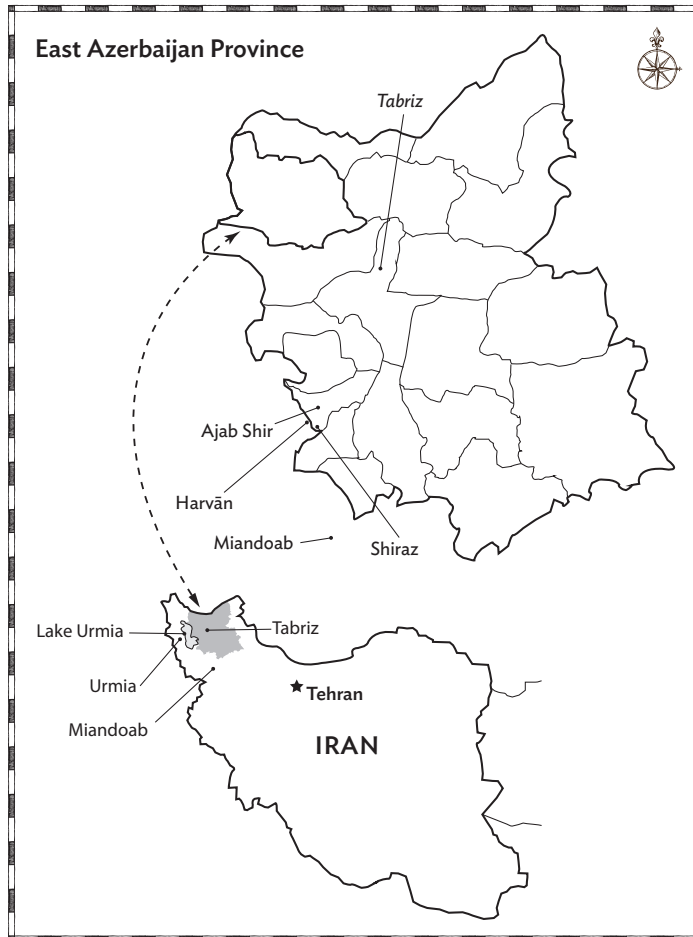




## Chapter One

June 1967



I was four when I first understood that my family was different.

My cousin Arash Amjadi raced into my family's courtyard, grabbed my hand, and began pulling me along behind him. "Come on, Mansur!" he said excitedly. "Baba gave me money." He held out a dirt-encrusted palm that held several worn coins. "We can buy candy!"

My eyes widened in surprise. Candy was a rare treat. I looked at Arash, who had an inch of height and a year of life on me, and then looked at my *Maman*, who nodded and smiled. Arash and I took off down the dirt road, racing toward the village store, our bare feet kicking up clouds of dust.

"Hey! Hey! Why are you running?" a village kid asked as we hurried past. He and some other boys were lazily kicking a soccer ball against a courtyard wall.

"We're getting candy!" I told them, an ear-to-ear grin never leaving my face.

"I have money!" Arash said, thrusting his fist in the air, the coins safely nestled inside. He wanted the boys to know that we weren't little kids pulling their legs. Soon, we would be enjoying delicious sweets.

"Lucky! Bring us some!" they shouted as we skirted past them. Arash and I looked at each other and laughed. We were lucky.