

Rojîn & Zerya

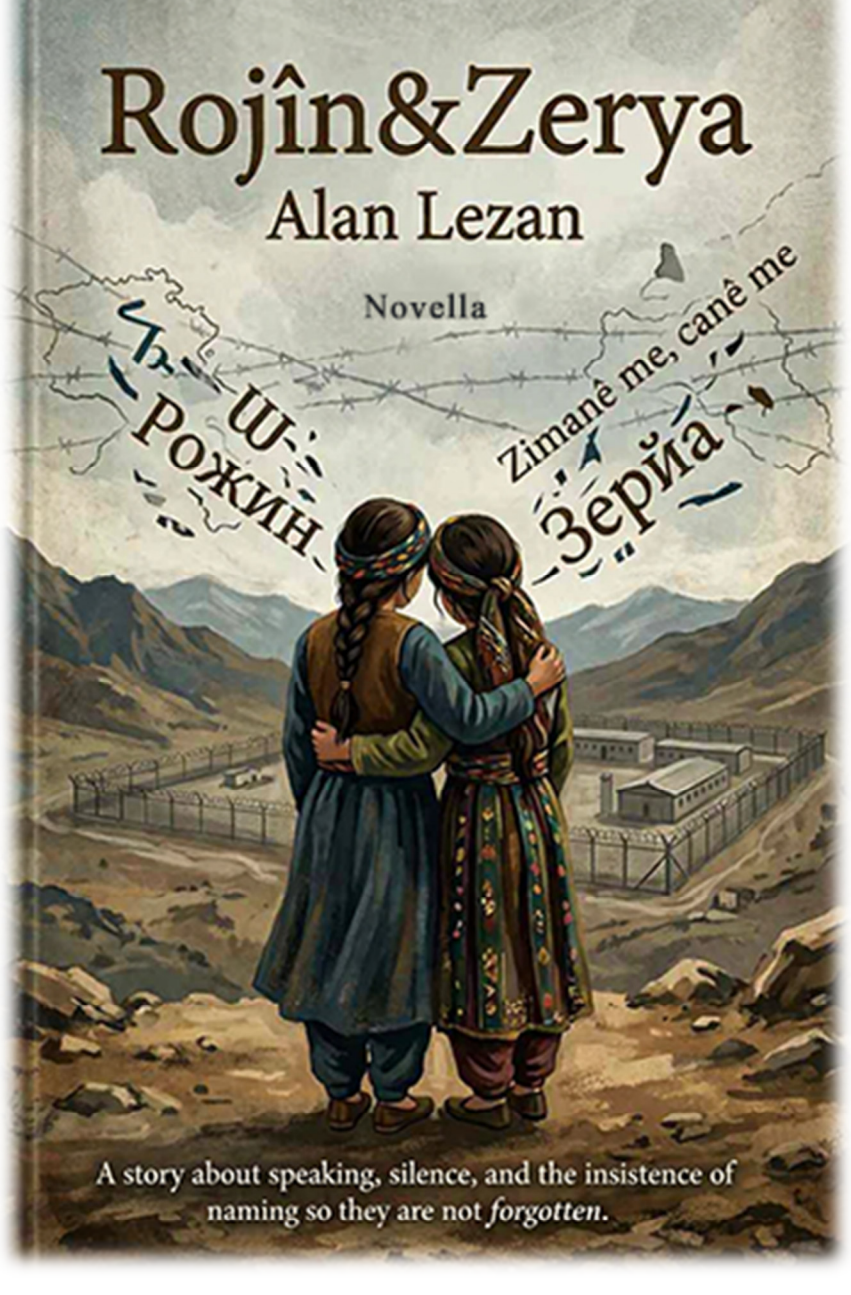
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Novella

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Zimanê me, canê me

Зеря



A story about speaking, silence, and the insistence of naming so they are not forgotten.

Prolog

The morning the language vanished was not a single moment, but a slow flickering out: voices that once leaned against one another grew faint, names slipped into the crevices of houses, and songs remained hidden in the pockets of women. In the villages, words hung from branches like unripe fruit—visible, yet out of reach—and whoever dared to pluck them risked that the hand which asked would not understand the hand that answered.

Rojîn and Zerya were but children when the men in dusty coats arrived. They knew the mountains, the springs, and the songs that marked the paths; they knew the names of the trees and the sequence of the stars. It was not just their freedom that was taken; they were commanded to reshape their voices, to force the melody of their origin into a foreign key. The prohibition was not merely a law—it was a blade cutting through families, a shadow bolting the doors.

This book is no ledger of protocols; it is a woven basket of voices. It gathers songs, letters, marginalia, and the quiet testimonies of those who stayed and those who went away. It tells of children in boarding schools, of wagons rolling into the distance, of maps that shifted, and of women who preserved names in their kitchens like seeds. It is a search for what no longer appears on official lists, and simultaneously, an attempt to make the lost voices audible once more.

In the end, there remains the simple act of naming: to speak a name, to strike up a song, to pass on a memory. Here, this is both resistance and reconciliation. When you open this book,

take the names with you; sing the lines softly; keep the maps open. For as long as people speak the names, they are not entirely lost.

Ez ji te re dibêjim — navên me ne mirin...
I say it to you — our names are not dead...

1 — Childhood and the Taking

The morning arrived like a breath that both woke the village and cut off its air. Mist clung to the terraces, the goats called out, and the women tied the last loaves of bread into linen cloths. Rojîn sat on the threshold of the house, her fingers still dusty with flour, watching the sun rise over the barren hills—a pale disc that only half-pronounced the names of the mountains. Zerya played with a shard of glass that sparkled in the light like a miniature sea. They laughed because they knew how to laugh when the world was still whole.

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Then came the horses. First a single hoofbeat, then two, then voices that did not belong to the voices of the village. Soldiers in dusty coats, their faces hard as stone, dismounted. An officer stepped forward, boots crunching on the gravel. He spoke Turkish, slow and loud, as if speaking to an animal. Their mother pulled the children close, her hands draped like nets around their shoulders. She whispered names that sounded like seeds: *Rojîn, Zerya, Miran, Gul*. The names were a shield, a small incantation against what was to come.

“You must learn Turkish,” the officer said. His voice was a command, but also an instruction that reordered the world. No one in the village answered in Turkish. Their mother nodded, not because she agreed, but because she knew that nodding is sometimes less dangerous than silence. The

children were loaded onto wagons; the blankets smelled of smoke and horse. Rojîn squeezed Zerya's hand so hard it ached. "If you forget my song," she whispered, "sing it in your head." Zerya nodded, and within her remained the sea, a silent ocean carried by her name.

The boarding school was a house of high windows and doors that seemed always closed. The walls were white, but the paint was old and crumbling like the stories one was no longer allowed to tell. A sign hung at the gate proclaiming something in large letters; the children could not read the words, but they felt the meaning like a cold wind. The headmistress, a woman with a severe jaw, received them with a look that promised both kindness and rigor. "Turkish is spoken here," she said. "Those who do not speak will learn."

The daily routine was clockwork. Waking, washing, roll call, lessons, labor, sleep. Turkish was not just a language; it was a law written into the timetable. The children learned vocabulary like soldiers drill: *House, Water, Bread*. The teachers clapped their hands when a word fell correctly. If someone murmured a Kurdish word in their sleep, they were made to stand in the corner until their knees trembled. Rojîn and Zerya invented codes: a glance, a finger to the lip, a play with their hair. During breaks, they secretly whispered words that were like small fires, passing them through the rows like forbidden letters.

On the third day, a man from the village came—a relative whose eyes moved too quickly. He brought news that sounded like shrapnel: letters that never arrived; names that vanished from lists; rumors of men lying by the roadsides because they had not understood the language. No one spoke of it aloud. The headmistress said only: "Rumors are

dangerous.” But the children listened. They heard of an old man stopped on the road because he did not understand Turkish; he had been questioned, and when he did not answer, something terrible had happened. The story remained incomplete, like a picture someone had torn apart.

At night, when the lanterns flickered and the others slept, Rojîn and Zerya sat on the floor of their chamber. Zerya pulled out a cloth that smelled of hay and softly sang a song their mother had taught her. The melody was simple, but it carried names and places that were like maps: *Peri, Hozat, the spring behind the stone*. Rojîn leaned her head against Zerya’s shoulder and listened, as if she were putting the world back together. The songs were dangerous, but they were also sustenance.

An excerpt from a file entry, which a child had secretly scribbled into the margin of a schoolbook in a jagged hand, read: “*Measures for those who know no Turkish. Learning the language is mandatory.*” The words were not fully understood, but they hung like a shadow over the house. The children knew that language was not just words; language was now power, and power could take a life.

“...and the mountains, still and inscrutable as closed books, looked as if they had kept all the answers for themselves.” Rojîn traced lines with her finger in the fogged-up windowpanes, and Zerya followed them with her eyes as if reading maps. “We will find our way back,” Rojîn said, not as a promise, but as a seed one places in the earth. Zerya nodded, and the sea within her answered with a low, unshakable murmur.

The taking had begun, but the story was far from over. In the years to come, names would be lost, maps would shift, and the children would learn that speaking is sometimes more dangerous than silence. Yet in that moment, while the world still smelled of flour and hay, two sisters held each other tight and carried the language forward like a hidden fire.

2 — Boarding School Days

The day at the boarding school was like a clockwork mechanism, forcing the children into a new era. In the morning, the tolling of the bell tore them from sleep; beds were made, blankets smoothed flat, as if it were an order intended to smooth thought itself. During washing, they stood in rows, the water cold, their hands hurried. The overseers moved like shadows between the beds, their voices clipped, precise, devoid of tenderness. Language here was not merely a means of communication; it was discipline, measure, and weapon.

In class, the children sat on hard benches, notebooks open, pencils ready. Turkish was taught like a new prayer: first the sounds, then the words, then the sentences, until the tongue grew accustomed to the foreign mold. The teachers praised when a word fell clean, and punished if a Kurdish whisper was caught. Rojîn watched the teacher's lips, searching them for the melody that Turkish was supposed to carry, and noticed how her own heart found a small piece of relief with every correct sound. Zerya, on the other hand, gathered words like seashells; she laid them in rows within her mind and organized them by sound, not by meaning.

Recess was a different realm. In the courtyard, among the linden trees, the children played games they had invented to avoid speaking. A glance meant "Watch out," a finger to the lip meant "Silence." But sometimes the necessity of the hidden broke through: a secret word, a short verse, a name that fell like a stone into water, sending out ripples. These small rebellions were risky and precious all at once. Once, as Rojîn and Zerya hummed an old song, an overseer stopped, her eyes sharp as needles. She did not scold; she only listened, and the listening was punishment enough.

Work was part of the daily schedule. The girls helped in the kitchen, peeling potatoes, kneading dough, carrying water. Their hands learned to do things that were not asked; their hands learned to remember when their mouths had to remain silent. In the kitchen, a cook who came from a village herself sometimes told stories in broken Turkish, and the children listened as if to forbidden fruit. The cook was careful; she knew the rules, but she also knew the gaps between them. Once, when she thought no one was listening, she murmured a short word—*Stimme*—and the air in the room changed. For a moment, they were all children again, not pupils.

In the evening, as the lamps were dimmed and voices grew lower, the examinations came. Not just the written ones in notebooks, but the invisible ones: Who could speak Turkish during recess without it seeming like a performance? Who could find the right form in a conversation with an overseer without betraying their own voice? These examinations were daily trials of the self. Zerya learned to lower her eyes when questions came; Rojîn learned to ask questions that required no answers, only bought time.

Sometimes strangers came to the house: officials carrying lists of names, men in uniform making notes. They spoke of “education” and “integration,” of “measures” that were deemed necessary. To the ears of the children, the words sounded like cold promises. Once, a boy was called from another department because his relatives were supposed to collect him; he walked away without looking back and did not return. The silence he left behind was heavier than any punishment. The children learned that absence could be a form of violence.

In the nights, when the doors were bolted and only the breathing of the sleepers filled the room, a few met in secret. They sat on the floor, knees pulled to their chests, and whispered names that were like maps: *Peri, Hozat, the spring behind the stone*. Zerya would sing then, softly, her melody spanning a bridge to the homeland. The songs were short, often just a few bars, but they were enough to keep the memory warm. Rojîn secretly wrote words in the margins of her notebook—words she was not allowed to speak aloud—and folded the pages so that no one could see them.

The headmistress of the boarding school was a woman who believed in the good, but in a good that was hard and unyielding. She spoke of progress, of the future, of a nation that needed one language to hold it together. Yet her eyes betrayed that she knew the cost. Sometimes, when she was alone, she stood at the window and stared into the mountains, as if searching for something she could not name. Once, when Rojîn saw her while passing by, the headmistress whispered: “Sometimes I wonder if we are taking too much.” Then she shook her head, as if to brush the question away, and walked on.

So the days passed: orderly, strict, shot through with small escapes. The children learned to live in two languages—one spoken aloud, and one kept in secret. The language that was forbidden became a treasure carried in the breast. And while the world changed outside, inside the house the girls formed plans that were quiet and persistent: ways to find the path back, to collect names, to draw maps. For even in the strictest clockwork, there remained time for that which could not be counted: memory, hope, the quiet promise not to forget one another.

3 — The Examination of Language

The morning the examination took place was clear and cold; the children's breath hung like small mists over the courtyard. The ranks had been drawn tighter, the benches polished, the blackboards freshly wiped—as if cleanliness could shroud the truth. The headmistress stepped forward, hands folded, speaking in a tone that brooked no dissent: “*Today, there is an examination.*” The words fell like a curtain.

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The examination was simple in its form: questions, answers, a judgment rendered in seconds. The children were called forward individually to face the teacher, heard a question in Turkish, and had to respond. “*What is your name?*” — “*Where do you live?*” — “*How many siblings do you have?*” The questions were harmless, but the consequences were not. Anyone who faltered, who hesitated, who slipped back into their own language, was marked; a mark meant detention, punishment, sometimes vanishing from the group.

Rojîn watched the faces of her friends as they stepped forward one by one. Some spoke with a confidence they did

not feel; others stammered, their tongues knotted like thread that refused to unravel. When it was Zerya's turn, she stepped forward, hands behind her back, eyes fixed on the floor. The question came, sharp and clear: "Where were you born?" Zerya answered in Turkish, but the words came like pebbles, not like bread. The teacher nodded, but her gaze remained cool.

During the break, a rumor spread like oil: a man from a neighboring village had been stopped on the road; he had been questioned, and because he did not answer, he had been shot. The children heard the story; the details blurred, but the essence remained: language was now a test, and failure could be fatal. No one spoke the word *shot* aloud; it was as if saying it would summon the deed. Instead, they said, "He is gone"—and looked at their hands.

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The examination was not just an instrument of control; it was a mechanism that severed identity. In the school notebooks were lists of vocabulary, and beside them, small drawings: a house, a water jug, a loaf of bread. Under one picture, a child had secretly jotted a word in Kurdish script, and when the teacher found the notebook, the child was stood before the class. The punishment was not merely physical; it was humiliation. They forced the children to say the Kurdish word aloud and laughed when the pronunciation was wrong. Laughter became a weapon.

An older boy, who came from a remote valley, knew hardly any Turkish. When he stepped forward, he stuttered, searching for a word that would not come. The teacher repeated the question, louder, sharper. The boy remained silent. An overseer stepped forward, took him by the arm, and led him out. The door clicked shut. The children heard

footsteps, then silence. Later, the adults said he had been “resettled.” The children knew that *resettled* was a word one did not question; it could mean many things.

In a corner of the dining hall, the cook sat sewing an old cloth. She had eyes that had seen too much, and when she spoke, her voice was a whisper that cut like a knife. “They do not ask so that you may learn,” she once told Rojîn as the girl peeled potatoes. “They ask to test who we are.” Rojîn set the potato aside and looked at her. The cook’s words were simple, but they opened a door through which a cold wind blew.

The examinations continued in the weeks that followed, but the children learned to develop strategies. They practiced answers; they memorized sentences like prayers. They invented small signs to help warn one another: a scratch at the throat meant “Careful, a stranger approaches,” a double blink meant “Do not speak.” These codes were more than protection; they were a net that held the community together. 11

Yet there were moments when the net tore. One evening, as the wind whistled through the cracks, a messenger arrived with a list. Names were read aloud, and at every name, the air caught. Some children were taken away; others remained. Among those taken was a girl Rojîn knew—she had always laughed loudly, as if laughter were a crime. She left without a goodbye, her eyes wide with fear. The door closed, and the silence she left behind was like a hole in the ground.

In the margin of a notebook, in a jagged hand, a child jotted down a sentence heard somewhere: “For those who cannot speak Turkish, measures will be taken.” The words were bureaucratic, but they carried a weight that constricted the

heart. The children read the line like an oracle; they knew that behind the word “measures” lurked something that could mean not only punishment, but deportation, loss, death.

In that time, Rojîn learned that courage is not always loud. Courage could mean keeping a song in one's head, whispering a name when no one was listening, or reaching out a hand to a friend when the world grew cold. Zerya learned that language consists not only of words, but of melodies one can carry within. And as the examinations went on, the certainty grew in both that what one was forbidden to speak became all the more precious.

Rojîn sits on the steps of the boarding school, hands clasped around her knees, looking into the distance. The mountains are dark, the stars sharp. She thinks of the song her mother sang to her, of the spring behind the stone, of names that are like seeds. She whispers a word, just for herself, and the word lingers in the air like a promise: *We will remember.*

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4 — Letters That Never Arrive

The mail was a promise that was often left unkept. In the first months at the boarding school, writing became a secret art. Rojîn learned how to fold a letter so it looked like an inconspicuous scrap of paper; Zerya learned how to choose words that would not betray where she came from. They wrote to their mother, to their brothers, to names that sounded like anchors. The letters began with simple sentences: “We are healthy. We are learning. Tell the neighbors that we sing.” Then they became more cautious, using signs only the family understood—a dot in a certain place, a small cross that meant: *All is not well.*

Censorship was invisible yet omnipresent. Letters were opened, read, cut apart. Sometimes answers came back, but the pages were blank where names should have been, or entire paragraphs were missing. Once, Rojîn received a letter where only one sentence remained: “Do not come.” The ink was smeared, as if someone had washed the words away with cold water. The children learned to read between the lines; they learned that silence could also be a message.

There were rumors of transports to Elazığ and Diyarbakır, of camps where names vanished from lists. The maps the girls drew in secret were full of question marks. A relative who visited once brought news that felt like a splinter: “They have taken some families away. Some letters never arrived.” The headmistress spoke of “redistribution” and “security measures”; the words rang in the children’s ears like thin glass. No one explained where the people went, only that they went away. 13

In the school notebooks, the girls sometimes found slips of paper not intended for them: lists of names, handwritten notes, a stamp with a date. One such slip lay on the kitchen table one morning; the cook secretly slid it toward Rojîn. Upon it, in terse, bureaucratic language, was written something like: “Transport list — Destination: Elazığ. Forwarding to military post.” The cook only whispered: “Keep this safe.” Rojîn folded the slip and tucked it into her shirt, as if it were a heart.

Some letters arrived late, others not at all. A boy from another department waited years for an answer; when an envelope finally arrived, the handwriting was strange, the words brief: “We could not stay. Forgive us.” Uncertainty gnawed at the days. The children invented rituals to cope

with the waiting: they placed stones on the windowsill, counted the moons, wrote names in the margins of their notebooks so they would not fade. The letters that never arrived became shadows lurking behind the doors.

There were also letters that returned, marked “Addressee Unknown” or “Departed.” These returns were like small sentences. Once, Zerya opened an envelope containing nothing but a piece of cloth—a fragment of her mother’s towel. The silence that followed was louder than any scream. The girls held the cloth like a reliquary, feeling the memory of home vibrate in their hands.

Amid the personal messages, official notices appeared with increasing frequency, speaking in sterile tones of “language promotion measures” and “resettlement programs.” A fictional file extract, which Rojîn secretly transcribed, read: *“Instruction: Children from regions with non-Turkish mother tongues are to be transferred to state institutions; repatriation only upon authorization.”* The words were cold, yet they explained so much: why letters faltered, why names vanished from lists, why maps remained incomplete. 14

Despite everything, letters remained an act of hope. Whenever an envelope arrived, the children gathered as if for a feast. They read the lines, pressed the words to their chests, and passed them on as if they were bread. Sometimes they were only tiny messages: “The apple tree is bearing fruit.” — yet the image was enough to nourish the memory. Rojîn and Zerya gathered these fragments like seeds; they tucked them into the pockets of their dresses and carried them through the years.

Rojîn sits at the window again, an envelope in her hand, empty save for a single sentence that lies like a stone in water: “We have not forgotten you.” She folds the letter, places it in her apron pocket, and stands. Outside, the air is clear; the mountains are like distant, closed books. She takes Zerya’s hand, and together they walk into the courtyard where children play, whisper, and hope—and where the letters that never arrive live on as quiet, unyielding promises.

5 — Attempted Escape

The night was black as spilled cloth; only the moon cut a narrow path across the courtyard. The shutters of the boarding school stood half-open, and through the cracks, the chatter of the guards seeped in like distant water. In this darkness, everything seemed possible and impossible at once. Plans grew like mushrooms on damp walls: secret, swift, and yet fragile.

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Rojîn had drawn the map that resembled no other map—lines that made sense only to those who knew the names of the springs. She had counted the paths, the hours, the steps, the pauses. Zerya knew the songs to sing to dampen the fear; she had hidden the melodies in her dress pocket—songs stored in her mind like provisions. Together with three other children—Miran, Gul, and a quiet boy named Hêvî—they planned to vanish into the night before the morning watch opened the gates.

The plan was simple: on the second night after the full moon, when the guards were tired and the dogs less alert, they would scale the latrine wall, take the field path, and navigate by the old stone bridges. No one spoke of returning. No one

spoke of what they were leaving behind. The silence before departure was thicker than any embrace.

When the hour came, they crept from their beds, blankets draped over their shoulders like shadows. The corridors smelled of soap and cold metal. Once, Rojîn paused, her hand on the doorframe, listening to the soft breathing of the sleeping children. She thought of her mother, of hands shaping bread, of the towel she had once secretly inhaled. Then, she stepped out.

The wall was lower than memory had held it, and higher than fear allowed. Miran climbed first, his fingers seeking purchase in the rough surface. Gul followed, then Zerya. When Zerya reached the top, she turned and looked at Rojîn; for a moment, their gazes met like two boats briefly touching. Then they leapt down and ran.

16

The path was colder than expected. The fields smelled of earth, the brooks murmured names they knew. They moved like shadows chasing themselves. But escape is never just a path; it is a web of decisions, and somewhere in the web, betrayal or misfortune lurks. A dog began to bark, far away, and the footsteps of the guards grew louder. The children stopped, pressing themselves against a hedge, as the world seemed to hold its breath.

A beam of light cut through the dark—a lantern light drawing closer. Voices that did not belong to the children asked something in Turkish. The group froze. Miran whispered a word no one understood, and Zerya laid a hand on his arm. The voices drew nearer, and suddenly there was a sound like a tear: a cry, a hoofbeat, the snapping of twigs. Someone had seen them.

The pursuit was short and brutal. An overseer stepped from the shadows, his uniform a dark cloak, followed by men with sticks. Hands gripped and yanked, and in the chaos, Rojîn lost Zerya. A shove, a lurch, and Zerya was torn away toward a path leading to the village. Rojîn called out, but her cry was drowned by the voices. She watched Zerya vanish into the lights, and then there was only the night.

Punishment followed swiftly. The children who were caught were brought back, faces bruised, clothes torn. The headmistress stood at the gate, eyes hard, and spoke not a word. There were no long interrogations; the punishment was exemplary. Miran was made to stand in a corner, Gul had to scrub the kitchen, and Rojîn was given a night in isolation, the walls narrow as a coffin. In the darkness of the cell, she heard the echo of her own heartbeat and the distant baying of a dog. The silence was a trial.

17

By the next morning, Zerya was gone. No one knew where she had been taken. Rumors flew like birds: she had been taken to another boarding school, she had been sent to relatives, she had been “resettled.” Rojîn searched the faces of the overseers for a hint, the lists for a name, the letters for a sign. Nothing. The void Zerya’s departure left behind was like a hole in the body.

The days that followed were marked by a new caution. The children spoke less, their games grew shorter, their gazes sharper. Rojîn carried the guilt like a stone; she wondered if she could have acted differently, if another hiding place, another song, might have saved Zerya. But guilt is often a luxury the world does not permit. Instead, she learned to measure the gaps: the gap in the dormitory, the gap at the table, the gap in the singing.

A few weeks later, a man from the village came, with eyes that saw too much. He brought a message that cut like a knife: Zerya had been taken to a collection point, forwarded toward Elazığ. The words were bureaucratic, but they carried a weight that strangled the heart. Rojîn held the slip of paper, which bore only a stamp and a date, and felt the world shift. The map she had once drawn was now torn.

In the years that followed, the memory of the escape remained like a scar: visible when the light caught it, invisible in the mundane. Rojîn learned to live with the absence; she learned to collect names that were like bridges. Sometimes, when the wind brushed through the linden trees, she thought she heard Zerya's song, a distant note lost in the streets. She gathered these notes like seashells and held them to her chest.

As dusk fell, Rojîn sat again on the wall, hands clasped around her knees, staring toward where Zerya had vanished. The night is quiet, but within it burns a small, persistent light. She whispers a word that sounds like a prayer: *Finding the way*. And somewhere, perhaps in another city, perhaps in another camp, another voice hears the same word and answers with a quiet, unshakable tone.

18

6 — Forced Resettlement and the Camps

Autumn arrived with the scent of wet leaves and metal. Letters that once felt like hope were now warnings; lists of names appeared more frequently, and the men in uniforms seemed less like visitors and more like fate. One morning, while the children were still half-asleep, the signal rang out:

Assemble. The ranks formed faster than usual, voices low, as if afraid the air might betray their words.

They were told it was a “relocation,” a measure for better provision, for the “security of order.” The words rang in their ears like phrases from a foreign book. Wagons rolled up, tarpaulins flapping, and men with stamps in their hands read out names. Rojîn stood in line, hands buried in her pockets, searching for a look that would tell her it was all a mistake. Zerya was not there. Her place was empty, a black hole in the row.

The transports were cold and cramped. People were huddled together, blankets insufficient for all, and the wagons drove for hours over roads that traced through the landscape like veins. Some said they were being taken to Elazığ, others whispered Diyarbakır. On the lists were stamps, dates, notes: “Forwarding to military post,” “Addressee unknown.” The names of places blurred in conversation; in people’s memories, only the sound of wheels and the rattling of doors remained. 19

In the collection points, bureaucracy ruled like a cold wind. Tents, halls, rooms with tables where officials checked papers and applied stamps. Sometimes families were separated—men in one direction, women and children in another. The children who had still been in the boarding school saw faces they knew, and faces they would never see again. An old man sitting in the corner murmured names as if trying to hold the world together with them. The children listened and secretly wrote the names in the margins of their notebooks.

The confusion of places became a daily reality. Some who were brought to Elazığ later recalled streets they believed to be in Diyarbakır; others spoke of both cities in a single breath, as if they were one and the same. The maps they carried in their minds were torn; rivers and mountains shifted in the retelling. This geographical blurring was not merely a consequence of failing memory—it was a result of the violence that distorted spaces and erased names. When a place was no longer safe, it grew hazy in the language of the people.

In a camp near Elazığ, it was said, there were barracks with narrow beds and long rows of tables. The children were registered, their hair shorn, their clothing replaced. Turkish lessons were held, but they were now part of a larger design: discipline, labor, assimilation. Those who did not speak Turkish were placed under special surveillance. In some accounts, collected years later, testimonies emerged of people being stopped on paths and questioned; those who failed to answer suffered punishment. In these stories, the words were spoken with caution, as if touching upon something that could never be fully named.

20

The camps had their own hierarchies. Some overseers were cruel, while others occasionally offered a gesture that recalled humanity—a piece of bread, a gaze that lingered a moment longer. The children learned quickly which words were permitted and which were not. They invented new rituals: a shared tapping on the wall, a song consisting of only two notes, a sign that meant "I remember you." These small acts became bridges between people who were otherwise separated only by fences.

Some families were forwarded, some remained nearby, and some vanished from the lists altogether. Official files spoke of "security measures" and "resettlements," while marginalia noted "actions against non-Turkish-speaking segments of the population." These documents, sterile and bureaucratic, cast a chill over the stories people told. Yet in the oral memories, other details lived on: a name no longer called; an apple tree that suddenly belonged to no one; a house whose door remained forever bolted.

Geographical confusion manifested also in the attempts to return. Those who searched years later often found only ruins or strangers inhabiting the land. Maps once familiar no longer served; paths had changed, villages were depopulated or renamed. Some who returned found survivors—old women who knew the songs, men bearing scars, children carrying new names. Others found only silence and ash.

21

Amidst this upheaval, small acts of resistance endured. In a barrack in Elazığ, a woman secretly sewed a cloth with Kurdish patterns; in the corner of a camp, an old man sang a song that cataloged the names of the mountains. These acts were inconspicuous, yet they were testaments to a memory that could not be entirely extinguished. Language, the people learned, is not just sound; it is a web of names, songs, scents, and gardens—and this web did not tear easily.

Rojîn sits on a low stone outside a collection point, hands cupped around a mug of tea, watching the road lead into the distance. She has letters, notes, and names in her pockets; she has maps that are torn and songs she carries in her head. The world around her has shifted, the places are blurred, but within her remains one clear point: the search. She stands, folds her papers, and walks back into the hall, where voices

count, names are read aloud, and people try to find their bearings in a world that has taken their language—but not yet their memory.

7 — Growing Up in Exile

The years settled over things like dust. Children became young women, their voices deepening, their steps growing sure. Rojîn found work in a city whose name she initially could not bear to pronounce; the streets smelled of coal and oil, the houses stood tight as teeth. She worked in a small workshop where metal was bent and repaired, learning to speak with hands that did not ask of home. The work gave her hours that were counted, and nights where the memory of the village remained like a distant chime.

22

Zerya had gone in a different direction. She had been taken to a collection point, then to another boarding school, and later to a family she did not know. There, she learned to adapt: to change her names, to adopt habits, to mold the language forced upon her. Yet in the nights, when the foreign world grew still, she sang the songs her mother had given her, and the melodies draped around her shoulders like a warm cloak.

Both carried the language like a hidden fire. Rojîn whispered words into the seams of her clothing; Zerya wrote names in the margins of bills and notes. They found ways to nourish memory: Rojîn cooked dishes whose scent summoned childhood; Zerya wove patterns into cloths that no one understood, save for those who knew the designs. These small acts of resistance were modest, but they held the net together.

The cities were full of people bearing names that did not fit their faces. Rojîn learned how to survive in a language without losing herself. She listened to how others spoke and gathered words like provisions. Sometimes, when an old man passed by the workshop and murmured a proverb in broken Kurdish, she would hold her breath and answer in a tone that was little more than a sigh. These brief encounters were like mirrors in which she recognized herself.

Zerya, meanwhile, found another kind of family in exile: women who kept vigil through the night, children who took her in like a sister, and men who knew stories that were not in official files. She learned that belonging is not determined by blood alone; it can arise through songs, through the breaking of bread, through the whispering of a name. In a small house on the edge of a city, she sang a song one evening, and a boy sitting beside her repeated the melody. For a moment, the world was whole again. 23

The search remained. Rojîn gathered lists of names found in the markets; she inquired cautiously after relatives, villages, old paths. Sometimes she stumbled upon people who knew something: a stamp here, a date there, a name surfacing on a list. Bureaucracy was a labyrinth, and the files spoke in a tongue that transformed lives into numbers. A fictional note, which Rojîn once secretly transcribed, read curtly: “Repatriations only upon authorization; addresses incomplete.” The words explained little and closed off much.

Zerya heard of Rojîn only in fragments: a rumor, a name dropped in conversation. She wrote secretly to an address someone had given her and waited for a sign. Letters came rarely, and when they did, they were brief and wary. Once, Zerya received an envelope containing a small piece of

cloth—the same pattern her mother had worn. She held it to her breast and wept, softly, as if guarding a secret.

Both women learned to live with loss without surrendering to it. Rojîn did not marry right away; she wanted first to know if the search held meaning. She built herself a small room where maps hung upon the wall, lines she traced in pencil. Zerya found work in a sewing shop, embroidering patterns no one could read, and during breaks, she told stories of springs and stones that the others heard like fairy tales.

There were moments of proximity and danger. Once, in the workshop, Rojîn was questioned by an official carrying lists of names. He asked about origin, language, relatives. Rojîn answered calmly, choosing words that did not betray what she carried in her heart. The official nodded, stamped something, and moved on. The encounter left a chill that lingered long. She learned that caution is not cowardice, but the art of survival.

Zerya faced a different trial: a child she cared for fell ill, and the doctors demanded papers, names, origin. Zerya searched her memories for documents, for a proof she did not possess. Instead, she found songs she sang to the child until the fever broke. The songs were a medicine that required no stamps.

In those years, small networks also grew. People with similar stories met secretly in kitchens, in backyards, in workshops. They exchanged names, maps, rumors. Sometimes they helped one another write letters; sometimes they hid someone for a night. These networks were fragile, but they were real—an invisible mesh connecting people who would otherwise have been alone.

Rojîn stands in a market, hands in her pockets, and sees a woman wearing a cloth with a familiar pattern. For a moment, time falters. She approaches, touches the cloth, and the woman looks at her—not with the coldness of a stranger, but with the recognition of one who knows the same songs. They do not speak much; words are often too heavy. Instead, they exchange a name, a look, a small piece of fabric. It is not a reunion that heals all wounds, but it is a beginning: a thread connecting two lives separated by years and space.

8 — Attempts to Return

The years had changed the maps. Roads that once led to familiar courtyards now ended at new fences; village paths had become fields tilled by others. As the first who sought to return set their steps toward home, they realized quickly that the homecoming was no straight path, but a labyrinth of names, stamps, and silence.

25

Rojîn began her quest with a list she had gathered over years: names, dates, places, small notes scribbled in the margins—a patchwork quilt of memories. She traveled by train, alighting at stations, inquiring in administrative offices after old records, knocking on doors that were sometimes open, but often barred. The bureaucracy spoke in sterile sentences: “No records available,” “Address incomplete,” “Forwarding not possible.” These sentences were like walls slowly closing in around those who searched.

Sometimes, a single hint led further. A stamp on an old envelope, a name surfacing in an archive, an old man in a café who suddenly paused and named a village Rojîn knew like a heartbeat. These slender threads connected the

scattered points on her map. She followed them, often into dead ends, but sometimes to doors behind which sat people who knew the very same songs.

The confusion of places remained a constant companion. People who had been sent to Elazığ remembered landscapes that others described as Diyarbakır. Names were mixed up, villages renamed, maps redrawn. Rojîn learned to distrust stories that sounded too smooth and to trust the fragments that stuck like splinters in the narratives. She gathered eyewitnesses, noted down voices, compared dates. Sometimes a pattern emerged; often, there remained only the feeling that something vital was missing.

During one return, she found a house whose door stood open and where no one lived. On the hearth lay ash and a half-burned cloth. An apple tree still grew, but its branches were bare. Rojîn sat on the threshold and softly sang a song her mother had taught her. The melody carried names that sounded like seeds, and for a moment, time seemed to stand still. Then a neighbor came, a man with a furrowed brow, and said only: “They are gone.” The words were brief, but they carried an entire history.

Other returnees had more luck. In a village Rojîn found after a long search, an old woman sat on the threshold, weaving. As Rojîn approached and whispered a name, the woman lifted her gaze, and in her eyes stood recognition. It was no grand reunion; it was a slow piecing together of memories: a name, a song, a scent. The woman led Rojîn into a small room, brought out a cloth, and placed it in her hands—the same pattern Rojîn knew from childhood. Tears came, quiet and without great words. Sometimes, that was enough.

The search was not merely physical; it was a struggle against forgetting. Archives were riddled with gaps, files incomplete, and often the official remarks read only: “Addressee unknown” or “Departed.” These phrases veiled destinies. Rojîn met people bearing names that did not fit their faces, children who had taken on new identities, elders who possessed only fragments of their language. Reunion was rarely complete; it was a mosaic of intimacy and estrangement.

Zerya searched in a different way. She collected songs circulating in the cities and inquired in sewing rooms, at markets, in the houses of women. A pattern in the fabric, a verse in a song, an old expression—any of these could be a clue. One day, in a small tailor shop, she heard a melody that made her heart falter. A woman was humming a line Zerya knew from childhood. She stepped closer, spoke the first verse, and the woman paused. It was not an immediate reunion, but it was a beginning: two voices sharing the same melody, two lives touching at a single thread. 27

Not all who searched found answers. Some returned with empty hands, with maps showing only question marks. Uncertainty gnawed at them; they learned to live with not knowing. Others found traces that raised more questions than answers: names on lists pointing to other regions; hints of camps long since dissolved; rumors of people stopped on the road. These fragments became stories told again and again, so that the past would not vanish entirely.

The attempts to return transformed the seekers. Rojîn, who had once set out with a map and a fixed goal, learned that searching can also be a state of being—a constant holding onto names, a gathering of voices, a tending to songs. Zerya

realized that belonging does not always hang upon a place; it can exist in a pattern, in a melody, in a shared piece of bread. Both carried the memory forward, not as a burden alone, but as a duty: to speak the names, to sing the songs, to preserve the stories.

Rojîn sits on a hill, looking down at a village half-veiled in mist. She holds a list in her hand, its corners worn, the writing faded. She folds the list, presses it to her chest, and whispers the names written upon it. The voices of the mountains do not answer, but within her, a quiet resolve takes shape: the search continues. And somewhere, in another city, in another kitchen, a woman sings a song that calls a name—and the world, for a moment, is connected once more.

9 — Encounters with Bureaucracy

28

The record rooms smelled of paper and dust, of ink that had not been stirred for a long time. For Rojîn and the others who searched, these rooms were like temples where one expected answers but often found only new questions. The counters were made of wood; the officials behind glass seemed like sentinels who judged with stamps instead of swords. Bureaucracy was a language that transformed lives into numbers; it could open doors, but it could just as easily bolt them forever.

Rojîn entered with a folder whose edges were frayed. Inside lay slips of paper, lists, letters—fragments of a life torn apart by many hands. She stood in line, waited, observed. The people around her held similar folders; some wept softly, others spoke with a coldness born of too many disappointments. When her turn came, she placed her papers

on the counter. The official took them, flipped through, stamped, and his eyes glided over names, dates, remarks.

“No records available,” he said finally, without making eye contact. The words were a verdict that seemed non-negotiable. Rojîn repeated names, cited villages, described paths, softly sang a song her mother had taught her. The official noted nothing. He spoke of forms, of jurisdictions, of file numbers. His language was precise; it left no room for songs.

Between the official sentences, small, contradictory hints surfaced repeatedly: a stamp on an envelope, a handwritten note in the margin of a document, a date that did not fit. These cracks in the order were often the only traces leading to people. Rojîn learned to read these traces: a stamp could mean someone had been forwarded; a marginal note could point to a collection center; a name appearing twice was a thread to be pulled.

In an archive room, she finally found a ledger whose entries were written in a cramped, sterile hand. The page was half-torn, yet one entry remained legible: “Transfer of children from Region X — Forwarding Elazığ — List attached.” Rojîn photographed the line with trembling hands, as if the image were a proof that no one could stamp away anymore. The ledger was not a promise; it was a clue, a piece of a puzzle yet to be assembled.

Bureaucracy also showed its cruelty in the language of forms. Words like “resettled,” “forwarded,” or “addressee unknown” stood in official records as if they were neutral facts. In the conversations of the people, however, these words became blows: they meant separation, loss, the vanishing of names

from life. Rojîn began to translate the official formulations—not into another language, but into what they truly meant for the people.

Sometimes, a door opened. An official who was older and whose hands shook set a file aside and said softly: “There were cases that were not fully documented. Some lists are fragmentary.” He pointed to a series of names added in pencil. For a moment, the coldness was broken; a human being had interrupted the machine of bureaucracy. Rojîn copied the names, folded the paper, and stowed it away like a treasure.

Yet the encounters with bureaucracy were not just a search for papers; they were also encounters with the people who worked within this system. Some officials were unreachable, others weary, still others helpful in small gestures: a pointer to another office, a telephone number, a name to call. These small assistances were rare, but they existed. Rojîn learned that patience and persistence often achieved more than anger. 30

Parallel to the dealings with authorities, other paths emerged: conversations with former overseers, meetings with women who had worked in collection centers, and the gathering of oral testimonies. These narratives filled the gaps left by the files. An old man remembered a transport whose wagon had been held in the night; a woman named a village that was no longer on any map. These voices were fragmentary, contradictory, but they were alive—and sometimes more vivid than any official note.

A fictional file excerpt, which Rojîn noted in a book, read curtly: “Remark: Repatriations only upon authorization; addresses incomplete; further investigations required.”

The sterile language of the excerpt stood in contrast to the stories Rojîn heard: children growing up in other cities; families who never found their way back together; songs that existed only in the minds of a few survivors. Bureaucracy could record facts, but it could not record the songs, the names, the scents of a home.

In a particularly cold winter, Rojîn visited an office responsible for repatriations. There she met a woman who had herself been separated as a child and had later worked in administration. The woman spoke softly, but with a clarity that surprised Rojîn. “We recorded much back then, but not all was preserved,” she said. “Some lists were destroyed, others lost. But there are names we never forgot.” She handed Rojîn a list with handwritten additions—small, inconspicuous entries that carried hope.

31

The encounters with bureaucracy left their mark. Rojîn gathered copies, noted hints, and spoke with people willing to share their memories. She learned that the truth often lay in the margins of the files: in pencil notes, in stamps, in forgotten envelopes. These margins became her field of work; there she found the threads that led back to human beings.

Rojîn sits in a small café next to the archive, her folder open, pages filled with notes. Outside, rain falls, making the streets glisten. She folds a copy of a file excerpt, places it in the folder, and writes a name in her notebook—a name that might open a door. Bureaucracy remains a labyrinth, but in the hands of those who do not give up, papers become maps. And maps, as she has learned, can show the way—even when the paths are long and arduous.

10 — The Mother's Voice

The years had changed the voices, but not the songs. In a small room with a window overlooking a backyard, Rojîn sat holding an old cloth in her hands. It smelled of smoke and lavender, of days that had been different. On the table lay a bundle of scraps, letters, notes, names—everything she had gathered to fill the voids. Yet what she sought most was not a stamp or a date; it was the voice that had explained the world to her before the world reordered her: the mother's voice.

One afternoon, as the rain drummed softly against the panes, a woman Rojîn hardly knew entered the room. She was old, her hands marked by labor, and in her eyes lay something Rojîn recognized instantly: the same kind of memory that did not exist in files. The woman sat down, pulled out a cloth, and began to sing—not loudly, not for an audience, but like someone rekindling a fire. The melody was simple, but it carried names, places, small stories. Rojîn closed her eyes and heard her mother in that stranger's voice.

32

The mother's voice was no mere repetition of words; it was a weave of images. "The spring behind the stone," the woman sang, and Rojîn saw the water that was cold in summer, heard the splashing that woke the children. "Peri, Hozat, the road with the two oaks"—every word opened a door in memory. The songs were like maps drawn not with lines, but with sounds. They showed paths that no official maps knew.

Rojîn began to write the songs down. She wrote not just the words, but the pauses, the breaths, the slight inflections that turned a melody into a homeland. Sometimes she placed a name beside a line, a note: "sung by Fatma from Village X," "melody similar to song Y." These notes were more than

archival work; they were an attempt to preserve the mother's voice before it lost itself to the world.

Zerya, who lived in another city, heard of these meetings. She came as often as she could, bringing fabrics she had found in markets—cloths with patterns reminiscent of the old looms. When the two sisters were together, the songs merged with the fabrics: a pattern recalled a line, a color a verse. They sewed, they sang, and in these acts lay a resistance that was quiet and enduring.

The mother's voice was not just solace; it was testimony. Within the songs were names missing from official lists, small details no one would have noted in a file: who sat beside whom, which woman shared the bread, which man left in the autumn. These details helped close the gaps. When Rojîn noted a song, she often added a marginalia: "Memory: Neighbor Hasan, apple tree, 1938." Thus, songs became documents, and documents became songs.

33

Sometimes people who knew something came and sat with them. An old teacher, who had once worked at a collection center, spoke of names he had seen on lists but never uttered aloud. A woman who had served as a cook in a camp remembered children who sang secretly at night. These voices complemented the songs; they added facts that anchored the memory. Together, they built a net of voices, stronger than the individual threads.

Yet the mother's voice also carried pain. In some verses lay a tone that recalled not just places, but partings: "He left one morning, hands empty," they sang, and the words conjured images of doors closing, of chairs left vacant. These lines were hard to sing; often voices broke, and the women

remained silent until the stillness found a song that could go on. Grief thus became part of the repertoire, and singing became a practice of remembering.

One evening, as the lamp flickered and the city outside blurred into rain and light, a young woman brought a bundle—letters she had found in an administrative archive. Among them was a name familiar to Rojîn: a note, a stamp, a date. It was not full proof, but it was an anchor. The women laid the letters on the table, sang the lines they knew, and added the new information like beads to a chain. Each find changed the melody slightly; each melody changed the meaning of a find.

The mother's voice thus became the bridge between the official and the lived. In the lines of the songs were clues that completed archival pages; in the files were names that gave weight to the songs. Rojîn understood that her work was not just to search, but to bear witness: to gather the songs, to speak the names, to order the stories, so that memory did not vanish in fragments.

At the end of the day, Rojîn and Zerya sit side by side, hands intertwined, singing a song they both know. The melody is simple, the words repeat, but in every repetition lies a different weight. Outside, the rain has stopped; the city breathes softly. The women in the room stop singing, and for a moment, only the afterglow of the voices remains—a warm echo hanging in the walls.

Rojîn places the cloth on the table, folds the new notes, and writes a name in her book. It is not an end, just another entry in a long list. But in this entry lies something else: the certainty that the mother's voice is not just memory, but an

obligation. Those who gather the songs bear a responsibility; those who speak the names hold the world together. And so they sing on, not just for themselves, but for those whose voices were lost—so they do not fall entirely silent.

11 — Reconciliation and Loss

The years had drawn scars, but they had also opened paths that were previously invisible. Some doors that had long seemed bolted opened slowly, with the creak of old hinges; others remained shut, and behind them lay only silence. For Rojîn and those who searched, reconciliation did not necessarily mean reunion—often it was a quiet process of acknowledgment, a weighing of what was against what still remained possible.

35

It began with small encounters. In a village Rojîn found after a long search, a man sat on the threshold of his house, carving wood. His face was tanned by the sun, his hands rough. When Rojîn spoke his name, he froze, then stood, walked slowly toward her, and took her hand. It was no triumphant reunion; it was a cautious feeling-out, like two people testing if a bridge still holds. They spoke little. Words were often too heavy. Instead, they sat, shared bread, and the silence between them filled with memories that were no longer explainable, yet palpable.

Other meetings were more painful. A woman who had once been Rojîn's neighbor recognized the names Rojîn spoke, but her eyes remained empty. She had new children, new duties, and the past was for her a chapter she had closed in order to keep living. Reconciliation here meant respecting the choice of the other—not as betrayal, but as a survival strategy. Rojîn

learned that seeing someone again does not always bring the healing one hopes for; sometimes it only brings the certainty that life has gone on, with or without you.

There were also moments where official recognition helped. In a small ceremony that was more formality than celebration, names were entered into a register that had long been missing. For some families, this meant a kind of closure: a document confirming that someone had lived, that a name was not just a whisper in memory. These bureaucratic acts were sterile, but for the bereaved, they carried weight. A stamp could not bring back the lost years, but it could make forgetting more difficult.

Yet loss remained omnipresent. Houses that had once been full of voices stood empty or were inhabited by others. Apple trees that had borne fruit had grown wild. Some graves could no longer be found; others were tended by strangers who did not know the names. Rojîn often stood before such places, feeling time settle in layers: the present on top, beneath it the past that could only be unearthed with great effort. 36

In the days of reconciliation, old conflicts also re-emerged. Some who returned demanded property, rights, recognition; others only wanted to be left in peace. The communities that had once belonged together were changed by years of separation. New bonds had formed, old ties loosened. Reconciliation therefore also meant renegotiating, finding compromises, sometimes forgiving—not out of magnanimity, but out of the necessity to live on.

For Rojîn, reconciliation was often an internal process. She learned to accept the gaps without romanticizing them. She gathered names, ordered songs, wrote down what could still

be saved. Some she searched for, she found alive; others she found only as memory in the voices of the elders. A reunion with a brother who had lived in another city was both tender and painful: years of absence had changed words, and yet a single look was enough to confirm the kinship. They spoke for a long time, and in the end, their hands lay in each other's, as if wanting to hold the lost time together.

There was also a reconciliation that did not take place with people, but with places. Rojîn returned to the spring behind the stone, sat upon its bank, and sang softly. The melody was the same as before, but the banks had changed; a fence now ran where a path once wound. She sang nonetheless, and her voice carried names that no one called anymore. The water answered with its ancient rushing, and for a moment, the world seemed whole again.

37

Some stories ended with a quiet peace. One woman, who had searched for years, found in the end only a letter lying in a drawer—a short sentence, an apology, a name. It was not much, but it was enough to close something. Others remained open, like wounds that refused to heal. Rojîn learned to live with both: with that which could be mended, and with that which remained irreparable.

Rojîn sits as she always does on a low wall, hands folded, looking out at a village half-veiled in the evening light. Beside her lies a bundle of notes, names, and songs. She takes out a sheet, folds it, places it in her pocket, and stands. Reconciliation is not a destination one reaches; it is a path one walks—sometimes slowly, sometimes stumbling, often accompanied by loss. Rojîn continues along the way, not because she has all the answers, but because remembering

itself is a form of living. And as she walks, she hums a song that calls the names that have not yet fallen entirely silent.

12 — Age and Testimony

The years had not extinguished the voices; they had only transformed them. Rojîn sat in a small hall whose windows looked out onto a narrow square. The room was filled with people—some knew her, many knew only the names they had found in lists. Upon a table lay her notes, the maps, the song sheets, the scraps with stamps and handwritten remarks. Everything she had gathered was now assembled like a small archive of life.

She had grown older, her hair silvery, her hands marked by labor. Yet when she spoke, her voice was clear; it carried the melody of the years she had endured. Before her sat young people, officials, neighbors, a few women who had once sung with her. Some eyes were moist, others searching; but all were listening. Rojîn did not begin with grand words. She began with a name.

“Miran,” she said, and the syllable settled like a stone in the room. Then she spoke more names, slowly, one after another, as if laying a chain that no one could ever break again. The names were not just words; they were bridges. For every name, she told a small memory: who had sat beside whom, which song had been hummed in the night, which apple tree stood in the courtyard. These details filled the voids left by the files.

Between the names, she read excerpts from the notes she had collected over years: slips with stamps, letters that never

arrived, marginalia from archives. She laid the documents on the table, pointed to the handwritten additions, explained how a stamp referred to a collection center, how a date laid a trail to another place. The bureaucracy that had once seemed so cold became something tangible in her hands—not as a justification, but as proof.

People came who brought answers. A woman who had worked in an archive handed over a list she had found in a ledger; an old man brought a piece of cloth with the pattern Rojîn knew; a young historian had brought copies of documents confirming names. These finds were not complete solutions, but they were threads that made the net denser. Rojîn organized the new information, wrote it into her book, and nodded, as if assembling an invisible puzzle.

Yet bearing witness was not just the reading of names or the showing of papers. It was also the telling of the small things that never appeared in official records: the way her mother cut bread, the whispering before sleep, the songs sung in secret. Rojîn sang some of these songs that afternoon, first softly, then louder, until the voices in the room joined in. The melodies connected those present, turning strangers into a community that carried something together.

A young official, who had been skeptical at first, stood and said that the documents they had gathered should be included in the official archives. It was a small but significant step: recognition made visible not just in words, but in records. For some in the room, it meant a form of justice; for others, it was a beginning, keeping the stories alive in schools, in communities, in books.

Between the official moments, there were quiet encounters. Rojîn was embraced by a woman she hardly knew, and the embrace was more than comfort—it was confirmation. A man who had been separated as a child sat with her, held her hand, and said only: “I searched for your songs.” The words were simple, but they carried the weight of decades.

In the evening, as the sun sank behind the houses and the light grew soft, Rojîn stepped to the window. The city lay quiet, and in the distance, a river shimmered like a ribbon of silver. She thought of Zerya—of the sea her name had carried—and of all the paths they had walked. Some had been followed to their end, others remained open. Yet in all of it, the certainty remained: memory is work, and work requires testimony.

Before the hall emptied, Rojîn asked for one last word. She stood, her hands trembling slightly, and spoke not only to those present but to those who were no longer there. “To name names is to keep them alive,” she said. “To sing is to refuse to forget.”

Then she began to sing—first one line, then a second—and the melody was simple, clear, like a breath.

The others joined in. The words were in Kurdish, and they fell like seeds into the air:

Ez ji te re dibêjim, navên me ne mirin...
I tell it to you, our names are not dead...

The lines repeated, and with each time, the air seemed to grow thicker, as if memory itself were breathing. The melody connected the names with the places, the places with the

people, and the people with the future. It was no triumph, no end; it was an act of persistence.

As the last notes faded, a silence remained that was not empty, but full of what had been said. People stood up, embraced one another, took copies of the lists with them, promised to pass the songs on. Rojîn sat down, laid her hands in her lap, and smiled, tired but content. She knew that not all questions were answered, that not all names could be found. But she also knew that the naming, the singing, the gathering of testimony was a work that would continue—beyond her own life.

Outside, the night sank deeper. In the square before the hall, some women lit small lights, arranging them in a row, and the lights flickered like points on a map. Rojîn watched them, then stood, took her folder, and slowly walked down the steps. Every step was a testimony, every breath a song. And somewhere between the names, the papers, and the melodies, a promise remained: that memory does not remain alone as long as people name it and sing it. 41

Epilogue

The city breathed softly, as if it were a body recovering from old wounds. In the square before the hall, the small lights still flickered; the women had set them in a row, and the shadows of those present fell long across the pavement. Rojîn walked slowly down the steps, folder at her side, songs in her breast. She felt the weight of the years and, at once, the lightness of a promise kept: names spoken, voices preserved, songs passed on.

Zerya had not been at the gathering; her path had led her to another city, to where the sea bore her name. She wrote letters that were rare and sent scraps of fabric that acted like signals. Sometimes messages came, brief and cautious; sometimes only a pattern on a cloth that someone in a sewing room recognized. The sisters had shared a life and yet walked separate paths; the bond between them remained, taut as a stringed instrument that brings forth sound at a touch.

The songs Rojîn had sung that afternoon went on. Young people who had come to listen took the melodies into their neighborhoods, their kitchens, the breakrooms of their labor. A teacher in a small school later read from a copy of the lists Rojîn had compiled; a girl noted names in her book and sang the first line of an old song softly to herself. Memory multiplied not only through archives, but through voices that carried it further.

42

Some names remained undiscoverable. Some doors opened only a crack, others remained bolted. Yet the work that had begun had taken on a momentum of its own: people who once only searched became guardians; the guardians became storytellers; the storytellers found listeners. From individual destinies, a collective memory was born, one that no longer rested in files alone, but in houses, in songs, in the hands of those who pass it on.

In the evening, as the lights went out and the city sank into darkness, Rojîn sat by a window. She folded a sheet bearing names and laid it beside the cloth Zerya had once sent. She thought of the spring behind the stone, of the lindens in the courtyard, of the voices she had heard—her mother's, the cook's, the men's at the collection centers. Memory was no finished work; it was a perpetual act, a daily tending.

Before she turned out the light, she whispered a line she had carried all her life, and the words fell like seeds into the night:

Ez ji te re dibêjim, navên me ne mirin...
I tell it to you, our names are not dead...

The line lingered in the air, not as a triumph, but as an obligation. Memory was work, testimony, and song all at once—and as long as people spoke the names and sang the songs, something of what seemed lost remained alive. Rojîn laid her hand upon the folder, closed her eyes, and heard in the distance a faint echo: somewhere, a voice answering back.