

was coughing incessantly. He left the room in a hurry to get some fresh air.

Mirza Hassan was back in his seat and muttering curses. However, Bahram couldn't think straight or hear anymore. Bahram's entire body was aflame with excruciating pains; every spot burned. He grew dizzy and fell into an abyss of unconsciousness.

The chief murmured in Mirza Hassan's ear, "You need to get his wife. This guy doesn't have much information. He could be good bait, however, to get the wife and her collaborators."

Mirza Hassan nodded.

"Keep him in the hospital for a few weeks to recover, and then send him back to his cell." The chief had become worried. "Will he survive the latest round of treatments?"

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Two months later, after Bahram's wounds had almost healed, he was interrogated for the last time. Mirza Hassan directed the session alone. He still believed Bahram was hiding important information about the Fadayans and their bomb factories. Even though Bahram was now frail and jittery, no further threat of torture could elicit any new information. After the initial beating and a series of shocks, Bahram became incoherent. Mirza Hassan, considered Bahram's pallid face, scarred neck, and drawn eyes, and decided not to proceed further and shortened the session. He was now convinced Bahram would not be able to tolerate more tortures and might die in the chamber.

"This is enough for this guy," he thought. "The chief was right. We should not waste him here."

He ordered the guards to take Bahram back to the prison hospital.

"We need to give this guy some breathing room to recover. Take his name off the list for a while. We need this guy later as bait on the street."

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Two large rooms in Building Two served as the prison hospital. In the first room there were six beds and a small station for casting, suturing, and injections. The beds were in rows of three along opposing walls. In the second room there were eight more beds and a small desk used as a nurse's station. All the beds were occupied when the Revolutionary Guards brought Bahram.

The young doctor in charge of the hospital told the guards, "I am sorry for this guy, but I don't have an empty bed."

One of the guards handed him the order from Mirza Hassan to hospitalize Bahram.

"Keep this guy alive. We need him."

The physician read the information about the wounded prisoner and recognized the signature. He had once been treated in similar fashion by Mirza Hassan, before he joined the prison health team after an arduous rehabilitation.

"I understand. Let's move one of the less serious cases into the corridor and make room for your man."

Quickly and efficiently, the aides pulled a patient with a plaster cast on his leg from the bed and placed him on a blanket in the corridor. They returned to fix the bed with a gray looking but freshly washed sheet. The doctor examined Bahram's wounds, took vital signs, and recorded his findings in a small notebook. He gave Bahram intravenous fluids and antibiotics, injected a dose of painkillers, and watched him until he fell asleep.

Bahram awoke in the evening. For the first time since the first torture session he could move his feet with some ease. He gradually regained consciousness and became aware of his surround-

ings. He moved his limbs slowly and saw a bottle of normal saline above his bed and the clear tube that ran down toward his right elbow, the drips in the tube and the cold feeling in his arm. It took a week before Bahram was able to leave his bed and shuffle to the corridor. All the beds were occupied with patients, most of them lying flat on their backs, some moaning, and a few in deep sleep. Bahram was gradually recovering, and soon he was able to walk along the corridor unencumbered by support. His wounds healed, his scarred back became less tender and painful with every day. Two months later Bahram had his last examination.

The physician pressed on his flanks and said, "Your kidneys are recovering well from the injuries. Your urine has not shown any blood for a week now. Your blood pressure and temperature are normal. Your blood count has improved, too."

He inspected Bahram's abdomen and detected a significant tenderness on his left side.

"The only serious problem you have is that your left kidney needs more time to heal completely. We have four prisoners in the corridor who are badly wounded and in need of care. I am going to discharge you from the hospital and send you back to your cell."

"Thanks for the care."

"Come back next week for a follow-up visit. I'll give you enough medicine to last you till then."

"You have been a great fellow, Doc. I am very thankful," Bahram said. "I hope one day I can repay your good medical care!"

The prison doctor was grateful for Bahram's words. "As a doctor, I have a duty to treat everyone to the best of my ability. I do the same for every prisoner, and I don't care if they are Communist, Fadayan, or Baha'i."

"I do the same in my practice."

"I hope you stay away from this place. Your kidney is seriously injured and probably will not tolerate another blow."

Bahram was aware of the severity of his injuries and replied with a quiet shrug of his shoulders, "I have no control over what goes on in this place. Thanks anyhow for your advice."

"I am discharging you today with a warning that further beatings may be fatal to you."

A guard directed him out of the hospital room and led him to the next building. As he walked, Bahram felt a stabbing pain in his knee and back. He was shifting his weight and moving slowly, limping in order to minimize his aches. Every now and then Bahram stumbled over and the guard had to assist him to continue. When they reached his cell, the guard pushed him in and slammed the metal door shut.

"Welcome back to hell!" one of the cellmates said.

He recognized only four of the prisoners. Kambiz was gone, too.

"What happened to the rest of our previous cellmates?" he asked.

"Two of them are dead," was the response. "Kambiz and another one were freed." He looked at the pale face of Bahram. "I thought you had died too, probably under torture."

The other prisoners became quiet and withdrew back into their own thoughts.

Later a man who had been in the cell before Bahram left said, "A prisoner who does not come back after a week is usually dead, either from torture or from being executed."

In the corner of the cell was one prisoner who kept staring at the old bruises on Bahram's face and neck. "I think there must