

## TEHRAN TIMES

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I hit the elevator's GF button, lift my T-shirt and wait for her to lick my stomach.

"I have a stomachache," I say. "Can I have a magical lick?" She gives me her special Ayda look. It could mean a lot of things. I go for a lack of adequate politeness. "Please," I add.

"Grow up," Ayda says averting her eyes from my hairy stomach. I am grown up already. I kind of don't want to grow up any more. "And let go of that," she says. "It's inappropriate." I think Ayda watches too much news. She thinks there is a camera hidden in every corner.

The numbers are going down fast. It's only seven floors. I know there is no chance I get a lick, but I keep my T-shirt up anyway. Just in case she changes her mind. She is not looking at me. We go down the three remaining floors with my bare stomach facing the closed doors. When the elevator jerks to a stop, I straighten my T-shirt and make the ladies-first hand gesture with a hint of a bow of the head which makes it more of a Your-Majesty kind of move. She steps out with a faint acknowledging smile. She plays along most of the times. But not always.

We leave the building and head for the subway station. Ayda must be a tad angry because whatever paper that needed to be stamped and signed didn't get stamped and signed. She has to come back here later. I hope without me. It's a terrible street. And in this heat. But that's for later. We head for the subway station. It's not as hot as yesterday. Which is a blessing.

"Didn't you say my kiss was magical?" she asks. She is playing along.

"No, no, I didn't say that," I answer. "I said your kiss is a panacea."

"Panacea won't work on your stomach?"

"No, it's a bad pain," I say. "Nothing short of real magic can heal me."

Ayda smiles and holds my hand which I am kind of okay with. Only that often the sidewalks are narrow, or the pavement is broken, or there are just too many people. It's harder to maneuver with holding hands. But it's okay. Her hand is soft and small. I like the blue of her fingernails. For some reason I don't like the blue of her shawl. I ask her if she wants to go to a café for a while, to cool down. But she wants to go back home.

We take the subway and get off at Beheshti Station where my car is parked outside the zone where personal cars are forbidden. We get in the car and I drive her home. It's almost noon and I am hungry. I try to go through the streets and alleys that I know are less busy, but there are certain streets I

need to take anyway and we end up spending a good while in heavy traffic. The A/C doesn't work and the window on Ayda's side won't roll down. At the first red light, I get out, go around the car and force her window down with my hands. She puts her palm on her side of the window and helps me. The honking of the cars behind me tells me the light is green. I hop into the car. It's not an out-and-out jalopy, but it's an embarrassment compared to hers.

She picks a newspaper from the backseat and fans herself. I would be less offended if she had insulted my mother and sister. I tell her about this problem that we have at home. It's a battle; I keep turning on the air cooler and my father keeps turning it off. He likes it warm. He can't stand the cold, even the cool. She says they used to have the same problem when they went to the North to stay at their beach villa for holidays. Until her father had a separate split A/C installed in each room. Like their apartment here in Tehran. She's an uptown girl. Her father is a bank branch manager. My father sells tar.

As we get closer to Parkway Intersection, the traffic gets slower. The intersection is infamous for its long red lights and short greens.

"Come on, it's not that bad," I say.

"Oh, yeah?" she, kind of, snaps. "How would you like it if you had your head and neck bundled in three meters of cloth?" She means her shawl. It doesn't seem to be very thick, but I guess it can be warm. "You should really have that A/C fixed," she adds.

"I've been thinking of getting a new car," I say. "But I just have too many memories with this bad boy."

"This is crazy," Ayda says a little annoyed. "What are all these cars doing on the street?"

"I kind of like the slow traffic," I say. She looks at me as if I am out of my mind. "I like watching people," I add as an explanation and before the conversation is pushed any further, a number of teenage boys and girls appear hopping around among the cars on the street. They are adorned with green stuff. One has a green T-shirt, one a green bandana, and another has a white knit hat on his head topped with a big green pompom. In this heat! They throw flyers and posters into cars and shout out the name of their candidate. We watch them for a little while as they go down the street from car to car. Then the light goes green and finally we get past the intersection.

"Who are you going to vote for?" Ayda asks.

"I don't know," I reply. "I haven't thought about it yet." The heat is more tolerable when the car is moving. I am fine in my T-shirt. We wind along Valiasr towards the north of the city.