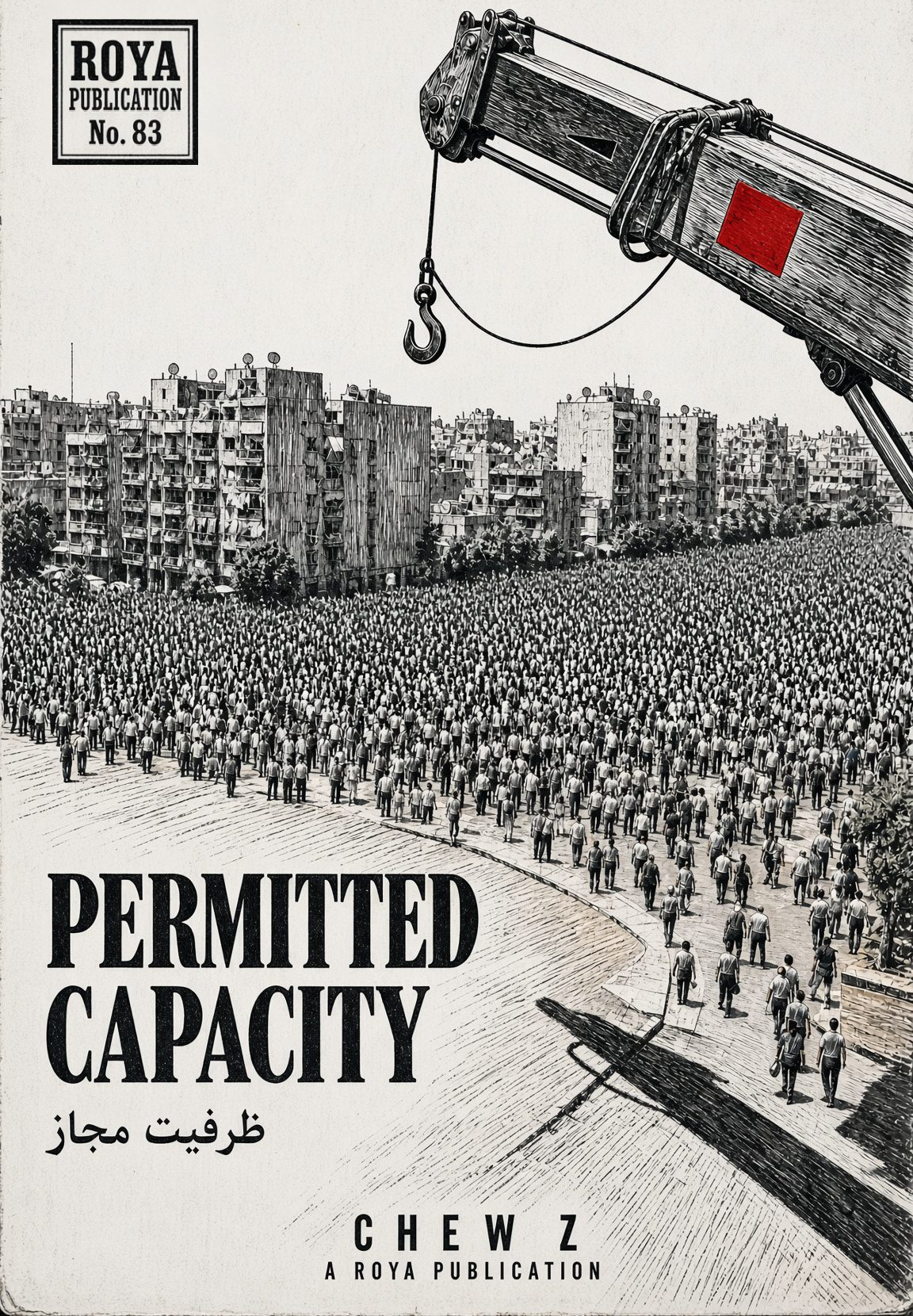


ROYA
PUBLICATION
No. 83



PERMITTED CAPACITY

ظرفیت مجاز

C H E W Z
A ROYA PUBLICATION

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ظرفیت مجاز

Chew Z

Printed in the Reach

Roya Publication No. 83

This is a work of fiction. Names, characters, places and incidents are either the product of the author's imagination or are used fictitiously. Any resemblance to actual persons, living or dead, events or locales is entirely coincidental.

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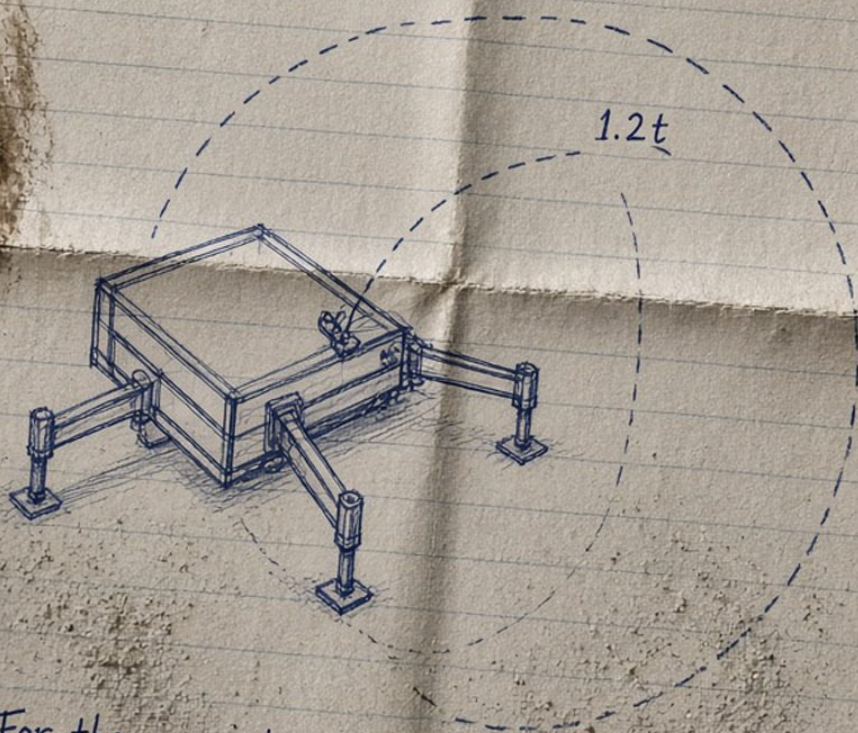
FROM THE UNSAID

Typeset in DejaVu Serif.

Printed in the Reach

PLAN 4539 · 20 SHAHRIVAR 1403 ·
GLAZING UNIT, SINGLE, TO REAR ROOF TERRACE

LOAD 1.2t · RADIUS 12m · BOOM 54° · GROUND
ASPHALT, WARM · ZONE 14m



For the ones who went up.

SYNOPSIS

Sattār Fallāhi is sixty-one and owns one truck-mounted loader crane. For thirty years he has put things on the roofs of a provincial city — air-handling units, water tanks, glass, marble, a jeweller's safe — at an hourly rate with a four-hour minimum, plus fuel, invoiced at the end of the month. He is not political, not devout and not stupid. He is a tradesman with a licence and a good reputation, and the reputation rests on one thing.

He knows what a load weighs. Not by looking: through the machine. In the half-second when the load leaves the ground the springs go quiet and the pump changes its note and the whole vehicle leans about the thickness of a coin, and all of that arrives in his hands at once, like a word, and it says a number. It has been right to within twenty kilos for thirty years. It is the only thing about him that anybody has ever admired.

Four times in twenty years, a man has asked the yard what the machine can do at four metres, and Sattār has been set up before six and off the road by twenty past, with his back to the load and the sheet on his knee. Nothing in the record of that country names the man in the cab, or asks who owns the vehicle, or what he is paid. The machines have been photographed for twenty years. Nobody has ever photographed him.

Then, in Khordad 1403, a pallet of cement says fourteen hundred kilos and is a thousand.

It goes slowly and it goes completely. He begins asking storemen for dockets, writing figures on the back of his hand, rigging heavier than the job needs, working close in, turning down the jobs he was known for. His son starts covering for him and neither of them says so. And it turns round and comes back the other way, so that things with no weight begin to have one — a sentence at a table that he has to put his knife and fork down before he can answer, a Tuesday that is heavier than a Wednesday, a telephone from his brother that takes both hands.

On a Tuesday afternoon in Shahrivar, at forty-one degrees, at twelve metres, on a job where he should have moved the truck, he writes a figure in the load box that he has not weighed, and rigs the load to the figure.

Permitted Capacity is the third book in THE UNSAID. It is told in forty-nine entries, most of them headed by a lift plan — the document a crane driver writes before a lift, which is not a record but a prediction, and which nobody in that country is required to write at all.

A NOTE FROM THE AUTHOR

This book is an argument with a campaign that was right.

Public executions in Iran are carried out from truck-mounted mobile cranes used as makeshift gallows. These are not purpose-built machines. They are ordinary commercial vehicles of the kind that put water tanks on roofs, and for two decades the world has photographed them and read the manufacturers' names off the paintwork. A campaign that has run since 1390 (2011) identified thirteen makers whose cranes had been photographed in use — among them Tadano, Palfinger, Atlas, Terex, UNIC, Konecranes and Liebherr — and pushed several of them out of the country altogether. A Palfinger was documented at Qazvin in Khordad 1390 (May 2011); Atlas machines in Shahrivar and Mehr 1392 (September and October 2013).

That campaign did good work and it has never once asked who was driving.

The mechanism matters, and it is the reason this book exists. The condemned is not dropped. He is lifted — raised off the ground with the rope already on, and death comes by strangulation over minutes. The motion is the boom going up: the same motion an operator performs a hundred times a week putting glazing on a roof.

Public hangings are rare and episodic against a very large national total. Iran Human Rights counted one in 1399 (2020), none at all in 1400 (2021), two in 1401 (2022), seven in 1402 (2023) and four in 1403 (2024). The United Nations human rights office recorded at least 901 executions in Iran in 1403 (2024) by every method; Amnesty International's global report for the same year puts Iran at close to two thirds of all executions recorded anywhere in the world, and every count that exists says 1404 (2025) was higher again. No total appears anywhere in the entries that follow. Sattār does not know one and would not be able to produce one, and the arithmetic of it is not what he is for.

So this is not a man with a routine. It is a man with an ordinary working life that has four mornings in it, spread across twenty years, and the horror is the intermittence.

What is documented. The regulation governing his trade is the Protective Regulation for Transport and Materials-Handling Equipment in Workplaces, made by the Ministry of Labour. Its Article 2 requires that the maximum permitted capacity be written by the manufacturer, clearly and legibly, on every machine. This book is named off that requirement. Article 19 provides for periodic inspection and a certificate of authorisation to work. And Article 47 says that the crane operator shall not permit any person to ride upon the load, or to be suspended from the hook or the cables of the crane and carried by it.

The first rule of that trade is written down, it is addressed to the driver by name, and it describes those four mornings in the exact words the four mornings would need. It did not govern them. It is never quoted in this book, because a man does not cite the rulebook of his own trade; he simply knows it, the way the yard knows it, which is as a joke about the hook.

The lift plan is real and is taught in that country, borrowed from foreign practice along with its English name. No law requires it, no inspector collects it, and no file of them exists anywhere but the drawer a man keeps them in. That is why most of this book is written on the backs of them.

What is not documented, and it is the whole subject. Nothing anywhere establishes who owns these vehicles, who is engaged, who operates them, or what they are paid. The man in the cab is so far beneath notice that a global campaign about his machine has run for more than a decade without mentioning him. This narrator stands on that silence and every part of him is invention: the man, his family, the yard, the compressor, the hose, the competitor, the apprentice, the glazier and his widow, the arrangement, and every word said inside that cab. The city is not named, deliberately, and no morning described in this book is any particular morning.

Nobody who is lifted in these pages is described, named, aged, given an offence or given a case. That is not squeamishness. It is

the exact boundary of what the man at the levers is permitted to know, and the book holds to his knowledge and does not go one step past it.

No person in this book is a real person.

In more than a decade nobody has put a single question to the man at the levers. What follows is forty-nine of them.

Chew Z

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I. GROUND CONDITIONS

1.

**PLAN 4471 · 12 ORDIBEHESHT 1403 · GLAZING UNIT TO
ROOF, TWO STOREYS, SOUTH SIDE**

*LOAD 1.4 t · RADIUS 9 m · BOOM 62° · GROUND HARDCORE, DRY
· ZONE 12 m*

Nobody makes me write these.

I want that down at the start, because a man reading this later will assume there was a rule and that I was keeping to it. There is no rule. The law says the maker has to write the capacity on the machine and it says the machine has to be tested and it says what I am not allowed to let a man do near it, and that is the end of what the law has to say to me. It has never once asked me what I intend to lift or where I intend to stand.

I write the plan because I was taught to by a man who is dead, in a yard that is now a tyre place, and because a lift you have written down is a lift you have already done once.

So this is a plan for a sheet of glass going onto a roof on a Wednesday.

The unit is a metre and a half by two and a bit, in a timber frame, and the frame is most of the weight. Fourteen hundred kilos, and I have not weighed it, and I do not need to. I put my hand flat on the frame when they set it down off the flatbed and I felt the boards take it, and it is fourteen hundred, and if it is not fourteen hundred it is fourteen fifty.

I have lifted heavier.

The house is on the corner where the road bends, so the truck goes on the pavement side with the jacks out over the kerbstones, and the kerbstones are the kind they laid before the revolution and they will hold. The legs are called *jack-e ta'ādol* [JAK-e ta-aa-DOL], balance jacks — the four that come down out of the chassis and take the truck off its own tyres, and the whole trade is decided by them. Every man who has ever gone over has gone over on his jacks.

I write the radius, I write the angle, I write what is under the feet. Then I sit in the cab with the sheet turned over on my knee and I wait for the roofers, because the roofers are never ready, and I have twenty minutes.

That is what this is. This is the back of the sheet.

2.

PLAN 4472 · 12 ORDIBEHESHT 1403 · SAME SITE, SECOND UNIT

*LOAD 1.4 t · RADIUS 9 m · BOOM 62° · GROUND AS ABOVE ·
ZONE 12 m*

The yard is Akbar's, and Akbar has been in the next chair to me for twenty years, and there is nothing in it that has not been argued about.

There is a compressor. It is his. I have owed him for half of it since 1385 and he has never once asked and I have never once paid, and by now the money is not the point of it; the compressor is a thing between us, like a relative neither of us likes.

There is a hose. It runs down the inside of the boom and it has a weep in it at the second collar, and it has had that weep since 1401. It goes down the paint about a hand's width in a week. Akbar says change it. I say it will do the season. We have said those two sentences to each other, in that order, more times than we have said anything else, including the two funerals we went to together.

And there is the certificate.

The boom is tested every year and a man comes and puts a load on it and watches the gauges, and afterwards he issues a paper, a *gowāhi-nāmeḥ* [go-vaa-hee-NAA-meh], which says the machine is fit and which is supposed to live on the vehicle.

It lives in Akbar's kitchen.

It has lived in Akbar's kitchen since the year his wife put it in a drawer with the electricity bills so it would not get oil on it, and every year the new one goes in on top of the old one, and there are now enough of them in that drawer to make a small book. When an

inspector wants to see it somebody drives to Akbar's house. This has happened five times in twenty years and every time the inspector waited in the yard and drank tea and was not annoyed, because everybody's certificate is in somebody's kitchen.

3.

PLAN 4475 · 13 ORDIBEHESHT 1403 · AIR-HANDLING UNIT TO ROOF, CLINIC

*LOAD 2.2 t · RADIUS 11 m · BOOM 58° · GROUND ASPHALT, DRY ·
ZONE 14 m*

Mohsen is thirty-four and the business is going to him and neither of us has said so out loud, which is how these things are done and also how they go wrong.

He is better than me at the part that is paper. He knows what a job should cost before he has looked at it. He rings people back. He has an account book with the columns in different colours and he can tell you in Ordibehesht what we will earn in Mordad, and he is usually right, which I find unpleasant in a way I have never been able to explain to him.

He is worse than me on the sticks and he knows that too.

It is not that he is clumsy. He is careful. That is the trouble. He brings a load down the way a man carries a full glass across a room, all concentration, all eyes, and a load does not want a man's eyes on it, it wants his hands off the wrong lever. You can see him counting. Thirty years and I have never counted.

He came out to the clinic with me because the roof there is bad and because he likes the parts of the work that have a problem in them, and he stood at the tail of the truck and looked up while I put the unit over the parapet, and when it went down onto the sleepers he said, that was nice.

It was nice.

Then he said, when I do it, does it look like that.

I said, it looks fine.

He said, that is not what I asked.

4.

NO PLAN. 14 ORDIBEHESHT 1403. FRIDAY. THE YARD SHUT.

—

What we do, all day, most weeks, is put things on roofs.

Everything in this city that goes up goes up on a truck like mine, because the streets were laid for donkeys and the buildings were put in afterwards and there is nowhere to stand a proper machine. So it is us. Air-handling units. Water tanks. Shop signs. Glass. Marble. Transformers for the substations on the ring road. A safe, once, into a jeweller's on the second floor of a building with a shop under it, and that took most of a morning and a police officer to hold the traffic, and the safe weighed less than the tanks I do every week and everybody on the street thought it was the biggest thing they had ever seen because they knew what was in it. I have lifted heavier, I said to the jeweller, and he did not like it, and I have never worked out why.

Weight has nothing to do with what a thing is. That is the first thing the machine teaches you and it never stops teaching it.

We are paid by the hour with a minimum of four, plus fuel, plus a figure for setting up if the setting up is difficult; and where a job takes a whole day there is a day rate, which is eight hours whether you are there for eight or for six. Somebody signs the docket and Mohsen invoices at the end of the month. There is no romance in it anywhere. It is the same trade as a taxi with a longer arm.

Friday I do nothing. I sit in the yard sometimes anyway because the house is loud.

5.

**PLAN 4479 · 19 ORDIBEHESHT 1403 · STEEL TANK,
GROUND TO ROOF, FACTORY UNIT 6**

*LOAD 3.8 t · RADIUS 7 m · BOOM 68° · GROUND CONCRETE
SLAB, GOOD · ZONE 10 m*

I should explain the one thing I can do, because everything after this is about losing it, and if you have not understood what it was you will not understand what went.

I know what a thing weighs.

Not by looking. Looking is guessing and every man in the trade guesses and most of them are within a quarter, which is not good enough. I know it through the machine. You take the slack up out of the rope and there is a moment — it is not even a second — where the load is not on the ground any more and is not properly on the hook yet, and the truck talks. The springs go quiet. The boom takes its set. There is a sound out of the pump that changes pitch, and the whole vehicle, all nine tonnes of it, leans about the thickness of a coin, and if your hands are on the levers you feel all of that arrive at once, like a word.

And it says a number.

I have never once explained this to anybody and I am not sure I am explaining it now. Old men in this trade all say they have it and most of them have a good memory for what they lifted last time. Mine is not memory. A crate I have never seen, packed by somebody in another country, and I will tell you inside twenty kilos, and the weighbridge will agree with me, and that has been true since my first year in the cab.

It is not a gift, exactly. It is thirty years of the same conversation with the same machine.

But it is the only thing about me that anybody ever admired.

6.

**PLAN 4481 · 20 ORDIBEHESHT 1403 · MARBLE, EIGHT
SLABS, LIFT TO THIRD FLOOR**

*LOAD 0.9 t PER SET · RADIUS 12 m · BOOM 54° · GROUND
ASPHALT, SOFT — MATS · ZONE 15 m*

Mehran cannot reverse a trailer.

He is nineteen and he has been with us since Farvardin and he is the only person in that yard who is happy. He can sling. He is quick, he is not frightened of height, he calls me *ostā* [os-TAA] which nobody has called me for years and which I pretend to find ridiculous. He will make a decent hand.

He cannot reverse a trailer.

He has been shown by me, by Mohsen, by Akbar, and once, at length and with diagrams, by a man from the tyre place who had come over for a different reason. He gets in. He puts his arm along the seat back. He turns the wheel the wrong way with the confidence of a man who has just worked something out from first principles, and the trailer goes into the fence, and Akbar says nothing, and that is the funniest part.

The second funniest part is that Mehran has decided the problem is the mirror.

He is not troubled by any of it, which is the third funniest part and is also why he will be all right.

Yesterday he was up on the deck flaking the rope out and he put his boot in the hook and stood in it, one foot, holding the sling, just standing there in the hook, and he shouted down, *ostā*, take me up.

Akbar did not even look round. He said, get down, we have a licence.

7.

**PLAN 1725 · 12 ABAN 1384 · MEYDĀN. ONE LIFT, VERTICAL,
NO TRAVEL.**

*LOAD — · RADIUS 4 m · BOOM 71° · GROUND ASPHALT, COLD ·
ZONE CLEARED BY OTHERS*

The first time was in Aban 1384 and the booking came the way every booking came, which was a telephone call to the yard.

The man asked whether we were free on the Thursday morning early, and he asked what the machine could do at four metres, and I told him, and he said that would be more than enough. He said where. He said six o'clock, and that we should be set up and off the road by twenty past. He gave a name for the docket and a department, and Mohsen — Mohsen was fifteen then and did the book in pencil — wrote it in.

It is a place I have driven past all my life. There is a bank on one side of it and there was a carpet shop then that is a phone shop now.

We were set up at ten to six. The jacks went on the timbers because the asphalt was cold and I did not want the feet to sink into it later when the sun came round. There were men there before us doing the barriers. The rope was theirs and the rigging was theirs and a man in a blue coat put it on the hook himself and stepped back and put his hands in his pockets.

I raised the boom to seventy-one degrees at four metres, which is a lift a child could do, and I did it at the speed they asked for, and then I sat with the levers under my hands and my back to it and I filled in the sheet.

That is all there was to it. It took less time than the glass on Wednesday.

I do not know what to say about that morning except that it was a morning. The shops opened at eight. I had breakfast on the way home. Soghra asked what the job had been and I said the *meydān* [may-DAAN], which is the square, and she said, oh, and put the bread down, and neither of us said anything else because there was nothing else that either of us knew how to say. The docket was

signed. We were paid in the ordinary way, at the ordinary rate, forty days later, like everyone else.

8.

**PLAN 4484 · 23 ORDIBEHESHT 1403 · TWO WATER TANKS,
ROOF, RESIDENTIAL**

*LOAD 0.6 t EACH · RADIUS 10 m · BOOM 60° · GROUND PAVING,
GOOD · ZONE 12 m*

Soghra has been ill for three years in a way that has not got worse and will not get better, and we have both stopped expecting either. I have lifted heavier, I told her brother on the telephone the week they told us, and he said, God willing, which is the correct answer to a sentence like that and not an answer to anything.

She gets up at five out of habit and is finished by ten and then the day is long for her. She has a chair by the window in the front room and a radio she does not listen to and a great many opinions about the family of the man opposite. In the evening I sit in the other chair and she tells me about them and I say the right things in the right places, and this has been the shape of the evening for so long that if she stopped I would not know what to do with my hands.

Amir-Ali is five and comes on Thursdays and gets on my shoulders and stays there until somebody makes him get down.

That is the whole of my life outside the truck and I want to say plainly that it is a good one. Nothing in this is a complaint. There are men in this trade drinking themselves into the ground and men whose sons will not speak to them, and I have a wife I have not run out of things to say to, and a son who is better at it than I was, and a boy on my shoulders on Thursdays.

I have never been able to make that add up with the rest of it either, so I have put both of them down here, one after the other, and left them.

9.

**PLAN 4488 · 27 ORDIBEHESHT 1403 · TRANSFORMER,
SUBSTATION, RING ROAD**

*LOAD 5.1 t · RADIUS 6 m · BOOM 72° · GROUND COMPACTED,
GOOD · ZONE 20 m*

There is a man across town called Rahmani who will do any job for two thirds of what I charge.

He can do this because his machine is older than mine, because he does not test it, and because he sets his jacks on whatever is there. I have watched him work. He puts the feet down on kerbstones and on drain covers and once, on the road behind the bazaar, on a piece of chipboard he found. His outriggers are not level and he does not care that they are not level, and the whole time the load is in the air that truck is standing on three legs and a promise.

Everybody knows. The men who hire him know. Akbar has explained it to three separate site foremen with a diagram in the dust.

They hire him anyway, because he is two thirds of the price and because nothing has happened yet.

That is the trade. That is the whole of the trade in one man. And I want to be careful here, because it is very easy to be the one who does it properly and to enjoy it, and I have enjoyed it, and I have said the sentence about the chipboard at that yard maybe two hundred times and it has never once cost me anything to say.

He will kill somebody. Everyone says so. Everyone has been saying so for years.

10.

**PLAN 4490 · 29 ORDIBEHESHT 1403 · BOILER, THROUGH
ROOF OPENING, LAUNDRY**

*LOAD 4.4 t · RADIUS 8 m · BOOM 66° · GROUND SLAB, GOOD ·
ZONE 12 m · BLIND LIFT — SIGNALLER*

A blind lift is one where you cannot see the load at the moment it matters, and there is a man on the roof with his arm up and you are working off his arm.

The laundry wanted a boiler through an opening in the roof with about three fingers of clearance on the long side, and the opening was behind the parapet and I could not see it from the cab, and Mohsen went up and stood where I could see him.

Forty minutes. He gave me the arm and I moved and he gave me the arm again. Down in fingers. Then in nothing at all — he just held his hand flat and I held it there and the boiler hung in the air over that hole not moving, and the whole street had stopped to watch by then because a thing hanging still in the air is more frightening to people than a thing moving.

Then his hand went down and I put it through.

The laundry man came and shook my hand with both of his. Mohsen came down the ladder and did not say anything at all, and got in the truck, and I understood that he had been up there giving the signals for forty minutes for a lift he could have done himself, and that he had not said so, and that this was a kindness, and that I did not like it.

Khasteh nabāshid [khas-TEH na-baa-SHEED], said the laundry man. May you not be tired.

I have lifted heavier.

11.

NO PLAN. 2 KHORDAD 1403. TEST DAY. NO LIFTING.

—
Once a year a man comes and we put weights on the boom and he watches the gauges and we do not work all day.

He is from the inspection company, he has been coming for six years, and he is decent. He walks round the vehicle first with his hands behind his back like a man at a wedding. He looks at the rope, at every metre of it, running it through a rag. He goes up on the deck and puts his thumbnail into the collar where the hose weeps and looks at me, and I say, this season, and he says, you said that last year.

And at some point he stands in the cab door and looks at the plate.

Every crane has one. It is riveted to the wall of the cab by the door and it is put there by the people who built the machine, because the law says it has to be — *the maximum permitted capacity shall be written by the manufacturer, clearly and legibly, upon every machine.*

On mine it is a steel plate about the size of a hand, painted over twice and scratched back both times, and stamped across the top of it is the phrase the law asks for: *zarfiyat-e mojāz* [zar-fee-YAT-e mo-JAAZ], the permitted capacity, with the word for *maximum* in front of it.

Under that is the *jadval-e bār* [jad-VAL-e BAAR], the load table, which is the machine's honest account of itself: at this radius, this much, at that radius, that much, and the numbers go down as the arm goes out because everything in this world costs more the further away it is.

There is a computer in the cab as well now, which reads the pressure and knows the angle and puts a figure on a screen and shrieks at you when you get near the *hadd-e mojāz* [HAD-de mo-JAAZ], the permitted limit. *Bishbāri* [beesh-baa-REE], it says. Overload. I have never had it shriek at me in my life. Mohsen has had it twice, both times on purpose, learning where it sat.

He signed the paper and I put it in the door pocket, and it went to Akbar's kitchen inside the week, the way every one of them has.

12.

**PLAN 4495 · 6 KHORDAD 1403 · CEMENT AND SAND,
PALLETES, TO THIRD FLOOR**

*LOAD 1.0 t PER PALLET · RADIUS 11 m · BOOM 56° · GROUND
ASPHALT, WARM · ZONE 14 m*

Here is the first one, and it is nothing, and I only have it because I write these down.

Twenty bags of cement on a pallet is one thousand kilos. It has been one thousand kilos my whole life. It is the most boring number in the trade and you can price a whole job off it without getting out of the truck.

I took the slack up on the first pallet and the truck said fourteen hundred.

I sat with my hands on the levers and let it back down and got out, and went and looked, and it was twenty bags, and I counted them twice like an old woman in a queue. Akbar shouted, what.

Nothing, I said. Wet, maybe.

They were not wet. It had not rained for a month.

I got back in and took it up and it said a thousand, the way it should, and I put all four pallets on the third floor in eighteen minutes and we went to the next job.

I did not write anything down about it. I have gone back to that sheet since, several times, to see whether I made a note anywhere on it, and I did not. The load weight on plan 4495 says 1.0 t per pallet in my own handwriting and it is correct, and it is the last one I ever wrote without knowing that I might be wrong.

13.

PLAN 4499 · 10 KHORDAD 1403 · GLAZING, FOUR UNITS, OFFICE FIT-OUT

*LOAD 1.6 t · RADIUS 9 m · BOOM 62° · GROUND HARDCORE, DRY
· ZONE 12 m*

Thirty years, and by the end of Khordad I had done, I think, something over nine thousand lifts, and dropped none of them.

You are supposed to say *by the grace of God* after a sentence like that and I never have, because the grace of God did not set my jacks. I set them. I set them on timbers when the ground was soft and I set them wide when I did not need to and I turned down a handful of jobs a year that other men took, and that is not grace, that is a man being careful for thirty years in a row, which is the most boring virtue there is and the only one this trade recognises.

That evening the four units went in without a mark on them and the fitters were pleased and Mehran got the slings off in the time it takes to smoke half a cigarette, and I came down out of the cab into the last of the light, and Akbar was sitting on the compressor.

He said, your hose.

I said, this season.

He said, that is what you said.

And I stood there in that yard with the sheets under my arm and I felt entirely well, and I want it written down that the last day I felt entirely well was an ordinary Thursday in Khordad and there was nothing about it at all.

The bag of bread on the seat of the truck on the way home weighed nothing.

I noticed. I did not do anything about it. I have lifted heavier, I said, out loud, in the cab, alone, to a bag of bread, and I laughed at myself, and I drove home.

II. RADIUS

14.

PLAN 4507 · 3 TIR 1403 · CONDENSER UNITS, SIX, TO ROOF
LOAD 0.4 t EACH (DOCKET) · RADIUS 10 m · BOOM 60° · GROUND
ASPHALT, HOT — MATS · ZONE 12 m

By Tir it was happening about once a week and I had begun to have a system for it, which is how you know a man has stopped believing something is nothing.

The system was this. If the screen in the cab said a figure and my hands said a different figure, I took the load back down, and I got out, and I found somebody who knew what it weighed, and I asked in a way that did not sound like asking.

You have got the paperwork for these, I would say. Just for the sheet.

And a storeman would go and find a docket and read me a number off it, and the number would be the number the screen had said, every single time, and I would write it in the box and get back in the cab and my hands would go on saying the other thing all afternoon like a radio in another room.

I have lifted heavier, I would say to the storeman, taking the docket off him, so that the asking had a shape.

Six condensers, four hundred kilos each. My hands said the first one was six hundred and the last one was two-fifty and they were all four hundred.

The screen has been right every time. That is the part I cannot get anybody to understand, on the rare occasions I have tried. It is not that I began to make mistakes. It is that I stopped being able to tell without asking, and being able to tell without asking was the entire content of what I was.

15.

PLAN 4510 · 9 TIR 1403 · STEEL BEAMS, EIGHT, TO SECOND FLOOR SLAB

*LOAD 1.1 t PER PAIR · RADIUS 6 m · BOOM 71° · GROUND SLAB,
GOOD · ZONE 10 m*

Radius is the distance from the middle of the machine to the middle of the load, and it is the only number in this trade that matters.

At four metres my truck will pick up eight tonnes and think nothing of it. At fourteen metres the same truck, the same rope, the same everything, will pick up a tonne and a half and start to think about it, and if you put two tonnes out there it will come over on top of you and there is no strength anywhere in the world that will stop it. The load has not changed. Nothing has changed but how far away you are holding it.

I have known it since my first month in the trade and it has never once been interesting to me before.

What I started doing in Tir was working close in. Where I would once have set the truck at the kerb and reached over the wall, I began driving up onto the site, moving the vehicle twice, three times, on jobs where nobody moves it once. It costs an hour. It costs the customer nothing because I did not charge for it.

Mohsen did not say anything about the hours for about three weeks. Then he said, you are taking longer.

I said, the sites are worse than they were.

He said, they are the same sites.

16.

NO PLAN. 14 TIR 1403. THURSDAY.

—

Amir-Ali got on my shoulders in the hall and I lifted him up and there was nothing there.

I want to be exact, because this is the one I have gone over the most. It is not that he felt light. Light is a reading. A feather is light

and a bag of bread is light and I could have told you the difference between the two of them in the dark six months before.

There was no reading at all.

I had a warm weight on my neck and two hands in my hair and I knew he was there in the way you know the wall is there in a dark room, by argument, and I stood in the hall holding my grandson's ankles and I could not have told you within thirty kilos what I was holding.

He said, go.

I went. Round the front room twice, into the kitchen, back. He did the noise he does. Soghra said something about the good chair.

Then I put him down and went out into the yard behind the house and stood there in the dark for a while with my hands on the wall, and then I came back in and ate my dinner.

17.

**PLAN 2422 · 24 TIR 1389 · MEYDÂN. ONE LIFT, VERTICAL,
NO TRAVEL.**

*LOAD — · RADIUS 4 m · BOOM 71° · GROUND ASPHALT, COOL ·
ZONE CLEARED BY OTHERS*

The second one was five years after the first and I had stopped expecting there to be a second one.

Same telephone call, same yard, a different voice. What can you do at four metres. Six o'clock. Off the road by twenty past.

The difference was that a man came to the cab window before, and put his forearms on the sill, and was pleasant to me for about a minute about the traffic, and then said: not fast.

I said, no.

He said, and not slow. He made a shape with his hand, flat, going up, steady. Like that, he said. Not stopping.

I said, *chashm* [CHASHM]. On my eye. Which is what you say to a man who has told you how he wants a thing done and is standing at your window waiting to hear it. And then I did it exactly the way he

had shown me with his hand, at the speed he wanted, all the way, without stopping, and I did it better than I had done it in 1384, and the reason I did it better is that a man had explained to me what he wanted and I am good at my work.

That is the sentence I have never been able to get out of my mouth to another living person, and here it is on the back of a sheet.

Twenty past six. Jacks up. Home before the traffic.

18.

PLAN 4517 · 30 TIR 1403 · PLANT, ROOFTOP, HOTEL EXTENSION

*LOAD 2.0 t (DOCKET) · RADIUS 8 m · BOOM 66° · GROUND SLAB,
GOOD · ZONE 14 m*

You will notice the word *docket* in the box. That started in Tir.

Other things that started in Tir. I began writing figures on the back of my left hand in pen, because I had got a number out of a storeman and did not trust myself to still have it by the time I was in the cab. I began rigging with four legs where two would do, and with rope a size up, which slows everything and looks like caution and is admired. I began asking Mehran what he thought a thing weighed, and treating his answer as a second opinion, which it was not, because he is nineteen and guesses like everybody else.

And I began, without deciding to, letting Mohsen take the awkward ones.

He never once offered. That is what I mean about him. He would look at a job on the way in and say, that stack is going to be a nuisance from where you will be sitting, do you want me to run it, and I would say, if you like, and he would run it. Then in the truck afterwards he would talk about the football.

He knew in Tir. I am certain he knew in Tir. He said nothing to me about it until Azar and by then it did not matter what anybody said.

19.

**PLAN 4521 · 6 MORDAD 1403 · TANK, ROOF, SCHOOL — OUT
OF TERM**

*LOAD 0.8 t · RADIUS 9 m · BOOM 62° · GROUND PAVING, GOOD ·
ZONE 12 m*

Then it turned round and started coming the other way, and I have never found a way of writing this down that does not sound like a man who should be somewhere with a locked door.

Things that do not weigh anything began to weigh something.

Soghra said, at the table, that her sister was coming on Friday. That is all she said. And it arrived in my hands. Not in my chest, which is where a man is supposed to feel a thing about his wife's sister. In my hands, across both palms, the way a length of rolled lead arrives when somebody puts it in your arms without warning, and I had to put my knife and fork down on the plate before I could answer her.

I have lifted heavier, I said, and she said, what, and I said, nothing, the sister, bring her Friday.

A Tuesday is heavier than a Wednesday. I cannot argue about this. I know how it sounds.

The telephone at the yard, when it rings, has a weight before you pick it up, and the weight is not the same every time, and twice now I have known before I lifted it.

And bread is nothing. Bread has been nothing since Khordad. I can carry three loaves in one hand across a road and there is nothing in that hand at all, and I have started buying it in a bag with handles so that there is at least something for my fingers to do.

20.

PLAN 4523 · 9 MORDAD 1403 · MARBLE, LARGE FORMAT, TO FOURTH FLOOR — ABORTED

*LOAD ? · RADIUS 13 m · BOOM 50° · GROUND ASPHALT, HOT ·
ZONE 16 m*

First time in thirty years I have put something back on the ground because I did not like it.

Six slabs on a frame, over a garden wall, at thirteen metres because there was a tree and the tree belonged to a lawyer. I took the slack up and the screen said one point nine and my hands said nothing whatsoever — not a wrong number, nothing, the way a dead radio says nothing — and I held it about a hand's width off the deck and looked at it for a long time.

Then I set it down and got out and said the ground was no good.

The ground was fine. Everybody could see the ground was fine. Akbar was not there. Mehran said, *ostā*, shall I get the mats, and I said no, and we packed up and went, and the lawyer telephoned Mohsen in the afternoon and Mohsen handled it and we did the job on the Saturday with the truck inside the garden and the tree branch tied back, which is what I should have proposed in the first place.

In the box on plan 4523 I wrote a question mark.

I have looked at that question mark more than I have looked at anything else in this drawer. It is the first one. Everything after it is downhill and it took four months.

21.

PLAN 4526 · 14 MORDAD 1403 · AIR-HANDLING, TWO, TO ROOF, BANK BRANCH

*LOAD 1.5 t (DOCKET) · RADIUS 7 m · BOOM 68° · GROUND SLAB,
GOOD · ZONE 12 m*

The hose let go on the fourteenth, in the yard, at rest, which is the only place in this world a hose is allowed to let go.

It went down the boom and across the deck and under the compressor and Akbar stood in it in his good shoes. It took two days and cost about what we make in five, and for those two days there was nothing else discussed by anybody.

Akbar's position was that he had said. My position was that a hose that lasts two years past a weep is a good hose and that he had had value from it. Mehran's position, which he gave at length, was that the same thing had happened to a cousin of his in another city, and that the cousin's boss had made him clean it up with sawdust, and that sawdust was the wrong thing.

Nobody worked. Everybody was happy. It was the best two days of that summer.

On the second afternoon Mehran got into the hook again, both feet this time, hanging off the sling with his arms out like a man on a poster, and shouted for somebody to take him up, and Akbar said the thing he always says, which is that we have a licence, and then he said: and anyway, we do not do that.

And everybody laughed, and I laughed, and I have thought about that afternoon more than I have thought about almost anything.

22.

NO PLAN. 21 MORDAD 1403. SUNDAY.

—
My brother telephoned from the north about a piece of land our father left, which has been going on since our father died and will be going on when I do. The telephone rang and I looked at it and it was heavy.

I let it ring four times and then I picked it up and it was so heavy that I had to put my elbow on the table, and I said the greeting, and he said what he always says, and I stood there in the hall holding a telephone with both hands, the way you hold something that has been put into them at a funeral.

He wanted a signature. He has wanted a signature for six years. I said I would come up in Mehr and he said that is what I said in Farvardin and I said I know, and then we talked about his knee for

a while, and then it was finished and I put it down, and my hands were shaking the way they do after a long lift in the cold.

That is the whole entry. A man had a telephone call with his brother about some land.

I have lifted heavier.

23.

PLAN 4533 · 3 SHAHRIVAR 1403 · GLAZING, SIX UNITS, OFFICE, SOUTH ELEVATION

*LOAD 1.6 t · RADIUS 8 m · BOOM 66° · GROUND HARDCORE, DRY
· ZONE 12 m*

In Shahrivar it came back for about a fortnight and I thought I was well.

I do not know why and I have stopped looking for the reason. It came back the way it went — without announcing anything. I took up a bundle of scaffold on the third and the truck talked to me the way it used to, and it said twelve hundred and forty, and the weighbridge ticket in the foreman's hand said one thousand two hundred and thirty, and I sat in that cab and something in my chest let go so hard that I had to sit there a minute with my hand over my mouth.

Fourteen days.

I did four glazing jobs, a transformer, two tank runs and a difficult chimney liner, and every one of them was clean, and on the twelfth I did a blind lift off Mehran's arm — Mehran's, not Mohsen's — and it went in like a key.

I did not tell anybody it had gone and I did not tell anybody it had come back, so there was nobody in the world to tell it had come back, and I drove around this city for a fortnight in the state of a man who has been let off something.

It stopped on the seventeenth of Shahrivar and it did not come back again.

24.

PLAN 4539 · 20 SHAHRIVAR 1403 · GLAZING UNIT, SINGLE, TO REAR ROOF TERRACE

*LOAD 1.2 t · RADIUS 12 m · BOOM 54° · GROUND ASPHALT,
WARM · ZONE 14 m*

Hamid Rezvani had a glass business with his brother-in-law and I had worked with him perhaps thirty times over fifteen years, and he was fifty-four, and that is everything I am able to tell you about him that is mine to tell.

He was a helper. There are men in the trades who cannot stand and watch. You put the truck up and they are at your elbow with the slings; you take the mats out and they are carrying the other end. It is not interference. It is a kind of manners. He had done it for fifteen years and I had never once told him to get back, because you do not tell a man like that to get back, and because I liked him, and because it was quicker.

The terrace was at the back of the building and the only way in was over the roof of a single-storey wash-house, and I set the truck in the lane and went out to twelve metres.

I should have moved the vehicle. There was a way in from the other side that would have put me at eight. It needed the neighbour's gate opened and it needed forty minutes, and it was twenty past four on a Tuesday in Shahrivar and it was forty-one degrees and I had been up since five. I wrote 1.2 t in the box. I had not weighed it. My hands had told me nothing since the seventeenth and I wrote the number that a unit that size usually is, and it was not that, and I have never found out what it was, because nobody weighs the thing afterwards. Nobody ever weighs it afterwards.

I had been rigging heavy since Tir. Four legs where two would do, rope a size up, every time, on every job, and every man on every site had watched me do it and thought I was careful.

I did not do it that afternoon. I said two legs and I have gone looking for the reason a hundred times and the only one I have ever found is that it was twenty past four.

Hamid put the slings on. Hamid put the slings on because he was standing there and because he always did.

25.

PLAN 4539 — CONTINUED

*LOAD 1.2 t · RADIUS 12 m · BOOM 54° · ZONE 14 m — NOT
CLEARED*

Here is what happened, in the order it happened, and I have written it out a great many times and it does not get longer.

I took the slack up. The truck leaned and said nothing to me. The unit came off the ground about a hand's width and it hung there and it was not level, and I could see that it was not level, and I have picked up a thousand things that were not level.

I raised the boom to bring it in over the wash-house.

When you raise a boom under load the boom bends. It has always bent. It bends more the heavier the load is and it bends more the further out you are, and when it stops bending — when the load takes to the air and the steel comes back — everything on the end of that rope moves. That is not a fault. That is a boom doing what a boom does, and every one of us knows it, and you allow for it with your hands without ever once thinking about it, because you know what is on the end.

I did not know what was on the end. It came back further than I had allowed for and the unit swung, one long slow swing in towards the building, and it went about a metre and a half further than it should have gone, and it caught him against the wash-house wall.

And then the snatch at the end of the swing took the rigging.

Two legs is what you put on a load of one thousand two hundred kilos. It was not one thousand two hundred kilos. It was whatever it was, and the only reason anybody in that lane thought it was one thousand two hundred kilos is that I had written one thousand two hundred kilos in a box, and I had written it without putting a scale anywhere near it.

The sling went at the hook end and the unit came down on him.

The exclusion zone on that sheet says fourteen metres, in my writing, and he was inside it, and he was inside it because I let him be inside it every time for fifteen years.

There was glass in that lane from one wall to the other and it went on making a small noise for a long time after everything had stopped moving.

26.

NO PLAN. 20 SHAHRIVAR 1403. AFTER.

—
He was alive in the lane and he was alive in the ambulance and he died the same night in the hospital on the ring road, of the chest, which they explained to me twice and which I understood the first time.

Things I did that afternoon, in this order. I telephoned for an ambulance and gave the woman the name of the lane twice. I moved the truck out of the lane because it was blocking the ambulance. I put the jacks up and stowed the mats, which took six minutes, and I did it correctly, every strap, the way I have done it every day of my life, and I have never got over that.

Mohsen came. I do not know who telephoned him. The police came and were decent and took the sheet off me, and the sheet was plan 4539 with 1.2 t on it in my handwriting, and a man in his twenties wrote out a receipt for it on a pad, with my name at the top in block capitals, Sattār Fallāhi, spelled right, which nobody spells right.

At about eight in the evening I was standing at the end of that lane and Akbar was next to me and neither of us had said anything for a long time, and Akbar said, it was the boom.

And I said, yes.

And it was the boom, in the sense that the boom started it. The boom deflected and released and the load swung, and any crane man in this country will tell you that a boom does that, and it is in the finding, and I have never told a single lie about that afternoon to anybody.

And none of it makes any difference at all. A sling that is right for twelve hundred kilos is right for twelve hundred kilos. I am the man who decided it was twelve hundred kilos. I have known what things weigh for thirty years and on the twentieth of Shahrivar I decided it at twenty past four on a hot afternoon without weighing it, and a man stood where I had always let him stand.

I have lifted heavier. That was the sentence in my mouth in the lane at eight o'clock in the evening, arriving out of nowhere the way it always arrives, about nothing, off the top of my head, and I did not say it, and I have not been able to get it out of my mouth since without hearing it.

III. THE EXCLUSION ZONE

27.

NO PLAN. 22 SHAHRIVAR 1403. THE THIRD DAY.

—

I went on the third day with Mohsen and with Akbar and with about sixty other men from the trades, and the courtyard was full and the chairs went out into the lane.

His wife is called Farideh. Her brother stood with her and did the greeting for both of them, and when I got to the front of the line she looked up and knew me — she had seen me at their yard a hundred times over fifteen years, drinking tea out of their glasses — and she took my hand in both of hers.

She said, *khasteh nabāshid*.

May you not be tired. It is what you say to a man who has been working. It is what you say at a door, to anybody, all day long, in every city in that country, and it means nothing at all, and she said it to me on the third day after I killed her husband because her hands were doing what her hands had done ten thousand times and there was nothing else in them.

I said something. I do not know what I said.

I got out into the lane and Mohsen came after me and I said I was fine, and I was fine, and we went back to the yard and I sat and checked the whole of Mordad against the dockets, job by job, which nobody had asked me to do, and it took until it was dark.

28.

NO PLAN. 23 SHAHRIVAR 1403 TO 12 MEHR 1403. NO WORK.

—

The truck stood in the yard for the rest of Shahrivar with the boom down and the tarpaulin over the deck, and then the inspections started and it stood through the first half of Mehr as well, and I went in every morning at seven because I did not know how to not go in. Akbar took the calls. He told people the machine was under inspection, which was true by then, and he told them Rahmani was

busy, which was a lie, and he sent three jobs to a man in the next town who is not as good as me and is not as cheap as Rahmani and who now has two of those customers permanently.

I swept the yard. I swept it on the second day and again on the fourth. On the sixth Akbar came out and took the broom off me without saying anything and leaned it against the wall and went back in, and I stood there for a while and then I went and sat in the cab.

The cab smells of hot vinyl and diesel and the cardboard air-freshener Mehran bought as a joke in Farvardin. I sat in it with the door open and my hands on the levers, which do nothing when the engine is off — they are dead sticks, they do not even have resistance in them — and I moved them through the whole lift. Slack. Up. In. Down.

I did that for about an hour and then Mohsen was standing at the bottom of the steps and I do not know how long he had been there.

29.

NO PLAN. 3 TO 9 MEHR 1403. INSPECTION, LICENCE, INSURANCE.

—

There is a great deal of paper after a man dies on a site and every sheet of it is polite.

The inspection company came first, not the man who usually comes but a younger one, and put the machine through everything — the rope, the pressures, the load test at four points, the limiter, the whole day. It passed. Of course it passed. There was nothing wrong with that crane on the twentieth of Shahrivar and there is nothing wrong with it now.

The insurance came second and wanted the annual certificate, and so on the fourth of Mehr I drove to Akbar's house and sat in his kitchen while his wife took a drawer out of the dresser and put it on the table, and we went through eighteen years of certificates and electricity bills with the tea going cold, and we found it, and there was a ring on it from the bottom of a glass.

Akbar's wife apologised for the ring about four times.

The licence people came third and were the worst, because they were the ones who could stop me working, and because the man who came was younger than my son and called me *hāji* [HAA-jee] in the way that is not respect.

And the last one was an inspector from the labour office, who came to the yard on the ninth with a folder and asked me to describe the lift, and I described the lift, and he wrote it down, and then he asked whether the exclusion zone had been established and maintained.

I said, it was on the plan.

He wrote that down too. He wrote down exactly what I said. He did not ask the second question, and I have thought since that this was not kindness and not laziness but simply that the second question was not on his form.

30.

NO PLAN. MEHR 1403. THE WHOLE MONTH.

—
And then I began to grieve, and I am going to try to describe the size of it, because the size of it is the thing.

I am sixty-one years old. I buried my father in 1381 and I carried him and I did not weep at the graveside; I wept in the car afterwards for about a minute and a half and then I drove everybody home. That is the kind of man I am. Nobody in my family has ever been anything else.

In Mehr I could not get through the middle of the day.

It came without warning and without any decency about where. In the queue at the bakery, twice. In the cab at a red light on the ring road with the window down and a man in the next car looking at me. At the table, with Soghra sitting opposite, and she put her hand flat on the oilcloth and left it there and did not say anything, and I have never loved her more than in that minute and I could not have told her so.

I was not weeping for myself. I want to be very clear about that, because a man who is sorry for himself knows it and I have watched for it. It was him. It was Hamid Rezvani, fifty-four, who carried the other end of everything for fifteen years, and his hands on the slings, and the fact that on the last afternoon of his life he was being helpful.

It was enormous. It was the biggest thing that has ever been inside me. It went on for six weeks and it has never entirely stopped.

And every single day of those six weeks I knew what was wrong with it, and I could not do anything about that either.

31.

PLAN 4541 · 12 MEHR 1403 · CONDENSER, ROOF, PHARMACY — FIRST WORK

*LOAD 0.5 t (DOCKET) · RADIUS 6 m · BOOM 71° · GROUND SLAB,
GOOD · ZONE 12 m — CLEARED, TAPED, TWO MEN*

The exclusion zone is the piece of ground you clear of people before you lift, and it is measured from the middle of the machine, and it is a circle, and nobody in this trade has ever once made it big enough.

It is on every plan. It is on plans written by men who have never cleared anything in their lives. You put a figure in the box — twelve metres, fourteen, twenty — and then you look at the street you are actually standing in, and there is a bakery, and a school, and a lane, and a man who wants to get to his car, and a boy on a motorcycle who will go round anything, and a customer who has come out to watch because it is his air-conditioning unit and he has paid for it.

So what everybody does is put the number in the box and then shout.

I have been shouting at people to move back for thirty years. I am good at it. And in all that time the only person I never shouted at was the one man who was always inside the circle, because he was a tradesman and not a member of the public, and because he knew what he was doing, and because he was helping.

On the twelfth of Mehr I went back to work and I taped a circle round that pharmacy with plastic tape on cones and I put Mehran

on one side of it and Mohsen on the other, for a five-hundred-kilo condenser at six metres, which is a lift you could do with the tea still in your hand.

Mehran thought it was funny. He said, *ostā*, are we doing a bank.

Mohsen looked at me over the top of the truck and did not say anything, and I taped it that way at every job for the rest of the year, and I have taped it that way ever since.

32.

PLAN 3403 · 5 ESFAND 1395 · MEYDĀN. ONE LIFT, VERTICAL, NO TRAVEL.

*LOAD — · RADIUS 4 m · BOOM 71° · GROUND ASPHALT, FROZEN
— TIMBERS · ZONE CLEARED BY OTHERS*

The third one was in Esfand 1395 and it was cold enough that the jack feet would have gone through the top of the asphalt when the sun came round, so I put the timbers down, and a man watched me do it and asked what they were for, and I explained, and he was interested.

Nobody telephoned the yard that time. A man came to the yard.

That is the only difference there was and it is the only one that matters, and I noticed it at the time the way you notice weather. What it meant took me another eight years. In 1384 and 1389 somebody rang a crane hire company out of a list. In 1395 a man came to the yard, in the afternoon, and asked for me by name, and waited by the gate while Akbar came and got me.

I was asked back. I have written it out on its own like that because it took me until this year to be able to think it.

And the reason I was asked back is not a mystery and I am not going to pretend it is. I am good. I was set up before time and off the road on time, every time, without exception, and I did the thing at the speed the man with the flat hand had shown me, and afterwards I went home and nobody had to talk to me about anything.

They know who is careful. Everybody in every trade knows who is careful. That is the entire basis on which work is given out in this world and it does not change according to what the work is.

33.

NO PLAN. 20 MEHR 1403. NIGHT.

—
One night in the third week I sat down in the front room after Soghra had gone up and I decided to grieve for the three of them.

I want to put down what that involved, because I think a man reading this will assume I had been avoiding it and that the avoiding was the problem. I had not been avoiding it. I have thought about those three mornings for twenty years, at the rate of perhaps a minute a week, which is more than most things get.

I sat in the chair and I put my hands on my knees and I tried, deliberately, the way you try to remember a name.

And what came up, every time, in order, was the case.

I did not choose them. I did not know one thing about them, not the name, not the reason, not one syllable, and I could not have found it out if I had wanted to, and I did not want to. I did not tie the rope. I did not put it on. I never touched it. There was a man in a coat whose job that was and he did it himself with his hands and stepped back. It was lawful. There is a paper. It was ordered by a court in the name of the whole country and printed in the newspaper before and after. If I had said no on any of those three mornings the man would have gone down the list and rung the next number, and there are nine crane hire firms in this city, and every single one of them would have said yes, and it would have happened at six o'clock with a different truck.

Every clause of that is true. I checked them one at a time, that night, like a man checking a rope, and every one of them held, and at the end of it I was still sitting in a chair with dry eyes and nothing in my chest at all.

You cannot grieve out of a position of total defence. There is nowhere to put it down.

34.

**PLAN 4548 · 2 ABAN 1403 · STEELWORK, MEZZANINE,
WAREHOUSE**

*LOAD 1.8 t (DOCKET) · RADIUS 7 m · BOOM 68° · GROUND SLAB,
GOOD · ZONE 14 m — TAPED*

So here is the shape of the thing, and I have had it since Shahrivar and it has not changed.

I killed a man by accident and I weep for him in bakeries.

I lifted three men on purpose, at a steady speed, without stopping, the way it was explained to me, and when I go looking for anything about that at all there is a clean floor and a good argument and nothing on it.

And I know which of those is the larger crime. I am not stupid and I have not been stupid about this for one single day. If a man came to me and laid the two of them out on a table I would tell him which was worse in about a second and so would anybody. That is not the difficulty.

The difficulty is that grief does not go where you send it. It goes where there is a hole for it, and the only hole in me is Hamid Rezvani, because he is the only one I did without a paper, and without an order, and without eight other firms who would have done it if I had not.

He is mine. That is the entire reason I can cry about him. He is the only thing I have ever done that was completely mine.

So I have all this grief and one small wrong grave to put it in, and I go there every day, and I put it in, and it does not fit and I put it in anyway. I have lifted heavier. I have been saying that sentence my whole life and this autumn I heard it, standing in a queue, the way you suddenly hear a word you have used since you were a boy. It does not mean I am strong. It means: this is less than you think it is. I have been saying that to people about their own troubles for thirty years and they have been thanking me for it.

35.

NO PLAN. 9 ABAN 1403. THE YARD.

—
Nobody in that yard has ever been funny about the meydān. Not once, in twenty years, from any of them.

They are funny about everything else. Akbar is funny about the compressor and about my hose and about a man in Karaj who is supposed to have gone up on a pallet to change a light and to have been left up there by his friends for two hours as a joke, which Akbar tells about twice a year and which gets longer. Mehran is funny about the trailer, now, having decided that being funny about it himself is better than the alternative. There is a running argument about Rahmani's jacks that is eight years old and has become a form of entertainment.

And they will say, about a difficult customer or a heavy day, *what do you want, shall I take you up*, and everybody laughs, because riding the hook is the great forbidden thing, and every trade has one, and a trade's joke is always about the thing it is most afraid of.

They know. Akbar has known since 1384. He took the first telephone call.

And in twenty years nobody in that yard has said one word to me about it, funny or otherwise, and I did not understand until this year that this was not tact and not squeamishness. It is the same rule as the joke. You are allowed to be funny about the hook because nobody has ever been up on it. That is what makes it funny. They stopped short every time. Every single time, for twenty years, all of them, without ever agreeing to it.

36.

**PLAN 4555 · 19 AZAR 1403 · TANK, ROOF, RESIDENTIAL —
DECLINED, PASSED TO M.**

LOAD 0.7 t (DOCKET) · RADIUS 14 m · BOOM 48° · GROUND

ASPHALT · ZONE 16 m

The trade is going out of my hands and it is going faster than the feel went.

I rig heavier than the job needs and everybody has noticed and nobody says it is wrong, because you cannot tell a man he is being too careful, it is not a sentence that exists. I ask for docket on loads a boy could price. I take an hour to set up where I took twenty minutes. I have turned down nine jobs since Mehr, all of them at radius, all of them the kind of work I was known for, and every one of them has gone either to my son or to that man in the next town.

Mohsen said it in Azar, in the truck, on the ring road, without taking his eyes off the road.

He said: are you going to tell me, or are we going to keep doing this.

I said there was nothing to tell.

He said, you cannot pick up a bag of cement.

I said, I can pick up a bag of cement.

He said, you cannot tell me what it weighs. And then he said the thing I did not have any answer to at all, which was: I have watched you ask a storeman what a pallet of tiles weighs. I was standing behind you. You asked a boy of about twenty what a pallet of tiles weighs and you wrote it on your hand.

We drove about four kilometres.

I have lifted heavier, I said, at the turning by the cement place, to nobody, and my son looked straight ahead and did not ask me what I meant, because he knew, and because he is thirty-four and has been listening to me say it since he could walk.

Then he said, all right, and put the radio on, and that is where it has stayed since, and I think that is where it will stay, because he is his father's son and there is not one man in this family who has ever finished a conversation.

37.

NO PLAN. 26 AZAR 1403. THE BANK ON MOTAHHARI.

I saw the glazier's wife at the bank in Azar and she saw me first.

She was at the counter and I was in the queue behind and she turned round with her papers in her hand, and there was that half second where a person decides, and then she came over.

She asked after Soghra. She asked after Mohsen and the boy. She said her brother-in-law had kept the business going and that it was hard, and that the glass came from Tabriz now and was worse.

And then she said, they told us it was the machine.

Not a question. She was telling me. She was passing on to me, because she thought I would want to know, the thing that she had been told about the accident in which her husband died, in case it was a comfort to me, since I had been driving it.

I said, the boom deflected.

She said, yes. That is what they said.

Then she said she was glad she had seen me, and she went, and I stood in that queue for another seven minutes and did my business at the counter and drove back to the yard, and I did not weep at all that day, not once, and that was worse than any of the days I did.

38.

NO PLAN. AZAR AND DEY 1403. THE FILE.

It went quiet in Azar and I did not notice for about three weeks, which tells you what my Azar was like.

There had been something every fortnight since Mehr. A letter. A form. A telephone call from the insurance about the excess. The licence people wanted the training records for Mehran, who has no training records. The labour office inspector had said there would be a determination and had said it in the voice men use when they are telling you it will not be quick.

And then there was nothing.

No letter in Azar. Nothing in Dey. Mohsen rang the insurance about the excess on the twelfth of Dey and the woman said the file was closed and seemed surprised he did not know, and he said, closed how, and she said, closed, and read him a reference number.

The determination came in the post on a Sunday, one page, and the finding was mechanical failure.

I read it standing in the hall. It is a short document and there is nothing wrong with any sentence in it. It says the boom deflected under load, and that the load displaced laterally, and that a sling failed, and that the deceased was struck. Every word of that happened.

It does not say anything at all about a man writing 1.2 t in a box without weighing it, and it does not say anything about who was standing inside fourteen metres.

And neither did I. That is the part. A man came to the yard with a folder and asked me a question with a box on his form and I gave him the answer that fitted the box, and everything I said to him was true, and I have gone over it since and there is not one sentence in it I would have to take back.

Soghra said, well.

I said, yes. And I went and sat in the yard until it got dark, because for the first time since Shahrivar there was nothing in my hands at all, and I did not know what to do about being let off.

IV. LOAD WEIGHT

39.

**PLAN 4562 · 16 DEY 1403 · CONDENSERS, THREE, ROOF,
CLINIC ANNEXE**

*LOAD 0.4 t EACH (DOCKET) · RADIUS 8 m · BOOM 66° · GROUND
SLAB, GOOD · ZONE 14 m — TAPED*

I had been ready for a long time and then there was nothing to be ready for.

I had thought about the licence going. I had thought about the money, which would have been the end of us, and about Mohsen having to start again on a rented machine, and about how you tell your wife. I had thought about the other thing too — the thing where a man in this country goes to prison for a while over an accident on a site, which happens, and which I had privately decided I would not fight.

That last one I want to be exact about, because it is the only thing in this book I am proud of and it lasted from Mehr to the middle of Dey. I was waiting to be punished and I was not dreading it. It sat in me like a job in the book. There was going to be a determination, and the determination was going to find that a lift had been planned by a man who did not weigh the load and did not clear the zone, and something was going to happen to me, and something happening to me was going to be a relief so enormous that I could taste it.

Then it was mechanical failure and the file was closed, and I was a man standing in his hall on a Sunday with one page of paper and nowhere to put anything.

You cannot serve a sentence nobody has passed. There is not a thing you can do about being let off. You cannot appeal it and you cannot hand it back and you cannot pay it, and I went out to the yard in Dey and did three condensers at a clinic and came home.

40.

NO PLAN. 24 DEY 1403. THE YARD, AFTERNOON.

—

A man came to the yard on the twenty-fourth of Dey at about four in the afternoon and asked for me by name and waited by the gate while Akbar came and got me.

I want to be accurate about him because I have been accurate about everything else. He was about fifty. Grey trousers, a jacket, no coat, in Dey. Clean shoes in a yard, which nobody manages. He had nothing in his hands. Not a folder, not a telephone, not a bag. That is the detail I have never been able to get past: a man came to talk to me about a death and he had brought nothing to write on.

He said khasteh nabāshid. He asked after the machine, and he knew what it was, and he knew what it would do at four metres.

Then he said: about the business in Shahrivar. That is finished. There will not be anything more.

I said, I know. The determination came.

He said, yes.

And then he stood there and looked at the truck for a while, in a friendly way, the way men look at machines, and he said: it was a difficult year for you. And then he said the thing, and he said it perfectly plainly, in a normal voice, the way you would tell a man the office would be shut on Thursday.

He said: you have been correct with us for a long time. That is not nothing.

Then he asked after my son, and he said goodbye, and he went and got into a car at the end of the lane, and Akbar came out with two glasses of tea about a minute later and looked at the empty gate and did not ask.

41.

NO PLAN. 24 DEY 1403. THAT NIGHT.

There is an account.

That is what I understood standing in the yard with the tea going cold in my hand, and I understood all of it at once, the way you understand a load when the truck leans.

I have been paid. Not in money — the money was the ordinary rate, forty days later, hours and fuel like anybody, and there is a docket for every one of the three. I have been paid in the other currency, the one nobody prints and everybody in that country can spend, and the payment was made in Azar 1403 when a file that should have had my name written all over it stopped moving.

And here is what makes it unbearable and I have thought about it every day since.

I did not know I was earning anything. Not on one of those three mornings. I went because a man rang the yard and asked what the machine could do at four metres, and I went because it was work, and I did it well because I do everything well, and I put the docket in the book, and I never once thought I was putting anything by.

You cannot even call it a bargain. A bargain has two people in it who know.

I have been correct with them for a long time. That is what he said, and *correct* is exactly the word, because it is not loyal and it is not obedient and it does not mean I believed in anything. It means I turned up on time and did what was asked at the speed it was asked for and did not talk about it afterwards.

That is all it ever takes. That is the whole of it. Nobody has to be a monster; somebody has to be reliable.

42.

**PLAN 4568 · 9 BAHMAN 1403 · MARBLE, TO SECOND FLOOR
— RUN BY M.**

LOAD 0.9 t (DOCKET) · RADIUS 10 m · BOOM 60° · GROUND

ASPHALT, COLD — MATS · ZONE 14 m — TAPED

By Bahman my son was running the business and I was a man who came to the yard.

Nobody said this either. It happened the way water finds a level. He takes the calls now because he is quicker on the telephone. He prices because he was always better at pricing. He drives the truck on the jobs that need somebody to look at the site and decide something, and I drive it on tank runs and condensers and the same three industrial estates, at short radius, on good ground, in the middle of the day.

I am not bad at what I do now. I want that written down properly. I am slow and I am heavy-handed and I check everything twice and I ask for dockets, and the work goes in, and nobody has ever had to do a job twice behind me. What I am is ordinary. I am now exactly as good as any competent man of sixty-one with a licence.

It is a strange thing to lose the one skill you had and find that the world does not particularly notice. The customers do not notice. They never knew. It was never a thing anybody paid for; it was a thing I had, the way a man has a good singing voice in a family that does not sing.

Everybody in this city knows I am the best of them, and the city has known it for twenty years, and not one of them has ever known why. Three men alive know there was a why — Akbar, and Mohsen, and the man from the inspection company, who once, years ago, made me guess a test weight in front of two other men for a bet.

Akbar has stopped asking me what things weigh. He did it for about a month in Aban, out of habit, and then he stopped, and he has never done it since, and he stopped in a way I was not supposed to notice.

43.

NO PLAN. BAHMAN 1403. THE ARRANGEMENT WITH THE GLASS.

—

Since Bahman I have been sending money to the glazier's wife and she does not know it is from me.

It goes through the man who supplies their glass, who owes me a favour from 1399 and who has never asked me one question about it. It goes in as a discount on the sheets. It is not a large amount. It is about what I would have earned on the jobs I have turned down, which is the only measure I could think of that meant anything, and I worked it out on a piece of paper in the cab and I have not changed it since.

I have thought carefully about whether to put this down at all, because a man who writes down his own good deed has already spent it.

It does not do anything. That is the point of including it. It does not reduce the weeping and it has not moved one gram of what I am carrying, and it will not, and I knew it would not before I started. Her husband is still dead and I still killed him and she still thinks it was the machine, and now she also gets slightly cheaper glass from Tabriz.

I do it the way you pay an instalment on something that has no principal. Every month. I did it in Bahman and I will do it in Esfand and I will do it in Farvardin.

I have lifted heavier. It is the last time in this book that I am able to say it about anything.

And I am aware — I have been aware since the first month — that the money is going to the one death I am allowed to pay for, and that there is nothing anywhere in the world I could send to the other three, and that if there were, I would not know the address.

44.

NO PLAN. 4 ESFAND 1403. THE TELEPHONE.

The telephone went in the yard at about ten in the morning on the fourth of Esfand and Akbar picked it up and listened and then held it out to me at the full stretch of the cord without saying anything, which is how I knew before I took it.

The voice asked whether we were free on the Thursday morning early.

It asked what the machine could do at four metres, and I told it, the way I have told it three times before, and it said that would be more than enough. It said where. It said six o'clock, and that we should be set up and off the road by twenty past. It gave a name for the docket and a department.

And I said yes.

There was no pause in it. I have gone back over the pause a hundred times looking for one and there is not one. A man asked me a question about a Thursday and I said yes in the ordinary voice I use on the telephone, and then I said the thing about the ground being cold at that hour and needing timbers, and the voice said that was fine, and then it was finished.

Akbar was standing a metre away with a spanner in his hand and he did not look at me and I did not look at him.

Mehran was in the gate doing something to the trailer and he shouted, *ostā*, is it a good one.

I said, it is a short one.

45.

NO PLAN. 5 ESFAND 1403. THE FIRST REASON.

I could have said no. That is the whole of it and I am not going to build anything around it. There are nine firms in this city and eight of them would have gone, and the man would have gone down the

list, and it would have happened at six o'clock on Thursday with a different truck and a driver who did not know how to put timbers under his feet on cold asphalt. All of that is true and it was true on the fourth of Esfand at ten in the morning and it is not the reason I said yes.

Here is the reason and I have had to sit with it a long time to be able to write it in one line.

If those three mornings had nothing to do with the file closing, then I am a careless old man who did not weigh a load and let a friend stand inside the zone and killed him, and there is nothing else in it, and Hamid Rezvani died for nothing at all — for a hot afternoon and a man who could not be bothered to move his truck forty minutes.

If they did, then there is an account, and the file closing was a payment out of it, and I am in something. I am part of an arrangement. I am the kind of man who was correct with them for a long time and got something for it.

And a man who is in something has a shape. You can hold it. You can carry it. It has weight, and I have not been able to feel the weight of anything since Shahrivar, and that one I can feel.

So I keep the account open, because the account is the only thing in this world that makes the glazier mean anything.

I would rather be guilty than careless. That is a sentence about me and I am sixty-one and I have only just found it out.

46.

NO PLAN. 6 ESFAND 1403. THE SECOND REASON.

—
And there is another reason and it is true, which is why I have put it second, because everything true in this book has had to be put down after the thing I would rather have said.

I am good at it. Not the lifting. Any man with a licence can raise a boom to seventy-one degrees at four metres; it is nothing, it is the first hour of the first day. I mean the rest of it. I mean being set up before time so nothing is standing about. I mean timbers under the

feet on cold asphalt so nothing shifts halfway. I mean off the road by twenty past, so the street is a street again before the shops open. And I mean the speed, which a man showed me with a flat hand in Tir 1389 and which I have never once got wrong since.

Not fast. Not slow. Not stopping.

There is a way of doing it that is worse and I have never done it that way, and I know exactly what the worse way looks like because I have thought about it more than I have thought about my own children.

If I had said no, somebody would have done it on Thursday. If it had been Rahmani he would have put his feet on whatever was there and done it in jerks, because his machine is old and his pump stalls at the top the way it stalls on everything, and it would have taken longer.

I am probably the best man in this country at a thing that should not have anybody good at it.

I have turned that sentence over for two days now looking for the place where it stops being an excuse, and it does not stop being an excuse, and it is also completely true, and I have found out that a thing can be both and that finding it out does not help you in the smallest degree.

47.

**PLAN 4575 · 9 ESFAND 1403 · MEYDĀN. ONE LIFT,
VERTICAL, NO TRAVEL.**

*RADIUS 4 m · BOOM 71° · GROUND ASPHALT, COLD — TIMBERS ·
ZONE CLEARED BY OTHERS · LOAD*

I wrote the plan on the Wednesday night at the kitchen table after Soghra had gone up, the way I have written every plan for thirty years, and I got to the box and I stopped. There are three sheets in that drawer with a dash in that box. 1384. 1389. 1395. A dash is what you write when a field does not apply. It is what I write for the exclusion zone on a job where the customer's own men are doing the barriers, and it is what I wrote on the meydān sheets in 1384 and 1389 and 1395, because there was no weight, because it was

not a load, because there is no figure in that world that anybody could have given me and I did not ask.

On the eighth of Esfand I sat at that table for a long time and I did not write the dash.

I left it empty. I put the pen down and folded the sheet and put it in the door pocket of the truck and went up to bed, and Soghra was awake and said, early tomorrow, and I said yes, and she said, what is it, and I said, a short one, and she went back to sleep.

I lay there and thought about the drawer.

There is a drawer in the office at the yard with thirty years of plans in it in my handwriting and nobody has ever opened it, because nobody has any reason to open it, because they are not required by anybody and there is no law that says they have to be kept. I keep them because I was taught to by a man who is dead.

Somebody is going to open that drawer. Probably my son. Probably not soon.

There is almost no other record anywhere in this world of any of it. The police have one sheet, plan 4539, in a file somewhere, with a made-up number on it and a receipt in my name. The dockets went to whoever paid them. The determination says mechanical failure. The certificates are in Akbar's kitchen under the electricity bills. Of the mornings in the square there is nothing at all.

Only the plans. Only the ones nobody asked for.

48.

PLAN 4575 — CONTINUED

SET UP 05:40 · LIFT 06:04 · JACKS UP 06:16 · OFF ROAD 06:19

We were set up at twenty to six, which is earlier than I have ever been, because I did the timbers twice.

The asphalt was frozen hard enough that I did not need them. I put them down anyway and I put them down square, and I set the jacks wide, and I checked all four feet with the lamp on my telephone the way you check the feet of a machine that is going to lift something over a school.

There were men there before us doing the barriers, the same as the other three times. The tape went round at about fourteen metres, which is a good zone, and they held it properly, and the people who came stood outside it, which is correct.

The rigging was theirs. It was on the hook by two minutes past six and the man who put it there stepped back and put his hands in his pockets.

I raised the boom at four past six.

I did it at the speed a man showed me with a flat hand in a cab window in Tir 1389, and I did not stop, and it was the best of the four, and I knew it was the best of the four while it was happening, and I sat with my back to it and my hands on the levers and looked through the windscreen at a shuttered bank and at the phone shop that used to be a carpet shop.

Then I filled in the times on the front of the sheet, because the times go on the front.

Jacks up at sixteen minutes past. Off the road at nineteen minutes past, one minute inside what they had asked for. I went on my own, the way I have gone every time, and I stopped at the bakery on the ring road because it was open by then, and I bought bread, and the bread weighed nothing, and I put it on the seat beside me.

And I went to say the other thing, the thing I have said all my life about every load and every argument and every piece of news, and my mouth was open to say it and it was not there.

49.

PLAN 4575 — LOAD WEIGHT

*LOAD 81 kg · RADIUS 4 m · BOOM 71° · GROUND ASPHALT, COLD
— TIMBERS · ZONE CLEARED BY OTHERS*

In the evening I did the invoice at the kitchen table, the same as any job.

Hours, and there are two of them, and the minimum is four, so it is four. Fuel, which I take off the docket in the cab. The job number.

The name of the department, copied letter for letter off the sheet, because Mohsen will not know how it is spelled.

I signed it at the bottom the way I have signed four thousand of them, and I put it on the pile with the two tank runs and the school, for Mohsen to send out at the end of Esfand with everything else.

Then I took the plan out and put it in front of me and unfolded it and looked at the empty box.

Here is a thing I have not said. On Thursday morning, at four minutes past six, with my hands on the levers and my back to it, the truck leaned and the springs went quiet and the pump changed its note, and it came up through the sticks into my hands the way it used to, all of it at once, like a word.

The first time since the seventeenth of Shahrivar, and the only one.

I wrote it in the box in kilograms because there is no number small enough for that box in the units this machine works in, and the load table on the wall of my cab begins at half a tonne, and *the maximum permitted capacity shall be written by the manufacturer, clearly and legibly, upon every machine*, and it is, and it says eight tonnes at four metres, and none of that has anything to do with anything.

It is the only figure in kilograms in thirty years of that drawer.

I put the pen down. Soghra called down to ask if I was coming up and I said in a minute, and I sat at the kitchen table in Esfand with the invoice on the pile and the sheet in front of me, and I read the box, and I read it again, and there is nothing in this world I know how to say about it.

GLOSSARY

Aban [aa-BAAN] — The eighth month, late October to late November.

Azar [aa-ZAR] — The ninth month, late November to late December.

Bahman [bah-MAN] — The eleventh month, late January to late February.

Bishbāri [beesh-baa-REE] — Persian, over-carrying. Overload. Also the name of the alarm that says so, which a good driver never hears.

Chashm [CHASHM] — Persian, eye. Said in answer to an instruction: on my eye — yes, of course, at once.

Dey [DAY] — The tenth month, late December to late January.

Esfand [es-FAND] — The twelfth and last month, late February to late March.

Farvardin [far-var-DEEN] — The first month, beginning at the spring equinox.

Gowāhi-nāmeḥ [go-vaa-hee-NAA-meh] — Persian, certificate. The paper issued after a machine is inspected and load-tested, permitting it to work. It is supposed to live on the vehicle.

Hadd-e mojāz [HAD-de mo-JAAZ] — Persian via Arabic, the permitted limit. The line on the load chart, and on the screen in the cab, past which the machine will not let you go.

Hāji [HAA-jee] — Persian via Arabic, pilgrim. Properly, a man who has made the pilgrimage. In the street it is said to any older man, and depending entirely on the voice it is either respect or the opposite.

Jack-e ta'ādol [JAK-e ta-aa-DOL] — Persian, from the English jack. The outriggers: the legs that come down out of the chassis and

take the truck off its own tyres. Every man who has ever gone over has gone over on his jacks.

Jadval-e bār [jad-VAL-e BAAR] — Persian via Arabic, load table. The load chart, riveted in the cab. At this radius, this much; at that radius, that much. The machine's honest account of itself.

Khasteh nabāshid [khas-TEH na-baa-SHEED] — Persian, may you not be tired. Said to anybody at work, arriving or leaving, by everybody, all day.

Khordad [khor-DAAD] — The third month, late May to late June.

Mehr [MEHR] — The seventh month, late September to late October.

Meydān [may-DAAN] — Persian via Arabic, open ground. A city square. In this trade it is also a booking, and everybody knows which one, and nobody says the rest of it.

Mordad [mor-DAAD] — The fifth month, late July to late August; the hottest.

Ordibehesht [or-dee-be-HESHT] — The second month, late April to late May.

Ostā [os-TAA] — Persian, master. The colloquial form of ostād. What an apprentice calls the man teaching him, and what nobody calls a man who is no longer teaching anybody.

Shahrivar [shah-ree-VAR] — The sixth month, late August to late September.

Tir [TEER] — The fourth month, late June to late July.

Zarfiyat-e mojāz [zar-fee-YAT-e mo-JAAZ] — Persian via Arabic, permitted capacity. What a machine is lawfully rated to lift. The law requires the maker to stamp it on the machine where the driver can read it.

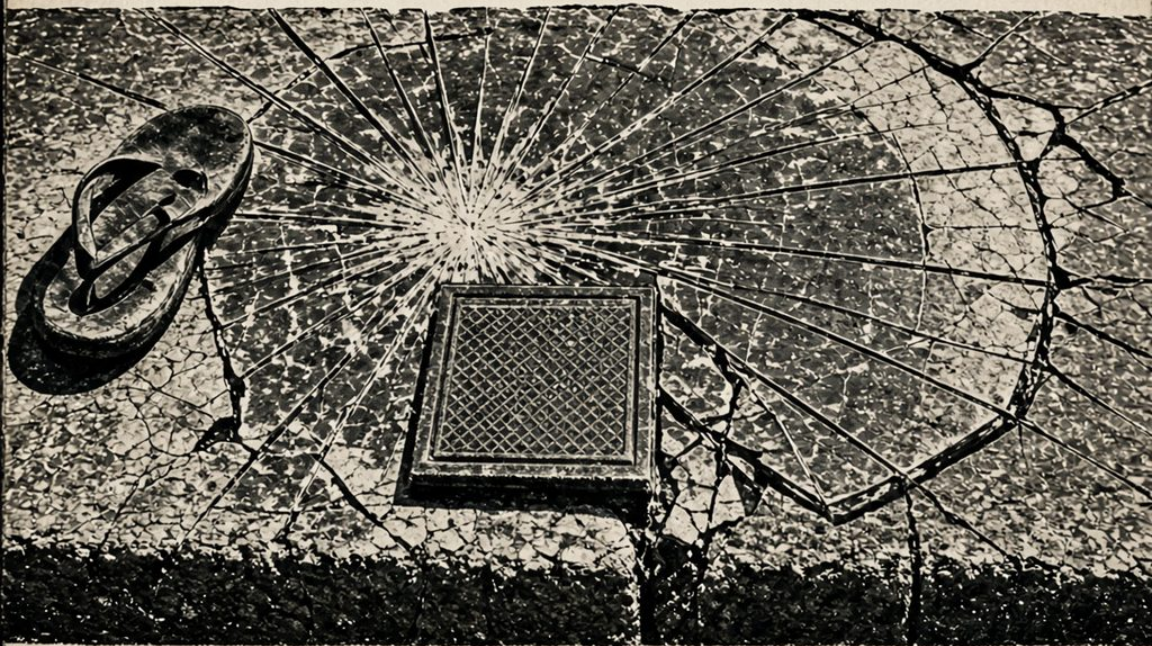
Sattār Fallāhi owns one crane and thirty years of knowing what a thing weighs before he lifts it. Air conditioners onto roofs. Shop signs. Water tanks. Glass. He is the best in the city at it and the city knows.

Four times in twenty years his crane is booked for a morning in a square. He does not tie anything and he does not touch anyone. He is told where to park, and when to raise the boom, and how slowly. Then he lowers it, and drives home, and sends an invoice. There is a day rate.

Then the weight goes. A bag of bread tells him nothing. His grandson on his shoulders is not a reading. He starts rigging heavier than he needs and writing figures on the back of his hand, and on an ordinary Tuesday, on an ordinary job, he drops a load and kills a glazier.

That one is entirely his fault. It is also the only death he is able to grieve.

His machine is rated in tonnes, and it did not notice.



CHEW Z
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