“Hi, my name is Kati, this is my phone number”, as she hurriedly handed Armin the small, folded paper, caught a glimpse of herself in the mirror, and adjusted her black bangs underneath her head scarf.

“I'm Armin”, as he took the paper from her hand and put it in the small fifth pocket in the front of his jeans, this exchange of information being the most dangerous part of their meeting, of being exposed with no chance of deniability. They were in the wash room which had four sinks, two wall mirrors, and one cactus plant. The room led to a hallway that had six individual bathrooms, each with two rows of three doors facing each other, with the other end coming from Café Cactus, famous for not only their amazing hot chocolate, cappuccino, and sweet delights but also this room which was, most likely, the only co-ed room in the country, the only room where a boy and a girl could legally occupy the same space, exciting and dangerous. If the wrong sort were to walk in during the exchange, there would be consequences - painful, humiliating consequences. You never knew who the Government informant was.

“Call me but never after six, please; that's when my father gets home.”

“GET UP!”

“Wha.., huh!?” Armin was in his bed and he could see his mother screaming at him but it didn’t make any sense. Kati… when did he get home?

“WE HAVE TO GO TO THE BASEMENT NOW!”, screamed his mother, and that was when he heard the distant roar of the Anti-Aircraft guns.
The air raid sirens usually came at 10 pm, followed by the pop-pop-pop of the Anti-Air. Armin and his family lived in the affluent, northern part of the city, at the foothills of the snow capped Alborz mountain range. The Iraqi bombers hadn’t made it that far north yet.

“They want to drop their bombs as fast as possible once they are over the city which is why the southern outskirts and the downtown areas get bombed and we don’t”, his father said. As a matter fact, once the family knew this important detail, his father would take him to the rooftop and they would watch the lights from the tracer rounds go towards the sky, searching but never finding their target. It was surreal, like being in a WWII movie. It was happening but it didn’t feel real. Raw would be a better word.

The universities had been closed since the Revolution. There were no jobs as the new regime was still busy purging, executing anyone that disagreed with them, and now there was war. Saddam had invaded southern Iran hoping for a 48-hour victory - that was one month ago. The only future available to Armin and his friends upon graduation from high school was to be drafted and sent to the front. Boys, younger and older than them, had already been sent to the front, in human waves against one of the largest armies in the region. They died brutally, an entire generation being exterminated.

The city would be blacked out so when the bombs exploded in the distance, the flames would be visible to Armin and his father. The morning news would show where the bombs had fallen, how many were killed, what was destroyed and gone. It was insanity. You would go to where a department store was the day before and just see a crater, the brain taking a moment to decode what the eyes were seeing. Tonight was different, the sounds of chaos were, for the first time, close to them.
His mother dragged him towards the stairs, her strength surprising him because she was so small. He thought...Kati was the same height.

“I don’t even know where she lives”, he thought to himself.

As they passed his father’s office, his dad was emptying the contents of the safe into a backpack - passports, important papers, U.S. dollars, (the Rial had been worthless since the over throw of the Shah), gold coins, and mom’s jewelry.

“What’s happening?” Armin thought to himself, realizing that he was still high from the hash he had smoked earlier with his friends on their way to their spot, their hang-out, their sanctuary from all of the insanity: Café Cactus.