
Gülistan
In the Shadow of Munzur
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A Novella

Note on Fictionality

This novella is a **work of fictionalized literature**. While inspired by public sentiment and discourse, it makes no claim to historical or legal accuracy, nor does it present unproven allegations as established facts. Names, locations, and characters are literary constructs; no real persons are accused of any unverified conduct.

Prologue

The river took on the color of the sky. The Munzur flowed as if it were carrying away the things people had lost—letters, cigarette butts, small scraps of wood dancing in the water like memories. On the bank sat a woman with a half-filled notebook on her lap. She traced a line with her finger, as if trying to nudge the words back into place, and listened to the low, rhythmic breath of the water.

"Do you remember the laughter?" she asked into the twilight, more to herself than to anyone else. The voice that answered did not come from afar; it was within her, a memory that refused to be shaken off. "I remember everything," the answer said. "Not just the laughter. The way she furrowed her brow when she was deep in thought. The books she never finished reading."

The city behind them was a tapestry of voices. Some whispered, some cried out, some remained silent—because silence was easier than asking questions. Yet the questions remained, like stones one could not throw away; they rolled on, struck the banks, and settled there. In the alleyways, the

clatter of pots, the distant honk of a car, and the occasional laughter of children merged into a soundscape that held time together and simultaneously pulled it apart.

The notebook was half full. On the first page was a name the woman had traced over in pencil: ***Gülistan*.** The letters felt like a promise made to oneself—a promise not to forget. She closed the book, rested it on her lap, and watched the river, which took everything and gave nothing back. Sometimes, she thought, remembering is the only justice we have: the speaking of a name, the holding onto a voice, the gathering of fragments until an image emerges.

Twilight settled over the city like a shroud. Lights flickered on; windows became small stages where people played out their everyday dramas. On a bench opposite, an old man sat watching the water's surface, as if searching for answers the years had denied him. A child ran past, shouting something unintelligible, and vanished back into the shadows. The woman by the bank breathed in deeply, as if to take the whole city into herself—the warmth, the cold, the closeness, and the absence.

She wrote a line in the notebook, then another. The words were short, like stones thrown into water to see how far the ripples reach. *Who remains when someone leaves?* she wrote, and beneath it: *What do we call that which stays behind—guilt, love, memory?* She traced the lines with her finger, as if to make them more permanent.

The river took the words with it. The Munzur carried them away, over stones and through rapids, out into a world that did not always give answers. But that evening, on the bank, the speaking of the name was an act of resistance against

forgetting. The woman stood up, closed the notebook, and with a final glance at the water, walked up the street toward where the lights and voices waited—and where the questions lived on, until someone found the courage to pursue them.

1 — Arrival

"You’re from Amed, aren't you?"

"Yes. And you?"

"From here. Dersim."

The words were brief, like trains stopping at a small station only to pull away again. The bus had dropped her at a stop that smelled of wet asphalt and cedar; the air was still warm from the day, but the shadows of the mountains were already stretching long. Gülistan pulled her shawl tighter, though she wasn't cold. In her backpack, books clattered alongside a photo album and a notebook whose pages were already slightly creased—traces of journeys, of thoughts, of nights when sleep eluded her.

Gülistan came to Dersim and moved into a room in the student dormitory of Munzur University. The city welcomed her with a mixture of harshness and tenderness. Houses clung to the slopes like old stories; the streets were narrow, the sidewalks uneven. Noises were everywhere: the cry of a vendor, the clatter of pots, the distant honking of a car. And in between it all, the constant, steady murmur of the river, winding through the valley like a silver ribbon. The Munzur was not just a river; it was a breath that held the city together.

"The library is up on the hill," said the woman with the suitcase, pointing to a narrow path that disappeared between two houses. "If you like, I'll show you the way."

"Thank you," Gülistan replied. "I'm looking for a place to study—and a place to drink tea without anyone asking why."

The woman laughed softly. "Here, we drink tea because we have time. Or because we have no other choice." She pushed her suitcase ahead of her and led the way as if she knew every step. Gülistan followed, observing the way the woman held her shoulders, the way she squinted her eyes when climbing a steep section. In these small movements, she read the city: cautious, resilient, steeped in habit.

The apartment she had found was above a bakery. In the mornings, the scent of freshly baked bread filled the air, and the owner—a woman with rough hands and a warm smile—would set down a cup of tea for her without a word. "For the cold mornings," she said when Gülistan thanked her. The apartment was small: one room, a table, a bed, a shelf with a few books. On the wall hung a calendar where the days were crossed out in pencil—a silent proof that life went on, day by day.

In those first days, Gülistan learned the city like a new language. She noticed which cafés were full in the morning, which shops offered the best conversation in the evening, and which paths to avoid when alone. The university sat on a rise; the lecture halls were drafty, the professors sometimes strict, sometimes tired. She quickly found her circle: Jinda, the sharp-witted one with a sarcastic comment always at the ready; Sarya, the quiet observer with wide eyes; and a few

classmates who met in the library to take texts apart and piece them back together.

"What do you want to do later?" Sarya asked one evening as they drank tea.

"I'm studying child pedagogy... I want to work with children. Maybe become a nursery teacher. Maybe a school teacher," Gülistan said.

"Then you'll have to send us stories," Jinda noted.

"And you'll read them and tell me what's missing," Gülistan replied with a smile. The smile was a promise: to herself, to her friends, to the future.

Yet arrival is never merely a physical act; it is an internal tracing. In the nights, when the city grew quiet, Gülistan sat by the window, watching the lights that hung like scattered stars in the alleys. She wrote letters home to Amed, folding them carefully and tucking in small drawings that her mother would later mark with a tiny heart. The letters were bridges that held her back and carried her forward all at once.

The city also showed her its cracks. At one corner, she saw a group of young men arguing loudly; at another, an old man sat on a bench with his hands folded. There were gazes that lingered longer than was polite; doors that closed faster when strangers passed by. Gülistan learned to read the nuances: when a smile was genuine, when it merely masked courtesy; when a conversation was open, when it only skimmed the surface. These lessons were quiet, but they mattered.

One afternoon, as the sun hung low and the shadows lengthened, she went to the river alone. The water sparkled, and on the far bank, children were playing, their voices bright and carefree. Gülistan sat on a bench, pulled out her

notebook, and wrote: *Here I am small and large at once. Here I learn how to reinvent oneself—or how to lose oneself.* She traced her finger over the lines, as if to test the words for their truth.

A man sat down beside her without a word. He was older, his face weathered by wind and sun. After a while, he said, "The city takes and gives. Sometimes more, sometimes less."

"And what does it give to you?" Gülistan asked.

"Memories," he replied. "And questions. Both are heavy to carry." He smiled—not mockingly, but in a way that made Gülistan feel understood.

The arrival was complete, yet not final. It was the first step on a path that would yet have many turnings. Gülistan did not know this for certain; she only felt it like a slight tug in her stomach, an expectation that could not be put into words. She stood up, clicked her notebook shut, and walked back up the street, past the bakery, past the houses, past the people carrying their own stories. The city took her in, and she took the city into herself—an exchange that was slow, imperceptible, and irreversible.

2 – Family

"Tell your mother she shouldn't worry so much."

"I'll tell her," Gülistan replied with a smile, though it could barely be heard on the other end of the line. "But she won't believe it."

Her mother's voice was a familiar rhythm, a beat that had provided her with security since childhood. Over the phone, it sounded thinner, as if a long river stretched between them. In Amed, it was evening; her father's workshop was not yet completely dark, metal clattered somewhere, and perhaps the neighbor was calling out for a grandchild. For a moment, Gülistan closed her eyes and imagined the scent of the kitchen: fried vegetables, the oil her father used sparingly, the fragrance of freshly washed linens hanging from a line in the courtyard.

"Come home soon," her mother said. "The trees are heavy with fruit, and the house feels empty."

"I'll come when the exams are over," Gülistan answered. "I promise."

Promises made over the phone were often lighter than those one kept. Her mother did not hang up until she had asked once more if she was eating enough, if she was dressing warmly, if she had someone she could trust. These questions were like small nets she cast to hold her daughter close. Gülistan felt the tenderness in them, yet also the worry that settled over the words like a shadow.

The letters she wrote were different from the phone calls. On paper, she could breathe longer; she could shape sentences that did not require an immediate answer. She folded the pages carefully, sometimes drawing small flowers in the margins, and her mother replied in a script adorned with little hearts in the corners. In one letter, her mother had written: *We are proud of you. Don't forget to laugh once in a while.* Gülistan had read the page several times before placing it in

the box where she kept all the messages that helped her endure the distance.

At home in Amed, the family was a tapestry of roles and memories. Her father, a man with rough hands and a quiet gaze, ran a small workshop where he repaired bicycles and sometimes assembled furniture. He was not a man of many words, but his hands spoke a language Gülistan understood: precise, patient, reliable. Her mother was the voice of the house, the one who ordered the days, hung the laundry, and placed the soup on the table right on time. Her siblings were loud, headstrong, and loving; they quarreled and reconciled in a single breath.

As a child, Gülistan had often sat beside her father in the workshop, her fingers touching oily bolts, her eyes wide with curiosity. He showed her how to balance a wheel, how to fit a chain properly, how to have patience when something did not work immediately. These lessons were practical yet symbolic: they taught her that things can be repaired if one has the right tools and maintains one’s composure.

"You are brave," her father had said once, when she told him of her decision to leave. "You are going to learn something. That is good."

"I’m afraid," she confessed. "Sometimes."

"Fear is a sign that you are alive," he replied. "Fear is no reason to stand still."

Her mother caught the conversation with half an ear while drying plates. Her eyes searched for her daughter through the phone’s camera, as if to ensure she was truly there. Then she placed a hand to her forehead, as if measuring an invisible

burden. "Take care of yourself," she said. "And call if anything happens. Don’t wait until it’s too late."

In Amed, the memory of Gülistan was not just familial; it was public, a part of daily life. The neighbors spoke of her when they met in the street: "She is so hardworking," "She writes such beautiful letters," "She always has a book with her." These small phrases formed an image that filled the family with pride but also made them vulnerable. For the more people held an image of someone, the more that person seemed to dissolve into expectations.

Gülistan knew she lived in two worlds: in one, the familiar warmth of Amed; in the other, the harsher, more demanding environment of Dersim. Both worlds shaped her, tugged at her, gave and took. Sometimes, when she was alone, she wondered if the distance was changing her. Was she still the girl who ran barefoot through the courtyard, who played with the neighbor's children? Or was she already someone else, molded by new books, new voices, new streets?

Once, on a Sunday, as exams drew near and the longing for home grew stronger, she wrote a long letter. She described the library, the scents of the city, the people she had met. She wrote of a lecturer who spoke of poetry in a raspy voice, and of a café where the owner always gave her a piece of cake. At the end of the letter, she drew a small sketch: a house with a tree in front of it, and beside it she wrote: *When I return, we will plant a tree.* The idea of planting something permanent was a promise to the future—to herself and to her family.

The answer arrived in a week. Her mother wrote that they had already chosen a spot in the courtyard where the tree could stand. Her father added a note: *I’ll bring the shovel.*

Her siblings drew little pictures, attaching them to the edge of the envelope with tape. This gesture, small as it was, filled Gülistan with a warmth that momentarily drove away the cold of the nights in Dersim.

Yet not all news was light. Sometimes worries came that could not be brushed away with a smile: an uncle who fell ill; a neighbor who lost his job; bills that piled up. These messages reminded her that life in Amed did not stand still just because she was away. There were obligations she could not ignore and decisions she would have to make when she returned.

In one of those moments, when fatigue lay heavy on her shoulders and the exams demanded much of her, her mother called late at night. Her voice was brittle. "We had visitors," she said. "People asking..." She trailed off, as if searching for words that would not wound. Gülistan felt the air in the room grow thin. "What kind of people?" she asked, though she feared the answer. Her mother took a deep breath. "Just neighbors. They wanted to know if you were well looked after. They said the city is different. Be careful, my child."

The words were a veil of worry and care. Gülistan put her head in her hands and thought of the workshop, her father’s hands, the oak trees that would one day provide shade. She thought of the letters, the little hearts, the promises. And she thought of the decision she had made: to stay, to learn, to try to understand the world without losing her own.

At the end of the call, her mother said, "We are praying for you."

"I know," Gülistan replied. "And I thank you. For everything."

"Come home soon," her mother repeated, and this time it sounded less like a plea and more like a wish that lingered in the air.

She set the phone aside, looked at the notebook on the table, and wrote a single line: *I am here. I am learning. I am coming back.* Then she folded the letter, placed it in an envelope, and put it in the box with the other messages. The words were not enough to bridge the distance, but they were an anchor—a small piece of home she carried with her while the city outside continued to breathe and the river quietly told its stories.

3 – Friends

"You have to come with us."

"I still have an essay."

"You always have an essay."

The voices in the café were as warm as the steam rising from the cups. The place smelled of cardamom and brewed coffee, of sugar and the soft creak of chairs. Jinda, Sarya, and a few others sat at a round table, legs tucked beneath them, hands cupped around their mugs. Gülistan entered, pulled off her scarf, and for a moment the world outside seemed to remain there—the cold, the gazes of strangers, the streets she did not yet fully know.

"Sit down," Jinda said, sliding a cup toward her. "Tell us. What is the essay about?"

"About memory in literature," Gülistan replied. "How places store stories."

"Sounds like you," Sarya said with a smile. "You're always collecting stories."

They laughed, and the laughter was a net that held together the small cracks in their days. In this circle, Gülistan was not just the stranger from Amed; she was the one who listened intently, who made small notes, who sometimes brought the discussion to a point with a single sentence. Jinda was the one who thought out loud, cutting the air with quick, sharp remarks; Sarya was the observer, the one who asked questions and said more in the pauses than in the answers. Together they formed a web of voices that made the university, the library, and the city a place where one was not alone.

"Tell us about home," Jinda requested one evening, when the cups were empty and the streetlamps outside looked like small lantern festivals.

"What do you want to hear?" Gülistan asked.

"Everything. The smells, the voices, the things only you know."

Gülistan smiled, and for a moment the air filled with images: her father's workshop, the scent of oil and metal; the kitchen where her mother baked bread; the narrow alleys of Amed where the neighbors' voices sounded like a choir.

"My mother makes the best yogurt," she said. "She lets it sit a long time, until it has exactly the right acidity. And my father... he has a way of holding screws as if they were little secrets."

"That sounds like poetry," Sarya said. "You should weave that into your essay."

"Perhaps," Gülistan replied. "Perhaps it is already an essay."

The friends were more than just conversationalists; they were witnesses to small rituals. During exam weeks, they sat together in the library, heads bowed over books, fingers tracing lines of notes. After long days, they would climb to the library roof, sitting on the edge to watch the city breathing in the twilight. There, they shared cigarettes, biscuits, and secrets. There, the grand questions were dismantled into small, manageable pieces: What does success mean? What is courage? How much of oneself must be surrendered to belong?

"What if I don’t become the person you expect?" Gülistan asked once, when the night was exceptionally clear and the stars pricked like needles.

"Then we will love you anyway," Jinda said without hesitation. "Friendship is not a contract."

"But it is a promise," Sarya added. "A promise to stay, even when things change."

There were tensions, as in any community. Jealousy crept in when one suddenly received more attention; misunderstandings arose when words fell thoughtlessly. Once, after a heated debate about a lecturer who had been too harsh, an argument flared up. Jinda felt undefended; Gülistan felt misunderstood. The days that followed were heavy, conversations faltered, and their shared lightness seemed fractured.

"You didn't defend me," Jinda said later, when they met alone.

"I didn't know how," Gülistan replied.

"Sometimes a word is enough."

"Sometimes a silence is enough."

They learned that closeness requires work. That forgiveness does not arrive automatically but must be earned. That one must sometimes acknowledge one's own faults to move forward. These lessons were painful and necessary; they shaped the friendship, making it deeper, less superficial.

Beside the intimate moments, there were public ones: small demonstrations, readings at the university, evenings spent debating politics, art, and the future with other students. Gülistan listened, asked questions, and later wrote notes in her book. hers was not the loudest voice, but often the one that held the conversations together, bridging the gap between theory and everyday life.

"You are good at listening," a classmate once said. "You turn words into bridges."

"Maybe," she replied. "Or maybe I only build bridges because I don't know where I want to go myself."

In these moments, a different side of Gülistan emerged: the uncertainty lying behind her calm gaze. She was not always sure whether she should stay, if her studies were the right path, if the city would mold her or break her. Yet in the community, she found courage. Her friends reminded her that decisions need not be final; that paths are allowed to change; that life consists of many small shifts in direction.

There was also lightness: spontaneous trips to the river, where they shared bread and laughed over trivial things; nights watching old films and eating popcorn; days when they could simply sit side-by-side without speaking, finding the silence familiar. These moments were like breathing spaces in a dense day, small islands where the world stood still for a moment.

"Promise me something," Jinda said one evening, as they sat on the roof with the city spread beneath them like a map.

"What?" Gülistan asked.

"Promise that you'll write to us, no matter what happens. Not just letters, but also when you're afraid."

"I promise," Gülistan said, and the promise was more than a word; it was a bond they tied together.

The friends were not just companions through her time at university; they became part of who Gülistan was. In their voices, she found affirmation; in their gazes, mirrors; in their faults, lessons. And as the days grew longer and exams drew near, she knew these bonds would carry her—through doubt, through joy, through the small and great storms that life holds in store.

4 – The Evening

"Are you coming?"

"Only for a moment," Gülistan said. "I still have to pick something up."

The street had grown cooler as the sun vanished behind the mountains. Streetlamps flickered to life, and the shadows of the chestnut trees fell across the pavement like dark fingers. Gülistan pulled her scarf tighter, though the wind only played softly with the leaves. At this hour, the city had a different voice: muffled, attentive, as if it were listening for what might happen.

She walked the path she often took—past the old bridge spanning the river, past the small shop where the owner always offered a bag of nuts to sample. Her steps were

familiar, yet something felt different that evening; a sensation not easily named, like a tone an octave lower than usual. Perhaps it was only the fatigue gathering in her bones, or the way the city breathed when people retreated into their homes.

In the café, they had laughed, made plans, talked about a seminar scheduled for next week. Jinda had spoken of a reading, Sarya of a film she wanted to see. The conversations had been light, the voices warm. "See you later," Jinda had called out, never suspecting the word would fall into the night like a fraying thread.

Gülistan turned into a side street where the houses stood closer together and the windows seemed smaller. A dog barked in the distance, then fell silent again. An older man sat on a bench, smoking, hands buried in his pockets. He nodded to her without looking up, as if he were part of a silent ritual the city performed at nightfall. She smiled back, a brief, fleeting smile, and walked on.

The memory of that evening was later told in fragments: a step, a sound, a car passing by, a sudden flash of light. Some said they had seen a figure; others said they had noticed nothing. The city, which possessed so many voices by day, seemed to hold a different stillness that evening, as if it were witness to a moment it could not interpret.

As she passed the small bookstore, she stopped. Through the window, she saw the shelves standing like rows of silent witnesses. A book lay open on a table, as if someone had just set it aside. She drew closer, looked at the cover, and read a line that felt like a promise: *Places store what we forget.* She smiled, bought the book, and tucked it into her coat pocket. It

was a small gesture, a way to reassure herself that the world still held an order.

On the way back, she took a shortcut through a narrow passage. There, between two houses, the air was cooler, and the city's noises became a distant murmur. A car drove past, its headlights cutting through the darkness. For a moment, everything was only motion and light. Then it was quiet again.

She did not immediately notice someone was walking behind her. Only when a sound, a footstep, drew closer did she turn halfway around. "Hello?" she said, more out of politeness than fear. A figure stood in the shadows, its contours blurred. "Is everything alright?" the voice asked, and it did not sound unfriendly—rather routine, like the voice of someone often out late.

"Yes," Gülistan replied. "I'm just looking for the way to the bridge."

"Then you're almost there," the figure said. "Go carefully." It was a brief exchange, a fleeting encounter that would later take on a significance in memory that was not present in the moment. She nodded, said thank you, and the footsteps receded again.

The final meters to the apartment were few, but they felt long. The bakery was dark, with only a faint light still burning in the window. The owner had left the door ajar, as if waiting for someone who might yet arrive. Gülistan stepped inside, laid the book on the table, removed her scarf, and stood at the window for a moment. The city lay beneath her

like a map, the lights twinkling, and the river was a dark ribbon connecting everything.

She thought of the evening's conversations, her friends' voices, the warmth of the cups. She thought of Amed, her father’s workshop, the trees that would one day provide shade. And she thought of the small gesture of buying the book, as if trying to hold onto something that might otherwise easily slip away.

Later, as the hours passed and anxiety grew, her friends would search the streets, questioning the bakery and the bookstore, reconstructing her final steps. They would find witnesses who remembered a figure, a car, a light. Some memories would overlap, others would be contradictory. But in that hour, when Gülistan closed the door behind her and turned off the light, the city was only a city, and she was only a person coming home.

Night took the city into its hands and held it fast. The streets, so familiar by day, turned into alien paths. And along these paths gathered questions that found no answer. The silence was not empty; it was heavy with an expectation that soured into dread. The friends waited, the mother waited, the city waited—and no one knew how long this waiting would endure.

5 — The Silence

"She isn't there."

"What do you mean?"

"The apartment. It’s empty."

The words fell like pebbles into a well; the ripples they struck grew wider and wider. The owner of the bakery stood in the doorway, her hands still smelling of flour, looking at the friends as if searching their faces for an explanation she herself could not provide. Jinda pressed the phone tighter against her cheek, as if she could hold onto her connection to the world that way.

"Did you see her?"

"No. I left the light on."

The police came, took notes, asked about times, about habits, about final messages. The officers spoke in sober sentences, as if writing a ledger intended to set the world in order. But the world of those who waited was not orderly; it was torn, full of gaps that refused to close.

"When did you last see her?"

"Yesterday evening at the café."

"With whom?"

"With us."

The questions were simple, the answers difficult. Every word was tested, every pause weighed. The friends repeated the same sentences, as if hoping through repetition to force something that could not be forced: certainty. The mother arrived from Amed, her eyes red, her hands clutching a photograph. She stood in the center of the apartment, as if trying to fill the void with her mere presence.

"She left her notebook here," Sarya said, holding up the small volume. "And her shawl."

"This is not normal," the mother whispered. "She always takes everything with her."

The media began to arrive. Cameras, microphones, voices searching for a story. Some asked with compassion, others with the greed of those who feast on sensation. The friends stood before the cameras, reciting lines they had practiced a thousand times, yet feeling as though they were speaking a language no one wanted to hear.

"We only want answers," Jinda told a microphone.

"We want her to be found," Sarya added.

"She is a human being," said the mother. "Not just a picture."

The city reacted in waves. Some brought candles, set up photos, taped notes to lampposts. Others went about their business as if nothing had happened. In the cafés people whispered; in the alleys, conjectures grew loud. Rumors sprouted like weeds, and with them the fear that the truth might be strangled beneath them.

"Maybe she ran away," Jinda heard someone say.

"I don't believe that," another voice replied. "She didn't take her things."

"Maybe she got lost."

"Or worse."

The rumors were sharp and swift. They cut through the days, leaving wounds that were invisible but burning. The family had to do more than tremble for their daughter; they had to fight against stories that distorted her image. Every new name, every new insinuation, was like a needle-prick.

"Stop speculating," Jinda said during an interview, her voice hoarse with effort. "She is a person, not a rumor."

"But people talk," Sarya said later, as they sat alone on the roof. "And the more they talk, the less of her remains for us to recognize."

The search began in small, chaotic steps. Volunteers combed through paths, questioned farmers, looked into abandoned huts. The police checked footage, asked about cameras, about cars, about witnesses. Every lead was noted, every call answered—and yet time remained an enemy, blurring the trails.

"We've found something," said a young man who had been out with a search party.

"What?" asked the mother, standing beside him, her hands folded as if in prayer.

"A piece of fabric. Near the river."

"Is it her shawl?"

"We don't know yet."

Hope flickered and died again. A find did not mean immediate certainty; it meant work, tests, waiting. The forensics team came, working in gloves, speaking softly as if not to wake the things they touched. For the family, every step was a small victory and a new torment, for it opened the possibility that what they were searching for was no longer whole.

"Why does it take so long?" the mother asked one evening, her voice thin with exhaustion.

"Because it's complicated," an officer replied. "We have to check everything."

"Check," the mother repeated, as if the word were a foreign object. "Check, check, check—and we wait."

The days stretched out. The friends oscillated between action and paralysis: distributing flyers, making phone calls, sleeping, rising again. They ate poorly, laughed rarely, and when they did, it was a brief, crooked sound that vanished quickly. The city they knew was the same and yet different; it was shot through with gazes that questioned, that searched, that judged.

"What if we find nothing?" Sarya whispered one night.

"Then we tried," Jinda answered. "And that isn't enough. But it’s all we have."

The mother wrote prayers on small slips of paper and placed them in the box with the letters. The father, who had come from Amed, often stood mute at the window, hands on the sill, as if he could turn back time through the glass. The siblings held onto each other, silent and stiff, as if molded from wax that melted anew with every piece of news.

The police called for patience; the media called for answers; the people called for justice. And in the center of this calling stood a name, spoken again and again, as if the speaking itself were an act of resistance against forgetting.

"Gülistan," Jinda said one morning, as pale sunlight fell through the curtains. "We say her name aloud. Every day."

"So she doesn't vanish," Sarya added.

"So we don't vanish," the mother said softly.

The silence was not just absence; it was a space that had to be filled—with questions, with demands, with memories. The people who remained filled it with voices, with candles, with pictures. They refused to accept the gap as final. And while the city moved on, with its shopping, its quarrels, its festivals,

a light stayed on in one window, as if waiting for a return that no one could guarantee.

6 — Search

"We have a lead."

"Where?"

"By the riverbank. A scrap of cloth. A footprint."

"Coming right now."

The news hit like a spark in dry grass. Suddenly, the city was no longer just a place of waiting; it became a place of action. People who until yesterday had set out candles and called out names now pulled on rubber boots, tied scarves around their heads, took flashlights, and went out into the cold, the damp, and whatever the night might reveal.

The search took on shapes no one had planned. Volunteers formed chains, combed through riparian zones, climbed into thickets, felt their way over stones. Farmers were asked if they had seen anything unusual in the night; shopkeepers were asked to show their surveillance videos. The police coordinated, marked discovery sites, spoke with forensics. It was work that demanded patience and precision, yet it was driven by the raw energy of those who could wait no longer.

"This way," called a young man, leading with a flashlight. His beam cut through the darkness, revealing wet leaves, a broken bottle, tracks in the mud. "There’s something here."

"What?" asked Jinda, kneeling beside him.

"A piece of fabric. Blue. Like her shawl."

"Is it her shawl?"

"We have to secure it."

The recovered items were photographed, placed in plastic bags, and assigned numbers. For the family, each object was a double-edged gift: it could nourish hope, yet it also opened the possibility that what they sought was no longer whole. The forensic experts worked in gloves, speaking softly, as if not to wake the things they touched. Their language was one of measured data and protocols; it brought order to what the heart could barely grasp.

“We are checking DNA,” an officer said later, as the mother stood beside him, her hands folded as if in prayer. “It may take several days.”

“Days,” the mother repeated, as if the word were a stone. “Days are an eternity.”

The search was not only physical; it was digital. Mobile data was requested, locations reconstructed, call logs scrutinized. A technician sat before a screen, dragging open time windows, zooming into maps, comparing signals. Technology promised clarity, yet it brought new questions: Why didn't a location align with a witness statement? Why was a call registered at a time when someone else claimed to have been speaking with the missing girl?

“The data isn't always definitive,” the technician explained. “Signals bounce; devices connect to different masts. We have to be careful.”

“Careful,” Jinda muttered. “Careful is good. But we also need answers.”

The search stretched into days. Dawn found people with wet trousers and red eyes, warming themselves, drinking tea, lowering their heads for a brief moment before heading out again. There were sparks of hope: a call reporting a possible sighting; a lead being followed up. And there were disappointments: trails that led to nothing, statements that contradicted one another. Fatigue settled like dust upon the faces of the seekers, but they pressed on, because stopping was not an option.

“We have camera footage from near the bridge,” an investigator said one evening. “We are analyzing it.”

“Does it show anything?” Sarya asked, standing beside him.

“It’s blurry. A figure. A car. We’re trying to pull more detail out.”

The media accompanied the search with a mixture of sensationalism and gravity. Reporters stood at cordons, asking for details that were often not yet confirmed. Some reports helped by mobilizing witnesses; others fueled rumors that placed an added burden on the family. The friends had to learn how to handle the cameras, how to give answers without claiming things they did not know.

“We need calm,” Jinda once told a camera. “We need the work to be done.”

“And we need respect,” the mother added, having become practiced in interviews, knowing that every statement shaped public perception.

The search brought together people who otherwise had little to do with one another: students, tradesmen, pensioners, journalists, police. In those days, small alliances were born. A baker brought sandwiches for the search parties; a teacher

organized sleeping quarters for the relatives; a lawyer offered legal advice. The city revealed a side that remained invisible in normal times: a readiness to stir when a human being was missing.

“We are not alone,” Jinda said one morning, sitting by the river with Sarya, her hands cupped around a thermos. “That is a comfort.”

“And frightening,” Sarya replied. “Because so many eyes are fixed on us.”

There were also moments when the search reached its limits. A lead proved to be a false alarm; a trail was too faded to be of use. In such moments, the group collapsed—not into resignation, but into exhaustion. They sat on curbs, staring into the distance, and the words they found were short and raw.

“What if we find nothing?” a volunteer whispered.

“Then we will have tried everything,” Jinda said. “And that is not nothing.”

The investigation also led to confrontations. Questions asked met with walls: authorities who did not immediately provide information; protocols that had to be observed; jurisdictions that confused. The family sometimes felt excluded from the process that concerned their very lives. They demanded transparency, but the institutions worked according to rules that did not always keep pace with the tempo of grief.

“We need access to the information,” the father said in a meeting with an official. “We are the family. We have a right to know.”

“You will be informed,” the official replied. “As soon as there is something verifiable.”

“As soon as,” the father repeated, and in his tone lay a mixture of distrust and weariness.

Despite all adversity, there were small steps forward. A video became clearer; a witness remembered a detail previously overlooked. Every piece of progress was a drop in a vast ocean, but drops accumulate. The search was not a straight path; it was a tangle of trials, errors, corrections, and renewed attempts.

One evening, as the city lights rose like scattered stars, the friends sat together, weary, their eyes heavy. Jinda pulled out a sheet of paper on which she had written a list: places yet to be searched; people yet to be questioned; tasks to be assigned. It was a small bit of order in the midst of chaos.

“We continue,” Jinda said. “Tomorrow morning. Early.”

“Until then, let’s sleep a little,” Sarya replied. “Just a little.”

The search was more than the sum of its parts. It was an act of remembering, an attempt to refuse to accept disappearance as a final silence. Every step, every lamp, every voice that called out was a resistance against forgetting. And while the night enveloped the city, people moved on, searching, feeling their way, hoping—because hope is sometimes the only weapon that remains.

7 — Rumors

“Did you hear?”

“Hear what?”

“They say she was...”

“Stop.”

Rumors began like small sparks and quickly became flames. They crept through the city, finding cracks in conversations, settling into the pauses between sentences. In the cafés, at the bus stops, in the barbershops—everywhere there was murmuring, interpreting, embellishing. A single word was enough for the story to take a new direction; a glance, and a detail became a certainty.

The friends felt it like a pressure. Jinda read comments under an online article and slammed her phone onto the table with the palm of her hand. “They’re writing things that aren't true,” she said. “They’re inventing scenes.”

“People need explanations,” Sarya replied. “If there are none, they fill the gaps.”

The rumors were not neutral; they had faces, voices, intentions. Some were born of fear, others of malice, still others from a need to be part of a story. An old acquaintance who had once worked in the city spoke in the teahouse of a car seen late at night. A merchant claimed to have seen someone who did not fit the description. An anonymous comment in a forum named names that no one had dared speak aloud before.

“Who said that?” the mother asked when Jinda told her of a new rumor.

“Someone online,” Jinda said. “No name. Many words.”

“Then it is nothing,” the mother said, though her voice trembled.

Rumors changed people’s perceptions. Gazes became more suspicious, doors closed faster, conversations grew more guarded. The neighbor who used to offer a friendly greeting now stood still, as if weighing whether she was allowed to speak to the family. A classmate who often sat with Gülistan in the library avoided eye contact, as if fearing that proximity would pull him into something he did not understand.

“Why do people talk like this?” Sarya asked as they sat together on the roof, the city beneath them like a map.

“Because it’s easier to have a story than to endure the void,” Jinda said. “The void is terrifying.”

The media played its part. Some reports were cautious, others lurid. Headlines that asked more questions than they answered spread like wildfire. Interviews were conducted, statements sought, and often enough, half-truths were presented as facts. The family had to learn to distinguish between what was being said and what truly was—a task that drained their strength.

“We must keep control of the narrative,” the father said one evening, leafing through the latest articles with the mother. “Not because we want to shape the truth, but because we must prevent lies from stifling it.”

“How do you control that?” the mother asked. “With words? With anger?”

Control was difficult. The city was a web of voices, and every voice could change something. The friends organized meetings, wrote short pieces describing Gülistan as a person—not as a headline, not as a rumor. They distributed flyers with photos, collected memories, asked people to share their stories. It was an attempt to save the image that was slowly being painted over by speculation.

“She wrote poems,” one said.

"She told us stories," a friend said in a video they posted online. "She wasn't just a name."

"We have to show her as she truly was," Jinda said to the camera. "Not as the rumors paint her."

Yet not all reactions were rooted in solidarity. Some exploited the uncertainty to pursue their own agendas. A local politician, hungry for attention, posed questions at a press conference aimed more at provocation than clarity. A blogger wrote long posts presenting mere conjectures as plausible scenarios. The line between public interest and voyeurism began to blur.

"It’s as if they are cutting us into pieces," Sarya said once, her voice raspy with exhaustion. "Each piece is passed around, and everyone thinks they have the right to touch it."

"We have to keep our voices loud," Jinda replied. "Not just with questions, but with what we know. With what we remember."

Amidst the rumors, there were small, quiet acts of counter-resistance: people who didn't talk, but acted. A teacher organized a list of volunteers to help with the search; a baker brought bread for those patrolling at night; a group of students collected donations for the family. These gestures

were no substitute for answers, but they were a sign that not all voices were destructive.

"Thank you," the mother said once to a woman who handed her a cup of tea. "Thank you for not talking, but helping."

"Sometimes," the woman replied, "silence is an act of humanity."

The rumors had a further effect: they pressured people to take a stand. Those who wished to remain silent were met with suspicion; those who asked questions were perceived as intrusive. The friends felt the community changing—not only in its attitude toward the missing girl, but in the way they treated one another.

"We mustn't turn against each other," Jinda said one evening. "Not now."

"But the voices are loud," said Sarya. "And loud is often wrong."

By the end of the chapter, the city remained a place full of voices. Some whispered, others shouted, still others kept silent. The rumors moved in widening circles, and those left behind had to decide how to face them: whether to let themselves be led by them, or whether to speak against them—with memories, with deeds, with the simple, persistent speaking of a name.

8 — Traces

"The phone sent a signal at 10:14 PM."

"Which mast?"

"The one near the bridge. Exactly where the path leads to the river."

"Noted. We’re securing everything."

The words were clinical, technical, and yet they triggered something in the group that went beyond data: hope clinging to numbers. Technology gave shape to the unknown; it offered coordinates, timestamps, pixels that could be enlarged. For a moment, the world seemed tangible again.

The forensics team worked with a precision that felt almost ritualistic. Gloves, tweezers, sterile bags. Every find was photographed, numbered, cataloged. A scrap of fabric, blue, with a delicate pattern—perhaps a shawl. A single footprint in the mud, half-smudged but still legible. A strand of hair clinging to a twig. The objects lay on tables like relics, and the people who looked at them tried to read stories from them.

"That's her shawl," Jinda said upon seeing the photo.

"Are you sure?" Sarya asked.

"I saw her wearing it often. The pattern matches."

Certainty was rare in those days. Mostly there were only probabilities, hypotheses that shifted with every new detail. The police sent samples to the lab, requested comparisons, waited for results that could take days. Days that felt like weeks.

The digital traces were a different field altogether. Location data, connection logs, brief messages sent in the heat of the night. A technician sat before multiple screens, pulling open time windows, zooming into maps, comparing masts. Sometimes signals jumped; sometimes there were gaps. Technology was powerful, but not omnipotent.

"The signal is jumping between two masts," the technician explained. "It could be the topography, buildings, or the movement of the device."

"So, no definitive position?" the investigator asked.

"Not without more data."

The search for traces was a labor of small steps. One lead led to the next; a contradiction demanded clarification. Eyewitnesses were re-examined, surveillance footage from nearby cafés and shops scrutinized. Some recordings showed only blurred silhouettes; others provided clear sequences, counting minutes and seconds. From pixels came movements, from movements possible paths.

"Here is a recording," an investigator said, placing a tablet on the table. "10:12 PM. A figure is walking along the street. 10:15 PM—a car drives past."

"Can you make out the license plate?" asked the father, who by now was often with the investigators.

"Not clearly. We’re trying to enhance the image quality."

The enhancement of images is both an art and a science. Specialists worked with algorithms, with filters, with patience. Sometimes they succeeded in sharpening contours; sometimes only noise remained. For the family, every enhanced recording was a moment of hope—and of fear. Hope because something became visible; fear because the visible raised questions that were hard to answer.

Physical traces led the searchers to places that had previously been unremarkable: an embankment by the river, an abandoned shed, a dirt track disappearing behind bushes. There, where the city met nature, traces blurred more quickly.

Rain, animals, people—everything could alter or destroy evidence. The search parties worked against time, against the elements, against forgetting.

"Here are footprints leading toward the old quarry," a volunteer said. "They are fresh."

"Mark them," the leader replied. "We need photos, measurements, the distance between them. And we'll secure soil samples."

The samples were collected in small containers, labeled, and placed in cool boxes. In the labs, they were analyzed: fibers, soil particles, potential DNA traces. Scientific language filled the rooms: contamination, control extracts, reference samples. To the relatives, the vocabulary was foreign and yet comforting; it meant that something was happening, that the search consisted not only of calling and hoping, but of work.

"If we find DNA, we can run comparisons," a forensic scientist said. "But it is not a quick process. We must work cleanly."

"We don't have time," whispered the mother, standing beside him.

The city itself harbored traces that did not end up in labs: gazes, conversations, small gestures. A shop owner suddenly remembered a woman picking up a package that night; a neighbor said she saw a car driving slower than usual. Such memories were brittle, mutable, yet they wove into a net the investigators tried to untangle.

"I took a photo of the bridge," said a student who lived nearby. "I uploaded it yesterday evening. Maybe there's something on it."

"Send it to us," the investigator said. "Every image can help."

The digital world was a reservoir of possibilities. Social media posts, location shares, message histories—everything could contain clues. But the flood of data was also a challenge: too much material to check; many false trails that cost time and energy. The investigators had to set priorities, deciding which traces were followed and which were not.

"We have to proceed systematically," the lead investigator said in a briefing. "No panic, no premature conclusions. Every lead is checked, but we work according to priorities."

"Priorities," Jinda repeated later while speaking with Sarya. "What if the priorities are wrong?"

The question remained open. Priorities are human decisions, influenced by resources, pressure, and emotion. The family felt the pressure of time, the media felt the need for news, and the public demanded answers. In this field of tension, the investigators worked, often with the sense that every decision carried consequences.

There were also moments when traces led to new insights. A witness remembered a conversation heard that night; a surveillance video showed a person not previously noticed. Such moments brought movement to the investigation, opening new paths to be followed. But every new path brought with it new questions.

"Why was that person there?" Sarya asked, gazing at a recording.

"Perhaps they were there by chance," said Jinda. "Perhaps not. We do not know."

Uncertainty remained a constant companion. Traces are clues, not answers. They point toward possibilities, open up scenarios, and exclude others. The work consisted of shaping a mosaic of fragments into a picture that was as complete as possible.

In the nights, when the search parties rested and the city lights grew dim, some of the helpers sat by the riverbank. They spoke softly, shared tea, and counted the hours. Sometimes there was laughter; often, there was silence. The traces they found were not merely evidence; they were also testimonies of a life that was suddenly called into question.

"We will find her," Jinda said one evening, her voice firm despite the weariness in her eyes.

"We must find her," Sarya replied. "For her. For us."

The search for traces was a battle against disappearance. Every find was a step, every clue a breath. And while the city moved on—with its shopping, its quarrels, its festivals—people worked in the shadows to fill the gaps torn open by the silence. Traces did not always lead to the truth, but without them, only the void remained.

9 — Voices

"Tell us about her."

"What do you want to hear?"

"Everything. How she laughed. How she walked. Who she was."

The request was simple, almost naive, yet it carried the weight of months. People had gathered in a small room of the community hall: friends, neighbors, fellow students, and a few teachers who had known Gülistan. On a table lay photos, notebooks, and a few poems she had written. The air smelled of coffee and candle wax; voices mingled with the soft rustle of paper.

"She always laughed loudly," one woman said, chuckling softly as if the words themselves brought the memory back to life. "In a way that you couldn't help but laugh along with her."

"She wrote poems," a young man added. "Short, sharp lines. She used words like knives—and then like bandages."

"She once painted a picture for me," a classmate said. "A tree growing in two directions. She said that was life."

The voices joined together into a mosaic. Every story was a stone—incomplete alone, yet together they formed a picture that was more than the sum of its parts. Some memories were clear: the laughter, the poem, the sketch. Others were blurred, soaked in time and pain: a look, a sentence, a moment that had suddenly gained significance.

"She would close her eyes when she was thinking," Jinda said. "As if she were organizing the world inside before she spoke."

"And she was always making notes," Sarya added. "Small margins full of words. Sometimes I found slips of paper in her pockets with half-sentences that sounded like promises."

In Amed, people who knew Gülistan gathered. Old teachers who had taught her in school, neighbors who had seen her at the market, children who had played with her. They brought

photos, told anecdotes, laughed and cried in the same breath. The family sat together, holding hands, and when someone spoke, they nodded, as if the words were filling the holes left by her disappearance.

"Tell us about the first time she stood on a stage," a woman who organized small readings in the city asked.

"She was fearless," the mother said. "She raised her voice, and suddenly the room felt larger. We were all in awe."

"She gave us courage," the father said quietly. "Not with grand speeches, but by the way she was."

The voices were not just memory; they were resistance. In a time when rumors and speculation could take the upper hand, storytelling was an act of preservation. Those who spoke made a mark: here was a life that was more than an event in the news. Those who told stories demanded that this life be seen in all its complexity.

"She sent us stories," Jinda said. "Sometimes just a sentence, sometimes a photo. She reminded us that we are human beings, not just roles."

"And she forced us to listen," Sarya added. "Not just to talk, but to truly listen."

There were moments when the voices became brittle. An uncle who rarely spoke stood up and told of an afternoon when Gülistan had helped him repair an old radio. He laughed, and tears ran down his cheeks. A neighbor spoke of a cake Gülistan had once brought over, and how the children in the yard had argued over who got the biggest piece. Such small stories were like anchors; they held fast the image of a person who lived on in everyday gestures.

"I remember her smile," a friend said. "Not the big one, but the one that appeared for just a moment when she read something beautiful."

"She showed us how to order the world with words," a lecturer said. "And how to heal with words."

The voices also formed questions. Some were practical: Who had spoken to her last? Who had seen her? Others were deeper, more existential: How do you handle the unknown? How do you preserve a life when the person is missing? The answers did not come immediately; they were sought in conversations, in letters, in small rituals.

"We will say her name aloud," Jinda suggested. "Every day, at a specific place. So the name does not vanish."

"And we'll collect her writings," Sarya said. "We'll make a booklet. For the family. For those who knew her."

"And we will listen," the mother added. "We will listen to the voices that describe her."

The initiative took shape. People offered to transcribe texts, scan photos, and collect poems. A small group began to organize the notes from Gülistan's booklet, deciphering the margins, completing the half-sentences. It was a work of tenderness: careful, slow, respectful. Every find was treated like a treasure, every line like proof that a life leaves traces.

"She once wrote: 'Places store what we forget,'" Jinda read aloud from one of the notebooks. "Perhaps she was right."

"Then we must visit the places," Sarya said. "The spots where she was. We must gather the stories at the locations."

So they began to visit the places: the bench by the river, the roof of the library, the bookstore where she had last stood. At

each location, they stayed for a while, spoke softly, laid down photos, and read poems. The places took in the voices; they became witnesses that supported the act of remembering. People passing by would stop and listen, and sometimes they too would share something—a small observation, a smile, a moment that had previously gone unnoticed.

"It feels like we are weaving a net," a woman who often helped at the meetings said. "A net that prevents the life from vanishing entirely."

"A net of voices," Jinda replied. "And every time someone speaks, it grows denser."

The voices were not just comfort; they were a demand. They demanded that the search not stop, that the institutions work, that the truth not be smothered by rumors. In assemblies, in letters to authorities, in conversations with journalists, the voices appeared as a collective: they demanded transparency, they demanded respect, they demanded that a human being not be reduced to a mere news item.

"We want answers," the mother said at a press conference she gave with the support of the friends. "But we also want her to be seen as a person. Not just a case."

"That is our demand," Jinda said. "Justice and remembrance."

At the end of the evening, as the lights in the hall were dimmed and the last cups emptied, some remained sitting. They spoke softly, shared cigarettes, held hands. The voices were tired but resolute. They had created something that day: a space where remembering was possible, where a name did not fall silent.

"We say her name," Sarya whispered, and the others repeated it, as if the speaking itself were a ritual. "*Gülistan*."

"*Gülistan*," the voices answered, and the word hung in the air, not as a question, but as a promise—that they would not be silent, that they would not forget.

10 — Confrontation

"Why was this not checked sooner?"

"Because it is complicated."

"Complicated for whom?"

The questions stood like pillars in the air, bearing a weight that could not be shaken off. People had gathered in the square before the town hall; posters swayed in the wind, voices overlapped, and the air tasted of cold metal and hot breath. The crowd was not a single body; it was a mosaic of anger, worry, resolve, and exhaustion.

Journalists crowded against the barricades, microphones stretching out like inquisitive fingers. A camera crew filmed the faces, the signs, the hands clenched into fists. Jinda stood at the front, her face taut, her voice unwavering. "We demand transparency," she cried. "We demand answers. Not excuses."

An official stepped forward, files tucked under his arm, his expression practiced and neutral. "We are working according to protocol," he said. "There are procedures that must be followed."

"Protocol is no substitute for humanity!" someone shouted from the crowd.

The confrontation was not limited to the street; it extended into offices, interrogation rooms, and newsrooms. In a cool room lit by fluorescent glare, investigators sat around a table, laying out maps and comparing timelines. The language there was clinical, precise, at times cutting.

"We must secure the facts," the lead investigator said. "No premature conclusions."

"Facts," Jinda repeated later, speaking with Sarya. "For us, facts aren't just numbers. They are people who are missing."

"And people have names," Sarya said. "Not just case numbers."

In the interrogation rooms, witnesses were questioned. Some statements were clear, others contradictory. A man who had been working near the bridge that night described a scene that another witness later remembered differently. The investigators made notes, checked details, raised eyebrows. The contradictions were not seen as betrayal, but as part of a process that had to forge truth out of blurriness.

"She looked like this," a witness said.

"How exactly?" the investigator asked.

"I don't remember anymore. It was dark."

The media turned these blurs into headlines. Some reports asked questions that pushed the investigation forward; others stoked distrust. Experts were invited onto talk shows to speak in calm tones about procedure, while outside, people stood with candles and called out names. The chasm between the language of institutions and the language of grief became visible, loud, and painful.

"We need results," the mother said in an interview, her hands clutching a photograph. "Not just words."

"We are doing our best," an official spokesperson replied. "But we must be meticulous."

Meticulousness was a word that, to many ears, sounded like delay. The friends organized vigils, asked questions in public forums, and wrote letters to those in charge. They demanded that the investigation not vanish into bureaucratic drawers. "If the institutions are slow, we will apply pressure," Jinda said. "Not out of distrust, but out of love."

There were moments when confrontation dissolved into dialogue. A meeting between representatives of the family and lead investigators took place in a small briefing room. The air was thick with unspoken expectations. "We want to know what you know," the father said quietly. "We do not want to be manipulated."

"You have a right to information," the investigator replied. "We will be as transparent as the investigation allows."

Transparency had its limits; certain details could not be made public because they might jeopardize the work. These limits were often felt by the family as walls. "Why aren't we told everything?" the mother asked, her voice brittle. "We are the ones suffering."

"Because some information could compromise the investigation," the investigator explained. "We must protect the evidence."

The explanation rarely helped. In the city, a feeling grew that institutions and people spoke different languages—a langu-

age of procedure versus a language of emotion. The friends translated, they demanded, they reminded. They organized public readings where people read Gülistan's texts, while simultaneously demanding that the authorities accelerate their work.

"We cannot wait until the world forgets us," Jinda said at a rally. "We must remain loud."

"Being loud is work," Sarya whispered later, as they sat alone on the roof. "It takes strength, but it keeps us awake."

Confrontation also revealed the cracks in the community. Some neighbors, previously supportive, withdrew for fear of entanglement. Others used the situation to settle old scores. In a local tavern, an argument flared up as two men clashed, old accusations resurfacing. The search for truth exposed not only facts but ancient tensions.

"Why can't we just stand together?" asked a woman who helped at the vigils.

"Because standing together is work," an older man replied. "And work requires courage."

Amidst the friction, there were small, human encounters: a police officer handing a blanket to a searcher; a journalist staying after the broadcast just to listen; a lawyer explaining legal steps free of charge. These gestures were not solutions, but they were bridges—between institutions and people, between protocol and compassion.

The confrontation was not a single event; it was a process that changed the city. It forced people to take a stand, to demand responsibility, to ask uncomfortable questions. It showed that justice is not only born in filing cabinets, but in

the public sphere, in the persistence of those who refuse to be silent.

In the evening, as the rally dispersed and people slowly headed home, a feeling remained that was neither hope nor despair, but something in between: the certainty that the path to truth would be stony, but it had to be walked. Jinda gathered the posters, folding them carefully as if they were documents of an oath. "We won't give up," she said softly.

"We won't give up," Sarya repeated, and the promise sounded like a vow to the city itself—that they would not be silent until answers were found.

11 — Patience

"How much longer?"

"As long as it takes."

The question was simple, the answer difficult. Time stretched like rubber in those months; days became loops that hardly differed from one another. Morning began with the same ritual: coffee, news, a look at the list of places yet to be searched. Evening ended with the same ritual: candles in the window, a photograph gazed at once more before being returned to its box.

The investigation moved in steps that seemed slow to outsiders. Expert reports had to be prepared, samples analyzed, witness statements cross-referenced. "We need patience," an official said in a live broadcast. In his mouth, patience sounded like an appeal to reason; for the family, it was a word that failed to fill the void.

"Patience is work," Sarya said one evening, sitting with Jinda on the roof, the city spread beneath them like a map. "You have to endure it; you have to organize it."

"And you have to bear it," Jinda replied. "Patience is not passive waiting. It is a constant doing."

The days were filled with small, necessary actions: phone calls with lawyers, meetings with investigators, sorting through messages, responding to emails from journalists. There were forms to be filled out, applications to be made, and letters sent to authorities. The friends took on tasks to relieve the family: distributing flyers, organizing vigils, coordinating donations. Patience thus became a collective effort.

"We must remain structured," Jinda said at a meeting. "If we lose ourselves, the cause loses its power."

"Structure helps," Sarya nodded. "But it doesn't replace the heart."

Between the appointments, there were moments when time ticked differently: a call that brought hope; a message that disappointed; a discovery that had to be verified. Every small advance was a drop that did not end the drought but made it more bearable. And yet, uncertainty remained the constant companion—a shadow that crept into the days.

"We received new results today," an investigator said one afternoon, entering the room where the family waited. Voices fell silent; gazes fixed on him. "A comparison is still underway. We will inform you as soon as we know more."

"As soon as," the mother repeated, and in her tone was a mixture of hope and dread.

Patience also meant dealing with setbacks. Sometimes leads led nowhere; sometimes tips proved to be false alarms. Such moments drained the strength from people. They would sit together then, speaking softly, drinking tea, and allowing the silence. The silence was not always empty; it was a space where grief, anger, and worry existed side by side.

"I am afraid that the world will forget us," the mother whispered one evening.

"We do not forget," Jinda said. "We remember. Every day. With names, with deeds, with everything we do."

The community's patience revealed itself in small, persistent gestures. Volunteers continued to arrive to help; people brought blankets, warm soups, notes of encouragement. A teacher organized tutoring sessions for the siblings so they would not fall behind. A lawyer offered to review the protocols. This help was no substitute for answers, but it was a net that held the family aloft.

"It is astonishing how many people stay," the father said once, walking through the streets with Jinda. "You think the world is cold—and then you see how many hands reach out."

"Reaching out is work," Jinda replied. "And work takes time."

Legal steps demanded patience in a different form. Deadlines had to be met, motions filed, expert opinions awaited. The language of the law was precise, often impenetrable to those standing in the midst of grief. A lawyer patiently explained what steps were possible, what rights the family held, and what hurdles remained to be cleared. The family listened, asked questions, took notes. Knowledge became a weapon against powerlessness.

"We must be informed," the mother said. "Not to push, but to understand."

"Understanding is a process," the lawyer said. "And processes take time."

In the long nights, when the city grew quieter, the friends sat together and wrote. They gathered texts, organized notes, transcribed poems. From these fragments, a small booklet emerged, intended to preserve Gülistan's voice. This work was a form of patience: slow, meticulous, loving. Every word they salvaged was an act of resistance against forgetting.

"We are making an archive," Sarya said, laying the pages together. "For her. For us. For all who will follow."

"An archive is a promise," Jinda answered. "That we will not stop remembering."

Patience also showed in how the friends dealt with the public. They gave interviews, but they set boundaries. They demanded respect, insisting that the person at the heart of it all not be reduced to a mere headline. They learned how to remain loud without exhausting themselves; how to make demands without losing their own strength.

"We have to budget our energy," Jinda said. "Otherwise, we burn out."

"Budgeting energy is also patience," Sarya said. "With oneself."

The months changed people. Some found ways to live with the uncertainty; others remained trapped in a state of suspension. Relationships were tested, priorities shifted. The friends learned that patience is not passive: it is a constant doing, a planning, a remembering, an enduring. Patience is

what remains when the first waves of outrage have ebbed and the long labor begins.

"I don't know how much longer we can do this," the mother said one morning, her eyes reddened from lack of sleep.

"We manage because we have to," Jinda replied. "And because we are not alone."

At the edge of the city, by the riverbank, people sat one evening and lit candles. They spoke softly, laid down photos, read poems. The flames flickered; the wind played with the edges of the pictures. Patience was visible in these moments: not as passive waiting, but as a persistent holding onto a name, a memory, a hope that one day, answers would come.

"We aren't just waiting," Sarya said quietly. "We are working. We are remembering. We are demanding."

"And we are loving," Jinda added. "That is perhaps the most important thing."

Time moved on, inexorable and indifferent. Yet in its course, the people had created something: a community that did not give up, an order made of small actions that held everything together. Patience was not the end of the story; it was the path they walked—step by step, day by day, with the name spoken over and over so that it would not vanish.

12 — Aftermath

"What remains?"

"The names."

"And the questions."

The question was not new, yet it sounded different in this room—no longer just a lament, but a demand. The months had left their mark: candle wax on the windowsill, photos in frames, a dog-eared notebook. The city had learned that a disappearance does not simply disappear; it leaves behind a web of voices that slowly tightens.

The friends had developed a routine. In the mornings they met, sorted mail, answered messages, organized gatherings. In the afternoons they went to the places Gülistan had often visited: the bench by the river, the library roof, the bookstore with the crooked shelf. At each spot they left something—a leaf, a poem, a photo—and spoke softly. These rituals were not mere substitutes; they were a way of preserving the life that was suddenly in question.

"We are gathering her writings," Sarya said as they sat at a table, arranging the pages. "We’re making a booklet. For the family. For those who knew her."

"And for those who are yet to come," Jinda added. "So people will know who she was."

The initiative grew. People who barely knew her brought contributions: a poem that had inspired Gülistan; a drawing a child in the courtyard had painted; a short note from a teacher praising her curiosity. From the fragments, a small archive emerged—handwritten, digital, living. It was no replacement for answers, but it was a bulwark against forgetting.

The family embraced the work. The mother read the texts, her eyes moist, smiling sometimes as if she found a piece of her daughter in the words. The father helped sort the photos, his hands steady and precise, as they once were in the workshop. The siblings pasted pictures into albums, laughing

at anecdotes and weeping over the gaps. Remembering became daily labor, both a duty and a solace.

"Sometimes I think we are building a monument of paper," the mother said one evening as they sat together at the table. "But paper is better than silence."

"Paper breathes," Jinda replied. "It carries voices forward."

The initiative reached beyond the personal. The group organized readings, small events where people recited Gülistan's texts and shared their own memories. The gatherings were simple: a chair, a microphone, a glass of water. But the impact was profound. Strangers came, sat, listened, and sometimes they too shared something—an observation, a smile, a moment previously unnoticed. The city began to inscribe Gülistan into its daily life, not as a headline, but as part of the collective memory.

"Remembering is work," a woman said after a reading. "It takes time and courage."

"And it is justice in small doses," a man added. "Because it gives weight to a life."

The legal and police procedures continued, often invisible to the public. There was progress, setbacks, and quiet days when nothing new was reported. The family learned to live with these rhythms: hope, scrutiny, waiting. They demanded transparency and remained tenacious, yet they also gave room for the work that required time.

"We have to find a balance," the father said once. "Between pushing and trusting the process."

"Balance is hard," Jinda replied. "But we are trying."

The friends helped keep the public alert without overwhelming the family. They organized vigils, but also quiet places of reflection. They spoke with journalists, set boundaries, and explained what could be shared and what could not. It was a tightrope walk: the need to apply pressure versus the desire to protect the dignity of the missing.

"We say her name aloud," Sarya often said. "Not just as a demand, but as a promise."

"So that it doesn't sink into the flood of news," Jinda added. "So that it remains."

Slowly, the city changed. Some gazes softened; some doors stayed open. People who had previously just walked by now stopped, read flyers, and asked questions. In schools, conversations were held about responsibility and solidarity; in cafés, small slips of paper with her name hung on the walls; in the bookstore, the booklet of Gülistan’s writings lay on the counter. Memory became part of the everyday—not as a burden, but as an obligation.

There was resistance, too. Some wanted things to be forgotten quickly so that life could go on as "normal." Others feared that the attention might stir political waves they did not want. These tensions were real; they showed how differently people handle loss and uncertainty. But the majority remained: people who brought candles, who reached out their hands, who listened.

"Not everyone will stay," the mother said once. "But those who do are enough."

"Enough to carry a story," Jinda replied.

The months turned into years. The search shifted its form: from the acute hunt for traces to a permanent demand for clarity and prevention. The initiative transformed into a small organization that supported families experiencing similar fates. They offered counseling, gathered resources, and connected people. Personal pain became collective action.

"We didn't want to become activists," Sarya said in an interview. "We wanted a friend back."

"But sometimes grief becomes a mission," Jinda added. "And from missions, things arise that are greater than ourselves."

On a quiet evening, years later, several of the friends met by the river. The wind was mild, and the city lights shimmered in the water. They sat on the bench, placing a small volume between them—the booklet of Gülistan's writings—and read softly. The words sounded different than before: not just as testimonies of loss, but as the tracks of a life that continued to resonate.

"She wrote: 'Places store what we forget,'" Jinda said, tracing a line with her finger. "Perhaps she was right."

"So we visited the places," Sarya replied. "And we gathered the voices."

The mother was not in the city as often; she stayed longer in Amed, tending to the farm and planting a tree, as they had once promised. The father continued to work in the shop, his hands steady, his steps measured. The siblings grew up, finding ways to live the life that remained to them. The family learned that grief is not a state of being, but a companion that changes when shared with others.

"We don't have all the answers," the mother said one day as they sat together. "But we have each other."

"And that is much," Jinda said. "More than we would have thought in the beginning."

The aftermath was not an end; it was a carrying forward. It demanded remembrance, vigilance, and the willingness to ask questions even when answers were elusive. It demanded that names not wither into headlines, but remain stories that shape people. And it showed that from personal pain, collective responsibility can grow.

At the river's edge, where the water embraced the city, people laid flowers, read poems, and spoke names. Sometimes strangers came, sat down, listened, and left with a feeling that was hard to name: compassion, perhaps, or the realization that memory is work that belongs to everyone.

"We have not forgotten you," Jinda whispered into the wind one evening.

"We carry you on," Sarya answered, and the words were taken up by the river, carried away, passed along—not as a final message, but as a promise that remains.

13 — The Years of Shadows

Gülistan was twenty-one years old, a second-semester student of child development at Munzur University in Dersim. But the story did not begin on that winter morning when she vanished. It began much earlier, in a moment that cannot be dated, because it was not an event but an attitude. An attitude that came from afar—from the long corridors of the capital, from offices where maps hung on which Dersim appeared not as a home, but as an administrative district.

When the new governor arrived in the city, he wore this attitude like an invisible cloak. He was a man from Ankara, a Sunni, a representative of a state that had not understood these mountains for decades and perhaps did not want to. For him, Dersim was an assignment, not a place. A space to be ordered, not one that breathed.

But his son moved differently. He did not see the city through his father's eyes. He saw the hills huddling together like sleeping animals. He saw the river, warm in summer and black in winter. And he saw her—the young woman, a follower of *Raa Heq*, whose world was built of songs sung in circles, of stories not written but passed down, of a spirituality that lived not in mosques, but in hearts.

Between them, something arose that no one had planned. A proximity that was not loud or defiant, but quiet. A proximity that, in a city like this, always meant more than just a conversation. And eventually, in a moment that would later seem like a point of destiny, this closeness became a secret larger than them both: a pregnancy.

When she told him, the air changed. Not between them—but above them. Something invisible tightened over the city, a pressure that did not come from the people, but from the power that stood over them. For the boy's father, this connection was an error that could not exist. Not because of the two young people, but because of everything they embodied: the possibility that two worlds could touch that were never meant for each other.

She was a follower of *Raa Heq*, born in the wide plains of Amed and made at home in the mountains of Dersim—a daughter of that ancient community that had preserved its

spirituality, its language, and its wounds across centuries. He was Sunni, the son of a man seen in this city not as a neighbor, but as the representative of an order that decided things over people's heads.

To the Turkish governor, she was not just a Kurd and a student. She was a symbol. A risk. A boundary that was not to be crossed.

What happened next is a room made of shadows. Some say there was an argument. Others speak of threats, of fear, of a moment when something broke that should never have broken. And still others remain silent—not out of indifference, but out of fear of a truth larger than a single fate.

Then came that morning in January 2020 when she disappeared. The city held its breath. The river was silent. The mountains were silent. And the authorities declared, almost reflexively, that it might have been a voluntary disappearance. Perhaps a jump. Perhaps a decision.

But her family disagreed. Tirelessly. Unwaveringly. They knew their daughter. They knew her voice, her dreams, her fears. They knew she had not simply walked away.

The years passed. The files grew. The explanations from the authorities remained thin, brittle, incomplete. But the voices that were quiet at first grew louder. New witness statements emerged. Digital traces were re-evaluated. Gendarmerie reports suggested that something had occurred that did not fit the initial version of the story.

At the end of 2025 and the beginning of 2026, everything changed. The prosecutor's office expanded the investigation,

ordering surveillance in several provinces and relying on the analyses of a specialized investigative team. In the spring, large-scale operations took place. Thirteen people were detained. Among them was the governor's son—a step that, for the first time, elevated the long-circulating allegations of violence and cover-up into the realm of official investigation.

Within the files were statements speaking of detention, threats, sexualized violence, and killing. Others spoke of deleted data, vanished recordings, and of state powers allegedly used to obscure traces. None of this was proven—yet all of it had to be examined. The investigators noted that these statements were not to be taken as facts, but as leads requiring thorough verification.

The main suspect denied any connection to the young woman. He stated he had never known her and described the allegations as grave fabrications. Nevertheless, the prosecutor's office ordered pre-trial detention—not as a verdict, but as a precautionary measure in light of the multitude of suspicions accumulated over the years.

Thus, a picture emerged that was simultaneously clear and obscured: a family searching for answers for years; suspects denying all guilt; a legal process slowly working its way through layers of contradiction, silence, and potential manipulation. To this day, it remains unresolved what happened in those hours, how the young woman disappeared, whether she was killed, whether an assault occurred, or whether state actors influenced the investigation.

In a country where there are not even current statistics on missing children—where the last published figure from 2008 to 2016 cites 104,531 disappeared children—the disappear-

ance of a single girl was just another number. But for the people here, she was no entry on a list. She was a heartbeat that had fallen silent. A light that someone had extinguished.

The city carries her absence like a...

...scar. And sometimes, when the wind brushes across the river, it seems as if it whispers her name—not loudly, not clearly, but in a way that makes one feel something unfinished lingers in the air.

Perhaps that is the true border no one could cross: not the one between faiths, nor the one between state and region, but the one between what has happened and what one is not permitted to say aloud.

Epilogue

In the end, the city remained still. Not because it wished to forget, but because it knew that certain truths live on only in silence. The years had left their marks—in the files, in the faces, in the mountains that had seen everything and yet betrayed nothing.

The young woman from Amed had long since become a part of this landscape. Not physically, not tangibly, but in a way deeper than any trace one could have found. She was in the voices of the people who no longer spoke her name aloud, yet thought of her in every sentence. She was in the songs sung within houses when the doors were closed. She was in the eyes of her mother, who woke every morning as if the day might bring an answer that never came.

The man from Ankara, sent to these mountains as governor, had long since left the city. But the attitude he had brought with him remained behind like a shadow—a shadow that had spread over the years, over the investigations, over the rumors, over the fear. His son had been but a part of this story, a crossroads where two worlds touched that were never meant for one another.

And she, the young woman, had paid the price.

The investigation moved on, like a wheel turning slowly but inexorably. Thirteen arrests, contradictory statements, deleted leads, vanished images—a mosaic of fragments that no one could assemble. The prosecutor spoke of suspicion, of clues that had to be examined. The family spoke of truth. The city spoke no more.

Sometimes, when the wind rose from the river and touched the hills, it seemed to carry something with it—not her name, not her voice, but something deeper. A memory. A trace. A remnant of warmth that refuses to disappear.

Perhaps that is all that remains:
not the answer, not justice, not the truth,
but the refusal to let go.

And perhaps that is enough to carry the story forward—
from mouth to mouth, from heart to heart,
until one day, someone finds the courage to speak
what has lain in the shadows all these years.

Afterword

After six years shrouded in mist, the darkness that had gathered around Gülistan's disappearance began to stir once more. For years, the city had used its own silence like a curtain; shadows drifting through the corridors, from the prefecture to the ministry, had cast a heavy shroud over the truth. Evidence had changed its course, records had been erased, and onto the cold surface of the dam, the false breath of a staged suicide had been laid; between whispers, photographs, and veiled instructions, the voice of the young woman had been almost entirely stifled.

But now, there is a step that breaks through this heavy silence: the female prosecutor transferred to Dersim has reopened the file, allowing a fine sliver of light to fall into the dark. With her presence, the locked doors of the state began to open, and names that had not been touched for years were spoken once again. The arrest of the governor and the sudden resurgence of media attention allowed a pulse to be felt—a pulse the city believed it had long since lost.

This new movement serves as a reminder that this is not merely a missing person's case, but a deeply entangled political story that has been kept in the shadows for years. It remains uncertain which rooms, which faces, which old scores the investigation will touch. Yet, for the first time, the city waits in silence to see where this fine beam of light will lead—much like one waits for the return of a voice once thought lost forever.

Gülistan, *and the thousands like her who have disappeared, will live on in the heart of every person of honor. May your light multiply within the universe, Gülistan… May your path be open in infinity...*

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