



## From *Zambeel* (Eritrean shopping basket)

### To *Coco Chanel* perfume

#### Dedicated to the fight of the brave Eritrean women

Abrehet joined the EPLF in the early 70's and left a life of modest luxury offered by her mother working in Beirut, Lebanon.



Abrehet was one of two sisters. Her mother had dreams for her daughters.

She decided one day to take a zambeel (Eritrean basket used for daily grocery shopping) some photos along with few needed items and left Asmara in hiding.

She never looked back. She joined the Eritrean People's Liberation Front (EPLF) and made sure to send a short note to her best friend Harenet.



As soon as Harenet received the note, she begged her brother and his friends to take her to Abrehet for a last hug. But in her mind she was planning to convince her friend to come back to Asmara and prepare themselves to leave the country for better opportunities in Europe.

Harenet was of mix race. Her father from Eritrea.

Abrehet and Harenet had a long friendship and so many dreams sparkling with laughter only young girls can have. They promised each other to be there for one another.

make Abrehet focus on the finished high school.

Abrehet would sometimes hint at the war going on the outskirts of Asmara, but Harenet was not interested at all. She was trying – on her turn – to

Harenet was able to meet Abrehet in a hidden house and once the two friends saw each other, they hugged and cried. Harenet told Abrehet "come back as if nothing happened. We will tell your family that you were with a young boy you feel in love with. Come back, we are almost done!"

Abrehet smiled and touched Harenet's hair and told her "You see, we are already far

away from each other. You smell so good and I have not taken a shower in days. They are moving me from one house to another each night and day. You will understand and I know in my heart, that you will give more to our country than I will ever do. Remember our laughter, our throwing stone to boys walking by your house. Never forget the delicious food your Mom prepared for us and told us to stop giggling and focus on homework. I will walk away and think about all this and you will always be my best friend. Promise me something, you will work for our country and wear this perfume when serving the most dangerous missions. What is it anyway?"

Harenet whispered "Coco Chanel. My aunt brought it back from Italy. I was hoping you and I would spray it all over our hair and go dancing. You are leaving me. Is what you are trying to do more important than our friendship and this Coco Chanel perfume?"

Abrehet laughed so loud Harenet's brothers' friend came in and told them to stop and asked Harenet to leave because it was time.

Harenet took out of her pocket a Khaki color hat and told Abrehet to wear it under the sun to protect her skin.

Abrehet laughed again. Harenet took out a pen and wrote inside of the hat "buona fortuna" "good luck in Italian.

The two friends hugged so dearly, at one point Abrehet pushed her friend away and never looked back.

In late 80's Harenet was walking into a reception of a foreign embassy somewhere in the Western World. She wore her favorite black little dress and her favorite perfume: Coco Chanel.

By the time she walked out of that reception, she was holding her purse very tight. Inside a Cartier pure gold watch valued at more than US \$ 50,000.00

She met her contact in a Milano hotel. She gave him the watch and other valuables and asked him to write a receipt.

The contact refused. Harenet told him to write a receipt for it was Government's money she was delivering.

He did. She turned her back to leave when suddenly her contact asked her what perfume she was wearing. Harenet looked straight at his eyes and told him "Let's call this perfume Abrehet for the moment"

She walked away smiling. She was leaving in few week to reach the front and the liberated areas of Eritrea.

She made sure she would bring a Coco Chanel perfume for her friend Abrehet.

Once they met, their laughter were loud, but free. Abrehet told her "Harenet dear, I have this basket for you. Maybe in Europe it will be fashionable. It is the only thing I could save for you when I was told you were coming".

Harenet took the zamebel and put the Coco Chanel perfume inside. She told her friend "do you remember? Keep the Coco and give me back my valuable zamebel once I come back. I have some travelling to do. Do you think my nails will chip?"

This time they both laughed at the joke.

Abrehet and Harenet sat side by side on the top of an elevated site and looked down at clouds and inhaled the fresh air of a free Eritrea.

Harenet told Abrehet "please do not die, I still want to go crazy with throwing stone to passing by cute Eritreans boys". Abrehet told her "I am married now". Harenet replied, "we will throw stone at your husband then and hide below the fence at your house or my father's house. Stay alive"

Abrehet said" I will, only if you promise me to wear your Coco Chanel perfume and drive the enemy crazy all while providing us with the much needed information. You are doing great and I know you are still crying for your murdered husband. I cry with you. I am with you. Here, I am protected and there you are alone. It must be scary. But I hear great things about you dear Harenet and I am so proud to be your friend"

Harenet put her head on Abrehet's shoulder and said "we are sisters, friends and forever comrades. I love you."

Abrehet and Harenet are still friends and proud to have witnessed the Eritrean Independence.

They both still like Coco Chanel perfume, but above all they cherish shopping together all while holding a "zambeel" (Eritrean shopping basket)

"This novel is a work of fiction. Any resemblance to actual events or persons, living or dead, is entirely coincidental."

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