

Chapter Twenty-six

The building housing Tehran's Institute for Political and International Studies was large and bleak in appearance. It looked as though its designer might have been a particularly morose Soviet exile. Karim al-Hadji presented himself at the reception desk at precisely ten in the morning. He had noticed that Minister Jarsan had been dressed in western style when they had dined at the Hezar Tehran Restaurant, so he had donned similar attire for this meeting. He was taken by the receptionist down a labyrinthine stretch of hallways, finally arriving at a door marked in Arabic, "Section R."

The guide opened the door and gestured for Karim to enter. As he did so, the woman left, leaving him in a nearly bare anteroom. The only furnishings were two chairs and a small table. On the table were two bowls. One held a quantity of pistachio nuts. The other contained a handful of empty shells. On the wall opposite the chairs there was another door, unmarked. Karim sat down and waited. As he did so he reached for a few pistachios, then hesitated. He looked around to see if there were any cameras. People who took nuts uninvited might fall into disfavor. It might be wrong to take the nuts without being invited to do so.

He did not take any nuts. In America, he could take all the pistachios he wanted, crack them and drop the shells on the floor if he wished, and when he grew tired of waiting, he could open the door and ask why there was such a big damn delay. But this was not the U.S.A. It was modern Iran and pistachio dissenters could very well be punished. It was his native land, and now it was a place where he had to fret about minute details that shouldn't amount to a hill of camel dung.

He was in danger of losing that boldness which had helped him commit the perfect offense against the Americans. Being in a police state does have a tendency to unnerve one. He ran his finger around the inside of his collar, betraying his nervousness. Then the door opened and Minister Jarsan entered with a smile and friendly outstretched hand.

“Good morning, Karim al-Hadji. Thank you for coming by.” Karim smiled inwardly. The Minister knew Goddamned well he had no choice but to obey the summons.

The Minister was dressed in traditional Arab garb, complete with a kafiya headdress. Karim felt like a fool with his blue suit, white shirt and tie. The bastard had thrown him off his guard and he didn't care for the feeling.

Minister Jarsan said, “Come into my office. I have fresh coffee brewing.”

In the next room, there was no desk, only a long conference table surrounded by comfortable armchairs. A side table held an American Mr. Coffee and cups and saucers. Two blue folders were on the table. The cover of each read, ”Operation BHI.” The Minister invited Karim to be seated and then slid one of the files to him across the table.

“Don't open it yet. I want to tell you why you are here. You know, you are lucky to be alive. I know of at least three officials who wanted you shot. Actually, make that two. The other desired that you be beheaded. He was so angry that he said he would do it himself. He has done it before. I think he likes it. But I have interceded on your behalf. I am your sole benefactor. The only one in all of Iran, outside of your family. Do you understand the importance of that?”

Trying not to appear obsequious, Karim replied, “Yes, Minister Jarsan, I do indeed. Thank you and may Allah bless you a million times.”

Jarsan said, “I already have Allah in my corner. It is your allegiance, your unquestioning obedience that I want. I am thinking of sending you on a mission. If you perform well, you can return to Iran and receive the glory and adulation you should have gotten on your last homecoming. Does it surprise you that I believe you performed heroically? It took ingenuity and bravery to pull off the blow to America that you did.”

Karim sat silently for a moment. Experience had taught him to be wary of flatterers. Then Karim said, “Yes, I am somewhat taken aback. I hope you will not think me to be too immodest, but I think your assessment is correct.”

“Do you want redemption?”

“Yes, Minister, very much. I will do anything you ask.”

“I hope you mean that sincerely. I am going to send you back to the United States to kill more Americans. There is one thing the Americans have done well. They have financed a very effective national security program, sending monies to their largest cities to implement the plans of their Homeland Security Department. I believe that we should show them that by doing so, they are leaving their smaller cities vulnerable to attack. When we hit them there, it will cause a great uproar among Middle Americans, who will demand a bigger share of the funds. The end result will be that they will have to spread the money around more evenly, which will shortchange those places we would really most like to strike, making them weaker. If you are successful, Karim, you will have rendered an inestimable service to Iran, Islam and, of course, to yourself.”

It was easy to see the validity of Jarsan's plan. And the benefit to Karim was clear as well. "Quite clever, Minister. I am eager to begin."

Jarsan asked, "Have you ever seen the American movie, *"Cape Fear?"*"

"No, Minister, I have not seen that one."

"There were actually two versions. The first, with Gregory Peck and Robert Mitchum, was by far the best of the pair. The movie had fear as a theme. I bring this up because there is actually a real Cape Fear, in the American state of North Carolina. That is where you are going. And fear, in the name of Allah, is what the infidels will feel when you make your presence known."

E-mail the author: mcdougal8@verizon.net