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compelling . . .”
—Alan Furst



NIGHT IN TEHRAN

A NOVEL



P H I L I P K A P L A N

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NIGHT IN TEHRAN

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For Barbara

1

PARIS

A **FOGGY MORNING IN** the Place de la Concorde.

Poking above the rooftops of the left bank of the Seine, a blinking red light was all that could be seen of the Eiffel Tower. David Weiseman shook the drizzle from his overcoat, and then dodged through the cars streaming into the great square. He hustled past the Hotel de Crillon and across to Avenue Gabriel. Get on with it, he told himself.

He strode past the US embassy, casting only a quick glance at the tough-looking French flics twirling police batons, staring down nosy American tourists. A clap of thunder hastened his step. Ten minutes later

he crossed the ornate Pont Alexander III, homage to the Russian Tsar who supported the Holy Alliance that endured for a hundred years, until the guns of the First World War shattered a century of post-Napoleonic peace in Europe.

Diplomacy rarely if ever succeeded like that.

Across the Seine, he took in the Quai d'Orsay, said to be the home of the French mandarins who considered themselves masters of the stylized international ballet known as diplomacy. This fine art meant staying on one's toes, sustaining the process, never letting it break down. But it did break down, Weiseman knew, remembering Berlin . . . the Grue-newald . . . every twenty years or so in Europe, leading to the two world wars of the twentieth century.

And so he saw things differently, reminding himself diplomacy wasn't just about process, or compromise. It was about persuading the other country that it was in *their* interest to do what *you* wanted them to do. Trevor said Gramont, the man Weiseman was on his way to meet, could be trusted. Well, he didn't quite say that. Trevor—Weiseman's boss, the director of the Central Intelligence Agency—didn't trust anyone. He said Laurent Gramont was important, the door into the French elites.

At the Foreign Ministry, a young woman in outsized amber glasses led him to the secretary general's office. Gramont was with an aide, giving instructions. He held himself tall and straight in a perfectly tailored, double-breasted gray suit with a subtle dark stripe, a silver tie with a pearl tie tack, matching cufflinks on his white shirt. His hair was a richly toned silver gray. He was a French Trevor, knowing and discreet, no doubt ready to be ruthless.

"Monsieur Weiseman, quel plaisir."

Gramont's inner office was a gorgeous Empire spectacle, separated from the outer world by mauve, silk drapes. The gilt inlaid desk was devoid of any papers. A revolving globe stood to the right. Europe on top, France in the middle.

Weiseman gestured toward it. "Still the center of civilization, I see."

Gramont allowed the kind of half smile that also reminded Weise-

man of Trevor. "It's our mission," he said. "But please, have a seat." He lifted the phone, whispered, "*Deux cafés.*"

"Justin Trevor suggested I see you first. I'll be—"

"Yes, of course. I know your role. Justin called me from Washington."

I need you to find me someone to replace the Shah, to run the country for us. A general, a cutthroat, a cleric. But our man. Our entire position in the Middle East depends on it.

Gramont sat perfectly still, a modern day Renaissance prince, a Machiavelli waiting to grant a trivial favor. Like Trevor. What exactly is their relationship? Weiseman wondered.

"You and Justin go back a long way."

"Oh yes, one could say that. We were in Moscow together, as ambassadors, before he went to Prague. He told me about his promising young protégé during the Prague Spring, an idealist who stood his ground, made him reconsider his own positions. Not easy to do with Justin. So it seems you're *un homme sérieux*, someone we can work with."

"Well then, has there been any progress on the New Year's Eve incident?"

"Ah, yes, the ritual executions. Quite grisly—in bed, nude, their throats were slit. The man was an anti-Shah exile, a bazaari, a businessman who came to Paris when things got hot."

Weiseman took that in without comment. Gramont had been calm in relating the barbaric acts, but it was obvious that the French were concerned Iranian infighting in France might spread.

He asked, "Who did it? What do your services think?"

"*Tiens, tiens*, it's a bit of a puzzle. The woman was a relative of Empress Farah. Fabulously wealthy. The word was that she liked to play."

"A puzzle indeed," Weiseman said, wanting him to get to the point.

Gramont turned his head ever so slightly, his Adam's apple bobbing a bit, a trait Weiseman had noticed before among high French dignitaries. "Perhaps a political assassination by SAVAK," Gramont suggested.

Weiseman shook his head, recalling what Trevor told him. "The Shah's security service? In Paris? Well, the French *would* say that,

wouldn't they. The Shah's our man. The French are betting he'll be gone soon, so they pin it on SAVAK and wait to displace our influence in Iran."

"I see. Of course it's not just a police matter," he said. "Something political."

"Oh, yes. With the Middle East it's always political. In France we have bitter memories of the Algerian war, of blasts in our Metro stations. That was just twenty years ago. Our Muslim community has been quiet since then, but I have no illusions. New Year's Eve and then the Sorbonne killing of that young woman. Suicide bombings are quite possible."

"And?"

"We monitor the Iranian factions. They could wage a jihad against each other in Paris."

Ah.

The door opened and a man in a white starched jacket with gold epaulettes came in bearing two white china cups and saucers and two tiny glasses of water on a silver tray. Gramont's little finger rose ever so slightly as he drank down the espresso. "It won't be easy," he said morosely, "what Justin is asking you to do. You'll rather stand out on the streets of Tehran. Of course, you'll be monitored from the day you arrive. By SAVAK, and by the others."

No doubt your people, too, and mine, thought Weiseman.

The phone rang and Gramont spoke softly into it, switching to an indecipherable Breton dialect. Weiseman looked around the office. There was a watercolor that looked like a Monet. He got up to examine a gold plaque on a nearby walnut table. The dedication was to Le Comte Laurent Gramont from former President Charles de Gaulle. Royalty then. And next to it was a facsimile of the ribbons in Gramont's suit lapel: *La Croix de Guerre*.

Gramont hung up the phone. He was sure, he said, that there was much he could offer a colleague of Justin Trevor's as it affected matters in Iran. He would be honored to put his new American friend in touch with the right people. And then, smooth as silk, "Please, call me Laurent. You'll come to dinner at my home on Saturday. We have to do our work quietly, under the radar, as Justin would say."

SAINT-GERMAIN-DES-PRÉS WAS A short walk away, through the tangle of narrow streets and alleys that flowed up from the Seine, between seventeenth-century buildings once occupied by French royals, by the noble facade of the École des Beaux Arts, on to the medieval church.

On the boulevard, a man with a salt-and-pepper beard, slightly stooped, was walking his dachshund, urging him on whenever he fell into a stubborn crouch, refusing to take another step. A young couple went by, holding hands, fingers linked, engrossed in each other. A beggar in baggy pants limped toward Weiseman, his cane tapping on the cobblestones, holding out his beret. Weiseman dropped in a franc and watched the withered old man hold it up, bite on it, then bow theatrically, sweeping the cap before him like some character in Molière.

Weiseman glanced across to the Café de Flore, where Sartre still held forth. During the war, many of the French intellectuals had taken care not to confront the Nazis, Weiseman knew. He himself had been a small child in Hitler's Berlin, but he hadn't forgotten what Johann had taught him about what it was like to live under a dictator. It's why he became a diplomat, to engage and make sure the horror didn't come again, didn't swallow up other innocents.

He paused and thought of Trevor, how the new CIA director had surprised him the day after Jimmy Carter's inauguration by plucking him out of the State Department and assigning him on detail as his personal agent to deal with the looming crisis in Iran, supposedly a reward for his work during the Prague Spring on his first Foreign Service assignment. There were others Trevor could have chosen—Mideast experts fluent in Farsi—but he had insisted on Weiseman, "because I trust you."

Weiseman had no illusions about the game of espionage, or who would take the fall should things go wrong . . . as well they might.

He started up again, crossing the street, heading down Saint-Germain, turning left on Rue du Dragon, by the fast-food joints and oriental restaurants, He reflected on how Gramont could help him on Iran, on what Trevor had told him about Gramont's game, on whether the French

count could be trusted. In a doorway of a *hôtel particulier*, a woman in white platform shoes, a short red skirt, and a red beret tapped ashes of a cigarette against the building. She raised her eyebrows.

“*Non, merci*,” Weiseman said.

He picked up the pace and rounded the corner to Rue Grenelle, over to Boulevard Raspail. In less than five minutes he turned onto the Rue de Varenne, pushed on double doors, and entered an enclave, Rue Cité de Varenne, an upper-class oasis insulating its residents from the hurly-burly of the city—the sounds and smells, the stream of pedestrians, the blaring Klaxons of speeding taxis. He started down a dark path, past enclosed tennis courts. Overhead lights came on, illuminating four white town houses. Number 8 was at the end of the road. He stepped up to the door and pressed the bell. A barely audible chime sounded. A maid in a black dress and white apron opened the door. “*Bonsoir, Monsieur Weiseman.*”

A BRONZE EQUESTRIAN statue with a stern Roman gladiator guarded the stairwell. At the top of the stairs, Laurent Gramont, in a three-piece, black-tie ensemble, stood on a finely woven Persian carpet—a Tabriz, Weiseman thought, based on the cream-and-red ornamental patterns. The town house was a *mélange* of East and West. The walls were a beige silk decorated with a motif that looked like Louis XV, before the revolution, when aristos still ruled the roost in well-guarded enclaves. Behind Gramont, guests whispered under the chandelier he had seen from outside. It was a formal affair—black ties for men, women in long silk dresses.

Like Trevor, Weiseman thought again, Gramont was tough, even ruthless when need be, but now the *bon vivant*. He followed his host into the salon, tasting his champagne. “This is David Weiseman,” Gramont announced, “en route to Tehran.” Heads nodded ever so slightly. A muscular man with a shock of gray hair approached, followed by an elegant woman, offered his hand and introduced his wife. He was the minister of defense. Next, a shipping magnate and a younger woman, not his wife. A professor at ENA, the elite French *École Nationale d’Administration*, his wife a couturier. Across the room, Weiseman saw a tall man with a white

Van Dyck beard and sunken cheekbones, yet deeply tanned for all that, with a tiny white mustache beneath a prominent nose. "Someone you will want to meet," Gramont said, and he led Weiseman over there.

"Alain de Rose," the man said. He looked a bit like James Angleton, the old paranoid CIA counterintelligence chief—chain-smoking, brushing ashes off his tux onto the superb Tabriz carpet. *Sûreté* was written all over him.

"Alain monitors the *Proche Orient* for our services," Gramont confirmed. "The Near East from Egypt to Iran, the Saudis and Gulf emirates. And of course, Israel."

"Then you're involved in the investigation," Weiseman said casually. He knew the Paris social scene, the little tricks and moral pieties that enabled one to inquire without breaching the code of the French upper crust.

"Yes, of course." De Rose's voice was gruff, almost as if his larynx had been removed. "The Iranian girl at the Sorbonne. But it's more than one assassination. We've got a sticky web of Iranians in Paris, fighting it out by proxy over what will happen when the Shah goes."

Well, this is someone worth talking to, Weiseman thought.

"You expect the Shah to be deposed?"

De Rose shrugged. "Everyone goes at some point. Your president was forced to resign, to avoid impeachment."

Weiseman nodded, recalling past encounters as a young diplomat with Nixon, that working dinner at San Clemente when the president was drunk, Nixon's diplomatic mastery in dealing with Kremlin leaders.

"Yes, we're all on short-term leases," he conceded.

Heels tapped. "*Et enfin*," Gramont said. "Our hostess has appeared, finally."

Weiseman turned to see a five-foot-ten woman in black silk; dark hair cut short, almost boyish; a rakishly tied belt that highlighted her narrow waist. This was Margot Gramont. She thanked him for the flowers he had sent along that afternoon, then introduced a lovely young woman in an emerald-green silk dress, with long, glossy, black hair. Yasmine de Rose was a student at the Sorbonne, and the daughter of Alain

de Rose.

A tuxedoed waiter came up and whispered into Margo Gramont's ear. "Dinner is served," she said. "There is one more couple expected, but we may begin."

Weiseman offered his arm to Yasmine de Rose and led her to her place, held her chair. She smiled shyly and gestured to the place marker with his name. "*Asseyez vous, monsieur.*"

He sat at the place next to her and took in her porcelain-like facial features, her two luminous dark eyes, the way she lowered them modestly. Is she Iranian? he wondered.

A fork tapped on a glass. Laurent Gramont welcomed his guests with words that flowed like the Seine.

The maid entered and announced, "*Monsieur Schreiber et Madame d'Antou.*"

The chunky man wore a tuxedo with a red bow tie and pocket square, red braces and cummerbund—gray-black hair was combed straight back and brilliantined flat against his skull. The woman was altogether different: in her early thirties, slim, a gold gown highlighting lustrous blond hair in a chignon with a jeweled clasp.

The host and hostess embraced the woman, then shook hands formally with the man. Laurent Gramont said, "We're pleased to welcome dear Françoise once again to our home. And Jacques Schreiber. Just in time for dinner."

A BLACK-TIE WAITER swept away the coquillage, a formidable array of prawns and scallops, clams and moules, oysters from Normandy. Seated between Yasmine de Rose and Françoise d'Antou, Weiseman chatted easily in French with each, aware of those across the table inspecting him. He asked Françoise what Jacques did, wondering, What is their relationship?

The waiter began to serve the grilled *turbotin* and to offer a sterling silver pitcher of hollandaise sauce. "Jacques is in the armaments business,"

Françoise said.

“In the Middle East?”

“*Oui*. In Iran and Saudi, also in Libya.”

“And when he travels there . . .”

“He goes alone.”

“And you?”

“I’m a diplomatic correspondent for *Le Figaro*, specializing in Iran. I speak Farsi and go there often, and to Iraq.” She sipped the wine, the napkin caressed her lips. She caught his eye. “We’re not a couple. *Vous comprenez?*”

Her glass was empty and Weiseman signaled to the waiter, who came over and filled it with more white wine. He gestured toward Yasmine and the waiter filled her glass, too.

“You were in Tehran recently, Jacques,” Alain de Rose said from the center of the table. “How goes the Shah?”

“Mohammad Reza Pahlavi,” he said, “is America’s puppet.” Jacques Schreiber sliced into the *turbotin*. “All Tehran is waiting for him to fall. The factions are arming to the teeth.”

“Well, you would know, Jacques,” the ENA professor said. “You sell to all of them.”

“And why not?” Schreiber said. “Jobs for our people. But regrettably, the Anglo-Saxons keep the Shah well equipped. Perhaps it was American weapons that SAVAK used here in Paris on New Year’s Eve.”

Weiseman noticed Schreiber staring hard at him, daring him to respond. Françoise whispered, “Let it pass. Jacques is trying to bait you.”

“Do you know that, monsieur?” Weiseman asked. “That SAVAK carried out the murder?”

Schreiber rolled his eyes, as if only the village idiot would doubt it. Weiseman looked first at Gramont, then Alain de Rose.

“Of course, you’re right to ask,” Gramont said softly. “The matter is unsettled.”

De Rose shot Weiseman a glance. His lips seemed to synch, *Later* . . .

Margot Gramont smiled sweetly, “Who would like more of the tur-

bot?”

“But you know Jacques may be right,” the professor’s wife said. “The Shah is a tyrant. The Americans have been propping him up for years, averting their eyes from the torture.” A pause for effect. “Look, I don’t have any use for French arms dealers”—here, a nasty glance at Jacques Schreiber—“but why not give the Shah’s political opponents a chance?”

Weiseman wondered, Why not indeed?

“And who are these opponents?” he asked. “Would we want to see them in power? Religious fundamentalists are operating right here in Paris. Isn’t that true, Laurent?”

“Well, we’ve seen those reports,” Gramont said. “It’s very complicated, rather opaque.”

“Not so opaque,” Yasmine suddenly said aloud. “Iranian exiles at the Sorbonne are organizing into cells, pro and anti-Shah. There are SAVAK agents in training, religious fanatics spreading the word of the Ayatollah. Students are being beaten up—one was even killed. And that Iranian couple murdered here on New Year’s Eve—”

Weiseman thought she seemed extremely agitated. It was more than the usual fevered debate at a diplomatic dinner party.

Françoise d’Antou said, “I interviewed Ayatollah Khomeini in Iraq recently. He was expelled by the Shah years ago; he’s the Shah’s *bête noir*.” She stared directly at Schreiber who seemed about to burst a blood vessel. “One of your customers, Jacques, I believe.”

Weiseman looked down the table at Gramont and de Rose, studying their fingers.

AFTER DINNER, THE men and women separated into two groups—the ladies in the salon, the men in a den where drinks and cigars were distributed. As Jacques went off to use the phone in the next room, Gramont led Weiseman into a huddle with de Rose. Gramont told him that Françoise’s father had been close to him. De Rose said Jacques Schreiber was a man of the far right, fiercely Catholic, a *collaborateur* who did the bidding of the

gestapo in the war, a schemer who advanced himself on the backs of others.

“It’s a sordid story,” Gramont added. “He’s here because we find him useful.”

Useful?

“The violence at the Sorbonne,” Weiseman said to de Rose. “It’s not just old wounds.”

“Of course not,” de Rose said, “What my daughter spoke about is correct. Those things are happening now, and it brings back memories of our past. We haven’t forgotten the bombings. It’s still a scar on our politics. Now we see it coming again.”

Gramont led them to a corner set of three fauteuils. “You leave tomorrow for Tehran, David. You’ll want to meet everyone in the government, civil society, even the mullahs. But discreetly. There’s a man called Hanif; he heads SAVAK. Justin knows Hanif. So do I.”

Gramont paused, as if deciding whether to say more. “We know the opposition, even some ayatollahs.”

I’ll bet you do, thought Weiseman.

“And intermediaries?” he asked.

“Yasmine will introduce you to student leaders,” de Rose said softly. “She was born there. She’s very attuned to the *reseau*. The network.”

“And there are others,” Gramont said. “Françoise—”

Jacques Schreiber reentered the room. “It’s time to go,” he said abruptly.

Weiseman looked up, startled by the peremptory tone. What was this about?

Gramont led them back into the salon.

Françoise d’Antou appeared a moment later, stunning in a shimmering black fur cloak. She gave Weiseman a subtle but meaningful look, as if anxious to tell him something.

“Monsieur,” Jacques said crisply, then turned on his heel and headed toward the door.

Françoise stepped forward, slipped a note into Weiseman’s hand, then kissed him on both cheeks, and pulled her cloak tightly about her as she followed Jacques Schreiber out into the cold Paris night.

YASMINE. WEISEMAN HAD a feeling she would be able to tell him more about the murder at the Sorbonne. He excused himself and went to look for her.

He found her sitting alone in a small book-lined den. She appeared to have been crying. She looked up, but didn't say anything.

"When you spoke in there about the Sorbonne student being killed," he said, "it didn't seem like something you'd only heard about. If you can tell me, I'd like to know. Perhaps it would help."

Yasmine shook her head, was silent for a moment. "She was a friend of mine," Yasmine finally said. "A gentle girl named Shirin Majid. From a good family. Her father is a banker in Tehran. She was completely apolitical."

For an instant it looked as if Yasmine would resume crying, but she stifled it and continued. "It was the headscarf," she said. "Shirin wore it every day. It didn't cover the hair in the front of her head—that was her tiny statement, her freedom. They warned her to cover up, but she wouldn't wear the chador. She was a modern Iranian woman, like me. She told me she wouldn't abandon her identity. And now . . ."

Weisman felt a gathering force in what she was saying, the way a small wave can crest into something terrifying. "Shirin was walking on the Boul'Mich," Yasmine said softly. "I was about a hundred meters behind her when I recognized her headscarf. I was about to call out to her when I saw three Muslim guys wearing skullcaps cross the street toward her. They grabbed her by the arms and pushed her against a wall. One of them pulled the scarf down over her hair so that all of it was covered. Then he tied it very tightly around her throat. Shirin started screaming. She pulled the knot open and fixed it again, her way. They started up again, and she screamed at them, saying she was a woman, not their property."

Yasmine's voice had risen, so that it seemed she was the one who was crying out against the attackers. Suddenly, she seemed to shrink down into her body, as if retelling the words had intensified Shirin's terror—and

her own.

Weiseman saw before his eyes the two slain nudes from New Year's Eve; he felt the wave swelling, ready to crash. "And then?" he said, urgently.

Yasmine took a deep breath. "A Mercedes was parked there. A man got out. He was huge, a big man in a jellaba."

Yasmine was sobbing now. He reached out to steady her, but she had to get it out, to tell everything. "The man drew a long sword out of his jellaba."

She sobbed hysterically as she relived what she had seen. "He raised the sword over his shoulder, and then he swung it at Shirin. She was standing there, and then—"

But the words wouldn't come.

2

PASSAGE TO IRAN

THE NEXT DAY, before departing for Tehran, Weiseman waited for Françoise d'Antou in a café, wondering why she wanted to see him. She professed to be a journalist, to travel around the Middle East, and to meet Arab and Iranian leaders. She was beautiful and sophisticated and worldly. And she was with Jacques Schreiber, a collaborator during the Nazi occupation.

Why?

He wondered, was she placed in his path by Gramont as bait? Did that explain the departure kiss at the dinner party and the note she had secretly passed to him?

He sipped his espresso and suddenly she was there, standing before him. They exchanged air-kisses and she slipped gracefully into the booth, smoothing her skirt and crossing her legs. He signaled to the waiter and a cappuccino was placed before her. She got right to her message, speaking to him of Iran, about the conflicting forces he was about to confront there. She told him that fear was the Shah's only remaining weapon, but now hatred was overcoming that fear. When the SAVAK secret police rolled out their dragnet to sweep up the middle-class opposition and student rebels, they only stirred the cauldron of regime hatred.

"And the mullahs?" he asked.

"When the mullahs take over," Françoise said, "the people will dance in the streets. They'll celebrate the Shah's departure and cheer on the new regime. They'll chant the prayers. Then they'll realize what they've allowed to happen. Black robes will replace military epaulettes. Everyone will conceal his true feelings. People will report their neighbors, as they do now. It will remain Iran . . . all the blundering and deceit, the suffering and self-preservation, the conspiracies and secret police."

He was struck by the comprehensiveness and realism of her perspective, conveyed in just a few moments, and how it corresponded with his own reflections about Iran—except she had been there frequently as a journalist, knew the language, and had anecdotal detail to bolster her views. And he was struck that her depiction of life under a future regime run by ayatollahs hardly supported Trevor's belief that the French were out to replace the Shah.

Was there more that grounded her insights? He'd have to find out.

The penetrating mind almost made him forget her beauty, the tendrils of blond hair that caressed a long graceful neck; but her passionate commitment forced his attention back to the fissures in Iranian society. She told him everyone in Iran was a hostage: the Shah, the soldiers and bazaari, the students and peasants. The ayatollahs. Even the SAVAK. "As soon as you get off the plane," she warned, "you'll be a hostage, too."

"And you," he said. "Are you a hostage as well?"

He had not meant to pry; it was incompatible with his character, his

insistence on guarding his privacy and respecting that of others—qualities inherited from Johann, his father—values he considered well suited to his life as a diplomat.

But she seemed to brush it aside, leaning forward and speaking softly, even intimately. “I met Jacques when I was in the university and he was a man of the world. He flattered me, took me to fine restaurants, to concerts. At that time, there were so few eligible young men who had come back from World War II and the German occupation.”

She paused, as if awaiting his reaction, then said, “We never know what is inside the gold wrapping paper. It ended before it started.”

Clever, he thought, and encouraging. But be discreet; how was she still linked to that beast?

“You need to understand the Iranians, David. They have their own rituals of decorum, politeness, and social etiquette. When they flatter, or say something they don’t necessarily mean you to take literally, they expect you to understand. And they expect the same in return. They have a word for it. *Taarof*. In Tehran, you must practice *taarof* like the Iranians.”

And did she practice *taarof* as well? Weiseman wondered. Was she doing so now?

She stood to leave and led him out of the café, up the Faubourg Saint-Honoré, past the upscale boutiques and the Élysée. The sun had warmed the day, and Françoise removed her gloves. A long black Citroën flashed by and entered into the courtyard of a massive gray building just up a narrow street. “It’s the minister of the interior,” she said.

Two blocks more and she stopped at Saint-Philippe du Roule, a church with a single spire that he had often passed but never entered. “*Vous permettez?*” she asked.

He watched her enter Saint-Philippe, kneel, and cross herself, then rise to light a candle. Eyes tightly shut, she said a silent prayer, crossed herself again, and walked out of the church, the sun casting its glow on her blond hair.

She led him to a bistro across the street, and they sat at a table with a red and black tablecloth. Over their quiches lorraine and salads and

glasses of pinot gris, he asked her about her work. How often did she go to the Middle East . . . to Iran?

She spoke knowingly, describing visits for *Le Figaro* to Iraq and Iran, to Lebanon and Egypt—even to Saudi Arabia, not the easiest place for a woman to cover. She had learned Arabic and become rather proficient in Farsi. The paper's editor was a crusty old man who doubted a woman's ability to operate in such countries. It was a point of pride that now, it seemed, the editor came to her to take on the tough assignments . . . as Trevor did with him.

He respected that, her intellect, and the way she had put Jacques down at Gramont's dinner party. But he wanted to know more. How could she be with Jacques? What was their relationship? Who was her mentor at the quai . . . her patron?

"You've risen . . . quickly," he said.

"I've met a number of the mullahs," she said. "Businessmen, even some military officers. I can help you contact them, once you get there."

She was cool and calm. He wondered, his mind going back to Gramont, to "useful" Jacques, was journalism her cover? He asked, "How long have you worked for *Le Figaro*?"

"Since I graduated from the Sciences Po. I read Oriental Political Studies. Laurent arranged my first job, as a *stagiaire*, an intern, at the quai."

Ah. Gramont. Of course.

"And then?"

"Then a call to *Le Figaro* and they took me on." She paused, as if seeking to gauge his reaction, and added, "I was very grateful to him."

"Of course," he said, wondering how grateful, and why she was telling him all this, and whether she had really met with Saddam and Khomeini.

"They're close," she said knowingly. "Laurent and your Justin Trevor. Really two of a kind."

He watched her dab at her lips, refresh her lipstick. She was sophisticated, practiced in the arts of intrigue, a journalist who could open doors to mullahs ostracized by Washington, a way to make contact.

And beautiful.

“You told me that you and Jacques were not a couple. And yet . . .”

“Yes,” she said. “We arrived together last night and departed together. *N’importe*. He’s old enough to be my father. But he could never be my father.”

A man came into the café carrying yellow roses and walked up to their table. “*Pour l’amour*,” he murmured.

Weiseman selected a rose and handed it to her. “It matches your hair.”

The man drew a pin from his green apron, and Weiseman helped affix it to her dress. His hands fumbled with the pin; it took three tries, and finally it was done.

“So, a collaboration,” he said, breaking the pregnant silence.

“Yes, we could call it that, if you wish.”

He watched her rise to go and stood as she glided away, turned at the door, and gently waved, the fingers in the white glove dancing seductively, performed as only a Frenchwoman can. He looked again at the note she had slipped to him at the dinner party: *Café Castiglione: 8 A.M., and Tehran*.

She was charming, while at the same time possessing the cool demeanor and intellect of the European professional woman. She had denied any relationship with the depraved Jacques Schreiber. He had to assume she was close to Laurent Gramont, perhaps the asset Trevor had mentioned. What was she not telling him? Could it be more than that?

Yet he sensed in her a kindred spirit, someone using the cover of *Le Figaro*, perhaps to carve out a measure of autonomy from Gramont just as he sought to do from Trevor. And there was their common past, how each had lost a father very close to them, her reaction to that.

And what else? Suddenly this woman had appeared in his path, an expert on Iran. Could that be a coincidence? Unlikely. Had he revealed too much?

He had lost Eva and remained unattached. There had been other women as he moved about Europe on missions for Trevor, most of them Europeans who shared his interest in the theater and music. And, of course, there was Regina Trevor, but the thought of marrying into Justin

Trevor's family . . . well, his father, Johann, had schooled him on Goethe's *Faust*, had cautioned him never to sell his soul to anyone, for any price.

Growing up on a farm in Illinois after their harrowing escape from Germany, Weiseman often heard Johann say, "*Never again.*" Now, years later as a diplomat tested by hard experience, he knew that terror and genocide had not ended in the ruins of Hitler's bunker. It continued to reside in the lower depths of the human condition and could not be wished away. Those who have power can and often do abuse it beyond the limits of human decency.

He relied on the counsel of two fathers: the good and gentle Johann and the coldly realistic Justin. Johann had saved his life and sensitized him to the importance of self-reliance, of helping others, to redeem a life that was nearly forfeited. Justin had enrolled him in the service of the American empire, promoting him in Prague, turning to him to wage the good fight in Europe for America's interests and ideals in the Cold War. But Iran—that was different, a blank slate for him. As director of central intelligence, Trevor had told him America's entire position in the Middle East depended on the Shah's secret alliance with Israel and Turkey, and of course with the United States.

They were so different in personal manner and in social station, Johann and Justin, yet Weiseman's own mind and methods were touched symbiotically by both. He still heard his father's words echo in his ears. "Our new country was carved out by individuals ready to dare, not by sheep who do what they are told. Remember what Bonaparte said, *Audace, toujours audace.*" And with his remarkable intuition, Trevor seemed to know just how to draw the best out of his protégés, touching their innermost drives to stir them to surmount what they themselves thought they could achieve.

Yet he still felt a missing personal dimension. Maybe it was because he lost his mother at such a young age, in Hitler's war. A bomb had exploded in her path. A psychiatrist he saw once in Vienna—only once—told him the death of a mother was like being torn a second time from the womb. He didn't have much time for psychobabble; he accepted the uncertainty of life, and so was pragmatic, ready to take events as they were

served up, to use his skills and internal discipline to confront any challenge. But he suspected he would have been a better man if his mother had been there to give him the love he missed amid the stress of growing up in an adopted country.

He remained in the café and ordered another espresso, his thoughts returning to Françoise, what she had said, and—“*Salaud!*” the waiter suddenly cried out, turning up the television over the bar. The TV screen was replaying that terrible night at the Sorbonne. Shirin Majid was on a stretcher, covered up before the gates. The camera panned in farther, and he felt a chill, reliving Yasmine’s horror. Everyone at the bar stared at the TV, their faces flush with rage. A TV reporter explained what happened. Shirin was an Iranian student who spoke fluent French. She had a brilliant career before her. She was murdered because she didn’t observe the precepts of some radical prelate of a foreign country far away. It was time to send them home if they dared to ignore French laws and customs.

At the bar, the patrons were all cursing the foreigners. The old fellow with a white mustache and fisherman’s cap was telling how he had fought at the battle of Algiers and shown them a thing or two. Next to Weiseman, a rail-thin woman with a gravelly voice said, “These people, they live in my quartier, they stay up late, play loud music, and keep me awake. Their place stinks from their strange cooking. It’s like a souk; a person can’t get any sleep. I don’t have any peace.”

Coins hit the counter, and a thin, dark-skinned man slipped out of the café, apprehension on his face. The innocent would get caught up in all this, Weiseman thought. They always did.

WEISEMAN SAT ON the Air France flight east, peering down at the Balkans, the mountains drenched in blood from centuries of conflict. The stark contrast reminded him graphically that he had a job to do, and his mind flashed back to the exodus from Germany across the Baltic Sea, onward to America, across the Atlantic on a barely seaworthy freighter. A lifetime ago.

There had been a man in a black turtleneck with big thick eyeglasses and wavy brown hair huddled alongside them just outside the boiler room. The man entertained young David with card tricks and tall tales of adventure, telling him of life's possibilities, granting a frightened child the precious gift of hope.

Johann had asked the stranger what he had done before ending up on a ship of refugees. The man said he was a member of the honored profession of survivors. A small town doctor from the French Auvergne, he had married a German woman who cursed the Nazis, swore to him that she hated Hitler. When she learned that he had joined the Resistance, she turned him in to the gestapo. They clapped him in Drancy, just outside Paris, the way station to Auschwitz. But he decided to survive. You couldn't fight back in Drancy, the doctor told them. You had to outsmart them. "I made myself into a whole camp of different characters: a magician, a gypsy violinist. I did card tricks for the camp commandant's children, and even seduced his wife. You see, you have to get into the head of your enemy, to think like him. You have to comprehend what he believes in, to imagine the rules *he* lives by. Then you can know what he will do."

"And so I stayed alive."

As did I, Weiseman thought, snapping back to the task at hand. He was on his way to Iran, a country he knew only from briefing books. Trevor had given him a mission: Replace the Shah; find a successor we can bend to our will. Be discreet, but get the job done. Stay out of the newspapers. That was the way Trevor operated. Trevor always gave him plenty of latitude, leaving him to sink or swim on his own.

He picked up a magazine and saw the Shah's photo, thought, this is the *Zeitgeist*. We depend on dictators till one day our leaders find them distasteful. And when they falter, we want them out. But replacing a tyrant with something decent . . . that's another matter. And sheltering the people from the ugly aftermath, the inevitable violence? Well, that's much harder.

He took out the Farsi language cards he had received from the Foreign Service Institute before departure and began methodically working

his way through them. He was good at languages and began to feel the rhythm of Farsi. Once he arrived in Tehran he would practice on the tapes he also had with him.

An Air France stewardess came by, offering him a drink. He shook his head; *non, merci*. She shrugged in the Gallic way: your loss, she seemed to say.

Ah, yes, Trevor's bottom line: do it any way you must. Find me a successor to run the country for us. Our guy: a general, a cleric, a cut-throat. We can't be too fastidious.

AT ANKARA THEY stopped to refuel. Arab and Iranian families joined the flight. Veiled Arab women incongruously nursed their babies in plain sight.

Over the Caucasus Mountains the plane soared. Out the window, Weiseman saw mountains give way to water. They headed southwest across Azerbaijan, and he could see the oil rigs, offshore from the port city of Baku. The Caspian Sea and Iran beckoned.

He opened the briefing book and read, seeking to steep himself in the psychology and culture of the Iranians, in the split between Sunni and Shia Islam, and especially in what existed in Iran *before* Islam. The Zoroastrian faith, closer to Christianity or Judaism, emphasized the responsibility of every person to work for social justice. Citizens had the inalienable right to enlightened leadership. Iranian kings were seen as the representatives of God on earth as long as they enjoyed *farr*, a divine blessing they had to earn through consistently moral behavior. Subjects had the duty to obey just kings and to rise up against wicked ones.

Like Confucian China, he thought. Shahs and emperors ruled by the mandate of heaven. Any ruler who violated that principle invited rebellion and his own ouster.

He pulled out a yellow pad and jotted down his priorities. Establish Iranian agents in place. Court the vulnerable. See the Iranians, and Turks, and Israelis, the British agent Trevor had mentioned. Co-opt

Hanif, the SAVAK chief. He paused and thought of his own harrowing escape with Johann from Germany. *Check the borders to arrange egress for exiles*, he wrote. *And reach out to the ayatollahs, just in case.*

He had to put a face to all these people, fill in the blanks. There were only bad options: Stick with the Shah, cancer or not, or one of his men. Accommodate the ayatollahs and hope they'd mellow over time. Find a white knight to save the day, what Graham Greene—whose reckoning with the moral compromises of espionage Weiseman admired—once called a third force. Stage a coup. Invade. Mind our own business.

But even his brief list was too complicated. The Shah would go, so it came down to this: find a credible leader we could work with or tie the ayatollahs in knots. That was the bottom line. That and finding a way to stay out of Evin Prison.

Meddling with another nation's future was a dicey business. We had done it before in Iran, in 1953, a quarter century before. Operation Ajax—overthrowing a regime, then bringing the Shah back. Iranians hadn't forgotten that; they probably never would. But taking on the ayatollahs? The very thought brought nightmares.

He locked the briefing book inside his attaché case, knowing that a briefing book was like a strategic war plan, to be abandoned at the first engagement with the enemy. He'd get to Tehran in a couple of hours and do his walk-arounds, imbibing the sights and smells, taking the measure of the city. He'd burrow in with the students, the mullahs, the troublemakers, as well as the military and business class. Find out what they're up to, before Iran goes up in flames. Then would come the hard part: deciding who to trust and who to avoid.

He thought back to what Françoise had said. *They were all hostages.* Iran was poised on the edge of an earthquake, exactly two hundred years after the French and American revolutions.

He was a hostage, too. And if it all went down, there'd be no one to claim him and bring him home.

A STEWARDESS STROLLED up the central aisle. “*Un quart d’heure pour l’atterrissage*,” she said. “Fifteen minutes to landing.” She drew a lavender silk scarf from her bag and covered her head, tucking her auburn hair under the scarf.

Mehrabad International Airport came into view, as if slowly revealing itself from behind cloud cover, hiding Persia’s secrets from Western intruders. From the air he could see miles of squat buildings mottled with centuries of pollution, while in the distance high-rise structures beckoned visitors to the new Iran the Shah was constructing as part of his White Revolution.

The wheels touched down and the aircraft bounced once, then again, before heading toward the bleak, gray terminal.

In Mehrabad, security guards with wraparound sunglasses surrounded the arriving passengers, demanding that one or another display his or her papers. At immigration, the customs official glanced at his black US diplomatic passport and quickly waved him on. America was still in good standing in the Shah’s Iran, Weiseman thought.

He passed a twenty-four-hour prayer room where a half dozen heads were bent toward Mecca. Women in chadors rushed by, their faces covered except for slits for their eyes. Younger women in miniskirts, holding hands, floated along like butterflies, displaying coiffed hair, tottering in high heels.

Outside the airport, throngs of Iranians waited for relatives. Cops and soldiers were everywhere. Horns blared, impatient taxis revved their motors. Security blanketed the airport.

A taxi pulled up. The black-bearded driver wore a white robe and white knit kofi cap. As a woman with glossy dark hair got out, her expensive knit dress rode up her legs to reveal a glimpse of lilac bikini panties. The driver took her Italian lire, tucked them in his billfold, placed his hand over his heart, then leaned forward and kissed the photo of Khomeini on his dashboard.

A cop with a swagger stick, a remnant of British colonial rule, thumped on the taxi's trunk to hasten him along. The rickety cab pulled up a few feet, scouting for another fare.

Weisman surveyed the scene, searching for his new "escorts"—SA-VAK agents, mullahs, US or French embassy spooks. He saw a short, wiry American in a brown suit and tie, head as bald as an eagle, studying an Iranian newspaper. Weisman hustled over to the still lingering cab, got in, and slammed the door. He glanced back toward the bald American, who was no longer there.

"Let's go," he said.

THE RIDE INTO Tehran was a journey into the past. Men led mules that pulled carts laden with farm produce. Women balanced baskets on their heads. Small children kicked a rubber ball near a polluted pond. Soldiers along the highway gripped automatic weapons.

They were in the suburbs now. The gray concrete buildings that lined both sides of the road resembled the featureless Stalinist architecture Weismann knew from Moscow. Pedestrians were bundled in padded coats to protect them from the frigid February weather. A billboard showed a smiling Shah and Empress Farah escorting two children into a model school.

A few miles farther on, there was another billboard. This one was a shot of the Ayatollah Khomeini's eyes burning with righteous wrath. "The Shah allows that?" Weisman asked.

"No, sir," the driver said. "They tear them down but they're back up the next day. In the bazaar, priests pass out leaflets cursing the American devil. They say the Shah must go."

The taxi entered the city. Soldiers were everywhere, patrolling the streets, riding in armored personnel carriers. Through the window, Weisman could hear the din of the crowds in the streets, where merchants were plying their wares from modest storefronts, and women were boiling chickens in sizzling clay pots. He rolled down the window to sniff

the aromas of the street. The driver ordered him to snap it right back up. "Security," he said sharply.

Weiseman spotted the marquee of the Intercontinental Hotel, and then the car was heading up the front drive. A doorman in a green uniform and red turban opened the door.

In the lobby, the Shah's picture was everywhere.