



Jiyan

The Kurdish Woman

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Novella



Prolog

Confetti fell slowly through the warm air, as if someone had opened the heavens to send down a silent blessing. The spotlights glided over Jiyan's dress, its colors evoking the sun and the earth of the Kurds. She stood on the stage, her right hand raised in a peace sign, and behind her fluttered the large flags that for generations had carried hope and pain in equal measure.

The crowd cheered, yet within Jiyan there reigned a deep, clear stillness. A stillness known only to the mountains of Dersim, when the morning does not yet know whether to bring light or mist.

No one in the hall saw the burdens she had carried. No one saw the nights in which she secretly whispered songs that were forbidden to be sung. No one saw the girl she once had been—barefoot, curious, full of questions that were dangerous in her world.

Now she stood here, in the light, and knew: this moment did not belong to her alone. It belonged to all the Kurdish women who had gone before her. To those who had to remain silent. To those who fought. To those who lost. And to those who never stopped hoping.

Jiyan smiled. Not for the cameras.

For the freedom that was not yet there—but had to come.

1 – The Woman from Dersim

The morning over Dersim smelled of damp earth and cold stone as Jiyan opened the door of her childhood home. The first rays of sun felt their way across the hills, as if to check if the world was ready for a new day. Jiyan was not—but she went out anyway, as she did every day.

Jiyan was the youngest of four children, the only daughter in a family that had shown cracks early on. Her three brothers—now thirty, twenty-eight, and twenty-six years old—had long since lived in their own apartments, married, scattered across the city like loose threads of an old carpet.

Her father, a primary school principal, had been a quiet man, barely forty-four years old when cancer tore him from life. An age at which other men still made plans, built houses, carried children on their shoulders. But he had already been tired long before his body admitted it.

He had his first child at twenty-two, and now, thirty years later, his sons wore their own wedding rings and lived in their own homes, while Jiyan—the youngest, sixteen back then—had to watch as his breath grew shallower, his hands lighter, his voice lost within the walls.

Since that day, a fine shadow lay over the family, a quiet, warm ache that did not hurt, but reminded.

She was twenty-four, yet in her movements lay the calm of a woman who had lived much longer. Her hands knew work, her eyes knew loss, and her heart knew a longing she never

spoke aloud. Perhaps, she sometimes thought, that was typical for a Kurdish woman: to be strong without showing it; to hope without saying it; to fight without naming it.

The courtyard was still empty. Only the chickens scratched in the dust, and somewhere a dog barked. Jiyan tied her hair back, pulled the shawl tighter around her shoulders, and began to draw water from the well. The cold bit into her fingers, but she did not complain. She had learned that the life of a Kurdish woman was rarely soft—and that dignity often lay in silence.

While she carried the heavy buckets, she thought of the night before. Of the dress she had secretly taken from the wardrobe. Of the colors she had touched with her fingertips. Of the feeling that overcame her when she saw herself in the mirror: not as a daughter, not as a worker, not as someone who had to conform—but as herself.

4

As a Kurd.

A gust of wind rushed through the trees, and Jiyan stood still. For a moment, she heard nothing but her own breath. In this silence, she felt something that had accompanied her for years: a quiet, unshakable certainty that her life meant more than it seemed. That her voice, as quiet as it was, would one day be heard.

She did not know when.

She did not know how.

But she knew the day would come.

And perhaps, she thought as she walked on, that day had already begun—without her noticing.

2 – The Burdens No One Sees

The day was still young, yet Jiyan already felt the weariness in her bones. Not the weariness of a poor night's sleep, but the kind that accumulates over years, quiet, patient, like dust in the corners of an old house. She was used to it. A Kurdish woman learned early on that exhaustion was no reason to stop.

Inside the house, it smelled of tea and freshly baked bread. Her mother stood at the stove, her shoulders bent slightly forward as if she were carrying an invisible weight. Perhaps she was. Jiyan knew that her mother had experienced more than she would ever tell. The women in her family rarely spoke of pain—they carried it like a second heart in their chest.

"You're up early," the mother said without turning around. "I couldn't sleep," Jiyan replied, setting down the water buckets.

Her mother only nodded. Between them lay a silent understanding: one did not ask for reasons. One knew that every reason was heavy.

Jiyan sat at the low table and watched the steam rise from the kettle. It reminded her of the mists that hung over the mountains of Dersim in the morning—dense, mysterious, almost alive. As a child, she had believed the mountains were breathing. Today, she knew it was the people who breathed life into them. People like her mother, her grandmother, her aunts. Women who kept going despite everything.

"You think too much," the mother said suddenly.

Jiyan smiled weakly. "Perhaps."

"That is not good for a young woman."

"And what is good for a young Kurdish woman?" Jiyan asked quietly.

The mother remained silent. It was not a question that could be easily answered.

Later, when the sun stood higher, Jiyan made her way to the village. The path was stony, and the wind carried the scent of damp moss and cold water. She knew every stone, every tree, every curve. Dersim was not just her home—it was a part of her body, her history, her soul.

On the way, she met an old woman carrying a bundle of wood on her back. The load was almost as large as she was, yet the woman walked upright, with an expression that knew neither complaint nor weakness.

6

"Good morning, Jiyan," she said.

"Good morning, Aunt Deria. Shall I help you?"

"No, my child. I have been carrying this for sixty years. It won't crush me now."

Jiyan had to smile. These women were made of a fabric the world no longer understood. A fabric woven from pain and pride.

"You're going to the village?" Deria asked.

"Yes."

"Then greet the people for me. And tell them not to forget who they are."

Jiyan nodded. "I will."

As she walked on, she thought about the old woman's words. Not to forget who you are.

That was easy to say. But what did it really mean?

Was it the language? The songs? The stories?

Or was it something deeper—something that could not be named?

The village was a hum of activity. Women carried baskets full of vegetables, men repaired roofs, children ran laughing through the alleys. But beneath the surface lay something invisible, something Jiyan had always felt: a constant vigilance, a quiet distrust of the world outside the mountains.

She entered her uncle's small shop. The scent of spices, tobacco, and dried herbs greeted her like an old memory.

7

"Ah, Jiyan!" her uncle called out. "Come, come! I have fresh tea."

She sat down, and he poured her a glass. His gaze was warm, but in his eyes lay a weariness she knew well.

"You look thoughtful," he said.

"I'm just thinking about many things."

"About the future?"

"About everything."

The uncle nodded slowly. "That is the fate of our young people. You think too much because we were allowed to say too little."

Jiyan looked at him. "Do you believe anything will change?"

He smiled sadly. "Something always changes. The question is only whether it gets better."

She remained silent. Words sometimes felt too small for the questions she carried within her.

When she started the walk home in the afternoon, the sky had turned grey. A light rain began to fall, and the drops felt cold on her skin. But Jiyan walked on, step by step, as if she were walking a path that was greater than herself.

She thought of her mother. Of Aunt Deria. Of the women in the village. Of all the Kurdish women who carried burdens no one saw.

And she thought of the dress in her wardrobe.

Of the stage.

Of the light.

Of the moment that would come.

Perhaps that was what distinguished her from the others:

She didn't just want to carry.

She wanted to show.

3 – Voices of the Past

The rain had stopped during the night, but the earth was still damp as Jiyan walked down the narrow path leading to the river the next morning. The sky was clear, and the mountains of Dersim stood there like ancient guardians who saw everything and forgot nothing. Jiyan loved these mountains.

They were harsh but honest. They gave nothing away easily, but they also took nothing without reason.

At the riverbank, she sat on a flat stone. The water rushed over the rocks as if telling stories understood only by those who listened long enough. Jiyan closed her eyes. The sound reminded her of her grandmother's voice—graff, warm, full of secrets.

Her grandmother had been one of those women one did not forget. Small, but unshakable. Her hands were marked by life, her eyes by knowledge. She had taught Jiyan many things: how to knead bread, how to gather herbs, how to be silent when silence was safer. But above all, she had told her stories. Stories that were not allowed to be told out loud.

"We are a people made of mountains," her grandmother had said. "And mountains do not kneel."

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Back then, Jiyan had not understood what that meant. Today, she understood it all too well.

She opened her eyes and saw her reflection in the water. The current distorted it slightly, as if to tell her that identity was never something rigid. She thought of the women in her family—of her mother, her grandmother, her aunts. Every one of them had led a life that was heavier than it appeared to the outside world.

Her mother had married at sixteen because it was expected. Her grandmother had lost three children without ever speaking of it. Her aunt had moved to the city to work and never returned. Each of them had fought—not with weapons,

but with endurance, with dignity, with a courage hidden in the everyday.

Jiyan often wondered if she was strong enough to step into that line. Whether she could carry the heritage that had been placed in her hands. Whether she had the voice that others lacked.

She took a small stone from the ground, turned it between her fingers, and threw it into the water. The ripples spread out, round and steady, until they vanished into the roar of the river.

That is how it is with our stories, she thought. They spread out, but the world does not hear them.

On the way back, she encountered an old man sitting by the path, packing his pipe. His face was etched with deep wrinkles, and his eyes were the color of dark wood.

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"Good morning, Jiyan," he said without looking up.

"Good morning, Uncle Cemal."

"You were at the river."

"Yes."

He nodded slowly. "The river remembers everything. It forgets nothing."

"Sometimes I wish I could forget," Jiyan said quietly.

Cemal looked at her, and in his gaze was something she could not decipher. "Forgetting is a luxury we do not have. We are Kurds. We carry our past like a shadow."

"And what about the future?" she asked.

"The future," he said, lighting his pipe, "belongs to those who have the courage to demand it."

Jiyan remained silent. She did not know if she had that courage. But she knew she would need it.

When she reached the house, her mother was already waiting. She held an old cloth in her hands, carefully folded, as if it were something precious.

"This belonged to your grandmother," she said, handing it to Jiyan.

Jiyan opened the cloth carefully. Inside lay a small, handmade amulet—a metal circle with a sun wheel engraved in the center. The symbol of hope. The symbol of freedom.

"She wanted you to have it one day," the mother said.

"Why today?"

The mother looked at her for a long time. "Because I believe your time has come."

11

Jiyan felt her heart beat faster. She did not know what her mother meant. But she knew that something was changing. Something inside her. Something around her.

She closed her hand over the amulet. It felt warm, as if it had a heart of its own.

And for the first time in a long while, she felt that the voices of the past were not just a burden—but a compass.

4 – The Call of the Festival

The afternoon was warm as Jiyan reached the small marketplace. The sun hung low, casting a golden light on the rooftops that huddled together like people seeking shelter. A light breeze carried the scent of grilled bread and fresh herbs through the air. It was the scent of home—a scent that comforted and ached at the same time.

The people in the village were more restless than usual. You could feel it in their movements, in their glances, in the way they whispered to one another. Something was in the air, something greater than the everyday. Jiyan noticed it immediately. She knew this mood. It was like the trembling of the earth just before a storm.

12

"Did you hear?" a woman beside her asked while placing tomatoes into a basket.

"Hear what?" Jiyan asked.

"There's to be a festival. Tonight. In secret."

Jiyan felt her heart race. A festival. A Kurdish festival. Music, dance, colors, voices—all that had been taken from them so often. All that they had never given up nonetheless.

"Where?" she asked.

The woman looked around, as if fearing someone might be listening. "Up on the old meadow. Where the oaks stand."

Jiyan nodded. She knew exactly the place the woman meant. A wide expanse hidden between hills, protected by ancient trees that had witnessed many secret celebrations.

"But be careful," the woman said softly. "You never know who is listening."

Jiyan thanked her and walked on. Her steps quickened without her noticing. A festival meant more than just music. It meant memory. Resistance. Solidarity. It meant that the people would not be broken.

In Dersim, people rarely celebrated openly. For too many years, they had learned that even a song, a dance, or a fire could be seen as suspicion. Festivals meant gathering, and gathering meant attention—the wrong kind of attention. So they celebrated in hiding, behind closed doors, under the cover of night. Not because they were doing something forbidden, but because the world around them had forgotten that joy is not a crime.

13

When she returned home, her mother was sitting on the threshold peeling apples. The peel fell to the ground in long, red spirals.

"You're late," she said.

"I heard there's to be a festival tonight."

The mother paused. Her hands trembled slightly, barely visible, but Jiyan noticed.

"A festival is beautiful," the mother said eventually. "But a festival is also dangerous."

"I know."

"Do you want to go?"

Jiyan looked at her. "Yes."

The mother set the apple aside and wiped her hands on her apron. "Then wear something warm. And..." She hesitated. "Watch out for yourself."

Jiyan nodded. She knew those words meant more than they sounded. In her world, "watch out for yourself" was a prayer, a shield, a silent wish born of fear.

As the sun went down, Jiyan set out. The sky was a deep orange, slowly fading into a dark blue. The first stars appeared, hesitant, as if they didn't know if they were welcome.

The path to the meadow was narrow and lined with tall grasses. Jiyan heard the chirping of crickets, the rustle of leaves, the distant barking of a dog. And then—very quietly—she heard music.

14

A saz.

A sound that was like a heartbeat.

A sound that said: We are still here.

When she reached the meadow, she stopped. Before her, people danced in a circle, hand in hand, shoulder to shoulder. Women in colorful dresses, men with solemn faces, children laughing as if there were no fear in the world. Torches burned, and their light reflected in the eyes of the people.

Jiyan felt something open within her. Something that had been locked away for a long time.

She stepped closer. An older woman saw her and smiled. "Come," she said. "Dance with us."

Jiyan hesitated. But then she heard the music, felt the rhythm, saw the joy—and she stepped into the circle.

The hands of the others were warm. The ground beneath her feet vibrated. The music grew louder, faster, more alive. Jiyan turned, step by step, in unison with the others. Her hair came loose, her heart beat in time with the drum.

For a moment, she forgot everything: the burdens, the fear, the silence of the mountains.

For a moment, she was just a young Kurdish woman dancing, because her people had never stopped dancing.

But then—a sound.

A snap.

A shadow at the edge of the meadow.

The music died.

The people held their breath.

Jiyan felt the air grow heavy.

As fear returned.

As the night suddenly seemed darker.

And she knew:

This evening would not end as it had begun.

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5 – Shadows at the Meadow's Edge

The snap came from the darkness, sharp and unexpected, like a tear in the silence. For a moment, time stood still. The torches flickered as if they were afraid, and the music stopped so abruptly that Jiyan heard the blood rushing in her ears.

The people on the meadow froze. No one spoke. No one moved.

It was that kind of silence known only to those who had learned to expect danger at any moment.

Jiyan felt the hands of the others let go. The dance circle broke apart, slowly, cautiously, like an animal retreating into the shadows. Children were pulled close by their mothers, men stepped forward, women held their breath.

A second sound.

Closer this time.

Jiyan felt her heart beat faster. She looked around, searching for a face, a clue, anything to explain what was happening. But the darkness was thick, and the shadows moved as if they had a life of their own. 16

“Stay calm,” someone whispered.

“Maybe it’s just an animal,” a woman said, but her voice trembled. No one believed her.

Then a figure stepped out of the shadows. A man. Tall, with broad shoulders, his face half-hidden in the dark. He raised his hands, slowly, reassuringly.

“Don’t be afraid,” he said. “I am alone.”

The people looked at him with suspicion. In this region, “I am alone” was not a sentence easily believed.

“Who are you?” an older man asked in a gravelly voice.

The stranger stepped closer into the light. His face was narrow, his eyes weary but alert. He wore simple clothes, dusty from the road.

“My name is Aram,” he said. “I come from a village further south. I heard there was a celebration here.”

A murmur went through the crowd.

A stranger.

A Kurd, yes—but not from Dersim.

Not from their community.

“Why do you come alone?” someone asked.

Aram looked around as if searching for words. “Because I have no one left to come with.”

17

The silence grew heavier.

Jiyan felt something tighten in her chest.

This man carried a pain within him that she recognized—not personally, but as part of her people.

“What happened?” she asked, without thinking.

Aram looked at her. His eyes were dark, full of stories he did not want to tell—or could not tell.

“Later,” he said. “Not here. Not now.”

The people watched him for a while longer, but eventually, the tension eased. The music did not resume immediately, but

the torches burned more steadily, and the children ventured a few steps forward again.

Jiyan remained standing, her gaze fixed on Aram. Something about him would not let her go. Perhaps it was the weariness in his eyes. Perhaps the way he looked at the meadow—as if it were a place he had been searching for for years.

“You are Jiyan, aren't you?” he asked suddenly.

She blinked in surprise. “How do you know that?”

“I have heard your name. People here speak of you.”

“Of me? Why?”

Aram shrugged. “Because you are different.”

Jiyan did not know what to say to that. She didn't feel different. She felt like any other Kurdish woman: tired, hoping, struggling, silent.

“I am not different,” she said quietly.

“Yes, you are,” Aram replied. “You have something in your eyes I haven't seen in a long time.”

“What is it?”

“Courage.”

Jiyan looked away. Courage. A big word. A dangerous word. A word that, in her world, often ended too soon.

The music began again, softly, cautiously, like a heart trying to beat again after a shock. The people did not dance immediately, but they exhaled. The festival was not over—only interrupted.

Aram sat down at the edge of the meadow, and Jiyan followed him, without knowing why. Perhaps because she

felt that his story was woven with her own. Perhaps because she sensed that this evening was a turning point.

“You said you have no one left,” she began carefully.

Aram nodded. “That’s true.”

“Do you want to tell me what happened?”

He looked at her for a long time. Then he said:

“Only if you are ready to listen.”

Jiyan nodded. “I am ready.”

Aram took a deep breath.

And then he began to tell his story.

6 – Aram’s Story

Aram was silent for a moment before he began to speak. It was no ordinary silence. It was the silence of a person who had to weigh words carefully, because every word touched a wound. The torches cast flickering shadows on his face, and Jiyan saw that he was younger than she had first thought. Perhaps barely older than herself. But his eyes looked old—much older than his years. 19

“I come from a small village,” he began softly. “No bigger than this one. We had little, but we had each other. And we had our language, our songs, our festivals. Just like you.”

Jiyan listened intently. She knew that stories like these were rarely easy.

“A few months ago,” Aram continued, “a group of men came into the village. Strangers. Armed. They said they were looking for someone. A young Kurd who had supposedly

done something. No one knew who they meant. Perhaps that boy didn't even exist."

He paused. His breath grew heavier.

"They searched every house. They asked questions no one could answer. And when they found no answers..."

He swallowed.

"...they took their anger out on us."

Jiyan felt her stomach tighten. She knew such stories. Every Kurdish woman knew them. But they never stopped hurting.

"My father stood in their way," Aram said. "He was no fighter. He was a simple man. But he had dignity. And dignity is dangerous."

20

The torches crackled. Somewhere in the distance, a dog howled.

"They beat him," Aram said. "Before our eyes. My mother screamed. My sister cried. I... I could do nothing."

He looked at his hands, as if searching there for the guilt he had carried with him for months.

"When they left, my father was severely injured. He died two days later."

Jiyan placed a hand on her shawl as if she needed to anchor herself. She knew this ache. Not personally, but as a part of her people. As a piece of her own history.

"And your mother? Your sister?" she asked cautiously.

Aram closed his eyes. "They are gone. I don't know where. Perhaps to relatives. Perhaps..." He broke off. "I don't know."

Jiyan felt something open within her. It wasn't pity—Aram wouldn't have wanted that. It was something else. Something deeper. A connection born of pain, but not of weakness.

"I'm sorry," she said softly.

Aram nodded. "I know."

For a while, they both fell silent. The music on the meadow had grown louder again, but it sounded different than before. Heavier. More solemn. As if it had understood that joy and pain always walked side by side in the lives of the Kurds.

21

"Why did you come here?" Jiyan finally asked.

Aram looked at her. "Because I heard the people in Dersim are strong. That they stand together. That they celebrate their festivals, even when it is forbidden."

"That is true," Jiyan said.

"I wanted to see if it was real."

"And?" she asked.

Aram smiled weakly. "It is real."

Jiyan felt a shift in the air. Not between them—or perhaps it was. It was hard to tell. But she knew that Aram's presence here was no accident. That his story had not met hers by chance. That this evening meant more than she had first imagined.

"What will you do now?" she asked.

Aram gazed into the darkness as if he could find an answer there. "I don't know. I have no plan. No direction. Only..." He looked at her again. "...only the feeling that I am in the right place."

Jiyan felt her heart skip a beat. Not out of love—it was too early for that. But out of something else. Out of the inkling that their paths had not crossed by fluke.

"Perhaps," she said quietly, "that is enough for a beginning." Aram nodded. "Perhaps."

The music quickened. The people danced again. The torches burned bright. But at the edge of the meadow, in the shadows of the ancient oaks, two young Kurds sat side by side—bound by stories heavier than words.

And Jiyan knew: this was only the start.

22

7 – A Spark in the Dark

The night had grown deep by now, and the torches on the meadow burned only as small, trembling points of light. The music had softened, almost a whisper that dared not disturb the darkness. Most people had already said their goodbyes, some with hurried steps, others with long embraces, as if they didn't know when they would see each other again.

Jiyan and Aram remained seated. Not out of comfort, but because neither knew where to go. The meadow had fallen still, and the shadows of the ancient oaks lay around them like protective arms.

"It's strange," Aram said after a while. "I haven't seen so many people together in a long time. Not like this. Not laughing. Not dancing."

"We don't celebrate often," Jiyan replied. "But when we do, we do it as if it were the last time."

Aram nodded. "Perhaps that's why it is so beautiful."

Jiyan looked at him. His face was barely visible in the half-light, but she felt his presence, warm and heavy like a stone that had lain long in the sun. He was a stranger, yes—but he did not feel like one. Not anymore.

"You have lost a lot," she said softly.

"Yes."

"But you are still here."

Aram smiled faintly. "Sometimes I wonder why."

"Because you are a Kurd," Jiyan said. "We don't give up. Even when we want to."

He looked at her, surprised. "You speak as if you were much older."

"Perhaps I am," she said. "Perhaps we are all born older."

Aram laughed softly. It was a short, brittle sound, but it was real. Jiyan felt something release inside her—a knot she hadn't noticed was there.

A gust of wind swept across the meadow, making the torches flicker. Jiyan pulled her shawl tighter. Aram noticed.

"Are you cold?"

"A little."

He hesitated for a moment, then draped his coat over her shoulders. It was a simple gesture, but it touched Jiyan more deeply than she had expected. Not because she was

freezing—but because she wasn't used to someone looking out for her.

"Thank you," she said.

"You're welcome."

They were silent again. But this time, it wasn't a heavy silence. It was a silence that left room. Room for thoughts, for memories, for what lay unspoken between them.

"You know," Aram began, "when I came here, I was afraid."

"Of what?"

"That I wouldn't be welcome here either. That I would be a stranger again. A man without a home."

Jiyan looked at him for a long time. "You are not a stranger."

"Not yet," he said.

"No," she replied. "Not anymore."

24

Aram lowered his gaze. His hands lay loose in the grass, but Jiyan saw that they were trembling slightly. Not from the cold. From something else.

"I don't know what to do now," he said. "I don't know where to go."

"Then stay," Jiyan said before she could think better of it.

Aram raised his head. "Stay?"

"Yes. In Dersim. With us."

"And with you?" he asked cautiously.

Jiyan felt her heart race. She didn't know how to answer. She barely knew Aram. And yet... it felt as if she had known him for a long time. Perhaps because pain bound people faster than words. Perhaps because they were both searching for something they couldn't name.

"Perhaps," she said finally. "Perhaps with me, too."

Aram looked at her, and in his eyes was something she couldn't quite read. Hope? Fear? Gratitude? Perhaps all of it at once.

The last torch went out. The meadow now lay in darkness, only the moon casting a pale light on the two figures sitting side by side.

"It's getting late," Jiyan said.

"Yes."

"I have to go home."

"I know."

They stood up. For a moment, they faced each other, unsure of what to do. Then Aram reached out his hand.

25

"Thank you," he said. "For listening. For... everything."

Jiyan took his hand. It was warm, firm, alive.

"We will see each other again," she said.

"I hope so."

She let go of his hand and walked down the path, back to the village. Aram stood and watched her until she disappeared into the shadows of the trees.

And on that night, on that silent meadow, Aram knew for the first time in months that he was no longer alone.

8 – A New Morning

The morning after the celebration was unusually still. Not the familiar silence of the mountains that draped over Dersim like a protective cloak, but a different kind—a silence that announced something. Something that did not yet have a name.

Jiyan woke early. The light fell through the small window of her room, drawing bright stripes across the floor. She remained lying there for a moment, listening to the breath of the house, the creaking of wood, the distant call of a rooster. Everything was as it always was—and yet nothing was as before.

26

She thought of Aram. Of his voice, his story, his eyes that had seen more than a young man should ever see. She thought of the moment he had draped his coat over her shoulders. Of the warmth that had come from more than just the fabric.

Jiyan sat up and brushed her hair from her face. She knew she had to be careful. In her world, feelings were a luxury. And closeness was dangerous—not only because of the people, but because of the times in which they lived.

Yet she also knew that she wanted to see Aram again.

In the kitchen, she found her mother sitting at the table. The tea was steaming, and the scent of fresh bread filled the room. The mother looked up as Jiyan entered, and in her gaze lay something Jiyan could not decipher.

"You're up late," the mother said.

"I didn't sleep well."

"Because of the festival?"

Jiyan hesitated. "Perhaps."

The mother took a sip of tea. "I heard a stranger was there."

Jiyan froze. "Who said that?"

"People talk. You know how it is."

Jiyan nodded. In a village like this, nothing remained hidden for long.

"His name is Aram," she said finally. "He comes from a village further south."

The mother looked at her for a long time. "And why is he here?"

"He has no one left."

The mother set down her cup. "That is sad. But it also makes him a man who has nothing to lose."

"He is not a bad person," Jiyan said, perhaps too quickly.

The mother raised an eyebrow. "I didn't say that."

27

Jiyan remained silent. She knew her mother was right—not about Aram, but about the need for caution. In their world, trust was a precious commodity, not to be given away lightly.

"Watch out for yourself," the mother said finally. "That's all I will say."

Later that morning, Jiyan went into the village. The path was familiar, but her steps felt different—lighter, yet more uncertain. She didn't know if she would meet Aram there. She didn't even know if he was still nearby.

When she reached the marketplace, she saw him immediately.

He was standing by the fountain, speaking with an older man who was apparently explaining something to him. Aram listened attentively, nodding, asking questions. He seemed calm but alert—like someone trying to find a foothold in a strange world.

When he noticed Jiyan, his face brightened. Not much, just a little—but enough that she saw it.

"Good morning," he said as she approached.

"Good morning," she replied.

The older man said his goodbyes and left the two of them alone.

"You stayed," Jiyan said.

"I promised I would."

"You didn't promise anything."

"I did," he said. "To myself."

28

Jiyan didn't know how to respond to that. So she stayed silent. Aram did the same. But it was not an uncomfortable silence. It was a silence that left room.

"I'm looking for work," Aram said eventually. "Anything. I don't want to just stand around."

"Perhaps I can help you," Jiyan said. "My uncle has a shop. He needs someone to lend a hand sometimes."

Aram smiled. "That would be good."

"Come," she said. "I'll take you there."

On the way to the shop, Jiyan felt something shift within her. It wasn't a grand feeling, not a dramatic moment. It was more of a quiet, warm knowing: that Aram was not just a stranger. That he could become a part of her story—whether she wanted it or not.

When they reached the shop, her uncle looked up in surprise.

"Jiyan? And who is this?"

"This is Aram," she said. "He's looking for work."

The uncle studied Aram from head to toe. Not suspiciously, but appraisingly. The way one looks at someone wanting to enter a community that does not open easily.

"Can you work?" the uncle asked.

"Yes," Aram said.

"Good. Then start."

It was that simple.

It was that difficult.

And so something began that no one had planned.

As Jiyan left the shop, she turned back once more. Aram was already standing behind the counter, listening to her uncle explain how to sort the goods. He looked concentrated. Earnest. Grateful.

And Jiyan knew:

This was the beginning of something new.

Something she could not stop.

Something she perhaps did not want to stop at all.

29

9 – Taking Root

The days after the festival passed more quickly than Jiyan had expected. It was as if that evening on the meadow had spun an invisible thread that now wove through her life—quiet, but tangible. Aram had stayed, as he said he would.

And with each passing day, he became a little less of a stranger and a little more a part of Dersim.

On that first morning, he had seemed uncertain in her uncle's shop, as if he didn't know where to place his hands. But after just a few days, he moved there as if he had never done anything else. He sorted goods, carried sacks, helped the older villagers without having to be asked. The people watched him cautiously at first, but they were not unjust. A man who worked, who greeted them, who showed respect—he found his place.

And Aram showed all of that.

Jiyan saw him often from a distance. Not intentionally, but their paths crossed more frequently now. When she went for water, she saw him standing with her uncle in front of the shop. When she walked through the village, she heard his voice as he spoke with the men. When she returned home in the evening, she sometimes saw him on the path, walking up the hill, his gaze fixed on the mountains. 30

He seemed to need the mountains. Perhaps, Jiyan thought, because they gave him something he had lost: a sense of belonging.

One afternoon, when the sun was low and the shadows were long, Jiyan went to the shop to get some flour. Aram was behind the counter, sorting bundles of herbs. When he saw her, his face brightened—not much, but enough for her to notice.

"Jiyan," he said. "Good to see you."

"I need flour," she replied, trying to sound calm.

"Of course."

He turned, pulled out a sack, and placed it on the counter. "Is this enough?"

"Yes."

He looked at her, and for a moment that silence was there again—not uncomfortable, but full of unspoken things.

"How are you?" he finally asked.

"Good," she said. "And you?"

"Good too. I..." He hesitated. "I'm slowly settling in."

"I'm glad."

"Your uncle is strict," Aram said, smiling. "But fair."

"He is a good man."

"He is."

Silence again.

Again, that thread between them.

"Jiyan," Aram began carefully, "I wanted to ask you something."

"Yes?"

"May I walk with you a little way tonight? Just a part of the path. I... I'd like to talk to you."

Jiyan felt her heart quicken. Not out of fear—but out of something else. Something warm. Something she didn't want to name.

"A little way," she said. "No more."

Aram nodded. "A little way."

The evening came faster than Jiyan had expected. The air was cool, and the sky turned a deep blue that slowly bled into

black. The stars appeared, one by one, like small lights marking the way.

Aram was waiting at the edge of the village. When he saw her, he took a step forward.

“Thank you for coming,” he said.

“I said I would,” she replied. “A little way.”

They walked side by side, in silence. The path was narrow, and the sounds of the night accompanied them: the chirp of crickets, the rustle of leaves, the distant call of a bird.

“I wanted to thank you,” Aram said finally. “For helping me. For... not turning me away.”

“I didn’t do anything special.”

“You did,” he said. “To me, you did.”

32

Jiyan didn’t look at him. She looked at the path, at the stones, at the shadows. But she heard every word.

“I don’t know what I’ll find here,” Aram said. “Perhaps a home. Perhaps only peace. Perhaps nothing at all. But... I know that here, for the first time in months, I can breathe again.”

Jiyan stopped. Aram did too.

“Dersim is a good place,” she said. “But it isn’t easy.”

“I’m not easy either,” he replied.

She had to smile. “I believe you.”

Aram looked at her, and in his eyes lay something she couldn’t decipher—something between gratitude and hope, between pain and a new beginning.

“Jiyan,” he said softly, “I don’t know where my path leads. But... I would like to walk a part of it with you. Not just tonight.”

Jiyan felt her heart skip a beat.

She knew she had to be careful.

She knew that closeness was dangerous.

She knew that her life was not simple—and his even less so.

But she also knew that she didn't want to lie.

“Perhaps,” she said quietly. “Perhaps a part of the way.”

Aram smiled. A real smile. Warm. Honest.

“That is enough for me,” he said.

33

They walked on until the path diverged. There, Jiyan stopped.

“Our ways part here,” she said.

“For today,” Aram answered.

She nodded. Then she turned and walked up the trail, back to her house. Aram stood and watched her until she disappeared into the dark.

And that night, Jiyan knew that something had been set in motion—something she could no longer stop.

10 – Between the Mountains

The days grew longer, and spring settled over Dersim like a gentle veil. The trees wore fresh green, and the air smelled of damp earth and the promise of new paths. For the people in the village, it was the time to prepare the fields, to lead the livestock to the pastures, and to mend the houses before the summer arrived.

For Jiyan, it was a time of change—quiet, but inexorable.

She noticed it in the small things: in the way she woke up in the morning with a feeling she couldn't name; in the way she walked the path into the village as if she were expecting someone; in the way she sat longer at the window in the evening, gazing into the mountains as if searching for an answer. 34

And she noticed it in Aram.

Aram now worked every day in her uncle's shop. He was diligent, reliable, and the villagers began to accept him. Some now greeted him with a nod, others with a brief smile. The children liked him especially—perhaps because he told them little stories when they bought sweets. Stories of mountains, rivers, and old times that he himself had heard from his father.

Jiyan watched this sometimes from a distance. She saw how Aram made an effort, how he adapted, how he tried to build a new life, even though the old one still hung over him like a shadow.

One day, as she entered the shop, she saw him speaking with a little boy who was crying because he had lost his coin. Aram knelt down, searched the floor with him, and finally gave him a sweet without asking for anything in return.

“But I have no money,” the boy said.

“Sometimes,” Aram replied, “you don’t need money. Sometimes a smile is enough.”

The boy beamed, and Jiyan felt something warm within her.

“You’re good with children,” she said when the boy had gone.

Aram looked at her, surprised. “Me? No. I just know what it’s like when you lose something.”

“You give them hope.”

“Perhaps,” he said. “But I don’t give them anything I don’t have myself.”

Jiyan looked at him. “And what do you have?”

Aram thought for a moment. “Not much. But... I have the will to keep going.”

“That is more than many have.”

He smiled faintly. “Perhaps.”

In the afternoon, her uncle asked Jiyan to accompany Aram to the river to gather herbs. It was a task she had often done alone, but she didn’t say no. She knew that her uncle understood more than he let on.

The path to the river was narrow and lined with tall grass. The sun was low, and its light fell golden upon the hills. Aram walked beside her, calm, attentive, as if setting every step with purpose.

“It’s beautiful here,” he said.

“Yes.”

"I understand why people stay here."

"Not everyone stays," Jiyan said. "Many leave. Some because they have to. Some because they hope to find an easier life elsewhere."

"And you?" Aram asked. "Would you leave?"

Jiyan stopped. The river rushed before them, clear and cold, like a mirror of the mountains.

"I don't know," she said. "Sometimes I think that I must stay. For my mother. For my family. For... everything that is here."

"And sometimes?"

"Sometimes I think I have to leave to find out who I am."

Aram nodded slowly. "I understand that."

"And you?" she asked. "Would you stay?"

He looked at her. Long. Earnestly.

"I would stay," he said. "If I had a reason."

Jiyan felt her breath hitch.

She knew what he meant.

She knew she had to be careful.

But she also knew that she didn't want to lie.

"Perhaps," she said softly, "you will find one."

Aram smiled. A warm, quiet smile that said more than words.

They gathered herbs at the riverbank, speaking little, but the silence between them had become familiar. As the sun set, the water turned a reddish gold, and the mountains cast long shadows over the valley.

"It's getting late," Jiyan said.

"I'll take you home."

"You don't have to."

"I want to."

They walked side by side, and the way felt shorter than usual. When they reached the house, Aram stopped.

“Thank you,” he said.

“For what?”

“For today. For... everything.”

Jiyan nodded. “Good night, Aram.”

“Good night, Jiyan.”

She went inside, but before she closed the door, she looked back once more. Aram was still standing there, gazing at the mountains as if searching for something.

And Jiyan knew:

He wasn't searching for the mountains.

He was searching for a place in the world.

And perhaps—just perhaps—he had found it.

37

11 – The Voice Within

The days passed, and spring grew more vibrant. The meadows around Dersim glowed in a lush green, and the mountains still wore the last remnants of snow like white scars. The air was clear, and the nights were mild enough to sit outside without shivering.

But within Jiyan, something was growing that had nothing to do with the weather.

Something she could not name.

Something that both unsettled her and gave her wings.

It was as if Aram's arrival had awakened a part of her she had long hidden—not out of fear, but out of habit.

For a Kurdish woman learned early to keep her dreams small, so they would not shatter.

One evening, Jiyan sat with her mother in the courtyard. The sun had just vanished behind the mountains, and the sky glowed a deep orange. The mother was mending an old cloth while Jiyan sorted herbs.

“You’ve been different lately,” the mother said suddenly, without looking up.

Jiyan froze. “Different?”

“Yes. Quieter. But also... more awake.”

Jiyan didn't know what to say. Her mother was a woman of few words, but she saw much.

“Perhaps it's the spring,” Jiyan finally said.

The mother smiled faintly. “Perhaps.”

But Jiyan knew it wasn't the spring.

The next day, she went into the village early. The path was silent, and the morning mist hung like a veil over the fields. When she reached her uncle's shop, she saw Aram already standing by the door. He was carrying a sack of flour on his shoulder and talking to an older man who was apparently explaining something to him.

When Aram noticed her, he raised his hand.

Not obtrusively.

Not demanding.

Just a silent sign that he saw her.

Jiyan felt her heart beat faster for a moment.

“Good morning,” Aram said as she approached.

“Good morning.”

“You’re early.”

“I wanted to bring herbs.”

“I’ll help you.”

He took the basket from her without asking. It was a simple gesture, but it touched Jiyan deeply. Not because she needed the help—but because she wasn’t used to someone easing her burden.

In the shop, they sorted the herbs together. Aram worked in silence, concentrated, and Jiyan watched him from the corner of her eye. His movements were calm, almost cautious, as if he feared doing something wrong. Yet at the same time, there was a strength in them that didn’t come from muscle, but from a will that would not be broken.

39

“You work hard,” Jiyan said.

“Work keeps the mind quiet.”

“And when you aren’t working?”

Aram looked at her. “Then I think too much.”

“About what?”

“About everything that was. And everything that could be.”

Jiyan nodded. “I know that feeling.”

“What do you think about?” he asked.

She hesitated. Then she said, “About my future.”

“And what does it look like?”

Jiyan looked at her hands. “I don’t know. But I know it has to be different from the past.”

Aram smiled. “That is a good beginning.”

Later, as she left the shop, Jiyan stood still for a moment. The wind caught her hair, and she felt her grandmother's amulet beneath her dress—warm, as if it had a life of its own.

She thought of her mother's words.

Of Aram's story.

Of the meadow.

Of the music.

Of the mountains.

And suddenly, she knew what this new feeling growing inside her was.

It was her voice.

The voice she had carried inside her for so long.

The voice she had never used.

The voice that said:

You are more than your burdens.

You are more than your fear.

You are a Kurd—and you have the right to dream.

In the evening, she sat by the window again. The moon was high, and the stars sparkled like small fires. Jiyan placed her hand on the amulet and closed her eyes.

She saw the meadow before her.

The torches.

The people dancing.

Aram's gaze.

The mountains.

And she knew:

Something inside her had awakened.

Something that would sleep no more.

12 – Unrest in the Village

The morning began peacefully, but Jiyan felt immediately that something was different. The air was heavier, denser, as if an invisible pressure lay over the village. The birds sang, but their song sounded muffled. Even the wind seemed to blow more cautiously.

When Jiyan opened the door, she saw two women standing by the well. They were whispering to one another, their faces tense, their movements frantic. When they noticed Jiyan, they fell abruptly silent and looked away. 41

A bad sign.

Jiyan walked on, basket in hand, gaze fixed on the ground. But her thoughts raced. In a village like this, news spread faster than the wind. And when people whispered, it rarely meant anything good.

When she reached her uncle's shop, she saw Aram already standing outside. He was talking to her uncle, but the mood was different than usual. The uncle looked grave, Aram tense. As Jiyan approached, they both stopped talking.

“What happened?” she asked.

Her uncle looked at her, a long, searching look. Then he said, “There were men in the neighboring village. Soldiers. They were asking questions.”

Jiyan felt her heart skip a beat. “What kind of questions?” “About strangers,” the uncle said. “About young men who aren't from here.”

Jiyan looked at Aram. His face was calm, but his eyes betrayed something else—a mixture of fear and determination.

“They are looking for someone,” Aram said softly. “You?” Jiyan asked.

He didn't answer.
He didn't have to.

42

The uncle took a step closer. “Aram, you are a good boy. You work hard. But you must be careful. If they are looking for you...”

“I know,” Aram said. “You can't just stay here as if nothing is happening,” the uncle said. “Not when danger is looming.”

Jiyan felt something tighten inside her. The thought of Aram having to leave—of him disappearing as suddenly as he had come—hit her more deeply than she had expected.

“What do you want to do?” she asked. Aram looked at her. His gaze was calm but firm. “I don't know. But I will not run away.” “Sometimes you have to run to survive,” the uncle said.

“And sometimes you have to stay to keep from losing everything all over again,” Aram replied.

Jiyan felt her throat constrict. She knew Aram was right. But she also knew that in her world, courage often came at a high price.

Later, when the shop grew quieter, Jiyan stepped up to Aram. He was sorting sacks, but his hands were trembling slightly.

"You're afraid," she said.

"Yes," he answered truthfully. "But I also have hope."

"In what?"

He looked at her. "In you."

Jiyan felt her breath hitch. Not out of surprise—but from the realization that she felt the same.

"Aram..." she began, but he raised his hand.

"I know I can't promise you anything. I know I have nothing to give. But I know I want to be here. With you. In this village. With these people."

"And if they find you?" Jiyan asked.

"Then I won't be alone," he said. "And that is more than I've had in months."

In the evening, Jiyan sat with her mother in the courtyard. Her mother was mending a cloth again, but her hands trembled slightly.

"I heard what happened in the neighboring village," she said. Jiyan remained silent.

"That boy... Aram... he brings unrest."

"He brings hope, too," Jiyan said.

Her mother watched her for a long time. "Hope is beautiful. But hope is dangerous."

"I know."

"And you?" her mother asked. "What do you feel?"

Jiyan placed her hand on her amulet. She thought of Aram's gaze. Of his words. Of the meadow. Of the mountains.

"I feel," she said softly, "that I am no longer the same."

The mother nodded slowly. "Then be careful, my child. For whoever changes pulls the world along with them."

Later, as night fell over Dersim, Jiyan stood at the window. The moon was bright, and the mountains lay like dark shadows in the distance. She thought of Aram. Of the danger. Of the future.

And she knew:

This was the beginning of a storm.

And she would be standing right in the center of it.

44

13 – When the Wind Turns

The wind had changed. It no longer blew gently through the valleys of Dersim; instead, it carried a weight that could not be seen, only felt. The people in the village sensed it. They spoke more softly, moved more quickly, traded glances that said more than words.

Jiyan noticed it the moment she reached the well that morning. Two men stood there, arms crossed, brows furrowed. They didn't speak to each other; they just stared into the distance as if expecting something—or someone.

"What is happening?" Jiyan asked cautiously.

The men looked at her, but neither answered. One gave a curt nod, the other turned away.

A bad sign.

Jiyan filled her water jugs and started back. But her steps were heavier than usual. She knew something was stirring in the village—something to do with Aram.

When she reached her uncle's shop, she found him with Aram in the back room. The door stood ajar, and Jiyan heard the muffled voices of the two men.

"You must be careful," her uncle said. "They are asking about strangers. About young men. About people who don't belong here." 45

"I belong here," Aram said calmly.

"I know that," the uncle replied. "But they don't."

Jiyan knocked on the door, and both men looked up. The uncle looked strained, Aram exhausted.

"What happened?" Jiyan asked.

The uncle sighed. "There were soldiers in the next village. They have lists. Names. They are looking for someone who looks like Aram."

Jiyan felt her heart quicken. "And are they coming here?"

"Perhaps," said the uncle. "Perhaps not. But we must be prepared."

Aram stood up. "I won't run away."

"Everyone says that," the uncle replied. "Until they are standing at the door."

Later, after the shop had closed, Jiyan and Aram walked a short way down the path. The sun was low, and the mountains cast long shadows over the valley. It was a beautiful evening—too beautiful for the unrest hanging in the air.

"You have to be careful," Jiyan said.

"I am careful."

"Not enough."

Aram stopped. "What should I do? Run? Hide? Go back to a life lived in the shadows? I'm tired of it."

"I know," Jiyan said softly. "But I don't want anything to happen to you."

Aram looked at her. Long. Earnestly.

"Why?"

Jiyan felt her breath catch. She knew he wanted the truth. **46**
And she knew she could no longer keep it from him.

"Because you matter to me," she said.

Aram closed his eyes as if he had to first grasp the words. When he opened them again, there was something new there—something warm, something vulnerable.

"You matter to me, too," he said. "More than I can say."

Jiyan looked away. Not out of shame—but because the truth was heavy. Heavier than any burden she had carried before.

They walked on in silence until they reached the small hill that overlooked the entire village. The houses lay there quietly, the roofs glowing in the evening light, the river winding like a silver ribbon through the valley.

"Dersim is beautiful," Aram said.

"Yes."

"I want to stay."

"I know."

"But I don't want you to be in danger because of me."

Jiyan turned to him. "I am a Kurd. I have been in danger my whole life."

Aram smiled sadly. "That isn't fair."

"Life isn't fair," Jiyan said. "But we are strong."

"You are strong," Aram said.

"We," she corrected. "Not I. We."

Aram looked at her, and in that gaze lay a promise—not romantic, not reckless, but one born of pain and hope.

When they parted, Aram remained on the hill for a long time. Jiyan saw him from a distance, a dark silhouette against the mountains. He looked small—but not weak. **47**

More like someone who, for the first time in a long while, had decided to stop fleeing.

And Jiyan knew:

The wind had turned.

And with it, everything would change.

14 – When the Mountains are Silent

The night was unusually clear. The sky stretched like a dark cloth over Dersim, and the stars sparkled so brightly it was as if they wanted to warn the people. Jiyan could not sleep. She lay awake, hearing the creak of the wood, the breathing of her

mother, the distant rush of the river. But inside her, a storm raged.

Aram.

The soldiers.

The rumors.

The fear.

The hope.

Everything tangled into a knot that would not come undone.

Finally, she stood up, pulled her shawl over her shoulders, and stepped out into the night. The courtyard lay still, only the moon casting pale shadows on the ground. Jiyan went to the well, sat on the edge, and closed her eyes.

48

She thought of her mother's words:

Whoever changes pulls the world along with them.

Perhaps that was what she feared.

Not the soldiers.

Not the danger.

But the change itself.

The next morning, the village was a restive sea. Men gathered in clusters, women whispered, and children were hurried indoors. The tension was tactile, an invisible mist settling over everything.

Jiyan walked with quick, sharp steps toward her uncle's shop. The moment she entered, she saw Aram. He stood behind the counter, posture rigid, eyes alert.

“They’re in the valley,” he said before she could speak.

“The soldiers?”

He nodded. “Not here yet. But they’re closing in.”

Her uncle emerged from the back room. “We have to be careful. Aram, you stay in the shop today. You do not go out.”

“I can’t hide,” Aram said.

“You can,” the uncle replied. “Just for today.”

Jiyan felt her heart hammer against her ribs. She looked at Aram and saw something in his gaze that frightened her—not fear, but resolve. A dangerous, quiet resolve.

“What are you planning?” she asked.

“I don’t know,” he said. “But I won’t let anyone suffer because of me.”

“You’re already suffering,” Jiyan said.

“That’s different.”

“No,” she said. “It isn’t.”

Aram looked at her, and for a heartbeat, everything went still.

The world.

The village.

The mountains.

Only their eyes spoke.

In the afternoon, word reached the village:

The soldiers had left the neighboring settlement.

They had moved on.

No one knew where.

The people exhaled—but only halfway.

In their world, peace was never final.

Aram stepped out of the shop as the sun began to sink. Jiyan was already waiting. They walked a little way down the path, silent, as they often were.

“I thought they were coming,” Aram said.

“So did I.”

“Maybe I’m lucky.”

“Maybe,” Jiyan said. “Or maybe it was a warning.”

Aram stopped. “I don’t want you to be afraid.”

“I’m not afraid,” Jiyan said. “I just have... something to lose.”

Aram looked at her, and in his eyes lay a pain that went deeper than words.

“So do I,” he said.

50

They sat on the hill overlooking the village. The lights flickered below, and the wind carried the scent of woodsmoke.

“You know,” Aram said softly, “for a long time, I thought my life was over. That I was just surviving.”

“And now?”

“Now I think I can live again.”

Jiyan looked at him. “Because of me?”

“Because of you,” he said. “And because of this place.”

She was silent.

Not because she felt nothing—but because she felt too much.

“Aram,” she finally said, “I don’t know what the future holds. But I know you aren’t alone.”

He placed his hand on hers.

Not firmly.

Not demanding.

Just there.

And Jiyan let it stay.

When they parted, Jiyan knew the end was approaching—not as a loss, but as a decision.

History was moving toward something.

Something larger than both of them.

And the mountains remained silent.

As they always did when something significant was about to unfold.

51

15 – The Cities Under the Skin

The evening draped over the village like a soft cloth, muffling sounds and stretching the shadows. Jiyan sat with Aram on the low stone wall in front of her grandmother’s house. The wind smelled of earth, of hearth-fires, of the nearby waters of the Munzur. Above them, the first stars sparkled, and somewhere a dog barked as if to greet the night.

“You know,” Aram said quietly, “sometimes I feel like the world only sees us as people from the mountains. As if we were born between rocks and never went further.”

Jiyan smiled, but a spark of defiance lit her gaze. “And yet, the first city in the world is here. Ergani. Nine thousand years old. And Amed... a city of millions. Hewlêr, too. Over seventy Kurdish cities, and still they think we are just a mountain people.”

“Maybe because they never really wanted to see us,” Aram replied.

Jiyan traced her fingers over the rough surface of the wall. “Our cities are under our skin. Even if we live in a village, we carry the history of the cities within us. The squares, the walls, the voices that are millennia old.”

Aram looked at her as if discovering her for the first time. “You are like a city yourself,” he said. “Ancient, full of layers, full of music.”

52

She laughed softly. “And you are the one who always finds the right doors.”

The wind grew stronger, bringing the scent of wild thyme. In the distance, the lights of Dersim glimmered. Jiyan followed them with her eyes, as if they were memories of a future already waiting for her.

“I’ll be there soon,” she said. “At the university. Music. A new life.”

Aram nodded. “And I’ll go with you. As far as I can.”

Jiyan looked at him. “And you? What do you want to do?”

Aram shrugged, almost shyly. “I have my diploma. I’m twenty-two now. I could study... mechanical engineering, maybe. Something technical. But I don’t know.”

“Why not?” she asked softly.

He looked into the distance, as if an answer were written there. “Because I’m not sure yet who I want to be. I can imagine many things, but nothing feels right yet. Sometimes I think I should just work, earn money. Sometimes I think I should go away. And sometimes...” He paused.

“Sometimes what?”

“Sometimes I think I should just stay near you until I figure out where my path is leading.”

Jiyan smiled—a warm, small smile meant only for him.

“Maybe the path finds you when you don't force it.”

Aram nodded slowly. “Maybe. And until then, I’ll walk a while with you.”

53

A silence grew between them, one that wasn't empty but full of everything they didn't yet dare to say. The mountains stood dark on the horizon, but in Jiyan's chest, the cities her people had built for thousands of years glowed bright. And she knew: her story would not end in a village.

16 – The City That Sings

Dersim welcomed them with a warm, vibrating pulse. The streets were full of people, full of voices, full of color. Culture festival posters hung everywhere, lanterns cast soft light on the facades, and music drifted from open windows—saz, piano, guitar, violin. Voices mingled like streams of water.

Jiyan wore a dress she had sewn herself—a flowing stage gown in the colors of Kurdistan. The red, white, and green draped around her body like living currents, and at the center, the golden sun glowed as if radiating from within her. The stage lights caught the fine stitches she had sewn with patient hands, making the dress appear to move with its own rhythm. In that moment, she was not just a singer, but a walking symbol of her people.

Aram walked beside her, unable to stop his gaze from drifting toward her again and again. The city seemed to transform her: she walked taller, her eyes shining as if she were finally standing in the place that had been calling her for so long.

“Are you nervous?” Aram asked.

“A little,” she admitted. “But it feels right.”

54

They entered the hall of the Cultural Academy. The room was packed, the air warm, the stage bathed in soft light. When Jiyan’s name was called, Aram briefly placed his hand on her back.

“Go,” he said. “This is your moment.”

Jiyan stepped onto the stage. For a heartbeat, the world fell silent. Then, she began to sing.

Her voice was clear and warm, carried by a stillness that surprised even her. She sang an ancient song of Dersim, but she sang it with the precision she had mastered at Munzur University—Western classical technique fused with the soul of her homeland. The people in the hall didn’t just hear a voice; they heard a history speaking through her.

When she finished, applause erupted like a warm tide rolling over her. Jiyan bowed, and as she left the stage, Aram was already waiting.

"You were... incredible," he said, his voice husky with emotion.

She looked at him, still breathless from the performance. "I felt you the whole time," she whispered.

He took a step closer. "Jiyan..."

She placed her hand against his cheek, and in that moment, the noise of the city, the people, and the lights faded away. There was only the two of them. Aram leaned in, and their lips met—tentative at first, then surer, warmer. A kiss that wasn't loud, but deep. A kiss that said: *We belong in this story.* 55

As they drew apart, Jiyan smiled. "I'll graduate soon," she said. "And then, everything truly begins."

Aram took her hand. "Then we walk on together."

Outside, the city hummed—vibrant, awake, full of voices. And Jiyan knew: she wasn't just a part of this city anymore. She had become one of its voices.

Epilogue – The Voice That Remains

Summer settled over Dersim like a golden veil as Jiyan completed her studies at Munzur University. The city had become familiar: the streets, the cafés, the voices, the evenings saturated with music. She had learned to stand between two worlds—the rigor of Western classical music and the ancient melodies of her people, which lived within her like roots.

On the day of the graduation ceremony, she stood with Aram on the banks of the Munzur River. The water carried the afternoon light away as if saving it for later. Beside her, Aram was quieter than usual, as if listening not to the river, but to something within himself that was only now finding the words. The water rushed, telling stories older than language itself. Jiyan held her diploma, but her gaze was fixed on the mountains embracing the valley. 56

"And now?" Aram asked.

She smiled. "Now the real work begins."

"The music?"

"The history," she said. "Our history. The cities they've forgotten. The voices they never wanted to hear."

Aram took her hand. "You will make them remember."

"We will," she corrected softly.

A gust of wind moved through the trees, and for a moment, it seemed as if the entire landscape drew breath. Jiyan knew she was no longer the girl from the village. She had become a woman who had found her voice—a voice that did not just sing, but recounted, healed, and remembered.

As she and Aram made their way back into the city, there was a sense of departure in the air. Not loud or triumphant—but quiet, clear, and unshakeable.

The future was not a promise.

It was a song that was only just beginning.

Afterword

On Cities, Voices, and the Truth of a People

This story begins in a village, but it does not belong solely to the villages. It belongs to the cities that have stood for millennia in the heart of Mesopotamia: Ergani, Amed, Hewlêr, Mêrdîn, Wan, Silemanî, and many others. Places older than most civilizations we know today.

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It is often claimed that the Kurds are a mountain people—as if they were born only among rocks and never ventured further. But the truth is different: the Kurds are equally an urban people, a people of town squares, walls, markets, libraries, music academies, and universities. A people who built cities long before many other nations even had names.

Jiyan's journey reflects this truth. She comes from a village, but she carries the history of the cities within her. She studies music because she knows that culture does not merely survive—it grows. She sings because her voice is a legacy. And she loves because love is the only force capable of transforming even the deepest wounds.

This novella is an attempt to correct a picture that has been painted falsely for too long. It is a quiet protest against

forgetting and a tribute to those who do not surrender their identity—neither in the mountains nor in the cities.

Dedication

*For the women of my people,
who carry cities within them,
even when the world sees only mountains.*

*For those who sing,
even when no one listens.*

*And for love,
which teaches us that freedom
always begins first in the heart.*

*May Jiyan's voice be a reminder:
that a people is not defined by clichés,
but by the stories they tell themselves.*

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Historical Note:

The Festivals Forbidden in Dersim

An explicit ban on festivals and religious ceremonies in Dersim was enforced through the Tunceli Law (No. 2884) of 1935 and the subsequent military operations of 1937–38. During this period, the traditional practices of the Raa Heq

community were severely restricted or completely prohibited.
(*Wikipedia*)

Historical Context of the Bans

1. The Tunceli Law (1935)

- Law No. 2884 placed Dersim under special military administration.
- It granted the state the authority to control or prohibit gatherings, religious rituals, festivals, and population movements.
- Although presented as an effort to “pacify” and “civilize” the region, in practice it aimed to dismantle the social and spiritual structures of the Raa Heq community.
- This marked the beginning of a period in which festivals, Cem ceremonies, and seasonal rituals could no longer be freely practiced.

2. Military Operations of 1937–38

- During the military campaign, all collective religious and cultural activities were effectively banned.
- The population was displaced, interned, or deported; spiritual leaders (pir, raywer) were targeted or killed.
- In this period, no festival, ritual, or religious gathering of the Raa Heq community could be held openly.

(*Wikipedia*)

Which Festivals Were Affected?

The bans particularly targeted:

- Hızır festivals
- Newroz celebrations
- Cem ceremonies
- Seasonal nature and harvest rituals
- Pilgrimages to sacred sites (ziyaret)

These festivals were central elements of the Raa Heq tradition and were viewed by the state as expressions of a “separate” identity.

When Exactly Were the Festivals Banned?

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1935 – Tunceli Law

(Beginning of state control and restriction of religious/cultural festivals)

1937–38 – Military Operations

(De facto total ban on all festivals, rituals, and gatherings)

After 1938 – Deportations & Forced Assimilation

(Long-term suppression; many festivals could only be practiced in secret)

The cover photo is taken from a social media video; though the creator remains unknown to me, I have immortalized it here as an expression of my appreciation.