

The
Martyr's Son

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Armen John Arakelian,
Lori Ciccanti and Parease Arakelian,
with Cheryl Sasai Ellicott



Sweetwater Still Publishing
Colcord, Oklahoma

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*Based on the true story of Armenian orphan
and genocide survivor, Armen John Arakelian.*

*“Be sober, be vigilant; because your adversary
the devil, as a roaring lion, walketh about,
seeking whom he may devour . . .”*

1 Peter 5:8



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From the Authors:

In the mid 1930s Armen Arakelian dictated his life story to writer Estelle Grant. It was published in 1935 as *Under a New Banner*, and in 1966 within the book *The False Prophet of Mecca*.

Unfortunately, not every character in this story left behind such detailed written memoirs. Therefore we've relied upon careful research, family tradition, and, where necessary, cautious speculation to bring certain scenes back to life—to the best of our ability.

We hope you enjoy Armen's story. We pray it impacts you as it has us.

Prologue

In the year 1853, an eleven-year-old boy kneeled to pray inside a little stone cottage, at the foot of Mount Ararat—the final resting place of the ark of the Bible.

"The God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob is calling me to pray, to fast, and to wait for an answer," he told his family. The boy, Efim Klubniken, bowed his head and began to wait. He wouldn't sleep, nor would he eat until he'd heard from God.

While the sun passed through the sky, the Klubniken family wondered if God would speak to little Efim. The boy had gone on prayer-vigils before, so they weren't surprised—only curious and expectant. Meanwhile, in the small village of Kara Kala, in the very heart of Armenia, their neighbors went about their business. The villagers were mostly Presbyterian or Orthodox Armenians. They shared a Christian faith, but not the extreme beliefs of the Russian-born Klubniken family. They agreed that a sleep-deprived, starved boy might hear voices, but they doubted it would be the voice of God!

Yet before a day had passed, Efim announced that God had replied with a message.

"What is the message?!" his anxious family asked.

"I don't know," Efim replied, appearing to stare at something invisible.

His relatives looked at one another, and then at Efim in confusion.

"The Almighty is speaking, but I cannot understand," Efim clarified.

What was this? The boy believed God spoke to him, but he didn't know what their Lord had actually said? Perhaps they should make him eat and lie down—after all, he was just a boy.

But Efim persisted. "I see a vision of charts," he said, "and a message in beautiful handwriting. If I had something to write upon, I might copy it down." Efim rose from his knees and went to the family's table. "Will you bring me paper and pen?"

Again his relatives were perplexed. Like many others in the region, the Klubniken family were not educated. Efim had never been to school. He could not read or write. It made no sense, nor was it easy to find what the boy requested.

But at last, a pen and blank paper were brought to him.

For the next seven days, Efim sat at the rough plank-table, staring at something only he could see. He was silent, except for the *scritch, scratch, scritch, scratch* of his pen upon the paper. Efim didn't eat; he didn't sleep. Stroke after

careful stroke, he copied the shape of letters and diagrams that passed before his eyes.

At the end of seven days, Efim plunked down his pen, blinked a number of times, and gazed around at his eager family. His relatives exchanged nervous glances as they stared at the transformed pages; they were now nearly covered in lines, forms, and other marks.

"What is it, boy?" someone finally asked. Efim's writing was pretty, but it meant nothing to them.

Efim shrugged. "I don't know, for I cannot read it," he replied.

The family elders discussed the problem. A few of their neighbors could read. Should they show the pages to them? But what might their neighbors think? After all, Efim was completely unschooled. To expect he'd actually written a message, an announcement from the Almighty, no less, would be foolish. Kara Kala was a small village . . . senseless behavior was never forgotten. Nevertheless, the Klubnikens were people of great faith. Should they limit God by saying He couldn't give a written message to an illiterate boy?! At last they decided to walk by faith; they would take the pages to their neighbors who could read. But first, the women insisted, it was time for Efim to eat something.

As it turned out, Efim had written a totally legible message, in perfectly formed Russian letters—and it claimed to be a warning from God! The message declared that

great danger was coming to the Christians in Kara Kala and beyond. Hundreds of thousands of men, women, and children would be brutally murdered, unless they left their homeland.

Leave their homeland? The Klubnikens and their neighbors listened to the message in wonder, until it proclaimed they must flee. Then they erupted with questions and doubts. How could this be? Were they really expected to leave their homes and livelihood because a young boy wrote that they should? How could hundreds of thousands of Christians be murdered, here, in this good and tranquil land?

Yet illiterate young Efim Klubniken had not only written a message in perfectly formed Russian letters, he had drawn maps showing exactly where the fleeing Christians were to go. When the time came, everyone in the region was to flee to a land far away, across the ocean. The maps amazed the educated villagers. This boy had never seen a geography book, but the body of water he drew so accurately was not the nearby Black Sea, nor the Caspian Sea. It wasn't even the farther-off Mediterranean. Efim had drawn an accurate map of the very distant Atlantic Ocean! At its shore, he drew a precise map of the United States of America.

But, the message said, the refugees were not to settle on the eastern side of this new land. They were to travel until they reached the west coast. There God would bless them, and their descendents would be a blessing to the nations. They were to stay there for many, many years, until a time

of great persecution threatened that land as well—and at that time, the faithful remnant would again be told where to go.

Villagers were astonished, puzzled, and overwhelmed. They had listened to the message intently from beginning to end. Then, during the following weeks and months, they thought about it, they talked about it, they prayed about it, and they even told visitors who passed through Kara Kala about it. It was the most sensational event of their time.

Eventually, each person had to decide what they believed. Was Efim's message really from God, or not? The Bible said to beware of false miracles. They were warned that trusting emotional experiences opened a person up to believing almost anything. In the end, given these truths, most villagers doubted that Efim's message was true. There was undoubtedly a natural explanation for the *miraculous* writing. They just weren't sure what it was.

Those few who did believe in Efim's writings were considered emotional and experiential. In time these Efim-following, miracle-chasers no longer attended the churches where they'd once belonged. Instead, they joined with the few others who were like-minded.

Peaceful years followed in the region of Mount Ararat. In fact, decades passed, and still there was no slaughter. Efim grew to be a man, and many people called him a fraud. Efim, and those who believed his message, reminded their neighbors that the prophecies in the Bible often

came dozens, or even hundreds of years before the event happened. The villagers replied, "Yes, but they came through *prophets*. God stopped giving men spiritual gifts after the Bible was complete!"

Many people called Efim *the Boy Prophet*, although he wasn't a boy anymore, and they didn't believe he was a prophet. Nevertheless, as the years passed, trouble between the Moslem Turks and the Christian Armenians increased. The hills around Ararat remained peaceful, but news of political troubles frequently reached the village. Each time they heard these reports, believers in Efim's message would get out the old pages and read them again. Then in August of 1896, a Turkish mob murdered more than six-thousand Armenians on the streets of Constantinople. The city of Constantinople was far away, but again Efim's followers prayed, "Lord, is it now time?" Year after year a few people continued to trust in the prophecy of Efim, but year after year, they said God wasn't telling them to flee just yet.

But at last, in the year 1900, Efim began to announce, "The time is near! We must now flee to America. All who remain here will perish!" It had been forty-seven years since he received this prophecy. He and others took out the now-yellowed pages and studied them intently. Then, while their neighbors looked on, Efim and his family packed.

Once again, Efim became the most-talked-about person in the region. Would he really leave home and take his family to an unknown land? A land where they would be

homeless foreigners, all because he feared an imagined danger may come? Did Efim not realize that every nation, including America, was filled with real danger?

As the people of Kara Kala watched, Efim continued to pack. At last he and his little family got into their wagon, rolled out of the village, and out of sight. After he was gone, a few other Russian and Armenian families from Kara Kala followed in this modern-day exodus. In the months that followed, fear of this unseen, coming danger spread throughout the region. Over two-thousand families packed what they could take and abandoned the rest—including the beautiful lands that had been their homes for as long as they could remember.

But as each family left Armenia, those who stayed shook their heads in dismay. Who runs from an imaginary danger, to a place known to hold real danger? This didn't look like faith, but fear and foolishness. They had known of other groups that had followed so-called prophets to their destruction. Efim's old neighbors knew there weren't any truly safe places in the world. But most of all, they knew that God did not issue pinpoint instructions for modern people in a modern age.

By the year 1912, the last of the small group who followed the Boy Prophet had left for America.

*“Jesus said unto them,
‘If God were your Father,
ye would love me:
for I proceeded forth
and came from God;
neither came I of myself,
but he sent me.*

*Ye are of your father the devil,
and the lusts of your
father ye will do.*

*He was a murderer from the beginning,
and abode not in the truth, because
there is no truth in him.
When he speaketh a lie,
he speaketh of his own:
for he is a liar, and
the father of it.”*

John 8:42, 44

ONE

Zartar

July, 1914

Syrian Desert

"... they wandered in deserts, and in mountains, and in dens and caves of the earth." Hebrews 11:38

The last of the Bedawee warriors disappeared over the highest sand dune just after midnight. When Zartar could no longer see the men, or hear the galloping and snorting of their Arabian horses, she silently lifted herself from the carpets. Quietly, and quickly, she gathered a few supplies and tied them inside a large cloth, making a bundle she could carry. Careful to stay in the shadows of the tents, she crept away from the warrior's fire, tiptoeing past where other women tended fires. Tonight there would be more victims; nonetheless, Zartar was glad the Bedawee men often went raiding at night. These were her only moments of relief and the only chance to hide her actions.

After clearing the edge of the Bedawee's temporary campsite, she broke into a sprint across the sand. Her legs, once plump and smooth like that of a cherished daughter, were now lean and strong like her Bedawee master's battle-scarred stallion. The full moon lit her way as she ran

swiftly. If she were to stay alive, she must return before the warriors did.

Zartar was an Armenian from southeastern Turkey. Her family lived in the port city of Durtiol, near the easternmost point of the Mediterranean coast. Five years earlier, when she was just fifteen-years-old, she was kidnapped by the Moslem Turks. The Turks sold her to the Arabs for fifteen Lira, which was less than the price of a camel. Then one day, while her Arab master's caravan was traveling southwest across the Syrian Desert, a group of nomadic Bedawee warriors attacked them. They slaughtered all of the Arab men, and Zartar was captured by a wild-eyed Bedawee warrior.

Every day her cruel Bedawee master painted a new tattoo on her delicate face, until it was completely covered. His tattoo marks declared that she was *his* property. But she knew differently. Zartar was a Christian; her real Master was the Lord Jesus Christ.

Zartar's small feet continued to pound the desert sand as she ran. Her long, thick braids swung at her sides and her robe billowed in the wind behind her. Eventually, she grew tired and her legs slowed, though her heartbeat continued to race. Her breath came in loud pants as she crossed the last place where the Bedawee warriors had butchered a vast crowd of Armenians—mostly women and children. As usual, after the slaughter, the Bedawees sent Zartar and the other captive-women out to strip the bodies of clothing and valuables.

Zartar ran on, almost numb to the horror that littered the desert around her. Memories of life before she was surrounded by misery and death were very faint. At last, when she was almost too winded to continue, Zartar reached a small, rocky ridge beside a crop of palm trees.

Panting, she rushed past the trees and climbed up the boulders to a small cave. When she reached the cave, she pulled a candle from the small bundle she carried. Lighting the candle, she entered the cave and hurried to the back. There she found a wounded teenage boy lying still on a soft bed of ferns—right where she'd left him.

"Are you better?" she asked, with a mixture of excitement and worry.

She knelt on the ground beside him, hoping he would respond. But just as the day before, there was no answer. Bowing her head, Zartar waited to catch her breath. At last she prayed aloud, "Master Jesus, You have finally let me find one of my people still alive! Will You now let this one die too?" Lifting her head and opening her eyes, Zartar watched the steady rise and fall of the boy's chest. Though still unconscious, his breathing was constant and strong. Zartar gazed at his face while the candlelight flickered and danced around the cave. The features of his pale face were striking.

"Please, my Lord and my God, let him live," she whispered.

Zartar was now twenty-years-old; she'd been a captive for five long, desolate years. She guessed this boy was about the age of her youngest brother, which would make him thirteen or fourteen. When Zartar was stolen, her baby brother hadn't even started school yet. Nursing this stranger might be the closest Zartar would ever come to seeing her beloved family again. Finding this boy alive held great significance . . . God had answered her prayers! The Almighty God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob had chosen to save this one, out of so many. Surely this boy was destined for something important.

As she examined his peaceful face, she imagined he made his father proud and his mother laugh. She also imagined he had a sister who delighted in him. He reminded her very much of her baby brother, with his fair skin, dark hair and thick eyelashes. The boy's jaw-line was square and his chin strong; he would be a handsome man, like her older brothers and her father. Long-lost feelings filled Zartar as she stared at the teenage boy. Violence and death filled their land; did any of her family still live? Emotions she thought she no longer possessed washed over her. But as Zartar gazed through tear-filled eyes at the boy, she also felt a glimmer of hope.

Again she whispered, "Please, my God, give this boy a future . . . Please, God, give me a purpose and a reason to live."

Taking a goat-skin filled with water from her bundle, she dripped water into the unconscious boy's mouth. Wetting the edge of her robe she washed his cheeks and forehead.

Then she changed the cloth bandage on the oozing gash across his neck. That done, she bowed her head again. Zartar had prayed for this boy since she found him unconscious, held tightly in the arms of another Armenian teen—a young man that her Bedawee master had reduced to just a headless body.

At last Zartar stood to her feet. She wanted to stay longer, but fear and urgency were growing too strong. It was time to hurry back to the camp before she was missed.

"I'll return tomorrow night," she promised the boy. "I pray to my beloved Master in Heaven that you will awake."





Two

Agayne

April, 1914; three months earlier
Nevsher, Turkey

"If the world hate you, ye know that it hated Me before it hated you." John 15:18

When dusk fled and the thickness of night settled over Nevsher, Agayne mourned the evil of the day. She lay on the floor by the church's back wall, where her son Armen had led her after the soldiers tore her wailing daughter from her arms. Her beautiful Parease . . . Agayne was beaten and bruised; the soldiers proved too strong for even her fiercest mother-love. So she had screamed aloud, begging her God for a miracle.

No miracle came; the Turks carried her innocent daughter away.

Emptied of tears at last, Agayne now lie still, inside a church that had been her place of joy. Many years earlier, she married her beloved Hagop here. Agayne wasn't much older than Parease when she fell in love with young Hagop. Dear, sweet Hagop . . . He had grown to be a devoted father and a gentle, loving husband. To this peace-

ful church Agayne and her good man brought their babies, one by one, and dedicated them to God. Their friends and neighbors cheered and embraced them. Their five precious boys and beautiful little girl Parease had grown up as members of this church-family. These same friends, relatives and neighbors were all gathered here now, mourning the events of the day.

Agayne moaned as a richer darkness shook her, seeping into the corners and filling the sanctuary. The black of night brought a temporary end to the Turkish revelry in blood, but the suffering of her priceless ones played on and on in Agayne's heart and mind. She wasn't prepared for such cruelty and bitterness. Things had been too good . . . before. Life was sweet, her family was happy. Oh, that such joy and tranquility could be swallowed in an instant! How was it possible? Today she had lost lovely Parease, dear Hagop and her three oldest boys—who had grown to be admirable young men . . . Agayne's pain was too great to bear.

Just two weeks ago the church bells were ringing as usual. Agayne's family had been whole and blessed. The Turkish town of Nevsher was home to an Armenian community with close ties. The Arakelian residence (and that of their relatives) was located on Arakel Street. Their church was just down the street; they could hear the bells from their home. On that morning Agayne and Hagop's youngest boys, Armen and Hoannes, were anxious to sing in the youth choir. The young teenage boys ran on ahead while their parents and sister Parease followed. Agayne held her husband's arm and patted his hand as

they walked. His worry was unspoken, but Agayne knew. She wished for him to give these worries to their savior, but she certainly didn't blame him for his fear. Their lives under the Sultan's rule had been difficult, but now that the Young Turks had political power, the Arake-lians and their fellow Armenians were truly worried. Yet when the church bells rang, Agayne could almost believe things were well.

Nonetheless, inside the beautiful stone church, the atmosphere was tense. All was not well. There would be no youth choir this day. Their Pastor, Dir Soruan, stood before them with tears streaming down his kind face.

"My friends," he said, "we are facing the greatest crisis ever met by the Christian church. I have a notice here that was placed in my hands by the Turkish guards. I will read it:

'By order of his most gracious Excellency the Sultan, this church is hereby ordered to disband and not reorganize except in the name of Mohammed. This is a final notice, and if it is not recognized within twenty days, the building will be burned and all of the people destroyed.'

For Agayne, this read like a death sentence. She knew her beloved Hagop. While some might think they could just worship God in their secret place, Hagop would consider that a betrayal of his own conscience and a denial of his faith. Their neighbors would also refuse to comply with the Sultan's demand. They would rather die, and see their families die, than to deny their faith. Agayne's knees went weak at this thought.

The Arakelians were Armenians, yet they lived in the predominantly Moslem country of Turkey, which was part of the Ottoman Empire. For centuries the Ottoman Turks had conquered throughout the Mediterranean, Middle East, Eastern Europe, Spain and North Africa, carrying tens of thousands of people into slavery.

But early in the 1800s, the Turkish Ottoman Empire began to decline as the European countries of Greece, Serbia, Bulgaria and Romania won their independence. Armenia's geographical position made it a doorway between Europe and Asia, therefore, many Sultans considered Armenia *a danger spot*. To make matters much worse, Armenians embraced Christianity; this identified them more with *Christian Europe* than with *Pagan Asia*. In the late 1800s, when rumor said the Armenians wanted their independence, Sultan Abdul Hamid—known as *the Red Sultan*—responded fiercely by massacring one-hundred-thousand Armenian men, women and children.

After the Red Sultan was deposed in 1908, there was a brief euphoria and great hope among Armenians. Hope quickly dissolved after the government was taken over by *the Young Turks*, led by the three pashas (leaders) Mehmed Talaat, Ismail Enver and Ahmed Djemal. Although they seemed mild at the outset, their brutal ways were soon revealed.

Agayne stood quietly beside her husband, gripping his steady arm, while the crowd discussed the current political threats and the pastor answered their questions. Young Parease came to press up against her mother as the

heated discussions swirled about them. Placing her arm around her trembling daughter, Agayne pulled her close and whispered words of comfort. Though she could be mischievous, Parease was Agayne's most sensitive child.

Life had never been entirely easy for the Armenians; the hatred between the Moslem Turks and the Christian Armenians was deep and bitter. But the recent assassination (in Serbia) of the heir to Austria-Hungary's throne, Archduke Franz Ferdinand, had set off a full-scale European war. Now the Central Powers (Germany, Austria-Hungary and the Ottoman Empire) were uniting against the Allied Powers of Britain, France, Russia and other smaller countries—countries identified as Christian.

It had the makings of a great war; Agayne and her husband Hagop feared that their people, and family, would be caught in the middle.

When the pastor finished speaking with his flock, the families silently slipped back out of the church and through the streets toward their homes.

Nevsher quickly began to look deserted. Businessmen closed their shops, schools shut down and young children could not be seen playing outside. Instead, the Armenian families gathered in their homes to pray.

Nine days later, in the stillness of the afternoon, the church bells broke forth in brisk, clanging notes. Louder and louder rang their frantic call. The bells were signaling a call for everyone to assemble in the Armenian church.

When they arrived, Dir Soruan was in the pulpit, waiting. The look on his face sent shivers down Agayne's body, freezing any bit of hope she retained. Pastor Dir Soruan was holding another paper. When the families were fully assembled, he read:

"In revision to his previous order, the Sultan will allow only five more days for the compliance of his wishes."

A greater silence filled the room as the congregation gazed at their Pastor for direction. After a pause, he spoke firmly, "Dear friends, it is useless for us to think there is any way possible to evade the trouble we face. Our turn has come; the Sultan means business. He will carry out his declaration. The one and only decision for us to make is this: are we going to meet this demand as Jesus Christ would meet it? Or are we going to renounce our faith and bow the knee to Mohammed?"

The people answered, "We will not bow down to Mohammed—Christ died for us, and we are ready to die for Him!" All around the church, heads nodded. Agayne's neighbors and relatives rose to their feet to show their resolve. In the front row, a young man cried out, "If need be, we will fight to the end for our God!" Around the room other men echoed his words.

Dir Soruan motioned for quiet, then turned toward a picture of Christ hanging in the front of the altar. Bowing his head, he prayed aloud, "Oh Lord Jesus, give us strength, give us power, give us faith to honor and obey Thee! If it be Thy will, turn these terrible people aside from their

purpose—if not; prepare us to meet them according to Thy will. In the Name of our Christ, we ask it, amen."

After this news, many families were afraid to go home. Others intended to fight the soldiers; they declared that the stone church was a better fortress, especially for unarmed men. Military service was not permitted for the Armenians. They were heavily taxed for this *freedom from military service*, but it was not negotiable; their Turkish leaders considered it too dangerous to allow Armenians the art of using weapons.

However, still others implored the group to meet the violence with non-resistance.

"Friends, please listen," they begged, "we're not being asked to deny our Christ. We are only banned from assembling in this building! We must respond in love, prayer and forgiveness," they said, "just as our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ met his enemies."

In the end, the majority decided that the people should all stay together in the church—the building they were ordered to vacate. And so, the waiting began. Mothers embraced their children, while the men inclined toward physical resistance took charge guarding the doors and windows. Together the group suffered hunger as the sleepless hours ticked slowly away. Only the eyes of the terrified friends, neighbors and relatives seemed alive, burning and boring through the hours in a ceaseless effort to read the future. Long, nightmarish days passed, and then, suddenly, that for which they waited came.

On the morning of the fifth day, the weary group were startled by the sound of soldiers ascending the church steps. A squad of formidable Turkish soldiers, headed by a captain resplendent in his jeweled fez, gold braid, curved saber and clanking spurs, mounted the church steps noisily and pounded on the door, shouting:

"Open the door in the name of the Sultan!"

The men at the front of the church shouted back, "We do not recognize the Sultan!"

"If you do not open, we will break down the door," the soldiers replied. "This is your last chance—will you open?"

"We will not—if you want us, you will have to fight your way in," shouted one of the Armenian men in response.

Without further parley, the door was battered, split and ripped from its hinges; heavily-armed Turkish soldiers swarmed into the church over the splintered door. Armenian women and children cowered in the shadows, while their unarmed, defenseless men stood between them and the imminent threat. The men stood motionless, despite the rifles aimed at them.

Then, with unconscious dramatic force and power, their beloved pastor forced his way through the crowd and faced the captain. Agayne looked on, grieved, noting the simple, quiet dignity that clothed Dir Soruan like a mantle. With the gentle simplicity of a child, he spoke:

"Please don't kill these men. It is I whom you want, not they. I am ready to go—take me."

It seemed that an unwilling gleam of admiration leapt up in the captain's eyes, even as he caught the old man by the shoulder, shaking him unmercifully. At this indignity, the men sprang forward to protect their leader, but were pushed back into the shadows by bayonets and fists of the soldiers, while the captain addressed Dir Soruan.

"You do not seem to understand that the Sultan's order is law and must be obeyed," he said.

"God's orders come before those of the Sultan," Dir Soruan answered quietly.

At that, the captain turned and ordered his soldiers, "Throw him down the steps!"

Hiding in the shadows of her husband and their three grown boys, Agayne pulled her young teenage boys to her side and held her quaking daughter. As their pastor hurled down the many steps, Parease whimpered and pressed her eyes tightly against her mother's shoulder. When the pastor lay broken upon the street below, the soldiers tied him with a rope and dragged him away.

After Dir Soruan was gone, the captain turned to the guards and repeated the orders he'd received from the governor: "Kill all the men and boys who are able to hold a gun!" he shouted.

"Hang them, shoot them, or cut off their heads," he continued, "but kill them all. Then loot the town and burn their homes!" Before noon, about eighteen hundred men had lost their lives, including Agayne's dear, sweet Hagop and their three grown boys.

When the soldiers tore the men away from their families, they ignored thirteen-year-old Armen, thinking him a child. However, at fifteen, his brother Hoannes could certainly hold a gun. But, by a miracle, when the men were all gone, Hoannes still remained. Throughout the rest of the day Hoannes attempted to keep out of sight, and Agayne held Parease and Armen tightly, mourning the loss of her husband and three of her sons. She prayed that God would shield her remaining children. Yet before the sun had set, as one gathers flowers from a trampled garden, the soldiers came for the girls and young women. Agayne knew well what awaited her innocent little girl, Parease, yet she was powerless; the soldiers violently ripped her daughter from her protective arms. Yet once again, Agayne's two youngest boys remained. For the moment, Agayne was still a mother.

As she now lie weeping for those lost, Agayne heard a silent whisper, again and again, urging her to remember her boys. Urging her to respond to her responsibilities as a mother . . . *Rise up, Agayne. Rise up . . .* She had lost so much. Nevertheless, Armen and Hoannes needed their mother. *Rise up, Agayne. Rise up . . .* For them Agayne dared not surrender to the emotions that threatened to envelope her now. *Rise up . . . Rise up . . .*

In the faint moonlight Agayne saw others huddled inside their dear church, some moaning and sobbing, but many were silent, slumped down, staring into the black of the night. Near the front doors were the silhouettes of many Turkish guards. When the light of day returned, they would surely continue their slaughter. At her side was little Armen, slumped over like so many others, silent, staring at nothing . . . waiting to die.

Rise up, Agayne!

Today Armen watched his beloved father and his three oldest brothers die. He watched his sister Parease torn from his mother's arms to be sold into a harem. Now, it seemed, Armen was watching his mother give up all hope . . . Finally, touched by the posture of her son, Agayne began to pray silently. *Oh, my precious Lord. How can I rise up? I am nothing. Rise up to what? I have nothing left. I have nothing to give. Oh, my Lord! Be my strength.* The minutes ticked by and Agayne continued to pray, begging for strength. As she prayed, a plan began to unfold within her mind. *There just might be a way . . . she could see it . . . yes . . . she might save her boys.* They were under heavy guard, making this plan very dangerous. But if Agayne did nothing, they were already as good as dead. She might save her boys, if she would only rise up. At last Agayne lifted herself into a sitting position and leaned against the wall.

"Armen," she said at last, "where is your brother?"

"He is under the pew," the boy answered flatly.

"Hoannes, come," she whispered into the dark. Within seconds, Hoannes shuffled to her side and sunk down beside her. Praying silently again, she thanked God for the strength of the mother-love she felt awakening within her. The Lord was answering her prayers; only this could enable her to retain her sanity.

Splitting the blackness, the dim moonlight shone through the tall windows. Agayne laid her hand on her son's head, brought his ear close to her lips and whispered, "Tonight, Hoannes, when it's darkest, you must try to get out of here. Can you squeeze through one of the cellar windows?"

"Maybe; I'll try anyhow," Hoannes replied quietly.

"I believe you and Armen will have a better chance to escape dressed as old women. After you get out, gather up enough clothes to disguise yourselves, and then come back and stay close beside me."

"I'll do my best, Mother," promised Hoannes.

"Go, and may God protect you," she said. Not much later, Agayne listened to the faint sounds she alone could interpret as Hoannes tiptoed down the dark staircase and wriggled through a tiny basement window below.

