

“How is Shirin?” Tooraj asked as soon as they had sat down.

“She is happy that Cyrus’s situation is resolved,” Shirin’s friend said. “Unfortunately two more safe houses were raided last night, and Shirin is in even greater danger now.”

When Tooraj told him about the documents with the name of Cyrus’ deceased mother, the man was thrilled. “How fortunate! That is great news for Shirin! She will be delighted to hear of this. This is unbelievably good luck.”

Tooraj repeated, “I have them right here.” He pointed to the forms on his desk.

“This is truly auspicious, my friend!” The comrade picked up the documents and immediately turned to the photo page. “Yes, we can work with this!” Then he added, “Let me suggest that Cyrus go right ahead and arrange for his seat on the next flight to the U.S. Meanwhile I’ll take these documents, and we will check the photo and the dates in the passport. I think we can use them just fine.”

The Lufthansa ticket agent did not have a seat for Cyrus, but after hearing of Cyrus’s debacle with the mix-up of names and the trip to Evin Prison, he called his supervisor. They agreed this was a special situation and they would do their best to find Cyrus a place on an upcoming flight. However, economy class seats on all flights were sold out for the next month. At that time, there were only a few foreign airlines with flights into Tehran, and they were usually booked a long time ahead.

“Sorry, sir, all seats are sold, and there are already ten people on the waiting list for last-minute cancellations in coach,” the supervisor said. He continued, “We had one cancellation, but unfortunately that was sold a few minutes ago.” He clicked a few more keys and stared at the monitor. “Wait, I see we now have one seat in first class. If you upgrade your ticket immediately, I can assign your seat right away. Are you interested?”

Cyrus was so eager to get out of Iran and return to his family in Texas that he would have paid anything to get a seat on the next flight.

Eagerly he answered, “Yes, sure, I’ll take it.”

While the supervisor entered the data, he chattily confided, “I was in the airport when the Revolutionary Guards pulled you out. I am so sorry for all your troubles, but I’m sure everything will go smoothly for you from now on.” He added, “This type of incident happens quite often here. All of us airline staff have become accustomed to it.”

Cyrus offered his passport together with a copy of the letter from the Revolutionary Court.

The supervisor reviewed the documents and said, “The airport police will return these papers to you three hours before your flight. Please get there in plenty of time.” He reminded Cyrus about his seat number and emphasized, “It isn’t easy to arrange a seat. One usually has to reserve a seat months in advance, but I am happy to see everything is falling in place for you. After the excitement of last week you deserve a break.”

Cyrus looked up, and it seemed there was a strange smile on the supervisor’s face. He wondered if the man could possibly know about Shirin’s planned departure. But no, his mind must be playing tricks with him. He patiently waited for the ticket.

When Cyrus was about to leave, the supervisor looked down the list of passengers and joked, “There are too many people and too few names in this country. We have two other passengers with your last name. You may want to check in early so there won’t be any mix-up at the airport.”

Cyrus did not trust himself to respond casually to this comment, so he smiled mutely in response and left the airline office without delay.

The Persian ritual of departure from Iran began once more for Cyrus. Tooraj and Jamshid took Cyrus to the airport, again allowing time for the long arduous checkout procedure. At eleven

at night they finally entered the airport police office. An officer opened a file drawer and paged through the passengers’ passports. There were three passports with the same last name. He pulled them out and found the one that belonged to Cyrus. The officer handed Cyrus his passport and wished him a safe trip. Just as he had done a week before, Cyrus said farewell to Jamshid and Tooraj and pulled his suitcases toward the customs department. This time he kept some Persian money in case he needed another taxi.

A woman with two children was already waiting when Cyrus joined the line. Soon the crowd behind him started to grow, accumulating a mixture of businessmen and families, and women swathed in black veils. When Cyrus pulled his suitcases to the counter, he noted the customs officer was in Revolutionary Guard uniform but unarmed. It was the first unarmed Revolutionary Guard Cyrus had seen during his trip. The officer asked if he were taking gold or jewelry out of Iran.

“Yes, here they are.” He exhibited several gifts of jewelry from Maryam for his family.

After a thorough inspection, the guard decided, “Because they are souvenirs and not very expensive, you may take them with you, but keep them separate, and be sure to have an officer at the next inspection station verify that it is okay to export them.” Without even a cursory look inside the suitcases, the officer asked him to move on.

The officer at the next post reviewed the receipts for the jewelry and said, “Who are these pieces for?”

Cyrus wanted to say it wasn’t any of his damned business, but he hid his frustration and responded in a calm voice, “They are for my wife and my daughter.”

The official sensed Cyrus’ annoyance, rubbed his short beard thoughtfully and finally decided reluctantly, “Go ahead! You can take them with you.”

He stamped the receipts and waved him on. Cyrus then moved to the area where the airline check-in counters were located. He handed over his ticket at the Lufthansa window and received his boarding pass. An airline employee took his suitcases and told him to proceed to the security inspection. He followed two women in black veils up an escalator toward the security inspection station, which was divided into two sections, one for men and the other for women passengers.

The two women ahead of him entered the curtained-off female inspection area. Meanwhile a bearded Revolutionary Guard took his time patting down Cyrus’ pockets and clothing. He seemed uninterested in personal belongings and was searching only for guns and knives. Cyrus assumed the American passport in his pocket was small enough to feel like a notebook. The guard had completed the task and told him to proceed to the gate and wait there for the call to board the plane.

The two women passengers had also passed through inspection. As soon as he took a seat, one of the women strolled past him. He glanced up and their eyes made contact. Although she was wearing thick prescription glasses, he was delighted to recognize Shirin and had to control a sudden intake of breath. With her washed-up appearance, dark veil and glasses, emaciated face, pale and sallow complexion, she looked much older than her real age. She sat down several rows away and started reading a book.

Some moments later, the agent at the gate announced that boarding was about to start. Armed Revolutionary Guards paced around the gate area and chatted with each other while they cast casual glances over the passengers. The airline agent called the first class passengers to enter the gate. Cyrus got up and followed a group of French and German businessmen through the boarding door and down the staircase onto the tarmac where a bus was waiting. The bus drove them to the plane, which was parked in the middle of the tarmac several hundred yards away. They ascended the staircase to the airplane, entered the first class section, and settled in.