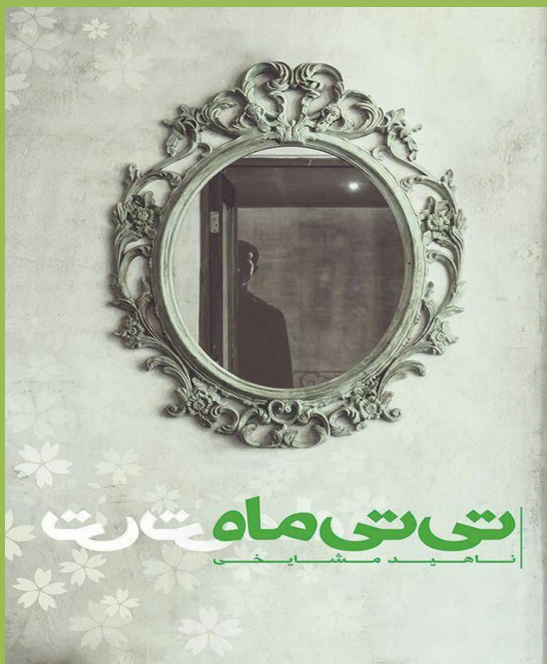


Ti Ti Mah



**Nahid
Mashayekhi**

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Chapter one

The house small pool was full of floating fruits¹ in autumn that father had provided them the night before for the party. Pomegranates, oranges and apples were drafted by the autumn wind and with their rolling; the reflected face of the full moon on the pool was broken into pieces. Juicy and big sour oranges on the branches were swaying and the fragrance of Mahbube which mom had planted many years before her passing away in the house small garden was overwhelmed the house yard.

I put the fruits in a big glass crystal plate. I lit the coal samovar and while on a brass tray placing next to each other the saucers and narrow-waisted tumbler-shaped tea cups that on both sides of them the picture of Naseredin Shah² was imprinted, I remembered a boy wearing a blue cap that had been waiting for me for hours in the beginning of our stone-paved street to

¹ In Iran, to wash the fruits when there was a party, they were put in houses pools. While this custom is not practised due to modernity, this is still done in some old houses especially in small cities where there is a pool of houses.

² The 8th and most famous king of Ghajarid dynasty whose picture is imprinted on the body of Iranian estekans (narrow-waisted tumbler-shaped tea cup) and hookahs

hand me out the folded letter he had held in his hands and never succeeded to do that.

I wore a purple dress, which on its waste it was folded, and my maternal aunt had tailored it for me. I braided my hair. When I heard the door knocker of the yard, my heart began to throb as the social custom had made me a doll which had to sit in the house window-shop waiting for a man who would select me as his house bride.

As the tray of teacups was shaking in my hands, I entered the room where guests who had come to propose me were there. The aunt, who unfastened her niqab (face veil) and left it hanging from her forehead and left her long hair hanging on her short and bony shoulders, with her eyebrows signalled to a middle-aged woman of tall stature who had fastened her white scarf under her chin.

When I kept the tray before her, she just kept gazing at me with her wide and big but lightless eyes. A white woman having russet hair who was sitting next to her and sometimes arose one of her bowlike brows handed her a teacup and said: "Dear Fakhri, thank God a thousand times. Your bride with such white skin and tall stature has no incompleteness of beauty and respectability."

The aunt glanced down at the carpet flowers of the sour orange pattern. Then with small traces of the smile on her lips said: "Dear Forough, swearing to God, you are right. In such time, such a decent girl can be found so scarcely.

While slurping, lady Fakhri said: "Oh, oh dear lady! It will be as whatever God wills. My son, Nader, is twenty-five and works in his father's shop located near Aminolmolk caravansary. My second son, Naser, and my daughter, Nasrin who is my youngest child, are at school. Regarding these, I am all alone. So, I thought of my son's marriage as I'll have a companion and my Nader's life will find its real future too."

When the guests left the house, while gathering the dishes of the guests' reception, the aunt asked: "My daughter, what's your idea? I know them no well. They are a family of a good reputation. Lady Fakhri is a kind woman and she is living with her husband's second wife in the same house."

When I saw my younger sister, Malihe, crouched in a corner of the kitchen and was scratching the wall of clay and straw plaster with her nails, I found out the fear of her future loneliness made her resume her bad habit of eating the soil.

I moved to her and cleaned her covered-with-soil hands with my dress and cleaned the traces of tears from her cheek and corner of her golden eyes. I told the aunt: “Dear aunt, I am not intended to marry now. When Malihe finishes her school and grows up, then I may marry.”

My brother, Javad, who was older than me, while with difficulty rolling his wheelchair wheels which was making a noise, passed by me as usual silently and with his brows frowned. Without expressing a word, he entered his cabin which dad had made it for him in one of the yard corners.

After witnessing Javad and Malihe’s states, feeling a tumult inside myself at those moments, I said to the aunt, who was washing the dishes with a special tenderness and rinsing them several times: “I am just fifteen and I have a lot of time for getting married.”

The aunt knitted her brows gently and while peering at me said: “dear daughter, you have to think of yourself. The chance knocks one’s door just once. You can’t always find appropriate opportunity. If you don’t get married up to some years later, you’ll be an old girl and then you have to marry a divorced man or a widower. I tell these words to Azam too. Since Sheikh Ali took Akram to the alter with a seminarian, I got relaxed of being worried about her but Azam

does not take it easy and can't accept to marry a seminarian.”

I could not disagree with the aunt as I respected her a lot for since I had lost my mom during the childhood, she acted as my mom in a way.

The aunt's house was a big mansion with an extended and full-of-tree yard and a pool which was full of goldfish. There were a lot of vases of geranium all around the pool. In summers or at Friday nights, all of our family members gathered in the aunt's yard and Sheikh Ali took the big, juicy and cold watermelons out of the pool and cut them in pieces of the same size on a big copper tray. We ate those red watermelons piece by piece and kept chatting and laughing until midnight.

That mansion was separated into two floors. The first floor which was connected to the yard had long balconies, bedrooms and living rooms specific for the family members and a traditional teaching room where the aunt was teaching Quran there and sometimes she wrote talisman and prayers from an old book for the sick. The second floor was a beautiful and magnificent building with long brick stairs and woodcut doors and reticulated windows with colourful glasses and the main hall of five doors that sun was always shining inside it.

The aunt's husband, Sheikh Ali, was a religious and reserved man who was busy with the affairs of theology students who travelled from far cities to Baabol Seminary. He always had hundreds of Islamic narrations in his mind and followed all religious compulsories. He was one of the great and known people of the Masjedololama'(scholars' mosque (the city's main mosque)). It was a mosque with brick walls and earthenware roof and a lot of pigeons nested on the bars of its frame. Whenever Sheikh Ali strewed fresh wheat grains by the big pool in the mosque yard, the pigeons were flying down like clusters of pigeons. He even allocated a part of his mansion for residing of theology students. He passed his leisure time in a pottery workshop inherited from his father. As he was an educated and benefactor man, people of the city respected him a lot and he was invited as a special guest in all rites and ceremonies.

While taking her Neqab out of her cloth bag, the aunt sighed and said: "I had better go back home sooner as Sheikh Ali is not in right mood these days. If he gets home while I am not there, he begins to make a fuss. I don't know what's wrong with him. These days he's trying to find an excuse to begin a quarrel. I feel really exhausted. I can't manage all kinds of stuff of the home. I'm looking for someone to help me."

By hearing those words, I remembered Zahra's mom, lady Khadije and said: "Since the death of her

husband, my friend's mom works in others' homes to provide her daughter's and her own living. Do you want me to ask her to come to your home?"

The aunt unknotted her brows and said: "Certainly. God bless you. I wait for her tomorrow."

The dad's voice saying "Yallah"¹ drew our attention. The aunt put her veil on quickly and while her Neqab was swaying because of the wind, she said: "Come on in Haaj agha², the guests have just left. They liked our daughter a lot. Now, it depends just on your idea, God willing. Congratulation!"

Dad straightened his collar and rubbed his hand over his hair that after mom's death got quite grey and said nothing. Some days later, I found out that despite my real desire and even without asking about my opinion, dad agreed upon my marriage with Nader that I had no idea about him at all. He even had asked Mr Shakeri (Nader's dad) to put our wedding party off due to his pilgrimage to Mecca in the season of Hajj.

That year dad set out his pilgrimage with the warm seeing off of the family members and neighbours

¹ Literally means: "O, God" but it is a common expression uttered mostly by men when entering somewhere to let the women know a *Namahram* man (one before him a Moslem woman is supposed to veil herself) is entering.

² Haaj agha (Mr Hajj): a Moslem man who went on the pilgrimage of Mecca

accompanied by Haaj Nemat's *Chavoshkhani*¹. Haaj Nemat was a bony, euphonious old man who knew religious songs and when performing Chavoshkhani, he wore a black scarf over his chest. How pity it was that at those moments mom was not next to dad!

Chapter two

I wanted to yell for a help but my vocal cords were shaking severely and I could not talk. Drops of the tear were frozen in my eyes but my eyesight got reinforced many times more to let me see that doomsday in our house of that day.

In one side, I was seeing my mom's lifeless body and in another side my dad's grief-stricken face, as he was plunged in his grey aba² and was reading Quran while sitting above my mom's body and weeping. I saw my four-year-old sister, Malihe, who had golden hair and eyes and was moving around mom's body like a butterfly and while cleaning her teardrops from her cheeks with the sleeve corner of her cotton, pleated dress, she kept repeating: "Mom, wake up."

In that doomsday, accidentally I saw the vase of red and pink roses that mom picked them from the yard garden last day and put it before the window. In the world of my childhood, I felt the roses were laughing

¹ Reciting religious songs

² Mullah's loose sleeveless cloak which is open in its front

at me. I fell into laughter because of their laughter. I moved toward them and rubbed my fingers over their delicate and soft petals and smelled them then. They smelled of mom.

I took the cold small hands of Malihe and cleaned her tears and running nose from her face. We, together, went to the yard and sat under the sour orange tree. With each wind blow, white pentagonal flowers of sour orange were falling on our heads and faces. We kept our heads upward to feel the falling of the flowers in Ti ti maah on our grief-stricken faces better.

I gazed at the sky. It was quite shining. Sometimes, the sun was looking at us from behind the dark clouds and smiled at us and then hid again.

Little by little, the sun thawed the ice of my eyes to let me cry. Malihe was cleaning my tears with her small hands and as she always pronounced 'r' with 'l', she said: "You play as mom will not wake up?"

I smiled with a lot of difficulties and said: "My sister, Cry not play."

The neighbours were coming in one after another one and the family members were getting aware of the news of mom's death by that time. Dad had no power to move but he got up from his place difficultly and

asked lady Hajar to take care of me and Malihe to be able to prepare the funeral necessities.

The neighbour women gathered in the room and kept saying: "Oh God, what a shame! Damned this time! Lady Rahele was quite well last night and came to the mosque at Tasua'¹ night."

While moving her two narrow brows upward, lady Ehteram said: "Poor lady Rahele, she died while young. We did not get what her sickness was that fell her on her knees to leave these innocent kids alone." Then she had a look at us and while moving her head, she sighed and continued: "God, May I die for them. I feel pity for them."

While holding a tray of dates and offering them to the guests, lady Hajar said: "Enough, please. Don't say such words before these kids. It is not deserved to backbite a dead person."

Lady Pari who was such a fat woman that occupied the room of three people wherever she sat and had a

¹ One night before the martyrdom of the 3rd Master (Imam) of Shia Muslims when for holding his memory the Shia hold mourning ceremonies.

man-like voice said: “For the happiness and peace of lady Rahele’s soul, pray with saying a *Salavat*¹.”

The voice of people saying Salavat echoed inside the house. I noticed my mom’s body hidden under a white sheet was witnessing everything quietly as usual.

I got up and sat next to my mom’s body. I took the Quran placed above her head, kissed it and opened it. The smell of the dried rose which mom had put in it overwhelmed everywhere. I did not know how to read the Quran. Mom had just begun to teach me that.

The nice sound of someone reading Quran could be heard from the mosque speakers:

The aunt, while weeping, and her husband, Sheikh Ali, entered.

Sheikh Ali shook his brown aba which he always put it over his shoulders and rubbed his hand over his grey beard which revealed his middle agedness and said: “Ya- Allah, Ya-Allah”.

All guests got up for his respect and the neighbour women while covering their bodies and a part of their faces with their veils tightly, whispered each other:

¹ An expression of praise and prayer among Muslims which is: “May God’s blessings be upon Mohammed and his family members”

“He is Sheikh Ali and that woman covering her face with a niqab is his wife, lady Saadaat.”

Lady Ehteram, who was standing next to me, whispered: “Is lady Saadaat your aunt?”

I nodded off. Suddenly, all women began to whisper to each other but as Sheikh Ali had a meaningful look at them, they got silence.

Sheikh Ali shook hands with dad and embraced him. He said: “Condolences, I know after Rahele’s departure, you tolerate what a bad pain. But what can we do? It’s the way of time. Today Rahele’s, tomorrow is our turn. It’s better with the guests we all go to the mosque to let lady Saadaat follow her sister’s will and wash her body in her own house and shroud her.”

Dad who respected Sheikh Ali a lot and always considered him as his older brother he had never had, was consoled a little and set out to the mosque with him.

Lady Hajar on another side of the yard and next to the water well placed a bed and set up a curtain-like sheet around it. Then while weeping quietly and her hands were shaking, she began to repeat “there is no God but Allah” and with some women of the family took mom’s light body out of the room and placed her on that wooden bed.

The splash sounds of water taken out of the well with repetition of Salavat and smell of camphor and lotus overwhelmed everywhere.

While weeping, the aunt was singing in a whispering mood and in Mazani¹ accent: “Dear sister, May I be sacrificed for you. You went and my heart became bloody of the grief.”

At the back of the curtain, I was counting the seconds that the aunt asked me to go on the other side of the curtain to see my mom. At those moments, I bit my lips so much that they began bleeding. Then a bony hand moved the white sheet aside and the aunt said: “My daughter, now you can come to say goodbye to your mom.”

Being grief-stricken and while pushing Javad’s wheelchair, dad entered the home, held the hands of mine and Malihe’s in his manly, rough hands, kissed our heads and took us on the other side of the curtain to our mom’s body.

Mom was like a baby in its white swaddling clothes and her face was shining like a diamond in the middle of sadness and grief darkness.

Dad gave Malihe to the aunt and while groaning and hitting his forehead, went toward mom’s body with

¹ Of Mazandaran (a province in North of Iran)

Javad. I stood by my mom as my feet were shaking seriously. I placed my lips on my mom's soft and tender cheek. It was as fresh as a jasmine. I kissed her. With my kiss, she smiled like before. By seeing mom's smile, tears gushed out of my eyes and fell down from my eyelashes until a heavy hand separated me from her. I still feel the heaviness of that hand on my shoulders.

Malihe, who got to know something, began to cry to that extent that her golden eyes turned to two blood bowls. The only place she would be consoled a little was the aunt's arms. As maybe she smelled of mom.

The family and neighbours men lifted the coffin while repeating "there is no God but Allah". In front of the coffin, Sheikh Ali, some elder men of the family, dad and Javad were walking.

Broken-hearted, depressed and dawn, dad was taking his steps with a lot of difficulties. There was a real commotion in the street. The mourning groups for Imam (master) Hossain were following each other while beating their backs with chains or hitting hands against their chests. The sounds of drums and cymbals played for mourning could be heard everywhere. The light green coffin of mom among the mourning people was like a jewel stone on a ring. Everyone who saw the mom's coffin prayed for her and followed us even as much as few steps.

We approached mom's eternal place; an old cemetery in Golemahale neighbourhood next to Babolrood where my ancestors had rested there one after another one.

Mom's grave had been already dug. The old gravedigger was living in a small dump room in one of the cemetery's corner. His hands were tough, rough and had calluses as he dug a lot of graves. I frightened of his rough hands and his mysterious look. When they put mom's coffin on the ground to say the dead prayers for her, I rushed toward my mom's coffin agitatedly and embraced her firmly. Then, I fainted. The last voice I heard was dad's, who was shouting: "People! Help, my daughter got fainted."

The aunt roasted the flour well and then added rosewater, saffron and thickened the syrup. She placed that mixture or halva in a tray which had the picture of two winged angels on it and asked me to garnish it. I drew small flowers on it with a spoon tip and those were like flower patterns mom had been sewing on white and pink clothes. Suddenly one of my cousins came anxiously and said: "Malihe is lost. We looked for her throughout the building but could not find her."

I went to our own house agitatedly but she was not there too. Dad's sunken black eyes were full of tears. While moving his body in the wheelchair, Javad said:

“Maybe she went to the cemetery.” After looking at each other for a second, we began to go there.

Malihe was on mom’s grave and with her small hands, she was moving the soil aside to take mom out of the grave and with her weeping eyes and full-of-soil mouth, she was repeating: “Yes mom, I myself take you out of the soils.”

Since that day, every time Malihe got worried or anxious, she began to eat soil.

Chapter three

Since lady khadije began to work in Sheikh Ali’s mansion following my recommendation and finding a fixed monthly income, she could form a more stable living especially as Sheikh Ali acted as a father for my friend, Zahra. He bought her whatever he was buying for her own daughters. He gave the aunt extra money to hand it to lady Khadije and he asked the aunt to pay a visit to her house sometimes to see if they needed something.

Zahra got interested to Sheikh Ali to that extent that if she did not meet him even one day, she would miss him. She was always repeating: “We owe our present life state to Sheikh Ali and your aunt.”

Everybody talks of Sheikh Ali’s gallantness and cavalierly. Until one day Zahra came to me and said:

"It's awhile that my mom is not well. She is mostly depressed and sad. She is gazing at a fixed spot for hours without saying a single word. She eats a little. Sometimes for trivial things, she makes a fuss and begins to scream. I had never seen her like that in the most difficult moments of our life even when my dad passed away. She does not tell me anything but I'm sure something bad happened otherwise it was impossible mom reacted like that."

To find any clue, as Zahra left me, I went to the aunt's mansion. As I knocked the mansion door, Azam, my cousin, opened the door and said: Good news! I think mom is going to have a baby soon as she asked lady Soghra the midwife to come here. Now, she, mom and lady Khadije are in a room. I wish this child be a boy that dad wished for."

Out of a sudden, we heard lady Khadije's scream. Azam and I ran toward the room and stood at the door eavesdropping. Lady Khadije was screaming: "For God's sake, take care; I'm dying of pain."

- "When having fun, you had to think of such days. Did Sheikh Ali and lady Saadaat not serve you enough that you paid them back in such disgracing way?"

After passing of some minutes in silence, lady Soghra continued: "No, I can't be made her abort this child,

now it's over three months and is a completely human and its killing is a homicide and I will have to pay it back. I can't do it at all."

- "Lady Soghra, for God's sake, gives a medicine that I abort it otherwise I'll kill it myself."
- "It's better you do that yourself. Who is the father of this bastard?"

While crying loudly, lady Khadije said: "Swear to God, it's not a bastard and I'm not a prostitute. Its father persisted so much on me that he made me agreed to marry him temporarily¹. After performing the formalities of temporary marriage, he put my hand on Quran² and asked me to swear not to reveal his name under any circumstances."

- "I know women like you well. You know how to make stories to justify yourself. No way, don't act for me."

The aunt, who was silent up to that moment said: "For God's sake, quieter, please. You are disgracing us before the neighbours. If Sheikh Ali knows this, he will make here a Judging Day. We have provided all your life stuff. Why did you accept to marry

¹ According to Islamic Sharia, It's legal for a man to practice polygamy by marrying women temporarily after doing some formalities or procedures.

² In Islam, it is a way to make someone swear

temporarily to cause such disreputableness? Was it a right answer for Sheikh Ali's kindnesses and attempts for you?"

- "My lady! I put myself on shame. I can't look in your eyes even a second. I'm embarrassed, really embarrassed. For God's sake, forgive me. God is my witness and I Swear to Him, I'm not at fault."
- "Who is that Mr. such and such? Does he know that you're pregnant?"
- "Ya and he left me no way but suicide to get rid of such disreputableness. I'm just worried about Zahra. If I were sure about her future, I would kill myself up to now."

Suddenly, lady Soghra opened the door and as she saw me and Zahra, she grasped our ears and said: "Damned you! Since when are you eavesdropping?"

While putting a dirty sheet in a plastic basket, the aunt said angrily: "Forget whatever you heard now. If I find out that this is revealed somewhere, swear to God, I'll punish you in a way that you never forget that."

I and Azam while looking down in a panicky way said: "sure, sure."

The aunt helped lady Khadije to put her pieces of stuff in her bag. An hour later, Zahra came from

school and when facing her mom's ready-to-leave bag, she asked: "Mom! Are we supposed to go somewhere?"

The aunt replied: "Not you, dear Zahra. Your mom does not feel well. The doctor advised her to spend awhile in a nice place so we decided to send her to our mansion in the country of Sabzbandpey heights near the old castle of Firouzjah.

Azam, who did not like Zahra, looked dagger at her and imitated her stealthily and told me: "I hate her. Whenever dad meets her, asks about her state and rubbed his hand over her head. She is the only person who has the right to enter dad's private room as she is literate and can count the pottery workshop charges and reads books and letters for dad. Dad buys her nice clothes in return. I wish I were literate to be able to read books for dad and do his things."

Lady Khadije returned to the mansion without any sign of pregnancy and began to do her pieces of stuff like before and the aunt was busy teaching Quran and writing talisman and prayers for the sick.

A week later after lady Khadije's return, the aunt brought a boy infant to the mansion wrapped in white swaddling clothes and handed it to lady Khadije.

Right as seeing the infant, lady Khadije embraced him and kissed every spot on his body and while going to burst into tears telling the aunt: "I am your maid forever. You made me happy, may God make you happy. May He make your daughters happy. Let me kiss your feet."

The aunt put her pointing finger on her nice and small nose and said: "Hisshh! No one is supposed to become aware of this. He is a foundling that I brought him here to bring him up and you are his nurse, got it?"

- "Sure, my lady, whatever you say. I will be dumb quite since now."

At that moment, Sheikh Ali returned home from the mosque and as usual entered the mansion by saying "Yallah". Right as seeing him, the aunt welcomed Sheikh and whispered him. Then, they went to the five-door room and after having a conversation of fifteen minutes, they backed the yard. The aunt called lady Khadije, who now was making the infant asleep, and said: "Kahdije! Bring the infant as Sheikh Ali desires to pray in his ear¹ and to choose him a name."

While his narrow eyes were overwhelmed with happiness, Sheikh Ali embraced the infant and with

¹ An Islamic rite

a smile said: “God! Thanks for your wisdom. Millions of thanks. I hope he brings us blessings.”

Then he whispered prayers in his ear and turned to the aunt and said: “Lady Saadaat, if you agree, we call him Mosaa¹ as God returned Moses to his mom, I have no doubt that He put him before us and it’s a divine test. May He help us pass it successfully.”

- “Sir, you are our lord. Mosaa is a nice name. I agree. The only concern now is his ID card.”
- “I have a lot of connection in ID card office and I’ll call myself his father. We prayed to God for a lifelong time to have a son and it was not fulfilled and now He heard our voices and sent us a son. Since now, there is no difference between Mosaa and my daughters Akram and Azam.”

While lady Khadije strived a lot nobody found out that Mosaa was her real son, her motherly sense to him finally betrayed her. To let lady Khadije be before the neighbours less, the aunt gave her a part of the mansion and sometimes she paid them a visit.

Sheikh Ali loved Mosaa to such degree that if he did not see him a day, he would be angry and impatient.

¹ Moses

Like before, as she was back from school, Zahra attended Sheikh Ali's private room to check his pieces of stuff. Lady Khadije was very sad of this and she asked the aunt to ask Azam to be with Zahra as nobody was aware of the Satan's tricks. The aunt agreed but Sheikh Ali got furious and told the aunt: "What does it mean? Are you suspicious of me?"

-“Swear to God, no. I just wanted Zahra not to feel bad and embarrassed. By the way, Azam is your daughter. What’s wrong with that?”

When lady Khadije noticed that Sheikh Ali disagreed with the aunt and was calling Zahra to be in his private room every day, she got furious and sad and without saying anything put her pieces of stuff in her bag and while holding Zahra's hand and embracing Mosaa, looked at Sheikh Ali who was sitting under the mansion porch and was smoking a hookah and said: “I am thankful for everything. You were great to me but what can I do?!! I have to leave here.”

As puffing the hookah smoke out, Sheikh Ali smiled bitterly and said: “Your welcome. You can go but without Mosaa. Where do you take him?”

While teardrops were running down on his face, lady Khadije held Mosaa tightly and said: “No, he is my son. I don’t let anyone separate me from him.”

- “Since when this foundling became your son?”

As her face had turned red out of furry, lady Khadije said: “This is neither a foundling nor a bastard.”

Sheikh Ali threw the yellow tube of his hookah aside and got up from the Pustin he had been sitting on and shouted: “Enough! Shameless woman. You have no right to be rude more. Get lost! Move Saadaat and took the baby. Why do you keep standing and just looking at me?”

While her white face got more red and fiery, lady Khadije turned to the aunt and said: “Lady Saadaat, Mosaa is the offspring of me and Sheikh Ali. He knows this very well. He is just playing a role of ignorance.”

The aunt lost her balance while her hands were shaking badly and said: "What are you talking about? Put yourself in shame."

- “Lady Saadaat, the man who made me marry him temporarily was no one else except your despicable husband, Sheikh Ali.”

Uncontrollably the aunt sat on the ground and with her neck tilted to a side she kept repeating: "It's a lie! A Lie"

Zahra began to sob and then cried: “Mom, I beg you, finish it.”

Sheikh Ali took Mosaa out of lady Khadije’s arms forcefully and out of anger, he slapped her face very strongly as she was thrown toward the wall, her head hit the wall and he broke her head. Blood was running over her head and face.

Sheikh Ali threw a handful of bills to her and said: "Take this and get lost from this house as soon as possible before I make a serious problem for you... See lady Saadaat? God damn me that my favours are not noticed. You brought this bastard woman in this mansion. Take it. Damned, Damned, she is looking into my eyes and is accusing me. Damn this bad time!"

Lady Khadije went toward Sheikh Ali with her blood-covered face. She gathered her saliva, moved her head backwards and spat the saliva to Sheikh Ali’s face. Sheikh Ali cleaned the spit from his cheek with his sleeve, held Mosaa more tightly and without saying anything left the mansion.

When the aunt got better, as her hands were still shaking, dressed lady Khadije’s wound with Azam’s help and said: “You had better leave this city as soon as possible as it is not clear what will happen to you if you stay here.”

- "Dear lady whatever I said was right..."

The aunt did not let her finish her words and said: "I don't want to hear anything about it. I put him before God. He has the Right. Even if your words are right, what can we do? He will claim that his deed is not illegal according to Islamic religious law. Besides, he can claim that he did something acceptable for providing a shelter for a widow. So, it's better not to talk about it anymore."

- "Lady Saadaat, what about Mosaa, I'll die without my child."

- "You have to draw a red line around that child as based on law, that child belongs to us. Meanwhile, it's better for Mosaa himself to be brought up here as he has all facilities here. Swear to God, he will be the apple of my eyes and I acted him like my own son. Swear to all rights we have to each other, I request you to keep the reputation and not to disgrace our long well-known reputation."

With her shaking cold hands, Zahra took my hands in hers and said: "I can't believe these. I hate my mom for what she did. She was always saying that she had loved my dad and no one could find his place in her heart. She told me that my dad and she had loved each other to that extent that when facing their parents' disagreement with their marriage, they

escaped homes and moved from Semnan to Babol. That was why my relatives never paid us a visit. Now, just some years after my dad's death, she had such scandal.

She then embraced me and while drops of a tear were running down from her long eyelashes and were sliding down said: "I did not have the chance to attend my best friend's wedding party. I wish for your happiness with Nader."

When Zahra and her mom left the mansion forever with bent backs and weeping eyes, I could not forgive myself for my stupidity to recommend the aunt to let them come and work in the mansion. Perhaps if lady Khadije was living the same way before coming to the mansion and was making her living by working in others' homes by washing their clothes, now she did not have to seek shelter like a refugee and I had my best friend, Zahra, next to myself at my wedding party and the aunt did not have to patch the clothes, sheets and even trashed rugs in such wretched way too.

Chapter four

By falling the sun lights from a hole in the broken wooden frame of the window on me, I opened my eyes in my husband's house for the first time.

The mirror and candlesticks of my wedding party decorated with silver flowers were put on the arched niche and next to it there was a big radio of four screws which at those time few girls had it in their trousseaux. Three sets of sleeping pieces of stuff, a twelve-meter hand-woven carpet of sour orange pattern, a set of copper pans and dishes, a set of rose-patterned porcelain of six and a chest in which I kept my clothes were other belongings of my trousseau.

My wedding night passed next to a man of green eyes and manly and well-shaped body. I had never thought that a night could cause such change in me and turn me into a woman whose only concern was her husband. Perhaps, as I gave him my greatest belonging, I considered myself as belonged to him. But did he have the same feeling to me?

While our marriage formed in a quite traditional manner and I had had no idea about him, I learned this point well that he has a room in my heart.

Cautiously, I turned to my side and began to look at him. I rubbed my hand over his soft hair fell on his forehead. Then I got up slowly and quietly, opened the chest door which was decorated with woodwork of bird and flower patterns and checked the colourful cloths that according to the aunt's recommendation and as a custom, I had to give them

to my new family members as a gift on the first morning of the wedding night.

I looked out through the window frame. There were two separate buildings of brick and ceramic roofs in a rather small yard. The upper part of the yard which had two rooms and a balcony with a wooden bar belonged to my mother-in-law, lady Fakhri, and her children. My room which was the smallest room in the yard was right next to them. On the opposite part of the yard, there were two big rooms that one of them had beautiful reticular windows which were used as the guest room and the other room was the place where lady Moluk, the second wife of Mr Shakeri (my father-in-law), whom I did not meet, was living.

Suddenly, from that room, as yawning, a young white woman with long hair of sunflower colour which reached her buttock, whose gold bangles that made sounds while moving up and down with each move of her hands appeared. She knitted her arched brows which were like two knife blades and made her narrow eyes appearing bigger and looked furiously at our window.

I experienced the bitter taste of lady Moluk's dominance in the first day of my married life when I was going to the kitchen to light the coals in the old

brass samovar. It all began when her voice saying: "Oh, lady bride" drew my attention. She continued:

"Well, you must be a clever girl who gets up early. A girl of such types who are diplomatic and by seducing power makes others accept their words. Well, dear girl, you have to face me. In this house, the last word is mine. My husband believes me completely. I am the best bride in this house so listen carefully, we don't consider anybody else as a bride and since today cooking, dusting and washing the dirty clothes is your duty."

After saying those words, she moved to her room and then the sound of her fun and laughter with Mr Shakeri could be heard in all parts of the house. While striving not to let my tears fall down on the first day of my married life, I went to my room. With the sound of the door dried wood, Nader woke up and while rubbing his eyes with hands said: "Where did lady bride go?"

As I was concealing my sorrow not to let Nader notice it, with a smile I said: "I am in the habit of being an early bird."

Nader rubbed his hand over his oily black hair, scratched his head and continued: "Well, I want you to listen carefully. There are problems in this home like all homes and you'll get to know them

gradually. As you know my mom can't afford the house chores and Naser and Nasrin had to attend school. Dad had to marry lady Moluk. She is selfish and arrogant. She had never kissed anybody and embraced a baby. She knows how to control dad very well. Her former husband was a truck driver who was killed in an accident. It seems they loved each other so much. Fortunately, she could not have any child from that man and from my dad too. She spent a lot of money and energy to be cured but it was all useless. She was not in agreement upon our marriage. That's why she did not attend any party."

When Nader and I left our room with the gifts, accidentally I looked at my father-in-law (Aghajun) brown eyes. I got embarrassed by meeting him and got flushed.

He kissed my head, turned to lady Moluk and said: "Dear Moluk come and become acquainted with my nice bride."

While pouring tea in crystal cups, lady Moluk utter a sound of disgust: "Iiii shhh!" and added: "My nice bride! May God give me a little chance." Right as she got her gift which was a purple velvet shirt cloth, lady Moluk said: "What a bad taste. What ugly colour does this cloth you bought have? It's clear then, nothing more can be expected from a girl brought up without mom."

As I was cleaning the traces of tears from my cheeks, I saw Nasrin on the house balcony who was writing her homework.

About the author:



Nahid Mashayekhi

Nahid Mashayekhi is an Iranian writer, teacher and jurist. She began to put pen to paper when she was a small child. Her professional career as a writer began in 2015 when she brought out Vista (an Iranian woman of heavenly nature). In her novels, Nahid focuses on the problems of Iranian women rooted in the wrong traditions that prevail in society. TT Mah is her second novel. Nahid Mashayekhi, a member of the Writers Association of Iran, lives along with her family in Tehran.