

come true, an answer to my prayers every night for eleven years: “God, please bring my dad home.”

I don’t remember our exact conversation that day. I was in shock and everything was a blur. I was drowning in a sea of emotions. He certainly asked about my mother and sister. Were we all doing well? Was my mom healthy? The latter question, I was told later on, stemmed from an eleven-year-long anxiety: had my mother waited for him or had she remarried and formed another family? His question was a subtle way of eliciting the answer to his tormenting apprehensions. Our meeting went by like a flash, before I could catch on and live its reality. The officer stood up and announced the end of the visit. He had to take my father back to where he was being detained.

After that momentous and privileged meeting, we had the opportunity a couple of times, my mother, my sister and I, to meet with him for short visits, always at Aslan Stepanian’s residence, and my father was always accompanied by the same officer. We were euphoric. A new life, a brighter life was dawning upon us. All of our acquaintances had heard the news and they were all happy and constantly congratulating us. They too were impatient to see the man, the hero who had escaped the graveyard of Siberian exile.

Roozan remembers one day at school when she was sliding down the banister: there at the foot of the stairway stood Khanum Farazmand, the famously strict vice principal, with a ruler in her hand. Roozan knew she was going to get whacked on the hand with that ruler, how many times or which side she didn’t know. When