

# Chapter Eleven: Hypatia of Alexandria

The chapter follows Arash Shirazi, a young Iranian man conscripted into military service during the Iran-Iraq War in 1984. With no means to avoid enlistment, Arash reflects on the absurdity of war and the shift from a revolution led by idealists to one controlled by armed zealots. He resigns himself to his fate, imagining his future as just another martyr's photo on the mosque wall. His observations highlight the senselessness of war, where men like him—poor, uneducated, and without special skills—are deemed expendable, referred to as "zero soldiers."

Arash's introspection deepens as he witnesses a young conscript being berated by a woman, possibly his wife or sister, for choosing to enlist. The scene contrasts sharply with Arash's own acceptance of his fate. He imagines the young man as a pianist, his delicate hands meant for music, not war. This moment underscores the tragedy of wasted potential and the arbitrary nature of conscription. Arash muses on the motivations for enlistment—ideology, family pressure, or sheer inevitability—and concludes that for him, resistance is futile.

The narrative shifts to Arash's departure for training at a makeshift camp in the Alborz Mountains. His mother's silent grief during his head-shaving ritual reveals the personal toll of war. Arash carries a family photo, a snapshot of happier times marred by political tensions. At the camp, he is grouped with other "zero soldiers," those with minimal education, reinforcing his expendability. The harsh, transient nature of the camp mirrors the disposability of their lives, yet Arash finds a strange liberation in having no expectations placed upon him.

Arash's reflections blend resignation and existential acceptance. The mountains, unreal in their grandeur, symbolize the surreal nature of his circumstances. The chapter captures the dissonance between individual humanity and the machinery of war, where young men are reduced to numbers and statistics. Arash's voice—wry,

observant, and devoid of self-pity—paints a poignant picture of a generation caught between revolution and war, their lives dictated by forces beyond their control.