

The Marchers: A Novel

Mo H Saïdi

BOOK TWO: The Flood *continued from previous issue*

Bahram replied, “We are in a much better position than the Mojaheddin. We are prepared. Many of our members have already gone underground in anticipation of the government’s move against us.”

Morteza was getting more nervous by the minute. He got up and quickly hid the empty bottle of wine behind the large rice container in the pantry. “The Revolutionary Guards may ambush us any time,” he explained. “They may knock at our door tonight.”

After dinner, the three climbed up into the attic to inspect the hideout they had prepared. One entered through a small niche behind a cabinet in the pantry. Containers of water, plastic bags, and crackers were hidden in various places. A pile of lumber and some dusty old rugs were scattered on the floor of the attic to disguise the area.

Bahram asked Morteza, “What do you think about our secret place?”

“I hope you will never have to use it,” he replied. “But why don’t you add a journal, a notebook, and a few pens so whoever hides up there can write a diary?”

When they returned to the living room, Bahram put one of the Mozart piano concertos on the stereo. “Let’s listen to something beautiful. It will take our minds off the present.”

The allegro had just begun when they heard a hard knock on the entrance door. The knocking was repeated and turned into a violent banging. Bahram whispered to Shirin to climb into the hideout. Bahram pushed the cabinet back against the wall and walked toward the front door, but before he could open it, it was smashed open. Three Revolutionary Guards with machine guns hanging from their shoulders, their handguns ready to fire, rushed into the small hall that divided the living room from the kitchen.

The tall, chubby Revolutionary Guard who seemed to be the leader pushed Bahram against the wall and held a gun to his chin.

“Are you Bahram?”

“Yes. What do you want?”

“Who is the other guy?”

“My name is Morteza. I am a professor of chemistry at Tehran University.” The questioner ordered his companions to search the residence. “Look for guns, anti-Islamic publications, any proof of subversion! Start with the living room! Check the papers on top of the radio, pull all the books from the shelves, and see if you can find anything.”

They had brought large black plastic bags and proceeded to fill them with anything even remotely suspicious. They took classical music LPs, novels, philosophy books, and they even took *Webster’s English Dictionary*, which Bahram had received as a high school graduation award. And of course, they found the empty wine bottle.

“Guilty as charged!”

One of the guards tied Bahram’s hands behind his back and blindfolded him with a black scarf. The other one shoved Morteza onto the sofa with the butt of his machine gun.

“You better shut up, professor. Sit down and don’t move.”

Morteza was shocked. He could not believe his eyes. The Revolutionary Guards kicked furniture, tore pillows apart in a search for incriminating evidence. In less than fifteen minutes, they had ransacked the whole apartment. The chubby leader ordered his minions to take Bahram to the armored truck outside. Then he dialed headquarters from the living room and asked for his commander.

After a minute’s wait he bellowed, “Yes, sir. We did, but we didn’t find any guns or address books.”

He paused and appeared to listen. Then he spoke again.

“Are we at the right place?” Again he waited for the response. “Yes, name and address are correct but...” He stopped and listened again. “Yes, there is a professor of chemistry here but not the guy’s wife.” He repeated louder, “No, there is no one else here.” Again he repeated, “Are you sure we are in the right place?” After a while he muttered, “Fine. We are leaving. Of course, we are arresting the guy. Hello! What should we do with this professor?” He looked at Morteza with annoyance. “Yeah, the professor. The subject’s brother-in-law? Fine.”

He put down the receiver and looked at Morteza with displeasure. “You are spared this time. Now be a good boy, and don’t make a scene after we leave. And for sure don’t call anybody tonight. We have more work to do. Heed my words. Otherwise, you will be our next catch.”

He slammed the damaged door behind him and tramped down the stairs.

Cyrus looked at Shirin and wondered, “How long did you stay in that attic?”

“All night. Morteza climbed up a few hours after midnight and brought me water.” Shirin said.

“But what about Bahram—what happened to him?”

“It’s a long story, and I know only a small piece of it. I’ll tell you later.” The humming of the engines was like a lullaby to Shirin’s tired ears. She looked exhausted and fell into a deep slumber, her head leaning against the side of the headrest. Cyrus was glad she felt calm enough to sleep. His mind was churning with the stories he had just heard. He was agitated, and sleep was out of the question for him, so he pulled a novel from his bag and began reading.

After a while, the plane entered unstable weather. The pilot illuminated the seat belt sign. A flight attendant woke up Shirin and helped her fasten her seat belt. The plane was buckling and shaking. Eventually, the turbulence awakened Shirin completely.

Cyrus noticed her uneasiness and assured her, “This instability should pass quickly. Take a deep breath and listen to some good music.” Sure enough, the weather became calm again. Now fully alert, Shirin asked for a cup of tea. The flight attendant brought it but asked her to drink fast. They were about to land.

Over sips of fragrant tea, Shirin told Cyrus, “I’m nervous about Bahram’s fate. While I was in hiding, I feared for my own life, but now I’m worried about Bahram.”

Chapter Thirty

Cyrus and Shirin Arrived at Frankfurt Airport

Cyrus and Shirin arrived at Frankfurt Airport, picked up their luggage, and passed through customs without a delay. An Iranian man in his late twenties who stood in the crowd waiting for the passengers outside the customs area waved as soon as he saw Shirin. He rushed to the end of the barrier and embraced her.

