

Shila M.'s Case as Never Published in Her School Newspaper:

An Account of High School Drama in Iran

A bright and humid afternoon of May in the North Side of Tehran. The brown, rustling leaves of the bergamot tree swayed to the whistling breeze and landed on the pavement. The dry leaves slithered in a gust of wind and piled up in the violet buds that surrounded the tree. They carried the sour scent of the fruit with them and spread it all over the park. M__ Park resembled a crystal prism. The gold and crimson of the sky reflected in the green of the damp grass. Shila M. - whose last name we cannot mention for the confidences must be respected - was sitting on a blue bench under the bergamot tree.

Shila M., a senior in Saint F__ All Girls High School, was in her regular navy blue uniform, as described by her classmate Mona Javidi. Javidi, who claims to be a witness of the crime - she refers to it as "a miracle." - was examined by a local coroner two hours after the incident. Numerous bruises were found on Javidi's arms- and other body parts that we are not consented to discuss here- as well as several scratches on the jowl area. Ahmad Khalili, the local police officer who is currently in charge of the investigations, considers this an evidence of Javidi's victimisation in spite of her denial. Regardless of the mental and physical trauma Javidi suffered from, she was willing to participate in the interrogation after the medical examinations were over.

Javidi had followed Shila M. right after they left the school. She had walked after Shila along the school's grey gates. She had stepped in the muddy puddles of the South Side pavements just like Shila M. and had stood shoulder to shoulder with her in the subway. When they were at the North Side and the subway was not as crowded and foul-smelling as in the South Side, she sat right next to Shila M., but Shila opened her book, which we will discuss later, and completely ignored Javidi. - We are still

uncertain about the reason for which Javidi decided to follow Shila M., but Officer Khalili reports that Javidi prevaricates as soon as this question is brought up. It is important to note that their classmates agree on Javidi's unexplainable attention to Shila M. "Mona always said she hated Shila, but you could tell she looked up to her. Like she adored her or something," a student who agreed to be interviewed anonymously admits, "I don't want my parents to know I said this, but who couldn't like her? No one dared to say it, but everyone was jealous of her. I mean, she was perfect. Perfect!"

Shila M., like any other student in Saint F__ High School, was from the South Side, but she was known among her classmates as "a North Side fanatic." Her white C__ sneakers, which were found in the park by Officer Khalili, were purchased from N__ boutique shop at the T__ mall (The store is currently closed after being accused of smuggling goods from sanctioned Western countries.) and she was widely known for taking any small chance to spend time in the North Side. "Because there she could wink at the boys and nobody in the North Side is responsible enough to stop such inappropriate behaviors," Javidi says.

According to Javidi, who was sitting on a bench across from Shila's, the park was distinctly quiet, except for the one dun passerine bird chirping on one of bergamot branches and the black motorcycles that went in and out of the park every half-an-hour. Shila's sheer scarf - as Javidi puts it - was as always so loose around her neck that everyone could see the curls of her brown hair. Shila M. sat on the bench and started reading her book again. Every once in a while, she looked up from her book and grinned at the boys who were riding their black motorcycles on the rear wheel - merely in order to impress Shila M., Javidi claims.

In the course of investigation, the people who were acquainted with Shila's character - such as teachers and classmates - suggest that there is a large possibility for Shila's own involvement in the

crime. There are reliable reports that prove her tendency to violate the school regulations - which according to the principal, were only made to protect the student body. She had been caught winking at the boys with the baggy Levis jeans and spiky hair styles who ride their motorcycles around the school gate on Thursdays (Javidi has observed them chase Shila M. after school on frequent occasions, including the day of the crime), and she had been suspended for plucking her eyebrows at far too young an age. (Javidi argues that Shila M.'s new look with the perfectly shaped eyebrows had caught the attention of all the students. She admits that she had been regretfully influenced by Shila M. to an excessive point that she was tempted to pluck her own eyebrows, for which her parents had punished her by grounding her at home for an entire week. "If her parents cared about her, like mine do, they would watch their daughter," Javidi declares.)

A debate has arisen as to whether reveal Shila M.'s story to the local news or not. Saint F__'s principal is strictly against any publication of the case to the media, including the school's newspaper. In a conversation with Officer Khalili, she expresses that spreading the story would be a threat to the school's reputation and even Shila M.'s family's honor. "We all know Shila's not completely innocent here," the principal states, "out of all the other students, why did this happen to someone like Shila? Revealing the story would only result in contempt from society and stigma for her parents. I'm sure they don't want the whole neighborhood to question their daughter's honor. In respect to the family, we should all stay silent."

Naturally, there have been a good many theories aimed at pinpointing the exact book Shila M. was reading in the park. The teachers assume she must have been studying her Iran History textbook for the final exam she had the next day, but Javidi claims to have seen the book by her own eyes, both in the subway and in the park when she walked past Shila's blue bench. "It was a vile title. Something

about wolves. Wolf something. Steppenwolf! That's it!"

As far as researching the school's library database, there is no evidence for the actual existence of this book. After putting tremendous effort to find a trace of it, Officer Khalili has found a book with the same title in a foreign language - which has been banned from translation due to the disturbing impacts such books have on the youth. "Despite what the title suggests," Officer Khalili reports, "the book is not about the so-called good-looking adolescent boy that turns into a werewolf, and God forbid, bites the so-called good-looking girl's neck and kidnaps her to take her to the so-called happy land. Heaven forbid. It's even worse. Far more corrupting. It's about, God forbid, I never use this word, *sensualists* who, God forbid, I hate to say this, who are Nihilists too, I'm sorry to say this, Nihilists who deep down know one day they would, God forbid, they would take their own lives. God forbid. It's devastating. God forbid. God forbid God..." - Due to our limit of space, we are unable to include the exact number of "God-forbid's" Officer Khalili used.

According to Javidi and her classmates, Shila M. tended to bring such books to school on a regular basis. The principal had acted somewhat oddly after finding Shila M. reading another mysterious book only a week before her disappearance - and for this there is no evidence but Shila's own admission to her classmates - wild excitement! Threat to be expelled if found with such foul books again.

There is an assumption that Shila M. might have been a N__ herself. Javidi recalls a day, not long before the incident, when the students were discussing the physics test and comparing their answers at the school's gates. One of the girls showed them a picture she had cut out of a tabloid magazine. The girls huddled around the picture and passed it around so everyone could clearly observe it. It was an abhorrent creature, squatted in the corner of an empty room with torn yellow wallpapers, as Javidi

describes. It had the face of a young girl. Long eyelashes and luscious legs. She was thoroughly nude and her skin was covered in a layer of filthy fluff. Nut-brown like the color of her wet, grimy hair. The hunchbacked girl was hiding her breasts behind her thin knees and she was howling in agony. Tears were clogged up in the corner of her eyes. A brief glance at the ferocious creature made everyone toss the magazine to the next girl's fumbling hands. On the contrary, Shila M. kept the magazine with her for a significant time. She held it close to her face as if having a telepathic communication with the wicked creature. "It's evil," one of the girls had gasped. Underneath the picture, in bold red letters, it read, "Karma of the Wayward Girl!" The girls didn't know what wrong the creature had done, but they shared their theories. It was right in the middle of the discussion when one of the girls shouted, "she's crazy!" and pointed at Shila M. who was still holding the picture with a smirk on her face. Shila M. started laughing right when they all turned around and stared at her. "This is dumb," Shila M. said and fanned herself with the picture. "Bullshit!" She laughed and her navy blue scarf slid down her shoulders. Her brown hair was the exact color of her hazel eyes - to which Javidi refers as an "oddly beautiful, but non-human feature of her."

"We always knew there was something sinful about her," Javidi says, "but after that day we were sure that she was a non-believer. She laughed at it! That's not acceptable. She laughed and her evil laughter was stuck in my head for the whole night. I couldn't go to sleep. It had the sort of ominous quality to it that we're always warned to stay away from. It sounded like the kind of music Shila listened to. Similar to the noise of a piece of *rock* scraping against a glass wall. A mouse gnawing at a *metal* stick. From then we all knew there was something wrong about her. Something that came from inside of her."

Shila M.'a parents are extremely upset with the defamation of their daughter who is now widely

regarded as a victim of inner demons. The parents may be turned down by defense counsel on grounds of their involvement. They claim it was only bad luck that had haunted their daughter's soul and she carried it around with her spontaneously. But there is evidence that the parents might have helped the demons develop when they patently permitted Shila M. to reject several eligible suitors she had not long before her premature disappearance, leaving their daughter with the risk of spinsterhood.

“She even rejected the plastic surgeon every girl wishes for. With such a ridiculous excuse like a nine-year age gap. Who cares about that when he can fix your face for free and take you to Hawaii too? Or at least to Dubai if he's not a specialist,” Javadi reported to Officer Khalili, “I mean, I spent too much money on my nose job and it still is not as thin and pointed as I wanted it to be. That's why I haven't had any suitors yet. And here's Shila. She had it all and she missed it. That couldn't be just bad luck. There was something more. Something that came from herself. No way. It couldn't be just bad luck. It seemed like she asked for what was done to her. You would say the same thing if you had been there. She didn't resist. There's something evil about that.” - We have to add that anonymous protesters from the North Side have been taking Shila's parents' side, accusing the school for scandalizing Shila M.'s name. “It's pathetic. She was pulverized by a grown man, because they didn't let her be young and act young. And now instead of the criminal, she is the one to blame? She's absolutely not the first, but shall be the last,” they argue. - According to the latest updates from Officer Khalili, the parents may be charged with involvement in the crime for giving their daughter an amount of freedom which Officer Khalili considers harmful for adolescents. “They not only let her be influenced by the destructive culture of the North Side, but also gave her permission to own books that could ruin anyone's morality.”

According to Javadi, Shila M. was so drawn in her book that she didn't notice when Mr. (For now, we prefer to refer to him by the common name “man,” in regard of the fact that his identity is still

unknown.) emerged from the violet buds behind Shila's bench. Javidi, who was sitting on another bench five feet across from Shila's, first spotted the brim of his black fedora hat. In a blink of an eye, he appeared behind a pine tree. Before Javidi could take a closer glance, he disappeared and came into sight behind a bush of violet buds. They started to bloom as soon as Man walked past them. He was lost in the blossoms. He was everywhere. Javidi couldn't guess how old he was. One second there were wrinkles at the corner of his eyes; another second it seemed to her that he was only squinting his eyes at the bright sun. One moment his hair was silver white like the milky ovaries of the violets, another moment he had a black walrus mustache as dark as the dung in the garden.

Investigators continue to search for Man, although Officer Khalili finds it a peculiarly hard task to detect any trace of him, considering the fact that Javidi cannot give a solid description of Man due to his rapid transformations. This point should be reemphasized; for one can never be quite sure whether one has fully realized to what extent Javidi has slandered or distorted. In lack of further explanation, we finish our report of the case by Javidi's description of the crime scene.

Man eventually sat on the other side of the bench. At the first look, he seemed very ordinary to Javidi. He was wearing a knee-high black jacket with oversized fabric buttons and creased leather boots. His eyes were barely in sight as they were covered in the shade of the brim. Javidi could not tell if he was a Northsider or a Southsider. He could be a charlatan from the South Side who thought his black fedora gave him a more imposing look, or he could be one of those men from the North Side who thought the hat would make them resemble those overrated Western intellectuals.

He sat down and crossed his legs. Shila M. didn't look up. Even when Man smiled and uttered, "Nice weather!" Shila M. turned her back toward him and focused on the sinister text. "The book must've been very, very intriguing," Javidi says. She grew suspicious and was going to inform the

authorities of Shila M's encounter with a stranger. "But then I saw her talk to him and I thought what if I leave and she does something worse? So I decided to pretend I was studying for the history test," Javidi says.

She sat quiet and looked at them only when she was certain Shila M. wouldn't notice her, which happened to be very easy as Shila M. rarely got distracted from her conversation with Man. He had finally convinced Shila M. to talk when he looked at the book and smiled. "Nice book!" he said.

"Shila got all excited when he said that," Javidi recalls, "then they started talking about the book for a short while, but I couldn't hear what they were exactly saying."

She recalls another sparrow perching on the bergamot tree and the motorcycles that arrived again. This time the boys were competing with Man to get Shila M.'s attention. They whistled and clutched the speed handles until Javidi couldn't hear anything else but the grunting noise of the engines. There were three black motorcycles circling around Shila M. "Yohoo!" the boys shouted and laughed, but Shila M. didn't look at them. She kept talking to Man, while Man had a consistent tranquil and hypnotizing smile on his face. "I would report to the school if she was staring at the boys like she would normally do. But she didn't even look when they started performing acrobatics for her. Maybe she knew I was there. But how could she even resist looking at those boys? That's not a human deed."

The boys rode their motorcycles as they stood on the leather back seats. "Wohoo!" they screamed. Man shook his head and sighed. "So loud!" he husked.

Shila M. nodded and looked down at her book. Soon she was so drawn reading again that she didn't notice when Man moved closer to her. "Or maybe she noticed, but didn't care," Javidi says.

Shila M. didn't even reveal any reaction when the third sparrow came. There was something queer about the muddy plumage and the long, jagged beak of the bird. It landed on one of the dry

branches right above Shila's head. A moment later another one came and sat next to the first one. Soon there were dozens of them all over the bergamot tree, chirping louder than the motorcycles. So loud that Javidi had to cover her ears, astonished to see Shila M. and Man were still sitting on the bench in the same position, indifferent about the noise.

The boys finally gave up and left the park. It was right at that moment when Javidi saw Man approaching Shila M. First he put his hand on her lap. Shila M. did not withdraw or even move. She was frozen. Then he danced his fingers up to her thigh and scratched his long feminine nails down her navy blue uniform. It produced such a loud rasping sound that even Javidi heard it on her bench across. Shila M. did not look up. - We are not certain if it was because of her fear or distraction with the book- She stuck her chin to her chest and remained in her reading gesture, crouching down into her book.

Shila M. was being atomized, as Javidi puts it. It started with her fingertips, up to her elbows, up to her shoulders; as if her whole body was being slowly pulverized through an invisible grater. The book fell on the floor next to her white sneakers. Her feet looked normal until the legs of her pants started to wrinkle up. They were empty. Soon her crumpled navy blue uniform fell on the bench. When Javidi looked around, she didn't see anyone else in the park who could have witnessed this miracle. The glittering particles of Shila M.'s body were rising higher and higher, ascending toward the sun-drenched sky. High until Javidi couldn't see them anymore. Now Man had vanished. The sparrows chirped too loud and flapped their wings as they spread out and circled around the empty uniform. Soon the sky was covered with them. Javidi couldn't tell them apart. They looked like one massive black chador covering up the sun. Javidi screamed. She knew she was screaming. She felt the sound waves vibrating in her whole body, but she didn't hear anything come out of her mouth.

The last thing she saw was a flock of fierce birds coming toward her. They scratched her arms

with their claws and bit her face. She had to protect her eyes with her hands, but before she covered her face, she took one last glance at the navy blue uniform lying on the bench. Shila M.'s book was left open on the pavement and the pages were flipping rapidly as if a turbulent wind was blowing. But nothing else was moving and Mona Javidi didn't even feel the breeze anymore. The violet blossoms were frozen in the garden; and the dry orange leaves were floating in the air, motionless.