

# Chapter Sixteen

The chapter introduces Arash Shirazi, a soldier in the Iranian army during the 1985 Iran-Iraq War, who adopts a unique role inspired by his comrade Arman. Dressed in a black robe with a flashlight illuminating his face, Arash becomes a symbolic "angel of night," riding his horse Badbadak among the dying soldiers to offer them solace and reinforce their resolve. Arman explains that every platoon has a soldier like Arash—one who embodies this celestial figure to provide comfort amidst the horrors of war. The imagery evokes a divine presence, blending light and darkness to create a sense of hope and spiritual reassurance for those facing death.

Arash's role is deeply tied to religious and cultural narratives, particularly the idea of enduring suffering with dignity. Arman recounts a hadith about a dying soldier who commits suicide and is denied entry to Jannah (Paradise) by the Prophet Muhammad. This story underscores the chapter's central theme: suffering must be endured "manfully" to secure a place in the afterlife. Arash's nightly rides aim to prevent soldiers from despairing or taking their own lives, offering them a vision of an angelic presence that validates their sacrifices and strengthens their faith in the midst of battle.

The narrative also highlights the tragic reality of child soldiers, referred to as "boys with men's names," who are sent into war with keys to heaven around their necks. Arash's mission extends to these young fighters, whose innocence contrasts sharply with the brutal demands of combat. His role as a symbolic guardian is not driven by personal conviction but by a commitment to preserving the spiritual fate of his fellow soldiers. Arman emphasizes that intention matters more than belief, urging Arash to focus on the impact of his actions rather than his own doubts.

The chapter concludes with Arash's reluctant acceptance of his role, despite his fragmented faith. While he struggles to fully grasp the religious significance of his

actions, he embraces the responsibility of being a beacon for others. The sword, briefly mentioned at the end, hints at the duality of his existence—both a warrior and a spiritual guide. The chapter paints a poignant picture of war's psychological and spiritual toll, exploring themes of duty, sacrifice, and the fragile line between hope and despair.