

“Wow, you made it!” He burst into a relieved laugh. “It’s a miracle that you got out of that hell-hole in one piece. How did you manage it?” Shirin gestured toward Cyrus. “This doctor is my savior. He placed himself in serious danger to rescue me.” Then she collected herself. “Sorry, I should introduce you to each other. This is Kambiz, one of our dearest friends.”

Kambiz smiled and shook Cyrus’ hand. “I am deeply grateful to you. I can’t wait to hear the whole story from both of you.”

“But first I need to know about Bahram, then we will tell you our story,” Shirin quickly replied.

Kambiz turned somber.

“Has he been captured again?” Shirin asked with a gasp in her voice. “Last I heard from our contacts, he was in the Kurdish area working his way toward the Turkish border. There are four of them, but unfortunately their escape has been detected by the Revolutionary Guards, and they are now chasing them. I don’t know if he has made it.”

“How will you know if he has crossed the border safely?” Shirin asked.

“Our friends will call me from a Kurdish village inside Turkey. I hope by the time we get to my place, we’ll have good news about Bahram.”

Cyrus looked at Shirin. “Well, Shirin, I am glad you are safe. Right now, I better go to the counter and check on my flight to Texas.”

He was about to leave when Shirin stopped him. “Stay a day with us. You have been so kind to me. You deserve a pause, a day of rest here before you return home.”

“Thanks, you are kind, but I need to get back to work and my family. I have been away longer and have seen more than I planned in the last few weeks.”

Shirin laughed. “I hate to be selfish, but I am glad the Revolutionary Guards prevented your first attempt to leave Tehran. It all worked out for the best, at least to my benefit.”

Cyrus had to smile at that, but Kambiz looked puzzled. He would find out soon enough that it was Cyrus’s forcibly delayed departure that had created the opportunity for Shirin to escape using the passport of Cyrus’s mother. Cyrus asked Shirin and Kambiz to wait for him in the airport café while he secured his seat on the next flight to Texas. He went to the airline counter and joined a long queue checking in. The next flight was leaving Frankfurt in five hours.

“I am sorry sir, but the flight is booked solid. Since you gave up your reserved seat last week, you lost your priority seating,” the agent said apologetically.

Cyrus explained the reason for the delay, adding, “It was totally out of my control. I really need a seat on the flight to Texas today.”

The employee left to discuss the problem with her supervisor. After a few minutes she returned and told Cyrus how sorry they were for his troubles in Tehran.

“Of course we will get you back to Texas. However, this is our peak season, and the next available seat is in four days. I really apologize, but that is the best we can do for you right now.”

“Can I get on the standby list?”

“Well, you could check with me an hour before today’s departure in case we have a last-minute cancellation.”

“What are my chances of getting on the flight?”

“Pretty low. But you never know. At any rate, let me confirm your seat on the flight in four days.”

Cyrus reluctantly accepted a new ticket and boarding pass.

“Don’t forget to check with me in a few hours, sir. You never know.”

It was late at night in Texas when his wife picked up the phone. “Is that really you?” Emily’s voice was tremulous.

“My love! I just arrived here in Frankfurt, and I’m sorry to call you so late, but I just had to talk to you.”

“My darling! It’s never late for you. I have been waiting for your call every night. I am so happy to hear your voice. Are you well?”

“I finally got out of Tehran in one piece, but what a problem that was....”

“I believe it. Are you really all right? Are you really in Frankfurt now? Oh God, you cannot imagine how worried I was. When are you coming home?” Cyrus explained about the overbooked flights.

“Four days. That’s so long.” She paused for a moment and then suggested, “Why don’t you use the time to visit my brother in Bamberg? But try to rest, get a good room with a comfortable bed, and catch up on your sleep. Perhaps see a performance at the Frankfurt Opera.”

Cyrus was pleased to hear his wife’s voice was turning cheerful and calm again. He felt a deep longing for her, a warmth spreading through his chest, his body. He always was at peace when she was around. She gave order and rhythm to his life. A good cook, sweet talker, and insatiable reader, she was a delight in any social setting. He deeply missed being next to her, seeing her fair face, touching her hair.

“I am so glad to hear your lovely voice. I missed you very much,” Cyrus said.

“Tell me, my love, how was Tehran? What really happened to you there?”

“It wasn’t anything serious, just a bureaucratic mishap. I’ll tell you all about it when I am back home with you.”

“Are you saying your brother didn’t have appendicitis after all?”

Cyrus was surprised by her question, till he suddenly realized that somebody must have invented this excuse for his delayed departure from Tehran.

“Yes! Yes, he is fine.”

“Call me from the hotel, okay?”

Shirin and Kambiz were deep in conversation when Cyrus joined them at the airport café. They were nibbling fresh croissants with butter and honey and sipping coffee. Cyrus settled in his seat and ordered a café latte.

Shirin was pressing Kambiz for more details about Bahram.

With a look at Shirin, Kambiz asked, “Are you ready for the whole story?” Then he turned to Cyrus. “Do you have the time to listen to it all?”

“Yes, I’m in no hurry. I couldn’t get a seat for today’s flight. I’ll be leaving in a few days, and I’m really interested to know more.”

“First of all, are you sure Bahram is alive?” begged Shirin.

“Yes. The last message came early this morning from our friends in the Kurdish village. He is alive, and he and the other guys are near the Turkish border and trying to get out of Iran.”

“What happened to him in prison?” Shirin asked. “How did he get out, and why do they want to capture him again?”