

“How can he manage to escape?” Cyrus wondered.

“Across the Iranian-Turkish border. I will know more about him when I see our friends in Frankfurt.”

Chapter Twenty-Nine

The Iran-Iraq War Reached Its Climax in 1983

By the spring of 1983, the Iran-Iraq war had reached its climax, its most ferocious phase. Iraq captured nearly one third of Iran’s oil-rich province of

Khuzestan. Khoramshahr, the largest Iranian port city on the Persian Gulf, had been leveled to the ground. Many cities near the Iraqi border were either occupied or vacated by the revolutionary government because of heavy bombardment by the Iraqis.

The Islamic government was using the war to ignite patriotism in the population, to enhance the morale of the military forces, to control its political opponents, and to strengthen its grip on power. For a short while, they allowed a few popular daily newspapers to resume publication, hoping to gain more support among the people, and Revolutionary Guards stopped breaking into private parties and abandoned their nightly checkpoints for un-Islamic behavior. However, the war also had given the government an easy excuse to suppress the remaining political opponents. The mullahs were well aware that the Soviet Union and Nazi Germany used wars to eradicate liberals and terrorize their people. So it was not a surprise for anyone who saw the Iranian people set aside their opposition to clergy and rise up ferociously in defense of their country. They swelled the ranks and files of the military forces and changed the course of the war. They stopped the advance of the Iraqis, and eventually forced them into retreat.

Once the Iraqis had been driven back inside their original borders, many Iranians, especially the opposition groups such as the Mojaheddin and the Fadayan, objected to a continuation of the war. But Ayatollah Khomeini, with dreams of capturing the Shiite shrines in the holy cities of Najaf and Karbala and the oil-rich southern Iraq, ordered the army to continue the war. Any opposition to the war became another easy excuse for the clergy to repress moderate political groups and to decimate the enemies of the regime like the Mojaheddin, Fadayan factions, and the nationalists.

In order to survive, the Mojaheddin group contacted the Iraqi government and sought its support for their own struggle inside Iran. In the summer of 1984, Mojaheddin members joined an Iraqi military company in their attack against an Iranian base in the southwestern mountains of Iran. They held a town and several villages for a few weeks. Mojaheddin fighters killed a large number of Revolutionary Guards and destroyed their offices. When Iranian reinforcements eventually recaptured the town and its surrounding villages, the Mojaheddin fighters retreated to their base in Iraq. That incident started a new crackdown against intellectuals and any group that opposed the rigid Islamic government. Another wave of terror and persecution swept over Iran.

Meanwhile, Tehran suffered a terrible heat wave. Pollution reached dangerous levels, while officials issued health warnings and instructed people to stay indoors. A water shortage and electrical blackouts added to the hardship of residents of the capital. At the same time, the war with Iraq had entered its fourth year with no end in sight and continued to exert massive pressure on the nation’s resources. Ordinary people suffered from severe shortages of essential supplies and had no means to express their discontent. Even in the face of regional and international efforts

for mediation to end the war, Ayatollah Khomeini’s unwavering determination to push on with the war continued unabated.

Shirin invited Shirin’s brother Morteza to dinner in their apartment. A light breeze was blowing in the streets, but the air in the living room had remained sultry and stuffy. Because of the power shortage, a government decree prohibited the use of air conditioners in the houses and offices. Simple fans replaced air conditioners, but all that the fans were doing was ineffectively stirring the stale air.

On that night, Shirin prepared vegetable rice with roasted chicken legs. Bahram set the table and prepared salad, and Morteza served the red wine that he brought from his own collection of home-brewed wine to complement the dinner. Despite the heat, the windows were shut and the curtains were pulled, so nobody could see them drink wine or eavesdrop on their conversation.

Bahram commented on Morteza’s wine, “This is a great wine! You are really getting good at winemaking.”

“Actually this is the last year’s vintage, a bit young,” Morteza explained proudly. “It’s from seedless red Qazvin grapes.”

Dessert was vanilla ice cream topped with wild cherry syrup. During dinner they talked about the nasty smog in Tehran, and later, as always, the conversation turned to politics. Bahram served fresh tea in the living room, while Shirin cleaned up the dining room. The friends settled into a casual late evening conversation about their work and complained about the scarcity of water, medicine, and books. Morteza was inclined to blame it all on the Iran-Iraq war, which had already gone on for more than four years. “The mullahs use war as an excuse for every failure. Unfortunately, there is no end in sight. The mullahs will not start peace negotiations because they believe God Almighty is only on their side, and He will lead them to victory.”

“This could last as long as the Trojan War,” Bahram said, displaying his knowledge of antiquity.

“Instead of relying on their God, the mullahs should seek the help of Odysseus to assure their victory,” Shirin retorted. She was well versed in Greek and Roman literature, too.

“Since the Iraqis also believe God is with them, they will fight until the end of time,” said Bahram. “There must be two Gods in the Middle East, one in charge of Iran’s affairs, and the other, Iraq’s.”

Morteza said, “*In the killing fields of history / God is a neutral observant / In the war between Shiites and Sunnis / Allah is a disinterested umpire.*”

Shirin chuckled, “And what about the God of the Israelis?”

They all laughed. But the smile on Bahram’s face faded when he began to discuss the fate of antiwar activists such as the Mojaheddin group. The government was persecuting them as collaborators who were helping the enemies of Islam.

“They are the enemies of the mullahs, and now the government has found an effective excuse to destroy them,” Shirin said.

Morteza wondered, “Guys, who will be next?”

“We are! The Fadayans,” Bahram said. “Look, the mullahs are eradicating organized political groups one after the other. Today it’s the turn of the Mojaheddin, and tomorrow we will be their victims.”

They became quiet. Shirin was filled with fear and pessimism. Finally, she broke the silence with the question, “Seriously, when will it be our turn?”

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