

# Compilation 2

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# Account 1 - Abbas

*Mehdi Navid*

November 8th, 2017

My acquaintance with Abbas goes back to our commander's tea to which we decided to add a new color with our piss. He was recently settled in the kitchenette and was a new recruit. He was not satisfied and impertinent to anyone who wanted to bother him, so he was punished more than the rest of us, either by the veterans or by the cadre forces and commanders. The kitchenette was exactly in front of the secretariat in which I was working, so we communicated a lot, but we were not buddies.

Military base had a cold atmosphere and you couldn't trust everyone, no matter about what. The important thing was to mind your own business and not meddle. It was enough to make a mistake to lose your daily leave to someone else. Since he was a new recruit and didn't know about the strict and unwritten rules of the military base, Abbas was punished repeatedly. It took him a long time to adapt.

The craziest image I have of him is of a war game for which a couple of other military bases had come to fight in our base. The war game was about urban riots. A group of soldiers was given the role of demonstrators and another group was supposed to oppress the demonstration under the commandship of the cadre forces. We were the spectators of the war game. Near its end, the demonstrators were besieged by the Special Forces in a pincer movement. A tear gas was shot toward the demonstrators, but before finding time to act, one of the demonstrating soldiers kicked it toward the shooter and his commander. The Special Forces didn't have gas masks. They were all trapped in the smoke. At this time Abbas held a wet cloth over his mouth and ran from the spectators' seating area toward the smoke which was escalating each second. He stole the pistol of the Special Forces' commander, who was caught amid the gas, from his belt and went straight to the military base's major general who was watching

like us. Impertinently he said: "This doesn't work sir" and gave the pistol to the general. Abbas was detained for one week and had to carry out one more extra month for his military service.

The night before that morning in which we mixed our piss with the commander's tea, Abbas poured Aragh Sagi<sup>1</sup> from a freezer paper in our cups. He had hid the freezer paper under the car seat of our unit so that no one would find out. We never understood how he did it and what secret deal he had with our driver. At midnight we went to one of our unit rooms which was dark and cold and drank a couple of cups without making any noise. The silence and blackness together with the fear which had got hold of me added an excitement to this event. In the morning he suggested to pour this excitement, which was now in our bladders, into the commander's tea so that he would also take part in our drinking. Our eyes twinkled and we did it.

He called me a year after military service and said he missed me and liked to gather the gang somewhere to meet. I dodged the request at first, but he wouldn't take no for an answer. A couple of the boys came and we gathered in a park. Abbas said he had got married and worked in a taxi firm. He was airing his grievances, just like the military service days. I was listening to his words until I realized the point of all these words and complaints was just one thing: asking me to participate in a work with which we could go from rags to riches just with a little capital. It was one of those pyramid schemes in which you just recruit members and make your own hand and then swindle the money of the people under your hand. Little by little as I understood the story, my hand and foot got numb. His voice was not planning to stop and it went on and on and on to reach that moment when your eyes would twinkle from the paradise he was portraying for you. Inevitably I said something so that I could escape from that dilemma.

Now a few years have passed from than night and I have neither seen Abbas nor heard his voice. But I have kept his number, before for if he called I wouldn't answer, and later because he was a comrade from

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the passed times and memories.

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Aragh Sagi literally means “Dog alcohol”; it is a type of distilled alcoholic beverage in Iran which contains usually at least 65% pure ethanol. The closest equivalent to Aragh Sagi in English is hooch.

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## Account 2- Adel

*Mehdi Navid*

November 11th, 2017

Curly black hair. Black eyes. Kind of swarthy. About the same height as me, but skinnier. He had three interests: Gregory Corso's poetry, Gilles Deleuze's philosophy and weed. Those days he used to pass his life with them. He worked at a bank and had a rental not fancy apartment. We talked when we were smoking weed and it was most about his translation of Corso and the things he wrote about Iranian literature in newspapers. I was supposed to find him a publisher for his translations. They never got published.

Adel married a university student who had come from the province to Tehran. He distanced himself from everyone, even from the newspapers. I heard he left Tehran and is working at a private bank in Shiraz. This phone number belongs to one of his bachelor day's apartments in Tehran.

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## Account 3- Akbar

*Mehdi Navid*

November 19th, 2017

Akbar's life was caught in the wind which began blowing with the Revolution. His father, a general in Shah's army, fled the country and Akbar was labeled an opposition and spent two years in prison. He was nineteen when he was released. He was drafted into military service to serve his duty in Iran-Iraq war. A couple of months later, he was suspended from serving his country due to his prison sentence. He returned from the frontline to Tehran. He mastered his broken French in university, which he had learned from a cellmate, and at the same time started working at a small lathe workshop as a turner. He fell in love in one of the classes and immediately got married, but didn't produce any offspring. He was given a column in a newspaper and started translating the economic news of the world. After a while, a publisher suggested a book in the field of economics to him for translation. He quit translating for newspapers and set his foot in the book industry. When his first translation got published, he was diagnosed with MS. Everything was white in his eyes. His feet and hands became numb and motionless. He was hospitalized for one month. He used medical herbs and was recovered again.

I met Akbar at this point; in the lunchroom of the National Library. He sat in front of me and put his vegetarian food on the table. I don't recall what book I was holding, but it caught his attention and we started chatting. After that day we ate lunch together every day and talked about everything. After one year, my second book was finished. It was a novel based on the love affair between Rabe'e and Baktash in Jami's account. I had done my best to extract the story of these two characters from Jami's poetry and to introduce it into the modern life. I gave the manuscript to Akbar and asked for his opinion. He read it. He said it was patchy and the characters were flat and ... I couldn't stand it. It was at that point that I realized I can't bear to witness my one-year work be destroyed in front of my eyes. I



grabbed the manuscript to leave. He got mad. I got mad too. After that incident, upon an unwritten rule, we adjusted our times in the Library so that we wouldn't run into each other. And we didn't run into each other, though now I agree with his comments on my book.

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## Account 4- Ali

*Mehdi Navid*

December 6th, 2017

My maternal grandfather finally gave in to my grandmother's request and they both went on a Haj pilgrimage. He had benefited from a huge heritage before. He was the son of a petty landowner and had estates of his own. He loved driving but he never got his driver's license out of snobbery; he used to bribe the cops on a monthly basis so that they wouldn't pull him over. In the prime of his life, he started working in the personal status registration office of the city just to pass the time. He had a neat handwriting and became a birth certificate writer; he traveled from city to city and from village to village to play his role in registering the early surnames of the inhabitants there. He was facetious and together with his colleagues he chose odd surnames for the illiterates due to ethnocentrism and the frictions between the dwellers of the city and of the village. The illiterates, not knowing anything, accepted the surnames. There are still many people around the city living with those surnames. Later he kind of knew everyone and because of this knowledge, whenever a close or distant relative came to him to ask for information about the girl or boy his son or daughter was going to marry, he used to puff up and ramble. The close or distant relative listened very carefully to his words and set the marriage in his mind since my grandfather always uttered favorable stuff and was pro-marriage. But once, his speech was stopped in the very first sentence. He said: "The great grandfather of that family had a tail". That was all.

In his middle age he realized that his wealth had been spent on parties and drinking and only a little saving was left. He opened a store and became a businessman. However, he was not successful in it, so he decided to move his family to Tehran and start a new life. He invested what was left of his money in a factory, bought a house and abstained from partying and splurging.

It was exactly one year later that he accepted my grandmother's request and they went on a Haj pilgrimage. In Mecca, many of the tents were burnt and a great number of Hajis were burnt and died.

My grandparents survived this incident and it became a turning point in my grandfather's life. He started throwing parties again, but this time in a religious form.

A couple of months ago, despite his weak heart and the strong advice of his doctor and children that he should avoid heavy sports, he picked up his Zurkhaneh<sup>1</sup> meels out of childish pig-headedness to show that there's life in the old dog yet. The next morning while he was sitting on the sofa and was holding his little grandchild, he had a peaceful heart attack and dropped dead.

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Traditional Iranian system of athletics, a combination of martial arts, calisthenics, strength training and music.

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## Account 5- Alireza

*Mehdi Navid*

January 3rd, 2018

Their house was in the provinces. He was ten years older than me and the other cousins and because of his age, his sovereignty over us was legitimate. Under his family's pressure and thanks to private lessons, he entered university. After three reports about him smoking opium at the university dorm, he was expelled from university together with a couple of his classmates and got drafted into the military service.

During the last months of his military service, we went to the province and he was also on leave. He had fallen in love and it was arranged that after receiving his military service completion card the wedding would be held. Three of my cousins and I followed Alireza and one of his childhood friends in the streets and alleys; we, being in our teens, lighted our cigarettes secretly and felt like adults by being close to Alireza. We entered an old bazaar, and then reached the row of tailors and drapers. It was a holiday and all the stores were closed.

Alireza's friend opened a store and we all went in. Through the store's old stone staircase, we reached the second floor and my three cousins and I were engrossed in the colorful cloths in there. Alireza brought an ashtray for us and warned us to be careful with the cloths.

Alireza's friend appeared with a picnic gas stove in his hand. We exchanged suspicious glances and blew our cigarettes. They brought a metal stick, a safety pin and a bottle which was apparently perforated with a Bic pen. We got a bit afraid and Alireza realized it. He said they would take some puff and then we would go. He told his friend to warm up the metal stick and then offered us. He inhaled deeply and held his breath.

A couple of years after his marriage, the news broke out in the family that Alireza and his wife were addicted to crystal meth. They had sold their house and all their stuff and became tenants. Alireza was a

flunky in a car showroom and his wife had outdone him in doing meth. Their neighbors called my aunt constantly and complained about the wife. At last, they lost their patience and called the cops for help. In the absence of Alireza, the cops burst in the house and arrested the wife. The house was ransacked and a great amount of meth was found, stashed behind the outlets and sockets. In order to escape the trap, Alireza got divorced and because of his parents' insistence, he was hospitalized in a clinic to come off drugs.

A couple of months ago, I saw him at a family gathering. He was buoyant and perky. He had fallen in love and had plans to marry. Now he is an intercity bus driver and supposedly has become meek and is working really hard.

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## Account 6- Alma

*Mehdi Navid*

February 24th, 2018

Alma is no longer here. She took her own life. It was just three years ago when I saw in Facebook that someone wrote Alma ended it all.

Did she really end it? I don't know. Hour later contradictory news spread and my head was spinning. I recalled ten or twelve years ago and Reza's death, an Afghan poet who fled from his country during the civil war, made it from Mashhad to Tehran and met Houshang

Golshiri<sup>1</sup>. Golshiri offered him a job in his monthly magazine.

However, one year later near the evening, Barbad called me and said Reza suffocated in his sleep from the gas leak in his home. He died in his sleep. My feet shivered.

But Alma didn't suffocate; she took many pills at once and lied on her bed waiting. Apparently she had even closed her eyes. Except that one time that we met, I never saw her again. She had told a friend that she wanted to see me to talk about the book she was translating. I was sitting in a café when she showed up. Her eyes, like her voice, were sad, and even the way she shook my hand. Her teeth were trying to hide the bitterness in her face, but they were caught in an unintentional lethargy. I was dead sure at that time that she was just playacting. She said she was twenty two and moved from Sareyn<sup>2</sup> to Tehran to pursue her studies at the age of eighteen. But she didn't say her father was an army officer and how much she was plagued by him. She didn't say that she was thrown out of home as she had become a disgrace to her family and as she was thinking differently. She didn't say how her mother got old after this incident and this separation. She didn't see how her father hid her "suicide" from others in her funeral to save his honor and left her mother alone beside the grave. She showed me her translation, we talked about it and she asked me for advice to find a publisher for it. An hour later we left the café and took our own separate paths. Except exchanging

emails, we neither saw each other anymore nor talked on the phone.

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Houshang Golshiri (1938-2000) was an Iranian novelist and literary critic and one of the most influential writers of Persian literature in the 20th century.

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A northwestern city in Ardebil province

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