with her entire family were also there. The house had four bedrooms and a salon. They gave us a room, and we used one of the other rooms as a dining room. We stayed there for several months and paid them the amount we would spend at a hotel. We always thought this was temporary since we hoped we would receive Turkish citizenship and return to Iskenderun.

Aram immediately went to the Turkish Consulate to ask for citizenship, to be able to keep our ownership and to be able to go in and out of Hatay. I was so sorry that our request was rejected. We were so troubled and hurt. The consul listened to Aram and said, "I am so sorry, but this is impossible. We too have entered the war. We cannot keep you as Turkish citizens here. You either return to Hatay or lose your citizenship." Aram returned home very sad. He thought we could go to Istanbul as Turkish citizens. Our friends disagreed, especially Hagop Dermelkonian. We remained in Beirut without hope, with one suitcase each.

I urged Aram to let me rent a truck and bring all the valuables. That was impossible. He said, "I would give everything up, but I would not give you up." With such wrong decisions we lost all the wealth we had.

After staying at Mrs. Marie's for a few months, we decided to go to the mountains for the summer. Khatchig and Aram went to Dhour Choueir and rented a two-bedroom house. We bought some furniture. One day Aram came back from the city with good news. He said to me, hoping to make me happy, "I've rented a very nice house. It has four bedrooms, a large corridor, a big kitchen, and a veranda, and overlooks the best boulevard. I paid 300 Lebanese Pounds." That was a huge sum at the time. I only said, "Good," and nothing else.

After spending two months in the mountains, we went back to the city. As I entered the new home, I remained quiet even though I was saying to myself, "This is not the kitchen I left behind." I didn't want to hurt him; I had to adjust.

It was an empty house except for the furniture we had bought for the summer home. Aram said to me, "Let's go get some furniture and kitchenware." "I am not going anywhere," I replied. "What we could have

brought with us you gave to the Turks. Remember how much I urged you to ask Khatchig to find us a home where we would send our belongings and store them. Or to ask him to rent a store so you could start your business here upon our arrival. Remember how much metal you have in your warehouse. We still had the opportunity and the time to bring everything, but you didn't listen, didn't listen. Go buy whatever you want. I am not buying a single thing!" Aram didn't open his mouth. He realized I was right. Gradually, he started buying things for the house, none of which was to my liking. I had given up on everything. I didn't care anymore.

OUR LIFE IN BEIRUT

I will not write a lot about the 25 years we spent in Beirut. I will only mention a few important events.

The first thing I want to mention is that my husband made worse decisions in Beirut than he had done while leaving Iskenderun. Even though he had come with only 700 gold coins, he could have started a business, he could have made money during the war, and he could have forgotten his big loss. Other people who came with less money made millions. Aram was a very smart, famous, and experienced businessman.

In 1915, during the Great War, when the enemy army bombarded Iskenderun, his two brothers fled to Aleppo with their families. The deportation of the Armenians had not started yet. Aram was left alone to manage all the finances. He put all the properties and money under the care of the bank, took with him 1500 gold coins, and fled to Aleppo. The expenses of the family of 15 were huge, and the money was soon depleted. Aram started looking for a job. He decided to go to the government and apply to work for the army to provide the soldiers with supplies. His application was accepted, and he immediately went to Aintab to work. Because of his job, his brothers' families were saved from the deportation. I remember very well; when he came to Aintab, he stayed at our home. He hired many employees, all of whom were exempted from the deportations along with their entire families. He used to charge 18 gold coins to give people a certificate of exemption (from military service). My brother Yacoub was one of those who got the exemption. Aram's work was around Marash. He took with him the two Haroutunes and those who got exemption certificates and left for Marash. He rented mules and camels and traveled fearlessly from town to town all by himself. He had such abilities that, when other people were hardly finding dry bread, his family was living in abundance. He sent them all kinds of food from Marash. He did this for four years and made 15,000 gold coins. He shared thousands with his brothers, who had had nothing to do with earning that amount.

Such a man, a man who was experienced in every kind of business, did nothing like that in Beirut. Hagop Dermelkonian insisted that he rent a store and fill it with merchandise, but Aram did not listen. There was a store for rent on Allenby Boulevard for 7000 Lebanese liras; Aram did not take it. Another person who came from Aleppo with only 200 gold coins became very wealthy. Only much later did I realize Aram was involved in a great many useless deals. His profit was never enough for our needs. I think he was struggling with discouragement and the fear of losing everything.

Many years have passed, and I still feel the pain. I am hurt because he left us without providing for our security. He died. He could have left us millions.⁵

⁵ My father, Aram, having too much to lose, initially decided to stay in Iskenderun. He took his family to Beirut giving the power of attorney to a Turk he thought he could trust. While in Beirut, he had a change of heart and decided not to return to Iskenderun. He told the Turk to liquidate his property. The man sold everything, gave my father a fraction of the money and pocketed the rest. My mother was surprised that he would trust this man when, as she put it, his left hand hardly trusted his right. – *H.K.*

THE ILLNESS OF MY ONE AND ONLY BELOVED SON AND HIS MIRACULOUS SALVATION BY GOD

During the war, in 1942, we went to Jebel Musa (Anjar - H.K.) to spend the summer. We rented a large house with my daughter Elvira. My brother Yervant had also rented a house nearby. It was in a village with a wonderful climate. My husband rarely went down to the town. We enrolled Herant at the local school. He was very intelligent, and the teachers loved him dearly.

One day, when he was returning from school, I saw him coming in the distance and noticed that he had his head bent to the side. I went to him, hugged him, and he started to cry, saying "Mama, I am sick; my throat is hurting." When we got home, I took his temperature. He had a very high fever. There was no physician except for our relative Dr. Bernard Khalikian, who had come there from Aleppo for the summer. We immediately called him. He examined Herant and said that his tonsils were swollen. We were not satisfied with this, so his father went down to town and brought Dr. Baghdasarian, who was an ENT specialist. He prescribed a drug which we used for a few days, but we saw no benefit. Dr. Baghdasarian suggested we take Herant to town and see what else we could do. He had to be hospitalized.

We took him to the hospital, got a private room, and I stayed with him. They said he had rheumatic fever. The laboratory exam found a dangerous microbe (Streptococcus - H.B.) which affected the heart and could be lethal; no antibiotics were available against it. It was not possible to operate as long as he was running a fever. So under the circumstance, there was no point in keeping him in the hospital, and we could take him home. We got home and put him to bed. The doctor said that he should not get out of bed, and not even move while in bed. So I had him sleep in my lap. A few weeks dragged by until one day I noticed that his fingers were turning blue. So we immediately contacted Dr. Baghdasarian. He came and told us Herant needed to be taken to the hospital right away.

We got a room, and I stayed with him. We waited for several days for the fever to subside, but it would not. Several physicians were brought in for consultation, to no avail. Dr. Baghdasarian took me aside and said, "I am very sorry, but despite the danger, we must take a chance and operate on him. We have no other choice. But you have to give us your consent." I turned to him and said, "I will leave it up to God. Everything is possible with God. I believe that He will keep and protect him."

They immediately took him to the lower floor. At night they made all the preparations that were necessary. Very early next morning Dr. Baghdasarian came, and they took Herant to the operating room. I was alone; his father had not come yet. I took his hand in my hand, and we went to the operating room.

They moved him to the operating table and put him to sleep.⁶ I went out and got onto my knees, crying, and prayed to God. A while later, his father came. The operation had already ended. The doctor said that the operation had been successful and, *inshalla*, the result would also be good.

They brought him back to the room. Getting through the first night was very hard. His father also did not go home, and we stayed awake. A while later, Herant woke up but could not speak. He looked at our faces and started shivering. We telephoned the physician. He came right away, saw the condition he was in, and said they were expecting this, but we should not lose hope. God is capable of everything. They started a saline infusion.

We spent the night in this condition. A while later, as if miraculously, he woke up and asked for water. The nurse brought him some milk. The physician came and said that God had performed a miracle. Thank God, he had got through the danger, but he needed a blood transfusion. Two healthy young relatives volunteered, but their blood was not compatible. My blood was compatible, as well as Elvira's, and for the third, I gave mine again.

A week later, when his cousin and godfather Khatchig came for a visit, Herant jumped onto to him from the bed and clung to his neck. Suddenly, blood started streaming out of his nose and mouth. Dr. Baghdasarian came. "This occurs only one in a thousand times," he said; "I am sorry that this happened to him." He made Herant sit down and put ice packs on his nose and mouth. The door was closed, and no one was allowed inside. His father came, was startled to see his condition, and began to cry. Herant looked at him and said, "Baba, don't cry; I am going to get well and go to school." I turned my face away to conceal my tears. We got through this calamity also, thanks to God. However, they thought it would be safer for him to go back to the hospital, where he stayed for a month. We finally returned home and were told that he should stay in bed to make sure that his heart was not affected. At that time, my cousin, the renowned Dr. Altounian, came to Beirut for a visit. We went to see him and told him all that had happened. He told us the drug for this microbe had not been found yet. But he also noted the many layers of clothing I had put on Herant. He said, "You are overprotecting your son. You should let him grow up like the gypsies living in tents."

It took a year for him to get completely well. Thanks to God, we survived these calamities and dangers. My one and only son's life was given to us as a gift. When he got well, he wanted to go to school. The school year was almost over, but he got the books, studied them day and night, and when the exams were given, he got the highest grades. His teachers were astonished. Thank God, as he grew up, he became an intelligent and obedient teenager - respectful towards his parents and believing in God. He never hurt our feelings in the slightest way. He finished High School then went to college at the

⁶ I have a distinct memory of that moment. I clung to my mother's hand until the anesthesia took effect and I passed out – *H.K.*

American University of Beirut for four years, then medical school, graduating from both with Honors. He then went to Rochester and became a specialist. He returned to teach at the medical school.

He then decided to go back to America; his father and I did not oppose it although it was very difficult for us to be separated from him. Many people blamed us for sending our only son to America. His father told them, "For the sake of my son's future, I should make this sacrifice and let him go." He got married to a fine, good-hearted and modest Finnish girl and was offered a position at Stanford University. They formed a good family and were loved in every way. They had two children, one girl and one boy, both intelligent and obedient.

There is no need to write more about him. In one word, he became a famous and renowned person at the University. He wrote many books and became the Dean of Undergraduates.



Efronia and Aram growing older together

For the past ten years, we have been here in America. I thank God that He made me worthy of these days. We are in the care of our son and his family. In every way they try to look after us, and we enjoy their love and respect. The Bible says, "Respect your father and mother, and you have a long life." Thanks to God, all these words were fulfilled in every way.

May the Lord grant him and his family a long and happy life. May He keep them free from all evil. May his children provide them with all the love and respect that he gave to us.

POSTSCRIPT⁷

My mother, Efronia, was cooking a special dinner in our kitchen one evening when she turned to me and said, “Go get me some parsley from the garden.” I brought her a few sprigs. “Is that all?” she asked sharply. “Mama,” I replied, “it’s just a small plant.” “Don’t be afraid; go cut some more,” she said to me and then added in Turkish, “Parsley plants are like Armenians: The more you cut them, the more they grow.” This is the sort of defiance, that, among other things, made my mother the extraordinary woman that she was.

During the several years that Efronia wrote her memoir, she would occasionally ask me if I wanted to read what she had written. Rather thoughtlessly, I would tell her to keep writing and that I would read it all when she was done. I said that partly because it was a very busy time in my life, but also I thought I already knew what she was writing about, having taped many hours of conversations with her about her past some years earlier.

When she finally presented me with the completed manuscript, I was surprised that it ran to over 400 pages. That night I sat down and began to leaf through the pages. The manuscript was written in her firm and elegant hand, and I noticed that it was free of any corrections. (I found out later that she had recopied the amended pages.)

The opening sections that dealt with her childhood consisted of material that I was largely familiar with. Then came a chapter heading that read, “The First and Only Time I Was in Love.” I knew immediately that she was not referring to my father. My mother had a great deal of respect and affection for her husband and was fiercely loyal to him. But, my father being the sort of cerebral and unsentimental person that he was, women (at least not a passionate woman like my mother) did not fall in love with his kind. This is when I first learned about the story of Ramzi.

My mother had a stronger hand in shaping my character than any other person. And I felt certain that I was the person she cared most about. Bound by an unconditional and tenacious love, we had always been very close. Thus, I was stunned that all this time I had known nothing about events that had been so central to her life. When I saw her the following day, I congratulated her on the wonderful job she had done but said nothing about Ramzi; she seemed relieved. When she felt reassured that I was not perturbed by this revelation from her past, we gradually began to speak more openly about it. And speak she did, since at ninety-one she was just as much in love with Ramzi as she had been at the age of nineteen.

Shortly after this, Efronia was diagnosed with pancreatic cancer and given six months to live. Although I sensed that she preferred not to know the truth

⁷ This section, written by Herant Katchadourian, is reproduced from: Stina Katchadourian’s book, *Efronia: An Armenian Love Story*, Gomidas Institute Books, 2001.

about her condition, I set aside all the time I could and started translating her manuscript into English, hoping to finish it before she died. I also promised her that I would have it published. Over the following months the story of her early love was what we mainly talked about as we waited for doctors and procedures in hospitals and clinics. Yet the publication of her memoir as it was written proved to be hard to achieve. The story, consisting of a mix of family lore, which would be of little interest to outsiders, eyewitness accounts of the times that would matter more, and the story of Ramzi that formed the core of her story, publishers found it hard to envisage an audience for the book. Finally, my wife Stina wanted to try her hand at presenting the material differently, and the result is *Efronia*.

The selective use of the autobiographical material in *Efronia* was necessary, but it left a number of gaps that have attracted the attention of some readers, most importantly with regard to Efronia's marriage to my father. As the text makes clear, Aram won Efronia's hand by appealing to her head rather than to her heart, which is what her unsuccessful suitors had done. It was a marriage based on a well-reasoned partnership, and it worked. Its foundation was the respect and trust husband and wife had for each other, cemented further by the love for their only child. My father's wealth and standing in the community, combined with my mother's managerial and social skills, made for a good partnership and a well-run, enviable home. Aram was an authoritarian figure in a male-dominated culture, but Efronia wielded her own influence. No one, including my father, pushed her around. She knew his strengths as well as his weaknesses: "Your father," she told me once, "is a very smart man who makes few mistakes. But when he makes a mistake, it is a very big one."

My father knew nothing about the Ramzi affair, but it is hard to imagine that something of my mother's grief and anger over her lost love would not have seeped into their relationship. Nonetheless, despite the fact that my parents had their share of disagreements and occasional quarrels typical of most marriages, they generally had a harmonious life together. Early in their marriage, they also weathered a crisis which may well have wrecked it. During their engagement my mother had made it clear that she did not want to settle down in Iskenderun. Of course, she could not tell Aram that the associations of the place with Ramzi would make life unbearable for her; instead she blamed it on her dislike of the town - and there was plenty to dislike about it at the time.

Aram accepted Efronia's wish, which was really more like a precondition for marriage. He told her not to worry. During WWI, while his compatriots were being massacred, Aram had gotten richer through shrewd business deals with the Ottoman army. Moreover, his assets were all liquid; he told her they could live anywhere and probably would settle in Beirut or in Constantinople. Efronia suggested they emigrate to America, but Aram would not go that far.

The newlyweds were temporarily living in Beirut while deciding where to settle down, when Aram received a plea from his two older brothers: Their business in Iskenderun urgently needed his help. Aram prevailed on Efronia to move there temporarily until he could sort the problems out. This was hard for her, but there was not much she could do. The description of her arrival in Iskenderun and her stepping onto the same pier on which she and Ramzi had walked so many times is one of the most poignant passages of her memoir.

But Efronia was tough, and the ordeal was made bearable by Aram's assurances that their stay would be temporary. But in time, it began to look more and more like a permanent arrangement. When Efronia finally confronted Aram with breaching his solemn promise to her, he walked out of the room. Efronia was confronted with a difficult choice: She either would have to leave her husband or put the matter aside and not let it poison her marriage. She decided to stay.

There is a second crisis which my parents managed to survive but which had profound consequences for our lives. This time it had to do with their leaving Iskenderun. While the threat of WWII was mounting, Turkey intensified the pressure on the French Mandatory government to cede to Turkey the district (*Sanjak*) of Iskenderun. This was based on the claim that Turks constituted the majority of the population in the district. A rigged plebiscite "confirmed" it. To ease their conscience, the French offered those who wished to leave the district the option of settling elsewhere in Syria or Lebanon. With the memory of WWI fresh in their minds, most of the Armenian population in the region (including the villagers of Mousa Dagh) left. However, my father owned a lot of property and several successful businesses; he had so much to lose that he decided to stay. My mother, who could see the writing on the wall, pleaded with him to liquidate at least part of his assets and move them out. My father would not hear of it. However, with the war heating up, Aram decided in 1940 to take his family on an exploratory visit to Beirut. Efronia, sensing that this was going to be the end of their years in Iskenderun, arranged to have the family rugs, silver and some other movable assets shipped to Beirut after them; and she did this without telling my father.

Soon enough, Efronia's predictions came true. Aram decided they could no longer return to Iskenderun. We settled in Beirut, and as a result, my father lost most of his fortune. When he rather apologetically told my mother that while they would have to furnish a new home, it was going to be hard to replace their rugs, she told him not to worry, the rugs were already there. (Twenty-five years later, at the outset of the Lebanese civil war, my mother had these same rugs shipped to us in the United States, this time without asking me....)

Aram was now 57 years old (Efronia was 47, and I was six). He had managed to salvage some of his assets, but he had lost his nerve; he never

again ventured into any bold business deals. Thus, he failed to profit from the economic boom in Lebanon which followed the war, thereby incurring a double loss. He had planned to retire in his fifties; instead, he worked into his eighties to support his family in some comfort. He dealt with the loss of Iskenderun by never talking about it, and Efronia never reminded him of it.



Efronia after she immigrated to America in 1976

Efronia's oldest brother, Yacoub, comes across in the book as the family villain. Though Efronia meant everything she says in her memoir in this regard, there was more to her subsequent relationship with Yacoub than the problems in their past. After his early tempestuous years, Yacoub grew into a respected and honorable man. He and Efronia had a lot of affection for each other, and this was reflected in Yacoub's willingness to give up his daughter Elvira to be raised by his sister Efronia as her own. Efronia grieved when Yacoub committed suicide in his old age.

Yacoub's wife Yester, the nemesis of Efronia's early life, is a shadowy character in the book. Efronia had known her since kindergarten and had disliked her ever since (my mother had a long memory for whom she liked and whom she disliked). When Yacoub married Yester, an untimely and ill-advised choice as Efronia saw it, Yester became the mistress of the household and made life difficult for all of them. Efronia actually blamed Yester's bad influence on Yacoub for many of his problems. Ultimately, Yester also came to a sad end. Diabetes led to the amputation of her leg. It was Efronia who had to convey to her the decision of the surgeons, because none of her children would do it. And it was Efronia who had lunches sent to Yester's bedside throughout the ordeal to spare her eating the hospital food. During one visit Yester asked for Efronia's forgiveness for all the grief she had caused her

through the years. “Don’t worry; I have already forgiven you,” was her response.

Another person who deserves some comment is my old nanny, Lucin. During the 60 years she and Efronia lived together, Lucin was constantly in my mother’s shadow. In fact, she was largely an extension of Efronia’s self and did her bidding without question. A survivor of the Armenian genocide who did not even know her own name, Lucin was bonded by a deep sense of gratitude and affection to Efronia, who was the only “mother” she ever had. Yet, during those years, Lucin was not always treated like a true member of the family, and she never forgave my parents for not allowing her to finish her schooling. It is only after my mother died that Lucin, in her old age, blossomed into taking over some aspects of my mother’s grandmotherly role in our family.

Admirable as she was, my mother was no saint. Her boundless generosity was often a reflection of a genuine altruism, but she was also quite capable of inducing gratitude in others in order to control them. She was highly competent, self-assured, strong and attractive - and she was disdainful of others who were less so. Having survived the loss of her father as an infant, and that of her great love in her youth, she had little patience with those who bent to the onslaught of life’s misfortunes.

Through years of self-reflection, I have acquired some understanding of who I am. Yet the story of my mother’s life opened my eyes to hidden facets of myself. I had known that I owed many of the strengths and weaknesses of my own character to my mother (tempered by my wife Stina, a different sort of woman, but yet another major influence in my life). However, I had not been able to quite understand why I was so different from my father, why we shared so little in character and outlook. There is a cryptic reference in the book to my mother having raised *me* to be like Ramzi. I am sure, without any inkling of what she was doing, Efronia did just that. As Ramzi’s character began to emerge more fully in Efronia’s memoir, I was amazed at the similarities between us.

When my mother had me at age forty (after virtually giving up the chance of having children), she must have found in me someone to endow with her unfulfilled love for Ramzi. I was bedridden for almost a year with a serious illness at age nine and during that entire time my mother never left my side. The terror of now losing me as well seems to have made her almost will me back to health. However, since no one can ever be someone else, I was not, nor could I ever be, Ramzi. Yet, to have someone whom she could love boundlessly must have provided her with a salve for her enduring, silent grief.

Yet such relief does not come free. Tragedies have a way of extracting full payment, and the price sometimes has to be paid by someone close. When I was young, having my mother’s undivided attention was enough for me, and I was content with the respectful yet distant relationship that I had with my

father. But as I grew older, it became a source of enduring regret for me that the closeness to my mother had been purchased with the distance from my father.

Moreover, as I reached manhood, my attempts to separate myself from my mother were quite likely partly responsible for my disastrous first marriage, which must have hurt my mother as much as it hurt me.

That the story of my mother's life should be important for me is hardly surprising. But why should so many others have cared to respond to *Efronia* the way they have? The success of the book in capturing the attention of readers no doubt is for a variety of reasons. It is a dramatic story well told. My mother was an unusually interesting and likable person, and that comes across. The fact that Stina is an objective westerner with a subjective knowledge of Armenians makes the cultural and historical contexts more readily intelligible to non-Armenians.

Yet the book also seems to touch a deeper chord. People not known for their sentimentality have been moved to tears by it. Perhaps it is because many of us start life with the romantic notion of that there is a one and only love who is going to bring fulfilment to our lives - before we learn to compromise and to make allowances. The old yearning, however, often lives on.

Most of the period covered in *Efronia's* memoir, and the story of Ramzi that is at the heart of it, coincides with the yearning created by the deportation and genocide of Armenians in Turkey during WWI. Yet *Efronia's* story is not the typical eyewitness account of a survivor. She and her immediate family were not deported for reasons explained in the book. The closest she came to witnessing these events was when a convoy of refugees being herded to the Syrian desert stopped temporarily in Aintab. *Efronia*, along with others, went to see them at a nearby quarry where they were being held for a few days. She describes their pitiful state and the pleas of mothers trying to give away their children to save their lives. Some time later, when it was the turn of the Armenians of Aintab to start on their road to exile, *Efronia* was heartbroken to see members of her church, and in particular, the dearly beloved director of the choir in which she sang, leave on their journey of no return.

While *Efronia* does not dwell on these events at length, she was well aware of what was happening to Armenians across Turkey. And she was incensed by not only what the Turks were doing to Armenians but also by the passive submission of the Armenians to their fate. She was adamant that once Armenians realized that they were doomed, they should have, in her words, "killed and been killed."

The Armenians of Aintab who had survived the genocide and returned home were vindicated somewhat when they fought back during the next crisis in 1920 with the support of a small contingent of French troops. Then they packed up and followed the retreating French troops, leaving Aintab for the

last time. During this period, Efronia and Aram were still in Aleppo, having just gotten married there. They were never to see Aintab again.

Efronia was proud to be an Armenian, but she was also critical of much that was Armenian. She had no use for what in her view was the chauvinism of their leaders and their uncritical devotion to anything Armenian. She maintained a similar critical distance from her Armenian Evangelical roots. Efronia had a deep faith, but she was disdainful of public demonstrations of piety. In more ways than one she was very much her own person.

What a pity that my mother died before *Efronia* saw the light of day. She would have relished every minute of the varied and wonderful responses it has elicited.

APPENDIX

MY FATHER, ARAM'S, FIRST LETTER TO MY MOTHER,
EFRONIA, FOLLOWING THEIR ENGAGEMENT

(From Aleppo to Aintab, 10 October, 1919)

My beloved Efronia,

This is the first time that I take pen in hand to write to you, and I do not know how to express my feelings towards you.

I can hardly bear to think of the moment that separated us, but the thought that very soon our good fortune will unite us again consoles me and makes me happy.

The moment of separation was sad, but the time preceding was so joyful for me that I cannot imagine that in my entire life I had such joy, and its memories will remain in my heart.

Our journey from Aintab to Aleppo was very comfortable and as joyful as possible. Before evening, we reached Kilis. The men went to a hotel, and the ladies slept at my cousin's home. The next morning, we got going quite early to Aleppo, and at ten o'clock we reached our family home. We found our family members well and happy, and they congratulated us for the first steps of our life.

The rest of the week was spent with visits and congratulations. Tomorrow, we will take our belongings to Mrs. Marie so that they can be sent to us whenever it is convenient.

Please convey my respects to your lady mother. I will be writing to her separately. Also, my respects to your honorable brother Yervant. I owe him a letter as well.

I know that my letter should not have been so tardy, but this being the first time, my pen has not been used to it. But I would like you to write back right away, and I promise to respond to you promptly. I hope you will try to write at length and with plenty of news.

Waiting impatiently to receive your response,

Aram Khatchadourian

PS. (*Paying respects and regards to a long list of family members – H.K.*)

LETTER FROM EFRONIA TO HERANT DATED BEIRUT,
FEBRUARY 18, 1968

My dear son Herant,

On Monday, February 19, at four o'clock in the afternoon, we received the happy news we were expecting. You had been blessed by the birth of a daughter. It is impossible to imagine our joy and the tears shed by all three of us.

The message had been wired to Khatchig, and he called us. I was still in bed, but your father got dressed and went to get the telegram. And I sat down to write to you to congratulate you.

My dear son, may God make her an obedient daughter and may she grow up with her father and mother. Congratulate Stina on my behalf, and kiss her. I always prayed to God for her to have an easy delivery, and He has heard my prayers. Also congratulate Stina's mother; I am glad that she is with you. My heart is now at rest. Give her my loving regards. And I am glad that the baby's birth was a little delayed so you could show her around.

Inshallah, Stina will come home soon, and the house will fill up. My dear son, this is a big change in your life. I hope you were not disappointed that you did not have a son. The love is the same. You will then also understand what the love of a child feels like and how there is no other love like it in the world. I know how much you like babies, and when she comes home, you will help care for her and play with her.

My dear son, we would have loved dearly to be part of your joy and see it with our own eyes. Yet, at the same time I give thanks to God that we got the news of my only, beloved son's becoming a father himself and we in turn becoming a grandfather and grandmother. *Inshalla*, we will see her with our own eyes.

My love and kisses to you, to Stina, and to our lovable granddaughter, Nina.

LETTER FROM LUCIN TO HERANT AND STINA [UNDATED]

My beloved Herant and Stina,

My congratulations for Christmas and a Happy New Year. Let us hope for many happy years and days. May God give you and your children long life.

I give thanks to God for giving us the gift of Aramig.

I cannot describe how much joy it gave us, how happy it made father and brought tears to his eyes.

May God make him and Nina obedient and intelligent children. How wonderful it is to see them grow and play together.

We were so happy to receive the pictures you sent us. Mother put all of them on the mirror. Sometimes I hear her at night when she looks at them and speaks to them. And so do I. But what is the use? That does not satisfy us. Mother is often in bed, not feeling well. So Nina's pictures are a source of consolation.

On Christmas Eve, we watched films. We all lost our minds over how nicely Nina talks and gestures with her hands. May God keep her! I kiss her eyes. My dear ones, I always think about you and long to be with you. I think about how tired you must be. I wish I were with you to help you. But I also heard that you have hired someone to help you.

I know that you want to hear our news. There is no change in father's condition although he has been better for the last couple of days. But he still has many problems and has to go to the toilet all night. There is no sleep either for him or for Mother. Mother's situation is very hard. She is on her feet all the time and takes care of Father lovingly, even at her age. I too try to do everything gladly. So do not worry about anything. You already fulfill your obligations fully. Thank you very much for your financial help. Mother shares some of it with me. May God reimburse you!

I very much long to knit a dress for Stina. Please send me her measurements. This will give me much joy.

Many greetings to all my dear ones, and kisses to all of you.

Your sister, Lucin

LETTER FROM EFRONIA TO HERANT DATED BEIRUT,
JUNE 1, 1971

My most beloved son Herant,

Yesterday I received your letter of May 23, which I was waiting for with longing, and hearing that you are well made me very happy.

I congratulate you for the baptism of my sweet Aramig.

May he grow up with the blessing of God and with his father and mother. May he live long.⁸

May his life be a continuation of his namesake, his grandfather Aram. May he keep alive the memory of his grandfather in our minds and hearts.

We read the program of his baptism. It is so nice, just the ceremony that I like so much. I congratulate you again. I will keep the program. Please kiss Aramig's eyes for me.

You must have received by now the letters Lucin and I wrote to Nina. I am going to send Lucin to Armenia with a companion called Pega. On the day that your father died, she came to our house for about fifteen days, and then she kept coming several days a week to help us.

They are going to travel for two days and spend fourteen days in Armenia. Pega did not want to leave me alone, but I think the journey will be good for her.

Elvira insisted that I go to them, but I don't have the heart to go out. I have not left the house yet. My dear son, I feel very oppressed. I realize that your father and I lived together for many years. But a loss is a loss. I can't get him out of my mind, and he is always before my eyes.

My nerves have become very weak. The doctor prescribed Valium, but that has not changed how I feel. What can I say, my dear son? I don't want you to feel upset. This must have been God's will.

I thank you very much for your invitation. It is still too early to think about it. May God ordain the best! I also appreciate your heartfelt condolences. I am confident that God above and you, Stina, and my darling grandchildren will always think of us and be concerned about our welfare. May God give long life to you and consolation to me and the chance to see you.

Your father's forty-day Memorial Service will take place on Sunday, and we are expected to attend it. I will write the details later. Let us know when you will be on the island so we can send our letters there. May God be with you! I hope my dear Stina, as well as my darling little ones, are all well. Kiss all of them for me on their sweet eyes.

With greetings and kisses, your mother Efronia.

⁸ The name is the full form of his grandfather's name, Aram. However, the actual name that we came to use is Kai – *H.K.*

MY MOTHER LEFT AN ENVELOPE MARKED, “OPEN AFTER MY DEATH”

June 15, 1981

My much beloved and only son, Herant; lovable and good-hearted daughter-in-law, Stina; and my beloved and priceless grandchildren, Nina and Kai.

I considered writing my Will, which I would put in an envelope to be opened after my death. Wills usually involve the inheritance of wealth which several siblings would divide among themselves. I very much regret that I have no wealth for anyone to inherit, just as your father, of blessed memory, could have left great wealth, but circumstances beyond our control did not make that possible, and he lost his wealth. But God did provide me with the kind of treasure which is priceless. And that treasure, my beloved son, is ... you.

So what I have written here is not a Will. It is my blessing and an expression of my gratitude. I hope and pray that you will live a long and a happy life, free of suffering. May God reward you for all that you have done for me and may your children do likewise for you. You discharged your obligations fully and spared no effort to provide for my comfort. My dear son, at no time did you hurt my feelings, but instead, I have enjoyed your love and respect, especially during the time I have been with you, and you have made these years the happiest time of my life, for which I bless you.

My beloved grandchildren, I bless you. May the Lord give you long life and happiness, and may you grow in God's care. May you grow up with your parents. May God keep you and protect you from the calamities of the Devil.

My beloved grandchildren, I thank you for always loving and respecting me. May God give you a fortunate and successful life. Respect your father and mother. Believe in God, and pray to God, and walk in His path. The only way to avoid being ensnared by the Devil is to trust in God. Do not forget me, and keep my memory alive.

I leave you two sisters: Elvira and Lucin. For many years, they have already been in your care in both material and non-material ways. In Elvira's case, this responsibility falls on her children, but if they are unable to do this, you may want to give them help, although Lucin's financial situation is satisfactory.⁹ I know she does not need financial help, but for her emotional support, I trust to God and your care.

Lucin came to our house from the orphanage at age 13. She became a true daughter, attached to us by her heart and love, fulfilling her obligations fully. I always wonder where she will want to live after I am gone. May God arrange for the best!

My beloved son, I hope that after Lebanon calms down,¹⁰ you will be able to place a marble headstone on your father's grave. I could only provide a temporary stone.¹¹

⁹ She received Social Security and had Medicaid - *H.K.*

¹⁰ The civil war was raging - *H.K.*

¹¹ My father, Aram (1886-1970) died of prostatic cancer when he was 67. He was buried in an extended family mausoleum in Beirut. My mother, Efronia (1894-1986) died at 93 from pancreatic cancer. My mother and Lucin are buried next to each other in the Alta Mesa Cemetery close to the High School which our children attended.

Both Aram and Efronia got to see their first grandchild, Nina. Aram, on his death bed, only got to hear about the birth of Kai (“Aramig”). Tearing up, he said, “My replacement has now arrived.” - *H.K.*

My dear son, there are two things that have tormented me. I want to get them off my chest.

First, when you were still a student, your father would give you only a meager amount of spending money with the idea that giving money to young people is not a good idea. I am sure you know with how much sacrifice your father paid for your education, sparing nothing, but in this other matter he did not give you satisfaction. It is I who should have made up for what he did not give you. I often blame myself for not doing that. I should have sold some of the gold coins that we had and given you the money. Please forgive me. When I think of this, it torments me.

Second, my beloved son, there is another matter for which I want to ask you for your forgiveness, for what I did out of my deep love for you that led to your unhappiness. When you were only 23 years old, you told your father and me of your wish to get married, and we said, "Son, we also wish to see you get married. But you are intelligent; think clearly so you don't regret it later. At that time, I was not able to speak to you frankly so as not to revive my own old grief."¹²

My dear son, from the first day when we saw them (Sylvia's family – H.K.) and interacted with them a little, we understood what kind of people they were. We saw many things. We understood a lot of things. Your father wanted to take the ring off your finger, but I would not let him. What accusations I heard against me! One evening your father was not home. You told me about the lies they told you about me, claiming that I was interfering in your marriage. I could have told your father but let it go, and I told nothing to your father. I did not tell you to take your ring off your finger to save you from being unhappy. But thanks to the Lord, we prevailed in the end.¹³ My beloved son. Do not forget me. Even when grass grows on my grave, I will still be alive. But when my memory has faded, I will no longer be alive.

At least once a year, visit my grave. I bless you again. and again. Your mother loves you dearly, and their grandmother, your children.

¹² I think my mother is referring to her love for Ramzi that ended in his tragic death. Her family had opposed her marrying him, and now she was opposing her own son marrying the woman he wanted to marry – *H.K.*

¹³ After I returned to Lebanon, I got divorced in 1984 (actually, the marriage was annulled). That made it possible for me and Stina to get married a month later. My mother was overjoyed – *H.K.*

EFRONIA AND STINA

There have already been several references to Efronia's relationship with Stina. But there is more to say.

After Stina and I met in Beirut, I introduced her to my parents. She was the first person from Finland they had met, and they only had a hazy idea of where that country was. Efronia was the first Armenian Stina had met. Starting from these unlikely beginnings, Stina came to play an important role in Efronia's life in her older years.

First there were the intimate kinship ties. She adored our children, our Nina and Kai. In addition, a strong bond of friendship developed between them. The fact that Stina came from Finland and was not Armenian did not constitute an obstacle, and the fact she learned to speak fluent Armenian made her "one of us."

Stina's being a writer and translator was also instrumental in instigating Efronia's own undertaking, the writing of the story of her life. Actually, the very idea came from Stina.

After I had translated my mother's life story, Stina wrote a book based on it called, "Efronia: An Armenian Love Story" (Gomidas Institute Books, 2001).

INTRODUCTION¹⁴

My mother-in-law, Efronia Katchadourian (1894-1986), is buried in the secluded Creekside Cemetery in northern California. Her grave, shaded by live oaks and redwoods, faces the high school both her grandchildren attended. It is also close to the university campus where her only son teaches. Had someone told the young Efronia, growing up in the Ottoman Empire, that this would be her final resting place, she might not have found it surprising. Although her hometown of Aintab (Gaziantep) on the Anatolian high plateau in Turkey seems many worlds away from the American West Coast, it had always had its share of enterprising young Armenian men hoping to make their fortune in the New World. With the hard work and good business sense characteristic of their people, they often succeeded, and many returned to their native communities to choose a bride. The attractive young Efronia herself received many inquiries from suitors who wanted nothing more than to offer her the good life in their new country. But for years, to her family's puzzlement and frustration, she turned them all down. In this book, written very near the end of her life, she explains why.

If burial in California might not have been so difficult for the young Efronia to imagine, having a daughter-in-law like me certainly would have been. Had her life followed a predictable course, she would have attended a college run by American Protestant missionaries not far away from the town where she grew up. She might have become a teacher and taught for a few years before getting married and having children. Later, she would have had considerable say in choosing her son's Armenian bride.

¹⁴ Both this "Introduction" and the following "Medzmama" are reproduced from, Stina Katchadourian's book, *Efronia: An Armenian Love Story*. – H.K.

None of this happened. During the fall Efronia planned to enter Marash College for Girls, the First World War broke out. Instead of being a student, she became a witness to what we today would call an ethnic cleansing, directed at her people: the first genocide of modern times. Although her family survived, her world was changed forever.

If Efronia would have found it hard to believe she would end up with a European daughter-in-law, the reverse is also true. The First World War had shattered Efronia's youth; the Second World War cast its shadow over mine. Few people left the war-torn Finland where I grew up. Long-distance travel meant taking the overnight steamer to neutral Sweden, where people were well dressed, where you could buy candy and other sweets, and where there were no bombed-out ruins. Even though Finland had become less isolated by the time I entered college, it still seemed a foregone conclusion that I would settle there. Most likely one of the women who had scraped and struggled to feed her family during the war years and whose husband had been fighting at the Russian front would be my future mother-in-law.

With luck, this mother-in-law would have been a benevolently distant presence in my life, sparing with her advice and aware of my need to regard us both as independent women on an equal footing. I would certainly not have expected her to call me "my daughter," with all this implied of supervision on her part and submissiveness on mine. Years later, though, that is precisely what Efronia did, effusively and enthusiastically. I wanted to duck for cover, until the day I realized the strength of our bond, as she saw it.

The occasion was the first large family gathering at our new home in a mountain village above Beirut. Uncharacteristically, my mother-in-law did not volunteer to cook. I had the distinct and uncomfortable feeling that the gathering was meant to showcase my culinary talents for the large extended family. I decided to make - without the benefit of a recipe - the only Scandinavian dish I knew how to prepare, Swedish meatballs.

When we began to eat, a silence fell over the room. As mouths puckered and one relative after another reached for more water, I realized that something was drastically wrong. I tasted a meatball: it was as salty as the Dead Sea.

It was then that my mother-in-law spoke up. Fixing everyone in the room with her matriarchal gaze, she declared: "You can never trust these local butchers. They have pre-salted the meat again."

That moment, for me, defines unconditional love. I realized that from now on, in the eyes of this mother-in-law, her daughter-in-law could do no wrong. And year after year, the manifestations of her love continued - in the form of presents, practical help, food, birthday cards and, most importantly, an ever-vigilant presence that proclaimed, with the primordial strength of a guardian angel, "I'm here whenever you need me."

I often wondered where this strength came from. By any ordinary standard, Efronia had endured enough hardship in her life to make her an embittered and constricted person. How could she be so expansive, joyous, and forward-looking? It seemed a mystery to me.

MEDZMAMA

One day, soon after Herant and I had returned to Beirut from our wedding in Finland, Efronia took me aside.

“Look, *aghchiges*,” she said, “my daughter, I know what it was like to have only one child. It is not good; a girl needs a sister to play with. A boy needs a brother. I tell you, have at least four. A big family is very nice.”

At that point, I wasn’t even pregnant yet.

Efronia would have to wait a few years to become a *medzmama*. The news of her granddaughter Nina’s birth came over the telephone from California. It caused great joy among the Beirut relatives; many telegrams arrived, and much gold jewelry. But that was nothing compared to the riotous outburst of jubilation at the news of the birth of our second child, Kai Aram. This one was a boy.

At first, Efronia had to play her grandmotherly role from a distance, but she didn’t let it deter her. Long before our daughter’s birth, packages from Beirut started arriving: swaddling clothes, masterfully knit small sweaters and dresses from Lucin with small beads sewn into the seams to ward off the evil eye. Later came enormous stuffed animals, a rabbit-fur coat, all manner of battery-driven creatures that danced and did somersaults and made music. And loving letters that always ended with “I kiss your beautiful eyes, Your loving *Medzmama*.”

Efronia was bonded to her grandchildren with strong biological ties that eliminated barriers of language and culture. As *Medzmama* in California, she was content if she could just see them, or even smell them. No amount of time spent with them seemed too long. Nothing was good enough for them, and there was no amount of misbehaving or messing up that could not be excused by the fact that they were still “very young.”

To her, everything the grandchildren did was simply the best. No one sat more erect or applauded longer at school drama performances or piano recitals than *Medzmama* and Lucin. No one cheered more loudly at the sidelines of Saturday morning soccer games. No one could last longer through a loud drum solo, or admire a Halloween costume more, or display a stick-figure drawing in a more prominent place.

She thought being asked to baby-sit was simply the best thing that could happen to her. When we left the house and the two children with *Medzmama* and Lucin, we knew our home was about to be taken over by a Gang of Four. Favorite and forbidden food would be smuggled in, football games - with Efronia as quarterback - would break out in the living room, houses would be constructed of furniture, pillows, and blankets. And after these games, what else could Efronia do for her poor darlings but let them sit and rest in front of the television for as long as they wanted, restore their energy by bringing them food, and finally excuse them from cleaning up on the grounds that the games had been “too tiring.”

At the end of all this, groggy with sleep and full of chocolate and ice cream, they would be escorted to their bedrooms, simply “too sleepy” to brush their teeth.

When we got home, we would invariably find *Medzmama* outside one of the children’s bedrooms and Lucin outside the other, both of them knitting in the semi-darkness of the corridor, “just so the children won’t be afraid.” And like magic, all the laundry in the house would have been done and ironed and folded, and every loose

button sewed back on, and every torn pair of jeans patched, and every last dish washed and in its place in the cupboard.

This extravagant love only grew as the years went by. Even as Efronia's consciousness was fading away during her final illness, the mere mention of one of her grandchildren would bring her back, alert and awake.

During her final month, she was mostly dozing, slipping away. A letter arrived from her granddaughter in college.

"Medzmama," I whispered, "there is a letter from Nina. She sends you her love."

In an instant, Efronia's eyes opened, her lips trying to form words. *"Sireli torniges.* My dear grandchild. May God protect her."

"Medzmama, Kai got his driver's license today."

"God bless him. When I get well, I will go for a ride with him."

Efronia was magnificent until the very last. When reality no longer was within her grasp, she made up her own. She ordered packages of food to be sent to faraway relatives, some of them long dead. She demanded an umbrella to protect her from the rain and warm boots with which to walk through the snows of Aintab. She asked Lucin to keep the brazier of her childhood living room burning and sent her out to pick olives and peppers to put by for the winter.

Images of the dead swirled through her memory: her mother and her two sisters, long gone; Yervant's lingering death from cirrhosis; Yacoub's despair and suicide when he was an old man.

Her son spent long hours sitting by her bedside in her home, massaging her back and arms, holding her hand. Did she know who was sitting there? Once, when I caught her looking at Herant, I could see that the man she had once loved and the son she had brought up to be like him had finally in her eyes merged into one.

One day shortly before the end, Efronia stirred in her bed, opened her eyes wide, and began to say something. Her speech had a beautiful, rhythmic quality to it, and it seemed to emerge from a great inner calm. I recognized the language. It was Turkish. But I couldn't understand the words. "It's the Lord's Prayer," whispered Lucin.

Efronia was looking far into the distance. Her voice was steady:

Forgive our trespasses.

As we forgive those who trespass against us.



Lucin in her old age
(Palo Alto, 1986, photograph by
Margo Davis)

LUCIN

My mother and Lucin came to live with us during the Lebanese civil war. We rented an apartment for them close to where we lived. This was a happy time for her since she had never even dreamed that she would spend the last years of her life close to us, where she would see her son's family, especially her adored grandchildren, on a daily basis.

During this period, due to fortuitous circumstances, my mother and Lucin met Helen and Nello Sartoris and became good friends with them. Among other common interests, they played poker for small stakes, which my mother constantly tried to raise.

There are relatively few references to Lucin in my mother's autobiography. This is surprising and disconcerting considering the

fact that my mother lived longer with Lucin than with my father or with me.

In her older years, my mother became more appreciative and dependent on Lucin. This is reflected in her comments in the preceding addendum.

It was even more comforting for Lucin to receive my and Stina's affection and those of our children during the last years of her life.

We held a memorial service for Lucin in our home for family members and friends who knew her.

After my mother passed away in 1986, after a brief struggle against pancreatic cancer, Lucin continued to live in their apartment, but it became increasingly difficult for her to manage on her own. So we moved her into the retirement community of Lytton Gardens. She started independent living.

It was a happy time for her since she had never been in a position to be free to do as she pleased. We frequently visited Lucin. After she became bedridden, Kai would pick her up like a child and carry her out to the car and take her for a drive. I also took her out in her wheelchair to go around the neighborhood. Lucin thought of me in two ways. In one, I was a famous man that she was proud of. In the second, I was the little boy that she had always taken care of. One day, when the weather turned chilly, she looked up at me from the wheelchair and said, "Put your sweater on," and I did. Unfortunately, this life did not last, and she moved into assisted living and finally to the dementia floor. She was not demented and felt miserable. "Why am I living with these crazy people?" she used to say.

When she died in 2001, it was a relief for all of us.

In addition to Elvira and Lucin, my cousin Nora, the daughter of my uncle Yervant, came to occupy a central place in my mother's life. Nora had been separated from her mother and younger sister, Zabel, when her family emigrated to South America. Nora stayed behind and lived with her father and grandmother in a town in Syria. During this period, my mother stayed in close touch with them and helped them the best she could. When Nora came to Beirut to go to college, she lived with us for two years.

We were very fond of each other, and she essentially became like a sister to me - a close relationship I maintained until her death in 2021.

COMMENTS BY NINA DURING
THE MEMORIAL GATHERING FOR LUCIN:
“VISITING LUCY”

When Kai was about eight years old, he became obsessed with airplanes. Applying his newly acquired knowledge of aeronautical engineering principles, he theorized that Lucy probably moved so quickly because she had less wind resistance. She always reminded me of a hummingbird; she was so tiny and precise in her movements. Visiting her meant stepping into a miniature world. Everything about her was tiny: her little chairs, her miniature sweaters, even her extra-small little Turkish coffee cups. One time when I came to visit, she had bought herself new shoes, a small pair of black flats. I asked her where she got them, and she told me she had gone to Rapp’s Shoe Store and found this pair in the children’s department. She was also quite pleased that she had beaten the guy down: “Mister, I am very small.” Instant discount.

She had incredible physical stamina for her size, even late into her life. Years ago, I stopped by just after she had done a run to the farmer’s market and (somehow) hauled home a sack of red peppers to make into red pepper paste. When I walked in the door, she was sitting on the floor, with the limberness of a little girl, her legs in a perfect V-shape and a mountain of peppers as tall as she was on the floor in front of her.

When Kai and I were really little, she let us ride on her back like a horse - and she must have been in her sixties at the time. She inherited the tiny play chairs that we outgrew, and there were many times I would come to visit and find her sitting in a little chair, even though all the big ones were available.

Her will, on the other hand, was not small. As a child, having been orphaned and then taken in by Bedouins, her chin was tattooed with traditional tribal markings. After she had been adopted into my grandparent’s home, she scoured these marks off using her fingernails and detergent. This display of stubbornness amazed me, and I used to stare at her chin to try to see remnants of those marks, but there were none. Several times over the past eight years, Lucy landed in the hospital, and we braced ourselves for the end. But time and time again, Lucy pulled through with some incredible strength she summoned from somewhere inside her tiny body. Visiting her in the hospital after she had her gall bladder removed, she yanked up her hospital gown to show me her massive scar. “Look like chopped lamb,” she said, with a dismissive wave of her hand. Then she looked at me seriously and said, “Again, I live.”

Watching television with Lucy was hilarious. In the afternoon she would often have the TV on the soap opera channels, and complained bitterly about all the kissing, which she thought was indiscreet and bad for children to see. As she ranted and raved about it, she also watched it and made fun of it, sometimes pantomiming along and saying “Ehhhh, habiby,” making faces, and then quivering with giggles. We were watching the news together once, and the lead story had something to do with the Clinton-Lewinsky scandal. I got a bit concerned; had she been following this, with all the salacious details? She turned to me. “President Bill,” she said (they seemed to be

on a first name basis), “President Bill have girlfriend.” Pause. “Eh ... He is man.” She had valuable pre-feminist advice for my friends and me as well. Jessica Evans and I were visiting her once, and over coffee she offered us her famous theory, “If boy have nothing in pocket, he no good.”

She had a kind of wild, unlimited faith in my abilities. If we were watching Family Feud, she would encourage me (or almost admonish me, for not having done it sooner) to go on the show and win the money. “Why you not go? You can also, eh, go, make!”

She saved a clipping for me from the Armenian paper announcing that a Van Gogh painting had sold for 18.3 million dollars. “Look,” she said, “you can also make.” Her idea was that I could easily paint another picture just like that one and earn a few million for myself.

Lucy was always telling me to learn Armenian, something I never succeeded much in doing. But in an effort to communicate with her more “in her language,” my English gradually bent more towards hers (as you’ve already heard!), adopting many of the same intonations and accents, phrases, grammatical quirks. She had some wonderful mispronunciations that I always enjoyed: “Tortinas” for “tortillas,” for example. I also loved the fact that this Mexican bread staple had been co-opted as the base for her lahmejuns. Or, if I was helping her cook, she might say “Please put in Freezon,” meaning the refrigerator, but sounding like some strange hybrid of prison and freezer where the food was jailed in the cold.

She talked a lot about heaven, too, but pronounced it “Heavy.” At first this word would appear in guilt-inducing phrases like, “Quickly, make marriage. I will go Heavy.” And more recently, as she began to understand that her time on this earth really was winding down, it took on a more serious tone: “One day, I will go Heavy. I am not afraid - Heavy also good.”

I think we can safely assume that she’s in Heavy now, having crocheted herself a pair of little wings. Actually, she had probably prepared well before she left, the same way she had already made me a wedding dress and about 10 different baby outfits for every possible combination of genders or multiple-birth scenarios. On one of my last visits with her I took her outside in a wheelchair, and we stopped next to a cluster of planted flowers on University Avenue. It was sunny, and she was happy to be outside. We squinted in the sunlight. I sat on a bench and held her hand, and she looked around. “Good you come,” she said and squeezed my hand. “My heart open.” I think that’s exactly the effect she had on so many of us.

COMMENTS BY HERANT DURING THE MEMORIAL GATHERING FOR LUCIN: “LUCY-A LIFETIME OF SERVICE”

Lucy was a survivor of the Armenian genocide of 1915 in Ottoman Turkey. She had no idea of who she was with respect to her name, her age or her family. Like countless others, her parents must have been killed in front of her eyes somewhere during the forced march between her home town and the Syrian desert at Deir Zor, on the shores of the Euphrates. Her mother may have handed her to a Bedouin family to save her life, or she may have been picked up by them some other way. She probably

was two or three years old at the time (which would make her about 90 at the time of her death).

At the end of WWI, American and European missionaries scoured the Syrian desert looking for Armenian orphans, whom they gathered (often buying them out) and placed in orphanages in Syria and Lebanon. Lucy's earliest memories went back to the years she spent at these institutions; and they were largely happy memories. In addition to attending school, these children were taught various handicrafts (Lucy learned needlework) and whenever possible, placed with Armenian families as adoptees, maids, or in some more ambiguous position.

My parents at the time were recently married and had no children. When the prospect of taking in one of these girls was pressed on them, they had no interest in adopting a child, and they had all the household help they needed. But they went ahead anyway and took Lucy, sight unseen, into their household. Several years later, when I was born, Lucy was put in charge of me and from then on she cared for me and felt responsible for me for the next 68 years. I was the center of her life. On my part, though I never confused Lucy with my mother, I loved her no less than I loved my mother.

In 1975, Lucy and my mother fled from the civil war in Lebanon and came to the US. My mother died in 1986, and Lucy eventually moved to Lytton Gardens (and became a US citizen). She was a tiny woman with something wrong with every system of her body, but she survived until old age took away her mind and then her body. Ironically, her happiest years were after my mother died, when Lucy came into her own.

For the last 15 years Stina, Nina, Kai and I took care of Lucy. While looking after her was burdensome at times, I never begrudged the effort. Having been the primary beneficiary of her care all my life, I felt a personal obligation to take care of her in turn. Since she was a victim of the Armenian genocide, I felt a broader responsibility to look after her. Lucy was someone who did more for everyone she encountered in her life than anyone did for her in return. To some extent, she had no choice but to serve others, but she did this joyfully, and she was unfailingly kind and helpful even to those to whom she owed nothing.

Lucy had no material assets to speak of. She never married, had no lovers, left no children. There is no legacy, no great accomplishment for her to be remembered by. She had no power over anyone. She had no way of fighting injustice in the world even though she was painfully aware of it. In the eyes of the world she was nobody. She did not even have a real name.

Yet, Lucy touched lives by simply being who she was. She especially loved children and brought laughter to their lives (one called her, "tiny grandma"). In some sense she treated everyone like a child to be loved and nurtured. Like the poor widow in the parable, Lucy only had a few small coins to offer to the world, but her gifts were imbued with love. Her life exemplified a form of "philanthropy" which is often neither recognized nor fully appreciated.

As her end drew near, she asked me if I thought she would go to heaven when she died. I told her, if she did not make it to heaven, the rest of us were sure to roast in hell.

Between 1978 and 1982, from age 84 to 88, Efronia Khatchadourian put words to her tortuous life history, which starts with the axing of her father in Armenian-populated Aintab in 1894. Efronia writes extensively on her daring love story with an Iranian boy, then elaborates aspects of the life of those Armenians who were not deported during the Armenian Genocide but were daily in terror of being kidnapped and forcefully married to Turks.

Next the memoirs describe some aspects of Armenian socio-cultural life in Iskenderun between 1920 and 1939, before it was acceded to Turkey by the French, and episodes of Efronia's life in Beirut, before her move to the USA.

The book, translated by her son, Dr. Herant Katchadourian, offers contemporary accounts of extended family support, family networks and relations, community habits and traditions as well as the self-deceiving perceptions and experiences of Efronia's husband, Aram, with a number of high ranking Turkish military officers, which eventually lead to the loss of Aram's wealth and fortune in Iskenderun. In this regard, the book is a personal account of confiscation of Armenian property by the state of Turkey.

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