

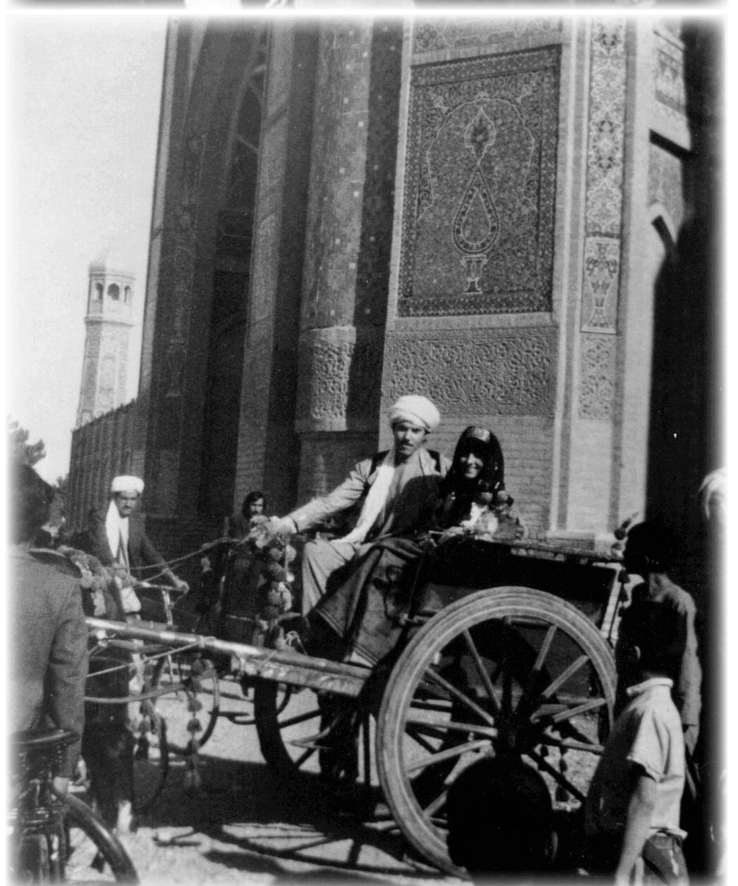
SUFI, SAINT AND SWINGER

A Jazzman's Search for Spiritual Manifestations in Many Nations

by

Lloyd Clifton Miller

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SUFI, SAINT AND SWINGER

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***Nama baga vazrka Ahuramazda hya imam bumim ada, hya avam asmanam ada,
hya martiyam ada, hya shiyatim ada martiyahya***

Benam-e khoda-ye bakhshande-ye mehraban

Bismillahi-rahmani-rahim

Note by Author

The experiences in this book are true and correct as I remember them. The book is written in the third person because many times the incidents appeared as if they were being witnessed from the outside and happening to someone else. Many of these experiences I wouldn't believe myself if I hadn't been there in person. The term 'swinger' in the title should be taken in the old sense as in 'a swingin' jazz cat.'

Almost all persons represented in this biography are called by their own names because it is a correct historical account and no offense is meant against anyone even if a few criticisms occur. In the eternal picture, all individuals have their varied rolls, whether pleasant or not; thus no one should be permanently disfavored for undertaking their various tasks therefore assuring a balance of energy between good and evil. Therefore I wish to acknowledge positively, to honor and to thank all persons mentioned herein whether benefactors or detractors, for they all have been necessary participants this unusual saga.

In all cases, it has been endeavored to relate the full truth about every subject without pulling any punches or acquiescing to the restrictive straight jacket of political correctness enforced by prejudicial contemporary American social dictatorship. Any severe opinions and angry thoughts expressed in this story during various phases of personal development, however true they may be or were perceived to be, eventually mellowed to a slightly more accepting peaceful philosophy although certain dangerous and violent ideas and entities still need to be continually and intensely opposed.

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Chapter 1

Khodafez Tehran

It was the late 70s and the loudspeaker of the Mehrabad International Airport crackled as a voice droned “Pan Am flight 001 to Frankfurt, London and New York is now ready for boarding, please proceed to the check-in area.” Having waited in line the usual three hours, Kurosh Ali Khan was glad to have finally reached the check-in desk after tediously shuffling along with other weary passengers. He hefted his obviously overweight suitcase onto the scale and shot a hopeful smile to the Iranian baggage worker who grinned back and scooted the bag directly onto the moving belt. The Armenian ticket man glanced up through the tops of his glasses and asked “checked all the way to New York, sir?” Kurosh Ali nodded affirmatively in Armenian “*ayo baron*” and the ticket agent blandly added “250 *rials* airport tax please.” Kurosh Ali plunked down several one and two *toman* coins along with a green five and a red ten *toman* note on the counter smiling “*ahavasi, baron, sedesutiun* (here you are sir, goodbye)” then took his yellow airport tax receipt and returned to where he had stashed his two huge carry-on bags.

He then proceeded through the gate showing his passport to the friendly policeman who proudly flaunted his few words of English in a dramatic “bye-bye meester.” Kurosh stunned him by answering “*khodahafez agha, enshallah baz ‘am bebinimetun.*” (good-bye sir, Allah willing we’ll see you again). Tugging his over forty pounds of hand luggage stacked on a dolly, Kurosh Ali made his way towards the desk where he presented his airport tax receipt then moved on to the passport checkout. As the line slowly snailed forward, a chubby cigar-puffing American behind him smirked “if we’re lucky, we might get to the plane in time to see it off.” A Yankee gal with two messy brawling brats turned and brashly shot back “that would be really speedy for this dump!”

A half hour later, Kurosh Ali finally reached the passport check where he was treated to a languid look from the jet-black almond eyes of a delicate little police girl with long wavy hair. She shyly and slyly glanced up at him, self-consciously wriggling in her snug fitting blue passport police uniform, and exclaimed “*sallam agha-ye Kurosh Ali Khan, baz ‘am mirid?* (Hello Mr. Kurosh Ali Khan, you’re going again?)” He timidly blushed and retorted wishfully “*bali azizam, ama bar migardam, enshallah.* (Yes, my dear, but I’ll be back, Allah willing).” She giggled and, stamping the purple inkpad then his passport, confiding “*shoma ra television didam.*” (I saw you on TV). Her intoxicating eyes froze on his for a moment as her tiny fingers slid his passport toward him; “*kheili khub mizanid* (you play very well)” she added with a tantalizing toss of her silken hair. “*Khodetun khub mishnavid, junam* (it is you who listens well, my darling)” he retorted as he slipped his passport into his pocket and smiled goodbye.

While he walked on towards the transit lounge he somberly mused “I’ll really miss these my adopted people; they may be a bit goofed-up, but the greatest.” He remembered when he first met that passport girl on one of his many visa trips to Beirut. He had fleetingly flirted with her on that occasion as well when he stared deep into her enchanting dark eyes and chided in Persian “are you going to arrest me?” then quickly added “if you would be my jailer then please arrest me right away.” They both laughed and a sort of romantic friendship was formed.

Kurosh Ali passed the door into the transit hall and looked up from his thoughts to see an old friend dressed in the dark green of the Iranian customs service. “Kurosh Ali Khan, it’s you again” the customs man exclaimed in Mashhadi Persian. It was good old Mahmud, his friend from the Tayebad border station where he had traversed dozens of times on visa trips to Herat, his favorite town in the world. He kissed his friend on both cheeks and asked in Persian “how are you and how is my friend Mr. Hosseini in Tayebad?” Mahmud responded “just fine” adding “when are you coming to Tayebad again? I’ll be transferred back

there next month.” Kurosh Ali sighed and ventured “only Allah knows, hopefully in the near future. This time I’ll bring my future wife; she is from Kabul, so you see I finally found a bride, even if she is from the other side of the border.”

Kurosh Ali waved goodbye and scanned the transit hall for a seat on the rows of brown couch-like chairs. Moving to a vacant spot, he noticed a grouchy-looking, blue-eyed man reading the *Süd Deutsche Zeitung* and, wondering about the seat, asked “*entschuldigung, ist hier frei?*” The little chubby man gruffly retorted positively “*bitte schön*” as Kurosh Ali sat to contemplate the sights and sounds presented by the collage of European, American, Iranian and other travelers. A Pakistani gentleman with his shy wife in a colorful *dupata* around her neck and flowing down behind her wandered by and carefully took seats next to Kurosh Ali who politely inquired as to their health “*sallam sahib, ap ka hal kya hai? Enshallah tik hai.*” The surprised couple responded in Urdu then Kurosh Ali settled comfortably in his seat reminiscing fondly about the time he tried in vain to visit the legendary health hideaway of Hunza at the rooftop of the world in Pakistani Kashmir.

Chapter 2

On the Rooftop of the World

“You gort it, I see.” The PIA desk employee at the Pindi airport smiled as he handed back the tourist card. That card had cost Kurosh a whole day of running around after having been turned away from boarding the day before. He shuffled out to the small prop plane that was to carry the few passengers high in the mountains to the Shangri-La type village of Gilgit which is in the north of Pakistan near the Afghan and Chinese borders.

The real reason Kurosh had originally wanted to go to Gilgit was to see the legendary Hunza valley where there were formerly no police, no hospitals, no jails, no white bread, white sugar, soda pop or other evils of modern society. There, in the quiet beauty of the mountains, people lived happily without needing money, cars, radios and TV, some of them reaching the ripe old age of 150 years. According to experts on the valley, the heavy mineral content of the water which flows directly from glaciers and is grayish brown from clean mineral mud, along with a healthy diet (one of the ingredients being apricot oil which some nutritionists feel contains a deterrent to cancer) has been a main factor in the incredible stamina and longevity of the Hunza valley inhabitants. But without realizing it, Kurosh had come all the way to Rawalpindi almost in vain because no one, including the friendly blue-eyed Kashmir Affairs chief Sekert, PIA, the Tourist Organization, Walji, head of Walji’s Travel and, even the prince of Hunza, Ghazenfar Ali, who Kurosh accidentally bumped into at the Intercontinental Hotel while telling his tale of woe to the PIA office, could do a thing to get him into Hunza. Because of the military road that was then being built through Hunza valley to China and, for some other reasons, no tourist, not even Pakistanis, were allowed into Hunza unless in a guided group of about 14 people. Sekert was very kind and suggested seeing the U.S. embassy that was planning a group trip; but after going there, Kurosh found that there weren’t accommodations for any more. They already had a waiting list of 100 or so and couldn’t in all fairness add anyone at such late notice. So Kurosh resigned himself to just seeing Gilgit plus the national polo tournament that was, conveniently and unbeknownst to him, scheduled for that weekend, and maybe the Mir of Hunza who, according to his son, would be at the polo match.

Kurosh sat back in his seat, sad but still excited about the new experience ahead, and gazed out the window at the beautiful mountains and the tidily terraced farmlands below. They passed over Kagan valley, rivulets, villages, earthen houses and a myriad of winding terraced fields up to green pines and

clusters of grass in the mountains. The captain drew attention to Nanga Parbat, a breath-taking massive mountain that guards a cluster of snow-frosted crags. Finally the plane descended to the green fields, tall trees and earthen compounds of Gilgit where a man from the travel agency greeted Kurosh and arranged for him to stay at their guesthouse.

The local people, who seemed to be very friendly, natural and uncomplexed, wore clothes that were reminiscent of areas of Afghanistan. The men were clad in billowing trousers (*shalwar*) long shirts (*kurta*) worn to the knees and a kind of rolled-up hat (*gharmi*) with the round rolled part circling the head above the ears. The ladies were adorned with flowing full dresses over *shalwar* and covered by a *kurta* topped off by a round, flat cap under a long scarf which was wound around the head. In Gilgit the only transportation were expensive jeeps or feet. Kurosh chose the latter which took him about 45 minutes or an hour to walk to town each time he wanted to get something. But the walk was so enjoyable, passing kids playing their version of polo using crooked branches for sticks, friendly old people and occasionally a lovely young girl whose mother or father would scold warning her not to look too intently at Kurosh as he trudged over the fresh scented fields. Once a pair of children followed along as he was returning to the guesthouse with a prize of unforgettably delicious dried apricots, unsulfured and unsprayed of course. He offered them each an apricot and in their simple shyness at first they wouldn't accept but finally gave in.

The apricots in Gilgit with seeds that were as sweet as the apricots, are sweeter than candy, silky soft and cheap as dirt and themselves almost warrant a trip there. One kilo was only two rupees fifty *paisa* or about 25 cents. The language spoken in Gilgit was recognizably an Indian or Indo-Aryan dialect which, from having worked on several Indo-Iranian languages, Kurosh was almost able to occasionally decipher. The English that gets any tourist by all over Pakistan and India was of only moderate use and Urdu seemed to be the only way to communicate. The crazy thing was that, after struggling for a few days, constantly whipping out his trusty Urdu dictionary when he got stuck, Kurosh found on his last day there that most people, especially those from Hunza, were fluent in Dari Persian which Kurosh spoke quite well.

Polo Matches

Kurosh made his way along the winding rutted road towards the polo grounds, enjoying the pure air, the quiet and the frank, friendly faces of the local inhabitants. Suddenly the familiar sound of *surna* (type of oboe) and *dhol* (barrel drum) caught his ear. Music being his thing, he quickened his steps toward the sound and soon came upon a large walled in compound where a few village folk were peeping through the gateway at what appeared to be the pep band warming up for the evening game. Three *urnas* whined away in loose unison accompanied by a large *dhol* player who used sticks on each end of the drum. The hardy, exciting and, at times, frenzied sound was very much like Afghan *surna* and *dhol* music and Kurosh even imagined he could recognize melodic patterns that resembled with Turkic *zurna* and *davul* or even Southeast Asian *pinai* and *taphon* duets. This would prove the previously postulated theory he had in the back of his mind that somehow this particular type of festive oboe and drum ensemble was spread from a common origin to as far as Korea in the East and Europe in the West.

He turned left and continued on his way to the polo grounds where helpful people found him a seat right in the middle of the stadium. The man from the rest house knew how enamored Kurosh was with Hunza and pointed out the Mir who was sitting with the local political agent only a few seats away. The cornet blew and the three sets of oboe and drum ensembles screeched out in frantic fervor as the

match exploded into action. Players used mallets, not only for hitting the ball, but for other purposes as well, such as baring opponents, pushing them away and, although it didn't occur this time, one could surmise that in the wilder days, players may have even given each other a solid tap or two.

There seemed to be no referee but there wasn't really any need for one. When the ball was struck out, someone threw it back in and on went the game. Some long drives went the length of the field and bouncing the ball off the side wall was a reoccurring tactic. Players would take a few minutes out to tighten a saddle strap or get a new mallet when theirs got broken or accidentally tossed into the crowd. The whole thing bore resemblance to the rougher, probably related game, *buzkashi* popular in North Afghanistan where a headless goat carcass was the ball.

The half-time entertainment was furnished by local talent that consisted of three fellows in white who did a sort of shuffle dance with their hands fluttering in snake-like gestures. One step they did resembled the Afghan national dance, the *Atan*. The second half was as rough as the first. Players raced back and forth to the screech of alternating *surna* bands. Besides the *dhol*, part of the ensembles were two upright single head drums beaten with sticks, which closely resembled the Arabo-Persian *nagarat*.

After the match, a couple of fellows jumped out into the middle of the field and started a wild hopping dance which faded into a swishing hand, arm and foot workout finally ending in a stomping step sprinkled with whirls and twirls. Soon, half the spectators were out on the field dancing up a storm even joined by a cop in full uniform, staff and all. The dance developed into a follow-the-leader mincing shuffle that ended in a wild free-for-all. The *surna* music went on late into the night after the match, and served as an aid, or maybe hindrance, to sleep.

Naltar

At the different polo matches Kurosh fell in with a few of the other tourists who sat in the special visitors' section. Two of them were Paks and two others were American ladies. All five of them ended up sitting around moping and moaning about the stiff restrictions which prevented anyone from seeing the legendary Hunza valley. During the talks, the jeep dispatcher from the travel agency suggested a substitute destination, a trip to Naltar which he claimed was as beautiful as Hunza even though it wasn't as well-known. After they countered that there was no famous apricot oil, no 150 year old men, no glacier water, ect., he finally convinced them that getting within a few miles of Hunza was better than just grumbling around the guest-house.

So the next morning all five guests and a Hunza-born driver were off to Naltar. They crossed the suspension bridge and wound up the mountain path as the jeep ground away in first or second gear. Stone huts and occasional trees greeted them as the jeep twisted and reeled past bleak boulders and ragged rock. Village areas were decorated with green fields surrounded by piled stone walls and inhabited by beautiful healthy-looking people. Everyone seemed so relaxed and happy. Blue or green eyes were as common as they were in Gilgit, and clothes were similar to those of Gilgit. The group paused a moment at the rest house in Normal, a village from which the road to Hunza separates from the one to Naltar. They were informed that the rest-house was only three chips a night (about 30 cents) and Kurosh was ready to stay there a few days, except it would cost a fortune to have a jeep come up and take him back to Gilgit.

Off they went, up, up over creaky bridges into the pines and finally Naltar. The dispatcher was right; when they pulled up to the Naltar rest house and stopped, it was like an unbelievable dream. All was so quiet and fresh. The sound of rushing streams, and the panorama of low rock houses nestled among majestic peaks shooting up on all sides, left everyone in an awe-struck silence. Since it was

lunch-time, the local rest house manager went to find some food which ended up being ambrosial apricots and the best bread Kurosh had ever had the honor to eat in his life. The bread was in the form of a thick flat round *chapati* but the whole grains were so unadulterated that the bread was full of half chunks of the seeds. The water they were served, even though not the ‘glacial milk’ from Hunza, was green from the fresh plant content and possessed the flavor of pine needles. They almost weren’t allowed to pay for the meal because the fellow didn’t seem to know what rupee notes were and it appears that up there money had almost no meaning. After lunch, the group was taken for a hike by the rest house manager. Even though he was about 70, he scampered up the hills like a young boy. The American ladies gave up near the bottom and the Paks were constantly slipping. Kurosh managed to keep up with him probably due to 12 years of a strict healthy diet consisting mainly of fruits and vegetables. No one really wanted to leave the heavenly hideaway in the tops of the mountains, but dusk was approaching and the jeep driver feared the dangerous return trip in the dark.

Meeting the Mir

Back in Gilgit, the next morning Kurosh eagerly clamored out of bed and dressed anxiously anticipating the surprise honor of meeting the famous Mir of Hunza. Kurosh had seen him in a documentary about Hunza and their healthy way of life and, to many adherents of natural diet, the Mir had become somewhat of an icon. The jeep dispatcher, who had been constantly helpful, turned out to be the Mir’s cousin and had arranged a meeting for Kurosh on the morning he was to leave Gilgit. They drove to the Mir’s compound where several people, likely his subjects waiting to gain an audience with him, were standing around in the yard. Among them was an Islamic leader in white turban and brown *aba* or robe. As Kurosh entered the guest room, the Mir stood and greeted him warmly in his kind, gentle way. They talked a while in English, but when he heard Kurosh was living in Tehran, the Mir asked if Kurosh knew Persian. Kurosh answered “*shma Dari yad dari?* (you know Dari?)” and from then on the conversation continued in Dari Persian.

When the Mir’s wife entered the room in her quiet delicate Middle Eastern way, he presented her declaring “the *Rani*.” She looked as young as she was in the documentary filmed some years prior. She was attired in a silky white scarf and her green eyes were clear, sparkling with straightforward honesty. In answer to the question to what race the Hunza natives belong, the Mir said “We are Greeks from the days of Alexander.” After a restful hour talking to the Mir, his brother and the *Rani*, Kurosh bade farewell and excused himself to catch the plane. As the small plane purred up into the snow-capped peaks, the words of the jeep driver continually went through Kurosh’s mind; when he had asked about the 150 year old men, the driver answered that there were nearly none left, explaining in Urdu “*chai aur soda on ko mardalay* (tea and soda killed them).”

Chapter 3

Lebanon before the Strife

The familiar sound of Lebanese Arabic brought Kurosh Ali back from his memories of Kashnir to the present in the Tehran airport waiting room as a young couple with their children passed by. Kurosh remembered one of his several visits to Beirut years ago when it was a peaceful paradise of fresh fruit, cheerful people and sunny weather.

Kurosh kissed Mona goodbye on the cheek as the Syrian taxi drivers looked on in shocked amazement. “Be careful, people are watching” she gasped, then self consciously backed up the hill to the Damascus-Beirut taxi station calling out “*masallama*, next time we’ll see the cedars and Baalbek, I promise.” As he drove off across the desert towards Baghdad, Kurosh thought of the places they had seen and the friends they had made. Mona (or Yumna) Habshi, born in a Lebanese village near Baalbek, was sweet 26 and never been kissed (except on the cheek).

Beirut, Sidon and Biblos

Mona had been Kurosh’s guide every time he visited Beirut. The first time they went sight seeing was only a few days after they met. He was peacefully sleeping in his room at the Atlas Hotel in Hamra, Beirut’s modern shopping district, when the phone rang. He reached over and picked it up as a familiar cheery voice chimed “*yalla!* Wake up, it’s 7:30 already.” Kurosh mumbled “good morning, Mona, *keefik?*” to which Mona responded “I’m good. I’ve planned an interesting day; meet me at the ‘*asir* stand on the Borj at 8:15 OK?” Kurosh quickly dressed and hopped a bus to the Borj, Beirut’s main square. At the juice stand, he chose crushed sugar cane from the large selection of juices and was sipping it down when he felt a little tug on his sleeve. It was Mona. “Come on,” she said “We’re going to Saida.”

Kurosh soon learned never to argue with Mona when she came up with an idea. They walked a short distance to where a young fellow was chanting “*Saida, Saida, yalla Saida!*” They climbed on the rusty old bus and rode past the palms and green countryside to Saida which, Mona explained, was an ancient fishing port in south Lebanon, the Biblical Sidon. In Saida the two passed the tiny shops and friendly people to a causeway that led out to a former fortress. After wandering through the rooms of the castle they climbed to the top and rested, drinking in the salt air and placid view of Saida with its turquoise mosques. Across the bay the *muazzin* called the faithful to prayer as the peaceful sound of his chant merged with the languid lapping of wavelets against the tiny island. Re-crossing the causeway, Kurosh and Mona stopped at a café and soon were deep in conversation with the manager who told them about the castle and the crusaders. He insisted they be his guests for an orange juice and even wanted them to stay for dinner. But they politely excused themselves after which he kindly drove the couple to the bus stop.

The next day, as Kurosh was waiting in front of the juice stand, Mona jumped off her bus, walked up and stated “Today we’re going to Byblos.” Half an hour later they found themselves walking down a narrow dusty road to another castle near the sea. When the caretaker wanted five *lira* to show them the castle, Kurosh offered him half, according to the Lebanese bargaining tradition; but he grumbled to their amusement “I’m not selling tomatoes.” Later Mona showed Kurosh an old Maronite church where the two peered a while through the windows and were about to leave when the caretaker appeared at the balcony of his house. “*Usbur, bizhi!* (wait, I’m coming!)” he shouted, jingling a large ring of keys and scampering down the stairs. He opened the door and invited them in with a cheerful “*Ahlan, faddal.*” As they entered the church he proudly showed the old art treasures. Afterwards, Kurosh tried to give him a couple of *lira* but he refused and even seemed insulted. Mona explained on the way back to Beirut that the Lebanese were mostly genuinely hospitable and were happy to see visitors interested in their rich cultural heritage.

Harisa

Back for lunch at the *filafil* stand on the Borj and two sandwiches later, Mona suggested a trip to Harisa. So the two found a *servis* taxi, sharing it with three other people. Um Khultum was crooning a song on the radio as the Mercedes climbed into the cool pines. Kurosh and Mona got out at a small village and the cab sped away leaving them in a green meadow. After walking some distance they came to an old monastery where there was a church high on a rock. Mona led the climb up the curling staircase to the dome which was covered with prayers and requests written on scraps of paper. Beneath stretched the verdant valley and emerald sea which they contemplated at length in the afternoon breeze before returning to Beirut.

Although Mona was an excellent guide, at times she left Kurosh to struggle with his phrasebook Arabic. Like the time they rode an empty bus through the mountains to Hamdun and at the end of the line the driver asked where they were going. “*Wain?*” he asked. “Beirut” Kurosh answered. The driver explained partly by dramatic sign language, that he would take them back for free after his lunch. Kurosh pantomimed and fumbled in a combination of Lebanese and literary Arabic that he would take a walk and soon return. All the time Mona was watching the comedy and giggling secretly. She believed in the good old Middle Eastern tradition which requires the man to do the talking even if he has to use a dictionary. After lunch, the bus driver’s wife rode in the back with Kurosh and Mona and at the end of the trip she asked Mona in Arabic “you were Lebanese all the time, weren’t you?” and they all had a good hearty laugh. During their short stay in Hamdun, Mona and Kurosh were walking through the village when a lady called out “*ahlan*” and motioned them to come in. Although they hesitated, she insisted and soon the two were eating fruit and discussing philosophy like part of the family. She showed them around her simple yet comfortably furnished home and even wanted to keep them for dinner once more demonstrating Middle Eastern hospitality that never ceased to amaze Kurosh.

Shopping in Beirut

One of Beirut’s most interesting sights was the *su’* (bazaar) where Kurosh and Mona often wandered, shopping or just enjoying the atmosphere. “*Tayyib el moz*” the banana merchants would call out and others might invent little songs to attract customers. One day a boy began avidly chanting “*yalla banadura be lira o nas*” (come on, tomatoes a *lira* and a half) and soon the others joined in standing on crates and clapping in rhythm. Then a colleague improvised new lyrics “*kilo banadura be lira o nas*” and the rest followed. The next time they came the hit tune was “*ya banadura, arba be lira*” (tomatoes, four for a *lira*). Besides food items, the bazaar offered handicrafts and elegant embroidered long dresses (*kaftan*). But Kurosh always got *kaftans* cheaper at the bazaar in Damascus along with *kafiyas* which he sported as a neck scarf on colder days and also around his head when sleeping to block out the light. He bought some big juicy dark grapes and then Mona showed Kurosh a new way to wash grapes. She went over to a faucet on the street corner and filled the paper bag with water and then punched a hole in the corner of the bag. As they walked along eating grapes and chatting, Kurosh innocently patted Mona on the rear in a fatherly way noting “*tayyib el khubz*” (nice bread) in reference to her slight weight augmentation since his last visit. Mona laughed slyly knowing that Kurosh favored fuller figures than the whimpy magazine models and took it as a compliment.

Music Fest in Alei

One evening, Mona was late for their meeting at the juice stand. As Kurosh stood gazing at the people bustling about the Borj, a village girl in a long *kaftan* and hand-worked scarf appeared in front of him. “Mona” he blurted “I didn’t recognize you.” She asked “you like my dress, it’s real Lebanese?” then added “I’ve passed twice and you didn’t see me.” Then she disclosed the plans for the evening. “Tonight we are going to a song fest in Alei to hear my favorite singer Samira Toufi’!” So off they went in a clattering old bus full of energetic youngsters who were soon singing and clapping along. The bus arrived at the *Amphitheatre du Liban* in the small mountain village Madraj Alei on the road to Damascus. The common evening dress worn by lady spectators consisted of beautiful long embroidered *kaftans* with or without fancy scarves. The large outdoor arena was nearly packed with enthusiastic listeners who broke into intermittent cheers during the emcee’s introductory speech. The program began with some rhythm-free vocal styling by a raucous redhead backed up by a 20-piece orchestra that combined traditional and, to Kurosh’s chagrin, Western instruments. The group broke into a lively rhythm with the audience frantically clapping in time and yelling continual approvals. Vocal passages by the girl were answered and echoed in unison by a trio of male singers standing behind the band.

One of the most memorable events of the evening was a Kurdish instrumental and dance performance. The group’s announcer gave a long talk in Kurdish which, for a change, Kurosh was able to partially translate for Mona. The instrumental ensemble was composed of four long string instruments that resembled the Turkish *saz* (long lute), a *ney* (flute) and two *darbukka* or goblet drums. The dance troupe, wearing full folk wear, danced hand in hand in a line with the leader on the end whirling a long handkerchief. One song was sung in Turkish style by a male artist while three girls chanted the refrains clapping or waving their scarves in time to the rhythm. After the Kurdish group, a bouncy girl, Lubluba, bubbled out on stage and did humorous imitations of well-known Arab pop singers. She was followed by an Iraqi fellow with a vocal styling closer to Iranian tradition, who offered an emotion-filled long *mawal* or free-rhythm prelude. At about two in the morning, Kurosh decided he couldn’t stay any longer because of an early appointment the next day. Although disappointed by not having heard Samira Toufi’ who was last on the program, Mona didn’t argue. As the taxi pulled away, Mona listened out the window and lamented “that’s her singing now.”

Over the Mountain to Damascus

Prior to leaving Beirut, Kurosh invited Mona to join him for a day in Damascus, or *Eshshems* as they call it, before he was to drive off to Baghdad. As they were leaving the passport and car-paper checkpoint at the Lebanese border, an official wandered up and asked to see Kurosh’s passport. He then asked for Mona’s. Kurosh passed her Lebanese ID card to the guard and a look of surprised suspicion surged over his face. He frantically motioned over a team of customs inspectors, who began unloading everything and partially dismantling the car. One of them poked a long wire into the gas tank, under the dashboard and through the upholstery. Another shook the doors to see if there was anything hidden inside.

One by one they sidled up to Mona and began asking her questions in Arabic. “Where did you meet him?” the first asked. She calmly answered “*fi knisa* (at church)” which crumbled his hopes of a scandal. Another pressed “how long have you known him?” She nonchalantly replied “over a year and a half” as he turned away puzzled. A third got belligerent and snapped “I bet you’ve been giving him a

lot of hash haven't you?" When the fourth queried "where is it hidden?" Mona sarcastically quipped "oh, the car is full of it." He warned "we'll find it" and she replied "look all day if you like."

Kurosh ventured in Arabic to ask one official who seemed more friendly "why are they going to so much trouble?" He stared Kurosh in the eye and stated "they are looking for hashish." Kurosh whimpered "but why?" The customs man retorted "because it's illegal. If you have any, you'd better tell me." Kurosh began to get impatient and explained "I mean why me? I don't even smoke or drink." The customs man stared bewilderedly as they began repacking the car. Kurosh rearranged his things under the VW hood, respectfully placed his Koran on top of the luggage and kissed it as their faces fell in unbelief. It had been an hour when they finally let the two go forgetting to even say goodbye which was a breach of the usual Lebanese hospitality.

As they drove off, Mona said "it must have been my ID card. You see, my family is from an area near Baalbek which is the hashish center of Lebanon." They both laughed and Kurosh added "I bet they were just jealous because they weren't driving to Damascus with a pretty girl."

Chapter 4

The Glass Eaters of Kurdistan

Kurosh looked up from his memories of Beirut to see two dignified Iranian gentlemen exchanging a Sufi handshake in which each person kisses the back of the other's hand then presses it against his own forehead. He was reminded of one trip to Kurdistan with his colleagues from Tehran Journal.

Kurosh reminisced how the scent of another adventure was in the crisp morning air as the three American Moslems, Kurosh Ali, Shamseddin (Terry Graham) and Selim (Peter Wilson), slowly packed their dusty suitcases and handbags under the hood of the worn but faithful VW Variant. After filling up with gas at the local station and being reassured as to the best road to Sanandaj, the three were eventually speeding past quaint clay villages and friendly Kurdish shepherds. "Do these guys really eat glass?" asked Kurosh. "That's what I've been told" answered Selim whose world travels in search of manifestations of mysticism in its purest form had carried him across the Islamic world from Morocco to India. Shamseddin, the tall blue-eyed Harvard graduate with curly blond hair, in his baritone, almost Hollywood film star voice, added "I guess we'd better not over eat today so we won't ruin our appetites when we join them for dinner." The three chuckled and Kurosh added "I'm going to tell them I'm fasting and won't be joining the feast."

As the rose-colored rays of the morning sun began to ignite the turquoise blue Kurdish sky, Selim, the most fervent Moslem of the three, exclaimed "hey, we forgot our morning prayers." Kurosh pressed both feet on the clutch and brake simultaneously as the car careened to a halt at the roadside. The three climbed out of the car and, after fumbling for their prayer cloths, were ready for the first *rakat* or recited prayer formula. Selim selected Shamseddin to sing the *azan*, or call to prayer, as Kurosh finished spreading his black and white checkered Kurdish *kafiyya* beside the other elegantly embroidered prayer shawls. In a strong deep voice that approximated a combination of Russian opera and Turkish folk singing, Shamseddin neared the end of the *azan*: "*haya ilassalah, haya ilal falah*" he sang as Kurosh quickly wrapped another checkered *kafiyya* around his head in the form of a Kurdish turban. Soon the three had finished their prostrations and, physically as well as spiritually refreshed, were ready to continue their journey. Later that afternoon, after lunch in a roadside teahouse, the three approached their goal. Kurosh read out loud a sign in Farsi that whizzed by "Sanandaj, 5." Excitement welled up in each of the Americans as they pressed on faster to the enchanting Kurdish village. "We

should go to the bazaar first” Selim directed “where we can find my contact Ahmad to introduce us to the Qaderis.”

Sanandaj Bazaar

The car slowed as the American Islamic supporters neared the bazaar entrance on the main street of the small town. “*Ya Ali*” stated Shamseddin, evoking the name of the main *imam* of Shia Islam, as the three climbed out of the car and descended the steps to the bazaar. They traversed the tiny alleys past the shops full of traditional as well as modern wares feeling that they had entered a different world. “Wow, look at those clothes” Kurosh exclaimed as he tugged the others into a small tailor shop. Then in his eloquent Persian, began bargaining for a complete Kurdish outfit. Soon the deal was sealed and, bowing respectfully, Kurosh promised to return later to pick up the clothes.

After questioning various shopkeepers, the three pilgrims were directed to Ahmad, a strange, fierce-eyed, yet warm friendly silversmith who was pounding on a lady’s coin headband as the three approached. Kurosh, unable to quell his insatiable compulsion for acquiring folkwear, boldly strode up and asked in his Paris learned Kurmanji Kurdish “how much for that?” Ahmad’s deep-set eyes momentarily twinkled as he quoted a price. “How much for a fellow *dervish*?” Kurosh cross-examined in Persian. Ahmad rose and, extending his bony weathered hand, asked in Farsi “are you three brother Sufis?” Shamseddin eloquated “of course, Kurosh is an affiliate of the Ahl-e Haq order and Selim and I are friends of the Nimatullahi order.” Ahmad immediately placed the coin headpiece in Kurosh’s palm and, closing his fingers firmly around it smiled “then you must accept this as a gift.” Kurosh blushed “oh, I can’t do that.” And then he whipped out the 200 *rials* originally quoted. “No, no!” Ahmad affirmed “it is a gift; you are our guests.” Kurosh spent the rest of his three days in Sanandaj futilely trying to pay for the headpiece.

“Now come, my friends” Ahmad said “I will introduce you to some of our *dervish* brothers.” That afternoon the three were led about the bazaar meeting several shopkeepers who were members of the Qaderi order and every time Kurosh exchanged the sacred handclasp of the *dervishes*, each kissing the back of the other’s hand while grasping it then simultaneously pressing the back of the other’s hand against their foreheads. Finally the last *dervish* they were introduced to was the same large tailor with the European hat who had been making Kurosh’s clothes. “*Ya Ali!*” evoked the big well-built man as he crushed the hands of each of the three guests one by one in his firm grasp. “So you are *dervishes*” he exuberated in Farsi. “Then you will get a special price on your clothes” he smiled at Kurosh who was already embarrassed at having received more kindness than he could absorb. The large *dervish* motioned to his *shagerd*, or apprentice, to bring the clothes. Kurosh excitedly climbed into the large billowing pantaloons and donned the heavy coat. A very long thin blue sash was wrapped around his waist, intertwined in front and wound back and around again three times then the ends were tucked in at the sides. Another apprentice produced a silky black and silver shawl which was quickly wound into a turban around Kurosh’s head as the large *dervish* tailor, chuckling to himself, slid the long white sleeve pieces over Kurosh’s hands, wound them around his forearms then tucked the ends in near his elbows. “Hey you look better that way” Selim announced and then added “everyone looks better in traditional clothes.” Kurosh couldn’t agree more “yes, nothing looks more drab and discouraging than the Western garb that has recently permeated Eastern countries.”

The Nimatullahi *Khaneqa*

Kurosh removed his new prize outfit and, after a few more purchases, the three were ready to go to the Nimatullahi *khaneqa* where they were scheduled to have supper. After driving up the hill, following Selim's roughly drawn map, the American *dervishes* found the *khaneqa*, a noble traditional structure amid a placid tree-studded suburb. Fervent knocking finally brought the caretaker to the door to whom Selim presented a letter from an important Nimatullahi *dervish* in Tehran. Soon lights illuminated the *khaneqa* and a sumptuous meal was placed on a *sofre* or tablecloth spread on the floor in front of the guests. When all had eaten their fill with constant urging from their hosts to eat more, it was time for an intimate *zehr* or religious chant by a selected few of the faithful. One by one, half a dozen or so members gathered quietly to meditate, exchange smiles and greetings. A large book of hand-scripted poetry appeared and, after respectfully kissing the book, one of the *dervishes* began chanting lines of poetry in the text from time to time breaking into tears crying out "*Ya Ali.*" The chanting subsided and the meeting drifted into an intense meditative calm that was broken by a knock on the door. Soon a dozen or so Qaderi *dervishes* appeared and smiled greetings to all before taking their places of honor against the wall farthest from the door. The big tailor Ahmad, the ghost-like silversmith, and several other of the newly acquired friends were among the group. From time to time, smiles were exchanged and greetings reiterated between the Qaderis and their American guests.

After a while, a large *dayere* or frame drum was produced and a short authoritative *dervish* began thumping out a slow heavy beat. The impelling rhythm soon forced all present to sway from side to side as the drummer sang praises to Imam Ali in a high-pitched piercing voice. The rhythm grew faster and more intense as several of the Qaderis rose to their feet to rock from right to left in a more frantic almost dance routine. Suddenly the large tailor threw off his hat and, to the surprise of the American guests, his almost knee-length pitch-black hair flew forth into a wild whip-like swishing pattern. Others of the Qaderis removed their various headgear as more long locks joined in the frenzy while the beat of the *dayereh* sped even more wildly. A group of four of the Qaderis lined up and, arms intertwined in the Kurdish folk dance tradition, tossed their heads up and down exclaiming "*hu! hu! hu!*" and later "*hi! hi! hi!*" Kurosh, Shamseddin and Selim were bobbing their heads and chanting along with the Qaderis absorbing every thrilling moment of the whole experience.

Finally the *zehr* drew to a close with the drumming and chanting subsiding into a slow undulating conclusion. The Qaderis slowly gathered up their hats and other belongings then politely bade farewell to the Americans as if nothing had happened. The Nimatullahis also left one by one until only the Americans remained to prepare themselves to spend the night sleeping on the floor of the *khaneqa*. "Wow, that was something." Kurosh gasped. With an almost sarcastic smile Selim explained "they didn't even get warmed up" and continued "just wait till we visit their *khaneqa* tomorrow night." Kurosh stared in the dark at the ceiling of the *khaneqa* and then queried "you mean they get wilder than this?" Selim knowingly asserted "no one even ate a tiny light bulb this time; you'll see the real thing tomorrow." The three fell asleep to dream of ancient Kurdish *dervish* warriors boldly battling their enemies unaffected by arrow or sword wounds.

Zehr at the Qaderi *Khaneqa*

The next day, after a peaceful morning and afternoon of meditation in the *khaneqa*, Kurosh proudly stated "look you guys, I finished knotting all the loose ends of my Kurdish turban shawl." Selim admired the work and then directed "OK, let's get moving to the Qaderi *khaneqa*." Guided by a

rough map and directions from various passersby, the three drove up winding alleys towards the Qaderi place of worship until the dusty road came to an abrupt halt. Kurosh called out in Kurmanji Kurdish to children suspiciously staring at the three foreigners “*Khaneqa li ku ye?* (where is the *khaneqa?*)” He repeated the question in Farsi to the bewildered youths who could believe neither their eyes nor their ears; then one of them reluctantly motioned ahead beyond the end of the road that had dwindled into a deep ravine. Another boy came from the direction of the *khaneqa* waving his hand downward calling out “*biya, biya!* (come on, come on!)” Obviously, the boy was the son of one of the Qaderis and had been sent to guide the three guests. They trudged up the hill into a small *kuche* (alleyway) to the door of the Qaderi *khaneqa* where the boy politely waved his right hand downward, inviting them in declaring “*befarmoid.*”

The three entered the main hall where a green banner with white writing caught their attention for a moment. The small *dervish* who led the Qaderi *zeker* at the Nimatullahi *khaneqa* the previous evening came up to the three and warmly welcomed them. Soon they were comfortably seated against the green wall and after several queries as to their health by all of the Qaderis present, the *seyyed* or leader, took a huge *dayereh* in his hands and began a slow but overwhelming beat. Three other *dervishes* joined him on their round frame drums and it wasn't long before the whole room was shaking with the rumble of the drums and the piercing chant of the *seyyed*. The Qaderis answered phrases sung by the *seyyed* in a roaring chorus that vibrated right down to the bones as the *zeker* grew in intensity.

Kurosh began to feel the trance as he occasionally glanced from the photographs on the walls to the drummers and then the swaying *dervishes*. The *shaykh* or *seyyed*, dressed in his brown *aba* or long sleeveless cloak with a black and white *kafiyya* wound as a turban, led the group into a more intense chant and faster rhythm patterns. The drums beat out: *dum tak dum tak dum --- tak* and then later: *dum taka dum tatak* as the worshippers moaned, sighed and shouted out various religious phrases. Soon all were singing in a loose unison “*ya Ali, ya Ali, ya Mollah Ali!*” then “*la-illa-ha-il-Allah, la-illa-ha il-Allah.*” The *dervishes* began one by one to cast off their turbans and hats revealing a jungle of flying hair as the intensity became more frantic. An older man with graying long locks came to the center of the group with his hair sweeping nearly to the floor and flying to the ceiling as some of the *dervishes* removed their coats.

Soon a handful of skewers were brought to the center of the room as well as a tray of razor blades and light bulbs. One small and wiry *dervish* swayed up in front of Kurosh and the other Americans then surprised them by handing Kurosh the tray of blades and bulbs. Astonished, Kurosh shot a questioning glance at the *dervish* accompanying the small fellow who had completely gone into a state of frenzied trance. His companion muttered in Persian “open the blades and give him.” Kurosh fumbled with the wrappings of the Nacet razor blades opening six, one by one, and handing them to the wild little Qaderi who popped them into his mouth like potato chips quickly crunching them to pieces in his mouth. Later Kurosh found out that sometimes nails were eaten as well. After the *dervish* had chewed them all into tiny bits, he opened his mouth for Kurosh and the rest to inspect the bits that had amazingly not cut his mouth at all. Then he gulped the bits of blades down swaying wildly in time to the music. In a few seconds, all the blades were devoured and the *dervish* reopened his mouth to show the amazed Americans that no bits of razor were left and that not a drop of blood had resulted from the feat. Kurosh began to tremble from the shock but wasn't allowed to shift his attention as another *dervish* came in front of him grasping the tray and swaying from side to side. This time the *dervish* took a pocketknife and tapped three light bulbs until they shattered into jagged chunks of glass. Then he pushed them all into his mouth and gleefully chewed then swallowed them all in one gulp also resulting in no blood whatsoever.

Kurosh's attention was then drawn to three *dervishes* in the middle of the group who had been forcing skewers and knives into their cheeks and under the bottoms of their chins to reappear through their mouths. Another man at the side of the group was sitting and working hard to press a dagger far into his stomach but was seemingly not completely into a state of ecstasy because, in his case and only in his case, a few trickles of blood were appearing from the wound. Discouraged at not being able to press the knife more than a couple of inches into his belly, he removed it and began to force the dagger into his head right above his eye. There again he only sunk the blade an inch or two and drops of blood appeared. The *shaykh*, realizing that this fellow had not gained the necessary spiritual power this time, shot a stern look at the *dervish*, then two of his companions helped him off to the side room to recuperate.

By this time Kurosh was so engulfed in the whole experience that he and the other Americans were chanting loudly along with the group and also wildly swaying from side to side. Kurosh was eyeing the silver tray of shattered light bulbs hypnotically rocking from side before him in the hands of a *dervish* with his eyes tightly shut in deep trance. Suddenly an imposing urge grasped Kurosh that made him want to try to eat a mouthful of glass. Just as his hand began to move towards the tray, the *seyyed* loudly sang a phrase staring right into Kurosh's eyes with a sternly reprimanding gaze. Kurosh quickly understood that the *shaykh* was telling him to forego the urge because he was not in possession of the spiritual empowerment necessary to successfully perform the feat. Partly discouraged, yet relieved, Kurosh withdrew his hand and returned to chanting refrains in answer to the *seyyed*.

Suddenly Ahmad, the thin silversmith, jumped on a chair and grabbed two bare wires drooping from the ceiling of the room. He opened his mouth and placed the 220 volt wires in the sides of his mouth on top of his tongue and began to tremble as the current hit him. He clamped his mouth down, shaking until the chair toppled and he fell to the ground. Undaunted, he set the chair back up and climbed again to repeat the act. This time he held on long enough for the main fuse of the *khaneqa* to blow and one of the *dervish* boys ran to the kitchen to switch it back on. The fuse blew off several times before Ahmad, pale from the electrical assault, fell to the floor to rest for a while before rising again to chant and sway with the others.

To the right side of Kurosh another Qaderi had a large ugly-looking snake which he was threatening to swallow in one gulp. But two neighboring *dervishes* disappointed him by informing him that it was only a garden snake and not poisonous at all. Momentarily heartbroken, the bold *dervish* put the relieved snake back into the sack and basket to return to the now almost insane frenzy of a roomful of Qaderis hopping and hollering to a very fast wild drum beat. Then the atmosphere took a turn from its wild climax towards a less frantic wave of undulations until finally the whole meeting dwindled to a slow mumbling. Finally, everything diminished to an exhausted calm with one large Qaderi sobbing on the floor overcome by the spirit of the evening.

Later, after fond farewells, the three Americans were driving in serious silence back to spend their last evening at the Nimatullahi *khaneqa* before heading towards Tehran. The deep silence was broken by Shamseddin who questioned "well, where do we go next?" Kurosh answered "I guess we will visit my friends the Ahl-e Haq *dervishes* in Sahneh, a small village between Kermanshah and Hamadan." Selim ventured "I hear they eat hot coals." Kurosh explained "they used to, but not anymore; at least my group doesn't." Selim quipped "anyway, thanks for taking us to dinner" as the three giggled and Kurosh added "lucky we weren't really hungry."

Chapter 5

A Drop in the Ocean of Eternal Godliness

It wasn't necessary to drive all the way to Kurdistan to visit spiritual groups; Kurosh Ali usually attended Monday night meetings of a spiritual order where his music master, Dr. Safvat, was a main member. It was Monday and time for Kurosh to attend the weekly secret and sacred meetings at the *khaneqah* in north Tehran. This time Kurosh's Tehran Journal colleague Terry or Shamseddin asked if he could come along. Usually no one was allowed to attend the meetings unless personally invited by Doctor or his father the *Ostad* (spiritual master). Occasionally Kurosh brought highly spiritual friends, Iranian or foreign, to the meetings and was able to obtain permission by asking the Doctor before the meeting began. Doctor always praised Kurosh for his purity of heart and for bringing worthy individuals who were spiritually prepared to attend the sacred ceremonies.

Doctor smiled at Kurosh and queried "*In shakhsho mishnesid? Hazer e?*" Kurosh nodded affirmatively that he felt Shamseddin was ready then added that he was affiliated with another spiritual order and was translating mystic poetry. Doctor warmly greeted Shamseddin and began to explain that this group was not like any others. "Because of incorrect reports and practices associated with so-called Sufi groups" he clarified "we prefer not to be associated with terminology such as '*sufi*,' '*darvish*,' etc., and would rather be known just as a school of perfection of the soul. Also we ask that no names be mentioned in speaking of our group in case some incorrect conclusions might be drawn." He went on to say "we are Shi'a 12th Imam Moslems and believe that esoterism has existed from the time of Adam as an essential factor in the teachings of all the prophets. Our goal is neither fear of hell nor hope for paradise; but instead we aspire to avail ourselves of the world of perfection where one becomes a drop in the ocean of eternal Godliness. The practices you witness here in our meetings" he continued "are only representative of much deeper spiritual concepts. Our *zeker* is meant to rest the soul and music is used to bring one closer to the spiritual realm. You may someday write what you see here but please mention that they are your observations and may be partially incorrect or may not pertain to the real purpose of our School of Perfection."

Zeker at the School of Perfection of the Soul

They entered the *khaneqa* where Kurosh along with the members who had been attending the meetings for years donned their long white gowns and white sashes then, one by one, took their places, male members on the left side and females on the right. Worship service began with the *zeker*, a group song led by one of the main members of the order. This time it was Doctor who, accompanying himself on a three stringed *tambur* with the two high melody strings tuned in unison, sang lines of poetry mostly in praise of Ali which is one of the names of God equivalent to 'The Most High.' The group answered the leader with repeated lines chanted in unison or sometimes in accidental harmony of 5ths or 4ths. This accidental harmony occurred when Doctor switched from singing in unison with his *tambur* and sang the melody from the 4th or 5th above. Some of the group joined him producing the parallel 5th or 4th effect. Finally most of the group were singing in a new unison while the *tambur* played from the 5th or 4th below the vocal melody.

Official male members, all with moustaches, sat while unofficial members and guests stood behind them. One of the group in authority blessed a bowl of water and passed it to each member in the circle. Each drank and then passed the bowl on. Later a copper ewer and a larger bowl were passed around from

which water was poured into the right hand of each member who then sipped the water from their hands. Some washed their hands or faces similar to the *wuzu* or ritual cleansing before the food was passed out. Then came the repast which consisted of large slabs of bread accompanied by a blessing using Arabic, Persian and Kurdish religious phrases. The group chanted “*amin*” at the end of each line of prayer. The portions of bread were passed to all the men in the room and a few more blessings pronounced. Then the men took their portions and filed quietly into the larger room where the female members of the group were. The women remained at the right of the room and the men took their places at the left. Some honored members or guests sat nearest the cushion against the wall reserved for the *Ostad*. Most were clad in long white floor length gowns that start from a Chinese collar and continue to the wrists and ankles. A white sash or cloth belt was tied around the waist which, in some cases, was merely a string symbolic of readiness to serve.

After the group was seated, they ate their portions of bread quietly talking and meditating. About the time they had finished eating, the *Ostad*, who hadn’t been present at the first part of the evening, arrived and all stood in respect. The *Ostad*, a kindly elderly man with a loving understanding face which radiated spiritual power, passed by as some members kissed his hand or shoulders. Some very faithful members tried to kiss his feet, reminiscent of the days of Jesus and ancient patriarchs, but he restrained them whenever possible admonishing “*pa machi dust nadaram* (I don’t like foot kissing).”

Message of Ostad (master) Elahi

The *Ostad* then sat at his place of honor against the wall far from the door and the members also sat, quietly waiting for him to direct the events of the evening. He smiled, glancing amongst the members and tacitly greeting friends and guests. He then called for his *tambur* on which he began to strum a powerful rhythmic refrain that nearly forced everyone to sway from side to side in time to the beat. The group soon became so involved in the music that they were all swaying to the rhythm or turning their heads from right to left, some chanting “*hu! haq!*” The long locks of the women members flew when they tossed their heads from side to side as spiritual emotion soon filled the room. The *Ostad* played as the members swayed until a *hal*, or state of ecstatic trance, was reached. Then he quietly set his *tambur* aside and, as the tension subsided, he uttered “*ya Mollah*” then “*ya Haq*” as the room quieted to silence in preparation for a religious discourse.

The *Ostad* chose to speak on the story of Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden and how they were tempted by Iblis (Satan) and thereafter driven out by Allah. He reiterated how Iblis would not submit to Adam and was cast from Allah’s presence and told to tempt the sons of Adam. After the discourse, members of the group asked questions and discussed points of doctrine with the *Ostad* whose wisdom seemed to be inexhaustible. Next some members asked personal questions either out loud or by approaching the *Ostad* quietly on their knees and whispering in his ear. He often answered the questions with a short sermon which was directed to the particular member but also useful to the whole group. The meeting ended with a closing prayer sung by one of the members accompanied by Dr. Safvat on *setar*.

At the end of the evening, the *Ostad* rose and all the members with him. As he passed, some of the members kissed his hand or his shoulder in respect. After the meeting, the *Ostad* continued discussions upstairs with some of the more devoted members who had questions about the sermon or particular points of doctrine. The rest of the members filed out into the hallway and doffed their white gowns, slipped into their shoes and, after exchanging farewells, left for their homes until the next Monday meeting. After fond farewells to friends and colleagues, Kurosh’s attention was directed to his music teacher Dr. Safvat who motioned to him to come up the steps to the elevated porch in front of the *Ostad*’s private living room.

Kurosh again removed his shoes and was guided in the door by Safvat to join an exclusive group gathered around the *Ostad*. After a few minutes of intimate conversations on religious concepts, Kurosh returned to Shamseddin in the courtyard.

Standing near the front gate of the closed compound, Kurosh shared some information on the background of the group with Shamseddin. He told how the group was founded some 700 years ago by Sultan Ishaq who later migrated to Turkey and continued spreading his message under the name Haji Bektash. The order is a branch of Jafari Shi'ism and their members formerly stretched from Baghdad up into the Caucasus and down to India. Kurosh explained that formal membership is not vital since they feel that those who are enlightened are automatically in touch. Initiation is possible by a member entrusting himself to the protection of Saint Benjamin, one of Sultan Ishaq's disciples, a type and shadow of the angel Gabriel. Otherwise they don't emphasize, prefer or disregard any particular organized religion as demonstrated in an incident when the *Ostad* visited a synagogue and explained to the surprised Jews there that he had enjoyed the meeting. Affiliates of the *khaneqah* are mostly Shi'a; but a participant could be Sunni, Jewish, Catholic or Mormon since the group is not really a religion but instead a spiritual school and esoteric path. The *Ostad's* niece happened to be living in Utah and was a convert to Mormonism which shares many concepts and practices with Islam.

After the Zekr

Kurosh and Shamseddin walked from the compound into the noisy street towards the car. Shamseddin asked "how much importance does their type of sacrament have?" Kurosh explained "they consider food that has been blessed by an authority as *murad* and it must be respected. Peelings of blessed fruit must not be thrown on the ground, in a ditch or garbage can. If the *Ostad* puffs on a small candy, it becomes blessed and can even cure illness, they believe." Shamseddin gazed contemplatively as he climbed into the VW Variant then asked "I heard that this group could be classified as *Ahl-e Haq* Sufis. I realize that Doctor doesn't agree with the name Sufi or *Ahl-e Haq*, but aren't they related to other *darvish* groups in Kurdistan which are classified as *Ahl-e Haq*? And didn't some *Ahl-e Haq* orders eat hot coals?" Kurosh admitted "yes, that's partly right" as he drove out of the narrow *kuche* towards the stream of traffic going down Pahlevi Avenue. "But long ago Doctor's father forbade such practices. Even so, one of the members of this group witnessed an amazing feat. He was visiting an *Ahl-e Haq* group in a Kurdish village near Kermanshah where a European guest was present. When everyone was sufficiently entranced, a tray of yellow hot coals was brought to the center and the *darvishes* began scooping up the coals and swallowing them like toasted marshmallows. Then to everyone's amazement, the European guest joined the coal eating binge and remained absolutely unharmed thus proving that anyone in the proper state of spiritual ecstasy can accomplish miraculous feats." Shamseddin stared in contemplation for a few moments then said "let's get back to the present; I heard there is a good play about the suffering of Job at the Iran-America Society put on by one of the members of *Ostad's khaneqah*. I am reviewing it for the Tehran Journal; why don't you join me? It's only a few more blocks down the hill." Kurosh agreed "sure, how about a snack of hot coals at the restaurant before it starts?"

Chapter 6

Daring Desert Drive on a Rugged Road from Kerman to Shiraz

The three American friends (Kurosh, Shamseddin and Selim) often traveled to various areas of

Iran in search of Sufi orders and shrines. One such trip was a visit to the Nimutallahi headquarters in Kerman and then across a rough and rugged road to Shiraz.

The evening that Kurosh, Selim and Shamseddin left Kerman for Shiraz, the placidity of the clear desert air held no hint of the events that were in store the following three days. A smooth asphalt road quickly brought them to Shirjan where they arrived late necessitating hunting down a hotel. Since there was only one *mehman-sarai* in town, the choices were rather limited. Kurosh was elected to climb the creaky stairway with the young man who posed as manager to see the one remaining 'room.' Clustered crowds of village families filled the floors of all the larger rooms; so the one room left was a windowless closet-size hovel with no furniture other than two saggy beds. The manager said he would bring a mat for Kurosh to fill the tiny space between the beds which was the point when Kurosh decided he was going to fold down the back seat of the good old Variant, roll out his mattress and quilt and let the others enjoy the 'comforts' of a 'room.' Kurosh bargained the manager down to eight *toman* with a portable kerosene stove or *bokhari* thrown in. Bidding them goodnight, Kurosh left his poor pals to play with the possible rats, cockroaches, fleas and bedbugs.

The following morning, they left the place which Selim so aptly christened as the 'filth pot hotel' and were off to find their fortune in the Iranian desert. They had been told at the last-chance gas pump to go to the asphalt then drive to Hajiabad which is what they did still unaware of the fate that was to befall them. Palm-leaved roofs on earthen homes, some with black tents attached, and palm orchards along the road reminded them that they were in the south as they rumbled along the rocky dirt road in a drizzling rain. Their first encounters with nature's nuances were occasional rivulets, which merrily meandered across the road with apparently no respect for the rights of motorists.

Water, Water Everywhere

They sportily splashed through the rivulets with a mind-over-matter determination even though some were a bit deep. But their haughty heads were soon bent down in humility when they decided to barrel through the Sharud River. They had seen a workman shoveling stones into the river ahead so they decided to push through as fast as possible. But alas, when they hit midstream, the back of the car sunk down as if in quicksand. Selim and Shamseddin jumped out, rolled up their pant legs and waded into the knee-high water where, along with the road worker, they heaved and hoed to no avail. Kurosh figured that was the end of their trip as he sloshed over to the small hut near the bank of the river where he found the driver of a large road crew truck having breakfast. Kurosh moaned that they were stuck in the middle of the river and maybe he could help pull them out. The driver smiled and darted out of the roadside hut to his truck as they attached a large cable to the bumper of the VW. The car had drifted a ways downstream and threatened to drift all the way to the ocean if they didn't hurry. With a little effort, the car was out of the river on the other side and they thanked the driver. While he checked the waterlogged motor, Kurosh asked Shamseddin to give the driver a few *toman* for his kindness, but he had already driven away. The road worker, when offered a few *toman*, cringed in bewilderment until Shamseddin finally forced one *toman* into his unwilling hand. This was the real Iran, the helpful hospitality, gracious goodwill and brotherly love that permeate a traditional people who love the Lord. As they drove away, Kurosh contemplated the graces of Allah for having spared them from watching their car disappear down the river.

As they sputtered off down the dirt road, they passed a camel herd lead by a small boy when the lead camel decided he wanted to race with the car. Kurosh had to really pump the pedal to pass him. The people of the area, Selim explained, were Semitic nomads who migrated there centuries ago. As they

approached the village of Faroq, two dark-tressed beautiful village maidens washing their clothes in a clean clear *jub* noticed them and, when Shamseddin boldly waved at them, they flashed back surprised but sweet smiles which remained etched in the memories of the three Americans. Palm orchards surrounded by earthen walls and the turquoise blue flat-sided dome of an *imamzade* also caught their eyes. The countryside was awe-inspiring; a crumbled down *karavan sarai* with black tents on the sides and fields of purple flowers broke through the valley mist. On the way off into the mountains, the stream that rambled down the road, at times, nearly got the upper hand. A thoughtful soldier waved them down and warned of bad road conditions describing the same things the three travelers had already been experiencing. As they continued on, they faced huge ruts full of water and washboard ripples that rattled them into near unconsciousness.

When they entered the village of Rostaq, a charming girl with jet-black hair and deep dark eyes wearing a collection of colorful petticoats, stared at the travelers in wonderment as they passed. A large whitewashed castle stood guard on the hill of the village. When a huge lake of water loomed up in the middle of the road, they plunged through it just barely making it to the other side. Finally they pulled into Darab, a village of reasonable size with the luxury of paved streets. The smooth ride after a day of ragged rumbling was like the relief at the end of a full day of deep drilling at the dentist's office. The weary voyagers drove to the center of town where a celebration was taking place. They noticed several almost blond blue-eyed girls in chadors indicating a potential ancient Aryan ancestry. After hunting around town, they found a *nunvai* where they bought a dozen slabs of bread to have on hand in case they got stuck a few days in another river.

Shiraz or Bust

They returned to the road and continued on towards Shiraz. Late in the evening, they ran into rougher weather, heavy rain and immense lakes in the road. They pushed on for hours of constantly splashing through ponds until a large stream lurked ahead. "Don't slow down, just ram through it" Selim and Shamseddin urged. Kurosh sped up and tore through as water oozed up around the motor, which died half way through the stream. Fortunately, they had enough momentum to carry the poor old VW to dry land on the other side where the car rumbled to a dead halt. They got out in the pouring rain to see what was wrong then decided to sit in the car and shiver until the motor dried out a bit. After huddling for a miserable sopping cold hour, Kurosh tried to start the car. With a hearty "*ya Ali*," the engine miraculously coughed, wheezed and finally kicked over; but somehow it had lost its power and never regained it.

After fording a few more large ponds, the engine died again. As Kurosh tried to restart it, Selim got out and then hollered "smoke is pouring out!" Kurosh jumped out, pulled up the hatchback and uncovered the motor to see furious flames leaping about. The three huffed and puffed until the last flame was extinguished from around the gas line which had melted into a blob of rubber. The plastic fuel pump cover was also a molten mass, hinting that the pump itself might have been damaged. Kurosh discouragedly stared at his friends and declared that this time it might really be the end of the line as they glared back in disbelief standing in the desolate darkness soaked by sheets of rain. Then Kurosh remembered the last time his fuel line had a problem in Herat, he had picked up an old rubber tube which, although too large and prone to leakage, might get them to Shiraz. The three unloaded all their belongings from the back seat of the car and Kurosh dug out the rubber tube under the seat. The rubber tube was installed and, to everyone's utter amazement, the motor started. They reloaded their soaked possessions on the back seat and sputtered off passing another small village.

But then they encountered a monstrous lake in the road. Selim jumped out to check the water depth as they were hailed by a jeep driver from the other side of the water who yelled in Persian “two trucks have sunk in a pond up the way and the road is closed.” He advised they return to the village and stay at the *qavekhane* (coffeehouse). So the three discouraged wanderers returned to the last village but couldn’t find any *qavekhane*; instead they found a schoolhouse. Kurosh suggested that Shamseddin go in and see if he and Selim could talk them into letting the two stay the night. They returned with a couple of young fellows, one of whom declared that he was a teacher and was ready to put the two up for the night. Kurosh bid his friends goodnight and drew his damp cotton Herati quilt over him for a long wet cold sleep in the VW. At dawn Selim and Shamseddin returned to the car accompanied by friendly villagers. The teacher stated that they hadn’t had rain like that for years and they were grateful for the deluge. After polite farewells, the three travelers continued off down the road again to face the monstrous pond where the two trucks were sunk. They decided to blaze their own trail around the pond just barely squeezing past the trucks near the shore.

As they continued upward into the mountains, there was gradual transition into snow as they again fought various wild streams cutting through the winding muddy road. The constant smell of gas fumes convinced Kurosh that they should stop and check the motor. Sure enough, the makeshift rubber hose was spraying gasoline all over the hot engine. So Kurosh tied the ends of the tube tightly with string and wire then asked Shamseddin to ride in the back keeping an eye out for danger signs from the engine. They bumped off over the puddle-infested road until Shamseddin suddenly screamed “fire! fire!” Everyone jumped out to fight the flames. After finally putting the fire out, the three trudged over to the nearby *jub* where they filled every container they had in case of future conflagrations. After retightening the gas line, the motor somehow started and they drove off in tense silence with Shamseddin carefully watching for more fires. Selim insightfully declared “everyone has jeeps but us.”

At Sarvestan they were relieved to find some blacktop; but after Akbar, the wretched rock road returned. They passed a village where a group of ladies were working on their laundry in the rain. An enchanting village girl in full folk wear was sauntering along the road with a cute little goat at her heels, paying no attention to the torrents of rain. The trio pressed on after suffering over two days of strenuous hardship; then Shamseddin shouted out over the roar of the engine “the gas leak is really bad.” They stopped and Kurosh checked it out, cut a short piece of the original rubber hose and inserted it into the swollen replacement tube and, of course, cut his finger in the process not to mention getting a bloody bump on the head from banging into the corner of the door. After the last repair, the motor became nearly powerless; but the car sputtered onward. At a turn in the road, a bus pulled over and the sympathetic driver motioned for them to stop. He shouted in Persian that they should take the short route over the mountains to the asphalt. Kurosh called back that they didn’t have enough power to climb. The driver said to follow him over the 30 Ks of mud and muck to the other asphalt. But after a ways, alas, the three dreary travelers hit one formidable deep pool, which washed up into the motor and this time killed it dead for good. After an hour of intermittently trying to start it, they were ready to give up when a jeep putted up and the driver asked what was wrong. Kurosh told the friendly fellow “*ba’d az se ruz-e baran o gel, motor kamelan koshte shode* (after three days of rain and mud the motor has been completely killed).” The driver smiled and said “*eib nadare, man be Shiraz mikeshametun.*” Kurosh swallowed his pride to meekly and gratefully accept the offer of a tow to Shiraz rather than be stuck in the desert.

Shiraz, Finally

It was late Thursday afternoon when they finally made it to Shiraz, but the first two VW garages they passed were closed. Adding to the problems, the windshield had partly rattled loose from the bumpy roads causing an incessant dribbling water leak which soaked Kurosh's already sopped knees. Finally, they came upon the Apadana Garage where a kind mechanic was ready to help. Kurosh forced 40 *toman* on the reluctant jeep driver and gave him a thankful hug. The mechanic worked for a couple of hours and eventually got the car running for a modest fee. The three spent three days visiting the religious shrines in Shiraz like Haft Tan Darvish (seven dervishes) and attending Sufi meetings before deciding to return to Tehran. When they got to the Quran Gate on the way out of town, the car refused to climb further and ground to a halt. They turned back and sputtered down to two different garages where various mechanics tried everything to get the car running well. From a sudden inspiration, Kurosh suggested that the carburetor might be clogged. Sure enough, after taking off the carburetor, the mechanic found a big clump of mud and some drops of water which was remedied in about an hour and the trio was quoted 25 *toman* for the repair. It was a reasonable fee; but they had barely enough to get to Tehran, so the faces of all three sunk in despair. When the mechanic realized how destitute they were, he tried to give them back all their money. But, after a friendly argument, they forced 16 *toman* into his hand then, after warm expressions of deep gratitude, they left to fight icy roads back to Tehran.

When Kurosh was comfortable back in his apartment on Ansarie Street in Amirabad, he was so thankful for a safe return, that he built a small pyramid-shaped stone altar across the street in the dirt near the Amirabad Prison wall following the custom to thank Allah for a safe return. How many dangerous trips had Allah brought him back from; every one more unbelievable than the last.

Boarding the Plane

Kurosh's meditative observations were abruptly broken by an exuberant Iranian girl in the light blue of Pan Am darting from one row of chairs to another calling out "Pan American passengers!" Kurosh slowly got up as half the people in the transit lounge rose to their feet as if on resurrection day. The Pan Am girl worriedly gazed at each group of passengers exclaiming "Pan Am flight 001 to Frankfurt, London and New York is ready for boarding at gate four!"

Kurosh and the others trudged towards the security check where their hand luggage was carefully searched by friendly guards after which they were frisked from head to foot in preparation for boarding. Kurosh Ali went through the checkpoint smiling and chatting with guards in fluent Persian then meandered into the boarding hall to await the long Iran Air bus into which passengers would be sardined and whisked off to the 747 jumbo jet. On the bus, Kurosh Ali gazed out the window at the Alborz Mountains and the typically smoggy sky for what, as far as he knew, might be the last time. He was leaving the city he had called his only real home for over seven years in the country where he had planned to live the rest of his life and where he had hoped to be buried. Despite the traffic terror, the housing horror, a little minor lying, cheating and trickery, Kurosh had learned to love Iran even if for the last three years he had been forced to live in his car due to the lack of any other available living quarters at under \$1,000 a month. He looked down at the floor resting his head on his hand to hide the tears welling up in his eyes as the bus bounced on.

Before he could really loose control of his emotions, the bus ground to a halt at the bottom of the steps up to the 747. He jerked his overloaded dolly off the bus and struggled to get his large leather bag

over his shoulder. He folded up the dolly and lifted off his other big handbag full of kinescopes of some of his most brilliant TV shows. At the top of the steps, he was greeted by a cheerful Pan Am stewardess who smiled and said “welcome aboard; seat number?” After several dozen flights between the Middle East and America or Europe on Pan Am, Kurosh knew exactly where 44 A was. He assured “I’ll find it” and began the acrobatic antics of trying to squeeze his over-stuffed huge hand luggage down the aisles to his seat. After carefully tucking his handbags in the overhead compartments, he eased into his window seat. Again he stared through the glass at his former home. As he began to contemplate more of the many events which had transpired during the seven hard but happy years in Tehran, he felt a caring hand gently touch his shoulder. He turned to see an attractive stewardess scoldingly survey his unfastened seat belt. “Oh sorry” he exclaimed fastening the belt as the stewardess dreamily floated on down the aisle.

Kurosh drifted back into his memories as the plane began to taxi down the runway. He remembered with an occasional smile or tear his many wanderings all over the Middle East from India to Lebanon and back, by air, by car, by bus or train. He always mingled with the local population in every country, speaking their languages as well as he could, wearing their clothes, playing their music and praying in their mosques or joining Sufi gatherings. He violently resented being thought of as a tourist or Yankee ‘spy’ and he had done very well to cover up his foreign identity during his travels in order to blend in with the people and to become one of them as much as possible. It was Kurosh’s skill at blending in which molded him into one of the foremost Middle East scholars, or maybe more correctly ‘adoptees,’ unknown, unappreciated and often resented by both Americans and Middle Easterners for having successfully traversed and even erased the chasm between East and West. As for the continual accusation of being a spy, once after a reception at the U. S. Embassy, Ambassador Helms and his friendly wife were bidding farewell to Kurosh and Terry Graham. Kurosh teased the ambassador “hey, where is my paycheck!” Helms scowled “what paycheck?” Kurosh smiled “for spying, of course,” to which Helms scolded “you’re not a spy!” Kurosh pleaded “then tell all the Iranians because they are positive I am.” Mrs. Helms chuckled a little; but the ambassador remained unamused maintaining his typical grim glare.

Chapter 7

Managing a Major Hotel in Herat

As the plane rose higher, Kurosh gazed one last time at the mountains eastward thinking about his last wonderful trip to Herat returning through Mashhad where he reviewed the Festival of Tus and later that year when he was a guest one last time at the Shiraz Arts Festival.

As he drove past the mysterious minarets with their sky-blue tiles, most of which had long fallen off into the surrounding dust, Kurosh felt that familiar feeling of peace and excitement. Now he was in Herat to stay a whole month instead of rushing around for a day or two of shopping. He had brought along a few liter bottles and a large plastic jug full of pure water from the mountain spring near Amol as well as a few raw food pastries and goodies from Hovanessian’s raw food restaurant in Tehran; so he hoped not to starve. No matter how much Kurosh loved Afghanistan and his favorite town Herat, he could never even imagine eating any vegetable washed in those ditches full of sewage.

As his old VW Variant bumped along the dusty road past the quaint little shops on the way into town, he felt more at home than ever. Now he had finally found an Afghan fiancée from one of the best families in the country related to a former Shah and he had also been honored as a government guest

scholar at the Ansari Millennial Conference in Herat not long before. So this visit was more of a meaningful pilgrimage and self-discovery venture than a visa trip or shopping spree. This time he wanted to do something for the people of the town he loved so much. He wanted to serve in some way, to do his little part to raise his voice against the monstrosity of modernization, the lethal cancer of westernization, which threatened to destroy this one last bastion of tradition and culture.

He slowly drove down the main street towards the Mowafaq Hotel passing the colorfully tasseled prancing horses that were pulling intricately decorated two-wheeled horse carts with a musical jingling of bells accompanying the calming clop of trotting hooves. Kurosh remembered the good old days when he first visited Herat and was totally amazed and mystified by the treasure of tradition and lack of the curse of westernization. There was hardly a car then except for occasional tourist vehicles and all transportation was by the enchantingly soothing *gadi* or horse cart. Kurosh still dreamed of the day he might be able to buy a horse cart and drive it all the way to some seaport and, after selling the trusty steed, put it on a boat for the US. But that was an unlikely fantasy. As he neared the hotel, his heart thumped vigorously with the excitement of being back where almost everything was like a dream of past cultural glories from former empires. He stepped out of the car and drew in the fresh village air laden with the sweet scent of wood fires. Street merchants accosted him in an enthusiastic effort to sell their colorful Turkman and Baluchi carpets. Kurosh politely declined even though he wished he had the funds to afford such luxuries.

“*Sallam Mualem saib*” greeted a kindly old man with a long white beard, the accountant for the hotel. As the old man, a portrait of the glorious past of ancient Khorasan, continued on his way out the hotel door, he muttered “*Khair Jan balas* (Khair Jan is upstairs).” Khair Jan, the hotel proprietor, had promised Kurosh Ali that he could come and manage the hotel any time and receive a free room with meals for his work. This was a very fair exchange for Kurosh since the 250 Afs a day he would have to pay for a good room and another 100 Afs for tangerines and bread would break him after a week. This time he decided to stay out his one-month visa in Herat and fully absorb the culture.

Hotel Proprietor Khair Jan

Kurosh had first met Khair Jan on a weird wild visa trip a few years before. One mid-winter night when he was just about ready to go to sleep in his apartment in Tehran, he was glancing through his passport checking the riot of colorful visas when he noticed his Iranian visa was to expire the next day. He panicked, immediately grabbed his trusty 5-gallon water jug and a few other necessities, dressed as warmly as possible and jumped into the car to drive the long slippery ice-ridden road to Mashhad and an even snowier more frightening drive all the way to Tayebad.

When he finally made it to Tayebad after almost sliding to his death several times, it was nearly midnight and the Tayebad border station was all but closed. His poor old VW crunched up to the border station on the jagged ice where the guard curiously slid the window open declaring “*Kurosh Ali Khan, dar in sa’at-e dir o dar in barf o yakh che kar mikoni?*” Kurosh was almost too embarrassed to admit that what he was doing there so late in the snow and ice was getting out of the country before his visa was to run out. His friend scolded Kurosh, not for almost missing his visa deadline, but for being so crazy and driving so far in such bad weather. His friend admonished “*fardo yo pas fardo miamedi; ma qabulet darim dige.*” Kurosh knew that they might let him slide a couple of days, but he wanted to be correct and obey all the rules exactly if possible. Kurosh was invited to come in and wait till morning when his friend Mr. Hosseini and the other officials who had gone to bed in town would be

back to check him through. Kurosh thankfully declined the hospitality noting that he had his worn but trusty sleeping bag, quilt and blanket and was all set to sleep right there until morning.

When morning came and all his friends quickly cleared him through, the car crunched on over to the Islam Qala border station on the Afghan side where his other friends checked him through and off he slid to Herat where he rumbled into town cold and freezing. He was so tired he just parked somewhere and fell asleep. After a while, there was a knock on his car window and Khair Jan, a wiry former weight-lifter from Kabul, shouted in English “hey come into this teahouse and get warm!” Kurosh obeyed and an immediate friendship was forged. Khair Jan said that someday he would open a big hotel and Kurosh could stay there for free on a future trip. So now, after a few trips and short stays at the nice clean Mowafaq Hotel that Khair Jan finally did build, Kurosh was ready to really settle in and get a complete inside survey of Herat and its arts.

After entering the hotel doorway, Kurosh respectfully greeted the night manager and the room service boys by humbly bowing with his hand over his heart then enthusiastically extending both hands to clasp those of his old acquaintances. Again he was informed that Khair Jan was in his room upstairs. So Kurosh proceeded up the carpeted steps past the restaurant where the grim but friendly Jallalabadi cashier was lounging with his knees tucked up under his chin on a seemingly rickety chair. “*Sallam, Mualllem Saib, kai amadi*” he called out in his heavy Pashtu accent. Kurosh answered “*aminali*” noting that he had just arrived then ask “*tsengei* (how are you)” in Pashtu, as he continued up the stairs to the second floor and Khair Jan’s room.

His knock was answered with Khair’s queried “*ki as?*” to which Kurosh responded “*man am, Kurosh Khan az Tehran.*” The door swung open and Khair Jan jumped up, kissed him on both cheeks then pulled him into the room and sat him down on a long floor cushion at the place of honor farthest from the door. After long exchanges of traditional greetings and welcomes, Khair got down to business. “*I dafa yak mah memani!*” he declared emphatically. “*A saib*” Kurosh agreed explaining that he had long been planning this chance to stay a full month in his favorite town. Then Khair jumped to open the door and call for the room boy to bring a sumptuous meal and to arrange one of the best rooms for his distinguished guest. Kurosh was always in the delicate position of having to *ta’arof* his way out of eating anything but bread, onions and a few spoonfulls of rice. His vegetarian diet was never understood in Afghanistan; so it required the most skillful eloquence not to offend his hosts. He relied on such statements as “I am not worthy of more than bread and onions” or “bread and onions was the food of the former great conqueror Mir Wais.” He would then smother his host with compliments so stunning that the matter of food was soon forgotten. As always, Kurosh was able to talk his way out of eating any of the intricately prepared meat or yogurt dishes and he barely conceded to a few cooked beans and carrots so as not to offend his old friend.

As the two friends waited for the food, they discussed many subjects. Kurosh asked Khair if he liked the Ansari Millennial festival during which the international scholars stayed at Khair’s hotel. Khair thanked Kurosh for having told him about it before the event took place so he could work it out that his hotel was the center of activities. Now Kurosh was no longer an honored guest of the state as he had been a few weeks prior, but the fact that he had been at the side of the *wali* (governor) of Herat province and in the company of other respected local and national figures during the seminar gave him an aura of dignity he had not previously enjoyed when he visited Herat on so many visa visits and buying sprees during which he blended in with the local populace in order to get correct, not tourist, prices and to tap the pulse of local culture.

After the meal, the two relaxed against the walls of the small room for a moment then Kurosh reached into his leather shoulder bag and pulled out the result of his smuggling, a half-gallon of U.S. commissary

whisky obtained from a military adviser friend back in Tehran. Although Kurosh's Mormon background and Sufi Islamic fervor pinched him with a pang of guilt for such improprieties, the financial strain which always hung over him in a dark cloud made it necessary to occasionally smuggle a bottle of less harmful liquor into Herat so he could buy those craft items which would eventually all but disappear from the face of the earth due to pestilence of modernization and materialistic globalization of the whole world. To collect and thus save the last vestiges of beauty left in this one corner of the globe, Kurosh would sink to the level of bringing an item which was nearly as big a curse as communism or capitalism. He attempted to justify the situation in his mind by rationalizing that he was saving his Herati friends, the ones who were unfortunately habituated to alcohol, from having to be possibly poisoned by the cheap home-made rot-gut junk that was floating around town that could even blind its victims.

"*Nem galun awordi*" Khair Jan exclaimed in surprise adding "*chandas?*" Kurosh ventured that such large quantity of the best American whisky should be worth 3,000 Afghanis; but since Khair was a buddy, 2,000 would do. Khair reached into his vest pocket and pulled out two gray 1,000 Afghani notes and a blue 500 as Kurosh vigorously protested that it was too much, even though he knew that was the fair market price in Herat. He was countered with "*khair a, skoma 'amkar asti*" After two more futile attempts to return the 500 note, he acquiesced to the concept that he was indeed a 'colleague' now at the hotel and he could pay Khair Jan back by shaping up the hotel so that it would feel like home to young tourists from Europe and America. With his knowledge of many of the typical languages of the Western world and several Eastern ones as well, Kurosh was sure to be an asset to Khair Jan in attracting guests to the newest and cleanest hotel in the province.

Enjoying the Mowafaq Hotel

Soon Kurosh was invited to his room where the small *bokhari* or wood-burning stove was crackling cheerfully in the corner. He locked his shoulder bag in the room and went down to his dusty car to heft his beat-up suitcase out from under the front hood of the Variant. The hotel boy and a couple of other young fellows on the street tried to assist him. But Kurosh had developed a keen skill for side-stepping any favors which might incur a cost no matter how insignificant. Also he always did his own work as much as possible because he didn't believe in others doing things for him unless it was some tricky auto or electronic repairs that he couldn't manage.

As Kurosh lugged his suitcase up the stairs, two suspicious ex-convict looking stocky Russians in lumpy suits were quietly conversing as they slowly made their way down from step to step. As they shot an uneasy glare at the tall American, Kurosh smiled back at them and blurted "*zdravityi tavarishchi, kak diela?*" The surprised comrades mustered up a semi-sneer and muttered "*kharaoho*" then sped up their pace down the steps casting an occasional suspicious askance glance at Kurosh. "The worst thing about these commies is their grumpyness and lack of any apparent sense of humor" Kurosh thought to himself. "Heaven forbid that they ever try to take over Afghanistan. It would be better for the Shah of Iran to re-annex Afghanistan before anything like that could ever happen" he mused. "But then if the Shah goes, there goes the Middle East, at least as a playground for Western puppeteers. Maybe the *mullahs* in Qom should take over the whole area, then at least the evils of globalization and modernization with junk 'music,' junk 'dance,' junk 'culture' and 'freedom' to be immoral and obscene to excess might be slowed down a tad."

He reached his room and, after fumbling with his key, which always got stuck, he opened the door, plunked his suitcase down and sighed in relief "well, I made it again" thinking back over the harrowing drive over mountains and desert from Tehran. It was about his 25th trip from Tehran to Afghanistan by

various means including car, train to Mahshhad then bus, plane to Kabul and the first trip in Jean During's car when almost no other cars could be seen in Herat. He still had not done the trip by camel caravan or by horse cart, a dream that never came true. He was reminded of his friend Jean During's story of driving into Herat years ago, the only car on the street. Then, in the quiet conflagration of the crimson gold rays of dusk, two young Afghan gentlemen in flowing white clothes poised on magnificent steeds passed him racing down the main street. Kurosh had also witnessed several times in the late evening, from the window of his second floor room at the Behzad Hotel, the ruckus racket of wild drag races between horse cart drivers. It was like the occasional hot-rod drags he used to catch a glimpse of from the upstairs window of his grandpa's house on the main street of Rexburg, Idaho in his pre-high school days.

Kurosh unpacked a new set of clothes and peeled off his dust and grease-ridden pants, his shirt and partly torn suit coat for his first full shower in weeks. Living in his car did not offer many opportunities to do anything but occasionally sponge off when he could. So he was overjoyed to really wash up even in a tiny shower that sputtered weird spray patterns, either too hot or too freezing, and on a cement floor that was clammy and cold. Of course, the attendant forgot to leave a towel; so he was obliged to dry off on his dirty clothes. He mused back over the years to when he lived in the Chateau Apartments in Salt Lake City and could enjoy a nice steaming shower twice a day if he wanted. But Kurosh was happy to sacrifice the physical comforts to be in one of the cultural centers of the world rather than lounge in luxury in the US that Kurosh felt was a cultural wasteland drowning in the flood of materialism, rampant immorality and heartless indifference.

Kurosh drew up his huge flowing *tumban* (trousers) and tied the drawstring then slipped into his intricately embroidered *kemiz* (shirt) and *vaskot* (simple vest) before wrapping a long white *lungi* (turban) around a glimmering beaded *arakchin* (cap). Now he felt like a real human being, a real man. Once dressed, with his turban tail elegantly flowing, he strolled down the hallway towards the stairs leading to the dining room. He tossed the end of his turquoise blue embroidered shawl back over his right shoulder from where it had slid as he approached the dining room door. Hotel employees shot admiring smiles at him in his full Afghan attire; but Kurosh acted as if wearing such a wardrobe was the most natural thing in the world. He felt that these were the type of clothes God intended for man rather than the drab unisex machine-age motley with those ghastly ugly jeans foisted on unwitting victims by globalization and its author the Devil. Kurosh endeavored to be an example of the conviction that traditional apparel is always better however and whenever he could.

He wandered into the dining room and took a seat near a window looking out over the peaceful activities of the village, a scene that traversed centuries to a distant past. Groups of two or four friends in national dress, then an old man with a dusty turban and a patriarchal white wavy beard urging along a donkey laden with a pair of straw bags over-filled with pomegranates. Coming the other way was a group of Hazara youngsters pulling and pushing a cart piled high with *ezom* or firewood. A little girl in a tattered but lovely embroidered dress was leading a small group of sheep. Horse carts jingled along the dusty street to and from the mosque which glimmered with its turquoise and lapis blue tiles in the dusk. The tranquil splendor was only occasionally broken by an ugly army jeep or the car of a European tourist. "If only the whole world could return to the ecologically sane, non energy-consuming society of the past; then we could just peacefully blend into nature, eternity and the millennium" Kurosh thought.

Kurosh was jolted from his paradisiacal daydreaming by the waiter who beamed "*wa, wa Muallem Saib, kai amadi?*" Kurosh returned the greeting with "*salam saib, khub asti, jur asti, teyar asti?*" He chatted for a moment before ordering the usual: bread, onions and a few cooked vegetables. As always he had to emphasize that the vegetables could not be cooked with meat or in animal oil. Although he was always promised that they weren't, he was never sure. Kurosh loved almost everything about Afghanistan

except the meat-heavy diet and the sanitation (or lack of it). But the healthy whole-grain flat-bread fresh from the *nanwa* (baker) perfumed with the natural smell of whole wheat and fragrant firewood was always a treat. And although every ditch, rivulet or pond of water was mixed with sewage, most everything else in Herat was great. In Zoroastrian times, religious tradition prohibited contaminating water, a concept Kurosh wished had continued. Soon a plate of steaming cooked carrots, beans and potatoes was set in front of Kurosh by the smiling Ozbaki waiter whose squinted dancing eyes expressed the hope that ‘Muallem Saib’ would enjoy his meal. A moment later, four slices of flat-bread were brought along with a bottle of boiled water. Kurosh suspiciously eyed the water as the waiter insistently assured “*bali, Muallem Saib, baid as, az chah-a otal as.*” Whether it was from the hotel’s well and boiled a hundred times or not, Kurosh wouldn’t chance anything but water from a safe mountain spring. He dug into his shoulder bag and fished out a bottle of Amolo spring water from northern Iran and pried the cap off with one of those typically dull butter knives.

As he ate, contemplating the spectacular splendor of the millennia-old culture resurrected before him in the red-orange rays of dusk, he wished that the whole world had remained unscarred by the industrial revolution, the red revolution, the sexual revolution, the white revolution in Iran and, worst of all, the greedy capitalist globalist conspiracy of the West. According to Kurosh, there are only a handful of places left in the world that are worth visiting, one was Herat and another Gilgit in the mountains of Kashmir. Places where the curse of cars, the trash of television, the atrocity of advertising, the mental mutilation of Marxism, the fraud of feminism and the curse of capitalism hadn’t made their ignoble incursion into the peaceful life of past cultures.

The evening air laden with a light layer of dust from the earthen streets and alleyways reflected the fading rays of the sun in a magic mirage of golden glory. Kurosh quickly finished his meal and called the waiter to pay his bill of what amounted to 30 cents. The waiter refused money affirming that Khair Jan insisted that Kurosh could eat anytime he wanted free of charge since he was now the manager. Kurosh thanked his Ozbaki colleague and excitedly made his way down the stairs to the lobby where three Afghans, who remembered him from former visits, stood from their chairs and, covering their hearts with their right hands and slightly bowing, offered respectful greetings of “*sallam Muallem Saib, b’khair amadi.*” Kurosh returned the greeting also covering his heart with his right hand from which his string of yellow *shahmaqsud* prayer beads dangled. Bowing a few more times as he backed out the door, he apologized for having to hurry before the shops closed. As he backed through the hotel door, he brushed by a French hippy accompanied by a female companion who blurted out “*pardon messieur*” to which Kurosh responded “*ça fais rien, mes amis, ç’ettait ma faute* (no problem my friends, it was my fault.)”

The Joy of Jingling Horsecarts

He quickly moved out into the glorious refreshing cool air to see the last glow of the crimson sunset paint its hue on the blue tiles of the mosque. The scent of firewood and various spices from the tiny shops permeated the air along with the cheerful chatting of local natives. A *gadi* rolled past with the musical clapping of the horse’s hooves and jingling of many bells adding to the enchantment of what always seemed to be more of a dream than reality. Afghanistan was the dream world that Kurosh had sought from his youth never knowing exactly what he was looking for and where to find it. The *gadi* driver clanged his loud warning bell, much more pleasant than the deafening harshness of truck horns all too often over-abused. As he drove past, the *gadi* driver, noticing Kurosh, pulled his cart to a halt a few meters ahead and smiled “*Muallem Saib, baz amadi Erat* (professor, you’re back in Herat)?”

Kurosh quickened his pace and, climbing up the step onto the cart, he seated himself next to the driver, an act that showed he wasn't going to follow the tradition of customers riding in the back. Even the supposedly democratic Russians sat in the back so as not to be near the driver who was looked down on in Afghanistan as were all persons in service professions of any kind. Also it balanced the cart to have customers sitting in the back. Kurosh surprised the driver by warmly clutching his wrist with both hands and beaming "*sallam saib, khub asti, khair asti, cha al dari?*"

Kurosh settled in his seat adding "*berim chakar!*" The old white-bearded driver chuckled with a twinkle in his clear dark eyes "*kho, kuja?*" Kurosh didn't care where, just a ride around his favorite town in his favorite mode of transportation was a joy. "*Shahr-a Naw, Shahr-a kohna, ar ja ka gadiwan mega* (new town, old town, wherever the *gadi* driver says)" he recited in a poetic rhythm and rhyme surprising the old man who laughed then rose slightly from his seat to urge his sturdy steed into a fast trot with a harmless whack of a frayed leather whip attached to a wooden stick.

As the horse cart jingled past the many small shops of Qiasi Street on the way to the mosque, Kurosh thought back over his many visits to Herat. A little girl, nearly old enough to be attractive, cast an almost romantic gaze into Kurosh's eyes, then shyly and prankishly stuck out her tongue and scampered away laughing. As Kurosh watched the leather shops drift by on his right, he was often greeted with a smile, a wave or a bow by the artisans from whom he had bought craft goods on various visits. Half way to the mosque, the leather shops flowed into trinket, scarf and antique stores.

They clopped along past the antique store of Herat's most interesting traditional two-stringed *dutar* master Abdal Ghafur and Kurosh peered into the doorway to see if his old friend was there. Abdal, seeing Kurosh, rushed out and motioned to him to stop in. As they rode by, Kurosh called out "*pasan meyom*" to which the cheerful old shop-keeper smiled back the hope that Kurosh really would stop in later to hear a private concert, talk about music and culture and maybe buy something. The horse happily clopped along the dusty rutted road around the mosque with its placid lapis blue and turquoise tiles gleaming in the sunset. The jingling bells of the horse cart took on a new melody when the driver stood up for a moment and cried out "*ha!*" gently stinging the rump of his black steed with his short whip. The cart weaved back and forth in a relaxing rhythm as the horse gallantly galloped past the used clothing bazaar where villagers milled about gazing at the circus of multicolored hanging garments which were likely donated by some so-called wealthy country. The horse returned to a trot in order to squeeze around the circle surrounding a small pillar and onward down the crowded metal worker's street where the hypnotic pounding, tapping and clanging of myriads of brass, tin and copper workers hummed like happy crickets. Kurosh was in bliss; every time he visited Herat, he felt he was half-way to heaven in the peaceful atmosphere among the intellectual carefree people.

"*Ha!*" the driver warned pulling the reins to stop his horse as a donkey loaded with grass sauntered across the road urged on by a carefree little boy in billowy trousers, a tattered vest and a worn beaded cap. "*Ha bacha, boro dega!*" the driver reprimanded as the boy tapped his donkey a few friendly strokes with a small tree branch that still had leaves at the end. The *gadi* driver tugged and maneuvered his horse around the donkey and clopped off towards the old bazaar. Kurosh stared lustfully at the small shops with their treasures of carpets, vests, quilted coats, beaded caps and many other items he always cherished and perniciously purchased every time he came to town.

"*Iji chaharsu a, payan meshi?*" the driver queried. Kurosh restrained the urge to get down and quench his overwhelming thirst for ethnic clothing for the moment because he needed to pick up a *dutar* his friend Zabiullah was supposed to have ready. "*Nay saib, berem b'khair. Darwaza Qandar yad dari ka; u su berem.*" Of course everyone knew where the Qandahar Gate was, so the driver whacked his horse a friendly tap and the cart jolted off down the dust road crowded with groups of people wandering to and fro

in a relaxed manner much as if it was all a big party. Groups of men would joke and discuss philosophy or events. Women shyly hiding behind their colorful silky red, turquoise, green or gray pleated and embroidered veil dresses or *chadri* would huddle together quietly chatting as if they were sharing some earth-shaking secret. Lumbering camels, shuffling donkeys, magnificent horses, colorfully decorated horse carts and occasionally a timid cringing dog with clipped ears shared the main road of the bazaar as the dust particles rose glistening in the golden glow of the sunset. The fresh smell of wet earth from the water which had been occasionally splashed on the road to calm the dust blended with the scent of spices, wood fires, woolen carpets, newly made cotton clothing and fresh fruit resulting in an unforgettable natural aroma.

The cart began circling the large round plot at Darwaza Qandahar where hundreds of merchants and buyers were busily bickering and bargaining over the piles of various rugs they would intermittently wave at potential purchasers while enumerating the many merits of each old piece. Kurosh glanced to the right down the almost unusable road to the west, which humped and bumped with ragged ruts and gouges in the center and deep ditches on each side. As always, there were several sets of camels snobbishly munching on grass, some still carrying large loads of wool, thread or twine, which were being stacked into the tiny, parched earthen shops. As the driver stood to urge his horse to greater speeds, a sudden thump told Kurosh and the *gadiwan* that the cart had experienced what amounted to a pre-machine age version of a flat tire.

The driver pulled the horse to a halt and jumped from his seat to inspect the wheel. Kurosh also climbed down to help. The driver reached inside a wildly painted tin box attached to the side of the cart where he kept a brass kerosene lamp plus other necessities and brought forth his tire repair tool. One edge of the thick strand of rubber, which was wedged into the center around the circumference of the wooden spoked wheel, had popped out so the driver began struggling with the strange wrench to try to wedge it back into the hollow of the wheel. After ten minutes of the driver and Kurosh squeezing and hammering to no avail, the driver told Kurosh “*boro, khair a, ech paisa nadi.*” But Kurosh nobly protested that he would be happy to pay even if he did not arrive exactly at his destination. He reached into his vest pocket and pulled out a crisp new purple 20 Af note, twice the fare, and placed it in the driver’s hand then affectionately closed the driver’s fingers around it saying “*i az shmas, khuda maya ka bigiri.* (this is yours; God wants you to have it.)” The driver bashfully smiled, his eyes beaming with warmth as he began to attempt a protest but Kurosh quickly darted off to avoid having his money returned.

Dutar Maker Zabiullah

As he strode along the pine-lined road with his *tumban* billowing and his long *lungi* (turban) flapping behind him, two little girls with deep black eyes glanced up from filling a large water pail at the corner faucet. They playfully ventured a ‘*sallam,*’ which was answered by Kurosh who was impressed with their femininity and charm. He had only to image how beautiful some of the older Herati girls were since nearly none were seen without their colorful *chadri* except, of course, on stage at the Nandari. Kurosh turned the corner of Kucha Kata where a small *samowar* offered tea to a couple of weary gray-bearded gentlemen. He continued down past the tiny roughly built shops lining the muddy rutted road until he reached the little shop of Zabiullah. As Kurosh stepped onto the high-raised doorway, Zabiullah glanced up from the golden chunk of *tut* (mullburi) he had been hollowing out by hacking with a small hatchet and then beamed enthusiastically “*sallam Muallem Saib, kai amadi?*” Kurosh answered that he had just arrived in Herat and then asked what Zabi had been doing. Zabi paused for a moment then answered “*mai ka dutar mesazom.*” Of course, he had been making dutars and very nice ones at that. Zabi’s little daughter peered from behind him and then shyly hid from the stranger. “*Cha shud dutar?*” Kurosh queried to which

Zabi answered “*ani*” reaching back in the corner to produce a beautifully inlaid long-necked instrument. Zabi’s eyes flashed with pride as he proclaimed in his thick Herati brogue “*i sar as! A, i bsyar alas!*” Kurosh wanted to see for himself if it was ‘the top,’ so he grasped the instrument and strummed out a few bars of an old Herati folk melody. Kurosh’s eyes lit up as he agreed “*a saib, i khob chez as!*” Then he posed the crucial question “*chand as?*” Zabi brushed wood shavings and sawdust aside making a place for Kurosh to sit urging “*beshi!*” Kurosh crouched down sitting on his heels waiting for the important answer. “*Ba dega kas az du u nem azar kamtar nedom, magar b’shma ba azar u af sad medom.*” Kurosh knew that a very unique and exquisitely inlaid instrument might fetch 2,500 Afs; but he also knew that Zabi’s reduced offer of 1,700 was too high for the simple but decorative inlay of black and white plastic, maybe some from old bike fenders rather than the traditional mother of pearl, even though the sound was good although not excellent. “*Magar dafa pesh ka amadom azar rupa nagofti?*” Kurosh reminded. Zabi’s eyes twinkled as a wry playful smile crossed his lips admiring Kurosh’s exacting memory of the formerly promised price of 1,000 Afs. “*U pesh bod, ala qaimat shud.*” Kurosh was aware that prices had gone up since the first 750 Af *dutar* he bought from Zabi five years prior; so he conceded “*kho, diga, azar u yak sad!*” he said offering 1,100.

Zabi twisted his head downward to emphasize a lowered offer of 1,500 “*kho, kho yak u nem azar.*” Kurosh shot a smile at the little girl who had mustered the courage to scamper out into the street, then he looked seriously back at Zabi to explain the story he had to constantly relate to all shop owners wherever he traveled in whatever language necessary. “*Ma turis nestum, ma shma wara kam paisa nafar astum.*” He searched Zabi’s eyes to see if his tale of poverty was gaining acceptance before making what he felt was his last offer then blurted out “*azar u du sad.*” Zabi thought for a moment not seemingly satisfied with 1,200 and then glared piercingly at Kurosh to give his final decision of 1,300. “*Yak gap, azar u se sad, kamtar nedom.*” Zabi’s right hand remained momentarily raised as if swearing an oath before it slowly fell back to his teacup. “*Chai mekhori?*” he asked pushing the teapot towards Kurosh who, in rehearsed politeness, smiled a refusal “*nay shokor.*” The two sat for a moment gazing out into the small alleyway where a donkey overburdened with fruit protruding out of two large carpet bags hanging from its sides was being urged along by an old man with a long wavy white beard and long turban that nearly drug in the puddles which dotted the road. Kurosh dug into his brocaded *vaskat* ritually unsheathing several bright red 100 Afghani notes counting them as if they constituted his life’s savings. When he reached 1,200, the red bills stopped and all that was left were three purple 20 Af notes which he waved defiantly at Zabi stating “*sai ko, az azar u du sad u shas balatar nadarum ... megeri?*” Then he frantically remembered he needed ten Afs for *gadi* fare back to the hotel and added “*da rupa bara garis.*”

Zabi smiled that affectionate, compassionate and generous smile with which Afghan shop owners prelude the acceptance of an offer that is slightly below their bottom line. “*Khair a, begi*” he conceded handing Kurosh the coveted instrument that he had been waiting for since months ago and that Zabi had spent weeks carefully crafting. Kurosh kissed his old friend on the cheek and patted the stringy black locks of the little girl who had just returned as he respectfully backed out of the shop offering farewells and stepping down into the street with his newly acquired prize proudly clutched in this hand. As he plodded along the shaded muddy alley out into the sunset, Kurosh happily stepped into the dusty main road in search of a *gadi*. When he passed the various shops and street vendors, several smiled at him remarking “*dutar b’grifti!*” Yes, Kurosh got a *dutar* and this time a good one. As he neared Darwaza Qandahar, a friendly *gadiwan* cried out from behind him “*o bacha! bala sho ka sazato bebenum!*” Kurosh was delighted to be able to show off his instrument to the *gadi* driver who happened to be a *zerebaghali* player who had driven Kurosh around during previous visits. The driver strummed out a few notes. Then when the horse, surprised by the music, gently jolted sideways, the driver grabbed the reins and Kurosh

vaulted up into the backseat as the cart jumped into motion. Kurosh took his *dutar* and began playing the well-known Herati tune Mullah Mahmad Jan as they clopped past the bustling shops of the old bazaar.

Central Herat

As he gazed out into the passing scene of pure traditional life, the gilded ruby glow of the sunset painted portions of the street and shop fronts while other areas lingered in the shaded shadows of dusk. The rhythm of the horse's hooves momentarily blended with Kurosh's *dutar* strumming and all seemed as if it were a beautiful dream. In his youth, Kurosh had longed for the day when he could completely escape all the shackles of the modern mechanical West and now he felt he had achieved his goal. He felt as if he were half-way to a higher kingdom of celestial realms where he was sure the music would be similar and the attire would be much like the white flowing clothing of Khorasan and the people would be kind, gentle and intelligent like those of Herat.

The *gadi* neared the main street of Herat which led to the center of the new part of town. As they turned right, Kurosh put down his *dutar* realizing that playing a musical instrument on the main street in public might bother some of the stauncher Moslem passers by. As they approached the Behzad Hotel, Kurosh told the driver to stop and then climbed down into the dusty steet. When he offered a green ten Af note, the driver smiled that typically generous hospitable smile uttering the familiar "*nay saib, shma maihman asti* (no sir, you are a guest)." Kurosh, according to the tradition, tried two more times to give him the ten Afs without success promising to even the score on a future occasion as the driver whipped his horse into a trot. A small boy scampered into the street to collect the few horse droppings in a pail to be used as fertilizer for local crops. Another boy was filling a larger pail with water from the ditch and splashing it onto the road to settle the fresh smelling dust. Kurosh was hailed by the fruit seller from whose shop he had once bought an over-priced watermelon. Back at the Behzad Hotel when he had cut it open he found it to be dried up and empty inside so he went back to complain. The ensuing discussion developed into an argument and then a shouting match. Later he made friends with the grocer and was given some free fruit as an appeasement. This time the fruit seller gleefully accosted him with "*kharbuza khub as, ney saib?* (nice watermelon, right?)" Kurosh laughed and promised to be back later to buy *kinu* (tangerines) and *malta* (oranges).

Kurosh stopped at the shop of his friend the baker on the right of the Behzad Hotel to exchange greetings with him and his co-workers. Over the years, Kurosh had stopped there before his return trip to Iran to load up with usually 40 or 50 slabs of bread since in Tehran whole wheat bread was non-existent thanks to westernization and 'progress.' Kurosh stood watching the process that never ceased to amaze him trying to learn how that fresh-tasting healthy whole-wheat flat bread was made. In the shadows of the back room of the bakery, one worker in tattered tan *tumban* and *kemiz* was kneading a large chunk of dough in a sink. Between him and the open floor oven, two boys were rolling and patting dough into grapefruit-size balls placing them in neat rows of five across and seven long on flat boards. Another thin middle-aged fellow with Mongol features was flattening and flipping the balls of dough back and forth crossing his hands like a juggler until they became flat oblong slabs about one by two feet. Then they were placed one at a time on a flat shovel-like board fastened to a long stick where the slabs of dough were reshaped to include rows of troughs passing from end to end and a rounded ridge surrounding the whole slab. Then the baker poked the wood shovel through the opening in the center of the floor and, leaning over as if performing a ritual, pressed the slab against the wall of the oven some feet below. Kurosh was always amazed at how the slabs of dough stuck to the walls of the underground oven until they were baked and removed with the same wood plank. He surmised that the heat supplied by the wood fire at the

bottom warmed the walls enough so that the dough stuck on contact. Kurosh watched mesmerized as slabs of crisp sweet-smelling bread were shoveled out of the oven and given to a small boy to stack vertically in front of the store where a line of customers was waiting to take their slabs or stacks and pay the nominal 2 Afs each.

The baker smiled at Kurosh and handed him a slab that was a bit charred stating “*begi Muallem Saib, i az shmas, sokhta khosh dari ka.*” Kurosh was a bit embarrassed at accepting even charred bread free but politely thanked the baker, bade farewell and slowly made his way past the Behzad Hotel waving at the manager whom he had known since his first trip years ago. As he nibbled on pieces of bread he broke away from the slab under his arm, his *dutar* proudly in hand, his dreamy daze was interrupted by a tall shop owner in white *tumban* and *kemiz* with a dark brown karakul cap cocked on the side of his head affirming “*ani Muallem Saib, qalincha!*” The last thing Kurosh was planning to do was to spend some \$20 or so on a small carpet, even though he loved them and picked up a few tattered cheap prayer rugs every trip. “*Az shma qaimat as*” he scolded appearing not to be interested in what he accused as being over-priced rugs. “*Nay saib, ba shma arzan medom*” the shop owner countered promising low prices that Kurosh never believed.

After constant pleading, Kurosh was convinced to sit for a few minutes in the raised doorway of the small shop set back off the street in a corner. After showing several nice prayer rugs at two and three thousand Afs as Kurosh sat in calloused silence, the shop owner queried “*ba chan mayi?*” Kurosh, never wanting to pay more than 1,000 Afs for any rug, answered “*ba azar rupa cha dari?*” The shop owner almost insulted and hearing 1,000 rummaged through his pile of rugs chiding “*sauda koni, gap nazani* (don’t talk, buy)” and yanked out a beautiful yet crude red and light tan Baluchi with the typical butterfly designs down the middle. “*I az Faras a, b’shma azar o ash sad . . . kamtar nemedum.*” Kurosh knew that when a shop owner says he won’t go any lower, he still will if pressed enough. As he admired the rug from Farah, he noticed what appeared to be a lengthwise knife cut in the center about a foot long. “*I cha shud?*” he accused as the shop owner stammered to explain that nothing serious had happened and it could be fixed for a few Afs.

“*Diljam bash Muallem Sa’ib, i bsyar khub chiz* (be assured, this is a very good thing)” he defended as Kurosh slowly rose in a combination of boredom and disgust while the shop owner panicked tugging at his sleeve pleading “*bishi bishi Muallem Saib, chai bearum.*” Kurosh didn’t want to sit down again nor drink any tea so he threw out an offer of 1,200. “*Ba azar o dusad megerum*” he challenged as he slowly walked off. The shop owner desperately called out after him that he would accept 1,500; but Kurosh paid no attention and wandered off towards his hotel past the shoe, trinket, clothing and antique shops he loved. He greeted his many friends refusing countless invitations to stop, have tea or dinner, talk and possibly buy, always promising to return sometime soon. Of course a few days later, the shop owner brought the sliced rug to the hotel and muttered “*ani Muallem Saib, ba azar begi*” and Kurosh kindly conceded to buying it for 1,000 Afs just to be nice and keep a friend.

Heart Samowar

Finally Kurosh reached the shop of his old friend Sa’id Ahmad who beckoned him in for dinner. Kurosh took his place around the *dastarkhan* or tablecloth spread in the middle of the floor. Sa’id knew about Kurosh’s eating habits so he instructed the boy to bring some tangerines, rice, a boiled potato and any other boiled vegetables he could find. Kurosh tried to refuse the hospitality but, as usually happened, in vain. He leaned his trusty *dutar* against the wall filled with hanging carpets, *kelims* and other treasures. One of Sa’id’s friends who happened to be there in time to share dinner was a

musician who was blind in one eye named Abdal Khaleq. Abdal reached out in the direction of the *dutar* insisting “*bedish, bebenum!*” Kurosh reluctantly handed the instrument to Abdal who masterfully meted out a series of local folk melodies strung together in the typical manner of various rhythms: 4/4, 6/8, 7/8. Kurosh’s musical blood tingled and he couldn’t resist crawling towards the corner to grasp a small clay *zerbaghali* on which he joined in as drummer. The jam session now also consisted of Sa’id Ahmad on *rebab*. Sa’id had been seriously studying and practicing *rebab* and *dutar* since he became owner of the Herat Samowar near the Herat Theater which had recently moved to a more intimate location above his shop. Of course the Alemyar brothers used to hold musical evenings and dinners at the small but clean hotel they ran between the time when they moved out of their former location and set up their new *samowar*. Sometimes an old gray-bearded *rebab* player and optician called Sufi would join the jams.

The music became more exciting and two schoolboys wandered in to listen. After about twenty minutes of playing, the small errand boy reappeared with a tray filled with bowls hooded with round tin coverings from under which steam puffed forth. A tiny girl, likely his little sister, followed along behind him clutching several slabs of bread and a clear plastic bag filled with large sweet juicy tangerines. The meal was passed out and everyone began feasting as the small boy scampered back out into the street for more supplies to accommodate the additional guests. Kurosh sneaked his Bronner’s organic mineral salt and Iranian olive oil from Rudbar out of his small shoulder bag and added them to his potato and vegetables. As usual Kurosh was queried by the others “*shma gosht namekhor!*” He was tired of having to explain his vegetarian diet at every meal so he just answered “*nay saib*” and continued on eating in silence as the gossip and lively conversation punctuated by loud laughs and goofy giggles permeated the air. Soon everyone was finished and it was time to peel the grapefruit size tangerines and, after fighting the plethora of seeds, enjoy their heavenly sweetness. Kurosh thought back of a former winter when, along with Sa’id Ahmad, his brothers and an Ozbaki *dutar* player named Sher Aqa, he sat under the *sandali* known as *kursi* in Iran. It consists of a tray of smoldering coals (*manqal*) under a table covered with a blanket where everyone can keep their legs warm. That time in mid winter, Sher Aqa had his *dutar* and was accompanying himself as he created lyrics. “*Ma Sher Aqa nam darum; bachabazi mekonom*” he droned verifying the stereotype that Ozbakis are homos, at least in this one case. Or was he just kidding around with the stereotype by singing his name was Sher Aqa and he played with boys? In any case, he never made a pass at Kurosh or anyone else in the group.

An Islamic Whipping from the Qazi

At one of the gatherings at Sher Ahmad’s, Kurosh was introduced to the Islamic judge who invited him to the office for a chat in Dari. Kurosh had questions about Islamic law and how it was implemented in Herat. The judge, who was a kind and mellow gentleman, explained in Dari that various infractions carried certain penalties such as a fine, stripes with a leather strap or jail. For poor people, a fine could be very severe but for the wealthy, jail was more appropriate. Some crimes could merit all of the punishments. The judge explained that the day before, a pick-pocket was given a 1,000 Af fine, 39 stripes and 2 months in jail. For adultery 100 stripes would be appropriate and 80 for drinking. Kurosh mused how fantastic it would be to have those drunken skunk, Mormon-hating booze pushers in Utah whipped good and long for causing a plethora of alcohol induced crimes such as murder, assault, drunk driving deaths, wife abuse even murder and child abuse. Then he asked the judge if the whip might be too painful to endure. The judge chuckled and pulled out his leather strap whip which was a short limp piece of leather attached to a wooden handle. He invited Kurosh to experience one lash to see how it felt. Kurosh figured he was guilty of plenty of weaknesses and deserved at least one lash that day. The judge had

Kurosh face the wall and was poised to whack him on the back. A few seconds later the judge asked if Kurosh felt the pain. Kurosh said “when are you going to whip me?” The judge giggled and said “I already did; you couldn’t feel it?” Kurosh was puzzled and turned towards the judge who handed him the whip and said “go ahead hit me on the back.” Kurosh tried it but the soft limp leather didn’t do anything. “So what’s the use?” he asked the judge who replied “it’s the embarrassment of being reprimanded by an Islamic authority especially in public.” Kurosh paused a moment and said “I see it’s psychological more than anything.” The judge added “they don’t punish tourists for having hash or opium like they do locals, maybe a gentle strapping for hash. One Afghan manager of an opium den was recently given a 15,000 Af fine and 39 hard lashes; yes there actually were hard lashes in some severe cases.” Kurosh asked if he could buy the little harmless whip and the judge said “*begi sa’ib, shma maiman asti* (take it, you are a guest)” as Kurosh reluctantly acquiesced.

Nightlife in Herat

It was getting late so Kurosh gathered up his *dutar* and what was left of his nibbled away slab of charred bread bidding fond farewells to his friends and promising to return every day to see how they were doing. Kurosh made his way across the dusty earthen street to the Mowafaq Hotel. He climbed the stairs to the second floor and down the hallway to his room where he deposited his things and rested for a moment on the bed. Soon the excitement of being in Herat welled up again and he sprang from the bed, locked his room, went out of the hotel to peruse the musical nightlife he sought out whenever he was in town. He crossed the main street to the opposite corner from the hotel and a few doors down towards the mosque where a *samowar* was already in full swing. The large brass tea boiler at the front of the *samowar* welcomed guests who would stroll down the center aisle between the two high raised earthen ledges of the *samowar* greeting others with a respectful bow, right hand over the heart and maybe an affectionate clasp of both hands. Kurosh made his way down the aisle greeting everyone, some of whom he had met during former trips to Herat, and then climbed the three-foot high ledge to find a place to sit near the musicians. The performers were the owners who would alternate playing *dutar* and occasionally *zerbaghali*. This time one of the owners was playing a free-rhythm accompaniment to the vocalizing of the comical old tailor Zindadel who was known for his *chaharbaiti* singing. The style reminded Kurosh of Iranian free-rhythm modal improvisation in the Shur or Homayun modes; so he felt as familiar with the musical phrases as anyone present. At various points in the performance when there were momentary pauses, members of the crowd including Kurosh would interject “*wa wa*” in enthusiastic approbation. The crowd grew and Kurosh was squeezed tighter between the listeners who sat perched on each side with their knees against their chests. The free-rhythm gave way to a slow rhythmic folk melody for which Zindadel accompanied himself on a large *doira* or frame drum. After the piece ended, tea was served to everyone except Kurosh who politely refused. Some of the other guests offered the traditional two Afs to the boy who was serving.

Soon the conversation hushed to a near silence as a good-looking young man in fresh white *tumban* and *kemiz*, black velvet vest with gold brocade and a black *karakul* cap strode towards the *samowar* with a *zerbaghali* under his arm. “*I Bolbol as*” one of the old men ventured “*dar zerbaghali ba Erat sar as.*” Kurosh knew the best drummer in town was Bolbol or ‘Nightingale,’ so nicknamed because he whistled birdcalls while playing. Bolbol greeted everyone individually with a broad smile and high-pitched laughing voice as he made his way towards the other musicians. Soon the *samowar* was alive with fast wild melodies shifting from seven to six and four then back again at a pace almost too fast to follow. Bolbol reached for the house *zerbaghali* in the corner and did a demonstration of his expertise on two

drums to the utter amazement of everyone present. After a while, Bolbol had to excuse himself to go over to the Nandari for the evening show where he was the drummer in the pit band as well as one of the actors in some of the plays. Then Kurosh left to visit one more small *samowar* before he also went to the Nandari to see his favorite theater cast in the world and the beautiful Setara, the only girl he had a musical crush on besides vocal master Parisa in Tehran.

***Dutar* Master Abdal Ghafur**

Kurosh made his way down the now quiet Jada Qiasi where most of the tiny shops were closed or lit by kerosene lamps while a few industrious leather workers or cap makers were busily preparing goods for the next day. Half way to the mosque, he again passed the shop of his friend Abdal Ghafur. This time he did stop for a few minutes to talk and listen to a little *chaharbaiti dutar* styling by Abdal who played the old traditional small two-stringed *dutar* which was making a comeback. The kerosene lamp cast intriguing shadows around the small shop laden with antique treasures and ethnic trinkets. Abdal sprang from his old Turkman rug characterized by large elephant foot patterns and gleefully greeted Kurosh with a kiss on both cheeks accompanied by several repeated inquiries about his health. Kurosh answered with his own inquiries of “*khub asti, khair asti; cha al dari, jur asti saib?*” As the two slowly sat down on the carpet in the flickering rays of the lamp, the question about each others health “*cha al dari?*” would crop up a few more times before a new subject presented itself for discussion.

After Abdal extracted satisfactory answers to his questions about where Kurosh had been, what he had done and what musical experiences he had witnessed, Kurosh felt it was the right time to ask for a little *dutar* demonstration. Abdal went through the usual explanation which all Afghan performers feel obliged to emphasize. “*Ma shauqi um, ba azar lak khaghaz bara ech kas namezanom dutar*” he insisted “*magar bara shma kam wara neshan medom.*” Kurosh knew that all players stress the point that they are musicians merely by hobby and would never perform for financial remuneration even if in reality they might be part-time or fulltime instrumentalists. Of course in Abdal’s case the hobby-only aspect was obviously true. No one liked the connotation of *kasbi* or professional performer which was, due to some Islamic inspired tradition, as bad as a street sweeper, sewage shoveler or barber. This concept prevented the plethora of really horrible pop musician attempters found in modern societies. Kurosh humored Abdal assuring him that everyone knew that Abdal was merely *shauqi*, that he played only occasionally as a hobby to while away the hours in his shop.

After Abdal’s point was clearly understood, the cheerful old man reached for his *dutar* then quickly tuned the strings in a fourth. Then like the jolt of a surging stallion, he strummed a wild tremolo which subsided into rhythm-free phrases centered around five notes in what seemed to Kurosh to be the Bayat-e Kord section of the Shur modal system. At least it had the character of Shur if not all the exact melodic patterns. The few minutes of undulating non-rhythmic improvisations on the high string with the low string continually ringing along as a tonic drone suddenly ended in a short segment of silence. Then a solidly forceful rhythmic cadence ensued which portrayed pictures of horsemen wildly riding across dusty deserts or grassy planes. Abdal smiled a wise grin as he eloquently executed a catchy repeated melody within the strong rhythmic cadence. The exhilarating experience ended a few moments later and Kurosh wished he could stay for hours and be transported by Abdal’s music to eras of Herat’s history through musical depictions of past glories. But he had other places to visit his first night in town. Kurosh thanked his friend and promised to return another day.

Jamming at a *Samowar*

Kurosh crossed the hard dirt street with its occasional ruts and stepped up on the dirt sidewalk on the other side passing the many tiny shops secured with various odd hand-made locks until he reached a small tea house near the corner opposite the central mosque. He peered into the dark doorway at a cloth several yards away which acted as a second doorway to the back room. The flickering light of a lamp could be seen through the tattered cloth so Kurosh ventured past the large shiny brass tea boiler and the raised floor on each side and brushed aside the cloth to see two short young men sitting on the high ledge cheerfully gossiping over tea. “*Sallam, sallam*” they exuberated jumping to greet Kurosh and ask the litany of questions which comprise Afghan hospitality. Soon the two were rumbling through some spunky old Herati folk tunes on *dutar* and *zerbaghali* as Kurosh stared in respect from his perch on the opposite raised ledge. After a while, one of the musicians typically offered Kurosh the small green *zerbaghali* with a dare or invitation to join in on the next tune. This was Kurosh’s chance to ‘sit in,’ an opportunity that he used to struggle for with every available means of trickery or bribery during his early jazz years in L.A. and Europe. Here in Afghanistan, he was always prevailed upon to join in at nearly every musical or dance occasion and those days of fighting his way to the piano for hours seemed to have faded as forgotten nightmares.

Kurosh grasped the small drum and smugly smiled as his hands whipped over the surface in wild patterns, cross rhythms, dog paddle rolls and fancy finger snaps and flicks. The two musicians gleamed with surprise at Kurosh’s virtuosity in combining Iranian *zarb* and Indian *tabla* skills with Afghan rhythms. Seeing that they were in the presence of a musical prodigy, the *dutar* player offered his instrument to Kurosh who returned the drum to its owner for another duet in which Kurosh imitated some of what he had adopted from Abdal Ghafur. He strung a few Herati folk melodies together using fast ornamental finger work acquired from his beloved *setar* master Daryush Safvat during his years in Paris. After Kurosh played, the other two musicians and the three or so guests, who had wandered in to see the action, didn’t dare play an instrument for a while but instead inquired about Kurosh’s musical training. They also asked him to give his ideas about the origins of musical styles and instruments of Iran and Afghanistan. Everyone listened in amazed silence as Kurosh lectured on in fluent Dari offering theories on the shared musical cultures of Iran Afghanistan and India and their modal scales as if he were back teaching at University of Utah.

Theater and Music at Herat Nandari

Eventually, Kurosh decided to leave the newly-made friends to contemplate and discuss the information which he had just shared with them. So he offered fond farewells clasping each person’s hand in both his, bowing with his right hand over his heart and backing out the doorway to the street. It was nearly time for the events to begin at the Herat Nandari, the main theater in the province. The Nandari had been established years ago to offer a taste of modern entertainment in that girls were seen unveiled, singing and even dancing (shyly and respectfully of course) in front of nearly all male audiences. This innovation for a traditional village like Herat could be considered a blasphemous breach in the revered tradition. But Kurosh liked to go anyway so he could hear all types of music, see interesting dance efforts and gawk at some of the local or imported beauties (or not really so) which he, as a foreigner, could never have seen otherwise since he was nearly never invited to intimate family gatherings.

Kurosh quickly made his way to the main street then across the meridian ornamented by a fountain to the door of the Nandari where he purchased a first class ticket for 50 Afs. Although in most cases Kurosh

was much more frugal, this was one time he felt it necessary to have a seat near the front row instead of settling for a back row seat for 30 Afs or away in the balcony for 20. He took his ticket and made his way up the quaint earthen steps to the top where Fazal Jan who was the carefree ticket taker, the sound man, light man and theater driver, greeted him chuckling “*aa, muallim saib, shma asti?*” Kurosh shuffling sideways towards the theater door sped through a string of greetings and then strode to his favorite seat in the second row right of center. He respectfully exchanged greetings and handclasps with some of the motley crew of spectators composed of various racial, social and linguistic classifications. A wild-looking Pashtun with a long black beard and very long turban extended his wrinkled hand towards Kurosh mumbling “*tsengaye*” in Pashtu to which Kurosh responded “*sha, sha.*” The big Pashtun reached into his weirdly brocaded faded gray vest and produced the typical small silver and green round tin box with a round mirror on the lid. After proudly gazing at himself in the little mirror for a moment, his other hand slowly twisted the lid off revealing that green gunk powder that Kurosh hated mainly because it was always seemingly spitefully spit all over the floors until they became sticky. The big Pashtun held the tin box in his right hand and passed it downward across his mouth obtaining a tongue full of the contents on the way. He then offered the tin to Kurosh questioning “*neswar saib?*” Kurosh timidly raised his hand in polite refusal and smiled a ‘thank you’ as the announcer pranced out from behind the curtains to reveal the evening’s events.

As always, the loudspeaker crackled and popped, overloaded or faded as two or three crazies tried to ‘help’ adjust it somewhere off stage. The playful audience giggled from time to time at the stumbling efforts of the stage crew and their ‘assistants’ to get the sound right and the spotlight to shine somewhere in the vicinity of the announcer. Kurosh just loved it; how refreshing it was to see these innocent, child-like yet wild and weird people having fun after his many grim years in America and Europe tolerating pseudo-serious ‘intellectuals’ or the obnoxious rebels trying to be as trashy as possible. Finally the sound was adjusted to a level of only slightly overloaded and the first singer was invited out to do his song. After three male vocalists demonstrated *chaharbaiti* and Herati folk songs, the long-awaited girls were brought out one by one.

First was Ziba, a spicy kid of about 13 with gold front teeth and long wavy hair. The announcer asked her secretly what she was going to sing and then dramatically revealed the title to the audience. Suddenly, Ziba shot a childish smile at the crowd with her gold teeth glimmering in the spotlight which brought a thunder of applause along with a few deliriously delighted laughs from the gang on Kurosh’s row. Ziba occasionally used a rehearsed arm movement or a self-conscious alteration of stance to punctuate her ‘singing’ which ended with her shyly scampering off the stage before the applause even began. Next out was Saroya Muzhgan who was the mainstay of the theater troupe and a pretty good vocalist. She had unbecoming short-cropped hair, a style copied from some crummy fashion magazine which had infiltrated Herat probably imported from Iran, and a heavily pockmarked face. She had a strange kind of beauty but her occasional sour character often overcame it. She had been the first female to go on stage in Herat so she was brave but also a bit brazen. Kurosh learned from interviews with her that she and the second wife of her husband in Kabul plotted together and one night left him because he loafed around the house all day while they worked to support him. For her performance she sang the national hit of the 70s in both Afghanistan and Iran, Mullah Mahmud Jan, to the unbridled glee of the audience some of whom softly sang along during parts of the tune. Saroya was always in tune and right on the beat unlike some of the other new or out-of-town girls who often had only pretty faces, if even that, but no singing skills.

After Saroya made her bow and professional exit, the announcer gave a brief description of the ensuing play. The curtains opened in jolts and bounces getting stuck part way as the audience chuckled. Kurosh enjoyed the goofs and flubs at the Nandari sometimes more than the shows. The play was a short

skit about two alcoholics and the problems they caused their families and the community. Another skit was about the corruption of local government officials which was so funny that a local provincial official in the audience seemed to enjoy it more than anyone. Finally, Saroya was featured in her best role, a bit about a nagging wife named Shirin. The scene opened with her grumbling to herself in venomous sputterings about her terrible spouse who did nothing but work all day but didn't earn much. When the unfortunate husband entered the stage he called out a loud "*sallam*" to which a group of crazies in the audience responded with their own "*sallam*." Shirin threw her washrag in his face as he went to kiss her fondly then began insulting the poor fellow as he smiled lovingly through everything. Her griping became so unbearable that several members of the audience started shouting at her. One young boy with Asiatic eyes and a brightly beaded cap yelled from the front row "*gomesh ko Shirin!*" Others who agreed that she should "forget it" chimed in agreement with a loud "*aa*."

Setara

Then Kurosh's heart pounded with excitement when from the right of the stage the beautiful Setara glided out from behind the curtains. She was portraying the daughter of the harassed husband. The father fondly greeted her as the nagging wife threw several snide remarks at Setara like so many poisoned darts. Setara, clothed in a highly ornamented green silken dress, dramatically recited her obviously memorized lines staring out over the audience like a librarian gazing across a group of studying school children. She had an air of class resembling a Bactrian statue of some *bodisatva* or Greek goddess from the Gandhara period of past eras. At one point she forgot her lines and the voice of the offstage prompter pierced the air with unabashed authority. Some of the audience tittered at hearing the prompter repeat a sentence twice before Setara could catch it. At a second halt in her lines, Setara looked at Saroya in dismay and Saroya broke her spell of hideousness with a girlish laugh. This laugh became contagious among other actors on and off stage and finally resulted in a roar of cackles and giggles throughout the theater. Finally a show-off from the row behind Kurosh shouted a set of lines that fit the situation and everyone screamed with laughter again. Another more serious old man in a cocked karakul cap called out the real lines that he remembered from having seen the skit before. After receiving a nod of approbation from Saroya who was trying to recompose the mean menacing glare, Setara took the old man's prompting to be as good as any. The play continued on with a few more incidents of audience prompting and participation finally finishing with a crazy ensemble song and dance routine. The culminating number of the first half was accompanied by everyone from the cast on or off stage singing, playing or dancing along in a wild free-for-all which some members of the audience joined by singing, clapping or stomping their feet. The curtains danced along with the music and the spot light swayed in time to the lively tune as the whole place went beautifully insane. Then the curtains stuttered shut for intermission and everyone rested catching their breath from all the excitement.

Intermission, Sharing Snacks, the Second Act and After the show

During intermission, a small boy in an old faded brocaded cap wandered around with cups and a teapot emphatically calling out "*chai khor! chai khor!*" One of the uninhibited bearded Pashtuns in Kurosh's row produced a few tangerines which he peeled, divided up and offered to his friends as well as Kurosh who, of course, politely refused. After the Pashtun had given away all his tangerines to everyone within reach, he was left with a large cucumber which he began peeling using a wicked dagger. As the floor piled up with tangerine and cucumber peelings blending with the green slosh of *neswar* that

everyone had been perniciously spitting, the Pashtun carefully, as if in slow motion, cut the cucumber in long thin slices. He then passed them out to the same friends and acquaintances until he was left with only one thin slice for himself. Kurosh had seen this type of unselfish hospitality all over the Middle East and always admired it. A person should give all he has to everyone present even if he is left with only the skins for himself. But this generosity is always reciprocal because eventually a person will receive part of other people's various offerings. Kurosh remembered the bus or train trips he had taken in Iran or bus trips in Afghanistan when he brought along a huge bag of extra fruit for the sole purpose of sharing it with other passengers.

The announcer was back for the second half of the show greeting the audience in Dari with "ladies and gentlemen" even though there were only a few ladies in the audience in colorful *chadri* huddling timidly in their own special seats at the front right just under the stage. Another set of short plays ensued followed by a few musical offerings until finally Setara paraded out on stage. This time, she was arrayed in a bright *tumban* and *kemiz* speckled with various jewelry items and a pink scarf. Shyly and wryly she shot a smile at the audience as a thunder of deafening applause exploded forth. As the clapping subsided, she took her place near the mic and gazed intellectually toward Kurosh who momentarily forgot the ringing and stinging of his hands which were red from over-clapping. His eyes met hers for a moment and she allowed one side of her mouth to twitch a tiny smile in recognition of Kurosh. The two had often chatted in the green room when he was preparing articles to be printed in publications in Tehran or as part of his PhD research. Kurosh was tingling with joy as she began the first bars of her hit *Man Dukhtar-a Erat Am* (I'm a girl from Herat). The thunder of applause repeated when the audience realized that the favorite song of the Nandari was being performed. Kurosh remained locked in a daze until Setara finished her number and danced off, casting one more knowing smile at Kurosh whose sort of love-lorn gaze must have been noticed by her.

The last act was the husky hussy Golghotai who was the biggest and brashest show-off and pushiest gal Kurosh had even seen on stage in Afghanistan. She marched out, raised her hands and turned from side to side milking the audience dry for all the applause she could wrench from them. Then, accompanied with an almost suggestive rhythmical twitching of her right hip where her hand was sexily resting, she hollered out a raucous Pashtu tune reminding Kurosh of a 1920s Chicago jazz or later blues crooner. The audience seemed to be fooled by her exaggerated showmanship and her rough harsh voice as she made her way through several popular tunes and finally ended her routine and the whole evening with an insanely wild ethnic dance routine that was goofy yet impressive and very well received.

After the show, Kurosh slowly made his way out staring through the curtain towards the green room just in time to catch a tiny smile from the beautiful Setara who was readying her *chadri* so she could respectfully venture out into the street. Outside the theater door, Kurosh met Sa'id Ahmad and his brothers who had seen the show and fell into a lengthy discussion in Dari. A moment later, a black form daintily whisked by and Sa'id whispered "that's your darling Setara." Kurosh blushed and affirmed that he was only in love with her art to which Sa'id and his brothers sneered and giggled "sure, we know." Then Kurosh queried "*cheto mefami ka u as?*" to which Sa'id boastfully answered that he knew every girl in Herat by their shoes. Kurosh gazed once more at Setara who was poised at the step of a *gadi* ready to climb up and ride home with two other girls. She momentarily glanced in Kurosh's direction then boarded the horsecart as the driver coaxed the horse off down the quiet street. Sa'id suspiciously stared into Kurosh's eyes and said "see, she looked at you, now what do you say?" Kurosh brushed the incident aside saying "come on let's go; I have to get to my room." Sa'id and the others broke into high-pitched cackles kidding Kurosh "see, I was right, you are in love with her." Kurosh never could explain the phenomenon

of caring about a woman's music to anyone in the Middle East; they all seemed hung up on some type of physical attraction and hoped-for interaction.

As he walked towards the hotel, Kurosh thought back on the afternoon rehearsal he visited at the Nandari. Upstairs in the shadows of the dressing room, the musicians were sitting around with Bolbol on one side of Karim Dutari, who was directing the activities, and a singer on the other. Nawak was coaching Golghotai through a rolling Pashtu tune while Suraya huddled in the corner near the wood-burning *bokhari* (stove). Zeba was discussing the songs with another singer near the stove while Parwana sat silently near the door waiting her turn. Setara picked up her notebook full of verses and drifted toward the door with her pleated *chadri* flipped back over her head. Karim was lecturing everyone "we have to learn old Herati songs" then chastised them "I was here before anyone and said my prayers long before you all showed up." Around noon one of them grumbled "*ajab mashk mekonem, yak bezha, teshna aw grosna* (this is a weird rehearsal, one o'clock, thirsty and hungry.)"

Trying to Improve Things at the Hotel

The next day Kurosh officially began his job as manager of the Muwafaq Hotel. The accountant, an old man with a beautiful long flowing beard and a long shiny white turban, explained that he would send a boy to fetch Kurosh's breakfast and lunch as promised by owner Khair Jan. Kurosh said that he only needed a kilo or two of tangerines or oranges for each meal. The first project he undertook was retyping the menu, using his best calligraphy to write signs and personally welcoming new tourists and guests in Dari, Farsi, Pashtu, French, German, Swedish, Dutch, Italian, Spanish, English and even (unfortunately) Russian. The guests and tourists loved Kurosh who had been a traveler for years and knew most of their languages and cultures, their needs, their questions and sincerely empathized with each of them. Only a few of the suspicious government-oriented and commie-loving Pashtuns or sneaky Russians treated him with cold disdain. But Kurosh had fun kidding the Russians about Lennin and the Party which always made them nervous and uncomfortable. "*Kak diela tavarishch*" he would sneer adding "*kuda vidioty, na sobrainya fi gar savieti*?" Of course, Kurosh knew that there were not, as yet, any visible local Communist *saviets* in Herat with daily meetings. But he knew that such was the Russians' plan for the future. So he resentfully yet amicably needled the fat grim comrades every chance he got.

Sometimes in the late afternoon when there was little or no activity at the front desk, Kurosh would ask one of the door men to watch it for a while and he would go upstairs to the restaurant to make his daily excursion to the kitchen. He always had to re-explain to the cook how to make vegetarian food, how to boil potatoes, carrots and beans using no meat, meat water or animal oils. Still, he was sure that he must have had a few servings that might have been polluted by some part of an animal's dead corps; that's why he was usually better off with just bread and onions. Usually, he would sit and gaze out the large windows at the peaceful late afternoon activities and slowly savor his dinner. Kurosh loved to watch the *gadis* clop by, the pattering donkeys laden with grass, vegetables or fruit, the playful boys pushing and pulling carts overloaded with goods and an occasional camel plodding past. It was all so ecologically perfect, emotionally restful and spiritually invigorating to see life being lived as it was in the days of the prophets and as it could have continued were it not for the horrible hegemony of the mean materialistic West.

One evening, Khair Jan suggested that he put his organizational skills learned in Germany with Kurosh's American managerial abilities to improve the sluggish service in the upstairs restaurant. Kurosh went right to work to devise a method which would allow partial self-service and speed things up maybe ten times. He decided that the menus, order forms and the bills should all be the same. He presented the plan to Kair who approved it and then Kurosh decided to spend three days at the local newspaper printing

house where he personally set the type for the new forms. He had them printed up and bound together in pads which were placed on each table. The left side was written in English and the right in Dari. The lines in the middle joining the English and Dari versions of the items were where the customers or waiters could mark the selected items. The slips were then given to the cooks who read the Dari side of the slip and prepared the order keeping the slip on the tray. Then the orders were slid through the window to the customer or waiter. When the meal was finished, the customer or waiter would add up the items and total them at the bottom and present the bills with payment to the Jalalabadi cashier when departing. The first evening that Kurosh's ingenious system was vaulted into action, he acted as headwaiter and Khair was chief cook. Just like clockwork, over two hundred guests were quickly served in an hour, a miracle never to be forgotten by anyone who witnessed it. Kurosh rushed back and forth to all the tables ordering the waiters about like an old SS officer while Khair whipped up dinners in a mad frenzy shouting constant instructions to the cooks. Every drop of food was sold and a small fortune was amassed by the end of the evening. Kurosh and Khair collapsed in each other's arms laughing in stunned amazement at the success. But the next day, the blatantly backward Jalalabadi Pashtun cashier began complaining that the order form menu system was no good because people could pocket or change order forms before paying. Kurosh argued that most tourists wouldn't bother cheating for a meal that was only about 50 cents or so and that locals probably wouldn't be able to figure it all out well enough to cheat. The Jalalabadi insisted on reverting to the former time-consuming method of waiters getting orders, bringing them to him so he could write up an authorization which the waiter took to the cooks. Then another slip was written up for the waiter to give the cook to get the food and finally all the slips had to be returned to the cashier who spent some time slowly and tediously tallying them up while disgruntled customers slouched in a long line at his desk. No matter how much Kurosh argued, the Jalalabadi won and Kurosh's dream of having the best-run restaurant in the country faded. He sullenly mused of his Jalalabadi coworker "*cha ragham nafar a?* (what kind of guy is he?) *Bsyar kharab shakhs a* (really a bad cat)." Then he caught himself thinking ill of his brother and reluctantly replaced the negative with positive thoughts.

Ansari, Patron Saint of Herat

The days passed pleasantly as Kurosh happily savored the bliss of traditional pre-machine age life in Herat. He would gaze from his room out into the riot of harrowing hues produced by the pink, golden and crimson rays of the sunset that blended with specks of suspended dust. He would write poetic letters to his Afghan fiancée back in Utah and she would write poetry back to him. Kurosh began to delve into the metaphysical philosophy of Herat's patron saint Khwaja Abdullah Ansari. One late afternoon as Kurosh was contemplating some of Ansari's *munajat* or prayer verses, an urge came over him to visit Ansari's shrine on the hill in Gazargah. He left his room and strode purposefully out into the dusty street where several *gadi* drivers and their horses were lounging in the afternoon sun. He quietly asked a few of the drivers what their rates were to Gazargah. Finally his friend, the *zerbaghali* player, greeted him and said "*ech paisa nadi.*" But the driver had given Kurosh enough free rides so he insisted he would pay this time. He knew the fare was from 50 to 100 Afs so he decided to give him the full 100 to make up for former kindnesses.

He climbed into the back although at first he wanted to sit in front with his driver friend. The driver explained that the cart would be unbalanced that way, front-heavy with too much weight on the horse. They clopped in silence to the pine-studded street called Jade Ansari then toward the hill. As they neared the outskirts of town, the driver began sharing facts about Ansari's life and recited a few *munajat*. Kurosh

also recited some that he had been studying and translating for his PhD dissertation. The translation of his favorite, due to many unfortunate failures in family and material ventures during his life, is the following:

Whoever knows Thee, what use is his life,
What use is his family, his children and wife?
Give him both worlds, take his reason away;
What use is both worlds to a madman anyway?

Kurosh and the driver exchanged recitations and philosophical concepts in Dari until they reached the base of the hill where the horse slowed to a plodding pace. As they approached the first crest, Kurosh gazed in a daze over the fertile valley below and the city he loved. Herat, that jewel of culture, art and crafts, that center of philosophy and religion. The hypnotic jingling of the *gadi* bells, the slow yet purposeful clopping of hooves, the simple innocent smile of the driver and the beauty of the placid valley brought tears to Kurosh's eyes. He wondered if he could ever share a true depiction of this peace and beauty with others. He cringed at the thought that the heartless Russians might decide to try to devour this happy yet brave country. Or even worse if the materialistic heartless Yankees decided to enforce their worthless ugly mod-odd sin-soaked non-culture on the unsuspecting unwitting populace.

The cart drew to a halt at the earthen wall of the shrine and Kurosh climbed down. He gave the driver the red 100 Af bill and told him not to wait. The driver persisted in vain that the ride was free or, at least, only 50 Afs. Kurosh firmly clasped both the driver's hands around the 100 with a loving nod as he bade farewell and then walked towards the sun-baked wall and through the archway to the inside. In the shrine, a flock of poor people were resting calmly, hopeful that some kind soul would bring *khairat* which usually consisted of slabs of broken or hard dry bread given to the less fortunate. He walked towards the arched doorway to the shrine and through the corridor to the inner courtyard. The few old men resting and meditating in the peaceful calm of the afternoon lackadaisically gazed at Kurosh for a moment then returned to their contemplations. Kurosh slowly and respectfully approached the enclosed shrine, his right hand near his heart with his yellow *shah maqsud* prayer beads dangling in a loop around his fingers. He performed the traditional circumambulation around the shrine counter clockwise as he would in Mashhad hoping that such a practice was in order at this shrine as well. He stopped a few times on his way around to place his right hand on the shrine and mumble a few lines of the *fatiha*. When he had completed the circumambulation, he returned to the front of the shrine where he calmly sat on a ledge of ground and, fingering his yellow beads, began to drift into the realm of the spirit. He lost track of time as he considered the words of the saint entombed in the placid shrine:

Give me a heart that in Thy work I give my soul,
Give me a soul that the next world's work's my goal;
Give me wisdom that I do not loose the way,
Give me sight to fall not in a pit some day.

Kurosh's thoughts drifted from one mystic meditation to another until suddenly he felt a surge of joy, light and energy rise up in his chest while his head began to spin and tingle with some supernatural power. He came out of his spiritual experience feeling exhilarated and fresh. He rose to his feet and backed away from the shrine in respect with his beads and right hand over his heart. He reached the corridor, went out the gate to the courtyard and turned to smell the sweet breeze of the late afternoon filled with the scent of

fresh plant life. He kindly greeted the poor folk and placed a few coins in the hands of some of the grateful children and then strode out through the arched doorway in the wall. Once on the dust road, he waved away offers by horse cart drivers to take him back to Herat but instead decided to walk briskly through fresh green fields and past trees to the outskirts of town. When he reached the bottom of the hill, he decided to assist two little girls who were shaking a mulberry tree to free some of the treasured white berries. Kurosh climbed up to the first branches and, with his white *tumban* billowing in the breeze, shook a branch until the children filled their shawls with the precious fruit. He also picked some berries for himself that served as breakfast and lunch both of which he had forgotten to eat as was often the case. As he continued on through a field of tall green grass, the sunlight seemed to inject him with joy and energy. He ran through the field with the rhythmic jingling of Abdul Ghafur's *dutar* ringing in his head. He didn't know how long he had been running when he came out of his spiritual trance to notice that he was nearing the more populous part of Herat. When he finally reached the hotel, he floated up the stairs to his room where he fell on his bed nearly unconscious from the spiritual and physical experience. One of his favorite lines of Ansari's wisdom continued to haunt him:

Rozgari tu ra jostom, khud ra meyoftom;
Aknon khud ra mejoyom, tu ra meyobom.
Before I sought Thee and found me;
Now I seek me and find Thee.

Later that evening, when Kurosh partly returned to his senses, he was able to talk to people again so he ordered a late dinner at the restaurant. From there a group of his acquaintances along with Khair Jan invited him to join them in the Afghan room upstairs where the two musicians from the small tea house near the mosque were playing. Kurosh was coaxed to sit-in with the group as usual and stunned everyone with his instrumental skills. He ended a long dexterous *zerebaghali* solo with a smile joking "*mo shauqi um.*" Everyone laughed that a non-native had become so saturated with local culture that he too would affirm that he was only an amateur to avoid the potential negative connotation of a paid performer.

Poet Dutarist / Bard Abdal Shaer and Dutarist Adal Ghafur

As the days passed, Kurosh learned of a rare, very authentic old style singer in the *chaharbaiti* tradition. The artist was an old man named Abdal Shaer who was famous for creating hours of on-the-spot conjured metric poetry and poetic elocutions. He was also credited with possessing a very adroit *dutar* technique nearly unrivaled in the province. Kurosh decided to visit Abdal's hangout which was a stable for *gadi* horses near Darwaza Qandahar. He readied his trusty portable battery cassette recorder and hailed a *gadi* to take him down past the blue mosque to Darwaza Khushk then beyond it down a quiet tree-lined road. The road almost ended when it met the other street with the gully in the center, the road which led to Darwaza Qandahar. Near the square, the driver pulled to a halt and motioned to a doorway of the *alaf forushi* (alfalfa shop) through which Kurosh could see large brown or black horses lounging in a large courtyard with a pool of stagnant water in the center. The driver began unleashing his horse to take advantage of the stable where fresh alfalfa was awaiting his hungry animal. As Kurosh timidly wandered into the courtyard, the driver assured "*boro, Abdal da posh as.*" As instructed, Kurosh slowly and suspiciously wandered toward the back past horses and goats until he reached the corner where a doorway led into a covered clay shed dimly lighted by secondary sunbeams. He hesitantly peered into the dark far corner to see an old man sitting peacefully and chatting with the stable owner Nawak. Kurosh wandered

forward and greeted the two as the stable owner explained to Abdal who couldn't see that a young man, maybe a tourist, wanted to tape his playing. He also described the two red 100 Af bills that Kurosh was carefully coddling in his other hand so as not to appear as if he was accusing Abdal of being a paid musician. Kurosh struck up a conversation with the colorful old musician asking several technical questions about the history of the Herati *dutar* and *chaharbaiti* vocalizing. Abdal said that *chaharbaiti* came from hill people in the *sarad* or border area between Herat province and Iranian Khorasan. Then Abdal went into a discussion of how he lost his sight. He blamed part of it on the pressure on his eyes from his powerful singing and then he noted that when one eye went blind, a doctor gave him some drops which eventually blinded the other. Finally, Kurosh set up his cassette recorder and was ready for a taping session. In Afghanistan Kurosh found that, instead of record companies with bad taste, unions, agents and hoods monopolizing the business, music fans would personally record their favorite artists in a teahouse concert or, for a small fee, in private. Then they might trade copies of their tapes with other fans to build up their collection. Of course, in this manner, electronic pop innovations and hideous studio-produced non-music would never be a threat since all music was live, personal and purely acoustic.

Sitting on a pile of hay, Abdal tuned his *dutar* as goats wandered around munching fresh fodder and horses pranced about in the courtyard occasionally playfully rolling on the soft ground. Abdal strummed a few bars to check the tuning as a goat nudged him and a big gray horse tugged at its rope then added a couple of intermittent whinnies to Abdal's eloquently invented lyrics. Kurosh noticed that Abdal mainly used the index finger of his right hand occasionally aided by the middle finger or thumb which would brush upward to add a stroke to the three or four beat rhythmic sequences. The cheerful old man played so fast with his bare index finger nail that it seemed that no one could surpass his speed even with a *nakhunak* or wire plectrum. Kurosh relaxed and allowed himself to be carried into a state of semi-trance staying just conscious enough to occasionally check the recording level for possible overloading. Abdal alternated between unbelievable *dutar* virtuosity and vocal verses usually without *dutar* accompaniment. One of the verses he created impressed Kurosh. "Why did I lose my sight? Because I have seen the light of the other world" Abdal sang in Dari staying within the traditional five-note framework of the Shur modal scale. He continued "God and his light existed before there was time or earth or sky or Satan." Then after a minute or so of *dutar* improvisation, Abdal continued "I am only a sinful servant, but there is a great power who forgives." An hour passed by like a moment then Kurosh's cassette ran out and he spent a few more minutes resting against the clay wall of the room contemplating the old master's music and poetic verses.

Abdal finally set his *dutar* on the ground and reached for the inevitable cup of tea that the stable owner had just poured for him. After a lengthy farewell and deep gratitude, Kurosh respectfully placed the two folded 100 Af bills in Abdal's trembling wrinkled hand assuring him that they were two red ones. Abdal's face shone with surprise and joy because he never really expected compensation for any of his performances even though he obviously needed any help that might be offered. Kurosh placidly made his way out the stable door affectionately patting a big black horse on the nose. His *gadiwan* had fed and watered his horse, hooked up the cart and was laid back swishing flies waiting for a fare. The driver lazily nodded to Kurosh mumbling "*bala shu Muallem Saib, berem b'khair!*" Kurosh took the advice, climbed up onto the *gadi* and they teetered off down the rutted road back to the hotel.

The next day, Kurosh made an excursion towards the blue mosque and on the way stopped off at the shop of Abdal Ghafur to relax and enjoy a few moments of *dutar* playing. During the performance, the comical old tailor from across the street, Sufi Funsenji Zindadel, entered the shop and, with a wild wide-eyed smile, greeted Kurosh. He then began his typical boasting how he was the best singer in the country. When Kurosh questioned him about a few of the main masters in Kabul and Logar, he conceded that he

meant the Herat area. Kurosh refrained from further argument and asked for a demonstration. The tailor joined in some free-rhythm *chaharbaiti* improvisations and then went into a couple of simple tunes with a lively rhythm furnished by Kurosh on an old drum in Abdal's collection of craft items.

Prayers at the Main Mosque

Following the usual fond farewells, Kurosh crossed the street and approached the corner opposite the mosque where he was successfully beckoned into a shop richly laden with expensive antiques, clothes and carpets. He was invited to sit and join another informal musical event. The shop owner and two of his friends took turns playing different melodies on an old *dutar* as Kurosh sat staring at the gold and crimson shades of dusk painting the turquoise and lapis blue tiles of the mosque. The glaze glimmered with the glow of reflected sunset blending with the music to create a hypnotic spell of ecstasy of another world and of other wiser eras. Groups of turbaned Heratis and merchants in *karakul* caps and wrapped in quilted cloaks with the long dangling sleeves that were never used but sometimes just tied in front, passed by the shop indicating that prayer time was near. As more men crowded the alleyway in front of the shop and clustered down the corridor to the mosque's inner courtyard, the shop owner and his friends laid aside their instruments and began to gather up their turbans and long embroidered blue shawls which they then tossed over their right shoulders. One of the fellows invited "*Muallem Saib, namaz.*" Kurosh always wanted to join in a few *rakats* of prayer in the Herat mosque so this was his chance. He was always afraid to go because he feared that his foreign origin might be discovered and not appreciated even though his fluency in Dari and familiarity with the procedures of Islam were beyond that of any foreigner he had ever met. To his surprise, the shop owners who might have suspected him of being a foreigner, other than just an Iranian which he had often been suspected of, greeted him with intense enthusiasm and seemed overjoyed to have him join in the prayer services even if he was maybe a *khareji* (foreigner) . . . or was he?

The faithful slowly found their places in rows standing shoulder to shoulder, some spreading their shawls in front of them. The first thing Kurosh noticed was the absence of any *mohr*, the small round or rectangular blocks of engraved baked Kerbala clay which are placed on the ground in front of Shi'a worshippers in Iran so that the head can be pressed against the engraving on the clay. Of course it was because he was in Sunni majority territory and thus he had to remember to hold his hands straight down at his sides in the Sunni manner and not to clasp them in front as the Shias do. The prayer began and everyone quietly mumbled "*bismillarhi-rahmani-rahim, alhamdu lillahi rab al 'alemin*" etc. As Kurosh joined in the prayer prostrations, he basked in that familiar soothing sense of community and brotherhood he had enjoyed throughout the Islamic world wherever he had joined in prayers. After a while, the prayer ended as the faithful all turned their heads to the right uttering "*sallam aleikum*" then turning to the left repeating the same utterance. Then everyone stroked their right hands downward over their cheeks and to the ends of their beards (or as if they had beards for those who didn't) signaling the completion of the prayers. Later when Kurosh and the others were walking out of the mosque and down *Jadah Qiasi*, several shop owners extended invitations to Kurosh to visit them later for tea, talk and trinkets. Tea, of course, Kurosh would always forgo as a good Mormon and a good Sufi. Later on that evening, Kurosh made the rounds of the *samowars* and the *Nandari* before retiring.

Learning Perso-Afghan Carpet Weaving

It had always been Kurosh's dream to learn to weave Persian carpets so some day he might set up a rug shop back in the States or teach it at the university. One day a little girl tagged along with Kurosh near the tape shop where he was searching for cassettes of old Herati *chaharbaiti*. She boasted that she was a carpet weaver and that she could teach him the art. She said that she could set up a small loom at this hotel room and, for a few Afs a day, work on a small carpet which would be finished in a couple of weeks. Kurosh invited her into the hotel lobby for tea and cookies to further discuss the plan. Later they walked back to the small muddy *kucha* where the little girl lived then she said goodbye and swore she would return to the hotel the next day then disappeared in a small doorway. Days passed and the little girl never came back so Kurosh decided to go looking for her. After his shift at the front desk, one evening Kurosh went to the tiny *kucha* where he asked some boys to point out the house of a little girl who weaves rugs. They guided him down the dark muddy alley and down another yet darker alley to a small earthen hut with a creaky crooked hanging door. He knocked and was greeted by a man in uniform whom he asked if there was a little girl there who wove carpets. This was a case where Kurosh was tired and his Dari had developed a flavor of Iranian Farsi; so he was immediately suspect. The soldier was upset imagining that some Iranian was trying to steal his daughter to take her to Mashhad or Tehran as a rug weaver slave or something. He began to curse Kurosh as an Iranian sneak and told him to get away. Then an older man came to the door calming the soldier and asking Kurosh what he wanted. Kurosh explained that all he wanted was to learn carpet weaving and some little girl said that she could teach him. The old man calmly smiled and instructed Kurosh to go the following day to the rug factory at Darwaza Khushk where he would learn everything.

The next day, as advised, Kurosh took a *gadi* to Darwaza Khushk and asked for the rug factory. He climbed the creaky stairs to the second floor where rolls of wool thread were dangling from different spots on the balcony. He entered the rug shop and was struck with awe at the different projects underway. Two huge red, white and black Turkoman carpets with the classic elephant foot pattern were hanging on looms near the doorway with several boys at each loom feverishly hooking, knotting and chopping the threads with strange tools. An assistant greeted Kurosh explaining that he was a weaver and his name was Ahmad: "*mai ka qalen mesazum, Ahmad nam darum*" he said. On the window side, two boys were gazing at an old gentleman who was inspecting their work on a prayer rug then he began pounding the most recent row with a weird looking multi-flat-pronged beater. Then the old man began carefully clipping the wool threads down to only millimeters from the warp. The boys giggled at the presence of a tall foreign-looking but Dari-fluent stranger.

The old man turned to see Kurosh and, after setting his tools down, warmly greeted the guest. As Kurosh revealed his desire to learn the art, the master immediately set out to build Kurosh a tiny loom so he could practice the skill of knotting the wool threads and chopping them off one by one. Later Kurosh was shown the back room where a dozen or so little girls were caught playfully tossing balls of wool at each other and generally acting silly. They scampered back to their positions on two large carpets they were weaving flat on the ground. The master explained that the knotting on flat carpets was done with a flip of the index fingers bringing the threads around both sides and up through the center of the warp strings. The threads were cut in advance instead of being chopped off after each knot with the knotting and chopping tool as the boys were doing on the vertical looms. There they used the hooked end of the knotting tool to turn the thread and pull it through the warp threads making a knot. Among the industriously knotting girls was Kurosh's tiny friend who had broken her promise to teach him weaving.

He shot a scolding glare her way and she self-consciously giggled then bowed her head so as not to publicly admit she had ever talked to him.

The following days, Kurosh visited the carpet factory to show the master his progress on the miniature loom and to be encouraged and offered occasional helpful hints. After he had a few inches of work done, the master decided to build him a medium size portable loom. This time Kurosh tried stringing the warp, wove and cross stitches obtaining the master's approval and admiration. The master made sure he had the first rows right then he mapped out a pattern on a page that had many little squares. With each square representing a knot, the master used colored pencils to map out a typical pattern. As the time for Kurosh to leave Herat drew near, he frantically bought up balls of wool thread in the typical colors of the pattern he had been given: dark brown, brown, tan, black, dark blue and red. He also obtained two knotting/cutting tools with the hooks on the end and the middle of the inside flat edge sharpened, a beater, scissors and a jagged curved rug rake which is used to coax up any threads that are stuck in the weave before sheering them down with the scissors.

Learning to Pleat from the Chadri Saz

Along with carpet weaving, for years Kurosh wanted to learn how to pleat cloth in fine rows like the colorful silk *chadri* veil shawls that were so elegant. He later learned that beautiful dresses designed by Mariano Fortuny, who was born in Cordoba and a fan of Islamic art, also had similar beautiful tiny pleats. The same pleating concept characterized a Sasanian dress represented in the Historical Pageant of Women's Dress in Iran, an event Kurosh attended where Queen Farah Diba was present. Kurosh loved the pleat idea and decided he had to learn how it was done. So one day he begged the *chardi saz* or *chadri* maker to teach him how to do pleats. With a little financial encouragement, the pleat master agreed and one morning early, Kurosh showed up at the compound where *chadri* washing and repleating was a thriving business. Working on the roof in full sunlight, the master demonstrated how, when the material was wet, one row was carefully pleated by pinching along for a short distance with the cloth on a flat surface then folding the pinched part down finally pinching another row next to it and folding that over the former one. Soon a few rows were folded over and then the master placed small pebbles on them to hold them flat. Then the same rows were pinched farther along and more pebbles placed on them until eventually stones were set across several rows. Finally when the whole cloth was pleated, boards carefully replaced the stones then the garment was allowed to dry several hours in the baking sun. The boards were then removed and each *chadri* was held up by the top of the cap and twisted tightly then curled up to protect the pleats. When Kurosh was in Mahshad on the way back to Tehran, he tried pleating his silky white turban soaking it in the hotel sink and using the technique but placing books and other flat objects to hold down the pleat folds which dried over night. Although the pleats were not as uniform and perfect as an Afghan *chadri*, the turban looked quite nice. Later back in the States, Kurosh tried pleating a white cotton *chadri* but it didn't turn out as well as he had hoped.

Miniature Painting and Ostad Mashhal

Rug weaving and pleating were not the only non-performance arts Kurosh was interested in; he always had a fondness for Eastern painting since his Chinese art classes in Idyllwild California and also at BYU. He was a hobby painter who had dabbled in southern Sung style ink painting in Idyllwild under the tutelage of a descendant of a former Southern Sung master. He also did oil painting starting

with the paint by number kit the ‘good’ doctors at Mount Airy Sanitarium in Denver provided him to while away the hours and days he was in holding before finally being committed there for shock and insulin treatments. So after finding out that the Herat school of Persian miniature painting was still kept alive by Ustad Mash’al, Kurosh decided to hop a *gadi* and visit the art academy. Kurosh went into the building and met Ustad Masha’l who told him that they were following the school of the former Timurid master painter Behzad. Of course Kurosh was aware of Behzad’s importance as demonstrated by the frequent use of his name, for instance: the Behzad Hotel, New Behzad Hotel, Super Behzad Hotel, etc. According to Mash’al, when they want to do a really important work, they make the paints in the old manner by crushing, for instance, Lapis Lazuli and mixing it into a paint. Kurosh surmised that other gem stones common in the area like ruby, emerald, turquoise, yellow agate, etc. could be crushed into paints as well. Also silver, gold or the dyes used for dyeing carpets might be used. Kurosh made an appointment to have one of the apprentice artists do a couple of Herati miniature paintings of Mormon figures. Later he returned and explained what he needed and was given a fair price for the work. He eventually got nicely painted miniatures of Nephite leader Moroni and the freedom banner and also one of the final fatal battle between the last surviving Jaredites Coriantumr and Shiz.

Harrowing Trip from Herat to Tayebad

Finally came time for Kurosh to leave Herat in order to attend the Tus Festival in Mashhad where he was supposed to review the event for the Tehran Journal and also the competing Kayhan International. He spent his last two days making final purchases, saying goodbye to friends, writing last minute signs for the hotel and collecting slabs of bread. Kurosh always bought 50 to 100 slabs of the excellent whole wheat bread which he allowed to dry out on his return trip so he could feast on it for weeks in the form of a type of cracker. There was no real edible bread in Tehran, all of it was made with bleached white flour, thanks to Americanization, and it tasted like dried out wet paper towels. With a small piece of bread in his hand, Kurosh went to visit the hard-working camel in the enclosed circular stone mill a ways down the street towards Darwaza Kandahar. The poor old camel would plod all day around and around in a circle tied to a beam that was fastened to the mill stone. Although the camel was probably happy to be doing something, Kurosh felt sorry for him. Kurosh stopped to gaze into the mill through a narrow vertical slit of a window in the clay wall then he stuffed the slab of bread through an adjoining slit hoping the camel might like a snack. The camel plodded by a couple of times with tired eyes then on the third time raised his head and grabbed the bread with his teeth and munched it down. Kurosh sent a blessing to the animal and returned to pick up his bread order.

As Kurosh loaded the 50 slabs of bread into the Variant, he noticed that his tire had gone flat. There was no time to have it properly repaired by having a patch melted onto the inner tube by a heat process. So he had to settle for having a patch glued on hoping it would get him to Tayebad where a *lastik saz* or tire man with more equipment could fix it right. So with the tire back on the car, Kurosh headed out of town past the minarets and over the peaceful desert. About an hour out of Herat, he heard a frightening thump and the car began to rattle. The patch had blown but his determination to get to Mashhad in time for the opening ceremonies of the Tus Festival left him with the only option of taking his chances with the beat-up spare which had been repaired several times and was down to the threads. He quickly installed the spare and sped off towards the village with the strange black vertical windmills flapping inside earthen towers with open spaces through which the wind turned the creaking wooden poles. Just outside of the village, Kurosh’s fears became a horrible reality as the spare also thumped into a flat. But Kurosh was insanely determined and stupidly stubborn; so nothing short of death was going to stop him from reaching

Tayebad that night. He didn't even stop but just slowed to about 10 Ks an hour so the rumbling wouldn't rattle the car apart. He rumbled through the village to the amusement of the populace. Some boys chased after him so he sped up to 15 Ks to avoid being razed and harassed. It was still another 50 Ks or more to the border, so Kurosh pressed on gritting his teeth, hoping that the tire would last him in its gnarled state until he reached Tayebad. There were no tire repair shops between Herat and Tayebad so that was his only hope other than abandoning the car with several hundred dollars in purchases to be pilfered by children or bandits.

The heat of the afternoon gave way to dusk and Kurosh thumped along now at only five Ks because the mangled remains of the tire wouldn't take any higher speeds. Later that night he was praying and intensely gripping the steering wheel as the car crawled up over the last hill just before the lights of the Islam Qalah border station appeared on the horizon. When he thumped into the Afghan customs and passport checkpoint, his friends stared in amazement. Out of pity, they quickly rushed him through the formalities in a record one hour and a half instead of the usual five hours. He climbed back into the car noting that the tire had become a hardened molten mass of lumpy rubber which meant that it might still carry him to Tayebad. It was a long drive from Islam Qalah to the Iranian border station with the thumping tire tormenting him. The normally ten minute drive took nearly an hour which seemed like many hours to exhausted Kurosh when he finally bumped into a stall at the customs checkpoint. His old friend Mr. Hosseini was alerted by the boys in the green uniforms, some of whom were fans of Kurosh's TV shows. It was good to be back where he was a famous TV personality and where he could spin eloquent lines of *ta'arof* showering compliments on everyone while being praised in return. Mr. Hosseini purposefully strode up and, with a hug and a kiss on both cheeks, said in Persian "so Mr. Kurosh Ali Khan, you're back. Welcome, but what happened to your tire; you have a spare?" Kurosh divulged his tale of woe and immediately one of the lesser officials ordered a customs man to run to town in a pickup to get the other tire repaired. Meanwhile, Kurosh sat and told his friends how he had spent a month managing Herat's best hotel, learning rug weaving and listening to music. After an hour, the pickup driver returned with the same mangled spare informing Kurosh that the tire man was home relaxing and wouldn't go back to his shop for anyone, not even the Shah. So Kurosh had to grit his teeth and, after fond farewells, thump on to Tayebad city some 20 more miserable Ks from the border.

Chapter 8

Problems and Pleasures at the Tus Festival in Mashhad

It was midnight when Kurosh's poor car limped up to the tire shop in Tayebad where he parked and set up the Variant for a night of well-earned slumber. The next morning he bought a new tire and a tube which carried him to Mashhad where he later found a reliable used tire for a spare. But when the tire man finished putting the tire on in Tayebad, it was already afternoon so Kurosh was sure to miss the Tus Festival grand opening and thus forgo an opportunity to be present at an event attended by the Queen and her entourage. He sped at 90 to 100 Ks all the way till he saw the golden domes of the holy shrine of Mashhad glimmering in the afternoon sun. After speeding around Mashhad to the village of Ferdosi, he noticed an official roadblock. When he drew near he asked one of the officers in a jeep what was happening and the officer replied that Her Majesty was there for the grand opening and no one was allowed near. Kurosh desperately waived his invitation and opening event tickets with the official SAVAK stamp, but to no avail. The officer said he had his orders and no one was allowed to pass the barricade for any reason. For a moment, Kurosh had a desperate urge to try to sneak around the barricade

and then scamper off to the event where he knew all his news media and TV friends were enjoying the program. But images of being machine gunned by the guards quelled his crazy urges.

Kurosh sat for four hours tensely biting his fingers and nails thinking of all the excitement he was missing until the crowd finally disbursed and the barricade was lifted. He drove madly up to the entrance of the festival area to see his old friend Purmoradian who was on the NIRT festivals public relations staff. Purmoradian smiled and, grasping Kurosh's hand, chuckled "*bah bah, Kurosh Khan, inja che kar mikoni?*" Kurosh answered that he was there because he had been sent to review the festival for two papers and two magazines as usual. Of course Kurosh was seldom recognized at such events unless he raised a fuss or wrote something nasty in the paper like the time he ended up sleeping on the grass at the Shiraz Arts Festival in protest to housing discrimination. Purmoradian looked sheepishly and warned "but, Miller, I don't think you are on the press list." Kurosh started fuming and threatened a repeat of the Shiraz incident if he wasn't given full press privileges. Purmoradian tried to calm him promising that he would be added to the list. Kurosh was instructed to go to the Tehran Hotel in Mashhad to see Miss Khalatbari who would find him a room. Kurosh cringed at the thought of having to deal with Nina who could be fairly hard-hearted. That is why some of the Tehran press community had gleefully adopted Kurosh's renaming her as Ms. Ghalatkari (mistake-maker). She gave Kurosh a rough time at every NIRT festival, especially since he got into that ugly shouting match with her at a former Shiraz Arts Festival.

Perpetual Rooming Problems

When he arrived at the Tehran Hotel in his grubby slept-in traveling clothes, people were less than impressed. Nina looked up at Kurosh from her desk cluttered with last-minute problems to solve. She blurted "Miller, oh no! What are you doing here?" Kurosh put on his best *ta'arof*, attempting to flirt in his warmest personality sweetly telling her he was there for two papers and two magazines to review the festival. Of course, she tried to ship him back to Purmoradian; but Kurosh contended that he had just been there and Purmoradian sent him to her because she was so wonderful and brilliant. Nina sat in perturbed silence for a moment then waved him aside with "Miller, I'm busy and we are completely out of rooms; you'll have to go over to the Hyatt and tell your story to Mr. Nafisi. See if he can do anything for you." Kurosh was really tired of Iranian red tape and buck passing after seven years of it; but he hunched and shuffled out to the car to fight the traffic to the Hyatt. Luckily, Nafisi was sitting in the lobby joking with Dr. Mahjubi, head of TV productions. When he approached them, Kurosh offered his best smile and warmest vibes saying how happy he was to see such intelligent and fine gentlemen. The TV big shots cheerfully chuckled then asked what he was doing in Mashhad. Kurosh put on a serious and important persona to explain his big news assignment to which Nafisi replied "then I guess you are our guest here." Nafisi had learned from the Shiraz drama not to slight Kurosh again adding "well, I'll tell Nina to find you a place to stay and Purmoradian will make sure you are invited to all the events, alright? Now run along like a good boy and get your room."

So back again to the Tehran Hotel to be suspiciously glared at by Nina over her big round glasses. "Miller, I thought you were taken care of" she reprimanded. Kurosh asserted "Nafisi told me you would find me a room." Nina sighed, closed her eyes a moment, and as if taking a handful of pills conceded "sit here a minute and I'll see what is left." 'Left' was far too kind a description. Kurosh, always feeling like Joseph and Mary who ended up in the stable, bit his tongue when he heard the word *khabgah* (dorm.). The 'accommodations' were the third floor of another really bad dorm like the awful one they tried to dump him in at the Shiraz festival where he staged his famous 'sleeping on the grass protest.' This time it wasn't just a horrible place with boisterous students partying all night. It was a gaggle of goofy opium

addicts from various downtown or across-the-tracks areas of different cities who were his roommates. They would trade off smoking strong stenchy Iranian cigarettes and a *qalyun* (pipe) of opium using the typical tongues and hot coals from a small heating tray. The conversation was replete with *pedarsag* (son of a b) and *madaraqab* (mother sodomizer) to name a few of their less offensive terms. The old codgers were well past due for their monthly baths as witnessed by the beyond B.O. which permeated what little air was able to exist overridden by smoke. Then they decided to set aside the opium pipe in order to roast some fetid-smelling kebab, one might have surmised a stray cat from the stench. Kurosh decided to politely excuse himself and return to the sanctity of his trusty old Variant where at least he could breathe. He found a nice placid spot among some trees, bushes and flowers where he parked and set up the car for a welcome night's rest.

Events at the Festival

The next day as he attended the various panels on Ferdosi, he met Nafisi who asked how things were. Kurosh decided to have some fun and related an exaggerated description of the situation that Nina had subjected him to resulting in no choice but to return to his outdoor sleeping protest. Nafisi began to nervously twitch and squirm fearing a huge scandal like before so he tried to comfort Kurosh by detailing the beauties of the outdoors and the starlit skies of Khorasan quoting a few lines of Persian poetry to boot. But Kurosh seemed unpacified; so Nafisi promised that he would order Nina to find something with the other journalists at the Tehran Hotel. That was all Kurosh wanted, just to be treated like any other journalist, whatever and wherever that was. Of course, the Hyatt was only for the scholars, TV executives and foreign guests from abroad as distinguished from foreign resident newsmen who in Iran were considered as a type of barely tolerated white slaves. That night, Kurosh was delighted to find himself rooming with his dear buddy Terry Graham who was less than pleased that his big comfy double room was to be shared after all. All the journalists dreamed of the day they might get a room to themselves since, back in Tehran, none of the resident foreign newsmen had decent living conditions. Their big hope was to be continually invited to festivals and other events so they could live like human beings a few weeks of the year.

So it was off to another fun festival with Lloyd and Terry, the two tall Iranicized American nut cases who resembled a pair of giraffes among the shorter natives. Terry was excited about the meetings he had set up with various religious personalities which included a Sufi *derwish*, an *ayatollah*, a member of the Gonabadi sect and an official from the Shaykhi group. As he began to describe his Shaykhi friend, Kurosh couldn't resist saying "but isn't this guy a bit shaykhi?" Terry got into the crazy mood and added "he can shaykh, rattle and roll." Kurosh countered with hysterical giggles "he might be a bit shaykhi if he doesn't have the *mullah*." Terry shot back "then he might be mullahfied." Finally the two, in disgust for their own corn, pasted on their straight scholastic faces in order to appear to be the important (or so they wished) newsmen they were as they left the room towards the elevator to the lobby to grab a meal at the hotel restaurant.

In the restaurant, everyone was staring at each other to see who was wearing what, who was talking to who and who was looking at who. Terry, who preferred his Iranian name Shamseddin among his friends, scanned the horizon for some acquaintances, which included almost everyone there. Kurosh was not as much for socializing with everyone that could breathe, so his friends and acquaintances in the crowd were considerably less. The two nodded, smiled, and otherwise greeted whomever they recognized by respectfully holding their right hands over their hearts and slightly bowing. After fifteen minutes of careful and selected acknowledging from near and far, not forgetting to respectfully ignore the more snobby and

high level TV executives in order to spare the big wigs the contamination of having to recognize low level white slave newsmen, the two were ready to order.

Now came the continual hassle which Kurosh had to face at every restaurant in the Middle East except in Arab countries. He had to go to great lengths to plead, beg, explain and sweet talk his way into getting rice without kebab on it, salad without eggs or meat, some Ab-e Ali or Amolo bottled spring water instead of gaggy Pepsi or other poison pop and finally some type of desert without sugar. The hardest was the plain rice since no restaurant could figure out prices for things other than their standard menu items. But usually Kurosh got something that fitted his vegetarian diet even if from time to time he had to shout, threaten and once throw a knife on the floor to get vegetarian food. No one could understand how anyone, especially an American, wouldn't want mountains of meat, eggs, pop and other junk food except for the few dozen frequent guests at the raw food restaurant in Tehran where the brilliant but crazy Armenian owner, Mr. Hovanessian, would rant and rave at anyone who dared mention the word 'cooked.'

After lunch, the air filled with an atmosphere of expectation as the minibuses lined up outside the hotel and the festival guests, hosts and hostesses clustered near the door, tickets in hand and chatting about the events. Terry couldn't resist demonstrating his ability in Russian as he tried to strike up a conversation with the delegate from Dagestan. "*Strasvitia, kak diela?*" he said. Kurosh chimed in "*payekheti na sobrainya?*" (you going to the meeting?) But then he left Terry to continue his conversation as Kurosh's attention became fixed on the breathtakingly attractive girl hostesses, a few of whom he remembered from other festivals and many of whom were semi-fans of his TV shows. He often invited the most beautiful ones to co-host his show and they always accepted but, as usual in Persian politeness, all invitations, acceptances, promises and oaths are merely timely or kindly remarks which are never taken seriously. However, one hostess of the Tehran Film Festival, Mahshid Eshraqi, did come through and taped a couple of shows with Kurosh where she was a wonderful intelligent and savvy narrator. One of a pair of strikingly lovely hostesses asked Kurosh the classic question all the girls wanted to know "*Aghaye Kurosh Ali Khan . . . dar Iran zan migiri?*" When asked if he was going to marry in Iran he always answered "of course, my dear, why don't I marry you?" To that reply of "*hatman azizam, chera shoma zanam nemishid?*" the girls self-consciously yet tauntingly giggled "*chashm, fardo.*" The promise of "O.K., tomorrow" or "for sure" or "I swear" always meant absolutely nothing at all in Iran and everyone knew it. When Kurosh had first arrived in Tehran, he took such statements literally and stunned and amazed everyone he dealt with when he kept his word and took promises to heart. Now he had become, as had Terry, a super master of *ta'arof* and was one of the most sugar-tongued eloquators of kind words in the whole country. Actually, he was an expert because he really meant most of the flattering kind remarks he made since all through his life he had always been a nice guy who tried to make people feel good.

About the third minibus, Terry and Kurosh were able to climb on and ride to the lecture hall where Ferdosi and his epic classic Shah-Name were discussed in great length and hair-splitting detail. The group filed into the lecture hall where Shamseddin and Kurosh took their places in the center of the balcony. First on the program was a professor from India who went on in great detail about the cultural ties between former Persia, India and Ferdosi. Then the commies came on, an almost humorous little scholar from Dagestan and a sneaky-looking professor from Moscow. There had been no real solid representation from the U.S. at Tus and Kurosh wished he had been an invited scholar as he had been to the Ansari celebration in Kabul and Herat. There his fluent and poetic Dari Persian heavily shamed the Russian representative who barely knew a bit of Pashtu and spoke with a heavy Russian accent. Both Kurosh and Shamseddin could have given memorable lectures but, since they were merely white slaves in Iran, no one gave them credit for having any intellectual prowess. Shamseddin, who always over-committed and over-worked himself, fell into his usual afternoon slumber as the lectures drug on. Finally, after several TV

executives shot perturbed glares at the two Americans, Kurosh nudged Shamseddin awake just in time to hear funny little poems written by the various scholars. The verses were in praise of Ferdosi and in the *motaqarib* metric framework of the Shah Name. Some of the attempts were cute, some were corny and, of course, the Russians tried to out-do everyone else and show off how they were the world's greatest, which they definitely were not.

After the lectures, everyone was whisked back to the Tehran Hotel for a quick dinner and then rushed out to Tus city where they witnessed a wild wrestling match accompanied by the shrill *sorna* (a type of oboe) and *dohol* (similar to bass drum). Kurosh and Shamseddin were mesmerized by the colorful conflicts in ancient athletic attire in the golden rays of the Khorasan dusk. After the wrestling, which Her Majesty the Queen seemed to fully enjoy, the crowd moved to the large stone shrine of Ferdosi for a demonstration of *shahname khuni* and *naqali* or recitations of the Shah Name and epic story-telling recited by some of the old codgers who would have been Kurosh's room mates in the grim dorm in Mashhad. They emphasized passages and words with exaggerated gestures, sudden shouts and by extending important syllables. The Queen was sitting on the ground with the other spectators but with a few velvet pillows around her at the insistence of her entourage. She was only a few rows away from Kurosh and he was almost more awestruck by her elegance and beauty than by the excitement of the recitations. During the seven times he had officially met her at various events and grasped her hand respectfully for a short exchange of *ta'arof*, he was always thrilled to have the honor of being in the presence of someone who had done so much for the arts. She had turned Iran into an international art and culture center during the early to mid 70s and everyone who supported music and arts looked up to her. This was especially true of Kurosh who had suffered degradation and misery trying to be a musician in America and Europe where no one cared about anything but material gain and where music and arts were disregarded except as props for silly advertisements or to be used by Satanic purveyors of rock and pop to mind-control unwitting youth.

Kurosh stared at Her Majesty, who was always surrounded with a special glow, until she turned for a moment and her eyes caught his in seeming recognition. That was enough to put Kurosh in a state of bliss for the rest of the evening as they all experienced the thrill of Khorasani folk dances, which appeared as almost exact replicas of Afghan dance patterns, and Khorasani bards who sang and accompanied themselves on *dutar*. One storyteller vocalist from Quchan named Yegane used *dotar* techniques and musical phrases that seemed to be strikingly similar to those Kurosh had been studying in Herat. Another performer was an old man with a typical large round black wool Turkoman hat with a flat top. His style of singing and playing was like the Turkoman performances that Kurosh had heard on recordings and on Radio Gorgan with the two strings tuned in 5th and played together in a type of eerie but powerful harmony.

The concerts ended about 10 p.m. and the Queen left with her entourage. The festival guests found their way to the mini-busses and Kurosh clung to Shamseddin because he knew that his buddy was always well advised of any parties or after hours gatherings. Sure enough, there was a gala dinner and social event for all the festival guests hosted by the governor of Khorasan at his palace. Of course no one had mentioned it to Kurosh as usual; but Shamseddin had somehow learned about it. When the two arrived at the palace, Mr. Roshan, an associate of Purmoradian in the hospitality committee, was at the gate to check for tickets. Kurosh hadn't been able to pick up his complete ticket packet yet because of the usual red tape that tangled up, everything especially due to the problem that he had not been on the official guest list. Shamseddin flashed his banquet ticket with the SAVAK stamp on the back as Kurosh tried to push his way through clinging close to his buddy Terry. Roshan suspiciously glared at Kurosh and asked "Miller, are you on the guest list? Where is your ticket?" Kurosh confidently declared in Farsi that Mr. Nafisi had

told Nina to tell Purmoradian to tell so and so to issue him the necessary tickets and passes because somehow, as usually happens, Kurosh was omitted from the master list. Roshan smiled in semi disgust affirming “you have to have a ticket, Miller.” Kurosh countered with “I swear on my grandfather’s grave, I am an official guest reviewing the festival for two papers and two magazines . . . Really!” Kurosh always commanded respect by his eloquent command of Farsi even though his looks and actions were often less than ‘respectable’ to say the least. Roshan glanced around to see if anyone was noticing the situation then whispered “*bashe, zud borrow!*” pushing him through the gate past the smiling security guards and poised polished army officers.

Partying and Romance in Tus and Mashhad

The two Americans climbed the stairs to the huge hallway where tables were over laden with the most sumptuous array of foods and delicacies imaginable. Fruits from Herat, Pakistan and India, likely confiscated items from customs warehouses, and the usual vast selection of very imaginable treat and dish that is offered at every festival in Iran was there to tantalize the eye and tongue. Bazari semi-pop music was furnished by a small group of ethnic instruments and a few of the more daring TV beauties and their male escorts were doing an upper-class version of the Baba Keram or Iranian huchi kuchi. Soon the dance floor filled up with most of the banquet guests bobbing their heads from side to side, swishing their hands daintily and prancing in tiny steps to the music. Then one of the more buxom babes with a low-cut dress came over to where the two Americans were standing and, with a naughty smile, grasped Shamseddin’s hand and pulled him out onto the dance floor. As he spun into his famous dance routines combining Iranian and Turkish patterns, his partner dropped out and began encouraging him by clapping along to the music soon to be joined by the whole room full of guests all admiringly arranged in a circle watching the tall blond, blue-eyed American do his antics. Then a sweet little doll with hip-length hair drew close to Kurosh and whispered “*biya, to am boro.*” Kurosh, being a show-off and showman couldn’t resist being tugged out into the middle of the crowd, especially by such a divinely attractive young lady. Soon the two Americans were thrilling the audience with their fantastic dance skills while TV executives, government officials, festival hostesses, army officers and SAVAK agents were giggling, cheering and clapping. Kurosh overheard members of the audience remark “*un Kurosh Ali Khan e; television nadidish?*” Of course everyone had seen him on TV at least once, so their admiration for the antics of the American dancers was heightened because they were watching a TV ‘star’ in person.

When the two show-offs were almost exhausted, the music stopped and it was time to eat. Their newly acquired ‘dates’ proudly clutched the arms of their two American prizes and led them to the table where everyone was crowding around to get the best food treats. Of course, the two Americans were pushed to the head of the crowd by their many admirers, so they got first choice. But Kurosh wasn’t interested in any of the gravied meat dishes. Instead, to everyone’s astonishment, he went straight to the salad bowl, filled a plate with vegetables, grabbed a bit of feta cheese and flat-bread, then loaded up another plate with fresh fruit. As always, the custom dictated that everyone stand around the tables of food and gossip while stabbing a chunk of chicken or scooping up a spoonful of saffron rice to add to their dishes from the common plates. No one seemed to care whether a mile-long line of starving guests was waiting to get at the table; it was a fight for food and the cleverest got the most by pushing their way in or by sneaking a fork between the gossipers who were hogging the table. Kurosh remembered how once he tried to stab at a block of feta through a space in a crowd at a film festival gala banquet and accidentally bounced his fork off the sumptuous roll of a beautifully built Iranian girl’s rump as she suddenly passed by. Unhurt but stunned, she and he both turned pale, then red as Kurosh offered all kinds of apologies

which she politely refused as unnecessary. The rest of the festival, she kept on eying Kurosh in search of some deeper romantic connotation for his clumsiness and he, flirt that he was, would give her little looks and occasional fond smiles assuring that, although it was an accident, he actually was attracted to her.

Innocently flirting with girls was one of Kurosh's occasional pastimes even if he had avoided physical contact for the years he was in Middle East. He was a part-time Mormon stake missionary, so any impure activity was to be avoided. This evening was not unlike many others when the two girls who had chosen to cling to the American pair were dropping all types of subtle and shy hints that they were possibly available for further activities. But Kurosh and Shamseddin were known as adopted Moslems who were active Sufis and some type of supposed 'holy men;' so they both were experts at sublimating any potential drives and desires. Kurosh looked back with pride, yet maybe a tiny tinge of nostalgia, on the many forgone opportunities when he had refused to spend a night or nights with some of the most desirable young women imaginable. But considering how those young beauties would look and act in their seventies or eighties would quickly cure any potential remorse.

The Tus festival drew to a close and Kurosh offered Shamseddin a ride back to Tehran in the Variant if he could wait one day because Kurosh had a bit of business to finish in Mahshhad. But Shamseddin, as always, had to rush back to be in Tehran for some other festival which did not interest Kurosh and to which, of course, he had not been invited. The next day, Kurosh spent the afternoon at the wool dyer's shop near the shrine and also on the street where his Mashhadi friend Zari lived. During the festival, he had spent a couple of days driving around with Zari and her friend Mehri. When he and Mehri were lounging on the grass behind the Hyatt one afternoon, it became clear that Zari was trying to fix them up. Later Mehri told Kurosh in Persian "you have everything I want . . . music, culture, scholarship, freedom to travel and carefreeness." Then she suggested "why don't I come to your hotel room and wash your clothes, massage your back and feet and take care of you?" Kurosh momentarily tingled at the tantalizing thought but, knowing that such a thing was absolutely inappropriate according to both Mormon and Moslem doctrine, he quickly and politely refused offering some vague excuse. Then there were suggestions by Mehri that they could get married to which Kurosh assured that he already had an Afghan fiancée back in America. For Mormons and also for Moslems, relationships were based on marriage first then physical romance later. So instead of asking a girl for a date, it was proper to discuss marriage possibilities. This policy kept Kurosh's romantic encounters to nonexistent and thus avoided his higher goals from being deluded by emotional and physical entanglements.

Wool Dying in Mashhad

Before leaving Mashhad, Kurosh went to see Mahmad Agha, the wool dyer, to have several kilos of wool dyed in the colors he needed for his future rug weaving back in the States. He had brought small rolls of samples from Herat representing the typical colors used there. After discussing the project and studying the colors, Mahmad began the process. Using an old long stick, he dunked the loops of wool into the hot boiling dye then raised the stick letting the wool drip for a few minutes before repeating the process two or three more times. Mahmad explained that the dyes were natural, made from wheat chaff, pomegranate skins, indigo powder, walnut shells and other vegetable sources. Only the bright red color was a chemical from Germany. Kurosh took only one kilo of the red since it was fake and not needed in the pattern he was working from. Mainly he wanted tan, dark brown, indigo blue and orange tan. When the dying was completed and dry, Kurosh made his way down the quiet alleyway struggling with the heavy load. He drank in the enchantment of the ancient wood balconies, the earthen walls, carved doors and strange patterns of woodwork on the front of the balconies. He reached his faithful but bedraggled

VW and loaded his wool collection then drove off westward to the Caspian coast and over the mountains to Tehran.

Back on the Streets of Tehran

Back in Tehran, Kurosh was again sentenced to sleeping in the back of his car as he had been for the last three harsh years. It was due to the cruel meanness of his Hamadani Jewish landlord who, greedy for higher rent, had evicted him from the apartment he had lived in for four years. Although most of Kurosh's Jewish friends and acquaintances throughout his life were wonderful, helpful and kind, this was one case where the negative stereotype of the chintzy and heartless materialistic Jew really did apply. Hamadanis were famous for chintziness and were called *pust khar kan* (donkey skinner). Add to that the worst of Jewishness and the result was what Kurosh termed *pust mush kan* (mouse skinner). The moment that Sa'id bought the three-floor apartment from Kurosh's mom's good friend Homa Ashraf, he had been tormenting Kurosh. First he tore out Kurosh's phone line which Kurosh put back by working all night chiseling a deep trench in the wall, putting a phone line in, plastering and repainting it to perfection. But then Sa'id disconnected the line again so Kurosh climbed way up on the roof reaching to the end of the pole sticking out from the wall and tapped into the line there. Meanwhile Sa'id and his naggy wife continually hounded him to give up the garage which he finally did. Then they daily harangued him to get out so they could find a renter who would pay top dollar. Eventually, Kurosh had to transfer all his instruments and other valuables to an office at Dr. Safvat's Center for Preservation and Propagation of Iranian Music in central Tehran on Khak Ave. When he had all his belongings stuffed into the small office, he put dark blue curtains in his Variant and one day handed the key to Sa'id's wife and said goodbye. Sa'id had continually stated "whatever you do to others, you only do to yourself." A good thought but this time it probably was Sa'id who would suffer the consequences of chasing a poor starving artist scholar into the street. One night, Kurosh had listened to a conversation between Sa'id and his wife through the floor of his upstairs room and when she asked "but what if he doesn't have the money to pay more?" Sa'id answered "he does; did you see that big thick PhD dissertation he wrote?" Little did Sa'id know that a PhD in Middle East Studies with expertise on Persian music could never result in any employment even in an American university. After all who in the American leadership would never want to be able to make friends with the Middle East? The U.S. has demonstrated that they are only interested in getting all the oil and natural gas they can pilfer from the Middle East by assassinating leaders, mass murdering innocent civilians or whatever vicious means possible. Looking back on the whole apartment nightmare, Kurosh could only pray for Sa'id that he wouldn't suffer too much for his cruelty although after the revolution Jews, especially really mean ones, surely weren't given any special privileges.

Chapter 9

Kurosh's Wedding and the Shiraz Arts Festival

Back at the Iran-America Society, the emotionless deskman slid a blue air letter across the desk mumbling "*Kurosh Khan, nameyetun.*" Kurosh had been expecting a letter from his Afghan fiancée Mari so he eagerly tore it open to read lines of poetry and kind words along with the promise that she was arriving the next week so they could go to the Shiraz Arts Festival together. Kurosh bounced from room to room at the IAS, excitedly explaining in English, Farsi, Armenian, Azeri and attempted Assyrian "she's coming, she's coming!" Everyone thought Kurosh was a bit crazy and they nodded and smiled wondering

who would ever want to marry such a wandering starving goofball artist. Kurosh begged his helpful and good-hearted boss Phil Pillsbury to allow him to make one long-distance phone call and deduct it from his monthly \$75 programming consultancy fee. Phil agreed but said not to worry about paying for it. Kurosh finally got through and found out the date and time she was arriving on the daily Pan Am flight which was usually late.

As the big day neared, Kurosh told his friends at the LDS branch to get ready for the wedding. He had arranged for a government-authorized Christian minister to preside and fill out the forms and the mission president to do the marriage. Everyone at Church was happy to see Kurosh finally ‘settle down’ after roaming all over the Middle East for seven years, barely surviving and living in his car for the last three years. One of the members offered to have Mari stay with them until the wedding. The day of the arrival, Kurosh was at the airport an hour early. As usual, parking was impossible and the crowds were like at Judgment Day, as the Iranians would say. He found a parking spot and then squeezed his way past the shoulder-to-shoulder masses to the arrival area. There he remained pinned for five tedious hours until she arrived, then three more hours until Mari was able to fight her way through the passport, customs and baggage claim. Kurosh finally spotted her wearing a goofy red dress and a weird straw hat looking like some showy eccentric Shiraz Festival artist, appropriate for the occasion but not what Kurosh would have preferred. He liked her as the sweet little Afghan girl who occasionally sported some of the beautiful hand-crafted traditional Afghan dresses prized by savvy intellectual ladies of class in the 70s.

She caught a glimpse of him in the crowd and waived discouragedly from the long line where she had to stand for an hour to get her luggage before taking it to the customs table. Kurosh tried desperately to sneak through the door of the arrival room, but the grim policeman warned “*na Kurosh Ali Khan, aslan nemishe.*” He knew it was impossible but was worth a try. Little Mari finally claimed her two suitcases loaded with clothes and make-up since she was deep into the show-off kick that nearly all Middle Eastern women seemed to be hung up on. She finally cleared customs who were suspicious of her eloquence in Tehrani Persian and her American immigration re-entry booklet that passed as a passport. She slid her large suitcases through the door where Kurosh grabbed them then he grabbed her for a solid hug and meaningful kiss that got the attention of some of his TV fans among the customs agents and bystanders. Whispers circulated “*namzad-e Kurosh Ali Khano didi?*” Of course he was proud for everyone to see his fiancée; finally, he proved that he could find a wife even if she wasn’t Iranian. As they made their way towards the outside of the airport, he boasted to anyone who recognized him “*namzadam, Afghani e!*”

After loading the suitcases into the car, they drove into the terrors of the Tehran traffic, fighting their way to the entrance of the Vanak Parkway and on to the home of the LDS family who had invited Mari to stay. There she conjured up one of her delicious Afghan meals of eggplant, turmeric potatoes and steamed puffed rice with carrots, almonds and raisins which delighted her hosts and the friends who had come to see the pretty prize Kurosh had finally convinced to marry him. The next day, they went to get the necessary blood tests and x-rays for the marriage license. They chose a Christian wedding since an Islamic one would be very difficult and because Mari had been recently baptized LDS by famous Near East scholar Hugh Nibley at BYU. After getting the license, Kurosh took Mari to meet his music and spiritual master, Dr. Safvat, at the Center for Preservation and Propagation of Iranian Music. They joked and talked about music, culture, literature and mysticism. Mari told Dr. Safvat that she had been caught in a state of jet lag and was being railroaded into a wedding. Safvat countered that they had to get married or they wouldn’t be able to share a room at the Shiraz Festival. The couple visited instrumental and vocal classes and spent some time in the Center’s instrument factory visiting with master craftsman Zadkher. Kurosh related how he had talked Dr. Safvat into sending Zadkher to Herat to spend a month studying instrument-making techniques from *dutar* makers Painda and Zebiullah. It was dinner time, and Dr. Safvat invited

them to the fancy restaurant across the street where he entertained important guests. After dinner, he reminded them that it was Monday evening and time to go to the *khaneqa*. Kurosh asked if he dared bring Mari without the requisite prior permission and Dr. Safvat reminded that Kurosh had barged in with uninvited guests before and was the only one who dared to, so why ask now. Also, Kurosh had always chosen worthy spiritually advanced individuals and was seemingly tacitly authorized to bring an occasional high caliber guest.

They drove up the hill towards Tajrish in silence until Dr. Safvat's dark gray Peykan came to a halt near the wide iron gates of the compound. They entered the courtyard and respectfully made their way down the narrow steps to the basement, removed their shoes and put on the long white gowns tied with the white belt symbolic of service to God. As Mari joined the women, whispers could be heard in Farsi saying "that's Kurosh Ali Khan's fiancée, she's Afghani." Dr. Safvat and Kurosh made their way to the front of the room where the men were gathering. Soon after, Dr. Elahi arrived and some of the faithful exchanged the sacred handclasp with him. When he reached Kurosh, he beamed "*Kurosh Ali Khan, namzadet resid?*" Kurosh answered yes his fiancée had arrived and that he brought her to the meeting, hopefully with permission. Dr. Elahi smiled and assured that she was very welcome since she was his future wife. Then Doctor made his way to the head of the room and asked for his *tanbur* and the evening began with a slow chant. Soon the chant became rhythmic with members singing and swaying to the beat that was eventually strengthened when joined by the large *dayereh* or frame drum. The music subsided and everyone calmed down. A large box of oranges was brought in and set before the master after which he and his brother blessed the fruit. It was then passed to each person present who kissed their orange and pressed it against their foreheads as a sign of respect before eating. After the meeting, the members began to leave, but Mari sat in stunned amazement remaining quietly alone next to Kurosh's arts writer friend Negin. Mari began to sob quietly and when Kurosh asked her what was going on she said "someone was here." Kurosh went to talk to Doctor who eventually observed in Farsi "your fiancée is a special person; she has seen my father, the *ostad*, who is in the spirit world."

The Wedding and Drive to Shiraz

Finally, it was the day for the wedding at the LDS mission home attended by a few intimate friends. Kurosh's pal, Bob Janati, who took over teaching his Persian music class at the University of Utah, and was now an assistant to Dr. Safvat at the Center, plotted with friends to steal the bride, an old Turkman tradition. So Kurosh was stuck with Bob's friend Lola, the crazy Brit who had befriended Kurosh and occasionally offered him a couch in her apartment during the years he had to live in his car. They drove to the reception and dinner at Negin's home where Kurosh's friends from the music world, the news world and the national television were waiting. "So you are going to have your honeymoon in that beat-up old car" one chided. "No, they are staying here tonight and driving to the Shiraz Festival tomorrow" Negin assured. "Oh that's right, Kurosh is going to sleep on the grass at the Festival like he did a couple of years ago" another kidded. Then Kurosh threatened "if they stick us on the grass, my story for the international wire service will scathe them out of existence." After a sumptuous meal, everyone relaxed at the poolside with refreshments until someone asked Kurosh to play *santur*. He was too embarrassed to play in the presence of his beloved master Dr. Safvat but reluctantly gave in cringing. Bob joined in on *zarb* and soon Lola was prevailed upon to do her version of Baba Keram. A few more ladies were talked into doing little Iranian dance routines until finally Mari was cheered out into the middle to demonstrate her elegant Afghan-Iranian dance skills.

The next day, the newly weds packed their things into the weary but faithful Variant and, with fond farewells to Negin who promised to meet them in Shiraz, they headed down Pahlevi Avenue to the center of Tehran. After fighting the hellish traffic near the bazaar, they were able to snail their way farther downtown and finally onto the southern road through Shabdelazim and Qom. There was no time to do a *ziyarat* of Qom and, because they were in a hurry, Kurosh wouldn't have time for a *sighe*, the infamous temporary marriage arranged between pilgrim gentlemen and available girls who hang around the shrine. Kurosh explained it all to Mari just to tease her about him adding a couple of temporary co-wives for the day.

Hours later, they pulled into Isfahan where they were astounded by the beautiful mosques tiled in turquoise, blue, yellow, black and white patterns. They went to the center of town, drank some fresh pomegranate juice and continued towards the old bazaar. There they browsed through the many little shops and watched an old man printing colors on a cloth with wood blocks. He chatted cheerfully as he stamped the block in a paint mixture spread out on a piece of old inner tube then pressed it onto the cloth. Then he pounded the block two taps with his other hand which had a leather and rubber shield fastened to the edge to prevent bruising. Mari wanted a block-printed skirt, so Kurosh bought her two and a top as well. They continued wandering through the obscure halls of the bazaar witnessing intricate inlay work in progress, eyeing expensive silken carpets and meandering down long alleys of busily hammering brass workers. Kurosh explained how the inlaid box work was done showing her the strips of bone, brass and other materials that were glued together in round, triangular or diamond-shaped rods. Those were later cut like carrots in many thin slices which were then glued one by one on the surface of the boxes or table tops, then sanded and finally lacquered.

It was *asr* or about five in the afternoon so the couple decided to continue on to Shiraz in hopes of arriving in time to get a good room at the famous Kurosh Hotel where Kurosh Ali had never been able to secure a room as a newsman in the past. This time they had to respect him a little because, added to the newspapers and magazines he was writing for, he was an official stringer for United Press International (UPI) thanks to his friend who was the UPI boss in Iran whom he had helped get established there when he first arrived. The last hours of driving were almost torture for Kurosh who was completely worn out from all the events of the previous days. But his new bride was able to keep him from falling asleep at the wheel by telling stories, singing, tickling him and even occasionally slapping his face when he would doze off. At last the car sped under the Koran Gate and down the hill into Shiraz. The weary pair pulled into the Kurosh Hotel parking lot about two in the morning and Kurosh went to the desk to authoritatively demand his room. He was given a key and asked to fill out the usual form then the couple trudged to the elevator with their luggage and found the room on the third floor. Kurosh was thrilled to stay in a first class hotel after three years of living in his car. Mari wasn't so impressed and observed "what's so fantastic about this place, it is just like a good motel anywhere in America." Kurosh agreed but noted that it was heaven after how he had been forced to live in his car through the Tehran housing crises caused by greedy landlords keeping half the town empty to drive rents up.

The Shiraz Arts Festival

The exhausted couple immediately fell asleep, but at eight the next morning they were jolted awake by the boisterous chatter and prattle of Tehran's prize gossip columnist James Underwood. "Jimmy, what are you doing here, old girl?" Kurosh kidded. "Well, the committee must've had it in for you so they paired you up with London's most gorgeous gay for a roommate. But what do we have here, is this your Afghan bride? My goodness, how can we all room together in this place which is even too small for two?"

Kurosh was again troubled how to solve the eternal housing crisis that even followed him all the way to Shiraz each year. This time, he had a bed in a room in a decent hotel, but his roommate was fussy fidgety Jimmy who, although no threat to any woman due to his flagrant fruitiness, could be difficult to have around. The newly weds were able to deal with the situation for the first two days by promising James that they would work on finding other accommodations for the rest of the festival. That proved to be more easily said than done. It was more the fact that James usually had his own room and felt that his importance as the top gossip in the country was diminished by him having to room with the crazy musician he helped train as a journalist and who was considered a type of vagabond living in a car.

The opening evening featured a contemporary dance extravaganza among the stone pillars of Persepolis offered by Merce Cunningham. Kurosh pegged the mess as a ridiculous rite of inhuman mechanical motions accompanied by ear-piercing cacophonous electronic non-music. But the queen and her entourage appeared to like it, probably to demonstrate how sophisticated Iranian high society was and how they could appreciate even the most avant-garde and unpleasantly odd ugly 'art.' That was the continual problem with Shiraz Festival events during its last years, half the offerings were ultra mod pseudo-art concoctions which the purveyors would probably never dare to foist on the public in their own native lands but which were drunk up by Iranian society folks as the last word in trendiness. To Kurosh and the real connoisseurs representing the local press, it was all more like a bowel movement and only good for promoting outbursts of hyena-like laughter from the art critics and their friends. "I always come to these terrible things for a good healthy laugh" Kurosh confided to his bride who was also giggling through it all in spite of occasional stern stares from NIRTV director Qotbi and his wife Sherry.

As the queen rose and left at the end of the performance, Kurosh and his bride were shocked to notice that she had dyed her hair an orangish color and had it pasted up into a huge beehive stack. Mari, knowing that Kurosh admired the queen for her support of the arts, got in a little catty remark. "Why did she dye her hair such an awful color? Gosh!" Kurosh disappointedly admitted "I guess so-called progress has come even to that." Back at the hotel in the snack bar, the journalists were frantically writing their stories about the opening evening so they could read them on the phone to the waiting page editors back in Tehran. James was snooping over Kurosh's shoulder to see what he was going to file and then became upset that Kurosh was panning the whole thing as pure garbage in the guise of dance. "Don't send that story, you daft bugger" he chastised while bouncing about in an angry fury. "You will only hurt yourself and the festival. And don't you dare even think of mentioning the queen's hair; I can't even say a thing about that." Kurosh whimpered that he had no intention of talking about the dye job and promised to rewrite his piece if James would sit down and stop prancing in nervous agitation. Of course Kurosh, stubborn cuss that he was, rewrote the review into a subtly sarcastic piece which proved to be more devastating than his first outright pan job.

But not all creative efforts over the years at Shiraz were total junk; ballet master Maurice Bejart choreographed a wonderful piece called Golestan which portrayed aspects of Sufi mysticism such as the mirror of the soul when the dancers held mirrors and depicted other deeper metaphysical concepts accompanied by the beautiful music by artists from Dr. Safvat's Center. Bejart had joined Dr. Elahi's *khaneqa* and one of his previous pieces, an Indian inspired creation called Bakhti, was also a hit at Shiraz. Then there was Peter Brook, also affiliated with the *khaneqa*, who made the wonderful film entitled 'Meetings with Remarkable Men.' Brook conjured up an avant-garde theater creation at Shiraz where Kurosh had been a percussionist with the group affectionately dubbed 'Brook's Kooks.

Rooming Crisis at the Festival

The third day of the festival, Negin had offered to have the newly weds stay at her uncle's. During dinner at the hotel, she told Mari to call her and wrote her number down on the back of a ticket. Otherwise, if Mari was going to the nightly ethnic concert at the Hafezie, Negin would meet them both there. When it came time for the evening programs, Mari was asked by James to go review the Persian play at Persepolis and turn in the article to the Tehran Journal. She agreed, gave Kurosh the Hafezie ticket, and went off to review the ethnic music concert. But that ticket had Negin's phone number on it and Mari wouldn't be there to meet them so she would be left out in the cold that night. The frightening realization dawned on Mari as she was sitting in the lobby waiting for the late bus to Persepolis. She knew that Negin was at her uncle's getting ready for the evening, but the phone number was gone. She had no choice but to peacefully meditate a few moments then she calmly walked over to the phone and dialed a number that appeared in her mind. A voice answered and she said "hello, who is this?" The voice said "hello Mari, this is Negin." The story of the miraculous channeling of a phone number was passed around among the inner circle mystics at the festival to become a legend.

That night after the concerts, the couple reunited and drove to the outskirts of town where, after several inquiries, they located the uncle's place among the clay houses. Lengthy knocking brought the uncle to the gate and the two were admitted. Negin brought a late snack of melons and other fruit then had two mats spread out in a side room for the guests. But when the newly weds retired, they were suddenly and viciously attacked by an army of fleas that had been lurking in the seldom used room. After being nearly bitten to blisters, the two fled for their lives returning to the faithful old car where they spent the rest of the night in the cramped quarters roasting in the summer heat. Of course, they didn't breathe a word of the attack to anyone in order not to hurt Negin's feelings. The next evening, the newlyweds shared an unbearably sultry tiny cell at the university dorm, a room which they were 'assigned' since no single rooms were said to be available at the Kurosh Hotel. One night there was all either of them could stand, so they accepted an invitation from the one and only Mormon couple in town to stay with them the next evening. By this time, the story of their plight was spreading to higher echelons of the festival organization committee. When James Underwood complained fervently to the festival program chief at a luncheon, finally the word was passed down to give Kurosh a break lest he repeat his yellow journalism of the former year when he ended up on the grass.

That afternoon, as Kurosh and his bride wandered into the Kurosh Hotel looking like ghosts from so many nearly sleepless nights, they were called over to the festival hosting table. Friendly and sympathetic Lilly Qashqai, a friend whom Kurosh had helped transport her stove in his car in Tehran, called them close and whispered a secret. "Listen, you know that there is a vacant single room with a big double bed which I am giving you two, but not a word to anyone, alright? It's a room that has been empty all the time and no one knows about it." Kurosh knew from several years at the festival that those mysterious rooms were all over town just like the half million huge empty apartments in Tehran which gathered dust while homeless families ended up in the streets or doubling up with relatives so greedy landlords could force prices up. Lilly quietly went to the desk clerk and returned with a key that she secretly pressed into Kurosh's palm with a wink. The newly weds beamed with joy and, after many thanks, hurried to the elevator to see their well-earned accommodations. When they opened the door, they both gasped at the beauty of the place. It must have been a presidential or bridal suite with silken drapes and tassels all around the large emperor-size bed and other fancy things everywhere. Soon a maid appeared asking the couple if they wanted anything and Kurosh ordered a sumptuous vegetarian meal with his favorite mineral water and all the trimmings. The dinner soon appeared and Kurosh gave the waiter coupons to cover it and

a big tip since he always had a hard time spending those coupons because he didn't eat kebab dinners nor did he drink alcohol.

Interviews and Reviews at the Festival

That evening, the couple went together to see the famed south Indian *vina* master Balachandra who was great as always. They returned to the hotel to discuss the concert and various other programs with James, Terry Graham, Peter Wilson and a dozen other intellectuals from various publications. The culture writers in Iran during those years were a congregation of the most brilliant and perceptive art critics and experts on Iranian culture that the world had ever known. For Kurosh it was like heaven on earth being with people of his own level of advanced intelligence and super-sensitive arts sophistication. As the newsmen were in deep discussions, Shahrzad or Sherry Afshar Qotbi graced everyone with her charming presence walking right over to the cluster of journalists at the snack bar and stopping in front of Kurosh. He and all his colleagues jumped to their feet in respect as they offered her a seat which she politely refused then stated her request to Kurosh. "Mr. Miller, would you and your wife help us out with two television interviews tomorrow afternoon? You can meet me at the broadcast building about noon and I will set up the interviews for you there." Kurosh was thrilled and stunned to be asked by the NIRTV director's wife to serve in some capacity. He gladly accepted and asked what the interviews entailed. She said "your wife will do an interview with the Pakistani Qawwali singers in Ordu and translate it into Farsi and you will interview Balachandra in English or Hindi and translate it into Farsi. Both the programs will be put on the national network as soon as they are edited." She elegantly pranced off nodding farewell to the crowd of journalists who were respectfully smiling at the newly weds. "There you are" James stated "you will be useful yet Miller, if you mind your p's and q's." Soon after, the newly weds retired to their plush suite to finally enjoy a well-earned night's rest in the exquisite surroundings.

The next day, the couple was on their way up the hill to the television broadcast building where they were introduced to the artists they were to interview. Neither Kurosh nor Mari was very fluent in Ordu/Hindi; he had studied it in Paris at the *Langues Orientales* and she had picked up many phrases and vocabulary from watching Indian films in Kabul. One of the Qawwali singers spoke Pashtu, one of Mari's native languages. So added to English as a backup, the interviews turned out well. Kurosh spent an hour discussing *alap*, *thanam*, rhythm patterns and the Malakarta *raga* system with Balachandra. Kurosh was a familiar sight on national television and very comfortable speaking Farsi in front of the cameras, so the interview went well. When the interviews were done, Kurosh couldn't resist breathing over the shoulder of the editor in the Ampex room as he always did when he supervised or edited his own shows. The editing sessions went quickly and enjoyably and were completed before the allotted time. When the newly weds were leaving the station, Sherry whooshed by hurrying to some important project and called out "thank you Mr. and Mrs. Miller, you did an excellent job. The interviews will go on the main network tonight during the news." The couple happily hugged each other as some of the cameramen friends kidded in Farsi "hey Kurosh Khan, watch that stuff, none of that in public; this is Iran!" A laugh went around the hallway and one of the script girls added "hey Kurosh, how did you get such a beautiful wife when none of us could stand you?" Kurosh chuckled and retorted "yea, none of you would marry me so she gets a free green card and eventually a passport without even passing the English test. So you girls can die of jealousy." Another cute little script girl blinked her long lashes and teased "but Kurosh, you said you wanted to marry four wives since say you are a Moslem; so you can take three more of us along with you to America." Mari tugged Kurosh out the door before he could continue the discussion.

Kurosh, the Trouble Maker

It was a late lunch at the main dining room of the hotel, and Kurosh was up to his usual antics. First he sweet talked the head waiter into letting him pay half the price, since the couple was not eating any meat, then he filled three plates with expensive vegetable delicacies. After returning a few times to refill plates with feta cheese, olives, mushrooms, artichoke hearts, asparagus tips, etc., he had Mari help him pack some of the vegetables into her large purse. Then he slowly and carefully filled up his huge festival bag with bread, fresh fruit and other items. On his fourth trip back to the asparagus tray, the assistant manager was called in to check on him. As he was sliding asparagus onto his large plate, Kurosh was approached by the restaurant manager and the hotel assistant manager. They politely explained that he had only paid half fare but was eating ten times that in asparagus which was going for over \$20 a pound in Shiraz. Kurosh sheepishly explained his weird diet and apologized offering them a whole book of coupons. The stern gentlemen were not really satisfied and advised he come with them to talk to the manager. In the main office, the manager politely received Kurosh and dismissed his assistant. He cheerfully gazed at Kurosh for a moment then declared “*shoma hamun Kurosh Ali Khan-e televizyon nistid?*” When Kurosh replied that he was the famous TV personality, the manager began to discuss music and to indicate the shows he liked most among Kurosh’s many masterpieces. The whole hors d’oeuvre and food smuggling incident was completely forgotten and the manager walked Kurosh back to the restaurant and was introduced to Mari. The couple was invited to a special party hosted by the hotel that evening and then the manager excused himself with instructions to the restaurant manager to give them anything they wanted on his account. Kurosh felt embarrassed that he was being offered so much kindness after his sneakiness. Mari gave him an accusing glare and scolded “see, your chintziness almost embarrassed me to death; you shame me in front of people.” Kurosh didn’t know the meaning of embarrassment because he never really cared what people thought about his crazy actions. Sometimes he enjoyed shocking people just to demonstrate his resentment for outer appearances and public opinion. Mari, although a proponent of the Sufi humility concept, enjoyed dressing up, showing off, and impressing people. She enjoyed being in the company of the elite for social reasons; Kurosh enjoyed their company for the cultural stimulation and intellectual interchange only.

That afternoon, the couple went to a concert of contemporary ‘music’ with James and Terry. It was one of the most hideous cacophonous conglomerations of noise ever foisted on an unwitting public at the festival, even worse than Stockhausen’s (the art critics called him *Shtinkhausen*) catastrophe at a former year. The couple couldn’t restrain themselves from laughing out loud, so loud at times James had to reprimand them. “Enough of that, Miller you daft bugger” he would warn then himself succumb to a giggle or two. Terry also had difficulty keeping a straight face as Iranian high society ladies glared at the group of foreigners with curious contempt. Near the end of the performance, Kurosh pointed out to James on the program that one particular theatrical instrumental composition was actually supposed to be a comedy; so the stoned-faced Iranians were actually wrong for not participating in the laughing. James felt a bit less embarrassed but was not completely convinced that he should join the hyena arena that now consisted of Kurosh, Mari, Terry and Peter who had just joined the group of cacklers.

Concert by Parisa and Musicians from the Center

Later that evening, everyone went to see the traditional Iranian music concert at the Hafezie. This was the big event for Kurosh because his master Dr. Safvat’s group of young virtuosos from the Center

featuring his idol vocalist Parisa were performing. It was through Kurosh's untiring efforts using his power at various publications that the young genius Parisa was eventually wrenched from the slimy clutches of the Ministry of Culture where destructive modernizers like Payvar were westernizing traditional music and turning unwitting vocalists into semi-pop crooners. Then it was his constant pleading that persuaded Dr. Safvat to arrange for her to become the main vocalist at the Center not to mention the peace conference with Parvin Sarlak at Rudaki Hall. Now she was the top singing star in Iran and a perfect example of pure traditional skills in an age of eroded cultural values when the monstrosity of modernization and mechanical materialism had nearly vaporized the rich traditions of the East. Kurosh, Mari, Dr. Safvat, his wife, Terry, Peter, Negin and a few other journalists slowly strolled down the walkway lined and lighted with large metal bowls filled with paraffin that encompassed big burning wicks. The flickering light, the stars and the moon coupled with the freshness and quiet of the late evening always created a deeply romantic and mystic milieu that engulfed and calmed the spectators. They climbed the steps and descended the rows of chairs to the front where Dr. Safvat had seats reserved for himself, Kurosh and their wives. The instruments had been tuned and were in place where large tube-shaped velvet pillows were positioned for the artists to sit in a semi-circle. The evening breeze jostled leaves and crickets provided enchanting background as the concert area slowly filled with audience members mostly composed of high-class inner-circle connoisseurs of authentic traditional music.

When the instrumentalists from the Center came out in their Chinese collar coats, a thunder of applause burst forth. This was the group Kurosh had joined in rehearsals several times playing *oud* in a totally Persian manner like a *tar* or *setar*. This was the group Kurosh had followed everywhere he could writing praises of their work in all the Iranian publications plus Sketch Magazine in Beirut and occasionally publications in London. This was the group he had done everything in his power to promote in the country and in neighboring areas as an example of how purely traditional acoustic music was far superior to the ugly pop concoctions of the modern era. Then shy and sensitive Parisa self-consciously came out on stage and blushed as the audience roared with applause and cheers while she fumbled her way forward to the center of the semi-circle. She tried to adjust the microphone as the applause subsided and she girlishly giggled when a soundman jumped to the rescue. She tried to hide behind her black silken hair but couldn't because, unfortunately she had caved in to wearing a shortened stylized 'hairdo.' She occasionally glanced up to see her fond supporters and friends on the front row respectfully gawking at her. The all-star instrumental ensemble consisting of *tar* master Daryush Talai, Reza Shafi'an on *santur*, Mohammad Moqadassi on *kamanche*, Mohammad Hadadian on *ney* and Bahman Rajabi on *zarb*, started with an introductory prelude in the Chahargah mode. Parisa shot a sly glimpse at Kurosh and Mari seeming to be mildly interested in who finally consented to marry Kurosh after all the gossip and the interest he had expressed in Parisa but mainly for her exquisite vocal virtuosity and not in a romantic sense. Following the instrumental introduction, she sang beautifully impressing everyone especially her main fan, Kurosh.

After the entrancing concert, Parisa nervously scampered off the stage in her long gown followed by the musicians and later the fans. Kurosh and Mari pushed their way into the artist's quarter which was a courtyard off to the side of the Hafezie. Kurosh chatted with some of the musicians as he worked his way over to Parisa who would occasionally eye the couple with an askance glance. Kurosh introduced his new wife to Parisa and the two seemed to find a spiritual bond. Parisa's husband came over and joined the friendly conversation. Soon Kurosh and Mari had to catch the bus back to the hotel where they could write up their reviews of the day's events to be taken to the airport by the Tehran Journal/Etelaat courier to the airport. They were happy with their reviews and, after a late dinner with the news crowd, they retired peacefully.

Cloud of Gloom

But the next day an ominous cloud descended on the newly weds, a cloud of suspicion and resentment that took weeks to dispel. An article had appeared in the Kayhan Farsi newspaper, an article which Mari had originally written but which had been turned backwards into scathing insulting remarks about Parisa and the young masters from the Center. Mari saw the review and turned pale with shock and anger. "They turned everything around into insults then they signed a phony name; who is Mari Afghani? They made it look like I did it under a false name." Mari began to sob as Dr. Safvat and his wife strode up to the large sofa where the newly weds were pouting. Dr. Safvat, endowed with an uncanny ability to see the real truth in every incident, comforted in Farsi "now Mari, don't feel bad. I know that low class lout from downtown Tehran took your article and reversed it all." Mari clutched Dr. Safvat's arm and in a stream of tears choked "I could never betray your Center or Parisa or the Festival. An Afghan would never betray anyone who has befriended them, never!" Dr. Safvat and his wife sat on each side of her soothing and reassuring that everyone would eventually find out the truth. But "eventually" seemed to take forever as all their friends began to abandon them. Dr. Safvat invited the two to lunch in the large dining room where they hung their heads in shame as various members of the Center's ensemble walked by in hurt resentment. When Parisa entered the room and saw Mari, she turned pale and tears welled up in her almond eyes. Mari also felt the same pain as the two intermittently secretly glanced at each other. Dr. Safvat, seeing hurt all around him, decided to mellow things out. He made his way to the table where Parisa and the Center's musicians were glumly poking at their food and greeted them cheerfully. Then he spent a half hour talking to them reassuring everyone that Mari had been used by an unscrupulous so-called journalist to vent his anger against the intelligencia and people of good taste. Also he must have imagined that yellow journalism was a quicker claim to fame while also preventing Mari from possibly taking over the Farsi language art critic spot he wanted. Mari's experience at radio Kabul and the Anisa magazine in Kabul as well as her university degree qualified her over him and he probably felt he had to use dirty tactics to get her out of the competition.

Eventually, Dr. Safvat returned to Mari and assured her that the musicians were convinced or at least seemed to be that she was not the author of the poison pen article. Meanwhile, Kurosh took Mari's original scribbled Farsi review to the table where his friend, the Etela'at editor, was sitting and asked him to please put it in the evening paper. He agreed with the condition that Mari write a few more highly intellectual articles on the Indian, Pakistani and other musical offerings. The article appeared in the next day's paper under Mari's real name and it seemed to ease the tension although NIRTV director Mr. Qotbi somehow retained the suspicion that Mari had something to do with the poison pen review. Kurosh later settled the matter for good one day when he was in Sherry's office in the main NIRT building. The subject came up and he immediately grabbed her phone, dialed the number of the creep at the Kayhan who had done the dastardly deed, schmoozed him with a bit of *ta'arof* then laughingly mentioned that people still thought that Mari Afghani was Kurosh's wife who wrote the review. Kurosh then put the phone to Sherry's ear as the answer came with a sadistic giggle "*na zanet nabud, man budam* (no it wasn't your wife, it was me)." Kurosh then took the receiver back and ended the call with a promise to do lunch sometime, which obviously never happened. That very day, Mr. Qotbi was completely satisfied that the whole thing had been a vicious set-up.

That evening in Shiraz, the couple attended the Qawwali concert with Dr. Safvat and Negin. A couple of the Center's musicians who hadn't heard the explanation mumbled in Farsi "there she is, the great art critic." When the festival wound up the next few days, the couple was somewhat relieved that the whole

incident could be put behind them back in Tehran. They drove off on the familiar road to Tayebad and eventually Herat where they could really relax a few days before the long drive to Kabul and their wedding reception there with Mari's family. When they finally came to Herat, Mari noticed the inch of more of dust which covered everything inside the car. Kurosh took the opportunity to explain that germ-filled dust and problems breathing resulted in the practice of women and men covering their faces for protection. He noted that in pre-Islamic Sasanian Persia as well as Hindu India, women wore head-scarves to avoid choking on the sometimes deadly dust. She seemed to see the logic and appeared to revise her understanding of the original true purpose of head coverings in the Middle East.

A Second Wedding Reception in Kabul

At the border stations and in Herat, all Kurosh's friends and acquaintances were warmly cordial to Mari and they had a wonderful few days at the hotel where Kurosh had recently been manager. They went to the Nandari, met Setara and the musicians, took charming horse cart rides to Gazer and the minarets of Goharshad, attended concerts and jam sessions and participated in the typical philosophical discussions on poetry, mysticism and life. Finally, they took the drive through Kandahar to Kabul in time for the big wedding reception party planned for them. It was at Mari's family compound in the best part of Kabul right next door to the famous Indian style vocal master Sharif Parwanta. Parwanta and his daughter, who now lived in Tehran, had been friends of Kurosh for years when Kurosh would attend classical Indian jam sessions at Parwanta's home in Kabul. This time the music for the reception was to be furnished by world famous Sarahang who won top honors as the world's best Indian classical vocalist although he was not even Indian but Afghan. Parwanta was to be backup vocalist and the two would do trade-offs and duels demonstrating their amazing *sargam* vocal virtuosity. In Herat, Kurosh had ordered a special, beautiful, white wedding dress made for Mari by the *chadri saz* who taught Kurosh how to do pleating. The dress had an intricately embroidered front with minutely pleated sleeves and a pleated floor-length skirt. An embroidered cap with a silky pleated shawl hanging down the back was also part of the ensemble as was a silky green sash. The dress represented traditional Afghan motifs in a contemporary Fortuny type creation honoring modesty based on both Islamic and LDS standards. Kurosh sported a super fancy embroidered white Afghan shirt hanging over billowing *tumban* with the silky white turban he had pleated himself. After the two were dressed and ready to come down the stairs from their room, Mari came down first as her friends and family gasped at the beauty of her dress. Then Kurosh started down as everyone glared in shock, not at his fancy attire, but because the long wide cord that was stung through the trousers had to be tied and knotted in front resulting in a big blob sticking out under his shirt in just the wrong place. Mari scampered up the stairs and pushed him back into the hallway exclaiming "hey that huge knot is poking out under your shirt in a very improper way; just tuck it in somewhere else." The guests were giggling at the whole thing as did Kurosh when he realized what was going on.

The couple again tried their big entrance but couldn't keep a serious composure after the first incident; so Mari just gave up and turned red with embarrassment as Kurosh tried to contain his intermittent chuckles which he shared with many of the guests watching him try to descend the stairs with a scrap of dignity remaining. The whole incident seemed to be an ice-breaker which set the party in action with wonderful food, great traditional Indian music, a jam session with Kurosh joining on *tabla* or *santur* and Mari playing *zerbaghali* on a couple of pieces with him. Later she and others danced traditional Afghan and everyone joined in the national Atan where dancers in a circle reach with the right arm while hopping on the left foot then turn to the center stomping on the right foot and clapping, all in a seven beat cycle of three plus four. After the party, the next day Kurosh and Mari visited various places of interest in Kabul

including a late afternoon drive with her father and mother to the beautiful mountain retreat of Paghman where Moghul emperors retired to enjoy the refreshing coolness during hot summer months. Back in Salt Lake, the couple had another reception with their BYU friends like Near East studies expert Dr. Hugh Nibley and Asian Studies guru Dr. Spencer Palmer.

Back to Tehran

After a few days of shopping for beautiful traditional dresses and men's clothing, jewelry and a few instruments, Kurosh had to drive back over the harsh desert to Tehran to eventually pack up his belongings and return to Utah which he dreaded but seemed necessary unless he could find housing and some real employment maybe more TV shows or something solid so they could survive in Tehran. Mari would stay a few more days in Kabul with her family then fly from there to Salt Lake. He sorrowfully bade farewell to his new Afghan in-laws and undertook the ever treacherous drive back to Tehran where he arrived just in time for the monthly press get-together at Roger Cooper's place. Every month, his wife Sherry Cooper had a press dinner, a party or luncheon. Once the luncheon was at a wonderful Lebanese restaurant where, after a fantastic meal, Sherry said "three cheers for the *hummus*." James Underwood stood up to acknowledge the applause because Sherry's semi-intoxicated pronunciation sounded like 'homos' rather than 'hummus.' A roar of laughter rocked the restaurant and the joke was never forgotten.

Also it was at one of the Coopers' press parties at a fancy hotel where Kurosh purposely went over to the Soviet table and chatted up the comrades. He never feared them but was interested in getting to know them. He was not against the concept of sharing belongings, just not in favor of the government requiring and administrating it. He believed in the way the Mormon Church instituted sharing everything administrated by religious leaders with God's inspiration. Even then it didn't really work and had to be temporarily abandoned. Kurosh was drawn to the good-natured Uzbek gentleman with whom he shared a concept he had always maintained. He said "in the Soviet Union you don't believe in religion like we do in America or here in Iran. But religion can be a good way to assure that people do the right thing. When the state is watching everyone, people usually feel they have to do what is expected. But when they are home alone, the state can't control them, especially not their thoughts. But when they believe in God, they know he is watching so they try not to even think anything bad and they try to do the right, day and night." Kurosh continued "so God can be a very important element of a stable government. Also a simple religion like Islam that has a high code of morals and keeps people from crime would not really a threat to what you are trying to do by encouraging people to be unselfish and ungreedy. Wouldn't Islam be a good religion for the Soviet Union?"

The Uzbek official smiled and enthusiastically discussed the concept noting that his dissertation was on the similarities shared by Islam and Marxism. After listening to his theories, Kurosh noted "then you believe in the possibility of Islamic Marxists?" The Uzbek thought for a moment and said "yes, that is a good way to describe it." Soon after that meeting in the late 70s, agitators for governmental change in Iran, calling themselves Islamic Marxists, began to appear and cause trouble. Kurosh hoped that it wasn't something that he had said because so often he would come up with a good idea and someone would take it and use it the wrong way. This might have been the case with the harsh seemingly anti-Western or anti-American articles Kurosh and some of his expatriate colleagues penned weekly in the press. He was so sick of everyone in Iran copying the worst garbage of American non-culture that he felt he had to, as an American, submit scathing critiques of all the bad things about America. This seemingly hateful poison pen policy against Americanization of Iran could have been carried a few steps farther resulting in the revolution. Kurosh never intended to encourage violence and he never cared about politics, only about

culture and bulwarking traditional societies against the vicious onslaught of destructive westernization and encouraging them to retain their traditions and remain pure in preserving their ancient arts in the face of western cultural aggression. A while after his friendly *tete a tete* with the commies, Kurosh went to their embassy to try to get a visa but was told he had to pay \$40 a day in advance for hotel rooms. He explained that he always found rooms for \$10 or less and that they could host him in jail every night, if that's all they could offer; but he wasn't going to pay that much for a room. He offered to be a communist for the two weeks he planned to spend there and work like everyone else to be able to understand where they were coming from. Then his Russian acquaintance from the press club meetings glared grimly and said "eet is not joke; people are giving deir hets for dat." So Kurosh was never able to use his airline ticket to Ashkabad, Yerevan, Baku, Tblisi, Tashkent and Dushambe provided by Kurosh's Fulbright scholarship.

This time, the press party was at Coopers' home and Sherry Cooper had plenty of booze ready for everyone, mainly herself. The conversation went from the recent Shiraz Festival to world politics and other matters. Two young Iranians cornered Kurosh in the living room before the party got under way and asked if he didn't think that one man ruling the country was unfair. Kurosh didn't fall for their sneaky SAVAK effort to compromise him and he didn't have to lie or fake it. He firmly stated that a good strong leader was the best way to keep order and accomplish goals. He added that America could really benefit from a powerful leader with high moral standards rather than some of the wimps, sneaks and phonies that the U.S. sometimes gets stuck with. Kurosh was confident that his answer saved him from a visit by the black Peykan and the scary men in the dark pinstripe suits knocking on his door the next day at 5 or 6 a.m. to take him down for questioning about his anti-Shah remarks because he hadn't fallen into their trap. Instead he chatted up the young provocateurs and they soon became friends.

As the evening dragged on and drinks freely flowed to those who weren't religiously oriented, the subject of Kurosh's plans for the future came up for razzing and teasing. Someone asked "so are you and your new wife going to live in the VW hotel?" Laughter permeated the room and another friend wondered "are you two going to sleep on the floor of that closet-size office at the Center that Safvat gave you?" More laughter. Then Sherry Cooper slurred "you said you wanna be buried in Iran maybe next to the Hafezie?" Cooper added "how about at the Haft Tan Darvish, they could change it to Hasht Tan Darvish and have eight rather than seven saints buried there. Do you want an *imamzade* built for you so musicians could go there and tie ribbons on it to be able to find more gigs? But I guess you wouldn't really be the ideal energy source for paying gigs." More laughs then suddenly, Kurosh felt as if the various remarks were a blur off in the distance and he was observing everything not as a body but as a spirit. He stood and a bright glow came over him as he purposefully and powerfully stated "blood will run in the streets of Tehran and no one, especially Westerners, will be safe here! I am going to return to the States and maybe you should go back to your home countries too!" He sat down and silence reigned for several cold minutes. Then Cooper reminded "but you were never going to leave Iran. Isn't it the safest place in the world right now?" Kurosh didn't know himself where his declaration had come from, but he knew it to be true. He stood up again and said "I'll be leaving town soon so goodbye and I have appreciated your friendships." He slowly and sadly wandered towards the door, as everyone remained stunned in solemn silence. It was not long after that incident that Kurosh had much of his belongings shipped to the States by way of APO through army friends from church and the rest packed up ready to take on his first trip back. The Pan Am flight he was now daydreaming on was his second trip back and he expected maybe one more for obtaining a few tapes from the Center, instruments, books and other important items just before his strange forecast demise of Iran was to occur.

Chapter 10

Buying a Car and a Scary Drive through Turkey

As the Pan Am plane passed into Turkish airspace, Kurosh Ali thought back over one of the several excursions to Germany to buy a car, one of the most coveted items of contraband one could possess in Iran. Since the taxes on cars were what appeared to be ten times the value or more, the only way Kurosh could have transportation, which could double as part-time living accommodations, was to bring a car in as a tourist and have to drive it out of the country every three months to keep it legal along with keeping his tourist visa legal. Iran and other neighboring countries would put a special stamp on a whole page of a person's passport with an image of a car. Kurosh's passport had so many visas from everywhere that twice he had to have extra accordion pages officially affixed to keep on traveling. He knew that if he ever got stuck having to abandon a car that totally died or somehow had to be sold illegally, he could maybe remove that page and scotch tape the adjoining pages together since some were worn, torn and already taped up. Thankfully, he never had to go to that extreme because the last car he had to get rid of was sold more than legally to a customs official. He did, however, have to do the disappearing passport page trick a few times to be able to fly back to visit his parents in California. At the customs desk at Mehrabad Airport, he often joked about having to drag a crumpled mass of metal from a totaled out car to the customs people and plop it right there in front of their desk to be able to leave for a week to visit family. It was good for a laugh, but imagine if it ever really had to happen.

With a smile and a cringe, Kurosh recalled one harrowing adventure traveling to Munich to get a VW Variant that could be comfortably set up to sleep in. So to get to Germany without paying a huge airfare, Kurosh had figured out how to save as much as possible since he was always barely scraping by. He had gone through the rigmarole of sending a copy of a student card which said he was under 26 (although not exactly but almost true) to the *Türkiye Milli Gençlik Teşkilatı* (TMGT) in Istanbul with the form filled out and two dollars in cash all carefully wrapped in carbon paper and requesting the international green student card. With that card, he was able to get 60% discount on any Turkish Airlines flight, plus discounts on train and other transportation. So he could have flown from Istanbul to Munich for only \$90 but being even poorer than that, he chose the hard way.

Kurosh went to the Mihan Bus depot to suffer the long uncomfortable bus ride to Erzerum in Turkey near the Iranian border for only 75 *tomans* (a little over \$10). There he stayed at the usual cheap hotel for only 20 *lira* (a little over a dollar) and ate reasonably including finding some of the famous Erzerum honey in a comb. The next day, Kurosh got his 110 Mark student discount train ticket from Erzerum to Istanbul continuing from there to Munich, also at a significant discount. The trip was always interesting although a bit uncomfortable during the first part. Kurosh was used to roughing it and had his tins of dolmas, beans, eggplant, crusts of Afghan flatbread, bottled Amolo water, onions cucumbers and a couple of tomatoes to last the days on the train.

As usual, Kurosh was the translator and unofficial guide for other European and American travelers, helping them get through the borders etc. Like the time he was herding a group of European and American bus travelers from Herat to Tehran and had to explain that they had to pay a few *toman* to sleep sitting in a crummy teahouse in Mashhad waiting for the morning bus to Tehran. On this train trip, he was smart and got his Bulgarian transit visa cheap at their embassy in Tehran saving the \$5 or \$10 cash they greedily collect at the border. In Bulgaria, better toilet paper showed up in the train restrooms and in Yugoslavia

towels actually found their way into the bathroom. Then in Austria and Germany, it was almost like being back in the States as far as comforts go.

When Kurosh got to Munich and said goodbye to the international friends who were traveling on, he now had the miserable task of finding a room that wouldn't cost as much as a car. He dragged down to the *Bahnhof* where that grim dark feeling crept over him as he remembered how many times he had to live in *Bahnhofs* and thrive on dried rolls as a starving jazzman in the 50s. The old German mean and impersonal attitude was not as harsh in Bavaria as it had been in the post war 50s in bombed-out Frankfurt. Kurosh was given the name of a *Frau* at the rooming information in the *Bahnhof* and he traveled by tram, bus and feet to finally find the place. She was a nice old lady, as they usually are, and was happy to share stories about the war and her husband who had fought with Rommel. Kurosh welcomed a chance to improve his self-taught German especially since he could try the Bavarian version. The *Frau* offered Kurosh dinner, fixing some vegetarian food after learning about his diet and, from time to time, would nostalgically point to the picture of her handsome deceased husband in his German uniform on the mantelpiece. In fact, she became so friendly that she even tried to help Kurosh in his efforts to track down a reliable car.

On his first car trips, Kurosh bought '*privat*' and just looked in the paper and hoped for the best. The very first time, he got stuck with a serious oil leak and had to add quart after quart until he got to Tehran where a kind mechanic rebuilt the engine for an affordable price. Since then, Kurosh found Lauren, a Californian who had a used car lot and always gave fair prices and reliable autos. He would send his cars through the grueling TÜV inspection so the vehicle was '*geTÜVt*' and ready for the hours of government paperwork, a headache the Germans are masters at inflicting. Kurosh found a nice '*geTÜVt*' tan VW Variant with a little over 80,000 kilometers on it for 2,000 Marks.

Kurosh was well aware of the horrible car insurance rates in Germany, so he had already purchased one month of insurance at the Royal Iranian Automobile Club where he got his international driver's license. To pay up to \$200 for one month of insurance in Germany just to drive away to Austria the same day was ridiculous; but the Germans required an insurance green card before any auto could be registered. So next Kurosh had to drag over to Langberger Straße to get his Z (*zollfrei*) plates then to the ADAC to get his *carnet de passage*. Luckily this year was just before a new law that required a \$1,000 deposit or a bank guarantee to get a *carnet* which was all to prevent a car from being illegally sold. For members of ADAC, the *carnet* was only 129 Marks which one year Kurosh paid to friendly *Frau* Arxleben after joining ADAC. In another year after the new law, Kurosh just got by without a *carnet* and was able to drive all the way to Afghanistan by having the car stamped into his passport everywhere.

Finally, the red tape nightmare was over and Kurosh bade farewell to his friends Lauren and his landlady *Frau* Schmidt, then bought up supplies for the long drive back to Tehran. Spring water, safe fruits and vegetables, Kleenex, etc. were readily available in Munich and later in Vienna. The plush green and friendly forests of Austria gave way to the foggy and difficult drive from Zagreb to Belgrade in Yugoslavia. Kurosh remembered in the old days when Bulgaria didn't accept green insurance cards, the best way was through Greece. On such trips, Kurosh struggled with a language that he had never studied; it was all Greek to him. He had to get by with very simple phrases such as "*ochi, deca litri*" or "*penta litri*" in answer to what seemed like "you want a full tank?" Greek numbers were familiar enough as were a few other words. Then there was the really scary drive along the Greek coast between Xanti and Komotina when once he was so sleepy that he let the car drift to the right and jump off the highway onto a parallel dirt road a meter below. Fortunately, he didn't continue right over the cliff into the sea. After that incident, Kurosh just sat for an hour in shocked amazement that he was still alive and guessed that Allah had spared him an untimely death to accomplish some mission, a mission that never materialized.

Yugoslavia & Bulgaria

This trip seemed to be full of car incidents, the first being when he had to park on the side of the unbelievably foggy road between Zagreb and Belgrade. When he woke up the next morning, his car had sunk into the fertile dark soil and wouldn't budge. He got out and stared forlornly at the poor car with mud half-way up the tires. Soon a friendly trucker drove over and nonchalantly hooked a chain to the bumper and pulled it out onto the road. The driver waived and drove off as Kurosh yelled out in Russian, which he hoped would be understood, "*spasiba tavarishch!* (thanks comrade!)" "Yes, we are all comrades in life," he thought, "and it is really cool when Commies actually put that concept into action."

In Belgrade, Kurosh stopped in a shopping center and decided to purchase some ethnic folk music. In his bad Russian, he tried to explain "*stari narodni musik* (old folk music)," which they somehow understood. As they kept bringing various 45 and 33 records with semi-pop folk songs, he kept insisting "*stari, ochin stari*" and "*ochin narodni*." Finally, a manager was summoned who spoke German, so Kurosh again insisted "*alten volksmusik*;" but they still couldn't get it. Eventually, they pulled out some really funky ethnic stuff from Montenegro and Kurosh perked up and declared "*da eta dobre!*" Then a few other obscure records were found and soon he had what he was looking for. Then when it came time to pay, he pulled out a red bill his mom had given him years ago. Now it was the clerks' turn to say "*stari, ochin stari*" because it was "very old" and no longer a valid bill. Kurosh was obliged to come up with one of his last \$20 traveler's checks, something that was readily welcomed. It took some paperwork and red tape to get the check cleared; but that wasn't a problem since the store was totally empty except for Kurosh. Good old Commies, no money, no customers.

Onward towards the south, Kurosh began to feel more at home in Skopia where there was even a little abandoned mosque and real people in ethnic clothing rather than the drab lumpy westernized attire. In fact, Kurosh noticed that some of the only real Turks left in the world were found in southern Yugoslavia along with a few in Bulgaria and Greece. He felt that these are the ones that Ataturk wasn't able to destroy with Westernization and ugly drab European garb. Ataturk even tried to prevent anyone from saying Islamic prayers by making them wear stupid caps with visors in front so no one could press their heads on a prayer cloth on the ground. Kurosh thought to himself that it was maybe Ataturk who started the rumor that Turks are stupid because everyone just put the cap visor on the side of their heads and went on praying anyway. They say Ataturk even had a mosque torn down because he didn't like hearing the *azan*. So his popularity is overstated; for sure Armenians and Greeks are not big fans. But Kurosh had many Turkish friends and they were wonderful people; so one bad evil God-hating womanizing drunken demonic dictator doesn't affect the natural goodness of a people.

As Kurosh drove up to the Bulgarian border, their eyes glittered at the hope of soaking him \$10 for a transit visa. But when he flashed the one he got in Tehran, their faces fell discouraged. Then the customs man glared at Kurosh's case of spring water and wondered "*shto eta?*" (what's this?) At the reply "*vodu*" (water), the customs man suspiciously accused "*vodka?*" Kurosh firmly negated that last try to milk him for duty by offering him a swig which he politely refused; then they both laughed. Kurosh was reminded of the story his old landlord Pierre told him in Paris in 1960. When a Spanish priest was returning from a trip to France with a large bottle of clear hard liquor, the customs agent asked what it was and he answered "miracle water of Lourdes." Then opening the flask and sniffing, the customs man declared "this is alcohol!" to which the Priest responded "amazing! It's a miracle!"

Soon a few of the Turkish truckers who Kurosh had been chatting up while waiting in the long line at the border came up to defend their new friend Ali the American Moslem. They assured in Turkish and a bit of Bulgarian that Kurosh was a nice guy and to let him go. The chubby Bulgarian customs man who had already warmed up to Kurosh's cheerful and fun personality, smiled and divulged that Kurosh should buy some gas coupons so he could save money. Kurosh was happy and surprised that he could talk to his new Bulgarian friend in Turkish; so he thanked him for the coupon idea. Then he was asked where his girlfriend was. Thinking of Pervin who he had planned to visit he retorted "*Istanbulda*" (in Istanbul) to which the border guards answered in Turkish "then we better get you stamped through and on your way."

As he drove off, a grim sign caught his attention warning in three languages that it was forbidden to park and sleep on the roadside. Kurosh had changed one dollar into Lev and wasn't about to spend that and much more on some expensive housing; so he tried to stay awake and finally made it to Sofia. There he drove around until he found a spot on a quiet side street between two cars where he parked and slept hiding under his sleeping bag. Every hour he woke in fear that the little men in brown uniforms were coming to get him and offer him a free trip to Siberia. Many of the cars parked around town were hidden under car-covers. He later learned that it was so no one would know who had a car which could define the owner as a potential capitalist traitor. Actually, the little men in brown uniforms were up early, not to arrest Kurosh, but to wash down the streets with big fire hoses. They kept the place clean and also clear of nightlife although the tourist brochures swore it existed.

After a visit to the abandoned Banya Bachi mosque and the also abandoned Alexander Nevsky Memorial Church with its gold domes, old wooden doors and stained windows, Kurosh was on his way towards Istanbul. He tried to use the gas coupons, but had to search to find a station that would accept them. Good old Commies; they mean well, but it just doesn't work out the way they hope. Everyone prefers cash especially dollars from the hated western capitalists. Bulgaria was pleasant with its peaceful forests and tree-lined roads with tasty apples and plums in early fall. Kurosh stopped to gather some fruit and even a few grapes hoping that he wouldn't be arrested for theft. It was a relief to finally arrive at the Turkish border where he wouldn't have to be ashamed of the little Koran he kept in his shirt pocket.

Scary Drive Through Turkey and a Car Accident

At the border, charming customs girls and friendly passport officials speedily stamped him through. An attractive customs gal named Rabia stamped the image of a car into Kurosh's passport and philosophized in eloquent English. She also wondered if he had a girl somewhere so he admitted that he had a friend, who happened to be a girl, in Istanbul. Kurosh insisted on using his basic Turkish and soon was friends with the whole border station. He felt like he was leaving a family dinner when he finally tore himself away. Driving along the coast from Edirne to Istanbul, Kurosh enjoyed the placid blue of the Mediterranean and the fresh sea air. He was relieved that prices were down to what a poor person could afford. In Istanbul, he drove from Sirkeri over the Galata Bridge along the water's edge keeping right up the Boğaz (Bosphorus) then he parked for a while to contemplate the whole adventure so far and the magic of Istanbul and its mosques.

After catching his breath from days of hard driving and little sleep, Kurosh Ali drove over to the house of his friend Pervin with whom he had developed camaraderie during various visits to the Istanbul airport where she worked at the gift shop. He knocked on the door and Pervin appeared and glared in unbelief. "*Ali*" she gasped "*burda ne yapıyorsin?*" (what are you doing here!) He smiled "*sana için janım*" (for you, my dear) and he gave her a harmless little hug. Still stunned, Pervin invited him in and introduced him to her father, a kindly furniture maker, her mother and her sister Nermin. "*Pervin ve*

Nermin, çok tatlı” he noted, complimenting the cute rhyming of the two names. That evening, he was invited to join the family for a plush dinner some of which he was able to eat. Then Pervin wanted to show him the sights of Istanbul. Of course, Nermin had to follow along because it would be improper for an unmarried man and a woman to run around together without a chaperone.

They climbed into the VW and Pervin remarked “*güzel bir araba!*” Sure it was a nice car in a country where cars were a rare possession even though his was fairly run-down. Kurosh Ali and Pervin sat in the front seat and Nermin was stuck in the back. After stopping at a little café, they tried to seat all three in the front but it was too crowded. Pervin and Kurosh chattered away in English, sometimes leaving Nermin out of their conversations until finally she broke into tears blubbering “*burda ben kara kediyim.*” Neither Kurosh nor Pervin ever thought she was a ‘black cat’ or was throwing cold water on some supposed ‘romance.’ Kurosh consoled “*hiç bir kara kedi değil sin, fakat beyaz ve güzel kedi* (you’re not a black but a white and beautiful cat.)” Pervin also tried to make her feel better; then Kurosh gave each of them a little kiss on the forehead and explained that he and Pervin were “*yalnız dostlar*” (just friends) and thus no third person could be in their way, but would only be an additional good friend. Eventually they were all laughing again and enjoying the lights playing on the water, a ferry ride to Uskadar and visits to various interesting parts of town before returning to the house.

When they arrived, Pervin’s father and mother insisted that Kurosh stay the night with the family, but he had to keep on traveling to get back to his work at the Tehran Journal, the Iran America Society and, most importantly, the National Iranian Radio and Television where he had his weekly jazz show. Pervin’s mother warned that it was cold across Turkey and so she gave him two dark gray heavy wool blankets that he treasured for years afterward. He bade the family farewell and drove off towards Ankara. After sleeping under his new wool blankets on the roadside, the next day Kurosh decided to turn north towards Samson and follow the Black Sea route to Erzerum. On one former trip, he had tried the rough central road through Sivas and Erzincan but, even if on the map it seemed shorter, that was longer and much more difficult because of grim road conditions. Then there was the constant fear of loosing a windshield to prankish children with handfuls of rocks on overpass bridges or on the roadside who used passing cars for target practice. Everyone warned Kurosh that he would loose a windshield in Turkey because almost everyone does. But he avoided the problem by waiving at every clump of children with rocks in their hands. The poor dumb kids dropped the rocks and waived back every time; lucky for Kurosh.

He drove slowly through Samson and once was accosted by a group of young men who asked where he was from and he answered “Iran” to which one of the boys declared “*bizim den* (one of us)” which made Kurosh feel he was almost home again. Still exhausted from days of dragging across various countries, he pressed on towards Trabzon with the Black Sea splashing purposefully against the sand on his left. “Kara Deniz . . . Black Sea?” he wondered; “but its not black, it’s blue. The Turkish word *kara* also means ‘north’ so probably that’s what the real meaning might be, like *kara ghüz*, possibly ‘northern *Ghüz*’ people which might be the name Kirgiz?” As he drifted into linguistic imaginings, several times he almost dozed off but caught himself until about half-way to Trabzon, he was jolted back from a somniatic daze to see a bus parked on the roadside in front of him with a crowd of passengers stupidly standing in the middle of the road watching the driver and his assistant changing a huge tire. A few seconds before, he had been temporarily blinded by the headlights of a big oncoming truck.

Kurosh frantically stamped both feet down on the break and clutch screeching to a halt when he felt two hard thumps, one on the side of the car and another was some poor guy scooped up on the hood crashing into the windshield. Kurosh skidded to a halt and jumped from the car yelling “*adamlara görmedim, adamlara görmedim!* (I didn’t see the people!)” He was so upset that some of the bus passengers had to calm him down from a panic and explain that the men he hit were not dead but only

injured somewhat. A passer-by took the fellow who had slid onto the hood to the hospital in Samsun and the other three men who were mildly injured by Kurosh's car were helped to the roadside to recuperate. The bus driver and his assistant finally got Kurosh calmed down and reassured him that nothing would happen to him; but he just had to do an accident report in the next town.

Late that evening, Kurosh and the bus driver's teenage assistant drove without a windshield in pouring rain to the next little town called Ordu. The police colonel was blond with flashing blue eyes and took a liking to Kurosh, the goofy American who continually thumbed through his Turkish dictionary trying to explain details about the *tesadüf* (accident). The colonel, assisted by his second in command, wrote down information about the incident and then glared firmly into Kurosh's eyes and proclaimed "*göregöre pek!*" Kurosh tried to figure out what he meant, *göre* maybe from the verb *görmek* (to see) and *pek* meaning 'a lot.' Kurosh thought "did he mean I should look harder or what?" The colonel stared more seriously and repeated the statement a few more times as Kurosh's heart pounded thinking he'd really had it. Then the younger assistant added "*Göregöre Pek . . . Holivut!*" They all laughed and the conversation continued "*Jan Vain, Kilint Istvut*" and, with sighs of admiration, "*Merlin Monro*" and so on. Soon Kurosh was part of the family and the colonel sent the bus driver's assistant away when the bus came to pick him up and drive him home assuring that the American would be their 'guest' until the morning when an official report could be filed.

So Kurosh was to stay in a Turkish jail for the night and he began to fear because of the rumors of how harsh that could be. But his fears were quelled when the police assistant took him to a large round room in front of the police station with a plush bed more comfortable than any Kurosh had slept in for a long time and a big table covered by a large brass tray that was soon filled with a huge mound of steaming rice and kebab accompanied by plates of other fancy food items. Kurosh felt as if he was in the presidential suite of the Inter-Continental Hotel or something. The only thing that reminded him that he was somewhat in jail was that they locked the door; but maybe that was to protect him from intrusion. When he needed to use the bathroom in the morning, he saw the real prisoners in a back room who were a dozen poor fellows squished side to side, chained together on a hard low cement bench in a small cell with bars all around. When one asked if he could also use the bathroom, the police assistant whacked him on the side of the head and, looking at Kurosh for approval, shouted "*Jan Vain!*"

The next day after a sumptuous breakfast, again little of which Kurosh could actually eat, the colonel finished the report and Kurosh signed it. Kurosh was able to decipher in the report that the bus driver's assistant had admitted fault because they allowed passengers to stand in the middle of the road without any warning device. As Kurosh and the colonel were chatting in the office, two of the men who had been slightly brushed in the accident came exaggeratedly limping up to the door hopping and groaning, hoping to maybe get in on the insurance that Kurosh had bragged about waiving his international green insurance paper whenever the occasion permitted affirming "*sikurta var!*" The colonel, who didn't mess around with anyone, literally kicked them out the back door as they scampered off suddenly cured of limping; then he proudly stared at Kurosh and proclaimed "*Göregöre Pek!*" Kurosh and the two policemen chuckled then Kurosh again affirmed that he had insurance if the one fellow who was really injured needed it. The colonel wouldn't hear a word of it and assured that the man was well taken care of in the *devlet hastahana* (government hospital) in Samsun. Soon it was time for farewells so Kurosh could go on to seek a windshield somewhere.

When Kurosh finally made it to Erzerum driving with no windshield, he searched around town and finally found a place that could put one in for him at a fair price. The car had developed some electrical problem so he went to an auto electrician and was quoted some outrageous fee to fix everything. Discouraged, he drove on until he found a garage that repaired VWs. Fearing even higher prices, he

trudged in and was quoted just a few dollars to fix it. When they heard the price the *elektrikçi* (electrician) down the street quoted him, they sighed “*çok fena adamlar*” noting that those were “really bad guys” for trying to cheat him.

The mechanics worked on the car for a couple of hours; then near dark, they approached Kurosh Ali and said “*Ali, gel cami, bu akşam Bayram dur* (Ali, come to the mosque, tonight’s Bayram).” Kurosh Ali surmised that Bayram was similar to Ramazan in Iran and at dark the fast was over after prayers in the mosque. So they all washed up for prayer and Kurosh happily joined them thinking a couple of *rakat* of prayer would be maybe ten or fifteen minutes. But once in the little mosque, the prayers lasted longer and longer, *rakat* after *rakat*, an hour, then another hour; it seemed as if Kurosh almost lost feeling in his knees and legs from the vigorous exercise necessary for Islamic prayers. When it was over, he could hardly walk as he staggered back to the garage with his friends for a big feast and to finalize the car. They invited Kurosh to join them for a vast repast, but Kurosh was in so much pain from all those prayers that he politely insisted that he needed to travel on. He had purchased a few combs of *Erzürümüm bal* or Erzerum honey for the trip back and for friends in Tehran and was ready to get back to Iran where he had native fluency in the language with no need for a dictionary.

The next morning, with very painful sore muscles from so much praying and trying to sit with knees folded under in the mosque, Kurosh drove towards the Iranian border. As he wound up the rough road to a mountain peak before Aleskirt, Kurosh stopped at Atatürk *çesmesi* where he filled a few containers with the pure fresh spring water. When he neared Mount Ararat or *Ağrı Dayı* as the Turks call it, he decided to stop for a moment to get out and contemplate the white peaks and mysterious clouds where Noah’s ark had landed. “This all is really Armenia” he thought being careful that no one was around to guess that he dared to even think such a thing or he could find out what a Turkish jail was really like. He also thought back on a former visa trip when he spent some pleasant days in Erzurum visiting with students of the university and attending their dance rehearsals. The guys did those unbelievable acrobatic feats including one boy from Kars who was able to strut and bounce on his curled-under toes and do knee spins, squats and breath-taking leaps. Whether or not Turks had always been very nice to Armenians or Kurds, they had always been wonderfully hospitable to Kurosh and he was very appreciative of the friends and acquaintances he had found in Turkey.

When he sat back in the driver’s seat, he noticed his green insurance paper and took a moment to study it. A frightening feeling overcame him when his eyes fell on the letters TK for Turkey that had been crossed out meaning that he really didn’t have any insurance in Turkey. He had never checked that at the Iranian auto club or he could have bought a reasonable policy offered to him at the Bulgarian Turkish border station. “Wow, Allah must have been with me on this crazy trip” he thought “or I might still be in that Turkish jail chained to those dozen poor guys;” a great horror story for the newspapers but no fun for him. Out of deep gratitude for the kindness of the police colonel in Ordu, Kurosh made a special trip there a year later to leave a pure silver Kennedy fifty-cent piece. Everyone around the world loved Kennedy; so a few of those silver coins were distributed by Kurosh to selected friends who had been kind to him. Personally, Kurosh was not a big Kennedy fan, he didn’t like left-wingers and thought Kennedy sort of sold America out even if he really was assassinated for trying to get rid of the Federal Reserve. But he never expressed his crazy right-wing reactionary feelings and just kept quiet when the name Kennedy came up. Instead he admitted that Kennedy was a nice guy, good looking, great orator, had a charming classy wife, etc. He also kept quiet about Jane Fonda, Barbara Streisand and other of his definite non-favorites. But he was very vocal about how great and valuable Islam was and no one he hung around with seemed to be contrary to that opinion except a few grumpy members of the LDS Church branch in Tehran.

Back in Iran to Clobber a Cow

After the accident and lack of insurance, Kurosh was especially happy to finally cross the border at Bazargan leaving the large grim wall picture of Ataturk glaring like Stalin in exchange for a picture of the Shah with his sweet wife and fun kids smiling cheerfully to welcome weary travelers. “I’m home” Kurosh sighed as he kissed his Iranian border guard friends on the cheek (men only, no man could ever kiss a woman in public and get away with it). After clearing customs and having his car stamped into his passport, Kurosh drove on towards Tabriz. He was really exhausted from little sleep and emotional trauma so he was not as safe a driver as he should have been.

As he was cruising half dazed on the road to Tabriz, suddenly a cow lunged into the middle of the road, stared at the car and tried to make it to the other side. Kurosh swerved to the left but couldn’t avoid the solid thump and thud as his right bumper and fender crumpled and the cow fell over in a coma. Kurosh slowly and sadly climbed out of the car looking forlornly at the poor innocent creature gasping its last breath. Kurosh experienced an awful feeling of guilt at possibly having killed a harmless animal; he had never really killed an animal except for a few fish under his dad’s tutelage. The little boy who was accompanying the poor cow rushed out into the road, saw that the animal was going to die and quickly pulled out his pocket-knife and began to gruesomely saw the cow’s neck so it would die correctly.

The cow lay motionless in a small pool of blood by its neck as an old man in tattered hanging rags for clothes stumbled out into the street to see his one and only possession dead and gone. The little boy declared “*helal öldü*” affirming that it died according to Islamic law; so at least the meat was usable for food. But that fact didn’t seem to help the deeply depressed gaze on the poor old man’s face as he staggered back to the roadside to sit pensively. Kurosh reached into his glove compartment and again waived his green insurance card claiming as he had done in Turkey affirming in Turkish, the language of Iranian Azerbaijan “*sekurta var* (I’ve got insurance).” Then he added “*kaliyorum, enşallah biraz sonra polis geliyor.*” (I’ll wait, hopefully the police will come soon.) He sat in sorrow next to the old man as a few village friends together with the little boy pulled the cow off the road.

Minutes gave way to hours as various villagers came to join the growing crowd sitting at the roadside all waiting for a potential highway patrol car to stop and write up an accident report so the old man could get the insurance. The sun set and still no police car passed. The villagers discussed what to do reaching no sensible conclusion. Discouraged, the old man turned to Kurosh and calmly advised “*get, get, aib yok tur!*” Kurosh didn’t want to go and it did matter that an old man’s seemingly only possession had been taken from him. Looking seriously at the old man, Kurosh was again told to go and forget it. Kurosh reached for his wallet and pulled out his last funds that amounted to a little over 35 *tomans* which probably wouldn’t even buy a small goat. He offered it to the old man who reluctantly accepted the pittance and tried to smile, wishing Kurosh a safer trip to Tehran. A year later, Kurosh tried to remember where that village was and attempted to find it again on a special trip to bring the old man 1,500 *tomans* to make up for the loss. But Kurosh never found the exact village or the old man although he spent a whole day asking everyone in the area. Actually when Kurosh got back to Tehran, he found that his insurance didn’t cover animals. So all he could do was to pray for the old man’s welfare and to feel deep remorse for the accident.

So with a dented and crumpled car, Kurosh drove off southward stunned by the two accidents but thankful that he wasn’t in that one which urban legend related; it was an accident in Saudi Arabia where someone died so they killed everyone else in both cars to exact justice. Or the other urban legend about the fatal accident in Iran where villagers cut off the hands of the guilty driver. Those were definitely only

made-up horror stories by anti-Muslim Americans, because from Kurosh's experience all over the Middle East, he was actually treated much better in any and every situation than he would have been back in the States or in Europe.

He drove along thinking of the poor cow and old man when suddenly, for no reason, the motor stopped. He pulled over, opened the back and surveyed the engine to see if he could figure out what had gone wrong. There was a spark and fuel was coming through the gas line. He studied and thought for half an hour then wondered if the fuel pump had heated up and temporarily stopped working. He noticed that it was quite warm so he soaked a cloth in water and put it on top of the pump. Finally, after about 40 minutes of being mysteriously stalled, he tried to start the car and off it went. He drove deeply puzzled about how and why the motor had stopped then but now it was just fine. About 20 Ks from where he had been stuck, he came up on a hill and saw a gruesome accident with a car mangled beyond recognition. The accident was obviously very recent, within a half hour and people from a nearby village were working to get the passengers out of the car. As Kurosh slowly drove by, a still small voice told him that he had been spared that accident by his engine dying. He wanted to stop and help but was too overcome with emotion from the other accidents and experiences and now this recent realization. So he continued on in a daze towards Qazvin.

Outside Qazvin, Kurosh noticed his gas tank was just about empty so he pulled over and sat thoughtfully wondering how he was going to get back to his apartment in Tehran. He knew that God had brought him safely back from many harrowing trips, through horrible weather, through many serious breakdowns and financial crises. So he bowed his head and offered a pleading prayer knowing that he was not worthy of the many blessings God had showered on him all his life but not knowing where else to turn. As he sat in pensive silence, suddenly a motorcycle cop pulled up beside him and turned off his motor. Kurosh wondered if he was going to be arrested for the cow or something. He timidly rolled down the window and turned on the charm and *ta'arof* in his fluent poetic Persian. The officer was a happy friendly fellow who soon pulled out photos of his motorcycle tricks and kids. Immediately, the two were like best friends and Kurosh told him about the accident in Turkey and the recent cow incident and how he had given the poor old man every penny he had. Now he was sitting waiting for a miracle from Allah so he could get back to Tehran. The officer said "*un asun e, ino bigir* (that's easy, take this)" handing Kurosh a 20 *toman* gas coupon. "*Rast migi baba?*" Kurosh questioned not believing his teary eyes. The officer assured that it was a good coupon used by the police and that every station would honor it.

Kurosh sighed with relief thinking "thank you again God, I knew you wouldn't let me die here on this highway." He heartily thanked his new friend and the two promised to try to meet up sometime for dinner and a longer chat. The officer advised Kurosh to drive carefully as Kurosh thought "no kidding;" then the cop sped off showing some of his tricks raising the front wheel and jumping from one side to the other. Kurosh stopped in Qazvin for gas although the joke is to never stop in Qazvin because they were supposed to have a high population of aggressive homos seeking male victims. He filled up the tank and, when he finally pulled up in front of his apartment in the Amir Abad section of Tehran, he was very relieved to be home. He really felt blessed that he survived a long drive through six countries, two accidents, avoiding a possible fatality, running out of money and even a stop in reportedly dangerous Qazvin.

That night he slept calmly in spite of the worry that he had to fix the dents and crumples in his newly purchased car. But he knew that his *safkar* (body man) Os Gholam could do wonders for only a few *toman*. He drifted off to sleep imagining Os Gholam's comforting voice claiming that it was no problem as he smeared the dented areas with heavy grease then, tapping and pounding his flat metal body tool on

the top holding a rounded weight on the inside, creating a musical rhythm and happily bobbing his head to the beat and sculpting a work of art out of crumpled metal until all dents were gone and the paint wasn't even scratched so no one could tell that there had been an accident.

Chapter 11

A Drive to Beirut to Sell a Contraband Car

After the car buying trip, Kurosh Ali had to get rid of the one he had stashed in the garage at his apartment, a very similar but older VW Variant the exact same tan color. His hope was to sell it in Turkey, Syria or Lebanon. Once a nice fellow in Istanbul had offered him \$3,000 for it; but he couldn't sell it then. Part of the preparation for a lengthy trip across deserts, mountains, through snow, sleet, wind and baking sun was a visit to his good friend mechanic Mahmad Agha. In the morning, Kurosh drove down Pahlevi past Shah Ave. then turned to the right a few blocks to the *tamirgah* (repair shop). After fond greetings, hugs and kisses on the cheek for Mahmad and his assistants, Kurosh revealed his plan. They asked "*chera inja nemifrushishi?* (why not sell it here?)" But the red tape, customs duty, taxes and *bakhshish* (bribery) necessary would be way beyond what Kurosh could bear. So Mahmad checked the engine over and noted that the threads on the head bolts were worn. He tried tightening them, but the threads were partly stripped. Mahmad squinted at Kurosh with a serious glare and noted that he had been losing oil which Kurosh glumly acknowledged. Mahmad looked down then grimly declared that Kurosh needed a new engine because it would not help much to try to insert threaded sleeves in the block although that would be a last resort. Kurosh asked how much it would cost and was told 1,500 *toman*. After gulping and hanging his head in consternation, he looked up with those puppy dog eyes and pleaded "*bare ye dust-e khub va musalman-e momen, hezar toman nemishe?*" Mahmad cracked a little half smile and agreed to the 'good buddy' and 'good Moslem' discount of 1,000 *toman* or about \$150 which was still a big sum for Kurosh. The work would take a whole day including the labor and the highly skilled Azeri machinist down the street to thread the new sleeves.

So Kurosh was invited for lunch as usual. Mahmad was fully aware of Kurosh's diet and specified just rice and flat-bread for him; "*faqat berenj o nun bare in*" he told the assistant who was off to the nearby lunchroom. Soon steaming plates of food under round tin covers were brought and, after lunch, tea was served to everyone but Kurosh. "*In nemikhore ke*" Mahmad remarked then he began to quiz Kurosh about Islam to see if his claim to be a 'good Moslem' was valid. First, he asked how the *wuzu* or ritual washing before prayer was done. Kurosh answered and demonstrated with exacting detail. Then Mahmad asked how the *sojde* (prostration) was performed which Kurosh was able to demonstrate perfectly. Then one of the assistants asked if Kurosh knew the *Fatiha* or standard prayer text. Kurosh powerfully and flawlessly recited it in literary Arabic to everyone's surprise. Mahmad then asked about Hasan and Hossein to which Kurosh replied that they were wrongfully martyred at the hands of the evil Yazid. But when it came to details about various *imams* or saints of Shi'a Islam, Kurosh ran out of facts. Then came the sticky (no pun intended) subject of wiping or splashing after using the bathroom. With giggles and red faces, the assistants and Kurosh were lectured by Mahmad. He asked Kurosh if he used toilet paper and, upon being informed that he did, warned that it was bad because "*hamash pakhsh mishe*" (everything spreads around) instead of becoming clean. Kurosh contended that splashing doesn't really clean well. Mahmad explained that it was necessary to splash correctly and forcefully. Kurosh mentioned the policy of using a few pebbles when no water was available and how inefficient that could be. The remainder of the afternoon, the disgusting discussion continued with intermittent goofy giggles and mutual kidding by

everyone. Finally, Kurosh came up with the possible resolution which he had adopted years ago, using dampened paper. Mahmad conceded that if anyone were to stoop to using paper, dampened would be more acceptable. Then Kurosh added that soapy dampened paper could be quite efficient. Finally, everyone was tired of the subject until Kurosh had to excuse himself for a bathroom break and everyone started teasing him about whether he would splash, use paper or pebbles or maybe even sand if they were out of paper. One assistant offered him an old shop rag, but he quelled their fun by noting that it was only to tinkle.

Deadly Mountain Pass in Turkey

Finally, the car was temporarily repaired and Mahmad advised “*ba in jai nemiri ke* (you’re not going anywhere in this).” Kurosh responded “*na baba, faqat Beirut.*” Upon hearing “no just Beirut” Mahmad’s eyes widened and then squinted as he offered “*pas khoda bat bash, akhe divunegi e.*” Kurosh agreed that God better be with him and it really was insanity; but he had no choice. So he stopped off at the apartment to pick up his few supplies including chains and other emergency items and a small carrying case to bring his things back on a plane from wherever he could sell the car. Then off up the Vanak expressway towards Tabriz, Maku and Bazargan. By three in the morning, Kurosh had made it past Tabriz where he set up the car for the night. The next morning, he pushed on to the Bazargan border station then on towards Erzerum. The sky grew dark and threatening then a violent snowstorm began to blow harshly, blotting out the road and making visibility nearly impossible. The battery began to weaken from having to constantly use the heater, windshield wiper and bright beam lights which now slowly started to dim. It was a nerve-racking drive to Erzerum and onward where the road disintegrated into rough ragged ruts. The snow temporarily subsided somewhat; but Kurosh was not sure where the turn-off south to Elazığ was. He found someone to ask “*Elazığın yolu nekadar kilometer dir?*” The answer was “*otuz (30)*” which he carefully counted on the speedometer until he found highway 391 exactly as promised. He turned on 391 which led to a small teahouse where a jeep and a truck were parked completely blocking the road. Kurosh stopped and entered the teahouse as the eyes of about ten tough-looking Turks followed him in distant disregard. He timidly stammered out “*yolda araba kaldı* (vehicle is stopped in the road).” A more cheery comical plump fellow wondered if he meant his own car to which Kurosh answered that it was a truck and jeep. The fellow then asked where Kurosh was going and was told Elazığ. The fellow’s eyes filled with emotion as he sternly interrogated “*zencir var?* (you got chains?)” When Kurosh reluctantly nodded “yes.” the fellow stressed “*zencir siz gitmiyor* (without chains it won’t go).” Sighing, Kurosh whimpered “*fakat ben tembelim* (but I’m lazy)” to which a few of the tea-drinking Turks smirked a smile. Again the man warned with frantically waiving arms that chains were absolutely a must. So in the pitch dark, Kurosh had to get his chains out and crawl around in the slushy cold mud to try to get them on the wheels. After what seemed like an hour or more, Kurosh finally got the chains on and was covered with mud from head to foot. He returned to the teahouse to wash the thick cakes of mud from his hands and clothes while the remaining three Turks didn’t seem to acknowledge or care that he had come back.

He trudged out to the car and drove from the teahouse up the steep road winding this way and that in mist and snow through a pass that seemed more like a film on scary mountain climbing than reality. The car ascended the steep road in the rain through haze and eventually torrents of snow as he climbed higher and higher. He wound back and forth up what was not much of a road and barely room for two cars to pass each other. A fierce wind howled brushing and sifting, shifting drifts of snow right up in the middle of the narrow ‘road.’ Kurosh was totally fatigued and nearly fell asleep on a few curves which could have been sure death. He drove in a daze as if in a nightmare with deep snow on the ‘road’

confused by flurries of flakes blowing wildly across his view in dizzying swirls then walls of white which seemed like one big white cloud. He had no knowledge of where he was going or how. A big lumbering truck came towards him on the other side and squeezed passed, leaving Kurosh about one inch from what seemed like a chasm-like cliff on his right. He couldn't tell where the road, or the mountain or the drop-off to destruction was.

He lifted his eyes for a moment and prayed "Lord, if I am to die here now then thanks for all the wonderful friends, music and beauty I have enjoyed all my life and forgive me for not being at all worthy of so many blessings. Otherwise, if I should continue on in this life then guide me safely to the other side of this deadly pass." Suddenly, a strange feeling of calm came over him and a glow of light even brighter than the gleaming white snow seemed to permeate everything. A strong power took control of the steering wheel and pedals although his hands and feet were assisting the force. He somehow arrived at the terrifying peak near where he noticed a snow-covered sign on the right side of the road which said 'Pülümür,' a name he could never forget, a name associated with the most deadly drive he ever would experience. The car continued to drift along, purposefully negotiating the frightening descent down the other side. After what seemed like hours of uncertainty and frightening hairpin turns, the road leveled out. Kurosh stopped to shed the pesty chains and pressed on towards Pülümür where complete exhaustion forced him to stop at a roadside parking spot to sleep till dawn. As he drifted off to sleep he thanked the Lord for saving him one more time, even if he didn't deserve it, and he marveled how the Lord could take total control in such a miraculous manner in an emergency situation. The next morning he tried to start the car but to no avail. Meanwhile, a little trollish fellow slithered up to the car and grunted in Turkish "are you going to leave without paying?" Kurosh quipped "paying for what?" The little freak responded "for staying here, see the sign?" Sure enough, Kurosh noticed the sign which in tiny print listed prices for various time periods. Kurosh pretended to be a dumb tourist still struggling to get the car started until the unfriendly little pest whipped out a two and a half *lira* coin and squeaked "*bir tana ver!* (give one!)" Kurosh tried to ignore him but finally had to sacrifice one of those coins to get rid of the guy since he couldn't just drive off due to the dead battery. Kurosh pushed the car into the road and jumped in as it coasted down the hill where he popped the clutch and got it going off to Elazığ. At the outskirts of Elazığ, women wore colorful dresses over billowing pantaloons and white scarves tied with brightly-hued head-bands. Farther on toward Malataya, some wore black chadors with white veils covering all but their eyes.

On to Syria and Beirut

On the way to Gaziantep, a truck in front of him was smoking as if it was on fire. When Kurosh drew near, he discovered that it was just a bon-fire on the truck bed, tended and huddled over by a group of workmen trying to fight the crippling cold. Outside of Gaziantep, the dark green rocks covered with scrubby pines created a mysterious atmosphere. Then on the road from there to Kilis near the Syrian border, rich red-brown soil, rolling hills and gray-green boulders greeted travelers. At the border, Kurosh was cleared quickly by friendly officials on both sides who seemed like they hadn't seen a car all day. When the Syrian passport official asked Kurosh where he was going and was told Halep (Aleppo), he asked in Arabic "*btarif ettari?*" (you know the road?) Kurosh answered he didn't and the official said in Arabic "I'm going there in a few minutes; if you don't mind, I'll come with you." Soon they were driving by olive orchards in rich soil and gray stone villages to Halep, a quiet town with stately buildings of yellow-brown stone. Nearly no modern or pop art structures were there to spoil the ancient beauty. Men wore black or red *kafiyas* on the head or around the neck. After having an informative conversation in

Arabic, Kurosh dropped off the new friend at his home near the outskirts of town and returned to the highway to Hama then Homs.

In Homs, the rain and weariness from the harrowing mountain episode the day before and a full day of driving overcame any alertness Kurosh might have been able to conjure up and he drove right by a cop who was holding up his hand for Kurosh to halt. Kurosh passed with a shocked look that matched the stunned stare of the police officer who blew his whistle and Kurosh sheepishly pulled over. Kurosh, cringing at the thought of a potential fine he couldn't afford, rolled down the window as the officer asked "*bt'arif 'arabi?* (you speak Arabic?)" to which Kurosh mumbled "*ay, shwaya* (yea, a little)." The officer asked for Kurosh's driver's license which was from the Iranian Auto Club. He and another cop were reading the Persian out loud as if it was Arabic which sounded so hilarious Kurosh could hardly keep from bursting into wild laughter at the weird way they were rendering it. The policeman demanded "*daftar lil gumruk*" and Kurosh fumbled through the glove compartment for the customs book. Then the officer asked "*wen b'tsafir?*" to which Kurosh answered "Beirut." The officer smiled and said in Arabic "then go on and be careful or next time they will take your license." Then he pointed to two buildings behind him noting "*hone fundu'* (here's a hotel) *wa mata'am* (and a restaurant)." Kurosh thanked the officers, bade them *masallama* and drove on, more shaken up about his drowsy driving than his encounter with the law.

Frightened awake, he drove down to Crak de Chevaliers where the Syrians cleared him quickly then he came to the Lebanese side. The Lebanese officials were sitting in a small neighboring restaurant at a sumptuous meal of all manner of delicacies. They kindly invited Kurosh to join them with a friendly *faddal*; but he politely refused. They sat back and checked his passport, asking if he was traveling alone. Kurosh answered that he was but said he had a friend in Beirut. He showed them Mona's photo and they said "aha" to which Kurosh immediately explained that she was only a friend. They advised that he should marry her then stamped his passport. Kurosh noticed they were eating funny-looking long flat vegetables and asked what they were upon which one fellow dipped one in the hummus, wrapped it in a slab of pita bread and handed it to Kurosh who savored the delicious treat. The official explained in French "*c'est une sorte de champignon* (it's a type of mushroom)." After a couple of more mushrooms, Kurosh thanked his new friends and drove to the outskirts of Beirut where he pulled over and slept.

The next morning was sunny and warm, a welcome relief from freezing Turkey. Beirut glittered against the sea like a bright sparkle on an emerald in the sunlight. He drove to the *borj*; but, since this was the first time he had a car in Beirut, he made three major traffic mistakes. Tough but understanding cops with ticket pads in their eager hands, learning that Kurosh was a foreign tourist, disgustingly conceded "*ruh!* (go on!)" as he pretended not to understand a word. Also being the first time Kurosh had a car in Beirut, he was able to listen to local radio stations. He went from station to station attempting to learn more Arabic until he found what seemed to be a complete corruption of the noble language. At first he couldn't figure what dialect the really bad improper Arabic was until it dawned on him maybe it was Hebrew. Gag, what an awful version of the traditional Semitic tongue. Sure enough he heard the word 'Israel' and knew it was those ego tripper Asiatics, the invading hords of Gog and Magog, Meshech and Tubal who had invaded God's sacred soil bringing their European imperialism, modernist immorality and genocidal policy learned from Hitler. Sure, Kurosh had a few Israeli friends in Geneva and other places; but the whole mess created by the Khazar Zionist movement had caused grievous unneeded problems. OK, the *kagan* (khan) of the Asiatic Khazars chose to adopt Judaism for his Mongol-type people and that is completely fine. But how could those Slavic, Hungarian and German Askenazi Jewish converts claim Palestine as theirs when they are not even of the blood of Abraham? And how can they call it Israel while boycotting descendants of the other eleven tribes, especially Joseph from whom Kurosh descended. Then

how about the murder of myriads of the real descendants of Abraham who had peacefully lived in the area for millennia, some or maybe all being authentic descendants of Judah? It seemed like Hitler's genocide was just transferred to the Middle East by some of those who had purportedly been his victims.

Kurosh found his way to Mona's place and visited her for a while before going to his usual home in Beirut, the Atlas Hotel in Hamra, for the 'good buddy' price of only eight *lira*. The pretty telephone girl, who remembered Kurosh and Mona together during his past visits, motioned Kurosh back to her window and asked "*kaif el khatiba?* (how's the fiancée?)" to which he answered "*hiya mish khatiba, hiya sahiba* (she's not a fiancée, she's a friend)." Then she asked "*ma b'tahki ma' ha?* (aren't you going to talk to her?)" Kurosh admitted "*ana shufitha elyom* (I saw her today)" which brought a glimmer to her impish eyes. Then with a naughty smirk he kidded "*mish enti khatibati, bint hilwa?* (Aren't you my fiancée, sweet girl?)" She laughed nervously her eyes sheepishly yet fondly following him as he climbed the stairs to this room. It was great to be in Beirut again where he could get wonderful fresh fruit, bottled Sohat spring water and vegetarian food at reasonable prices. He left his things at the hotel then took bus no.7 downtown to shop. In the Beirut bazaar, Kurosh was meandering along and noticed an exceptionally beautiful young woman with her mother on the opposite side of the row he was in. She was dressed modestly with a head covering like one would think the Virgin Mary would have worn according to the Islamic account. With jet black hair and piercing dark brown eyes, she had the glow and spiritual aloofness yet simple humility that perfectly embodied what one might imagine the true image of Mary to really be. Kurosh felt inspired to have witnessed a wonderful likeness in a neighboring area not far north of Bethlehem reinforced the reality of the Biblical and Koranic narratives. She was the opposite of the emblematic blond, blue-eyed Romanized Babylonian 'virgin' mother goddess Semiramis, Ishtar or Astarte, who was the wife of the evil Nimrod and mother of her own later husband Tammuz. That impostress wrongfully inserted into the Trinity in early Rome was actually the Mother of Harlots scorned in scripture. It makes sense because in ancient Rome, profane prostitutes usually had to dye their hair yellow.

After purchasing some fresh fruit, Kurosh went to the music school and found his friend master musician Ustaz Abyad who, as always, had a wonderful 'oud to sell Kurosh. Of course, Kurosh was not able to buy anything this time since he was down to his last bit of funds and was there to sell his car. He mentioned the car to Abyad and everyone he knew or met until one student at the American University seemed to be interested but offered a very low price since the customs duty would be so outrageous. After enduring a few faint offers to buy the car, Kurosh realized that it was not going to be possible to sell it in Beirut. He went to see Mona one more time before leaving to return to Syria or Turkey where he hoped someone would buy it so he could get back to his responsibilities in Tehran.

Back to Syria and Turkey

He checked out of the Atlas and began the drive up the coast towards Trablus (Tripoli), Hama, Halep and Turkey again. As he drove along with the Mediterranean happily splashing on his left, to the right he noticed a sign in Arabic with a drawing of a familiar long brown bean. As he neared the roadside shop, he sounded out the word *kharub* then it dawned on him that it was carob. He pulled over and entered the shop where carob syrup was being sold in various types of containers so he sacrificed some of his meager remaining funds for a bottle of the syrup and continued on up the coast. This time, he didn't go up to Crac des Chevaliers but turned right a ways out of Trablus towards Homs. He remembered his visit to Crac years before when he took the official tour and learned of the importance of the impenetrable castle built in 1031, later reinforced with three meter thick walls and a food supply that could feed 3,000 men for five

years. So Mormons who complain about having to put away a year or two of food should check out this place. It is rumored that when archeologists found huge jars of olive oil stored by the medieval Christian knights who manned the fortress, they tried eating it and it still tasted good even after several hundred years. The fortress was very important because no one could pass by on the narrow road it overlooked without permission of the Christian knights. It is reported that at one point the Christians allowed the Mongol hordes to ride by, hoping they would wreak havoc on the Moslems. Good old so-called 'Christians,' accepting every chance to cause death to those who actually obey the one true God .

Ever since he drove or rather slid down from the terrifying pass on the way to Pülümür, Kurosh had been obliged to add a quart of oil every 100 Ks. Back in Tehran, mechanic Mahmad Aqa had grimly warned Kurosh that he couldn't go anywhere in that car because the sleeves holding the motor bolts couldn't be seated as firmly as necessary and that eventually everything would come apart. That fear had kept Kurosh under pressure to sell the car as fast as possible; but everywhere he went, he failed to find any serious customers. Even if the motor had serious problems, it was a bargain at the few hundred dollars Kurosh was asking compared to the thousands it would usually be with customs taxes assessed in any Middle Eastern country. As he drove northward, the oil leak worsened until he was only able to go a few Ks on a quart of oil. As the fear of being stuck in Syria with that car stamped in his passport and being on foot in the middle of nowhere began to panic him, he saw what appeared to be a mechanic shop in a small town before Bab el Hawa near the Turkish border. The helpful and friendly Syrian mechanic tried to tighten the head bolts but was not really very successful. He looked down and uttered "*mish ma'ul* (it's impossible)." Kurosh tried to offer him his last few Syrian pounds, but the mechanic waved the money away. Kurosh sincerely thanked the mechanic for retightening the bolts, hopefully enough to travel a few hundred more Ks and promised that Allah would reward him.

Discouraged and disheartened, Kurosh drove off towards Turkey wondering what his fate would be. He pulled into the Bab el Hawa border station, cleared customs there and then drove the few Ks to the Turkish border station where he cleared Turkish formalities. After unsuccessfully trying to sell the car in Turkey, Syria and Lebanon, he was at a loss where to go and what to do. He knew that it would be impossible for the poor old VW to re-cross the deadly pass between Pülümür and the long and potentially snowy road back to Tehran. As he drove away from the Turkish border town of Kilis towards Gaziantep, he wondered which way to turn. He quietly prayed for guidance and then released his fears remembering how he had been saved hundreds of times from various possible grim fates all over the world. When he pulled into Gaziantep, he was impressed to take the road to Urfa as he remembered his deceased friend Halil's family lived in Urfa. He thought that maybe Halil's family might help find a customer for the car.

Kurosh had met Halil in a strange way in Tehran when one night the phone rang at his Amir Abad apartment. When he answered, a desperate girl was sobbing and chattering in Farsi. Kurosh, being a kind caring guy and an LDS stake missionary, tried to calm her down and help her resolve her emotional dilemma. She told him that she had randomly phoned a few numbers and any man she talked to was only interested in meeting and becoming involved. Kurosh was the only one who just wanted to help and wasn't interested in meeting up. Then she asked him to come to her apartment because she was lonely and afraid. He agreed, went there and continued his role as a makeshift psychologist offering comfort and friendship only. He finally calmed her down then left promising to stop by the next day. When he stopped by the next day, he bumped into Halil, a brilliant Turkish student studying at the Tehran University who was living on the same floor of the building. They immediately became friends and Kurosh asked Halil if he would do a Turkish translation of the informational pamphlet about Mormonism that Kurosh had prepared in Farsi before leaving Utah. After a few weeks, Halil had a beautiful translation of the pamphlet which Kurosh typed up and printed a few dozen copies of on a visit back to Utah. Sometime later, he

learned that Halil was killed in an auto accident. It seemed that he must have been ready to enter heaven because of his almost perfect character and his wise, helpful and thoughtful personality.

Kurosh began to become excited to visit with Halil's family knowing that they must be some of the finest people in Turkey. He drove into Urfa and found the address he had gotten from Halil a while ago. He knocked on the door and was greeted by one of the most charming and beautiful girls he had ever seen in Turkey. He fumbled introducing himself in Turkish as Halil's friend from Tehran as she piercingly gazed through him with her clear glowing eyes and a patient pernicious grin. Then she interrupted his stumbling and mumbling in Turkish noting in fluent English that Halil had spoken of him and the translating. She then welcomed him into the house and called her mother to meet Halil's friend from Tehran. Soon the father came home from work and later they were joined by other family members until it was time for dinner where Kurosh was the honored guest. After an explanation of his weird diet, they had no trouble finding him wonderful vegetarian items for the meal. Halil's sister's attractiveness was difficult to ignore as Kurosh tried to talk to her without letting on that he was struck by her beauty. She suggested that he come to her English class at the elementary school the next day and teach a lesson as a native. Normally, Kurosh felt that being used as a lowly native English speaker was the biggest insult for an accomplished musical genius and Middle East scholar; but in this case he gladly consented. Then the conversation turned to the car problem and the father promised to call a meeting of his friends including a city official or two to see what could be done. Kurosh slept calmly that night hoping that maybe the car could be sold soon.

The next morning after a hearty breakfast, Kurosh was off to teach English with Halil's sister. He put forth every effort to succeed and make his host proud to have brought a native speaker, of course not letting on that he had flunked freshman English in college and was a problem student in both junior high and high school. Then it was back at the house for lunch and off with the father for an official meeting about the car. On the way there, Halil's father told Kurosh in Turkish the story of Abraham who, according to tradition, was born in Urfa and whose father was an idol maker. He said that one day Abraham broke all the idols except a big one he couldn't reach. When his father came home he asked what had happened, Abraham blandly stated that the remaining big idol broke the others. His father angrily scolded that idols can't do anything. Then Abraham wisely asked "why then would anyone worship them?"

The Car is Finally Sold

After arriving at the meeting and exchanging courtesies, some of the friends offered suggestions, but no one actually was or knew a potential buyer. Then the subject of the car being stamped in Kurosh's passport came up. They noted that in his passport "*bir kait dir* (there is a stamp)" to which Kurosh replied "*benim masale dir* (that's my problem)." But the whole meeting became more of a philosophical discussion rather than a resolution of the situation. After the meeting, Kurosh dropped Halil's father off at the house, said goodbye to the rest of the family members and drove back towards Gaziantep and Kilis with one last desperate attempt to possibly drag the remnants of his poor old VW to Beirut again and sell it there to the one partially interested fellow at the AUB. He glumly went through the Turkish border again and forlornly drew up to the Syrian border. As the car slowed to a stop, he timidly but desperately ventured another prayer for help as he slowly rolled into place at the customs check where a nice-looking young man smiled "*ahlen* (welcome)" Then looking over the car, he shocked Kurosh with "*bidek bitba' al 'araba?* (you wanna sell the car?)" Stunned by those words, Kurosh smiled hesitantly and stammered "*walakin mish mamnu?*" (but isn't it illegal?) His new friend assured in Arabic "not at all; you are

nowhere. Turkey is a few Ks behind you and Syria a few Ks ahead. This is no country and you can sell it to me very easily. I will do the papers first thing in the morning.” Again Kurosh was stunned at Allah’s goodness saving him one more time from some grim fate. He thankfully agreed to the sale and asked about price. “*Shukran . . . adash?*” he asked. After a bit of mild bargaining, they settled on a price of \$300 to be paid in various currencies, \$150 in dollars and the rest in Marks, Turkish *lira*, Syrian and Lebanese pounds. So instead of a potential \$1,000 by selling the car unofficially, Kurosh was more than happy to finally get \$300 just to get it out of his passport legally.

Kurosh slept one more night in the VW Hotel and the following morning his friend started the paper work at the customs desk inside the border station. Kurosh had given him one of the Arabic versions of his informational pamphlet about Mormonism, about Lehi leaving the wicked city of Jerusalem and building a boat to sail to Central America, etc. After a while, an intimidating stocky Syrian soldier with a loaded machine gun hanging from a shoulder strap stormed out of the back office and accosted Kurosh. He came right up to Kurosh with the machine gun almost in Kurosh’s stomach and, waving the pamphlet at Kurosh, accused in Arabic “did you give this?” Kurosh thought that if he was to die for sharing general information about the Church here in a small border station, then he was ready. He boldly answered “*ey*” waiting for the bullets to fly. The soldier glared and asked in Arabic “do you have any more of those?” Again Kurosh was ready to be sent to the next life because he had lost his recent family in a grim divorce and didn’t care what happened to him; so he glared back admitting “*ey*.” Then the soldier surprised Kurosh with a smile as his machine gun slid so the barrel faced the ground and continued in Arabic “this is very logical, do you have any more? I want one and so do others in the office.” Kurosh immediately reached into his jacket pocket and produced half a dozen of the pamphlets, handed them to the soldier and sighed with relief as the soldier politely thanked him and returned to the back room.

Back to Beirut where Troubles Erupt

Soon the paperwork was complete, Kurosh was given his cash of various types and was hugged and kissed goodbye by his customs friend, the soldier and others in the station then sent off in a *servis* taxi to Halep where he could catch a bus to the Lebanese border and then another one to Beirut. In the cab, Kurosh gave a remaining pamphlet to one of the four other passengers who read it and at the end of the trip also noted that it was very sensible. The part about Lehi leaving the wicked Jews in Jerusalem who were eventually rightfully destroyed by God might have been one of the items of interest to Arabs. Back in Beirut, Kurosh returned to the Atlas Hotel to rest a couple of days before flying back to Tehran. But Kurosh noticed something strange about the feeling all over town. The fun relaxed mood of Beirut had changed to a tense, nervous and somehow angry feeling. The atmosphere was very frightening. On the way to the Atlas Hotel, Kurosh stopped in a small café for a takeout *filafil* and was deeply disturbed at the conversations of various groups of men sitting at the long tables. One fellow vociferously verified that he would fight “*ana b’harab!*” as another chimed in “*ana kaman!* (me too!).” The various groups were muttering and mumbling in an intense angry manner that Kurosh had never witnessed in Beirut before. He tried to figure out what was happening; was the Moslem and Christian rift that had long ago been healed by the policy of equality in the government finally coming apart? Was it the Israeli problem which had troubled neighboring nations for years? Kurosh quickly paid for his *filafil* and, without the usual politenesses, hurried out into the street towards the Atals hotel. Clusters of agitated men on the street were agreeing with the feelings he had heard in the café; they were willing and ready to fight if necessary and with vigor.

When he rushed into the Atlas Hotel, his friend the manager asked in Arabic “so you are leaving Beirut tomorrow?” When Kurosh affirmed the fact, the manager added “good, leave as soon as possible because I don’t think Beirut will ever be safe again.” Kurosh sadly nodded in agreement, paid his bill in advance and sped up the stairs to gulp down his *filafil* and begin packing. Then he lay on the bed staring at the ceiling as the sounds of machine gun fire intermittently rattled from various areas around Beirut accompanied by occasional explosions. He turned on the radio in hopes of finding out what was going on. On the radio, fierce accusations and threats were being exchanged in the parliament as tension grew among the various government representatives. Kurosh turned off the radio in despair as more angry shouts, gunfire and bomb blasts filled the streets.

The next morning, Kurosh was up early and at the curbside trying to wave down a cab. A few passed by refusing to acknowledge him; but finally a kindly old man slowed and asked “*wain?* (where?)” to which Kurosh retorted “*matar* (airport).” As they frantically drove through the streets of Beirut where people were setting up makeshift barricades, the driver asked in Arabic “the airport road is very dangerous; how much do you pay?” Kurosh answered “if nothing happens 15 *lira*; if we get killed, 50 *lira*.” After a moment of silence the driver noted “but if we die, 50 *lira* won’t be of any value to me.” Kurosh flipped his palms up as if to say “so” and nervously chuckled in Arabic “or no use to me either.” The driver timidly laughed as they drove on through the obstacle course. When they passed through the open area near the airport, a rocket or something probably aimed at a military truck coming the other way whizzed past and exploded at the side of the road. Kurosh and the driver stared at each other in frightened shock as Kurosh renewed his 50 *lira* promise “*iza mout, khamsin lira.*” They tried to laugh but couldn’t; instead they glared sternly at the road until the cab finally pulled up in front of the airport. Kurosh jumped out, grabbed his luggage and handed the driver a 20 *lira* bill with a hearty thanks and a blessing that the driver be safe on his return and thereafter. Kurosh rushed into the airport and, after the usual formalities, was on a flight back to Tehran. As the plane flew over the city, Kurosh hoped that no missile would be launched at his flight. Clouds of smoke from explosives could be seen emitting from various quarters of Beirut as Kurosh quietly offered a prayer of thanks to the Lord for saving him from one more potential fatal disaster. Kurosh wondered when this unsettling spirit of anger and bloodshed would spread to other countries, maybe even Iran and eventually the U.S. as promised in the forecasts of Mormon Church leaders. For instance, according to early leader John Taylor and several others, America will be almost completely destroyed by internal strife just like Jerusalem was in the days of Jeremiah due to rampant sin. Other early LDS leaders agreed in grim prophecies on the fatal fate of that ‘wicked nation’ America.

Chapter 12

Memories of Beirut

Studying Music and Writing for Sketch Magazine

As the plane left the sad scene of Beirut in turmoil, Kurosh thought back on his several happy trips there to submit articles, relax in the warmth, buy reasonably priced fruit and to hear, study and play music. He mused over the time he first found the National Conservatory (*Al Conservatoir al Musiqi al Watani*) and met Ustaz George Farah and Ustaz George Abyad. It was up from the Borj, under the overpass, left down a small street then on the right. He learned some *qanun* skills from Ustaz Abyad and some *oud* pointers from Farah who never personally taught anymore since he was the director. But he decided that since Kurosh was also a teacher, he would offer him instruction for only five *lira* an hour. At his last class,

Kurosh asked Ustaz Farah to play a *taksim* (solo) phrase by phrase which Kurosh reiterated fairly accurately adding a few frills of his own to the amazement and satisfaction of the master. In Ustaz Sabsabi's *qanun* class, Kurosh also shined drawing on his *santur* skills to quickly absorb a melody the teacher had demonstrated. He stunned both teacher and students by successfully rendering his version of a *qanun taksim* he had learned from an Iraqi record that he had been listening to since the early 1960s.

Kurosh also visited the *dumbek* class and, when the teacher handed him a *dumbek* to show what he knew, he belted out some fancy Persian techniques. The teacher and students were giggling in amazement at some of the Persian tricks especially the roll done by throwing the limp fingers against the head one hand after the other until a smooth roll is achieved. When they asked him how it was done, he described it as *kelb fil bahr* (a dog in the ocean) paddling fast to get to the shore. Then the drum teacher said "*usbur shwey* (wait a bit)" then went to round up a dozen more music students to see the show. As the room filled up, Kurosh was told "*amal el kelb!* (do the dog!)" which he did as everyone gleefully giggled then each tried to imitate it with Kurosh offering guidance on how to throw limp fingers one hand at a time and then blend them into a smooth roll. Kurosh also fondly remembered the various *ouds* that Sabsabi had found for him, two of which he ended up keeping and the others he sold or traded. Also, he remembered the trip to Beirut with the Iranian *qanun* player Shahla who was on his Turkish music TV special. He had donated the funds for Shahla and her mother to spend a couple of weeks to study with masters Sabsabi and Farah. She became highly skilled on the instrument, bought an excellent *qanun* then, after returning to Tehran, sadly eventually gave up music.

Then there was the visit to Beirut when he was invited to hang out at a hotshot hotel with his friend Wajih Ghossub who was director of the famous Lebanese Baalbek Festival. He met Wajih at a Shiraz festival where the organizers had assigned him to host Wajih and his charming sisters since Kurosh knew a little Arabic and was the art critic for a Lebanese magazine. Usually, Kurosh was down on the street with the common man wherever he went. But this time, he was with the very upper crust of wealthy high society where everyone spoke French and English to perfection and often blended French with Arabic. He would lounge with Wajih by the pool being treated to fancy snacks and fruit juices watching Wajih's attractive and fun sisters splashing around in the water. After a few days of fancy living, Kurosh got into the Franco-Arabic lingo. The last day he was in town, he dropped over to the hotel and greeted Wajih and his sisters with "*bonjour 'alekum, mes 'aziz amis, keif allez vous? Ça vas mnih, enshallah. Bukra ana doit retourner ila Tahrnan.*" Everyone around the pool broke out in wild laughter at Kurosh's attempt to be high-class Lebanese and the weird way he mixed French and Arabic. He somehow was accepted as part of the group because he was classy, intelligent, talented and an American even if he wasn't a preferred descendant of some upper-crust Lebanese family.

As the plane to Tehran droned on, Kurosh chuckled and reminisced about various trips to deliver his articles to the Sketch Magazine where he was the correspondent for Iran and Afghanistan concentrating on arts and culture. Some of his prominent pieces were on the annual Tehran Film Festivals, Shiraz Arts Festivals and other similar events. For the 1976 Tehran Film Festival, Sketch gave Kurosh six pages including photos, one of which was Kurosh meeting empress Farah Diba. At first, the Sketch editor was Bedros Kazanjian then later was Ali Ashry. Kurosh and Ali Ashry became good friends and when Yasir Arafat gave his speech at the UN, Kurosh watched it at Ashry's home in Beirut. The speech was in classical Arabic, clear and purposeful, so Kurosh understood almost all of it. He and Ashry were impressed when Arafat said words to the effect that he sympathized with the suffering the Jews had endured in Germany and that they were welcome in Palestine but that the Palestinians expected that they would be allowed to remain there also.

Visit to the Gulf

A few months later, Ali Ashry had assigned Kurosh to go on a trip to the Gulf, to Bahrain and Abu Dhabi where he was to do a week or so survey of the culture and arts, gather information about other subjects including oil and then return to write a whole 78 page special issue of Sketch on what he had found in UAE (United Arab Emirates), and another separate complete issue on Bahrain. Kurosh was given an airline ticket, a comparatively sizeable roll of cash to cover hotels, local transportation and meals along with a reasonable honorarium for the project. Of course, Kurosh cut a few corners hoping to be able to come back to Tehran with extra cash to fund future trips. Kurosh took the flight to the Gulf, a place he never would have visited unless he had to because it was where stupid ugly oil came from. Oil was the poison which became air pollution, caused bloody wars, violent revolutions, Western imperialistic control of and victimization of Islamic societies including many conspiracies to depose leaders and murder populations so that greedy oil companies in the West could fatten their already obscenely over-bloated bank accounts. Kurosh hated the whole ugly mess and had hated oil from the time the fun, charming and highly practical steam trains of his childhood were trashed for the stupid, bland, boring, moaning and completely unfun diesel trains. But Sketch wanted some articles about Abu Dhabi and Bahrain hoping Kurosh could find out about any silly oil deals.

Kurosh landed in Abu Dhabi in the United Arab Emirates or UAE and, for the first time in many years, he booked himself into a nice hotel, the hotel where the oil leaders were to have a meeting the next day. Kurosh attended the whole day of oil meetings gagging through it all but pretending to be interested. No one doubted his rank as a journalist there which was a nice change from the constant degradation he suffered in Iran because he was so well adopted into the culture and didn't put on any phony airs. He really shouldn't have to; his mother had received a medal of honor from the Shah for her best-selling book on Iran and his dad was honored by the Shah for setting up a business school in Tehran. Also Kurosh was a PhD scholar on a Fulbright and could play all the instruments of the Iranian and many other traditions to an admirable degree of virtuosity. But for some reason the Iranians couldn't accept him as a scholar or journalist. One important leader in the arts once told him in Farsi "Iranians can only accept a little genius" indicating that Kurosh was too much of a genius and no one could really believe he could play almost every instrument in existence well and could chatter on in perfect Farsi, Dari and other languages to various degrees of acceptability. The Gulf Arabs, on the other hand, immediately accepted him because his Arabic was not that good and he relied on English at the oil meetings which seemed to make him trustworthy. If he were to grab an *oud* and wail out a fantastic *taksim* like he might do on Iranian TV, then he would probably be relegated to the caste of possible spy or low class performer.

The food at the fancy events during the oil talks and the beauty of the bright blue Gulf waters along with the pushiness of the hotel made the assignment bearable. But when the last Buick in the caravan of cars following the leader drove from in front of the hotel off into the desert, Kurosh was relieved to be able to finally be free to absorb the local culture and try to find something that didn't seem to be a carbon copy of the West. He went to a few government offices and collected valuable publications, mostly in English, which he later turned over to Sketch as useful informational documents. Then he went out into the town to absorb the atmosphere. In his Sketch article entitled 'Exotic Sea and Sand, Pollution-Free Haven,' Kurosh described the emerald turquoise blue of the clear warm waters which softly play upon the smooth gray white sands gently brushed by pure sweet air. He compared Abu Dhabi to some of the more plush beach towns of his native California, but it unfortunately lacked a quaint old bazaar like the *su'* in Damascus. Although he was forced to write extensively about the treasure of black gold (gagging all the way), his real contribution to journalistic literature that month was his article entitled "Islam: Green

Gold.” It was the result of a few days in the company of a wonderful *imam*, Sheikh Ismael Sadeq, who kindly shared religious information and invited Kurosh to prayers at the mosque on several occasions. When asked if modernization and monetary wealth could erode away the religious principles of Islam, Sheikh Sadeq answered in Arabic “a diamond does not decay.” Kurosh hoped that it was true because Christianity had long lost its spirituality due to greed, power hunger and recent Western imperialism.

At one of Sheikh Sadeq’s sermons, he expounded on the essence of Islam. “Real Islam is quality not quantity” he stated in classical Arabic, his head bobbing from side to side as he punctuated his message with appropriate gestures and facial expressions. “The Torah, the Bible, the Koran” he continued “all contain God’s covenant with man. The trouble is in the first two cases, people eventually turned from the essence of this covenant and fell into an empty shell of the outward appearance of holiness. For the believer to offer prayers that are straight from the heart and not just from the tongue, he must honor the covenants revealed by God in the scriptures. How can we honor that covenant?” He answered “by keeping God’s laws. First we should love God, then love our parents, love our family and relatives and then love all humanity. To love humanity we must care for the poor, the orphan, the widow, the invalid, the weak and the meek. We must internalize the fact that all mankind are brothers and act accordingly.” He continued “the first eternal decree of God is free agency . . . free agency to follow God’s will. God’s glory is intelligence; man without intelligence is on the level of an animal. Therefore we should not destroy our intelligence with alcohol or other harmful substances.”

While in the Gulf, Kurosh also visited the island Bahrain and wrote a whole Sketch issue on that location. Other than information on oil, culture, music, dance, history, etc., Kurosh found a shop that sold pearls for which Bahrain is famous. He was hesitant to be thinking of buying one because of the hardships, even possible death, that pearl divers suffer as expressed by Khalid Sadeq’s famous film *Bas ya Bahr* or The Cruel Sea which was a main film at one of the Tehran Film Festivals where Kurosh was a film critic. He waited while another customer was selecting a nice pearl then told the shop owner he was looking for a small inexpensive pearl. When the shop owner asked how much Kurosh wanted to spend, the answer was “*wahed dinar* (one *dinar*).” The shop owner laughed and noted “*be dinar mafish lulu* (there isn’t a pearl for one *dinar*).” Kurosh was informed that for two *dinars* he might find one; but Kurosh was too careful with his funds due to years of living way below poverty so he hung his head and sadly slouched out of the shop. Kurosh returned to his room, packed his suitcase and enjoyed his last night at the plush Dilmun Hotel.

The next day, he flew back to Beirut to spend a few days writing the two special issues on UAE and Bahrain. On his way back to the airport, he climbed off the bus and someone bumped into him. As he entered the airport, he reached for his wallet and it was gone. He pulled his suitcase up to where a policeman was stationed and reported his missing wallet. Luckily, his ticket was in his coat pocket. The officer asked “*fih masarih?* (any cash in it?)” When Kurosh admitted that there was, the officer looked at his partner and they both knowingly acknowledged “*Mesri* (Egyptian).” Kurosh was informed that sneaky Egyptian pick pockets were all over the airport. So Kurosh lost the several hundred Lebanese *lira* along with some *dinars*, dollars and *tomans*, altogether about \$200, more than he usually ever had at one time. From then on, Kurosh attached a strong chain to his wallet and was never pick pocketed again. He also gained even more disdain for Egyptians than he had before. He disliked them because they tolerate the Hollywood conjured fraud of belly dance allowing themselves to be swept up in the phony Orientalist construct which insults women and Islam.

Dr. Sadat Hassan

Kurosh thought back with a smile or a chuckle or a tear considering the many experiences he shared with his Lebanese platonic sweetheart Mona. One trip back from shopping in Damascus came to mind when there were almost no passengers going to Beirut. Kurosh, Mona and a nice Palestinian fellow who spoke perfect English were the only ones to share a *servis* which was to cost eight Syrian pounds. Kurosh always had to be careful with his meager funds so they waited until the Palestinian fellow paid for the last seat so they could get going. He turned out to be a wonderful intelligent conversationalist who had spent over 15 years in the States. They learned that he was the spokesman for the P.L.O., his name was Dr. Hassan. Kurosh was excited to finally meet the man who he had watched on TV back at University of Utah debate a vicious Jewish lawyer. He noted how he and his Arab friends loved the way Dr. Hassan kept his cool and, in a jovial easy-going manner, allowed the angry and over-emotional Jewish lawyer to commit debatal suicide flying into a childish tantrum. Of course, Kurosh had always been a fan of Jewish people in the various schools and camps he had attended, in the jazz world and among his parents' friends; but he was very disappointed that some of the meanest SOBs in history came out of Nazi Germany to continue Hitler's genocide against the real Semitic people in Palestine. From his studies, Kurosh had found that the so-called Jews in Europe were mostly from the Khazar Asiatic race who were merely converts to Judaism and not of the blood of Abraham. So why would they have the right to murder myriads of the real descendants of Abraham, steal their land and cause them to end up in filthy refugee camps? Dr. Hassan was surprised that an American could have the insight to see the real truth in the face of the false pro-Israeli propaganda that flooded the media non-stop. Also Kurosh noted that Mormons are mostly descendants of Joseph who was sold into Egypt by Judah and the other brothers. How could they use the name Israel and exclude the other 11 tribes from having any rights there? Dr. Hassan said that he couldn't even see his mother who was stuck in Jewish-occupied Arab territory, so he couldn't get in to visit her. He related how six Jews broke into his office in New York and beat him with lead-filled billy clubs attempting to kill him but not quite succeeding. Then he added "we can't generalize, there are good and bad among all people. There are many young Jews who are opposed to Israel's racist policy and favor being Jews by the old standard, Jews who are intelligent and have a good heart." Kurosh readily agreed that all his life Jews had come to his aid when he was beat up in school or needed a friend. He noted that he had two ex-wives who were Jewish and were just wonderful even though they couldn't remain with him due to his inability to make a living with music.

At the Syrian-Lebanese border, the customs agents were unpacking all the luggage; but when they saw Dr. Hassan's special passport, they quickly closed his. Mona's suitcase was full of purchases Mrs. Leeds had asked her to buy; so the customs agents were ready to charge duty, but Dr. Hassan stepped in to vouch for her. Then he helped the Armenian driver, who couldn't write Arabic, fill in his Lebanese entry card. They drove off and at the top of the mountain above Alei, they stopped at a café where Dr. Hassan invited everyone for light snacks and beverages. Back on the road, they dropped Dr. Hassan in Alei where he took another cab to his home. Kurosh had told the *servis* driver he could take Dr. Hassan to his place; but the driver said "*mish ma'ul, ana Suri* (it's impossible, I'm Syrian)." The driver explained that he was only allowed to transport passengers between Damascus and Beirut and had to stay on the main highway. Kurosh set a day the following week to visit Dr. Hassan and, of course, Kurosh gave him a copy of the Arabic pamphlet about Mormonism before the traditional lengthy farewell. So the next week, Kurosh caught the Alei Sir al Gharb bus for the drive up into the mountains. On the bus was an interesting lovely young lady with green eyes who kept noticing that Kurosh was noticing that she was not noticing that he was not noticing her in the typical enchanting tradition of the East. At Sir al Gharb, Kurosh got off and

stopped at a café to ask directions. The owner started to walk with him a ways then accosted a boy across the street with “*andek shoghl?* (are you busy?)” The boy volunteered to lead Kurosh the rest of the way to the building. Kurosh went to Dr. Hassan’s apartment and was warmly received. Dr. Hassan immediately brought a huge bowl of the nicest grapes, peaches and plums along with a bottle of Sohat water. Then he noted that he had read the pamphlet about the Mormons and said it made perfect sense. Kurosh offered that Palestinians and Mormons both shared a history of bitter persecution. He added that according to the Mormon Articles of Faith, Zion will be built on the American Continent so the Jews (whether converted Asiatics or real ones) should move to or back to the US and stop bothering the poor Palistinians. They chatted about culture for about an hour then Kurosh headed back to Beirut where he was to meet with an official of Sketch Magazine to turn in a story.

At the meeting, he mentioned his visit with Dr. Hassan. Then his friend stunned him with a strange confession. He said “you know I am going home to Israel soon.” Kurosh stared and warned “but you’re Palestinian, how can you go there? And what do you mean ‘home’?” With a chuckle he was answered with “no, I am Jewish. My family changed religion to Moslem a few hundred years ago and other relatives became Christian.” Kurosh glared in disbelief but was reassured “I can show you my family records if you don’t believe it.” Then a spirit of awakening came over Kurosh as he exclaimed “then the Palestinians are the Jews and the Jews are Mongol invaders of the Khazar race. So the whole mess there is totally backwards!” His friend agreed “I know many families who are in the same situation, Jewish race but Moslem or Christian religion. So that land is our birthright too. I’m fine with Jewish converts being there, I can get along with them; but just let us have our inherited share.” When Kurosh went to the Atlas Hotel that evening, he mentioned the enlightenment to the night manager who agreed, noting that his Palestinian ancestors also converted from Judaism to Christianity and that he knew he was Jewish by race. Kurosh treasured this new-found knowledge which proved that things are not what they seem and real understanding needs deeper inquiry. Leave it to the Devil anyway to set up a fake version of the return of the ‘Israelites’ to their homeland. If old Satan didn’t counterfeit everything good with his phony version, he would be failing in his eternal task. Because according to the scriptures the real gathering of Israel is not at all political, it will not be until after the times of the Gentiles is fulfiller or the end of Western culture and power and after Jesus returns. Zion or New Jerusalem will actually be built in Missouri.

Drive from Beirut Through Iraq to Tehran

Kurosh looked out the window of the plane down on the Syrian desert as he remembered his drive from Damascus to Tehran after dropping Mona off at the Damascus-Beirut taxi station. He had gathered up fresh fruit from Beirut and Damascus, Sohat bottled water and half dozen artichokes that Mona cooked up for him. He started out eastward on a paved road and on the way out of town, Kurosh noticed the Bedouin tents that speckled the green countryside as occasional donkey carts calmly moved along. After the Baghdad turn-off, the desert began and he reached the Syrian border station which was a tiny group of buildings with Arabs swarming about trying to get cleared. Kurosh went to one room and was told to wait because the lights were out. When they flashed on again, they slowly entered his vehicle in their ledger and sent him to buy stamps for the 20 *lira* road tax. He went to the passport office and was stamped out and, without any customs inspection, was told in Arabic by a very kind fellow to go in peace and he was assured that he was welcome back any time.

Kurosh drove off into the empty desert towards the border post Tennf which was just a few buildings. From there the road disappeared into nothing but a washed-out rut-riddled path that looked too rudimentary to be a real road. He parked and ate a couple of Mona’s artichokes dipped in *tahina* while

waiting to see what the approaching trucks behind him would do and then follow them. The trucks pulled up and clustered together for a short conference. Kurosh climbed out of the VW and one trucker asked “*wain rahi?* (where you going?)” Kurosh answered “Baghdad” then pointed towards where the road dissolved into sand in the desert and bemoaned “*ma b’shuf ettari* (I don’t see the road).” The trucker smiled and comforted “*nahnu raihin* (we’re going)” then jumped into his truck and drove off motioning for Kurosh to follow him. The trucks led Kurosh through the dozen or so bad unmarked kilometers of dust and sand to a beautiful highway which lasted all the way to the Iraqi border. After driving an hour or so, Kurosh felt tired and decided to pull over near another group of trucks to sleep. One of the drivers came up to the car and said “*ahlan, fadhhal*” motioning for Kurosh to join them for dinner. He went over and sat around talking for a half hour, then after a few minutes of one fellow drumming on a metal *dumbek* and some others dancing a *dabka* joined by Kurosh, they all went to their vehicles to sleep. Kurosh mentioned that his car might not start in the morning and they all promised that they would not leave him until his car was running.

The next morning, Kurosh drove to the Iraqi border station at Rutba. He went up to the passport window fearing that the bad relations between Iraq and America or Iran and Iraq at that time could cause him major problems. After leafing through his passport a few times and passing it to the other window, they entered Kurosh into the ledger and returned his passport. He then paid his one *dinar* compulsory insurance and the customs man stamped the car into his passport, briefly looked at his belongings, thanking him and wishing him a pleasant drive with a kindly smile. Everyone was so nice; Kurosh wondered what happened to the supposed animosity towards foreigners especially with American passports. From Rutba to the Iranian border, there were several check points where soldiers looked over his passport and sent him on with a smile, sometimes trying to bum a ride; but the car was too full of stuff to accommodate a passenger. At the gas station, they were out of *momtaz* (extra), so he settled for regular at 37 cents a gallon. Nearing Ramadi, the rich-looking red earth was speckled with sage brush and grass with occasional camels or herds of sheep which broke the monotony. Ramadi was an oasis of palms and green grass on the Euphrates River. From Ramadi to Baghdad, the countryside was green and speckled by stone houses. Outside of Ramadi, the back tire blew out. Kurosh carefully jacked the car up with his broken jack, propping it up on rocks while children crowded around trying to help him put on the spare.

In Ramadi, Kurosh found a tire man who mounted a tire he had purchased back in Lebanon and fixed the flat. Another old man helped Kurosh searching under the right front wheel to find the cause of rattling in the steering. Together they discovered a loose bolt and put in a new one. Kurosh offered the old man money, but he wouldn’t accept. Kurosh assured him “*min Allah barakat* (God will bless)” and the old man chimed in “*min Allah*” in agreement. About that time, an Iraqi cop purposefully strode up and asked for Kurosh’s passport which he studied with a serious glare and then suspiciously returned it. Then the tire repair man, all the onlookers as well as his companion cop started haranguing him for bothering the tourist. The tire man shouted in Arabic “I’m just trying to get a little *bakhshish* and you bother my customer!” The cop countered “but an American going to Iran, I thought . . .” The other cop advised “forget it” and they wandered off. Kurosh gave pamphlets on Mormonism to the tire guy and the old man; then the friendly kids gave the car a push and Kurosh was off towards Baghdad. Kurosh noticed how the drivers in Iraq were so polite and thoughtful like they were in Tehran back in the 1950s when Kurosh first arrived there. Conversely in the 70s, the Tehran traffic with its rude drivers was like being tormented in Zoroastrian hell.

Baghdad seemed like a small town compared to Tehran. As Kurosh was slowly circling in a round-about looking for the road to Khaneqin, a red convertible with a young modernized couple motioned him over to the side of the road. They were eager to practice their rudimentary English on the tall foreigner,

but when Kurosh answered them in Arabic they were trumped. When they found out where Kurosh was from, they had dozens of questions about America, California, and Hollywood. He placated them with some interesting information but then affirmed that the whole globalist agenda was to destroy tradition through modernization and product pushing. He warned them to be careful not to be dazzled by anything American. As the young couple stared in disbelief, Kurosh lectured them on honoring traditional music, respecting Islam along with their ancestral heritage and not being victimized by ugly American products like tobacco, alcohol, coke, jeans, etc. He then gave them one of his Arabic pamphlets on Mormonism and they offered to lead him to the road to Khanaqin.

On the road from Baghdad to Khanaqin, choruses of crickets serenaded in the fresh sweet evening air. A recent heavy rain had filled the rough road with deep pools of water one of which killed the motor. As Kurosh was waiting for the water to dry out, a friendly Iraqi driver stopped, asked what was wrong and then dried out the wet wires by burning a few matches under them. He helped push the car and it started. One stretch of road had become a river bed and the car slogged along in a foot of water for about a mile. It was about nine in the evening when the old VW limped into the Iraqi border station. The fellow at the gate tried to send Kurosh back to Khanaqin to spend the night because the border was closed; but Kurosh wasn't going back one inch on that road. Finally, they let him in and he noticed a group of Afghans bedded down on the floor. Kurosh chatted a few minutes with them in Dari than returned to his car for a sound sleep.

In the morning, he was quickly stamped through the formalities and sent on toward the Iranian border station. There a long string of trucks was parked waiting to get through. Kurosh asked one of the drivers what the trucks were transporting and was informed that it was oranges from Israel which were raised by Arabs so they were *mabsut* (OK) and legitimate to sell in Moslem countries. The trucks would leave them at the border then return to Jordan for another load. Two Iraqi army tanks, one small and one huge, were lurking near the line of trucks. Kurosh carefully drove up thinking he should stop for permission to pass. He looked at the soldier on the turret of the small tank who asked in Arabic where he was going. Kurosh answered "Tehran" and then was asked "American?" He hung his head in shame for a second then admitted "*aiwa, laken Muselman* (yes, but Moslem)" to which the soldier in the huge tank shouted "*kul ennas wahid* (all people are one)," a statement that could become a wonderful policy if it were accepted as a universal philosophy. Kurosh nodded and shouted back "*zein, hadha sahih* (good, that's true)" in agreement, smiled then slowly passed the tanks with that familiar feeling of friendship, something which followed him everywhere he traveled outside the US.

A Snowy No Ruz and Burnt Bearings

At the Iranian border station, a blue-eyed official came to the gate and told the gateman to let Kurosh in. Kurosh was eager to practice the Kurmanji he had learned from Emir Bedir Khan in Paris. He completely astounded the official who took him to show off to the other officials who were mostly Kurds. Kurosh was quickly cleared through the formalities, but he lingered a while to chat in Kurdish and Persian enjoying the feeling that he was back home in Iran. Then he continued on the road to Kermanshah passing by green hills. Qasr-e Shirin was like an oasis of palms with straw huts, round white tents and also flat black tents on the roadside. Kurosh stopped at a blacksmith to fix the broken jack. When Kurosh offered the blacksmith five *toman*, he said it was too much and that just two *toman* would do. Kurosh observed that Kurds were really honest and the blacksmith said "that's the only way to be." Kurosh found a *nunvai* (bakery) and was thrilled to discover they made whole-wheat bread for only two *rials* each. He ordered 40 slabs to take back to Tehran. An old man came up and asked in Farsi where he was taking all that bread

and Kurosh answered “Tehran, there isn’t any there.” The old man became concerned noting in Farsi “if there isn’t any bread in the capital, what will happen to us?” The baker explained that there wasn’t any whole-wheat bread just white bread with no vitamins, quoting Kurosh. Then Kurosh added in Farsi “it’s just like paper or cardboard . . . worthless.”

He continued on his way, driving past jutting jagged peaks and green rolling hills up through vertical slab-like gray mountains and crevice-etched mountain walls to the village of Kermanshah. The climate had been cooling until near Asadabad where wind and snow became fierce. It was *No Ruz* day; but it seemed like the Arctic. Kurosh came up to a long line of cars stretching as far as he could see up a hill. Two fellows came over to Kurosh and offered to put on his chains for a small reasonable fee. As they were working, he asked what was going on and learned that for two days no one had been allowed up the pass and it was just now opening. Kurosh drove up to join the line of cars where he rolled the window down and chatted with the driver of a Peykan. Then a huge snow-plow rumbled up the road to wild cheers of all the drivers, some shouting appreciation and blessings. Soon the pass was opened so the soldiers and highway patrol police waved everyone through as cheers again burst forth. Some passengers, crazed with joy, were overcome with the festive *No Ruz* spirit and danced on the tops of their vehicles as others clapped in rhythm. Soldiers waved the weary travelers on and soon a highway patrol car with flashing red lights rolled up, shouting instructions trying to untangle the traffic jam. After snailing up the pass about a half mile, Kurosh came to an abrupt halt again. This time it was a stalled bus. Dozens of people got out of their cars and came together with the soldiers and highway patrol officers to push with all their might until they slid the bus off to the side. Then a few more miles ahead, a car without chains was stuck in the middle of the road. Again drivers came over and altogether lifted the car over to the roadside. Some stayed to help the driver put on chains loaned by another helpful family.

As the cars pressed on up the steep pass, Kurosh noticed the poor old VW started to smell like smoking oil. The smell got stronger and by the time Kurosh reached the top, he noticed a rattling in the engine. He pulled over and soon a thoughtful traveler stopped to help out. When the driver listened to the rattling, he grew stern and with his head down muttered “*yateghan e* (it’s the bearings).” Kurosh forlornly choked “*yani kharaband?* (you mean they’re broken?)” The driver lovingly grasped Kurosh’s shoulder and answered “*are, sukht* (yep, burned).” As Kurosh slumped into the driver’s seat, his new friend asked in Farsi “do you know a mechanic in Kermanshah?” Kurosh mumbled that he didn’t and was too broke to go to one anyway. The driver offered “*age lazem e, man pul daram* (if you need, I have money).” Kurosh proudly refused grasping his new friend’s arm appreciatively. Then the driver said “*boro tamirgah-e Kuhsari o bogu dust-e Ahmad id* (go to Kuhsari Garage and tell them you are a friend of Ahmad).”

Kurosh discouragedly sunk further into his seat and slowly closed the door shutting out the piercing icy wind as the driver returned to his Peykan where his sweet-looking wife and cute kids were waiting. As the Peykan drove off, Kurosh flipped the VW around and pushed across the line of climbing cars back downhill towards Kermanshah. Coasting as much as possible as the rattling became more prominent; he finally was back in Kermanshah where a helpful traffic cop directed him to the Kuhsari Garage. Once there, he soon became endeared to the owner who fully sympathized with his situation. Kurosh was down to just a few *toman*, barely enough to buy gas for his return trip to Tehran where he didn’t have any cash coming in either other than maybe minor payments for articles he had submitted to Tehran Journal before leaving. Mr. Kuhsari said that Kurosh was a guest and that the garage would somehow fix his car with old parts after hours when the mechanics could put in an extra hour or so each day. Kurosh lived in the car for five days in the garage with just the food he had brought from Beirut and Damascus along with the slabs of bread from the Kurdish bakery. The shop boy offered each day to bring him some hot rice and vegetables from home, but Kurosh assured that he was fine. Every time there was a lull in repair work, the

mechanics worked on Kurosh's motor disassembling the whole thing, removing the burnt bearings and hunting for used bearings that would fit. Finding all the necessary used parts in the big empty storage barrels was problematic so finally Mr. Kuhsari lovingly took a few new items from the shelves and gave them to the mechanic shooting a kindly smile at Kurosh.

At first, Kurosh had become so worried about the breakdown that he had put out the word that he was willing to sell the car. One very polite and slick-looking army officer came to see the car and offered him a fair price; but Kurosh really needed the car for his work, his travels and as an alternative living quarters. So when Mr. Kuhsari offered the needed items such as bearings, gaskets, etc., things looked up. Finally, after five days, the engine was back together and ready to mount into the car. Everyone pitched in including Kurosh to help hurry things along so he wouldn't be stuck alone in the garage over the weekend. With the engine in the car and the final bolts tightened, the lead mechanic fired it up and it purred like a kitten. They all cheered and soon everyone was doing a little Kurdish dance with arms linked, including Kurosh, as Mr. Kuhsari beat out a rhythm on an oil pan. Kurosh hugged and kissed everyone on the cheek one by one and firmly grasped Mr. Kuhsari's hand. Then he wrote a poetic letter in Farsi thanking the garage and praising their work signing his full TV stage name Kurosh Ali Khan then told them to put it under the glass top of their front office table. They wished him a safe trip back and told him to be careful and to go easy up the steep slope at Asadabad which they called '*sar balai-ye yateghan kosh-e Asadabad*' or the 'bearing killer ascent of Asadabad.'

As Kurosh carefully drove up to Hamadan using low gears and stopping often, he vowed that he would return to Kermanshah and pay the \$200 or \$300 he owed Mr. Kuhsari. Strangely enough, he actually did return there a year later for that purpose and Mr. Kuhsari showed him his letter of thanks still taped under the glass near the cash register. When Kurosh proudly pulled out several hundred *toman* bills, Mr. Kuhsari put his arm around him and pushed Kurosh's hand back into his pocket saying in Farsi "you don't owe anything; Allah has blessed me already for helping you." Adding that wisdom to the many valuable lessons learned in the Islamic world, Kurosh left the garage asking God to further bless that fine man and his whole garage for years to come. Kurosh drove through historic Hamadan, the Ekbatana of Median and Achaemenian times with its quaint earthen buildings. He stopped on the steep street near the bazaar and bought a small trinket with the few *toman* he dared chance on anything but gas and then continued up another pass to Takestan where the road was like an ice skating rink. Towards the end of the trip as he neared Tehran, Kurosh had to chew on raw garlic cloves to keep awake. When he finally had the VW locked into the garage on Entesarie in Abasabad, he was more than thankful that God had brought him back again from one more treacherous trip.

Chapter 13

The Caspian, Olives and Orange Blossoms

Kurosh was brought back to the present as a charming Pan Am stewardess touched him on the shoulder to remind him that it was time for dinner. As usual, he wasn't sure he had been able to inform them that he wanted vegetarian meals. He looked into her gentle blue eyes and, affectionately placing his hand on hers, asked "is there perhaps a vegetarian meal for Miller?" She promised to check on it and a few minutes later produced a meal with the name Miller on it. But when he looked it over, he discovered it was Kosher not vegetarian. Kurosh then scanned the passengers until he noticed an older balding obviously Jewish man with horn-rimmed glasses standing a few rows in front of him and grumpily looking around the plane. Kurosh took the Kosher meal and approached the fellow saying

“are you Miller too? I guess the *mashugeneh shaineh shikseh* mixed us up. You got the vegetarian, right?” The man winced a wry smile and said “yea, thanks.” They traded meals then Kurosh added “you wouldn’t wanna go hungry all the way to New York; *ess gezunterhait*” as he took his dinner back to his seat. While he ate gazing out the window, he noticed they were over water . . . some sea. It reminded him of his trip to the Caspian with his Rashti friends living in Tehran.

Two of the most interesting and nicest people Kurosh had been fortunate to know in Tehran were Mr. Yamini and his wife Afshin, both natives of Rasht. Yamini was a schoolteacher and poet by hobby while Afshin worked for PTT (Post, Telephone and Telegraph) and designed clothes in her spare time. Afshin was the sister of Parisa’s best friend Hurshid who sat next to her in Karimi’s vocal class at the Honarestan. While various friends were trying to fix up Kurosh and Parisa as fiancées, he favored Hurshid, not because of her enchanting green eyes, but her childlike easy-going nature was appealing. Once, Kurosh gave Hurshid a ride home from class and stopped off at the Intercontinental Hotel where he often jammed with Roger Hererra’s fabulous Phillipino jazz band. It was break time, so he and Hurshid took over the bandstand and did a rendition of the mode Isfahan with Kurosh using his amazing index fingers *santur* technique on piano, a skill that eventually made him even more famous than he was as a TV personality when he later appeared on the main program of the prime TV showman Parviz Qarib-Afshar. After jamming a couple of tunes with Hererra’s band, he dropped Hurshid off and was invited in for snacks and a chat. He immediately became chums with Hurshid’s sister and her fun Gilani husband Mr. Yamini. One evening when Kurosh was over at their home after one of those delicious Rashti dinners, they all stayed up till 2 a.m. to watch Kurosh’s TV show. After the show, Kurosh was excitedly discussing philosophy and at a lull in the conversation when about 3 a.m. Afshin questioned “*Agha-ye Kurosh Ali Khan, akhe khabet nemiyad* (Mr. Kurosh Ali Khan, aren’t you sleepy?)” Kurosh suddenly realized everyone but him was in their pajamas and curled up on couches or the floor under quilts, so he quickly ran through a long line of *ta’arof* while backing towards the door. That evening he had suggested that Yamini take a drive with him up to Rasht some weekend.

So early the next Friday, they were off starting at Vanak Circle down the expressway, off over the Karaj freeway past Qazvin where the road forks off to Hamadan to the left and Rasht to the right. After turning on the Rasht road, it wasn’t far to the small hamlet of Agha Baba famous for its whole-grain wood-baked flat-bread. They stopped at Manjil where reportedly the hardest wind in Iran continually howls non-stop. At Manjil, the groves of silvery-leaved olive trees begin. The next town, Rudbar, is nestled among an abundance of olive groves on the edge of the emerald glimmer of Sepid Rud and is the olive center of Iran. A ways out of town, they stopped at the Ganjeh olive oil company to buy a few quarts of some of the best oil in the Middle East. Although, when they got back to Tehran, Afshin’s father, an olive connoisseur, said they should have gotten some of the small olives called *mar-e zeitun* (mother of olives) that have a nice strong, more tangy flavor. Then there is *pust-e mar* (snake skin) that is more mellow. There are also large solid olives and split ones. On later trips, Kurosh always stopped at the small teahouse between Manjil and Rudbar where the owner Mehraban sold pure olive oil, olives and soap at very reasonable prices produced by his company at Keleshter a few kilometers up the hill. Yamini explained about olive trees saying “olive wood is next to walnut in quality and good for building.” Then he added “did you know that olive leaves are considered good medicine for high blood pressure?”

As they drove onward, square patches of submerged rice fields became frequent with women in bright dresses hand planting each seed into the mud below the water. Green rice shoots poked their heads above the muddy waters where the planters waded through with straw hats which shaded them

from the rare sunshine. After they passed Rostamabad, the landscape became a riot of green plant life. Wheat fields waved in the breeze on one side of the road while carefully terraced rice fields decked the other with occasional cornstalks here and there. Picturesque clouds adorned the mountaintops and the verdant-clad hills covered with fields. The grass was caressed by breezes in waves of shimmering silvery crests and it was almost impossible to see the ground due to the thickness of the plush greenery. According to Yamini, the forests in Gilan are mostly composed of oak, ash, box and wing nut trees. The orange-hued blossoms of pomegranate trees added to the colorful constantly greener landscape as they moved on towards Rasht. Low gray clouds gradually became thicker and the damp drizzling atmosphere seemed to press down at the outskirts of the city. The mountains darkened as the clouds enveloped them further and the landscape sombered.

Rasht

Yamani related that “about 27 years prior, there was a huge fire in Rasht one winter driven by a strong wind. No matter how hard the people tried, they couldn’t put out the fire and it was starting to consume several houses in different quarters. Finally, out of desperation, everyone raised their hands to the sky and prayed fervently for help. A while later, the wind died out, clouds gathered and soon rain followed smothering the last of the flames otherwise the whole city would have been burned to the ground.” Rasht was an enchanting quaint old town that hadn’t been hit by the disease of modernization. Red-brown brick was the common building material and red round shingles adorned most roofs. Wood was often used for small shops. The mosques were not the blue-tiled domes typical of other parts of Iran, but instead they seemed to resemble chapels in small Italian or Mexican villages. They were characterized by one small round tower partially extending above the building and topped with curved red shingles serving as a minaret. Inside one mosque, Masjid-e Laken, large square plaster pillars reached up to the low ceilings and the floor was covered with simple designed carpets, *gelims* or *hasirs* (straw mats). Quaint winding alleys were lined with brick, clay or pebble walls and the air was pure and smog-free. The continual humidity seemed to give its inhabitants a smooth complexion less likely to wrinkle. The town came into being by accident; it was just a teahouse for travelers going between Fuman and Lahijan. The town grew without any real plan or layout with small streets winding rather senselessly. Whoever visits Rasht usually brings back some fun woodcarving souvenir, the favorite being eating utensils.

Rashti Dialect, Food and Traditions

At the home in Rasht, Yamini’s good-natured niece gaily chattered with Kurosh and then took on the role of a school marm. She answered his questions about the Rashti or Gilaki dialect and taught him different words and expressions. Yamini’s sister set out lunch and, as they devoured the succulent food, said that the Rashti dialect is an Iranian language something like Kurdish but closer to the standard Persian. Kurosh couldn’t restrain himself from asking the sister how she made some of the Rashti specialties and what they were called. From her and also from Afshin back in Tehran, Kurosh had learned something about Rashti food but not enough. Afshin was the first one who introduced Kurosh to *derar* which he was told is to be spread on a cucumber. When he asked what it was, she explained it was four herbs chopped and milled with a stone then salted. She brought out her Rashti threshing stone and her little sister showed how they use it. Afshin explained that about half of the paste is made from coriander, part of the rest from a local Rashti plant called *gheshniz* similar to

cilantro with a strong mint-like flavor, plus mint and parsley. Another tasty dish Afshin made was the classic Mirza-Ghasemi, which is created from coal-baked eggplant which is skinned and chopped then added to crushed garlic fried in oil after which chopped tomatoes are added and usually egg. Another *shomali* (northern) dish typical of neighboring Shasavar is *ash-e torsh* which is an all vegetable thick soup composed of a variety of greens, garlic, broad beans, rice and small sour plums all boiled up in a large pot.

After lunch, Yamini explained that it was time for *zavaleh* or the afternoon nap. The change from Tehran's dry air to the damp of Rasht seemed to create a feeling of relaxation; so Kurosh was glad for some sleep. Yamini's niece said that she liked the rainy weather because it was nice to sleep to the pattering drops on the roof nearly every afternoon. As they stretched out, Kurosh asked Yamini why people thought Rashtis were dumb. He said it might be due to the easy-going nature of the people and their lack of trickiness that is mistaken for stupidity. After Kurosh and others had been napping a while, Yamini came in and asked in Rashti "*zakana kue se?*" Always the linguist, Kurosh figured that *ku* was probably like Kurdish *ku* for 'where' and *se* was a version of *ast* or 'is' since verbs are at the end in Iranian languages and there needed to be a verb. But *zakana* which seemed to obviously be a plural of an animated object was beyond his drowsy perception. Then Yamini asked again in Farsi "*bachha kojastand?*" So it dawned on Kurosh that *zakana* was 'kids' and thus 'where is everyone?' He became excited to find that, with a little effort, an Indo-European language enthusiast could figure out Rashti. Then when Yamini was chattering, and with wide questioning eyes cried out "*rasti gi?*" Kurosh easily understood he meant "*rast migi? (really?)*" And "*shan darum bazar*" was obviously "I'm going shopping." Other than the afternoon nap, another tradition is that when a person was asked if they had ever been to Rasht before and answers "no" then they must eat seven small pebbles; but it is rarely enforced.

After the nap, they left to see one of Yamini's good friends by driving through the winding back streets adorned by old houses with extended wood balconies and artistically designed doors past plastered colored walls to a tiny *kuche* which they squeezed down till it ended. Yamini's friend Soleman was overjoyed to see him as was his whole household. It is amazing how hospitable Rashtis are; they make you feel like they have been waiting for you all week when you drop in without the slightest warning. When they left, Soleman and his family followed them out the door in the traditional Rashti hospitality and he poured a bucket of water on the door step to signify his wish for their friendship and return. As they drove off, Yamini explained that if a person doesn't like you, he breaks an old cracked dish or vase in the doorway after you leave.

The Caspian Coast and Tea Fields

Soleman suggested a drive up to Bandar-e Pahlevi so off they went. The drive to Bandar reminded Kurosh of the forested road to the Belgium coast. On the way, Soleman explained that private fishing has been limited by law and now fishermen have to rent an area for a specified period which has made fish scarcer in Rasht than before. As they entered Bandar, they noticed the beautifully carved wall tops of a row of buildings. They went to the beach walk and stood staring out over the Caspian then they drove out along the beach edge. Luckily, the tourist season hadn't started yet so they were able to drive right along the water's edge as emerald waves crashed against the shore and the tides. Kurosh was impressed that they could drive right up to the water's edge and along the beach for miles under the heavy shifting gray clouds. It was so peaceful that when he was finally evicted from his apartment in Tehran by his mean-spirited Hamadani Jewish landlord, he picked this very spot on the Caspian coast

to park, meditate and sleep in his new home, the trusty old Variant. But one morning he woke up in about a foot of water and was wondering if he would drown in the sea. Soon a jeep with members of the *niru-ye daryai* or Coast Guard drove out, hooked up a chain to the car and pulled him to safety. That was just one more of thousands of examples of God's continual efforts to keep Kurosh alive and of the kindness of the people of the Middle East.

After an hour's drive along the beach, they turned back and returned past the huts with peaked thatched roofs with stick walls and green rice fields to Rasht where they had dinner at Soleman's and stayed there for the night. The next day, they drove to the beautiful hamlet of Lahijan, the oldest city in Gilan and the tea capital of Iran. It was there where tea was first planted by Kashef al Saltaneh who brought it from India. A large gray tomb in honor of Kashef stood near the grounds of the oldest tea company. On the way to Lahijan, they stopped off at one of the red-shingled blue wooden shops in Kuchesfahan to get some of the famous thin rice bread called *lako* that Yamini had been talking about. When they passed the blue mosaic mirror-studded *imam-zadeh* built in honor of Jelal-eddin Ashraf, Soleman told the story of the saint who was poisoned by villagers in the mountains while preaching there and was dumped into the river in a box. The box was later discovered on the riverbank at Astaneh Ashrafieh where the saint was properly buried and a shrine built for him. Lahijan itself is a vast vista of verdure and vegetation, said by some to be the most beautiful town in Iran. It is a pleasant city nestled in the green hills blanketed by tea gardens in which colorfully clad women diligently work picking the leaves.

After they passed through the city and were driving up the hills, which at times reminded Kurosh of California, Yamini suddenly said "stop here, I want to show you about tea." They pulled off the road and he asked a little girl if he could have a tea plant. Then he held it up like a university professor and said "when the top part of only two leaves and one bud is picked, it is first class tea. If the first three leaves are picked, it is second class and the whole thing is third class." He continued "it doesn't hurt to pick the tops because in about two weeks the remaining buds grow new leaves. This goes on for the whole four-month tea season." They drove on up the hills to Satalsar where heavy mud in the road prevented them from seeing what Yamini and Soleman said was the most beautiful part. On the way back through Lahijan they stopped to buy some of the famous Lahijan walnut-filled cookies or *kuluiche*. They left Lahijan passing the green hills and stone houses making one last stop at Afshar, a group of small waterfalls and an ancient tree in which a two-story tree house had been built. The huge several-trunked tree is reportedly 1,000 years old and similar to another such tree in Harzebil near Rudbar which was cited by Naser Khosrow in his *Safarnameh* as being several centuries old even in his day. Big black oxen sitting in fields munching on straw cast an uninterested glance as the travelers passed the green hills and stone houses.

Beneficial Spring Water

Kurosh thought of other trips to the north when he visited the Caspian tourist spot of Ramsar to the east where no one but the very wealthy could afford to stay at the hotel. East of the hotel at the bottom of the hill was the famous health spa where, for a small fee, people could soak their aching bones in the hot healing sulfur-water to gain some relief from rheumatism, gout, arthritis, back aches, etc. There was another spa at Sa'adat Mahale about one kilometer north on asphalt and four more on gravel in a charming area nestled at the foot of verdant hills overlooking the distant emerald Caspian. Kurosh thought back to the time he was preparing an article for Tehran Journal about the spas and he interviewed some of the steady customers. One was Qorban who had worked at the spa some 34 years

and remembered many people who were cured of various ills. He himself said that a while ago his waist was really bad so he went to the bath for about 20 days and was completely cured. Another employee, Sarkhosh, affirms that he was bedridden for 25 days until he found relief in the bath. Adbullah had rheumatism so bad he couldn't move from his bed; but after 20 days he was completely cured. He would come back every year for a dip just to be sure. The sulfur or *gugerd* is the main healing ingredient; but the water also contains iron and other minerals. Qorban told Kurosh that every year there was a convention of some 40 doctors who visit the spa and test the water.

But warm sulfur springs for bathing was not the only healthy product along the Caspian, Kurosh had discovered a wonderful mineral water plant outside of Amol between Tehran and Babol on the road eastward to Mahshad. Many times he drove up to the plant and, after watching the glass bottles happily dancing along the conveyer belt through the large front window, he would go in and ask the cheerful manager if he could fill up a five or ten gallon plastic jug at the tap outside the plant. The water contained several minerals including natural fluoride (not the deadly poison variety forced on victims in America) and had a light pleasant natural sparkle. They said it was good for digestion, good for teeth and, if rubbed in the scalp, might stop falling hair. It was said to be more powerful than Evian or Vichy. Kurosh remembered that a little farther east from Ramsar on the coastal highway was Shahsavari, the birthplace of virtuoso vocalist Parisa, where in spring the perfume of orange blossoms blending with the fresh scent of the sea was elixir to the lungs and soul. On the outskirts of Shahsavari, a small road on the right lead to the town's nicest beach called *Plaj-e Shardi*. At Sharud, Kurosh once stopped for a *ziyarat* at the shrine of Hossein, brother of Imam Reza.

Back to Tehran

From Lahijan, they started back towards Tehran driving along the coastal route through Ramsar and Chalus. Back in Tehran, Afshin, her father, her brothers and sister Hurshid, were excited to hear about the trip and pleased to receive the travel gifts which included some of those delicious green olives. Then they all sat down to another wonderful Rashti dinner and started planning the next trip to Rasht. Kurosh remarked that he was surprised to see a grim statue of what appeared to be Stalin on one of their drives near the Caspian and was it because they were near the USSR border? Everyone broke into wild laughter as Kurosh was assured that it was a statue of Reza Shah, similar but different. Kurosh realized that he wasn't that far off because Reza Shah banned the veil causing many women to die from disease and dust and he perpetrated other anti-tradition cruelties similar to Stalin. While the whole group was there, Kurosh thought it was a good opportunity to ask "is it really true what they say about Rashtis, I mean in those jokes?" Afshin said "we made most of those jokes up ourselves." Then Yamini asked "what do you think now that you've been there?" Kurosh had to admit that if the jokes were really true, he hadn't seen any evidence of it in the time he was there. He affirmed in Persian "Rashtis are definitely not at all stupid and no supposedly unfaithful and desperate Rashti wives have ever tried to make a pass or flirt in the slightest. Right Afshin?" he kidded, pinching her flirtatiously on the cheek as she faked a seductive look. Yamini giggled then Hurshid blurted "*ey nakon, un namzad-e man e dige!* (hey don't, he's my fiancée!)" Sure Kurosh would have liked that, but he was too weird and crazy to really be anyone's fiancée. Then to be equitable, he also pinched Yamini on the cheek then assured his stunned pal, using another stereotype image, "*natars baba, Qazvini nistam* (don't worry dad, I'm not a Qazvini!)" A roar of laughter went through the room as Afshin chuckled on the way to the kitchen to bring out the coveted *mirza qasemi*.

Chapter 14

The Music Maker of Trabzon

An Evening at Tehran Journal

Looking out the window at the water, Kurosh recalled another trip north from Tehran all the way to Trabzon on the Turkish Black Sea coast. He had been called by Tehran Journal editor Vahed Petrosian to be sure that he was coming in that evening to turn in a review of a concert of Persian music he had recently seen at Rudaki Hall. Rudaki was where the Ministry of Culture and Arts (or lack of both) foisted their ugly semi-pop westernized concoctions by *santurist* Payvar and other innovators, dubbed *ahangsaz* or ‘composers’ so-called, on unwitting audiences. Kurosh fervently panned every horrible event that polluted Rudaki Hall with his famous poison pen that rivaled even Peter Wilson and Janet Lazarian. Vahed was a hardened Chicago-trained editor who appeared grimly serious when he glared at his writers with those piercing eyes and wrinkled forehead. He would menacingly stare and grumpily growl “what’s this garbage, Miller?” then throw back a review on the table in front of him declaring “rewrite this trash so it makes sense and get Ralph to sub-edit it; and your spelling and grammar stinks too!” Vahed was a hard trainer; but he helped flakes like Kurosh, Terry Graham and Peter Wilson develop from spacey scholars into real journalists. Vahed had also mentioned in his phone call that Peter wanted to see Kurosh so he better get down there that night.

So Kurosh drove way downtown to the Ete’elat building where Tehran Journal was housed. He parked in back, breezed through the door greeting the guard and took the elevator up to the Journal. He entered as writers were feverishly typing stories, chatting and socializing. Swishy (and proud of it) James Underwood threw a limp-wristed wave at Kurosh declaring “there you are, you daft bugger” to which Kurosh replied “hi, you cute thing; did you like my last review?” With an effeminate jiggle, James haughtily shot back “you silly boy, when will you learn to write? I have a lot of work to get you up to snuff. It was tolerable, but try to improve your writing and leave out some of those inflammatory adjectives.”

As Kurosh turned to acknowledge art critic (and critical she was) Janet Lazarian who was frowning as usual muttering to Vahed about some really bad attempt at opera she had seen at Rudaki. Everyone at the Journal agreed that the Ministry totally trashed all the performing arts. Only after Reza Qotbi and his intellectual wife Sherry brought some real class to the National Iranian Radio and Television, did the performing arts find a respectable voice in Iran. The Minister of Culture was related to the Shah; but Qotbi was related to the Queen who did all she could to promote quality in the arts rather than that pop slop the Ministry favored. Also Kurosh’s music guru and spiritual master, Dr. Safvat, had set up his marvelous Center for Preservation and Propagation of Iranian Music under NIRT jurisdiction. Iranian ethnomusicologist and modern classical composer Hormoz Farhat had been invited from Tehran University to direct the music division of NIRT and was the person who contracted Kurosh to do his fabulous weekly prime-time hour spots on the main TV channel called *Kurosh Ali Khan va Dustan* (Kurosh Ali Khan and Friends).

As Kurosh walked towards a typewriter to knock out his review that would slam Payvar’s destruction of Iranian traditional music by trying to ‘orchestrate’ *gushe* (melodies) of the *dastgah* (modal systems) like modern composers would by injecting disgusting junky fills, phony frills and way out of place ‘harmony.’ Payvar would attempt to ‘conduct’ an ensemble of traditional instruments with two *santur* sticks in one hand snootily posing as a composer/conductor with his ego-tripper smirk. Kurosh spent years

blasting Payvar and other musical traitors in every mode of media he wrote for, which was almost every existing publication in the country and some out of the country. As a result of the plethora of anti-Ministry poison-pen pieces, eventually concert announcer and poetry declarant Parvin Sarlak invited Kurosh to her office at Rudaki. Exuberating all the charm and amiability she possessed, she offered him fancy snacks and a choice of uppity beverages, all of which he politely refused. Then she asked what could be done to diminish the non-stop bitter criticism of the Ministry in every publication. Kurosh said “just let Parisa go from the Ministry to be a member of Dr. Safvat’s Center at NIRT and make Payvar just play the correct traditional *dastgah* system from the *radif* of Mirza Abdulla and Hossein Qoli. Payvar, a highly technically skilled *santurist*, just needed to play the traditional system and forget about his stupid innovation and modernization mania.” Soon after that meeting, Payvar toned down his semi-pop sludge and Parisa was sent to the Center the very next day. Kurosh kept his promise and tried to find good things to write about some of the Rudaki concerts when possible and concentrated on praising Safvat’s musicians and Parisa now that she was free from having to sing horrible pop junk concocted by Payvar and other Ministry sell-outs. It was quite a coup to free her from the clutches of the Ministry because Kurosh’s friend and vocal guru Karimi had warned “*un ta’ahod dare* (she has a debt)” He was referring to the fact that the Ministry had funded her music education and now she was obliged to repay that debt by being one of their ‘singer’ slaves.

As he slid into a chair and began typing with a vengeful determination, Peter sidled up to him and declared “tomorrow you’re driving me to Trabzon on the Black Sea. So pick me up in the morning!” Usually Kurosh was agreeable with such requests so he said “O.K. but why?” Peter noted “because my visa is up tomorrow and I need to get another one at the Iranian consulate there.” Kurosh looked puzzled and asked “but isn’t there a consulate in Erzerum near the Iranian border?” Peter muttered that there wasn’t and reaffirmed his edict to pick him up early the next morning. Kurosh acquiesced to Peter who was sort of the *mullah* in the gang of American *Sufi* adoptees then added “we have to go through Van because I always wanted to see it and visit a town that speaks the dialect of Kurdish I studied at the Langues ‘O’ in Paris.” Peter gruffly muttered an agreement and Kurosh quickly typed his review, showed it to Peter’s sort of girlfriend, the Pak girl Shirley who did a quick sub-edit before plopping it on Vahed’s desk and leaving before Vahed could grouch about it.

Westward to Van

Kurosh hurried back to the apartment on Entesarie, organized a few things for the trip and hit the sack. The next morning, Kurosh drug out of bed, loaded his few necessities into the Variant then fought the hellish traffic to Peter’s before grinding up the Karaj freeway to Qazvin, Zanjan, Tabriz then back down around Lake Rezaye to Rezaye town then to the border at Sero. When they reached the Turkish side it was about 6 p.m. and two friendly Turkish soldiers informed the two Yanki *sufis* that the border was *kapali* (closed) till morning. Soon a helpful young customs man came down from the shed on the hill to invite them up. He said in Turkish that he would have been happy to check them through, but the passport official had left and took the stamps with him. Kurosh hung out with the border officials as they played cards and *tric trac* late into the night discussing everything from Greeks to girls while Peter (or Selim as he preferred) decided to sleep in his seat in the VW. One official knew some Kurmanji Kurdish; otherwise Kurosh had to communicate in Turkish with the help of his trusty dictionary.

The next day, the travelers were quickly checked through and on their way over the roughest road imaginable to the first real town, Yüsekova. The rut-riddled dust and gravel highway improved slightly, but it was hard riding all the way to Van. Between the border and Van there was an enchanting old fort

where they stopped and contemplated while munching on canned dolmas and flat-bread. As they neared Van, Selim offered his scholastic wisdom about the town. He noted that it was originally named Tushpa of the Urartian kingdom in the 9th century BC. Then later in the 7th century was ruled by the Medes and the Persians by the 6th century. Alexander overran it in 331 BC; but later it became part of the Armenian kingdom. It was disputed by the Safavids and the Ottomans and was site of the Armenian genocide by the Turks during World War I. At that point, both scholars looked at each other as fears began to wax in them that they might be found speaking truthfully about the Armenian massacre and the rights of Kurdistan. Maybe some Turk might find out that Kurosh had studied Kurdish at the Langues 'O' in Paris with the exiled Kurdisani leader Emir Bedir Khan. They suspiciously hunched down and carefully drove into town hoping no one had a listening device focused on the VW.

Van, a Center of Northwest Kurdistan

In Van, they drove to the bazaar to hunt for ethnic craft items and Kurosh had a chance to try his Kurmanji Kurdish. At one shop he asked "*saheb li ku ye?* (where is the owner?)" Then one of the owner's sons decided to go home to bring their father declaring "*ez dichum mal* (I'm going home)." When the owner came, Kurosh asked about Kurdish traditional clothing and was answered with a blank stare. He didn't push the issue knowing that Turks did all they could to exterminate Kurdish culture including language. He wondered if he might be arrested for speaking Kurdish but was ready to fight for language freedom if necessary. Later in the car, he and Selim griped and grumbled about the horrible murdering dictator Ataturk who persecuted Islam. He was the villain who trashed Turkish clothing, their alphabet and other valuable traditions in the name of stupid 'progress.' They agreed that Turkey didn't 'progress' at all but just became more run-down by having their roots ripped away. Selim noted that "instead of sporting classy and colorful regional folk wear, now Turks look like poor Sicilian butchers in their crummy rumpled western garb dictated by Ataturk. The two scholars agreed that Ataturk ranked along with other horrible dictators of the century who hated God and traditions, criminals like Stalin, Hitler, Mao and Reza Shah.

Kurosh was accosted by the local Kurds who had been staring in admiration and partly in fear at the black-and-white *kafiyya* he always sported as a neck scarf doubling as a prayer shawl everywhere he went in the Middle East except in Afghanistan where he wore the full national clothing. Kurosh had heard that the black-and-white *kafiyya* idea was originally invented by the Kurds so he could understand their enthusiasm to get one. Kurds flocked around Kurosh fondling the scarf and offering various sums trying to out-bargain each other. Kurosh wouldn't sell his *kafiyya* because he really needed it for a prayer shawl, to wrap around his head to keep out the light when sleeping in the car, also to keep warm when necessary. He apologized to his Kurdish friends and, when they asked him where he was from, he told them Iran and explained it was a paradise for Kurds. He described the bazaar in Sanandaj with the beautiful Kurdish dresses and men's wear and how the Iranian government encouraged Kurdish folk dance. He noted how in the Iran the Kurds were respected because they were the ancient Medes who were the staunchest allies of the benevolent Achaemenian emperors. Kurosh talked to them in Kurmanji and Turkish struggling along the best he could. Kurosh's description of freedom and respect for Kurds in Iran brought tears to the eyes of the gentle old men in crumpled ugly European style suits and goofy little French hats. Kurosh looked around to see if any Turkish government agents might be lurking about then ventured a very daring remark. He noted that Kurdistan had belonged to the Kurds or their ancestors, the Medes, from since Noah's ark landed not far from there and that the Turks had moved in and usurped their land much later.

Then he said goodbyes and quickly jumped into the VW before the Turks could gun him down in case any had been listening.

On to Trabzon

They left Van continuing on to Ağrı, then past Eleşkirt to the spring where they filled up Kurosh's five gallon plastic water container. Again they spewed anger over naming the spring *Ataturk çesmesi* after the evil dictator Ataturk who hated Islam and everything else that was good about Turkey. Onward to Erzerum where they picked up a few honeycombs then off towards the village of Bayburt. Selim again expounded his vast information about the area noting that for centuries Trabzon, Ezerum and Tabriz were landmarks on the important caravan land routes from Europe to Central Asia. Trabzon was a center of Greco-Roman contact to Central Asia and a vacation spot for Romans who called it Bethenia. Selim went on to explain that it was through Trabzon that Italian merchants acquired Persian goods and later was a main land route for British trade. Some of the monuments still standing in Trabzon are the old city walls and part of the Palace of the Grand Comneni of medieval times and several Byzantine churches which were later revised into mosques. Both scholars despised Greeks and Romans for their paganism, idolatry and evil mother goddess cults with enforced premarital child prostitution as opposed to the enlightened rule of the benevolent Persian emperors who were cited in the Bible for their willingness to serve the one true God when even the chosen Israelites would abandon Him. Greeks and Romans worshiped the body, their bodies, with which they exercised their phony 'freedom' to commit all manner of the most degrading sins. The Persians offered mankind the true Lord of Light *Ahuramazda* and knowledge of the opposing God of Darkness *Ahriman* who must be avoided and not worshipped in pagan form as did the evil Greeks and Romans.

They entered the town and passed the bazaar which mainly dealt in modern goods seeming to lack a selection of carpets and handcrafts then they turned back towards the city center on Kavameydan Cadde. As they slowly cruised along the small street, a tiny shop with musical instruments hanging in the window caught Kurosh's eye. "Look" said Peter "should we stop and check it out?" Kurosh replied "by all means, we shouldn't miss a chance like this now that we have come all the way up here." They parked and went into the shop where an energetic old man was sanding away on the long neck of a *saz*. He smiled and motioned to the two chairs cramped against the wall and invited in Turkish "please sit down." Then after a few moments he put down the instrument and asked one of the fellows sitting against the other wall to bring some tea which Kurosh politely refused and then he sat on a chair across from the scholars and began stringing the instrument occasionally glancing at the guests then finally asking where they were from. Kurosh answered "*Iranda oturiyoruz* (we live in Iran)." The craftsman asked "*Tahrán?*" and Kurosh replied "*evet, arkadashim yazar dir ve ben sazında* (yes, my friend is a writer and I'm an instrumentalist)."

The instrument maker's eyes lit up as all the Turks in the shop smiled. "*Sazında?*" he exclaimed adding "*ben Istanbulda sazında edim.*" Then he went on to explain more about when he was an instrumentalist in Istanbul and how he made instruments for many of the top radio artists during the 30 years he worked there. He handed his card to Kurosh which read '*Mehmet Hamzaoğlu, saz ustası.*' He said he had set up shop in Trabzon about five years ago and musicians come from Erzerum to buy his instruments. "Most of the radio artists in Erzerum got their instruments from me" he proudly declared in Turkish twisting loops in the *saz* wires. Kurosh inquired in Turkish "do you only have different size *saz* or do you make other instruments?" I make *kemençe* as well" he answered. Of course, he knew the *kemençe* as the native instrument of the Black Sea coast played on two strings at once creating a constant harmony in 4ths or 5ths. Kurosh asked about *saz* prices and was told that the *maydan* or *divan saz* like the one that

was being sanded was about 500 *lira* which equaled about 250 *toman* at that time; the *bağlama* which was a bit smaller was 100 to 200 *lira* and the *cura* or small *saz* was 50.

“Do you have a *bağlama* for around 100?” Kurosh ventured then was told “I have one at home for 200” which he said he could bring by later. Kurosh asked what type of wood was best for *saz* making and was told “*dut, yalnız dut* (mulberry, only mulberry).” Then he added that the neck is of juniper. He went over to a small desk and rumaged through a box producing thin wooden plectrums declaring in Turkish “the *mezrab* is made from cherry bark.” On his way back to his chair against the wall, he picked up a flat piece of wood and held it up against the light. “See this, you can see light through it. It’s only about two millimeters thick; that’s how the surface of the soundbox has to be.”

Mehmet finally had all the strings in place on an instrument he was completing and began tuning the *saz* as everyone watched in silent interest. He sat back and finished tuning as a young fellow came in and eagerly blurted in Turkish “ah you’ve finished it!” Mehmet smiled and introduced Kurosh to the young customer telling him “this is Ali, a musician from Tehran.” Soon they were friends and chatted while Mehmet fine-tuned the new instrument. Then suddenly he struck out a few notes and silence fell over the small sawdust-filled room. He smirked like a little boy about to tell a story and then tore into an exciting rendition of Kaşık Havası or the ‘Spoon Tune’ as the jingling hum of the strings reverberated through everyone’s bones. While the onlookers were still entranced, Mehmet began another familiar tune. Kurosh queried in Turkish “is it Hermandali Zebek?” Mehmet smiled and confirmed “*evet*” as the others mumbled “*biliyor*” indicating that Kurosh knew the music. As Ustas Mehmet played on, thumping the soundbox every two beats and freely using the thumb of his left hand to grasp the low strings, Kurosh felt as if he could stay there all day but was reminded by Selim that they had to get to the consulate.

After fond farewells and Kurosh distributing his harmless Turkish informational pamphlets about Mormonism to his new friends, Kurosh and Selim went to the Iranian consulate as Kurosh again complained why would they put one way up on the Black Sea instead of Erzerum. The two scholars were rewarded for their arduous trip by the extremely hospitable courtesy extended to them by the Iranian consul and his assistant. The visa was finished quickly and then they were invited into the office for a pleasant chat. They learned that since there were only two Turkish consulates in Iran, Turkey reciprocally allowed only two Iranian consulates in Turkey. Kurosh asked in Farsi “wouldn’t it be possible to have a small office in Erzerum or have someone drop down there every few days to stamp passports then have the Turks set up a small office in the area of Bazargan on their side?” Their faces revealed that it was a good idea but the present system was already in place.

They left and drove around town before the trip back to Tehran and Selim mentioned that Trabzon was a logical former visa spot for travelers coming by boats on the Black Sea since in past eras the Trabzon to Erzerum route was very popular. The present inhabitants seemed to be dominated by a Caucasian or East European look with many cases of light complexion and blue or green eyes. It reminded Kurosh of the Iranian Caspian coastal provinces of Gilan or Mazandaran. They returned to the instrument shop and Mehmet had brought the *bağlama saz* from his house. Kurosh looked in his wallet and realized that with the gas costs to get back to Iran, he really couldn’t spend more than 150 *lira*. When he explained the problem, Mehmet thought for a moment and was advised by the others in the shop to give Kurosh a break. He played a couple of tunes then handed Kurosh the *saz* acquiescing in Turkish “alright, since you are also a musician, you can have it for 150.”

As Kurosh was examining the instrument, Mehmet encouraged “*çal Ali çal!*” The others chimed in agreeing that Kurosh should play something. So he tried a couple of choruses of the Spoon Tune while everyone in the shop offered encouraging remarks. They left the shop and their new friends who trailed along to the car sharing promises to write. They drove off to Bayburt for a lunch stop and then on to

Erzerum, then the next day Tabriz and back to Tehran. Not long after the trip, Kurosh was able to use his new *saz* as well as his father's Albert system clarinet for a TV special on Turkish music he produced. He organized his all-girl Turkish band with three girls from the *Honarestan*: Shahla on *qanun*, Malihe on *oud*, Linda on *dumbek* and his friend Parvin on tambourine for the highly successful program. The Turkish embassy lent Kurosh traditional clothing for the show which was a big success.

Chapter 15

Jamming with Jazzman Tony Scott in Sunny Italy

Kurosh got up to visit the WC, passing various travelers mostly peacefully snoozing in their seats or flat on a row of seats in the center with the arms folded up. He smiled and kindly greeted the few who were not fully asleep or were reading. On the way back he gave his stewardess a kind squeeze on the shoulder and she answered with a loving look and cheery smile. Before Kurosh reestablished himself on his temporary bed, he glanced out the window and noticed the sea still below and was reminded of the wonderful paid vacation he had on the coast of southern Italy invited by a wealthy Italian businessman jazz fan.

Lovable Businessmen Aldo D'Amato

It was the result of one of his better jazz concerts at the IAS where upscale arts aficionados would gather to enjoy classy music arranged by Kurosh as their part-time music advisor. He had his jazz combo of Armenian-Iranians he had trained to play fairly good cool jazz: Hovik on piano, Armik on Guitar, Heros on bass and Varoj on drums. Kurosh was playing amazing Giuffre style clarinet with Coltrane overtones belting out *If I were a Bell* and *Summertime* in the Miles Kind of Blue tradition. Hovik was sounding like Bill Evans with moments of Horace Silver like Kurosh had taught him and everyone in the audience was enjoying the mellow sophisticated sounds. Kurosh also did some of his Oriental Jazz blends using the *santur* and *oud* much to the amazement of the guests many of whom had not been following his weekly prime-time TV series and were not aware of his East-West blends. During a break, a kind and intelligent Italian gentleman with fluent English came up and shook Kurosh's hand asking "would you like to come to Italy to play some of this music?" Kurosh answered that he was always enthusiastic about sharing his music but couldn't afford such a trip. The Italian gentleman, Aldo D'Amato, explained "don't worry, I will fly you there and take care of your hotel and food." Kurosh gazed in amazement asking "when?" Aldo responded "in a couple of months, this summer." Kurosh thought for a moment and realized that he didn't have any big responsibilities until the Shiraz Arts Fest, no huge concerts and he had taped TV shows for several months in advance. So he agreed.

A few weeks later, Aldo sent Kurosh a roundtrip ticket in care of the Iran America Society and Kurosh began to figure out what he was taking so far as instruments and clothes. He had been able to carry on a *santur* and *oud* on Pan Am since the 747s had plenty of storage space and their flights were not usually full. Clothing and other items like his clarinet, tapes and a couple of records would be stuffed into two checked suitcases. When the date of departure came up, Kurosh asked his dear friend and vocal master Karimi to drive him to the airport and off he went to Rome first changing to Alitalia for a short flight to Milano. In Milano, two classy gentlemen came up and asked if he was Mr. Miller (which he decided was an easier name to use in Italy) and then drove him to the train station furnishing

him with a first class ticket with instructions how to get to Bologna and transfer to a local train to Cesena (pronounced chezena) where Aldo would meet him and drive him to the Adriatic resort town of Milano Marittima. Lloyd had to give the porter 500 *lira*, about a whole 80 cents in those days, which was still 8 times what they would charge in Afghanistan or the Subcontinent. The first-class car was more like a fancy hotel lobby. A polished well-dressed gentleman was sitting in the plush upholstered seat next to Lloyd and chatted about how the world was becoming more decadent, especially America and Lloyd agreed wholeheartedly.

In Bologna, he had to hire a porter to help him haul all his stuff across the tracks to where the train to Cesena was ready to leave. But this train was stuffed to the brim, not even standing room was available. He struggled with his two instruments and suitcases assisted by the porter to the baggage car where there was no room not even for one more suitcase. He desperately tried to communicate in fake Italian he made up by smooching French and high school Spanish together finally convincing the old baggage man to concede to one suitcase. Then a big strong Italian kid and his friends grabbed Lloyd's other suitcase and instruments and pushed them into the WC, the only unoccupied space; then they all helped to pull and squeeze him onto the train where everyone was frozen like sardines for the trip to Cesena. The young people on the train were simple country folk but warm and friendly singing songs and enjoying the adventure.

Finally in Cesena, he was relieved to see Aldo's familiar face and to finally place himself and his things into a nice big car, again thanks to a little help from his young Italian train mates. After a wonderful Italian dinner at the station restaurant, they drove to Milano Marittima and the fancy Hotel Rio where Lloyd was to stay. It was like a dream for a starving jazzman who had been roughing it in Iran, Afghanistan, Turkey and Lebanon for years and who remembered Europe in more uncomfortable times. The next morning, Aldo met him for a sumptuous breakfast then over to the Cervia Yacht Club where they took a small pole-driven ferry then boarded Aldo's beautiful sloop. Lloyd's minimal experience sailing prams on the Todd Island crawl key in the 50s came in handy as he helped string up the jib before they motored out to sea. Aldo gave Lloyd the rudder and hoisted the mainsail then the jib. After an afternoon of sailing, they brought their boat back to port and went to dinner. So Aldo and Lloyd became boat buddies, sailing almost every day and enjoying hanging out in nice restaurants. The next day, Aldo took him to the popular Pineta club for an audition hoping that the owner would be interested in hiring him.

He started before noon playing jazz piano, some *santur*, Afghan *dutar* with vocal and *oud*. Small groups of audience members came and went seeming to appreciate the music. But when the owner showed up, he affirmed that he needed a pop pianist like the last one he had, a slick commercial phony who sang really silly Italian pop tunes and chatted with audiences in Italian. Lloyd was definitely not that kind of musician. The owner, Lucky, acknowledged that he was good but some of his instruments were "*molto strano* (really weird), which was actually the point. Needless to say, he didn't get hired there or anywhere else in the Cervia/Milano Marittima resort area and Aldo was disappointed that no one could see the potential of his skills and excellent musicianship except some of his local jazz club friends. Aldo had established jazz clubs in various towns during his life. At twenty he founded the Hot Jazz Club in Venice then later the Hot Jazz Club of Bari followed by one in Verona.

Cool Clarinet Cat Tony Scott

One evening they returned to the Pineta where famous worldclass jazz clarinetist Tony Scott was playing with his combo that included Romano Mussolini, *figlio del Dolce* (son of the Sweet One, Mussolini himself). Aldo and Lloyd were sitting when a big guy with a straw hat purposefully strode in; it was Tony. Lloyd stood up and warmly shook his hand noting that he also was a clarinet man and had long been a fan especially of Tony's Eastern work most notably the Japan LP. Tony immediately noticed the two LPs Lloyd had brought along, *Oriental Jazz* and *Jazz at the U of U* which he grabbed and studied. He was excited to meet another jazzman who was into Eastern music. He took Lloyd's arm and said, "come on, let's go to the restaurant." As he pulled Lloyd along, Aldo waved goodbye assuring "you're in good hands now." Tony ordered a big plush vegetarian meal and the two feasted and chatted about music, the jazz scene in Italy and America and other subjects. Tony spoke Italian because his family was from southern Italy; the original name was Sciacca which was simplified to Scott. So Antonio Sciacca had become Tony Scott.

Lloyd and Tony shared stories of being miraculously saved in car incidents. Lloyd told about the miracle of his car driving itself over the deadly pass to Pülümür in Turkey and the time he dozed for a moment and flopped a few feet below onto a side road instead of many meters down the sea cliff between Komotene and Kanthi on the Greek coast. Tony told of the time his car slid down a perpendicular incline and didn't turn over. Another time he was dozing off when he felt a hand reach inside his chest and wake him up. Then they shared some of their lines of poetry which were very similar with traditional rhyming and solid rhythm. Tony said he wanted to do something with Middle Eastern music and Lloyd invited him to drop by Tehran. Tony, like Lloyd, was enamored with Armenian *duduk* and Lloyd noted that on his two LPs he approximated the *duduk* sound with his Albert clarinet. The two were enthusiastically woven into deep conversation when Romano came in and warned that it was time to start playing at the Pineta. Lloyd was amazed that Tony did a lot of the same things he did, singing hard blues, scatting rhythm patterns and generally entertaining but not commercializing. After the gig at the Pineta, they went over to the Mini Club to play some more until 2:30 in the morning.

The next day Lloyd visited Tony at his room in the high rise Rosela; then they went over to Lloyd's hotel where he demonstrated *santur*, *oud* and *dutar*. Tony really liked the *santur* and wondered if Lloyd could find a good *santur* player in Tehran who could be on a jazz blend LP. Then Tony looked through the books Lloyd had written, his jazz scores and Eastern music theory text. He was impressed with Lloyd's calligraphy and was amazed that he could write so much music and couldn't read it himself. Tony said "I can't understand it man, what are you doing, you should have a gig, man; you ought to be working, man." They went over the club and Tony asked the bar tender to put on Lloyd's tapes of the music from his LPs. Tony liked Lloyd's clarinet playing, especially the trad jazz things. He obviously liked the cool jazz stuff but kidded Lloyd putting on an angry voice "hey man you come to Tony Scott with Giuffre?" Then Tony had Lloyd sit at the piano and demonstrate his various styles like cool, blues, boogie, New Orleans and Persian with two index fingers. Then Lloyd did a longer slow dirty blues during which Tony sang along. Afterwards Tony declared "man I gotta find you some work. Why don't we blow some gigs around the Middle East?" They had dinner at their favorite restaurant and Lloyd promised to come to the Pineta to hear Tony at midnight. Tony thought for a minute then said "come at 11 and bring all your axes and we'll show old Lucky how good you really are." Lloyd timidly agreed then went to the Rio to rest and practice a little.

Peerless Performance at the Pineta

A little before 11 p.m., Tony went upstairs and got Lucky to come down to see something special. Then when Lloyd came in, Tony had him sit down at the piano and Tony took his clarinet and they blew some wonderful jazz. Then Tony sat down at the piano and Lloyd got his clarinet for some honkin' hard blues. Tony had a nice boogie technique and got the whole place rockin.' Then Romano came back to the piano, the bass man and drummer joined while Tony dueled with Lloyd on clarinet with playing way beyond their usual abilities until the crowd went wild. Then both Lloyd and Tony joined Romano on the piano for some six handed insanity, Tony doing a boogie bass on the low notes and Lloyd plinking wild licks on high notes while Romano comped with hard hitting sizzling chords. The crazy set ended with both Tony and Lloyd blasting wild clarinet lines together weaving in and out up and down and into oblivion crashing down to a finale that left the audience clapping their hands sore. Lucky couldn't help but smile approval; but after the set when Tony challenged him to hire Lloyd who was already in town and would play for much less than the slick phony piano guy, Lucky said Lloyd didn't have any personality. Lloyd thought that was pretty funny coming for a glum grumpy dead-pan fat little unfriendly guy. It was a fun incident to remember anytime Lloyd needed a laugh during future months. Tony muttered while packing up his clarinet "this is sure a messed up world, a cat like you not working, it sure is a goofed up world." He added, "man, I take care of my family first but if you ever are really down, I'll send you a few bucks." Lloyd gave Tony a hug and said "don't worry man, God will surely bless you for your good heart and I'll get by. I may have to live to be 120 years old to ever get a real break if even then. Aldo rushed up after chatting with his jazz club friends and gave Lloyd an Italian kiss on the cheek and a hug raving about how great the session was. Then one of Aldo's jazz club pals started chatting with Lloyd wondering why he came to Italy questioning "perché?" Aldo jumped in and proudly declared "*per suonare al Pineta* (to play at the Pineta)."

You da Guru

The last days that Lloyd was in town, he and Tony hung out a lot listening to Persian and Afghan classical music. Tony loved one sample of *santur* and Persian classical vocal and wanted to do something like that on a future album. Lloyd suggested that since Tony had an LP called "Music for Zen Meditation" and was planning "Music for Yoga Meditation" together they could cut an album called "Music for Sufi Meditation." Tony exuberated "I was just thinking of something like that." Lloyd had a few extra intricately embroidered Afghan men's shirts that Tony liked and bought at a good price to help Lloyd out. Tony tried to convince Aldo to do more for Lloyd like sponsor an LP of some great Eastern jazz blends for which Tony would help advise and maybe play on a few tunes. He declared to Aldo "this guy is a real saint, a holy man, a musical prophet; we need to help him." Lloyd was embarrassed to death and knew he was far from even half good, forget holy. No LP ever happened then or for decades later. The only LP that stood to represent Lloyd's work was the 1960s Oriental Jazz record that found its way along the hash route all the way to Katmandu and to other locations around the world and finally became a rare sought after item from the year 2,000 selling for up to \$600 a copy. Lloyd originally gave away hundreds of the LPs when no one understood or wanted the weird music. He even bribed people with free dinner or other gifts to make them take the albums.

But Tony promised Lloyd "some day you're gonna make it." When Tony died in 2007, his promise hadn't come true. But in Italy, Tony and Lloyd had a wonderful summer exchange of mutual musical concepts and many fun moments. One afternoon, Tony and Lloyd were wandering along a

path into the pines and discussing life. Lloyd told Tony “you’re my guru, a four letter word spouting rough and tumble yet humble guru.” Tony objected “no, man, you’re my guru.” Lloyd protested that Tony was the guru and Tony argued that Lloyd was until they both backed down with a truce that they were a combined guru. Then Tony went on about how someday jazzmen and fans would seek the path where the great gurus and clarinet virtuosi wandered in the pines and someday later fans would develop a religion based on their philosophies. Their followers might be called “Pine-heads” and many would come to touch the bench Tony and Lloyd sat and be healed, become jazz virtuoso performers or maybe their cars would miraculously run without gas.

The last few days of Lloyd’s visit, Tony went sailing with Lloyd and Aldo a few times; they sat around Aldo’s plush apartment to dig cool jazz albums and they all became very close friends. The last night that Tony was booked at the Pineta, Lloyd and Aldo went to cheer him on. Before the first set, Lloyd notice three the girls who often came to see Tony were sitting across from him so he mustered up the courage to ask “*come va?* (how’s it going)” To which they replied positively then one asked in Italian how long he had been mostly on a fruit and vegetable diet. He understood the question but not why she would ask it. The other girl with long black hair asked him in French and he responded in French and then Italian that it had been ten years. They chatted for a while as Lloyd conjured up enough Italian to get by. During the last set, Aldo asked Tony if Lloyd could sit in. Tony said he would fix something and then called Saints as the last tune and asked Lloyd to come up and sing it. Tony sang in harmony then scatted a chorus which instigated a wild scat chorus from Lloyd, they traded choruses then fours then twos scating like maniacs then let loose together in outrageous screaming counterpoint before it turned to trad jazz for the finale with two clarinets going wild. The piece initiated mass calls of encore from the wildly applauding audience so Tony told Romano to take a break and ordered Lloyd to do some boogie piano and had all the audience clapping along. Then Lloyd played a beautiful romantic rendition of Lover Man joined by Tony’s breathy and sensitive clarinet including some nice low register work, maybe an occasional touch of Giuffre who no jazz clarinet man could totally ignore not even if they were the great world renowned Tony Scott.

After the gig, almost everyone in the club came up and shook Lloyd’s hand complimenting him in Italian as he tried to answer intelligently. The title of *maestro* had been attached to Lloyd and was passed among the regulars at the Pineta, the Rio and everywhere Lloyd roamed. While everyone was packing up, Lloyd had a chance to talk to Romano who was a kind and mellow fellow. When he went around town with Tony and Lloyd, little old ladies would constantly run up to him and declare how much they loved his dad and how they missed him. He was sort of a celebrity and a star just for being the son of a popular former leader before anyone knew how well he played jazz piano. Lloyd mentioned how his own mom and her best friend did a demonstration fencing match for his dad’s brown shirts and they went wild at seeing two girls fencing so well. Romano suggested that he and Lloyd do some concerts sometime when Lloyd came back to Italy and had Lloyd write down Romano’s Rome address on Viale Libia. When Romano, Lloyd and Tony where kidding around once, Lloyd suggested that if Romano’s dad was *Il Dolce*, then Tony should be *Il Calvo* (the Baldy) and Lloyd would be *Il Pazzo* (the Crazy). Or since Romano was *Figlio del Dolce* then Lloyd should be *Figlio di Cagna* or S.O.B.

Arrivaderci Amici

Before Lloyd was to leave to return to Tehran, Aldo insisted he check out some of the good bargains on Italian leather good. They went to a few shops and vendors where Lloyd found a very

reasonable chic purse he decided to buy and later decided to give it to his vocal idol Parisa in Tehran. Then he found a pair of great loafers that looked like a millionaire should be wearing them. With his rundown beat-up over eight year old shoes with holes in the bottom, the back and the sides, Aldo saw that Lloyd's most urgent need was shoes. Lloyd noticed another pair of black shoes that were only about \$10. The vendor offered the tan loafers for a reduced price of under \$15. Lloyd asked why these classy shoes were so reasonable and was told "*è finito il modello* (the style is finished)." Aldo offered that if Lloyd bought the black shoes, Aldo would buy him the tan ones. He felt awful accepting any more favors from the kind man who had been too good to him already. But Aldo had 10,000 Lira out already, so Lloyd reluctantly added his funds and the shoes were his. The next day Aldo insisted that Lloyd visit historical Ravenna, which represented old Italy and was replete with Middle Eastern type art and architecture. In Ravenna, Lloyd noticed two churches with adjacent tall towers much like minarets, Persian type weaving and inlay boxes and men's attire of a brown robe as worn by Islamic clerics with the waste sash and fez-like round hat. Lloyd wandered around Ravenna for a few hours then caught a train back to Milano Marittima and the Rio.

The final day as Lloyd was checking out at the front desk of the Rio, he turned to be stunned by an unbelievable charming girl with beautiful long hair, luscious lips and stunning sparkling eyes. Their gaze fixed like a trance on each other as they tried to converse. She had heard him play the night before and noted that Lloyd was *molto gentile e simpatico* (very polite and sympathetic) while he observed that she was *molto amabile e splendida* (very lovable and beautiful). She said that she was just checking in while he regretted that he was just leaving town. Starting to go their separate ways, they gazed forlornly at each other then she remorsefully philosophized "*è peccato, molto peccato* (it's a pity, real pity)." They both chuckled sadly before she suddenly fastened a long meaningful kiss on his lips shocking him into almost dropping the keys he was returning as he blurted *ma che cosa?* (but what?). From the hotel door, Aldo called to Lloyd to bring his things to the car where the two suitcases had already been loaded in the trunk. Lloyd glanced one last time at the mysterious girl that he would never get to know and smiled "*arrivaderci mia cara* (goodbye my darling)" as he wistfully collected his instruments and wandered towards the door of the Rio for the last time as his newly found but immediately lost Italian dream girl tearfully sputtered a forlorn "*ciao.*" As Aldo's car drove through the Italian countryside, Lloyd watched the greenery pass by being thankful for a wonderful musically rich vacation even if he did find a potential ideal girlfriend too late.

Chapter 16.

Stop off in Beirut in the late 1950s

Lloyd meditatively glared at the ceiling of the 747 pacified by the pleasant purring of the engines wondering how many times he had missed out on warm loving physical exchanges with amazingly beautiful young women because of his philosophy of celibacy outside of marriage. But he also wondered at how many times he had been blessed by divine providence and saved from potential disasters. Remembering the pleasant Italian Adriatic seacoast reminded him of his first trip towards the west from his initial wild year in Iran in the late 50s, a trip to Beirut where his parents would try to install Lloyd as a college kid at the American University of Beirut. They were also worried that since he had found a source for his drug experimentation with hash and opium in Tehran that they needed to once again remove him from potential problems. Part of the problem was that his parents had been so busy with their social climbing in the southern California scene that they couldn't be bothered with

him or his sister who were just excess baggage. They tried to offer wonderful opportunities for developing various skills and talents to Lloyd; but just a little TLC instead of ugly parties with rowdy drunken slobs would have done a lot to develop a more balanced rather than a bitter angry youngster.

Lloyd was leaving Tehran just as he was beginning to fit in and enjoy life there. He just took items he would need for a year at the AUB in case he was accepted and his parents were to send everything else back to Glendale when they returned there a year later. His dad had convinced the AUB to give Lloyd a chance even if his high school credentials were not very convincing (no mention that his mom had to finish his course work). They arrived in Beirut, which was a stopover for Lloyd's parents on their way to be tourists in Egypt for a couple of weeks. Lloyd's dad had arranged for him to stay at the AUB dorm and paid for two weeks room and board with the promise that he would take care of any additional days. His dad gave Lloyd \$50 in spending money because he wouldn't need much past his room and board. When his parents left for Egypt they asked him if he was sure he didn't want to go along and he assured them that he wasn't at all interested. Lloyd hated any exaggerated touristy trap places and he thought Egypt with the stupid Sphinx, the touristy pyramids and disgusting belly dancers was the last place on earth he wanted to visit except maybe the Australian outback or the South Pole. He knew that Beirut had a couple of copycat repulsive belly dancers; but he was planning to avoid anything to do with them. Although he was still shackled by sin, he hated the whole fake Hollywood negatively stereotypical promulgation of sexually explicit images that objectify women in the crassest manner. So Lloyd chose to stay in Beirut and check out the AUB and the possible jazz scene there.

His parents had made friends with another American family at the Phoenicia Hotel and had planned to have lunch and visit some tourist spots in Beirut. Lloyd was happy to be on his own, so he wandered through the plush lobby of the hotel and tried to use some of his basic Persian when necessary. He found that some words in Persian that were of Arabic origin would work in various situations like *kebrit* for 'match' and several more. He changed the five dollars his dad gave him and studied the green five *lira* notes with the familiar heart shaped number five. Those five pound notes seemed like the green Persian 50 *rial* notes and he was able to calculate that they were similar in value, both something like a glorified high powered one dollar bill. He wandered out the door of the hotel into the winding street past interesting shops and stopped at a *filafil* stand where there were serving strange fried burger-like substance rolled up in a slab of fat bread with white sauce, tomatoes and parsley. Lloyd tried the treat and was enjoying the interesting favor when a short chubby fellow began to joke with him about politics, cars, movie stars, American girls, etc. When Lloyd went to pay for his meal, his new friend forbade him stating "*ahlen*, welcome, you are a guest here." Then he took Lloyd by the arm, led him to a cab and invited him to ride to the city center with him, also as a guest. They arrived at the town center called the Borj where his new friend dropped him off and promised to invite him for dinner some time. Lebanese hospitality was similar to what Lloyd had experienced in Iran for his year there. Lloyd wandered around availing himself of delicious fresh-squeezed orange juice and other interesting treats.

As he walked towards the hotel, myriads of taxis like vultures honked and yelled trying to get a fare. Lloyd waved them aside until finally one driver in a Mercedes somehow conned him into getting in with the line "geev you cheep ride an tour." Lloyd was suspicious but the short sneaky driver kept pressing him to climb in. As they slowly drove along, occasionally the driver droned "here ees beech, here is Hamra" taking the very long way to the hotel. Finally at the hotel, Lloyd offered a five Lira note hoping to get at least half back but the driver nastily insisted "twenty five lira!" Lloyd had nothing like that and protested that he didn't have it. The driver glared at him yelling "geev me the money" until Lloyd reached into his pocket and found two Iranian ten *rial* coins with the number written on

them in Arabic writing hoping the driver would think ten was a lot. He yelled “how much ess worth eet?” to which Lloyd blurted “more than you asked for” as he jumped out of the cab and scampered into the hotel. He found his parents and sat at their table pale and frightened. His parents grilled him until he told the scary story as a waiter listened and then stated “you are lucky, some Americans get kidnapped by cab drivers, robbed and killed. It’s all because to the horrible things Israel has done to Palestinian families. Some of them who had nice homes and jobs before their country was usurped are now very bitter cab drivers and are really mad at America for supporting Israel.” Lloyd perked up and blurted “but I don’t like how those mean Israelis murder innocent families to steal their land, it’s horrible.” A fat disagreeable New York Jew at the bar turned and glared; so Lloyd looked at him and added “the Jews I’ve known are great people and sensitive intellectuals; I can’t understand who these cruel heartless Israelis are.”

Cool Sounds at the Caves de Roy

After dinner, Lloyd said he was going out to find any jazz groups that might be in town. He sped off before his parents could talk him out of it since they never supported his music activities. He was lucky to discover the Caves du Roy (Caves of the King) in the nearby Excelsior Hotel where a fairly good band was playing. Lloyd entered the swanky club and ordered a beer. He was able to make that beer last three hours. During the break, he went over to the musicians and began charming them and soon became friends. When the bandleader found out Lloyd was a jazz pianist he asked him to sit in next set. The regular pianist was happy to get a break so he could flirt with the bar maids. The band was composed of an Italian drummer, a Greek guitarist, the French leader on vibes and occasionally vocals, a German bassist and a Spanish trumpet man. They had a nice jazz feeling, but most of their arrangements were fairly commercialized. Everyone knew Lloyd’s tunes like Nearness of You, Autumn Leaves, Foggy Day, Moonlight in Vermont, the inevitable Blues in F, etc. The hard-core jazz standards like Doxy and Dig, Lloyd took the lead and the band picked them up quickly.

During the next break, the bandleader asked Lloyd “eh man, you write sharts?” Lloyd affirmed that he was an arranger and then was asked to do a few scores for the band. The band, out of respect for Lloyd’s piano playing, ordered him a huge meal, drinks and cigarettes. He wasn’t much of a smoker in those days but appreciated the kindness. He became good friends with the manager who offered Lloyd the job of solo pianist in the afternoons and on the band’s night off if he wanted to stay in Beirut. But Lloyd wasn’t really interested in playing for slobby drunken Yankees who were a large percentage of the audience. Lloyd played a few more sets even surprising everyone by borrowing the trumpet and blowing a great blues chorus. At the end of the evening, Lloyd floated back to the hotel in ecstasy; he had been accepted by a great band and they wanted his charts. The next days, Lloyd visited several night clubs sitting in with various groups and soon all the musicians in town were aware of the amazing American jazzman who played several instruments and wrote arrangements. Every afternoon Lloyd worked on the four arrangements for the guys at the Caves.

Local Ethnic Performing Arts

Two days later, Lloyd was sitting in a downtown sidewalk café copying off parts when an old Turkish man who was spooning thick black coffee in a little cup, invited Lloyd to his table. Soon a Greek joined them then an Armenian. They communicated in Turkish or French and occasionally one would explain what they were talking about to Lloyd in English. He soon learned that they were

musicians who played Eastern music at a large club near the beach. He knew that place which was on the ocean side of a curve in the street where his hotel was. They were interested in Lloyd's music arranging and asked him to do a piece for them. But since their instruments were *oud*, *qanun*, *clarinet*, *dumbek* and sometimes violin, he couldn't figure out the keys and how to write for them. And a jazz standard might sound silly on mostly string instruments. Suddenly a jovial jestful Arab with twinkling eyes joined the group and was introduced as the drummer who played *dumbek*. Lloyd stayed a while listening to them chatter in French then excused himself to join his parents for a late lunch at the hotel. The *dumbek* player instructed Lloyd to meet him that night because he wasn't working; another group was performing for a show at the club. He said he wanted to show Lloyd real Eastern culture and girls; "you can geet girl for loving," he chuckled as Lloyd winced and forced an apprehensive smile.

That night after finishing work on his arrangements and playing some piano with the group in a small backroom club downtown, Lloyd met his new friend at their appointed rendezvous in front of the Phoenicia. The drummer Atif introduced Lloyd to his sidekick Amir and they all headed off towards the center of town. They walked along the winding street to the Borj then turned left towards the sea. About half way to the seaside, Atif led them down a narrow alley way and then an even narrower one past enclosed yards, antique doors and tiled clay walls. They stopped in front of a weatherworn carved door and Atif banged the old metal knocker. After a few minutes, an aged gentleman creaked open the door and the three were admitted to a small courtyard. On the other side of the courtyard they were admitted to another doorway where they climbed a squeaky wooden stairway to the top then ducked under a low archway into a tiny room.

In the corner of the room, an elderly blind man was tuning a *qanun* while a skinny pock-marked middle-aged fellow puffing on a water pipe reached for his violin in its weathered open case by his side. Nearby a small boy was moving a ceramic *dumbek* counter clockwise over a kerosene lamp hoping that the skin would tighten after having sunk in the cool damp seaside air. The musicians finished their preparations then started a slow introductory melody. As Lloyd and his friends sipped tea or spooned thick coffee, the music became more emotion-filled when the *qanun* player took a long *taksim* or rhythm-free solo in waves with logical beautiful passages of repetitive patterns, which emphasized specific important notes through constant reference. The emphasized note changed a couple of times moving upward in the modal scale similar to the Persian music Lloyd had grown so fond of during his year in Tehran. Following the *qanun* solo, the violinist took over with an equally inspiring rendition of the same type of phraseology weaving a melodic web with occasional slurs and slides extracting a tone more like a skin-covered ethnic folk fiddle than a violin. From time to time Lloyd's friends and others in the audience would exclaim "ey" or "ahsan" and other some other encouragements to the performers who wound through various sequences slightly altering notes in the minor scale from time to time. Then a lilting rhythm from the *dumbek* joined by Atif, who found a large nearby tambourine with big brass discs, got the audience members heads bobbing and hands clapping as the string instruments joined in a simple refrain.

Grotesque Jittery Jiggles by a Hoaxy Hollywood Hooker

As the rhythm became more throbbing and intense, the beat quickened and suddenly from behind a tattered dirty curtained archway to a side room in the corner opposite the musicians, a woman burst forth twirling and sexually shaking in wild abandon. The atmosphere suddenly changed to an abrasive crassness negating the beautiful esoteric placidity of the pensive prelude music and the musicians' expressions reflected an uneasy dismay that they had become the backdrop to a carnival circus act. The

woman was too chubby to be dancing, if it could even be called that, was bedecked with gross chunky pot metal jewelry including an ugly nose ring and she was made up like a Halloween ghoul or an Arab villainess in a bad Hollywood black and white Valentino film. Behind her see-through shawl, a potentially pretty but pockmarked face grimaced in exaggerated expressions as she attempted to tease and tantalize the audience. Lloyd thought it was more of a disgusting overdone comedy routine, a spoof on very low-grade bad American films and that was exactly what it was. Later Atif explained that any such silly so-called belly dance efforts in the Middle East came from Hollywood fantasy and was never seen anywhere except among a couple of insignificant prostitute clans left over from the pre-monotheistic times. It was from the ancient pagan mother goddess child prostitute cults that were so abhorrent to God and all religions that sought Him in his authentic form by completely rejecting the Baal and Astarte cult which had recently morphed into this disgusting belly dance fraud .

The ‘dancer’ spied Lloyd as a foreigner so she jiggled over to him and tried to tease him with exaggerated sexual undulations as he tried to avoid vomiting his filafil. She whipped her straggly unwashed hip-length hair across his face and rocked from side to side then jittered in a mad frenzy emitting nauseating body odor and dripping greasy sweat until the music came to a welcome halt. Lloyd was utterly revolted by the whole clown routine; but he tried not to let on so his friends wouldn’t feel bad. Then finally the sex star backed toward the archway from where she had invaded the room and, with a naughty sneer, glared at Lloyd and invited “*ahlan!*” He shot a questioning glance at his friends who nodded and motioned for him to go with her. He cringed in repulsion but tried to smile apprehensively as they continued to encourage him to follow her. So just to be polite, he slowly rose as they pushed him forward affirming “ees OK!” Lloyd reluctantly moved towards the fateful archway and ducked into the small side room where a floor mattress and a long tubular worn silken pillow loomed. A dim flickering lantern in the corner supplied a tentative light, which caused eerie shadows to dance on the dried clay walls. On a low inlaid table, an etched brass tray held a teapot and two small cups. Pointing to herself, the woman accosted Lloyd introducing herself “*ana Aisha, wa enta?*” Lloyd hesitantly muttered “*ana Ali*” using the name his friends assigned him back in Tehran. She poured tea into the small cups then produced a white cardboard box with red writing on the sides, opened it and offered Lloyd a sticky candy with walnut filling. She motioned for him to sit on the bed and as they were eating she began to undo her clothes and Lloyd quickly queried “*adash?* (how much?)” Somewhat disheartened at his crass mention of money so soon, she conceded “*’asra lira.*” Lloyd politely produced two green five *lira* bills, stuck them under the teapot and then sheepishly moved toward the archway and freedom. She grabbed his arm and tearfully questioned “*ma bidek?* (you don’t want?). He smiled kindly and answered “*la shukran ’azizati* (no thanks my dear)” and then whisked through the tattered cloth back into the main room. He returned to his place and was sipping coffee when Atif asked “good, no?” Then Amir followed with “you no stay long, really fast,” to which Lloyd refrained from any response then Atif bumped his shoulder against Lloyd’s kidding “really nice, no?” Lloyd refused to comment on the encounter with Aisha; she was a belly dancer and a hooker and he had absolutely no interest in any affiliation with either even if he had formerly been with a few of hookers when he first got to Tehran. But a belly dancer was more trashy than any of them and. Sure, he cared about people no matter what situation they were in, but not to the extent of supporting what he considered less than honorable activities.

Astounding Acrobatics at a Concert on the Cornish

After listening to another soulful *qanun* and violin *taksim*, the three friends left the room and

made their way down the rickety steps to the courtyard of the old compound. Atif urged “*yalla*, we have to geet to club, over on Cornish.” They quickly made their way through back alleys and finally bigger streets to the large Arab concert club where Atif worked. They entered and walked down the hallway a short distance then Atif stopped at the food service window and shouted an order. Soon two plates filled with Lebanese delicacies were produced. He shoved the plates in Lloyd and Amir’s hands and instructed “here take these and find table near stage; I have to geet ready for show.” Lloyd and Amir made their way through a jungle of tables where a variety of men and a few occasional scarved women were sitting sipping tea, spooning thick coffee and munching on sticky candies. Near the stage, a man in a red fez and baggy pants motioned to the two to join him. They sat as the cheerful chubby fellow offered them a tube from his water pipe. Lloyd took a couple of polite puffs but was more interested in the sweet smelling smoke from the adjoining table as the familiar aroma of hashish seeped into his nostrils. He shot a suspicious glance at the gentleman who seemed to be smoking it and the man smiled back asking “you know what ees?” Lloyd grinned broadly and confided “yes, I like it.” Then after glancing from side to side the man slowly slid a slender Lebanese cigarette across the table to Lloyd who carefully lifted it up noticing that it had been nearly emptied of tobacco and loaded with a familiar greenish brown chunk of hash. The man then scooted Lloyd a tiny box of those minute matches made of minuscule short pieces of straw with a little round blob of sulfur at the end. He lit up, took a couple of tokes and Amir noticed the familiar smell and askantly glanced at Lloyd who then felt obliged to share his newfound treasure. He passed the joint to Amir who drew in a couple of deep tokes before returning It; meanwhile their Druze table-mate in the red fez was so involved with his water pipe that he didn’t even notice, or at least he didn’t show he knew, what was going on.

Suddenly everyone’s attention was directed towards the musicians who appeared on the side of the stage then made their way to their stand at the right front side of the stage. They began tuning and soon were playing a familiar tune that everyone in the club was humming or clapping along to. The group broke into a fast cadence and the ambiance of suspense was broken by the entrance of the star of the evening, a certain Habiba. Lloyd couldn’t believe his eyes, she was at least 300 pounds and less than plain looking as she bubbled out on stage while Lloyd wondered if she might break a hole in it. The applause and screams were deafening and, even before she began her routine, some faithful fans had already plucked flowers from vases on their tables and tossed them toward the stage. She began her show by twirling about the stage as gracefully as a ninety-pound teenage ballerina. Not for a moment did anyone notice her huge blubbery form as she fluttered about the stage never tiring for what seemed like an hour. Much of her act consisted of unbelievable acrobatic contortions and pretzel tricks that she would deftly drift into and maintain for long stunning poses before jumping back into action then another pose. Nothing she did was at all like the degrading crass sexually explicit jiggling of the belly dancer in the back alley inner sanctum.

Although sometimes silly, her routine was stunning for its apparent unachievability. For her finale, she wrapped one big fat leg around her neck to the stunned thrill of the audience, then she stood up on her hands as everyone rose from their seats to cheer and clap for her. Then wrapping both legs around her neck, she stood up again on her hands then shifted to one hand and, for a second, on just three fingers before deftly rolling back on the stage, unraveling and standing for a quick bow before scampering off like a shy child. The seemingly one thousand screaming audience members who were throwing flowers, coins, coins wrapped in five, ten or twenty *lira* notes, couldn’t stop applauding and yelling for what seemed like fifteen minutes before they could calm down. The stage lights dimmed and the music subsided. Lloyd finally fell back into his chair still in stunned awe for a long time after everyone else had eventually filed out of the theater until Atif appeared to asked “so you like show,

right?” Lloyd couldn’t hardly answer but just said “unbelievable, and your band sounded great too.” On the walk back to the Phoenicia where Atif and Amir tendered lengthy fond farewells, Lloyd muttered a few more times how he couldn’t believe the acrobat and was really happy to see Lebanese culture and hear such great music.

Starving and Struggling Alone in Beirut

The next day, Lloyd’s parents finally left for Egypt but let Lloyd stay in the room at the Hotel Phoenicia before finally moving into the AUB dorm. This way he had a chance to wash all his clothes in the bathtub and hang them out the window to dry hoping that the fancy hotel wouldn’t notice and punish him for creating an eyesore. That evening Lloyd took his four newly written jazz scores over to the Caves du Roy. When he entered the club, everyone rushed to greet him. He was invited to the musicians’ table where he was offered the seat of honor, a fancy drink and a sumptuous meal. The musicians looked over their parts and seemed to be happy with them; so they slowly made their way to the bandstand to try out the new charts. Each piece flowed forth beautifully, emulating a combination of Shearing, Brubeck and the M.J.Q. The manager, barmaids, the band and a few tourist guests came over to the table to congratulate Lloyd and he was poured a glass of champagne to reward his arranging skills. During the break, the bandleader sat puffing on a strong French cigarette assuming the air of a businessman as the other musicians looked on hopefully. After a deep inhale and exhale of his pungent cig, the bandleader asked “zo *messeur* Lloyd, ow mush you van for eesh of zees sharts?” Lloyd looked from musician to musician as everyone was hanging in suspense to see if he would charge \$20, \$30 or maybe even \$50 apiece, maybe even more because they were really good arrangements like those on records of top jazz bands. Lloyd beamed his childish smile at everyone as they timidly yet apprehensively smiled back with worried eyes. “Listen Jaques” he said to the bandleader; “I am a musician our are a musician.” Jacques nodded nervously in agreement as Lloyd continued “you have invited me to play at this elegant world-class club, you let me play your vibes, the trumpet and my clarinet, you even let me flirt with the cute bar maids. You fed me, bought me drinks and smokes and treated my like family; how can I charge you money for these?” The musicians gazed in bewilderment as Lloyd continued. “Yea, I never expected any money, I am just glad you played my junk and are my friends.” Jacques couldn’t believe what he had just heard “*mais non*, Lloyd, you mus accept somesing, an what you mean zhunk?” Lloyd quickly changed the subject with “forget about it guys and let me play piano on the next set, OK.” Lloyd played his heart out that evening and heard his cool charts played a few more times before leaving with many thank yous from the band, the manager and the bar maids.

Hanging out at A.U.B.

The next two days, Lloyd spent repacking and hauling his huge suitcases one by one over to the A.U.B. dorm where he was to check out the University and see if he wanted to stay a year and study. At the dorm he met interesting guys from various countries and seemed to fit in quite well trying his modest efforts in various languages on some, discussing politics and philosophy with others and making the acquaintance of a black American who wanted to sing jazz. The two rehearsed Summertime when they could get access to the piano at the A.U.B. and planned to perform it at a school concert. Unfortunately at the concert, the singer decided to render it in the higher range and his voice kept crackling to the amusement of the audience who incessantly cackled thinking it was a

comedy. Needless to say, the two were so embarrassed that Lloyd's music possibilities at the U ended before the even started which indicated that he might not succeed as a student there. The few classes he visited where is rabid remarks against American 'culture' and imperialism and his boasting that he would never go back to that Yankee snake pit cesspool indicated to the university directors that he could be a problem on campus especially when he strongly sympathized with the plight of the Palestinians. Although he had several wonderful Jewish friends over the years and Jews had saved him several times when some bully was planning to beat him up, he had also experienced the occasional mean and obnoxious side of a few Jews and could completely understand how the worst of them could heartlessly murder thousands of families to steal their land and whatever else they could get. Whenever two or three Palestinians were shaking cans of coins out in front of the entrance to A.U.B. collecting funds to help the refugees, Lloyd would add a few *piastres* or even *liras* even though he also was in almost as bad financial straits as the refugees.

Realizing that he probably wouldn't be accepted at the U, Lloyd concentrated his efforts on writing music for the band at the Caves and also undertook arranging a full big band version of A Night in Tunisia that he felt was appropriate since he was visiting an Arab capital. He spend many hours at the A.U.B. poaching on the piano whenever possible or at various tables with his manuscript paper strewn about. When people would stop by and ask why he had music paper with no notes but only numbers, he would explain the system he learned at Westlake of notating by numbers until the parts were copied off. The complex arrangement would be a Kentonesque Shorty Rogers Dizzy Gillespie big band creation with a smattering stereotypical Arab musical and rhythmic quotes. Lloyd always hoped his arrangements would be played by someone somewhere and this chart was finally played by Stockholm's top big band and eventually premiered decades later by the Colorado Springs Symphony.

Roughing it in a Raunchy Rundown Room

When Lloyd's two prepaid weeks were up at the A.U.B. dorm, he was called into the office to talk with the official who was a different person than Mr. Williams who his dad had become friends with, likely a fellow Lions Club member. The manager kindly explained "well Lloyd, your father paid for you up until tomorrow and Mr. Williams is in Europe for a month; so I don't know exactly what understanding he had with your dad. In any case, I have a letter for you here from your father if you care to open it." Lloyd opened the envelope and found \$50 with a short note saying nothing about the original arrangement of his parents covering any extra room and board costs on their return from Egypt. Lloyd said "well they left me \$50 so I guess that along with the \$30 I have left will have to tide me over until they returned." Since the room at the dorm was about \$5 a day that would eat up Lloyd's funds too quickly so he decided he needed to find a cheap room for five *lira* a day. He thanked the manager and went to survey some of the students to see if they knew of a really cheap hotel nearby. He learned of a place two miles up the hill which was five *lira* a day, so he packed everything up in his heavy suitcases and started the tortuous trek trying to trudge the two miles up the hill. At first Lloyd attempted to carry everything clutched by his fingers and under his arms but only made it half a block before dropping everything in miserable exhaustion. Then he developed a more practical yet crazy way of shuffling a few steps at a time, kicking, dragging and groaning. That really didn't work either so he resigned himself to carrying two pieces a few steps then going back and carrying the other two past the first in a system of baggage relay slowly snailing up the tedious hill. The worst part was the jeers, yells and incessant honks from sneaky thuggy taxi drivers who were continually harassing him to climb in

and thus risk potentially being gypped if not robbed or worse. Of course he couldn't waste one *piastre* on the luxury of a cab ride even if he weren't cheated.

After a few hours of painful plodding, Lloyd dragged into the lobby of the Bahr Hotel, so fatigued that he barely had the energy to fill out the guest form. He asked if he could get a cheaper weekly rate and was told he could save a few *lira* that way so he paid for a week in advance to be sure he would have a place to stay. Then they told him his room was on the third floor and of course there was no elevator. He gazed at the steep stairs then began hauling his burdensome baggage a step at a time until a half hour later he made it to the room which had a saggy dirty bed, a beat up sink and a toilet with a broken seat and one bent up chair. Lloyd didn't care how bad it was; at least he wasn't on the street. After a few hours rest, he got out his manuscript paper and began to work on the arrangements he had promised to the band at the Caves. He later bought a few slabs of pita bread, a few cans of hummus, some onions and oranges at a little shop in the area and holed up in his raggedy 'room' for a few days writing music and coping parts like mad. Sometimes he would work all night until he noticed the sun was coming up so he flopped in a daze on the miserable sinky bed for a few hours of semi-sleep then he would be back to work writing arrangements not just for the band at the Caves, but other combinations like trumpet and tenor, trumpet and alto, tenor and trombone, etc. which he hoped to share with other bands in town or later in his career.

Cool Kraut Drummer Comes to the Rescue

One evening, Lloyd discovered a new nightclub, a very posh place in a first class hotel where Lloyd sat in on piano and amazed everyone as usual. The house drummer was a German named Gunter Hess who was a very skilled jazzman. Gunter took an interest in Lloyd as did his sweet and caring Dutch wife Berta. When Gunter learned that Lloyd was an arranger, he asked him to write twenty charts for trumpet and two saxes. Lloyd eagerly obliged and set to work on the project. More all day and all night marathon arranging cooped up in his cell at the hotel with dwindling funds and food, made Lloyd thinner and paler as he raced to complete the project for Gunter. He had finally completed the charts for his pals at the Caves and he was straining to finish Gunter's scores before his parents came back to town. One evening he broke out of his hermitage to see his friend Atif at the big club on the Cornish. On the way down there he took a side trip to a music store in Bab Edris to find more manuscript paper and see the cool ethnic instruments. He got to the club and learned that Atif was off that night but Amir was there and invited Lloyd for a huge dinner. Lloyd politely refused twice before finally outwardly reluctantly but secretly joyfully accepting. Lloyd also was obliged to occasionally hang out in the lobby of the Phoenicia and other classy hotels using his charm and intelligent conversational skills on American tourists or businessmen assuming the role of a fellow tourist who knew nice restaurants and great clubs like the Caves and could show them those places. Of course he was invited to join them for lunch or dinner and, also at most clubs, the band would invite him to sit in and he would play a couple of his host's favorite jazz standards while carefully sneaking little left over food items into his pockets for later. This provided Lloyd with a few free meals so he could keep on living with his nearly exhausted funds. At night he would count up his few *piastres* and scanty paper currency notes trying to calculate how much longer he could pay for the room and keep eating.

The day that Lloyd had to leave the hotel because his funds had nearly come to an end, he drug his luggage in three trips down the hill to the A.U.B. dorm where he asked them to let him store his things there until his parents returned. They probably would have let him stay there and pay later but Lloyd never liked to burden anyone and had a bit of pride although not much self respect. Gunter had

intimated that, for writing the 20 arrangements, Lloyd could stay a few days at his apartment until his parents returned. It was almost a month beyond the date that his parents had promised to return and Lloyd was worried because anything could happen in the Middle East. That evening Lloyd went to Gunter's gig and presented him with 5 of the promised arrangements then diplomatically broke the news that he would be homeless that evening. Gunter and Berta hesitantly semi-insisted that he stay with them that night and that night became two weeks as Lloyd, invisible as he tried to be, wore out his welcome several times over as a heavy burden on the formerly happy newlyweds privacy. Finally, the 20 charts were finished and they were veritable masterpieces especially in Beirut in the late 1950s.

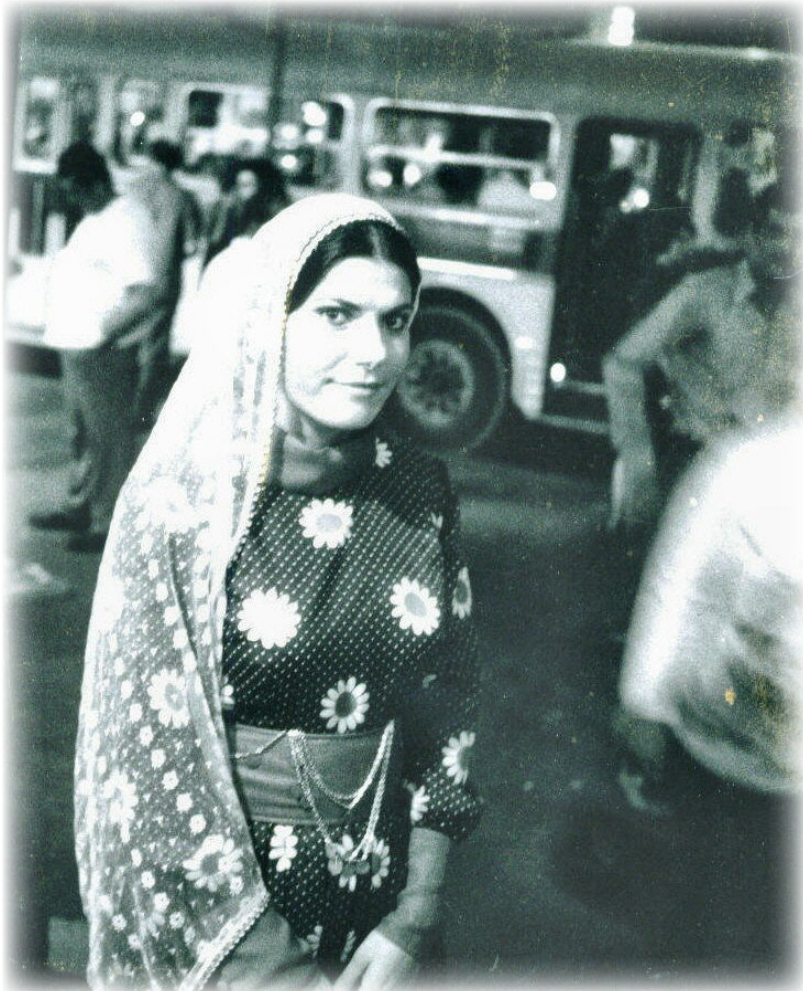
One day Lloyd wanted to visit with the Greek trumpet man who he had heard was the best in town and reportedly could have been a success in the California jazz scene if he wanted. When he found the trumpet man's apartment, he was invited in and noticed Gunter was there with the 20 arrangements talking serious business. Lloyd was thrilled that his music was apparently going to be the basis for a new fantastic band. Gunter appeared embarrassed that he was already setting up something the very day he got the arrangements; but Lloyd smiled and was exited to hear about their plans. Later that night at the apartment, Lloyd divulged his philosophy about everything. When Berta questioned "so it doesn't bother you that people take your hard work almost free and then make money from it." Lloyd laughed and quipped "not at all" then continued "I only want good jazz, good authentic music to take over the world, like the Führer wanted to take over the world, but for a different cause and in a different way. So I would even pay to have people play good jazz instead of the horrible trash that fills the radios, records and clubs all over the world. Also when someone wants something from me, I feel it is my duty to oblige. I never care about getting money; money is why the world is a mess." The couple were impressed and respected Lloyd even if he appeared emaciated and exhausted. That evening Berta fixed Lloyd a good old Dutch dinner piling lots of cheese and other goodies on the table.

The next day Lloyd went over to the dorm to see if there was any word from his delinquent parents and received a note informing him that they were back at the Phoenicia and to contact them soon. Lloyd rushed to the hotel and found their room shocking them with his pale emaciated appearance. Lloyd told them he had to move into a bad hotel then crowd in with a friend, which upset his dad who wondered what happened to the agreement he had about paying for the dorm when they returned. Lloyd said it didn't matter that everything was great and his music was being played around town and would be the basis for a future all-star club band. His parents then hired a reliable cab to take Lloyd to collect his luggage at the dorm and bring it to the Phoenicia. Then his dad contacted Gunter, thanked him for taking Lloyd in and invited Gunter and Bert to dinner at the Phoenicia where Gunter was given more money than what could be expected for the nights Lloyd stayed there. Lloyd's dad added an extra \$20 to get Lloyd to the airport for his flight to Frankfurt since Lloyd had been convinced that Germany was an important jazz center where he should try his luck there. Gunter described the lively jazz scene at the Domicile du Jazz in Frankfurt where many world-renowned jazz performers had appeared and where Germany's best jazzmen congregated. Lloyd's parents had offered to take Lloyd back to Tehran if he wanted and, although Tehran had been great and a very constructive experience, it was time to get into the big time jazz scene since he had to leave L.A. just as he was on his way to making it. At dinner, Lloyd's dad gave Gunter and Berta Lloyd's airline ticket to Frankfurt to make sure he got there and, as always, slipped Gunter an extra \$20 to keep an eye on Lloyd. The next day, his parents gave Lloyd a \$100 to get started in Frankfurt and then they left for Tehran. Lloyd had their room that night, so he washed everything in the tub again and hung it out on the veranda and started hauling his luggage over to Gunter's. This time it was a lot less because he left anything extra with his parents.

Sufi Saint & Swinger: photos for Section A, The Middle East, Chapters 1 - 7



Kurosh Ali as a Kashmiri tribesman



Mona on the Borj in Beirut in the 1970s



Sacred music, 1970s Tehran Khaneqa



Setara at Herat Nandari with Soraya



**Kurosh
playing
Herati
dutar**



central Herat in the 1970s



Mari



Kurosh Ali and Parisa



**Turkish
airport
vendor
Pervin**



Tony Scott & Lloyd Miller in Cervia Italy