

Chapter Twenty-four

The interior of the Hezar Tehran Restaurant was finished in rich sandalwood and red velvet. Gold columns were situated between the tables that ringed the room. The center of the dining area was devoted to a small stage where Suri, a locally popular singer was singing the words of a Rodaki poem. Accompanying her was a traditional four-piece combo, four musicians playing a tanbur, a kamanchen, a ney and a daf. Colonel Mansour al Mohammed nodded smilingly to the reedy harmony. The amalgamation of sound they produced was conducive to dreams of Persia ascendant, of glory about to be regained. Perhaps rising on a fiery cloud above a devastated Tel Aviv or Washington.

His dinner companions were the somewhat subdued and misguided Karim al-Hadji, who seemed to have learned the importance of obedience, and Assistant Minister Salim Jarsan of the Institute for Political and International Studies (IPIS).

Minister Jarsan appeared too young to hold the important post he occupied. Not yet thirty, he was a rising star in IPIS. His membership in the Iranian Revolutionary Guard Corp was one of his principal credentials. His personal ruthlessness was another. His actual duties at IPIS had nothing to do with the stated mission of the organization. Minister Jarsan was involved in the surreptitious spreading of absolute terror, horror which would solidify Iran's role as the rising star of Islamic fundamentalism. His working hypothesis, the theory extant of his superiors, was that Iran should use the disparate radical Muslim forces across the globe to their own ends. When the time came that they would no longer need them, they would cut them loose.

Jarsan said, "So, Colonel, this is the hero of Houston?"

The Colonel laughed. “More to the point, the pragmatist of Houston.”

Jarsan said, “Pragmatism is good, if it is exercised in the proper mix with dedication to a cause.” He directed a question to Karim. “Are you dedicated to a cause?”

Karim answered slowly, “Most assuredly, Minister.”

Jarsan asked, “And what cause would that be, Karim al-Hadji?”

“The cause of a greater Iran. Or if you prefer a pragmatic answer, whatever cause you want me to embrace.”

Jarsan laughed aloud. “Alright, Karim. We will talk some more about your dedication, but not tonight. I have ordered Karoshte Ghorme Sabzi for the three of us. You do like lamb stew, don’t you? Or were your tastes Americanized while you toiled in the land of the Great Satan? Perhaps a hamburger would be more to your liking.”

“No, Minister. I have a fondness for lamb. It is a good choice. Perhaps a lambburger.”

Jarsan laughed again. He said to Colonel Mohammed, “You’re right. He is a cheeky one.” Then to Karim, he continued, “Now let us enjoy the evening. Tomorrow, come to the Institute at ten in the morning. I have something to discuss with you. For now, let us listen to the delightful Suri.”

“Thank you, Minister. I will be there.”

“I’m sure you will.”

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