

# CHAPTER ONE

## SHEMIRAN

Dave Knight is on his toes peering through a playroom window at the snow. It fell overnight, but there are already tracks in the fresh powder. They lead to the shallow end of the swimming pool. Several servants have gathered there, and now Dave sees why. “Uh-oh, Haji fell into the pool again,” he exclaims.

“Let me see,” Melissa says, shoving Dave aside. Haji Baba is her donkey, and she watches with concern as two houseboys cling to his tail. The driver, Mahmoud, is partway on the ice holding the animal’s neck. “Stupid donkey,” Melissa says. “Now he’s stuck.” She allows the curtain to close and goes out.

Soon Melissa is back holding a Coca-Cola bottle. “This is for you,” she says and gives the drink to Dave. He takes a swallow and immediately gags. As he regurgitates his breakfast, Dave’s nurse, Farah, rushes over and looks at what’s left of the drink. “You give brother soap water,” she says to Melissa. “Bad girl.” Farah spins Melissa around and gives her two bops on the behind. Then she takes Dave on her hip and carries him down the hall to the master bedroom.

Lieutenant Colonel David S. Knight Jr. answers Farah’s knock. He belts his uniform jacket while listening to Farah describe what Melissa did. Then the officer wrinkles his nose. “What’s that smell?” he asks.

“He throw up,” Farah replies.

“Well, get him changed, we have to leave,” Knight tells the nurse. “Stop sniveling,” he barks at Dave.

“You don’t have to holler at the poor child,” Bobbie Knight says to her husband. She’s still in bed, propped up on pillows having breakfast. “I wonder why Melissa takes such delight in tormenting him.”

Farah carries Dave into the bathroom to clean up. Then she takes him to the bedroom he shares with his brother, Dan, who’s sitting on the floor playing. The toddler looks up and blinks his brown eyes curiously as Farah gets Dave into a fresh set of clothes. Dan’s the only one of the children to inherit Knight’s dark good looks. The others all have Bobbie’s fair hair, light-colored eyes, and Celtic complexion.

While Farah gets Dave ready, Knight goes downstairs to the kitchen. His youngest child, Marie, is in a high chair being spoon-fed breakfast by the family’s cook, Aliya. “Where in the hell is Mahmoud?” Knight asks with an impatient glance at his watch.

“Haji fall in pool,” Aliya replies.

“Not again,” Knight exclaims. He stalks to the front door past Oscar, who’s wagging his tail in anticipation of a pat on the head. Knight ignores the dog and goes outside, where he’s momentarily stunned by the sight of the Alborz Mountains rising in front of him. With the sun just up, only the peaks are illuminated, so the icy spires appear to be floating. It’s a captivating illusion, but Knight now turns his attention to the swimming pool. “Where’s the goddamn rope?” he shouts after a quick assessment.

“I get,” Mahmoud hollers back. He beckons a gardener to take his place holding Haji’s neck.

As the driver makes his way to the stable through deep snow, Knight lights a cigarette. He watches Mahmoud return to the pool with a length of thick rope, loop it across the donkey’s chest, and then organize the other servants to pull on the ends. They quickly haul the animal out. “Put Haji back in the shed and lock the gate,” Knight directs. “What idiot left it open anyway?”

Flicking the cigarette away, Knight reenters the house to see Farah coming down the stairs with Dave who is once again properly attired. Melissa follows, holding the hand of her nurse. Knight shepherds both schoolchildren outside and into the backseat of the family car. Mahmoud closes the door behind his passengers then gets behind the wheel. “Don’t you people ever learn?” Knight asks as the vehicle gathers speed.

“Yes, boss.”

“No, you don’t, or you would’ve got the rope right away.”

“Forget rope.”

“That’s what I mean,” Knight laughs. “You forget what worked last time and go back to what was not working last time; pulling on the poor creature’s tail, for Chrissake.”

Knight relaxes now that they’re on the way, and soon the vehicle is passing through the outskirts of Tehran. At first, there’s little traffic, but as they near downtown, the streets become congested. Wagons drawn by horses or donkeys intermingle with bicycles, pushcarts, automobiles, and trucks. Businesses housed in rudely constructed cinder block buildings line the road. In between are rubble-strewn vacant lots that shabbily dressed pedestrians cut through on their way to work.

Once past the commercial district, the neighborhood improves, and soon Mahmoud is turning onto the treelined street that leads to the United States embassy. It’s in a compound that takes up an entire city block. Enclosed within the walls are the ambassador’s residence, an apartment building, a dinner club, barracks for the Marines, and the multistory embassy building, which is topped with an antennae array. This electronic gear was installed by Knight and his command to spy on the Russians.

As the Knights’ car approaches the embassy entrance, a crowd chants anti-American slogans. Many of the protestors carry signs while others shake their fists. They crowd around the front gate, so a squad of Marines comes out to clear the way. Then a sergeant waves the vehicle through, and now, despite all the chaos at the house this morning, Mahmoud pulls up to the embassy building right on time. He springs out of the driver’s seat to open the back door, and the Knights go inside. Once past more Marine security, they approach a bank of elevators. Melissa and Dave take one down to the basement schoolroom, while their father goes up to his spacious corner office on the sixth floor.

“The demonstration was smaller this morning,” Knight tells his secretary, Janice Watkins. She’s a recent college grad from Kansas who’s married to one of the immigration counselors.

“Yes, it looks like they’re running out of steam,” Janice agrees.

Downstairs, Mrs. Rhonda Harper oversees the schoolroom. She's a tall, plainly dressed woman with a dull but pleasant face who succeeds in looking middle-aged even though she's not yet thirty. Mrs. Harper majored in education at Auburn University then married an Air Force sergeant. Now her husband works as a contractor helping the Shah maintain his fleet of F-86 Sabrejets.

There are eight children in Mrs. Harper's care. Dave is the youngest; the oldest is ten. They sit at desks arranged in a circle, and every day Mrs. Harper makes up individual folders containing age-appropriate worksheets for them. Then she spends each morning in the center of the circle going from desk to desk working with each student in turn.

Today Dave is given a piece of tracing paper taped to a chart that depicts five capital letters. His task is to trace the five letters using a marker, but he makes a mess. None of the squiggly shapes he draws resemble letters, so Mrs. Harper patiently replaces the tracing paper. "You need to focus on your work," she says. "Don't just scribble."

Mrs. Harper turns to work with another child, and when she looks back, Dave is on the floor playing with a jack-in-the-box. "Dave, you're supposed to be working now; playtime is coming soon," she says. Dave ignores her, and when Mrs. Harper leaves the circle and walks toward him, the boy playfully runs around her to the other side of the room. "If you don't settle down, I'll have to put you in the corner," the teacher threatens.

"You can't catch me," Dave laughs and as Mrs. Harper again approaches, he tries to get past her. However, this time she cuts him off. So now the teacher sits Dave in a corner facing the wall. "If you behave for ten minutes, you can rejoin the group," she promises.

Soon it's playtime, and the children scatter to find toys. Dave is allowed out of the corner to join them. "Who needs to go?" Mrs. Harper asks, and several kids raise their hands. The teacher takes them out in the hall where a Marine is on guard. He walks the children to the lavatory and waits outside.

Meanwhile, Mrs. Harper returns to the classroom and finds Dave lying on the carpet fast asleep. She decides not to wake him, but when Melissa returns from the potty break and sees her brother on the floor, she kicks him. "You can't sleep now," she says.

As class resumes, Mrs. Harper gets a book and settles into her chair. “It’s story time,” she calls, and the students eagerly gather. They sit on the floor at the teacher’s feet as she begins reading *Hansel and Gretel*.

“Leave me alone,” the girl next to Dave says.

“What’s going on?” Mrs. Harper asks.

“Dave’s bothering me.”

“No, I’m not.”

“Well, come sit next to me,” Mrs. Harper tells Dave. Then with the troublesome boy seated nearby, she resumes the story.

“I want *Snow White*,” Dave interrupts.

“We read that yesterday,” Mrs. Harper says.

“*Snow White!*”

“Not today,” the teacher replies. “We can read *Snow White* tomorrow.” Mrs. Harper continues reading, and all is peaceful for a time. Then she hears Dave humming under his breath. She ignores him at first, but the sound gets louder. “Dave, be quiet,” the teacher orders. However, Dave leaps up and begins marching around the room.

“Heigh-ho, heigh-ho, it’s off to work we go,” he sings, swinging his arms.

“OK, back to the corner with you,” Mrs. Harper snaps, and immediately Dave is running again with Mrs. Harper in pursuit. The other kids watch, mouths agape, until the teacher gets Dave by the ear and, using that appendage, drags him toward the corner. On the way, Dave collapses, and the teacher loses her grip. She stands over him breathing heavily. Then turning to the circle of children, Mrs. Harper says, “OK, playtime.”

“We already had playtime,” Melissa complains.

“We’ll finish the story later, now go play.”

Mrs. Harper turns to Dave. The child is whimpering and holding his ear. “Get in that chair right now,” she orders, “or I’m calling your father.”

Dave doesn’t want any trouble at home, so he goes back to the corner, and for now, just sits and quietly daydreams. Someday he’d like to have a donkey of his own, and Dave pictures himself riding one that’s even bigger than Haji

Baba. As he rides his donkey down the driveway, the servants all admire him. But then Mrs. Harper intrudes on his fantasy. “Go get your lunch and come back,” she says.

Dave goes to his cubby, gets his lunch box, and looks inside. Aliya knows peanut butter is his favorite and, sure enough, she packed him a peanut butter and jelly sandwich, a thermos full of juice, and two cookies. He sits in the corner to eat, and when he’s finished, Dave gets up to return the lunch pail. “Get back in the chair,” Mrs. Harper orders. “You have ten more minutes.”

As lunch hour winds down, kids that need to go are again accompanied to the lavatory. Then it’s time for the afternoon class, and Mrs. Harper releases Dave from the corner. She places more worksheets on each child’s desk then goes around helping the students get started. Melissa is doing subtraction, so the teacher pauses to help her with a problem.

“Need to pee-pee,” Dave whines.

“We just had a bathroom break,” Mrs. Harper says. “Next one’s at two.” She goes back to working with Melissa, but when Mrs. Harper looks up again, she sees Dave has left his desk and is now at the door. “OK, back in the corner,” she snaps.

“Pee-pee,” Dave cries, and as Mrs. Harper comes for him, Dave again runs away. But this time the teacher quickly catches the child. As she drags him toward the corner, Mrs. Harper notices Dave is leaving a trail on the carpet. She sees a dark stain on his pants and releases the sobbing boy who slumps to the floor. The teacher looks down at the freckle-faced, green-eyed five-year-old and wonders for the hundredth time how such a cherubic-looking kid could be such a terror.

The other children have been watching Dave’s go-round with Mrs. Harper, and now one shouts, “Dave pee.” Soon all of them are laughing and pointing at the front of Dave’s pants.

“Get back to your work,” Mrs. Harper yells. “Do you want to sit in the corner too?” The teacher goes out in the hall and comes back with the guard. “Corporal Hernandez will stay with you while I’m gone,” she tells the students. “He will make sure you do your assignments.” The children gaze solemnly at the lance corporal who is immaculate in his dress blues. Then they get back to work.

Now Mrs. Harper speaks softly to Dave: “Come on, sweetheart, we’ll get you cleaned up.” She takes him to her apartment and washes his underwear and pants. After twenty minutes in the dryer, the garments are ready, so she gets Dave back into his clothes and returns to the classroom. The remainder of the school day passes without incident then parents start streaming in to pick up their children. When Knight arrives, Melissa immediately rushes over. “Dave peed his pants,” she announces.

“Yes, we had a little accident,” Mrs. Harper says and looks imploringly at Dave who stares morosely at the floor.

“Sorry to hear it,” Knight says, but he has become accustomed to getting bad news about his oldest son. Nevertheless, he needs a drink, so Knight takes his children to the Alborz Club next door. It’s an attractively furnished watering hole with a bandstand, dance floor, tables and chairs for diners, and a long, well-stocked mahogany bar. Knight sits Dave and Melissa at a table then approaches the bartender. “Let me have the coloring stuff,” he demands.

Once Knight has his children set up with a coloring book and crayons, he returns to the bar and orders a rum and Coke. Several embassy staffers are seated nearby enjoying happy hour. “India was better off with the Brits,” one of them is saying.

“Yeah, they kept things under control,” an immigration counselor agrees.

“That country is basically ungovernable,” a Marine officer suggests. “It’s just a collection of warring tribes each with its own language. The British were able to play one off against another. That’s how they kept the lid on.”

“Now look at it,” the first man says, “riots, turmoil, killing.”

Knight half-listens to the conversation while gazing at his reflection in the bar mirror. People often say he looks like Humphrey Bogart, and in this light, the resemblance is there. He lets his cigarette dangle from the corner of his mouth. “Can I get you another?” the bartender interrupts.

“Sure,” Knight replies, and shortly a fresh rum and Coke appears. He squeezes a slice of lime into the drink and lights another smoke. There’s a pause in the bar talk and Knight seizes the opportunity to weigh in. “The greatest mistake the British made in India was introducing modern sanitary methods,” he opines. “Before that, diseases like cholera, diphtheria, dysentery, and so on

kept the native population in check. Now look at the mess they've left behind; a motley rabble half a billion strong and growing."

The other barflies nod their heads in agreement with Knight's Malthusian views. Some have heard this rant from him before but don't let on. They hope he'll put a round of drinks on his tab. However, Knight now looks at his watch and gives a start. "Got to go," he says. "The cook will have dinner on the table soon, and if I'm not back with the kids, my life won't be worth living."

After tossing back his drink, Knight pulls on his overcoat and goes to the children. "Show me what you've done," he says, feigning interest. Melissa holds up a neatly colored drawing of Donald Duck then Dave displays his paper. It's supposed to be Huey, Dewey, and Louie but looks like Oscar's breakfast. "Very nice," Knight comments after a cursory glance. "Let's take them home and show Mama. Now button up, we're going outside."

When Knight and his offspring arrive home, an irate Aliya reheats the now cold dinner and then sulks as the family eats. Afterward, the nurses take charge of the children while their parents repair to the master bedroom. Bobbie changes into a nightgown while her husband showers. She's at the vanity brushing her hair when Knight comes out of the bathroom. "There were fewer demonstrators this morning," he says while putting on his pajamas.

"That doesn't mean anything," Bobbie replies. "They'll be back in force on Friday after prayers."

"You're probably right. Maybe we should just get out of Dodge. That's what everyone says."

"And leave all this?!" Bobbie puts the hairbrush down and turns to face her husband.

"You take a big risk going to Sharia court," he says.

"Why? The accident wasn't my fault. That man pushed his cart out of the alley right in front of the car. I couldn't avoid him."

Knight sits on the bed and takes a *Newsweek* off the nightstand. "It's the mullahs," he says idly flipping through the magazine. "They don't approve of women driving, so now they're out to get you."

"Well, too bad," Bobbie retorts. "No one's running me off."

"I think I'll have a nightcap. Care to join me?"

“You already had two drinks at dinner.”

“You have no idea what my day was like.”

“No, and you can’t tell me, can you?”

“It’s secret, other than the problem with Dave.”

“Poor child.”

“He’s backward.”

“Don’t say that!”

Abruptly, Knight stands up. “Well, I’m going to get a drink. Sure you don’t want one?”

“If you’re determined to drink, take a blanket and pillow downstairs with you,” Bobbie insists. “I know how you get, and I’m not in the mood.”

“You’re never in the mood,” Knight says bitterly. “Maybe if you’d drink a little you wouldn’t be so damn frigid.” He snatches his pillow off the bed and goes out. As the door slams, Bobbie wearily rubs her temples. A headache is building behind her eyes, so she reaches for a box of pills and swallows three. Then she goes to the door and locks it.



It’s a bleak wintry morning in downtown Tehran. Snow crunches under the feet of people waiting to enter Sharia court. Women in the queue are covered from head to toe by burkas while most of the men are in peasant attire consisting of baggy pants, long, voluminously sleeved shirts, and knee-length woolen vests. They look on impassively as three four-door Chevrolets pull up. Bobbie and Lt. Col. Knight are in the middle car while the other two are occupied by Marine embassy guards who, like Knight, are wearing civilian attire.

The Marines leap from their vehicles and escort Bobbie and her husband into the ornate red-brick courthouse. Inside, ancient brass chandeliers hang from the rafters. Below them rows of benches are rapidly filling with spectators. At the front of the hall, a raised dais supports three throne-like chairs and a podium, set off to one side. No one is on the stage at present.

As the Knights look around, Davash Barzani, an interpreter from the embassy, comes in accompanied by another professionally attired Iranian. “Good morning, Colonel,” Davash says as he approaches the Knights. “Allow me to introduce Mr. Eghbali, who will be representing us today.” The lawyer shakes hands with Knight and nods to Bobbie. Then he escorts them down the center aisle to the first row. The dead man’s family occupies the front bench on the opposite side.

After a wait, three men wearing white turbans and black robes come into court from a side door and stand on the dais facing the crowd. Slowly the hubbub dies down in deference to these clerics. In the silence, one of the mullahs launches into what even the non-Farsi-speaking Knights can tell is an invocation. Cries of “Allahu Akbar” end the prayer and the lead mullah summons the lawyers for each side to the dais. When Mr. Eghbali returns, he speaks to Davash. “The victim’s family will present their case first,” is the translation.

At a signal from one of the clerics, the opening witness for the family steps to the podium and delivers an impassioned eulogy with much crying, shouting, and waving of the arms. The speech sets off a sympathetic reaction among the spectators, and soon the courtroom is in bedlam. Men stand moaning, weeping, and pulling at their clothes while on the dais the three clerics calmly finger their beads.

An hour later, the first speaker finishes and then a woman in a burka takes the stand. She commences wailing in a heartrending manner. Immediately, the women in the crowd join in the display of grief. As the courtroom once again erupts, Mr. Eghbali takes advantage of the chaos to move to the other side of the building where he sits next to the man who was the first witness. “This doesn’t look good,” Knight fumes. “The rats are deserting the sinking ship.”

“That’s the brother of the wife of the dead man Mr. Eghbali is speaking with,” Davash explains. “He’s trying to arrange a settlement. The woman up there now is the widow.”

After the widow concludes her lamentations, one more witness appears, and then the morning session is over. Once the building empties, the Knights and their escorts go back to the embassy to eat a nervous meal. Afterward, they return to Sharia court and as they wait for the trial to resume the benches again fill with excited spectators. Soon the courtroom is full, and people must be turned away at the door. Instead of departing, these latecomers remain outside.

Inside the courtroom, the crowd noise ebbs as the judges return to the stage. Then the plaintiff's attorney calls his next witness. He's a bearded, robed, and turbaned man who approaches the podium then begins to rhythmically bash himself on the chest first with one open palm and then the other. The men in the courtroom rise and join in. Meanwhile, Mr. Eghbali returns to the Knights' bench and sits next to Davash. He talks at length with the interpreter as thunderclaps reverberate off the exposed brick walls.

Having been briefed on developments in the case, Davash now turns to the Knights. "The family has one more witness, then it'll be our turn," he explains. "But God be praised, Mr. Eghbali feasted the brother at lunch and got a settlement."

"How much?" Knight asks.

"Five million to the family and one million for their lawyer. You also owe Mr. Eghbali a million."

"What?" Knight exclaims. "That's much more than usual."

"The brother says he's sticking his neck way out on this," Davash replies. "His sister will do what he says, so we either make this deal or else."

"Or else what?"

"Sharia law says 'an eye for an eye,'" Davash explains. "That means the punishment for your wife would be death. The family can choose the method. They could elect to have her tied to a stake, and one of them run her over with a car. That would be considered appropriate; however, they will probably choose stoning. It would be simpler since none of them have a car. They stone women who have been convicted in the vacant lot next door. Everyone participates. It's what passes for entertainment around here."

"Guess we'll have to pay, in that case," Knight says laconically. "How much is that in dollars?"

"One hundred and fifty should do it."

Knight takes out his wallet and hands Davash some bills. "Good that I brought enough," he says. "Even though I thought it would be less."

"I'll go to the bazaar and be back in half an hour with the rials."

"There's no rush; we aren't going anywhere."

The last witness for the family is wrapping up when Davash returns with the settlement money. He gives the bag to Mr. Eghbali who goes off to meet his counterpart. Meanwhile, the defense is called to make its case, so Bobbie goes to the podium accompanied by Davash. She's wearing a navy blue suit with an ankle-length skirt. Sunglasses and a maroon scarf obscure her face. Still, Bobbie looks glamorous; like a movie star traveling incognito.

At the podium, Bobbie launches into her speech, expressing regret, remorse, sorrow, despair, and every other emotion she thinks might help the situation. She fervently wishes none of this had happened. The dead man was a pushcart peddler bringing bundles of twigs from the country to sell as kindling. Bobbie pities his impoverished family; they have now lost their breadwinner.

As Bobbie drones on, frequently pausing for Davash's interpretation, the spectators grow increasingly restless. The tension rises when at the conclusion of Bobbie's speech, the lawyer for the family stands and addresses the mullahs. Immediately he is summoned to the dais where a heated argument breaks out. As the purport of the discussion becomes known, the crowd seethes. Shouting erupts in the back of the hall as white-helmeted club-wielding members of the Imperial Guard force their way inside. They take up positions along the aisle, and the crowd grows more agitated. Angry muttering fills the air.

Eventually, the clergymen on the dais give up the argument and send the family's attorney back to his bench. Then the lead mullah takes center stage and makes an announcement that instantly transforms the spectators into a raging mob. As shoes fly through the air pelting the plaintiffs, protestors hold their benches aloft and hurl them at the Imperial Guards who swing their truncheons wildly. The Marines use their hand-to-hand combat skills to protect the Knights.

Slowly the Imperial Guards drive the mob from the building. In the suddenly quiet courtroom, Knight turns to Davash. "What did the judge say to kick off the fun and games?"

"He said that the infidels paid blood money and according to the law the case is dismissed."

An Iranian officer dressed in elegant, white uniform enters the courtroom and approaches the Knights. "Allow me to introduce myself; I am Colonel Radzwilli of the Imperial Guard. Please accept my apologies for this slight unpleasantness." The officer dismissively waves his arm to indicate the demolished interior and the scores of prone figures bleeding on the floor.

“Nothing your boys couldn’t handle, I see,” Knight grins.

“It is an honor to be of service,” the Iranian officer replies with a slight bow. “Now come, and I will see you safely on your way.”

Outside, the Shah’s forces are still pursuing protestors up the icy street. Darkness has fallen but the night is lit up by blazing vehicles that were overturned and torched by the mob. Cries of wounded demonstrators fill the smoky air. “Here is your transportation,” Colonel Radzwilli announces as the embassy cars come around the corner then pull up in front of the courthouse.

“Once again, Colonel, your men were magnificent!” Knight says with a salute.

“God willing, it will always be so,” Radzwilli replies, touching the brim of his headgear.

It’s a short ride back to the American compound. Once they’re inside the embassy gate the Knights can relax. “Let’s go to the club,” Knight suggests.

“Yes, I could use a drink,” Bobbie agrees.

“Come on,” Knight says to the Marine officers. “I’m buying.”

As the Knights enter the Alborz Club, they find that news of the acquittal has preceded them. “Three cheers for Bobbie,” someone shouts and after a roar of approval a queue forms of those eager to shake her hand. “You’ve got more balls than ten men,” a contractor tells her. Knight gives the man a withering glare for his crassness.

After the impromptu receiving line peters out, excitement in the room ebbs and the club settles back into its familiar routine. In the corner, several officers gather around a piano as an embassy staffer picks out a tune. At the bar, Bobbie is the object of attention from a semicircle of homesick expats. Her husband stands nearby, drink in hand, surrounded by his usual coterie. Tonight, Lieutenant Blankenship, one of the Marine officers, joins the circle. The young man unthinkingly unzips his jacket, revealing a shoulder holster with a Colt .45.

“Good thing they took the money today,” Knight comments with a glance at the handgun.

“Yes, sir, could’ve gotten ugly,” Blankenship says regretfully.

“So, they were really going to stone Bobbie,” an immigration counselor exclaims. “I don’t understand this country.”

“You should read Curzon if you want to understand Iran,” Knight declares. “Anyone who hasn’t read *Persia and the Persian Question* has no business here.” The other men in the group nod their heads sagely, though none have read the book. Neither has Knight, but that doesn’t deter him. “Nothing good has come out of Persia since Alexander defeated Darius at Gaugamela,” he continues.

Before Knight can launch into a blow-by-blow description of the battle, Blankenship interrupts. “Why is that?” the Marine asks.

Knight is irritated but has no problem changing tack. “It’s simple, Lieutenant,” he says condescendingly. “In Darius’s time, the Persians practiced a progressive religion called Zoroastrianism, but later, Islam took over.”

“What was so great about Zoroastrianism?” Blankenship persists.

“Zoroastrianism took in any gods that wanted to join,” Knight replies. “So, when the ancient Persians conquered a new province, the deities of the defeated tribe would simply be added to the ones the Persians already worshiped. In this manner, they gained acceptance of their rule and built a mighty empire. You see, Zoroastrianism was inclusive. It fostered consensus. Contrast that with the ‘my way or the highway’ approach of Islam that supplanted it. Mohammedans conquer territory to spread their faith, offering new subjects a stark choice: convert or perish. Not a great way to win hearts and minds. That’s why the Persian Empire failed and why the Middle East stagnated after Mohammedanism took root.” Knight gives his admirers a self-satisfied smile and finishes what’s left of his drink. Then he deftly extracts a fag from his pack of Chesterfields and tamps it down on his lighter. The bartender brings another round.

“Hey, Knight, cut the bull over there and come sing a song,” Ambassador Davenport bellows from across the room.

“Sorry, my master calls,” Knight says importantly. He carries his fresh drink over to the piano.

“Do the one about that Arab, whatever,” Davenport demands.

“You mean ‘Abdul Abulbul,’” Knight replies.

“Yeah, Abdul,” Davenport nods.

“Not that again,” Bobbie shouts from the bar. But Knight ignores his wife and begins singing:

*Oh, the sons of the Prophet are brave men and bold  
And quite unaccustomed to fear,  
But the bravest by far in the ranks of the Shah,  
Was Abdul Abulbul Amir.  
If you wanted a man  
To encourage the van  
Or harass the foe from the rear  
Storm fort or redoubt you had only to shout  
For Abdul Abulbul Amir . . .*

Knight carries on singing the many more rousing verses of the old music-hall number then brings the ballad to its dramatic conclusion. As he holds the final note, the room erupts in applause and cheering. Several voices shout, “Give us another.” However, Bobbie disagrees. “That’s quite enough,” she declares, and with purse and coat, she heads for the exit. Her husband hastily follows.



All is quiet in the Knight household early Sunday morning because the servants have the day off. Dave loves Sundays because it’s the one day of the week when he is free from Farah and can get some attention from his parents. So now he tiptoes down the hall and quietly opens their door. Sure enough, they are awake and relaxing in bed. A tray of dirty breakfast dishes is nearby.

“I suppose you want to be read to,” Knight says, putting down a magazine. He likes reading to the children, though with Dave it can get tiresome. That’s because Dave gets stuck on one book, and for weeks at a time that will be the only one he wants. Lately, it’s been *Grey Squirrel’s Party*.

Dave climbs onto the bed, but before his father can begin reading, Dave interrupts. “Today I will read,” he says.

Knight laughs, “Maybe in a couple of years.”

“I can read,” Dave insists and tries to wrest the thin volume from his father.

“Stop that.”

“Why don’t you let him try?” Bobbie asks. “What can it hurt?”

Knight gives his son the book. “Sure, go ahead, read,” he says.

Dave delightedly looks at the first page and recites the text: “Grey Squirrel wanted to have a party. ‘Little Duck,’ said Grey Squirrel, ‘will you come to my party?’” Then he slowly turns the pages, delivering the lines spoken by Grey Squirrel and each of his friends including Red Fox, Wise Owl, Yellow Bird, and so on. In the story, Grey Squirrel invites each of them, and they all come to the party, which turns out to be a roaring success. “The end,” Dave says and smiles at his parents proudly.

“How in the hell did he do that?” Knight asks his wife.

“I’m not sure,” Bobbie replies. “Honey, come over here by Mama,” she says to Dave. “I want to look at the book this time while you read.”

Dave eagerly scrambles over and settles next to her. “Put your finger on each word as you read it,” Bobbie says reassuringly. “Can you do that for me?”

The child starts “reading” again, but it soon becomes apparent that he can’t do as his mother asks. Dave keeps “reading” one word but putting his finger somewhere else.

“He memorized the damn book,” Knight exclaims. “He can’t read.”

“No, he can’t read, but what child this age memorizes a seventeen-page book?” Bobbie replies. “Let’s start over,” she tells Dave. “I’ll read and point at each word.” She begins reading, then when she gets to the phrase “have a party” Bobbie leaves her finger on the “a.” “Do you know what letter this is?”

“Yes, Mama, it’s an ‘a,’” Dave says.

“That’s right,” Bobbie replies. “Now you see ‘a’ is also a word.” She continues reading *Grey Squirrel’s Party*, pointing out other short words that Dave can recognize. Now he really can read. It’s exciting, but soon the lesson ends. Nevertheless, Dave takes the book downstairs and continues picking out words while eating breakfast. That evening before dinner, Dave studies *Grey Squirrel’s Party* while his parents have cocktails. Later, after his bath, Dave takes the book to bed with him.

The next day the servants are back at work and so is Knight. He’s in his office at the embassy having a slow morning until Davenport summons him. The ambassador is a good-natured heir to a Midwestern meatpacking fortune. He’s an unassuming man who wears a perpetually rumpled look, which goes well with his jowly face and the stogies he smokes. “Hi, Roger, how’s your morning going?” Knight asks once they’re alone.

“It was OK until I got a call from Mullah Asfandara.”

“That can’t have gone well.”

“You’re right,” Davenport agrees. “He told me that Ayatolla Hazmajhani wants Bobbie out of the country.”

“I’ll speak to her,” Knight promises. “But you know how stubborn she can be.”

“Asfandara says if she’s still here Friday, the ayatollah’s gonna drop a fatwa on her at prayers.”

“That’s not good.”

“Right again,” Davenport agrees. “Bobbie wouldn’t be safe anywhere in the world.”

“Can’t the government do anything?”

“They can arrest Hazmajhani,” Davenport says dryly, “and have revolution in the streets.”

“Guess I’ll have to put my foot down then,” Knight sighs. “No two ways about it.”

“There’s a Pan Am flight to Frankfurt Friday morning,” Davenport says. “That gives you the rest of the week to pack.”

“We’ve done it in less.”

“I’m sure.”

Knight spends the next several hours working the phone. By the close of day, he has orders to return to the States and travel reservations. When he gets home, Knight breaks the news to Bobbie, and they start packing. Two days later the movers come to put the furniture and anything not needed short-term into wooden shipping crates. Knight sells the car that evening, then on Thursday Bobbie canvasses the neighborhood and at the last minute finds a new home for Oscar. After that, it’s time to say goodbye to the servants. They assemble in the foyer, and Knight goes down the line speaking to each one while handing out wads of rials. The children and their nurses cry, but Mahmoud is happy. He’s lost his job but gained a donkey. The driver rides off into the sunset on Haji Baba.

Early the next morning, an embassy car comes to take the family to the airport. It's snowing, and Knight's last view from the porch is of a monochromatic landscape where the whiteness is only relieved by the dark trunks of the skeletal trees that line the driveway. Just a faint outline of the mountains is visible through a veil of snowflakes.

Three days later Knight is at Fort Monmouth, New Jersey, for a meeting with General James Gaston, commandant of the US Army Signal Corps. Gaston's office occupies a suite on the third floor of Russell Hall. It's the largest building on the post and arguably the ugliest. The massive brick edifice would look like a Bronx tenement if not for a bit of white marble façade slapped onto the center of the building.

When Knight gets upstairs, he finds two sergeants and a captain working in the commandant's outer office. They leap to their feet and salute. A few minutes later, Knight's shown in and finds his boss sitting behind a brightly polished mahogany desk. Light shining through a series of floor-to-ceiling windows reflects off the general's bald dome as Knight strides across the room and comes to attention. "Sir, Lieutenant Colonel Knight, reporting as ordered."

Gaston rises from his chair, casually returns Knight's salute, then comes around the desk to grasp his subordinate's hand. "How was your trip?" the general asks.

"Sir, it was tedious."

"Then you could probably use a drink."

"Yes, sir."

Gaston slides open the door of a cabinet to reveal a well-stocked bar. "Still drinking rum?" he asks.

"Yes, sir, rum and Coke."

As the general tends bar, Knight looks out the window where a garrison flag ripples in the sturdy breeze. The front lawn of the headquarters leads onto the parade ground, which is surrounded by signal school buildings. Beyond that is the four-story base hospital where Dan was born. Knight has spent a lot of time at Fort Monmouth and has many good memories of the post.

Gaston comes over with the drinks. "Sink the Navy," he toasts.

“Hear, hear,” Knight seconds and they drink to it. Then the two men settle down to talk.

“How’s Bobbie?” Gaston asks.

“She’s mad we had to give up the house in Shemiran, but she’ll get over it.”

“Well, you did a great job over there,” Gaston comments. “Our friends at the NSA love the product; they say it’s absolutely essential.”

“Glad to hear it.”

“I don’t have to tell you what that means for us when budget time rolls around.”

“No, sir.”

“But now I guess we have to find something else for you to do.”

“That’s right.”

“I don’t have anything that’s hot right now,” Gaston says. “But we can always send you back to Leavenworth until something turns up. They love you there.”

“Sir, that would be great.”

“Let’s seal the deal with another drink.”

“Yes, sir.”

After the meeting Knight returns to the hotel in New York where his family is recuperating from the trip. “We’re going to Kansas,” he announces.

“Wonderful,” Bobbie exclaims. She likes Fort Leavenworth, and it’s within driving distance of her hometown in Texas.

“When do we leave?” Melissa asks.

“Not till we get a new car,” Knight answers.

So that evening Knight goes out, kicks some tires, and buys a Plymouth station wagon. Early the next morning the family packs up and heads west. Marie rides between the two adults in the front seat while Melissa, Dave, and Dan sit in back. The roof rack holds their suitcases and trunks.

Bobbie has purchased a good supply of coloring books, toys, and Golden readers for the trip, and this keeps the children busy while their father drives. He makes good time and doesn’t stop until they’re clear across Pennsylvania.

The next morning, after breakfast, the family hits the road again. Late in the day when the children get restless, Knight entertains them with Irish drinking songs. The singing continues until they stop for dinner. Afterward, Knight puts the backseat down, and Bobbie uses pillows and quilts to make a bed. There's room for all four kids to stretch out.

The journey resumes as the Knights roll across the rich farmland of Indiana into the setting sun. It's the time of day when local radio stations go off the air so city-based clear-channel stations can broadcast without interference. Bobbie twists the dial until she picks up a Chicago station playing "A String of Pearls."

"You can't beat Glenn Miller," Knight says approvingly.

A little later Bobbie asks for a bathroom break, and Knight stops at a filling station. Before they leave, he buys two bottles of Coca-Cola, each in a little paper sack. He pours half the contents of each on the ground then fills the bottles back up with Bacardi. When the couple resumes the journey, both have damp, brown sacks tucked between their knees.

With the children asleep, Bobbie and her husband enjoy driving along, listening to nostalgic music, and sipping their drinks. After a while, the Plymouth stops again, and Knight invests a dime in a couple more Coca-Colas. In this manner, they travel deep into the night until finally stopping at a motor court. Knight goes in to register then parks outside their room. After taking a few things inside, he and Bobbie come back out for the children. "Look," Knight says, "they're completely zonked out."

"I can take Marie," Bobbie offers.

"Don't you think we should just let them sleep?" Knight asks, slipping an arm around Bobbie's waist.

"But I don't want them waking up and wondering where we are."

"I'll come out and get them before too long, I promise."

"Oh, OK then."

The next day, the family arrives at Fort Leavenworth. Roughly nine months later, Perle Jenkins Knight is born at the post hospital.