

## **The Summer of the Beautiful White Horse- Lesson Explanation**

ONE day back there in the good old days when I was nine and the world was full of every imaginable kind of magnificence, and life was still a delightful and mysterious dream, my cousin Mourad, who was considered crazy by everybody who knew him except me, came to my house at four in the morning and woke me up tapping on the window of my room. Aram, he said.

I jumped out of bed and looked out of the window. I couldn't believe what I saw.

It wasn't morning yet, but it was summer and with daybreak not many minutes around the corner of the world it was light enough for me to know I wasn't dreaming.

Magnificence – extremely beautiful

Daybreak – dawn

One day nine-year-old Aram was asleep and was in a world of extremely beautiful imagination. His life was pleasant and kind of, in a mysterious dream. His cousin Mourad showed up on the window of his room at 4 in the morning. He called Aram, who jumped out of his bed and still couldn't believe what he saw out of the window. It was dawn and there was light enough outside to make him see outside what made him believe he wasn't dreaming.

My cousin Mourad was sitting on a beautiful white horse.  
I stuck my head out of the window and rubbed my eyes.  
Yes, he said in Armenian. It's a horse. You're not dreaming.  
Make it quick if you want to ride.

I knew my cousin Mourad enjoyed being alive more than anybody else who had ever fallen into the world by mistake, but this was more than even I could believe.

In the first place, my earliest memories had been memories of horses and my first longings had been longings to ride.

This was the wonderful part.

Armenian – official language of Armenia branch

Longings – an aching desire

Mourad was sitting on a white horse. Aram rubbed his eyes and stuck out his head out of the window. Mourad assured him it was not a dream. He asked if he wanted a ride, he must make it quick. Mourad was the type of person who enjoyed being alive but he couldn't believe that he was seeing a horse in front of him. Aram's earliest memory was of horses and he always wanted to ride one. This was the wonderful part that he was actually going to ride a horse for real.

In the second place, we were poor.

This was the part that wouldn't permit me to believe what I saw.

We were poor. We had no money. Our whole tribe was poverty stricken. Every branch of the Garoghlanian<sup>1</sup> family was living in the most amazing and comical poverty in the world. Nobody could understand where we ever got money enough to keep us with food in our bellies, not even the old men of the family. Most important of all, though, we were famous for our honesty. We had been famous for our honesty for something like eleven centuries, even when we had been the wealthiest family in what we liked to think was the world. We were proud first, honest next, and after that we believed in right and wrong. None of us would take advantage of anybody in the world, let alone steal.

Comical – funny

Garoghlanian – an Armenian tribe

Aram's family was poor and had no money so it was difficult for him to believe in what he saw outside his house. He belonged to the Garoghlanian family that was strictly and funnily in poverty. They didn't even know how they managed to get food for themselves every day. Although his tribe was poor, they were known for their honesty for eleven centuries. They were honest, proud and always believed in right and wrong. No one from their family would ever steal anything or would take advantage of anyone in the world.

Consequently, even though I could see the horse, so magnificent; even though I could smell it, so lovely; even though I could hear it breathing, so exciting; I couldn't believe the horse had anything to do with my cousin Mourad or with me or with any of the other members of our family, asleep or awake, because I knew my cousin Mourad couldn't have bought the horse, and if he couldn't have bought it he must have stolen it, and I refused to believe he had stolen it.

No member of the Garoghlanian family could be a thief.

I stared first at my cousin and then at the horse. There was a pious stillness and humour in each of them which on the one hand delighted me and on the other frightened me.

Consequently – as a result

Pious – religious

Aram was so excited that he was seeing a horse that was so pleasant and beautiful. He could smell it and hear it breathing and still couldn't believe that Mourad or anyone in the family could afford a horse. He was thinking if Mourad had stolen the horse but he didn't believe it as he thought no one in his family could be a thief. He stared at his cousin and then at the horse. There was religious motionlessness and wittiness in both Mourad and the horse as one charmed him and the other scared him.

Mourad, I said, where did you steal this horse?

Leap out of the window, he said, if you want to ride.

It was true, then. He had stolen the horse. There was no question about it. He had come to invite me to ride or not, as I chose.

Well, it seemed to me stealing a horse for a ride was not the same thing as stealing something else, such as money. For all I knew, maybe it wasn't stealing at all. If you were crazy about horses the way my cousin Mourad and I were, it wasn't stealing.

It wouldn't become stealing until we offered to sell the horse, which of course, I knew we would never do.

Let me put on some clothes, I said.

All right, he said, but hurry.

I leaped into my clothes. I jumped down to the yard from the window and leaped up onto the horse behind my cousin Mourad.

Leap out – jump out from a place

He asked Mourad if he had stolen the horse. Mourad replied that if he wants a ride he must jump out of the window. Aram was convinced that the horse was stolen by Mourad. He came to visit him to ask him to ride it with him. Aram tried to convince himself that it was not the same as stealing money as they both were so crazy about riding a horse. He thought that it would not be called stealing until they decide to sell it which they would never do. Aram said he will wear some clothes and come outside. He jumped down to his yard from his room's window and sat on the horse behind his cousin.

That year we lived at the edge of town, on Walnut Avenue.

Behind our house was the country: vineyards, orchards, irrigation ditches, and country roads. In less than three minutes we were on Olive Avenue, and then the horse began to trot. The air was new and lovely to breathe. The feel of the horse running was wonderful. My cousin Mourad who was considered one of the craziest members of our family began to sing. I mean, he began to roar.

Every family has a crazy streak in it somewhere, and my cousin Mourad was considered the natural descendant of the crazy streak in our tribe. Before him was our uncle Khosrove, an enormous man with a powerful head of black hair and the largest moustache in the San Joaquin Valley<sup>2</sup>, a man so furious in temper, so irritable, so impatient that he stopped anyone from talking by roaring, It is no harm; pay no attention to it.

Vineyard – plantation of grapevines used in winemaking

Orchards – a piece of land of the plantation of fruits

Irrigation ditches – manmade channel used to deliver water to homes, industries and other uses

Trot – proceed with something

Descendant – a system that develops from an earlier simple version

Streak – race

Enormous – huge

San Joaquin Valley – one of the long interior valleys of California

Aram lived at the edge of the town on Walnut Avenue. There were orchards, vineyards, irrigation ditches and country roads behind his house. They were on Olive Avenue within three minutes and the horse started to proceed. The air felt new and lovely to breathe. Aram

felt wonderful sitting on the horse which was running. Mourad started singing loudly who was considered one of the craziest members of the family. There is one crazy person in every family and Mourad was the one natural descendant of a crazy race in their tribe. Before Mourad was Uncle Khosrove was the one huge man with black hair and largest moustache in the valley. He had an energetic temper and was impatient which was irritating. He used to make anyone stop talking by roaring and say 'it is no harm, pay no attention to it.'

That was all, no matter what anybody happened to be talking about. Once it was his own son Arak running eight blocks to the barber's shop where his father was having his moustache trimmed to tell him their house was on fire. This man Khosrove sat up in the chair and roared, It is no harm; pay no attention to it. The barber said, But the boy says your house is on fire. So Khosrove roared, Enough, it is no harm, I say.

My cousin Mourad was considered the natural descendant of this man, although Mourad's father was Zorab, who was practical and nothing else. That's how it was in our tribe. A man could be the father of his son's flesh, but that did not mean that he was also the father of his spirit. The distribution of the various kinds of spirit of our tribe had been from the beginning capricious and vagrant.

We rode and my cousin Mourad sang. For all anybody knew we were still in the old country where, at least according to some of our neighbours, we belonged. We let the horse run as long as it felt like running.

Capricious – inconsistent change of mood

Vagrant – a person without a settled home or work

Uncle Khosrove was always this rigid no matter who happened to be talking about in front of him. Once his own son, Arav, came running to him when he was getting his moustache trimmed at the barber's shop. He told him the house was on fire to which he roared and said the same dialogue. Barber was amused and tried to talk to him about it but as usual, Khosrove roared again and did not pay attention to it. Mourad was considered to be a natural descendant of this man but he was not his son. His father was Zorab who was a practical person. A child could look like his father but doesn't mean he gets his nature and attitude just the same. There are different kinds of people in their tribes – moody and without any settled work or home. They were still riding the horse and Mourad was still singing loudly. They were still in the countryside where according to their neighbours, they belonged to.

At last my cousin Mourad said, Get down. I want to ride alone.

Will you let me ride alone? I asked.

That is up to the horse, my cousin said. Get down.

The horse will let me ride, I said.

We shall see, he said. Don't forget that I have a way with a horse.

Well, I said, any way you have with a horse, I have also.

For the sake of your safety, he said, let us hope so. Get down.

All right, I said, but remember you've got to let me try to ride alone.

I got down and my cousin Mourad kicked his heels into the horse and shouted, Vazire, run. The horse stood on its hind legs, snorted, and burst into a fury of speed that was the loveliest thing I had ever seen. My cousin Mourad raced the horse across a field of dry grass to an irrigation ditch, crossed the ditch on the horse, and five minutes later returned, dripping wet.

Vazire – a name

Fury – anger

Mourad asked him to get down as he wanted to ride alone. Aram asked if he could ride the horse alone. He said it is up to the horse if he wants to ride you along and asked him to get Mourad down again. Aram tried to convince him that the horse would let him ride to which Mourad said that we shall see and told Aram that he had a way with a horse. Aram told him that he had it too. Mourad told him to get down and said it is for his own safety, let us hope so. Aram got down while telling him that he will ride the horse alone. Mourad kicked his heels in the horse and shouted run to him. The horse stood on its hind legs, breathed out and ran into a speed. Mourad raced the horse across a field of dry grass and irrigation ditches. When they arrived five minutes later, they were wet.

The sun was coming up.

Now it's my turn to ride, I said.

My cousin Mourad got off the horse.

Ride, he said.

I leaped to the back of the horse and for a moment knew the most awful fear imaginable.

The horse did not move.

Kick into his muscles, my cousin Mourad said. What are you waiting for? We've got to take him back before everybody in the world is up and about.

I kicked into the muscles of the horse. Once again it reared and snorted. Then it began to run. I didn't know what to do.

Instead of running across the field to the irrigation ditch the horse ran down the road to the vineyard of Dikran Halabian where it began to leap over vines. The horse leaped over seven vines before I fell. Then it continued running.

My cousin Mourad came running down the road.

I'm not worried about you, he shouted. We've got to get that horse. You go this way and I'll go this way. If you come upon him, be kindly. I'll be near.

Reared – raised

Snorted – breathed out

The sun was almost up and Aram told him it was his turn to ride. Mourad got off and Aram sat on the horse. He was fearful and the horse did not move. Mourad tried to guide him by saying that he should try to kick into his muscles and told him that he should hurry because they need to take him back before everyone woke up. Aram kicked into the muscles of the horse to which the horse again raised and breathed out. The horse began to run and Aram didn't know what to do next. The horse started going towards the road that leads to the

vineyard of Dikran Halabian. It began to move over vines and Aram fell down. The horse continued to run and Mourad came running down the road towards him. Mourad told him that he is not worried about him but they need to find the horse. They both went different ways to find him. He instructed Aram to be kind if he saw him anywhere.

I continued down the road and my cousin, Mourad went across the field toward the irrigation ditch.

It took him half an hour to find the horse and bring him back.

All right, he said, jump on. The whole world is awake now.

What will we do? I said.

Well, he said, we'll either take him back or hide him until tomorrow morning.

He didn't sound worried and I knew he'd hide him and not take him back. Not for a while, at any rate.

Where will we hide him? I said.

I know a place, he said.

How long ago did you steal this horse? I said.

It suddenly dawned on me that he had been taking these early morning rides for some time and had come for me this morning only because he knew how much I longed to ride.

Dawned – appeared

Aram looked for the horse down the road and Mourad went towards the irrigation ditch. He came back after thirty minutes with the horse. He told him to jump over as the whole world was awake by then. Aram asked what would they do now to which Mourad told him about two options – take him back or hide him until tomorrow. Mourad was not worried and Aram knew that Mourad would hide him somewhere and not take him back for a while. Aram asked him where Mourad would hide him, Mourad told him about a place he knew which would be perfect as a hidden spot. Aram eagerly asked him when he stole the horse. It appeared to him that Mourad had been taking the horse for morning rides for quite some time and he showed up this morning to ask Aram to ride along because he knew he was longing to ride one.

Who said anything about stealing a horse? he said.

Anyhow, I said, how long ago did you begin riding every morning?

Not until this morning, he said.

Are you telling the truth? I said.

Of course not, he said, but if we are found out, that's what you're to say. I don't want both of us to be liars. All you know is that we started riding this morning.

All right, I said.

He walked the horse quietly to the barn of a deserted vineyard which at one time had been the pride of a farmer named Fetvajian. There were some oats and dry alfalfa in the barn. We began walking home.

It wasn't easy, he said, to get the horse to behave so nicely.

At first it wanted to run wild, but, as I've told you, I have a way with a horse. I can get it to want to do anything I want it to do.

Horses understand me.

Alfalfa – a flowering plant

Mourad shuts him down by asking a counter-question about who talks about stealing a horse. Aram tried to change the question by asking him since how long was he riding the horse every morning. Mourad told him that morning was the first time. Aram was not convinced and asked him if he was telling the truth. Mourad said, if anyone asked Aram, he should say that it was true. He further added that he didn't want them to be liars but they had to say only this. Aram agreed and Mourad walked the horse quietly towards the barn of a deserted vineyard. It belonged to a farmer named Fetvajian. The barn had some oats and alfalfa. They started walking home. Mourad told Aram that it was not easy to get the horse to behave nicely as it wanted to run wild at first. He told him again that he had a way with a horse and he could get them to do whatever he wants to. Horses understood him.

How do you do it? I said.

I have an understanding with a horse, he said.

Yes, but what sort of an understanding? I said.

A simple and honest one, he said.

Well, I said, I wish I knew how to reach an understanding like that with a horse.

You're still a small boy, he said. When you get to be thirteen you'll know how to do it.

I went home and ate a hearty breakfast.

That afternoon my uncle Khosrove came to our house for coffee and cigarettes. He sat in the parlour, sipping and smoking and remembering the old country. Then another visitor arrived, a farmer named John Byro, an Assyrian who, out of loneliness, had learned to speak Armenian. My mother brought the lonely visitor coffee and tobacco and he rolled a cigarette and sipped and smoked, and then at last, sighing sadly, he said, My white horse which was stolen last month is still gone — I cannot understand it.

My uncle Khosrove became very irritated and shouted, It's no harm. What is the loss of a horse? Haven't we all lost the homeland? What is this crying over a horse?

Parlour – a sitting space in a house

Aram amusingly asked him how he controlled the horse to which Mourad said he has an understanding with the horse. Aram asked him what sort of understanding did he have with him to which Mourad told him – a simple and honest one. Aram confessed he would also like to know how to have an understanding with a horse. Mourad assured Aram by saying that he is still a small boy, he will learn when he will be thirteen. Aram went home and ate breakfast. That day, his uncle Khosrove visited his house for coffee and cigarettes. He sat in the parlour and was remembering the old country when a person came to visit him. He was John Byro, a farmer, who learned to speak Armenian because of loneliness. His mother bought Byro some coffee and tobacco. He sipped and smoked and told them about his missing white horse who was stolen last month and he is not able to find it. Khosrove roared again that it's no harm and shouted that why he was crying over a lost horse when they had lost their homeland.

That may be all right for you, a city dweller, to say, John

Byro said, but what of my surrey? What good is a surrey without a horse?

Pay no attention to it, my uncle Khosrove roared.  
I walked ten miles to get here, John Byro said.  
You have legs, my uncle Khosrove shouted.  
My left leg pains me, the farmer said.  
Pay no attention to it, my uncle Khosrove roared.  
That horse cost me sixty dollars, the farmer said.  
I spit on money, my uncle Khosrove said.  
He got up and stalked out of the house, slamming the screen door.  
My mother explained.  
He has a gentle heart, she said. It is simply that he is homesick and such a large man.  
The farmer went away and I ran over to my cousin Mourad's house.  
He was sitting under a peach tree, trying to repair the hurt wing of a young robin which could not fly. He was talking to the bird.  
What is it? he said.  
The farmer, John Byro, I said. He visited our house. He wants his horse. You've had it a month. I want you to promise not to take it back until I learn to ride.

City Dweller – a person who lives in a city  
Surrey – a country in South-East England

John replied to Khosrove that he would not bother as he lives in a city but his country was of no good without his horse. Khosrove shouted that he must not pay any attention to it. John told him that he walked down ten miles to come here. Khosrove shouted that he has legs to which John said his left leg hurt. Khosrove again tried to shut him down by saying that he should not pay any attention to it. John shared that the horse cost him sixty dollars. Khosrove said he would spit on the money after which John got up and went away slamming the door. Aram's mother told him that John had a gentle heart as he was homesick and he was such a large man. Aram went to Mourad, he was sitting under a peach tree talking to a robin bird. He was repairing the wing that was hurt. Aram told him about John Byro and how he visited their house and he wanted his horse. Aram asked him not to return the horse until he learns to ride it.

It will take you a year to learn to ride, my cousin Mourad said.  
We could keep the horse a year, I said.  
My cousin Mourad leaped to his feet.  
What? he roared. Are you inviting a member of the Garoghlanian family to steal? The horse must go back to its true owner.  
When? I said.  
In six months at the latest, he said.  
He threw the bird into the air. The bird tried hard, almost fell twice, but at last flew away, high and straight.  
Early every morning for two weeks my cousin Mourad and I took the horse out of the barn of the deserted vineyard where we were hiding it and rode it, and every morning the horse, when it was my turn to ride alone, leaped over grape vines and small trees and threw me and ran away. Nevertheless, I hoped in time to learn to ride the way my cousin Mourad rode. One morning on the way to Fetvajian's deserted vineyard we ran into the farmer John Byro who was on his way to town.

Let me do the talking, my cousin Mourad said. I have a way with farmers.

Mourad told Aram that it will take him a whole year to learn to ride a horse. Aram said they could keep him for a year then. Mourad stood up on his feet and shouted at him about encouraging him to be a thief in spite of being a member of the Garoghlanian family. He declared that the horse should go to his true owner. Aram asked when would they have to return the horse to which Mourad said in six months. He threw the bird into the air, it almost fell twice but flew at last. For the next two weeks, they both would take the horse out of the barn and ride it. But every morning the horse would throw Aram and run away whenever he tried to ride it. He still hoped he would learn to ride it the way his cousin did. Once on the way to the deserted vineyard to hide the horse again, they met John Byro who was on his way to town. Mourad insisted on talking to him as he had a way with farmers.

Good morning, John Byro, my cousin Mourad said to the farmer.

The farmer studied the horse eagerly.

Good morning, son of my friends, he said. What is the name of your horse?

My Heart, my cousin Mourad said in Armenian.

A lovely name, John Byro said, for a lovely horse. I could swear it is the horse that was stolen from me many weeks ago.

May I look into his mouth?

Of course, Mourad said.

The farmer looked into the mouth of the horse.

Tooth for tooth, he said. I would swear it is my horse if I didn't know your parents. The fame of your family for honesty is well known to me. Yet the horse is the twin of my horse. A suspicious man would believe his eyes instead of his heart. Good day, my young friends.

Mourad wished him Good Morning and Byro saw the horse carefully. Byro wished them back and asked the name of the horse. Mourad said 'My Heart' in Armenian language. Byro complimented that it was a lovely name for a lovely horse. He swore that it was his horse that was stolen weeks ago. He asked if he could look into his mouth. After looking from tooth to tooth, it said it was his horse if he didn't know his parents. He said the horse was a twin of his horse. He further said that his family is all for honesty but the horse looks just like the one he lost. A man who is suspicious would easily believe his eyes and not his heart. He wished them and went away.

Good day, John Byro, my cousin Mourad said.

Early the following morning we took the horse to John Byro's vineyard and put it in the barn.

The dogs followed us around without making a sound.

The dogs, I whispered to my cousin Mourad. I thought they would bark.

They would at somebody else, he said. I have a way with dogs.

My cousin Mourad put his arms around the horse, pressed his nose into the horse's nose, patted it, and then we went away.

That afternoon John Byro came to our house in his surrey and showed my mother the horse that had been stolen and returned.

I do not know what to think, he said. The horse is stronger than ever. Better-tempered, too. I thank God. My uncle Khosrove, who was in the parlour, became irritated and shouted, Quiet, man, quiet. Your horse has been returned. Pay no attention to it.

Mourad wished him back. The next morning, they took the horse back to John Byro's vineyard and put it in his barn. The dogs followed them around without making any sound. Mourad replied they would not bark at them since he had a way with dogs. Mourad put his arms around the horse, then pressed his nose into the horse's nose. He patted him and then they went away. That same afternoon, John came to Aram's house in his surrey and showed his mother his horse that returned. He said he didn't know what to think as the horse is much stronger now with a better temper. He thanked god. Uncle Khosrove who was in the Parlour again shouted irritated, 'Quiet, man, quiet. Your horse has been returned. Pay no attention to it.'