

# CHAPTER ONE

## I

**I**T ALL started on 5 December 1978.

Jay Coburn, Director of Personnel for EDS Corporation Iran, sat in his office in uptown Tehran with a lot on his mind.

The office was in a three-storey concrete building known as Bucharest (because it was in an alley off Bucharest Street). Coburn was on the first floor, in a room large by American standards. It had a parquet floor, a smart wood executive desk, and a picture of the Shah on the wall. He sat with his back to the window. Through the glass door he could see into the open-plan office where his staff sat at typewriters and telephones. The glass door had curtains, but Coburn never closed them.

It was cold. It was always cold: thousands of Iranians were on strike, the city's power was intermittent, and the heating was off for several hours most days.

Coburn was a tall, broad-shouldered man, five feet eleven inches and two hundred pounds. His red-brown hair was cut businessman-short and carefully combed, with a part. Although he was only thirty-two he looked nearer to forty. On closer examination, his youth showed in his attractive, open face and ready smile; but

he had an air of early maturity, the look of a man who grew up too fast.

All his life he had shouldered responsibility: as a boy, working in his father's flower shop; at the age of twenty, as a helicopter pilot in Vietnam; as a young husband and father; and now, as Personnel Director, holding in his hands the safety of 131 American employees and their 220 dependents in a city where mob violence ruled the streets.

Today, like every day, he was making phone calls around Tehran trying to find out where the fighting was, where it would break out next, and what the prospects were for the next few days.

He called the US Embassy at least once a day. The Embassy had an information room which was manned twenty-four hours a day. Americans would call in from different areas of the city to report demonstrations and riots, and the Embassy would spread the news that this district or that was to be avoided. But for advance information and advice Coburn found the Embassy close to useless. At weekly briefings, which he attended faithfully, he would always be told that Americans should stay indoors as much as possible and keep away from crowds at all costs, but that the Shah was in control and evacuation was not recommended at this time. Coburn understood their problem – if the US Embassy said the Shah was tottering, the Shah would surely fall – but they were so cautious they hardly gave out any information at all.

Disenchanted with the Embassy, the American business community in Tehran had set up its own information

network. The biggest US corporation in town was Bell Helicopter, whose Iran operation was run by a retired Major-General, Robert N. Mackinnon. Mackinnon had a first-class intelligence service and he shared everything. Coburn also knew a couple of intelligence officers in the US military and he called them.

Today the city was relatively quiet: there were no major demonstrations. The last outbreak of serious trouble had been three days earlier, on 2 December, the first day of the general strike, where seven hundred people had been reported killed in street fighting. According to Coburn's sources the lull could be expected to continue until 10 December, the Moslem holy day of Ashura.

Coburn was worried about Ashura. The Moslem winter holiday was not a bit like Christmas. A day of fasting and mourning for the death of the Prophet's grandson Husayn, its keynote was remorse. There would be massive street processions, during which the more devout believers would flog themselves. In that atmosphere hysteria and violence could erupt fast.

This year, Coburn feared, the violence might be directed against Americans.

A series of nasty incidents had convinced him that anti-American feeling was growing rapidly. A card had been pushed through his door saying: 'If you value your life and possessions, get out of Iran.' Friends of his had received similar postcards. Spray-can artists had painted 'Americans live here' on the wall of his house. The bus which took his children to the Tehran American School had been rocked by a crowd of demonstrators. Other

EDS employees had been yelled at in the streets and had their cars damaged. One scary afternoon, Iranians at the Ministry of Health and Social Welfare – EDS’s biggest customer – had gone on the rampage, smashing windows and burning pictures of the Shah, while EDS executives in the building barricaded themselves inside an office until the mob went away.

In some ways the most sinister development was the change in the attitude of Coburn’s landlord.

Like most Americans in Tehran, Coburn rented half of a two-family home: he and his wife lived upstairs, and the landlord’s family lived on the ground floor. When the Coburns had arrived, in March of that year, the landlord had taken them under his wing. The two families had become friendly. Coburn and the landlord discussed religion: the landlord gave him an English translation of the Koran, and the landlord’s daughter would read to her father out of Coburn’s Bible. They all went on weekend trips to the countryside together. Scott, Coburn’s seven-year-old son, played soccer in the street with the landlord’s boys. One weekend the Coburns had the rare privilege of attending a Moslem wedding. It had been fascinating. Men and women had been segregated all day, so Coburn and Scott went with the men, his wife Liz and their three daughters went with the women, and Coburn never got to see the bride at all.

After the summer things had gradually changed. The weekend trips stopped. The landlord’s sons were forbidden to play with Scott in the street. Eventually all contact between the two families ceased even within the confines

of the house and its courtyard, and the children would be reprimanded for just speaking to Coburn's family.

The landlord had not suddenly started hating Americans. One evening he had proved that he still cared for the Coburns. There had been a shooting incident in the street: one of his sons had been out after curfew, and soldiers had fired at the boy as he ran home and scrambled over the courtyard wall. Coburn and Liz had watched the whole thing from their upstairs veranda, and Liz had been scared. The landlord had come up to tell them what had happened and reassure them that all was well. But he clearly felt that for the safety of his family he could not be *seen* to be friendly with Americans: he knew which way the wind was blowing. For Coburn it was yet another bad sign.

Now, Coburn heard on the grapevine, there was wild talk in the mosques and bazaars of a holy war against Americans beginning on Ashura. It was five days away, yet the Americans in Tehran were surprisingly calm.

Coburn remembered when the curfew had been introduced: it had not even interfered with the monthly EDS poker game. He and his fellow-gamblers had simply brought their wives and children, turned it into a slumber party, and stayed until morning. They had got used to the sound of gunfire. Most of the heavy fighting was in the older, southern sector where the bazaar was, and in the area around the University; but everyone heard shots from time to time. After the first few occasions they had become curiously indifferent to it. Whoever was speaking would pause, then continue when the shooting stopped, just as he might in the States

when a jet aircraft passed overhead. It was as if they could not imagine that shots might be aimed at *them*.

Coburn was *not* blasé about gunfire. He had been shot at rather a lot during his young life. In Vietnam he had piloted both helicopter gunships, in support of ground operations, and troop/supply-carrying ships, landing and taking off in battlefields. He had killed people, and he had seen men die. In those days the Army gave an Air Medal for every twenty-five hours of combat flying: Coburn had come home with thirty-nine of them. He also got two Distinguished Flying Crosses, a Silver Star, and a bullet in his calf – the most vulnerable part of a helicopter pilot. He had learned, during that year, that he could handle himself pretty well in action, when there was so much to do and no time to be frightened. But every time he returned from a mission, when it was all over and he could think about what he had done, his knees would shake.

In a strange way he was grateful for the experience. He had grown up fast, and it had given him an edge over his contemporaries in business life. It had also given him a healthy respect for the sound of gunfire.

But most of his colleagues did not feel that way, nor did their wives. Whenever evacuation was discussed they resisted the idea. They had time, work and pride invested in EDS Corporation Iran, and they did not want to walk away from it. Their wives had turned the rented apartments into real homes, and they were making plans for Christmas. The children had their schools, their friends, their bicycles and their pets.

Surely, they were telling themselves, if we just lie low and hang on, the trouble will blow over.

Coburn had tried to persuade Liz to take the kids back to the States, not just for their safety, but because the time might come when he had to evacuate some 350 people all at once, and he would need to give that job his complete undivided attention, without being distracted by private anxiety for his own family. Liz had refused to go.

He sighed when he thought of Liz. She was funny and feisty and everyone enjoyed her company, but she was not a good corporate wife. EDS demanded a lot from its executives: if you needed to work all night to get the job done, you worked all night. Liz resented that. Back in the States, working as a recruiter, Coburn had often been away from home Monday to Friday, travelling all over the country, and she had hated it. She was happy in Tehran because he was home every night. If he was going to stay here, she said, so was she. The children liked it here too. It was the first time they had lived outside the United States, and they were intrigued by the different language, and culture of Iran. Kim, the eldest at eleven, was too full of confidence to get worried. Kristi, the eight-year-old, was somewhat anxious, but then she was the emotional one, always the quickest to over-react. Both Scott, seven, and Kelly, the baby at four, were too young to comprehend the danger.

So they stayed, like everyone else, and waited for things to get better – or worse.

Coburn's thoughts were interrupted by a tap at the

door, and Majid walked in. A short, stocky man of about fifty with a luxuriant moustache, he had once been wealthy: his tribe had owned a great deal of land and had lost it in the land reform of the sixties. Now he worked for Coburn as an administrative assistant, dealing with the Iranian bureaucracy. He spoke fluent English and was highly resourceful. Coburn liked him a lot: Majid had gone out of his way to be helpful when Coburn's family arrived in Iran.

'Come in,' Coburn said. 'Sit down. What's on your mind?'

'It's about Fara.'

Coburn nodded. Fara was Majid's daughter, and she worked with her father: her job was to make sure that all American employees always had up-to-date visas and work permits. 'Some problem?' Coburn said.

'The police asked her to take two American passports from our files *without telling anyone*.'

Coburn frowned. 'Any passports in particular?'

'Paul Chiapparone's and Bill Gaylord's.'

Paul was Coburn's boss, the head of EDS Corporation Iran. Bill was second-in-command and manager of their biggest project, the contract with the Ministry of Health. 'What the hell is going on?' Coburn said.

'Fara is in great danger,' Majid said. 'She was instructed not to tell anyone about this. She came to me for advice. Of course I had to tell you, but I'm afraid she will get into very serious trouble.'

'Wait a minute, let's back up,' Coburn said. 'How did this happen?'

'She got a telephone call this morning from the

Police Department, Residence Permit Bureau, American Section. They asked her to come to the office. They said it was about James Nyfeler. She thought it was routine. She arrived at the office at eleven-thirty and reported to the Head of the American Section. First he asked for Mr Nyfeler's passport and residence permit. She told him that Mr Nyfeler is no longer in Iran. Then he asked about Paul Bucha. She said that Mr Bucha also was no longer in the country.'

'Did she?'

'Yes.'

Bucha *was* in Iran, but Fara might not have known that, Coburn thought. Bucha had been resident here, had left the country, and had come back in, briefly: he was due to fly back to Paris tomorrow.

Majid continued: 'The officer then said: "I suppose the other two are gone also?" Fara saw that he had four files on his desk, and she asked which other two. He told her Mr Chiapparone and Mr Gaylord. She said she had just picked up Mr Gaylord's residence permit earlier this morning. The officer told her to get the passports and residence permits of both Mr Gaylord and Mr Chiapparone and bring them to him. She was to do it quietly, not to cause alarm.'

'What did she say?' Coburn asked.

'She told him she could not bring them today. He instructed her to bring them tomorrow morning. He told her she was officially responsible for this, and he made sure there were witnesses to these instructions.'

'This doesn't make any sense,' Coburn said.

'If they learn that Fara has disobeyed them—'

'We'll think of a way to protect her,' Coburn said. He was wondering whether Americans were obliged to surrender their passports on demand. He had done so, recently, after a minor car accident, but had later been told he did not have to. 'They didn't say why they wanted the passports?'

'They did not.'

Bucha and Nyfeler were the predecessors of Chiapparone and Gaylord. Was that a clue? Coburn did not know.

Coburn stood up. 'The first decision we have to make is what Fara is going to tell the police tomorrow morning,' he said. 'I'll talk to Paul Chiapparone and get back to you.'

On the ground floor of the building Paul Chiapparone sat in his office. He, too, had a parquet floor, an executive desk, a picture of the Shah on the wall and a lot on his mind.

Paul was thirty-nine years old, of middle height, and a little overweight, mainly because he was fond of good food. With his olive skin and thick black hair he looked very Italian. His job was to build a complete modern social security system in a primitive country. It was not easy.

In the early seventies Iran had had a rudimentary social security system which was inefficient at collecting contributions and so easy to defraud that one man could draw benefit several times over for the same illness. When the Shah decided to spend some of his twenty

billion dollars a year oil revenues creating a welfare state, EDS got the contract. EDS ran Medicare and Medicaid programmes for several States in the US, but in Iran they had to start from scratch. They had to issue a social security card to each of Iran's thirty-two million people, organize payroll deductions so that wage-earners paid their contributions, and process claims for benefits. The whole system would be run by computers – EDS's speciality.

The difference between installing a data processing system in the States and doing the same job in Iran was, Paul found, like the difference between making a cake from a packet mix and making one the old-fashioned way with all the original ingredients. It was often frustrating. Iranians did not have the can-do attitude of American business executives, and seemed often to create problems instead of solving them. At EDS headquarters back in Dallas, Texas, not only were people expected to do the impossible, but it was usually due yesterday. Here in Iran everything was impossible and in any case not due until 'fardah' – usually translated 'tomorrow', in practice 'some time in the future'.

Paul had attacked the problems in the only way he knew: by hard work and determination. He was no intellectual genius. As a boy he had found school work difficult, but his Italian father, with the immigrant's typical faith in education, had pressured him to study, and he had got good grades. Sheer persistence had served him well ever since. He could remember the early days of EDS in the States, back in the sixties, when every new contract could make or break the company;

and he had helped build it into one of the most dynamic and successful corporations in the world. The Iranian operation would go the same way, he had been sure, particularly when Jay Coburn's recruitment and training programme began to deliver more Iranians capable of top management.

He had been all wrong, and he was only just beginning to understand why.

When he and his family arrived in Iran, in August 1977, the petrodollar boom was already over. The government was running out of money. That year an anti-inflation programme increased unemployment just when a bad harvest was driving yet more starving peasants into the cities. The tyrannical rule of the Shah was weakened by the human-rights policies of American President Jimmy Carter. The time was ripe for political unrest.

For a while Paul did not take much notice of local politics. He knew there were rumblings of discontent, but that was true of just about every country in the world, and the Shah seemed to have as firm a grip on the reins of power as any ruler. Like the rest of the world, Paul missed the significance of the events of the first half of 1978.

On 7 January the newspaper *Etelaat* published a scurrilous attack on an exiled clergyman called Ayatollah Khomeini, alleging, among other things, that he was homosexual. The following day, eighty miles from Tehran in the town of Qom – the principal centre of religious education in the country – outraged theology students staged a protest sit-in which was bloodily

broken up by the military and the police. The confrontation escalated, and seventy people were killed in two more days of disturbances. The clergy organized a memorial procession for the dead forty days later in accordance with Islamic tradition. There was more violence during the procession, and the dead were commemorated in another memorial forty days on . . . The processions continued, and grew larger and more violent, through the first six months of the year.

With hindsight, Paul could see that calling these marches 'funeral processions' had been a way to circumvent the Shah's ban on political demonstrations. But at the time he had had no idea that a massive political movement was building. Nor had anyone else.

In August this year Paul went home to the States on leave. (So did William Sullivan, the US Ambassador to Iran.) Paul loved all kinds of water sports, and he had gone to a sports fishing tournament in Ocean City, New Jersey, with his cousin Joe Porreca. His wife Ruthie and the children, Karen and Ann Marie, went to Chicago to visit Ruthie's parents. Paul was a little anxious because the Ministry of Health still had not paid EDS's bill for the month of June; but it was not the first time they had been late with a payment, and Paul had left the problem in the hands of his second-in-command, Bill Gaylord, and he was fairly confident Bill would get the money in.

While he was in the US the news from Iran was bad. Martial law was declared on 7 September, and the following day more than a hundred people were killed by soldiers during a demonstration in Jaleh Square in the heart of Tehran.

When the Chiapparone family came back to Iran the very air seemed different. For the first time Paul and Ruthie could hear shooting in the streets at night. They were alarmed: suddenly they realized that trouble for the Iranians meant trouble for *them*. There was a series of strikes. The electricity was continually being cut off, so they dined by candlelight and Paul wore his topcoat in the office to keep warm. It became more and more difficult to get money out of the banks, and Paul started a cheque-cashing service at the office for employees. When they got low on heating oil for their home Paul had to walk around the streets until he found a tanker, then bribe the driver to come to the house and deliver.

His business problems were worse. The Minister of Health and Social Welfare, Dr Sheikholeslamizadeh, had been arrested under Article 5 of martial law, which permitted a prosecutor to jail anyone without giving a reason. Also in jail was Deputy Minister Reza Neghabat, with whom Paul had worked closely. The Ministry still had not paid its June bill, nor any since, and now owed EDS more than four million dollars.

For two months Paul tried to get the money. The individuals he had dealt with previously had all gone. Their replacements usually did not return his calls. Sometimes someone would promise to look into the problem and call back. After waiting a week for the call that never came, Paul would telephone once again, to be told that the person he spoke to last week had now left the Ministry. Meetings would be arranged then cancelled. The debt mounted at the rate of \$1.4 million a month.

On 14 November Paul wrote to Dr Heidargholi Emrani, the Deputy Minister in charge of the Social Security Organization, giving formal notice that if the Ministry did not pay up within a month EDS would stop work. The threat was repeated on 4 December by Paul's boss, the President of EDS World, at a personal meeting with Dr Emrani.

That was yesterday.

If EDS pulled out, the whole Iranian social security system would collapse. Yet it was becoming more and more apparent that the country was bankrupt and simply could not pay its bills. What, Paul wondered, would Dr Emrani do now?

He was still wondering when Jay Coburn walked in with the answer.

At first, however, it did not occur to Paul that the attempt to steal his passport might have been intended to keep him, and therefore EDS, in Iran.

When Coburn had given him the facts he said: 'What the hell did they do that for?'

'I don't know. Majid doesn't know, and Fara doesn't know.'

Paul looked at him. The two men had become close in the last month. For the rest of the employees Paul was putting on a brave face, but with Coburn he had been able to close the door and say OK, what do you really think?

Coburn said: 'The first question is, What do we do about Fara? She could be in trouble.'

‘She has to give them some kind of an answer.’

‘A show of co-operation?’

‘She could go back and tell them that Nyfeler and Bucha are no longer resident . . .’

‘She already told them.’

‘She could take their exit visas as proof.’

‘Yeah,’ Coburn said dubiously. ‘But it’s you and Bill they’re really interested in now.’

‘She could say that the passports aren’t kept in the office.’

‘They may know that’s not true – Fara may even have taken passports down there in the past.’

‘Say senior executives don’t have to keep their passports in the office.’

‘That might work.’

‘Any convincing story to the effect that she was physically unable to do what they asked her.’

‘Good. I’ll discuss it with her and Majid.’ Coburn thought for a moment. ‘You know, Bucha has a reservation on a flight out tomorrow. He could just go.’

‘He probably should – they think he’s not here anyway.’

‘You could do the same.’

Paul reflected. Maybe he should get out now. What would the Iranians do then? They might just try to detain someone else. ‘No,’ he said. ‘If we’re going, I should be the last to leave.’

‘Are we going?’ Coburn asked.

‘I don’t know.’ Every day for weeks they had asked each other that question. Coburn had developed an evacuation plan which could be put into effect instantly.

Paul had been hesitating, with his finger on the button. He knew that his ultimate boss, back in Dallas, wanted him to evacuate – but it meant abandoning the project on which he had worked so hard for the last sixteen months. ‘I don’t know,’ he repeated. ‘I’ll call Dallas.’

That night Coburn was at home, in bed with Liz, and fast asleep when the phone rang.

He picked it up in the dark. ‘Yeah?’

‘This is Paul.’

‘Hello.’ Coburn turned on the light and looked at his wristwatch. It was 2 a.m.

‘We’re going to evacuate,’ Paul said.

‘You got it.’

Coburn cradled the phone and sat on the edge of the bed. In a way it was a relief. There would be two or three days of frantic activity, but then he would know that the people whose safety had been worrying him for so long were back in the States, out of reach of these crazy Iranians.

He ran over in his mind the plans he had made for just this moment. First he had to inform a hundred and thirty families that they would be leaving the country within the next forty-eight hours. He had divided the city into sectors, with a team leader for each sector: he would call the leaders, and it would be their job to call the families. He had drafted leaflets for the evacuees telling them where to go and what to do. He just had to fill in the blanks with dates, times and flight numbers, then have the leaflets duplicated and distributed.

He had picked a lively and imaginative young Iranian systems engineer, Rashid, and given him the job of taking care of the homes, cars and pets which would be left behind by the fleeing Americans and – eventually – shipping their possessions to the US. He had appointed a small logistics group to organize plane tickets and transport to the airport.

Finally, he had conducted a small-scale rehearsal of the evacuation with a few people. It had worked.

Coburn got dressed and made coffee. There was nothing he could do for the next couple of hours, but he was too anxious and impatient to sleep.

At 4 a.m. he called the half-dozen members of the logistics group, woke them, and told them to meet him at the 'Bucharest' office immediately after curfew.

Curfew began at nine each evening and ended at five in the morning. For an hour Coburn sat waiting, smoking and drinking a lot of coffee and going over his notes.

When the cuckoo clock in the hall chirped five he was at the front door, ready to go.

Outside there was a thick fog. He got into his car and headed for Bucharest, crawling along at fifteen miles per hour.

Three blocks from his house, half a dozen soldiers leaped out of the fog and stood in a semicircle in front of his car, pointing their rifles at his windscreen.

'Oh, shit,' Coburn said.

One of the soldiers was still loading his gun. He was trying to put the clip in backwards, and it would not fit.

He dropped it, and went down on one knee, scrabbling around on the ground looking for it. Coburn would have laughed if he had not been scared.

An officer yelled at Coburn in Farsi. Coburn lowered the window. He showed the officer his wristwatch and said: 'It's after five.'

The soldiers had a conference. The officer came back and asked Coburn for his identification.

Coburn waited anxiously. This would be the worst possible day to get arrested. Would the officer believe that Coburn's watch was right and his was wrong?

At last the soldiers got out of the road and the officer waved Coburn on.

Coburn breathed a sigh of relief and drove slowly on.

Iran was like that.

## II

Coburn's logistics group went to work making plane reservations, chartering buses to take people to the airport, and photocopying handout leaflets. At 10 a.m. Coburn got the team leaders into Bucharest and started them calling the evacuees.

He got reservations for most of them on a Pan Am flight to Istanbul on Friday 8 December. The remainder – including Liz Coburn and the four children – would get a Lufthansa flight to Frankfurt that same day.

As soon as the reservations were confirmed, two top executives at EDS headquarters, Merv Stauffer and T. J.

Marquez, left Dallas for Istanbul to meet the evacuees, shepherd them to hotels, and organize the next stage of their flight back home.

During the day there was a small change in plan. Paul was still reluctant to abandon his work in Iran. He proposed that a skeleton staff of about ten senior men stay behind, to keep the office ticking over, in the hope that Iran would quiet down and EDS would eventually be able to resume working normally. Dallas agreed. Among those who volunteered to stay were Paul himself, his deputy Bill Gaylord, Jay Coburn, and most of Coburn's evacuation logistics group. Two people who stayed behind reluctantly were Carl and Vickie Commons: Vickie was nine months pregnant and would leave after her baby was born.

On Friday morning Coburn's team, their pockets full of ten thousand rial (about \$140) notes for bribes, virtually took over a section of Mehrabad Airport in western Tehran. Coburn had people writing tickets behind the Pan Am counter, people at passport control, people in the departure lounge, and people running baggage handling equipment. The plane was overbooked: bribes ensured that no one from EDS was bumped off the flight.

There were two especially tense moments. An EDS wife with an Australian passport had been unable to get an exit visa because the Iranian government offices which issued exit visas were all on strike. (Her husband and children had American passports and therefore did not need exit visas.) When the husband reached the passport control desk, he handed over his passport and

his children's in a stack with six or seven other passports. As the guard tried to sort them out, EDS people in the queue behind began to push forward and cause a commotion. Some of Coburn's team gathered around the desk asking loud questions and pretending to get angry about the delay. In the confusion the woman with the Australian passport walked through the departure lounge without being stopped.

Another EDS family had adopted an Iranian baby and had not yet been able to get a passport for the child. Only a few months old, the baby would fall asleep, lying face down, on its mother's forearm. Another EDS wife, Kathy Marketos – of whom it was said that she would try anything once – put the sleeping baby on her own forearm, draped her raincoat over it, and carried it out to the plane.

However, it was many hours before anyone got on to a plane. Both flights were delayed. There was no food to be bought at the airport and the evacuees were famished, so just before curfew some of Coburn's team drove around the city buying anything edible they could find. They purchased the entire contents of several *kuche* stalls – street-corner stands that sold candy, fruit and cigarettes – and they went into a Kentucky Fried Chicken and did a deal for its stock of bread rolls. Back at the airport, passing food out to EDS people in the departure lounge, they were almost mobbed by the other hungry passengers waiting for the same flights. On the way back downtown two of the team were caught and arrested for being out after curfew, but the soldier who stopped them got distracted by another car which

tried to escape, and the EDS men drove off while he was shooting the other way.

The Istanbul flight left just after midnight. The Frankfurt flight took off the next day, thirty-one hours late.

Coburn and most of the team spent the night at Bucharest. They had no one to go home to.

While Coburn was running the evacuation, Paul had been trying to find out who wanted to confiscate his passport and why.

His administrative assistant, Rich Gallagher, was a young American who was good at dealing with Iranian bureaucracy. Gallagher was one of those who had volunteered to stay in Tehran. His wife Cathy had also stayed behind. She had a good job with the US military in Tehran. The Gallaghers did not want to leave. Furthermore, they had no children to worry about – just a poodle called Buffy.

The day Fara was asked to take the passports – 5 December – Gallagher visited the US Embassy with one of the people whose passports had been demanded: Paul Bucha, who no longer worked in Iran but happened to be in town on a visit.

They met with Consul General Lou Goelz. Goelz, an experienced consul in his fifties, was a portly balding man with a fringe of white hair: he would have made a good Santa Claus. With Goelz was an Iranian member of the consular staff, Ali Jordan.

Goelz advised Bucha to catch his plane. Fara had told

the police – in all innocence – that Bucha was not in Iran, and they had appeared to believe her. There was every chance that Bucha could sneak out.

Goelz also offered to hold the passports and residence permits of Paul and Bill for safekeeping. That way, if the police made a formal demand for the documents, EDS would be able to refer them to the Embassy.

Meanwhile, Ali Jordan would contact the police and try to find out what the hell was going on.

Later that day the passports and papers were delivered to the Embassy.

Next morning Bucha caught his plane and got out. Gallagher called the Embassy. Ali Jordan had talked to General Biglari of the Tehran Police Department. Biglari had said that Paul and Bill were being detained in the country and would be arrested if they tried to leave.

Gallagher asked why.

They were being held as ‘material witnesses in investigation’, Jordan understood.

‘*What* investigation?’

Jordan did not know.

Paul was puzzled, as well as anxious, when Gallagher reported all this. He had not been involved in a road accident, had not witnessed a crime, had no connections with the CIA . . . Who or what was being investigated? EDS? Or was the investigation just an excuse for keeping Paul and Bill in Iran so that they would continue to run the social security system’s computers?

The police had made one concession. Ali Jordan had argued that the police were entitled to confiscate the

residence permits, which were the property of the Iranian Government, but not the passports, which were US Government property. General Biglari had conceded this.

Next day Gallagher and Ali Jordan went to the police station to hand the documents over to Biglari. On the way Gallagher asked Jordan whether he thought there was a chance Paul and Bill would be accused of wrongdoing.

‘I doubt that very much,’ said Jordan.

At the police station the General warned Jordan that the Embassy would be held responsible if Paul and Bill left the country by any means – such as a US military aircraft.

The following day – 8 December, the day of the evacuation – Lou Goelz called EDS. He had found out, through a ‘source’ at the Iranian Ministry of Justice, that the investigation in which Paul and Bill were supposed to be material witnesses was an investigation into corruption charges against the jailed Minister of Health, Dr Sheikholeslamizadeh.

It was something of a relief to Paul to know, at last, what the whole thing was about. He could happily tell the investigators the truth: EDS paid no bribes. He doubted whether anyone had bribed the Minister. Iranian bureaucrats were notoriously corrupt, but Dr Sheik – as Paul called him for short – seemed to come from a different mould. An orthopaedic surgeon by training, he had a perceptive mind and an impressive ability to master detail. In the Ministry of Health he had surrounded himself with a group of progressive young

technocrats who found ways to cut through red tape and get things done. The EDS project was only part of his ambitious plan to bring Iranian health and welfare services up to American standards. Paul did not think Dr Sheik was lining his own pockets at the same time.

Paul had nothing to fear – if Goelz’s ‘source’ was telling the truth. But was he? Dr Sheik had been arrested three months ago. Was it a coincidence that the Iranians had suddenly realized that Paul and Bill were material witnesses when Paul told them that EDS would leave Iran unless the Ministry paid its bills?

After the evacuation, the remaining EDS men moved into two houses and stayed there, playing poker, during 10 and 11 December, the holy days of Ashura. There was a high-stakes house and a low-stakes house. Both Paul and Coburn were at the high-stakes house. For protection they invited Coburn’s ‘spooks’ – his two contacts in military intelligence – who carried guns. No weapons were allowed at the poker table, so the spooks had to leave their firearms in the hall.

Contrary to expectations, Ashura passed relatively peacefully: millions of Iranians attended anti-Shah demonstrations all over the country, but there was little violence.

After Ashura, Paul and Bill again considered skipping the country, but they were in for a shock. As a preliminary they asked Lou Goelz at the Embassy to give them back their passports. Goelz said that if he did that he would be obliged to inform General Biglari. That would amount to a warning to the police that Paul and Bill were trying to sneak out.

Goelz insisted that he had told EDS, when he took the passports, that this was his deal with the police; but he must have said it rather quietly because no one could remember it.

Paul was furious. *Why* had Goelz had to make *any* kind of deal with the police? He was under no obligation to tell them what he did with an American passport. It was not his job to help the police detain Paul and Bill in Iran, for God's sake! The Embassy was there to *help Americans*, wasn't it?

Couldn't Goelz renege on his stupid agreement, and return the passports quietly, perhaps informing the police a couple of days later, when Paul and Bill were safely home? Absolutely not, said Goelz. If he quarrelled with the police they would make trouble for everyone else, and Goelz had to worry about the other twelve thousand Americans still in Iran. Besides, the names of Paul and Bill were now on the 'stop list' held by the airport police: even with all their documents in order they would never get through passport control.

When the news that Paul and Bill were well and truly stuck in Iran reached Dallas, EDS and its lawyers went into high gear. Their Washington contacts were not as good as they would have been under a Republican administration, but they still had some friends. They talked to Bob Strauss, a high-powered White House troubleshooter who happened to be a Texan; Admiral Tom Moorer, a former Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, who knew many of the generals now running Iran's military government; and Richard Helms, past Director of the CIA and a former US Ambassador to

Iran. As a result of the pressure they put on the State Department, the US Ambassador in Tehran, William Sullivan, raised the case of Paul and Bill in a meeting with the Iranian Prime Minister, General Azhari.

None of this brought any results.

The thirty days which Paul had given the Iranians to pay their bill ran out, and on 16 December he wrote to Dr Emrani formally terminating the contract. But he had not given up. He asked a handful of evacuated executives to come back to Tehran, as a sign of EDS's willingness to try to resolve its problems with the Ministry. Some of the returning executives, encouraged by the peaceful Ashura, even brought their families back.

Neither the Embassy nor EDS's lawyers in Tehran had been able to find out *who* had ordered Paul and Bill to be detained. It was Majid, Fara's father, who eventually got the information out of General Biglari. The investigator was examining magistrate Hosain Dadgar, a mid-level functionary within the office of the public prosecutor, in a department which dealt with crimes by civil servants and had very broad powers. Dadgar was conducting the inquiry into Dr Sheik, the jailed former Minister of Health.

Since the Embassy could not persuade the Iranians to let Paul and Bill leave the country, and would not give back their passports quietly, could they at least arrange for this Dadgar to question Paul and Bill as soon as possible so that they could go home for Christmas? Christmas did not mean much to the Iranians, said Goelz, but New Year did, so he would try to fix a meeting before then.

During the second half of December the rioting started again (and the first thing the returning executives did was plan for a second evacuation). The general strike continued, and petroleum exports – the government's most important source of income – ground to a halt, reducing to zero EDS's chances of getting paid. So few Iranians turned up for work at the Ministry that there was nothing for the EDS men to do, and Paul sent half of them home to the States for Christmas.

Paul packed his bags, closed up his house, and moved into the Hilton, ready to go home at the first opportunity.

The city was thick with rumours. Jay Coburn fished up most of them in his net and brought the interesting ones to Paul. One more disquieting than most came from Bunny Fleischaker, an American girl with friends at the Ministry of Justice. Bunny had worked for EDS in the States, and she kept in touch here in Tehran although she was no longer with the company. She called Coburn to say that the Ministry of Justice planned to arrest Paul and Bill.

Paul discussed this with Coburn. It contradicted what they were hearing from the US Embassy. The Embassy's advice was surely better than Bunny Fleischaker's, they agreed. They decided to take no action.

Paul spent Christmas Day quietly, with a few colleagues, at the home of Pat Sculley, a young EDS manager who had volunteered to return to Tehran. Sculley's wife Mary had also come back and she cooked Christmas dinner. Paul missed Ruthie and the children.

Two days after Christmas the Embassy called. They had succeeded in setting up a meeting for Paul and Bill with examining magistrate Hosain Dadgar. The meeting was to take place the following morning, 28 December, at the Ministry of Health building on Eisenhower Avenue.

Bill Gaylord came into Paul's office a little after nine, carrying a cup of coffee, dressed in the EDS uniform: business suit, white shirt, quiet tie, black brogue shoes.

Like Paul, Bill was thirty-nine, of middle height, and stocky; but there the resemblance ended. Paul had dark colouring, heavy eyebrows, deep-set eyes and a big nose: in casual clothes he was often mistaken for an Iranian until he opened his mouth and spoke English with a New York accent. Bill had a flat, round face and very white skin: nobody would take him for anything but an Anglo.

They had a lot in common. Both were Catholic, although Bill was more devout. They loved good food. Both had trained as systems engineers and joined EDS in the mid-sixties, Bill in 1965 and Paul in 1966. Both had had splendid careers with EDS, but although Paul had joined a year later he was now senior to Bill. Bill knew the health care business inside out, and he was a first-class 'people manager', but he was not as pushy and dynamic as Paul. Bill was a deep thinker and a careful organizer. Paul would never have to worry about Bill making an important presentation: Bill would have prepared every word.

They worked together well. When Paul was hasty, Bill would make him pause and reflect. When Bill wanted to plan his way around every bump in the road, Paul would tell him just to get in and drive.

They had been acquainted in the States but had got to know one another well in the last nine months. When Bill had arrived in Tehran, last March, he had lived at the Chiapparones' house until his wife Emily and the children came over. Paul felt almost protective toward him. It was a shame that Bill had had nothing but problems here in Iran.

Bill was much more worried by the rioting and the shooting than most of the others – perhaps because he had not been here long, perhaps because he was more of a worrier by nature. He also took the passport problem more seriously than Paul. At one time he had even suggested that the two of them take a train to the north-east of Iran and cross the border into Russia, on the grounds that nobody would expect American businessmen to escape via the Soviet Union.

Bill also missed Emily and the children badly, and Paul felt somewhat responsible, because he had asked Bill to come to Iran.

Still, it was almost over. Today they would see Mr Dadgar and get their passports back. Bill had a reservation on a plane out tomorrow. Emily was planning a welcome-home party for him on New Year's Eve. Soon all this would seem like a bad dream.

Paul smiled at Bill. 'Ready to go?'

'Any time.'

'Let's get Abolhasan.' Paul picked up the phone.

Abolhasan was the most senior Iranian employee, and advised Paul on Iranian business methods. The son of a distinguished lawyer, he was married to an American woman, and spoke very good English. One of his jobs was translating EDS's contracts into Farsi. Today he would translate for Paul and Bill at their meeting with Dadgar.

He came immediately to Paul's office and the three men left. They did not take a lawyer with them. According to the Embassy, this meeting would be routine, the questioning informal. To take lawyers along would not only be pointless, but might antagonize Mr Dadgar and lead him to suspect that Paul and Bill had something to hide. Paul would have liked to have a member of the Embassy staff present, but this idea also had been turned down by Lou Goelz: it was not normal procedure to send Embassy representatives to a meeting such as this. However, Goelz had advised Paul and Bill to take with them documents establishing when they had come to Iran, what their official positions were, and the scope of their responsibilities.

As the car negotiated its way through the usual insane Tehran traffic, Paul felt depressed. He was glad to be going home, but he hated to admit failure. He had come to Iran to build up EDS's business here, and he found himself dismantling it. Whatever way you looked at it the company's first overseas venture had been a failure. It was not Paul's fault that the government of Iran had run out of money, but that was small consolation: excuses did not make profits.

They drove down the tree-lined Eisenhower Avenue,

as wide and straight as any American highway, and pulled into the courtyard of a square, ten-storey building set back from the street and guarded by soldiers with automatic rifles. This was the Social Security Organization of the Ministry of Health and Social Welfare. It was to have been the power-house of the new Iranian welfare state: here, side by side, the Iranian government and EDS had worked to build a social security system. EDS occupied the entire seventh floor. Bill's office was there.

Paul, Bill and Abolhasan showed their passes and went in. The corridors were dirty and poorly decorated, and the building was cold: the heat was off again. They were directed to the office Mr Dadgar was using.

They found him in a small room with dirty walls, sitting behind an old grey steel desk. In front of him on the desk were a notebook and a pen. Through the window Paul could see the data centre EDS was building next door.

Abolhasan introduced everyone. There was an Iranian woman sitting on a chair beside Dadgar's desk: her name was Mrs Nourbash, and she was Dadgar's interpreter.

They all sat down on dilapidated metal chairs. Tea was served. Dadgar began to speak in Farsi. His voice was soft but rather deep, and his expression was blank. Paul studied him as he waited for the translation. Dadgar was a short, stocky man in his fifties, and for some reason he made Paul think of Archie Bunker. His complexion was dark and his hair was combed forward,

as if to hide the fact that it was receding. He had a moustache and glasses, and he wore a sober suit.

Dadgar finished speaking, and Abolhasan said: 'He warns you that he has the power to arrest you if he finds your answers to his questions unsatisfactory. In case you did not realize this, he says you may postpone the interview to give your lawyers time to arrange bail.'

Paul was surprised by this development, but he evaluated it fast, just like any other business decision. OK, he thought, the worst thing that can happen is that he won't believe us and he will arrest us – but we're not murderers, we'll be out on bail in twenty-four hours. Then we might be confined to the country, and we would have to meet with our attorneys and try to work things out . . . which is no worse than the situation we're in now.

He looked at Bill. 'What do you think?'

Bill shrugged. 'Goelz says this meeting is routine. The stuff about bail sounds like a formality – like reading you your rights.'

Paul nodded. 'And the last thing we want is a postponement.'

'Then let's get it over with.'

Paul turned to Mrs Nourbash. 'Please tell Mr Dadgar that neither of us has committed a crime, and neither of us has any knowledge of anyone else committing a crime, so we are confident that no charges will be made against us, and we would like to get this finished up today so that we can go home.'

Mrs Nourbash translated.

Dadgar said he wanted first to interview Paul alone. Bill should come back in an hour.

Bill left.

Bill went up to his office on the seventh floor. He picked up the phone, called Bucharest, and reached Lloyd Briggs. Briggs was number three in the hierarchy after Paul and Bill.

‘Dadgar says he has the power to arrest us,’ Bill told Briggs. ‘We might need to put up bail. Call the Iranian attorneys and find out what that means.’

‘Sure,’ Briggs said. ‘Where are you?’

‘In my office here at the Ministry.’

‘I’ll get back to you.’

Bill hung up and waited. The idea of his being arrested was kind of ridiculous – despite the widespread corruption of modern Iran, EDS had never paid bribes to get contracts. But even if bribes had been paid, Bill would not have paid them: his job was to deliver the product, not to win the order.

Briggs called back within a few minutes. ‘You’ve got nothing to worry about,’ he said. ‘Just last week a man accused of murder had his bail set at a million and a half rials.’

Bill did a quick calculation: that was twenty thousand dollars. EDS could probably pay that in cash. For some weeks they had been keeping large amounts of cash, both because of the bank strikes and for use during the evacuation. ‘How much do we have in the office safe?’

‘Around seven million rials, plus fifty thousand dollars.’

So, Bill thought, even if we are arrested we’ll be able to post bail immediately. ‘Thanks,’ he said. ‘That makes me feel a lot better.’

Downstairs, Dadgar had written down Paul’s full name, date and place of birth, schools attended, experience in computers, and qualifications: and he had carefully examined the document which officially named Paul as Country Manager for Electronic Data Systems Corporation Iran. Now he asked Paul to give an account of how EDS had secured its contract with the Ministry of Health.

Paul took a deep breath. ‘First, I would like to point out that I was not working in Iran at the time the contract was negotiated and signed, so I do not have first-hand knowledge of this. However, I will tell you what I understand the procedure to have been.’

Mrs Nourbash translated and Dadgar nodded.

Paul continued, speaking slowly and rather formally to help the translator. ‘In 1975 an EDS executive, Paul Bucha, learned that the Ministry was looking for a data-processing company experienced in health insurance and social security work. He came to Tehran, had meetings with Ministry officials, and determined the nature and scale of the work the Ministry wanted done. He was told that the Ministry had already received proposals for the project from Louis Berger and Company, Marsh

and McClennan, ISIRAN, and UNIVAC, and that a fifth proposal was on its way from Cap Gemini Sogeti. He said that EDS was the leading data-processing company in the United States and that our company specialized in exactly this kind of health care work. He offered the Ministry a free preliminary study. The offer was accepted.'

When he paused for translation, Paul noticed, Mrs Nourbash seemed to say less than he had said; and what Dadgar wrote down was shorter still. He began to speak more slowly and pause more often. 'The Ministry obviously liked EDS's proposals, because they then asked us to perform a detailed study for two hundred thousand dollars. The results of our study were presented in October 1975. The Ministry accepted our proposal and began contract negotiations. By August 1976 the contract was agreed.'

'Was everything above board?' Dadgar asked through Mrs Nourbash.

'Absolutely,' Paul said. 'It took another three months to go through the lengthy process of getting all the necessary approvals from many government departments, including the Shah's court. None of these steps was omitted. The contract went into effect at the end of the year.'

'Was the contract price exorbitant?'

'It showed a maximum expected pre-tax profit of twenty per cent, which is in line with other contracts of this magnitude, both here and in other countries.'

'And has EDS fulfilled its obligations under the contract?'

This was something on which Paul *did* have first-hand knowledge. 'Yes, we have.'

'Could you produce evidence?'

'Certainly. The contract specifies that I should meet with Ministry officials at certain intervals to review progress: those meetings have taken place and the Ministry has the minutes of the meetings on file. The contract lays down a complaints procedure for the Ministry to use if EDS fails to fulfil its obligations: that procedure has never been used.'

Mrs Nourbash translated, but Dadgar did not write anything down. He must know all this anyway, Paul thought.

He added: 'Look out of the window. There is our data centre. Go and see it. There are computers in it. Touch them. They work. They produce information. Read the printouts. They are being *used*.'

Dadgar made a brief note. Paul wondered what he was really after.

The next question was: 'What is your relationship with the Mahvi group?'

'When we first came to Iran we were told that we had to have Iranian partners in order to do business here. The Mahvi group are our partners. However, their main role is to supply us with Iranian staff. We meet with them periodically, but they have little to do with the running of our business.'

Dadgar asked why Dr Towliati, a Ministry official, was on the EDS payroll. Was this not a conflict of interest?

Here at last was a question that made sense. Paul

could see how Towliati's role could appear irregular. However, it was easily explained. 'In our contract we undertake to supply expert consultants to help the Ministry make the best use of the service we provide. Dr Towliati is such a consultant. He has a data processing background, and he is familiar with both Iranian and American business methods. He is paid by EDS, rather than by the Ministry, because Ministry salaries are too low to attract a man of his calibre. However, the Ministry is obliged to reimburse us for his salary, as laid down in the contract; so he is not *really* paid by us.'

Once again Dadgar wrote down very little. He could have got all this information from the files, Paul thought: perhaps he has.

Dadgar asked: 'But why does Dr Towliati sign invoices?'

'That's easy,' Paul replied. 'He does not, and never has. The closest he comes is this: he would inform the Minister that a certain task has been completed, where the specification of that task is too technical for verification by a layman.' Paul smiled. 'He takes his responsibility to the Ministry very seriously – he is easily our harshest critic, and he will characteristically ask a lot of tough questions before verifying completion of a task. I sometimes wish I did have him in my pocket.'

Mrs Nourbash translated. Paul was thinking: What is Dadgar after? First he asks about the contract negotiations, which happened before my time; then about the Mahvi group and Dr Towliati, as if they were sensationally important. Maybe Dadgar himself doesn't

know what he's looking for – maybe he's just fishing, hoping to come up with evidence of something illegal.

How long can this farce go on?

Bill was outside in the corridor, wearing his topcoat to keep out the cold. Someone had brought him a glass of tea, and he warmed his hands on it while he sipped. The building was dark as well as cold.

Dadgar had immediately struck Bill as being different from the average Iranian. He was cold, gruff and inhospitable. The Embassy had said Dadgar was 'favourably disposed' toward Bill and Paul, but that was not the impression Bill had.

Bill wondered what game Dadgar was playing. Was he trying to intimidate them, or was he seriously considering arresting them? Either way, the meeting was not turning out the way the Embassy had anticipated. Their advice, to come without lawyers or Embassy representatives, now looked mistaken: perhaps they just did not want to get involved. Anyway, Paul and Bill were on their own now. It was not going to be a pleasant day. But at the end of it they would be able to go home.

Looking out of the window, he saw that there was some excitement down on Eisenhower Avenue. Some distance along the street, dissidents were stopping cars and putting Khomeini posters on the windscreens. The soldiers guarding the Ministry building were stopping the cars and tearing the posters up. As he waited, the

soldiers became more belligerent. They broke the headlight of a car, and the windscreen of another, as if to teach the drivers a lesson. Then they pulled a driver out of a car and punched him around.

The next car they picked on was a taxi, a Tehran orange cab. It went by without stopping, not surprisingly; but the soldiers seemed angered and chased it, firing their guns. Cab and pursuing soldiers disappeared from Bill's sight.

After that the soldiers ended their grim game and returned to their posts inside the walled courtyard in front of the Ministry building. The incident, with its queer mixture of childishness and brutality, seemed to sum up what was going on in Iran. The country was going down the drain. The Shah had lost control and the rebels were determined to drive him out or kill him. Bill felt sorry for the people in the cars, victims of circumstance who could do nothing but hope that things would get better. If Iranians are no longer safe, he thought, Americans must be in even more danger. We've got to get out of this country.

Two Iranians were hanging about in the same corridor, watching the fracas on Eisenhower. They seemed as appalled as Bill at what they saw.

Morning turned into afternoon. Bill got more tea and a sandwich for lunch. He wondered what was happening in the interrogation room. He was not surprised to be kept waiting: in Iran, 'an hour' meant nothing more precise than 'later, maybe'. But as the day wore on he became more uneasy. Was Paul in trouble in there?

The Iranians stayed in the corridor all afternoon, doing nothing. Bill wondered vaguely who they were. He did not speak to them.

He wished the time would pass more quickly. He had a reservation on tomorrow's plane. Emily and the kids were in Washington, where both Emily's and Bill's parents lived. They had a big party planned for him on New Year's Eve. He could hardly wait to see them all again.

He should have left Iran weeks ago, when the fire-bombing started. One of the people whose homes had been bombed was a girl with whom he had gone to high school in Washington. She was married to a diplomat at the US Embassy. Bill had talked to them about the incident. Nobody had been hurt, luckily, but it had been very scary. I should have taken heed, and got out then, he thought.

At last Abolhasan opened the door and called: 'Bill! Come in, please.'

Bill looked at his watch. It was five o'clock. He went in.

'It's cold,' he said as he sat down.

'It's warm enough in this seat,' Paul said with a strained smile. Bill looked at Paul's face. He seemed very uncomfortable.

Dadgar drank a glass of tea and ate a sandwich before he began to question Bill. Watching him, Bill thought: this guy is trying to trap us so he won't have to let us leave the country.

The interview started. Bill gave his full name, date and place of birth, schools attended, qualifications, and

experience. Dadgar's face was blank as he asked the questions and wrote down the answers: he was like a machine.

Bill began to see why the interview with Paul had taken so long. Each question had to be translated from Farsi into English and each answer from English into Farsi. Mrs Nourbash did the translation, Abolhasan interrupting with clarifications and corrections.

Dadgar questioned him about EDS's performance of the Ministry contract. Bill answered at length and in detail, although the subject was both complicated and highly technical, and he was pretty sure that Mrs Nourbash could not really understand what he was saying. Anyway, no one could hope to grasp the complexities of the entire project by asking a handful of general questions. What kind of foolishness was this, he wondered? Why did Dadgar want to sit all day in a freezing cold room and ask stupid questions? It was some kind of Persian ritual, Bill decided. Dadgar needed to pad out his records, show that he had explored every avenue and protect himself in advance against possible criticism for letting them go. At the absolute worst, he might detain them in Iran a while longer. Either way, it was just a matter of time.

Both Dadgar and Mrs Nourbash seemed hostile. The interview became more like a courtroom cross-examination. Dadgar said that EDS's progress reports to the Ministry had been false, and EDS had used them to make the Ministry pay for work that had not been done. Bill pointed out that Ministry officials, who were in a

position to know, had never suggested that the reports were inaccurate. If EDS had fallen down on the job, where were the complaints? Dadgar could examine the Ministry's files.

Dadgar asked about Dr Towliati, and when Bill explained Towliati's role, Mrs Nourbash – speaking before Dadgar had given her anything to translate – replied that Bill's explanation was untrue.

There were several miscellaneous questions, including a completely mystifying one: did EDS have any Greek employees? Bill said they did not, wondering what that had to do with anything. Dadgar seemed impatient. Perhaps he had hoped that Bill's answers would contradict Paul's; and now, disappointed, he was just going through the motions. His questioning became perfunctory and hurried; he did not follow up Bill's answers with further questions or requests for clarifications; and he wound up the interview after an hour.

Mrs Nourbash said: 'You will now please sign your names against each of the questions and answers in Mr Dadgar's notebook.'

'But they're in Farsi – we can't read a word of it!' Bill protested. It's a trick, he thought; we'll be signing a confession to murder or espionage or some other crime Dadgar has invented.

Abolhasan said: 'I will look over his notes and check them.'

Paul and Bill waited while Abolhasan read through the notebook. It seemed a very cursory check. He put the book down on the desk.

‘I advise you to sign.’

Bill was sure he should not – but he had no choice. If he wanted to go home, he had to sign.

He looked at Paul. Paul shrugged. ‘I guess we’d better do it.’

They went through the notebook in turn, writing their names beside the incomprehensible squiggles of Farsi.

When they finished, the atmosphere in the room was tense. Now, Bill thought, he has to tell us we can go home.

Dadgar shuffled his papers into a neat stack while he talked to Abolhasan in Farsi for several minutes. Then he left the room. Abolhasan turned to Paul and Bill, his face grave.

‘You are being arrested,’ he said.

Bill’s heart sank. No plane, no Washington, no Emily, no New Year’s Eve party . . .

‘Bail has been set at ninety million tomans, sixty for Paul and thirty for Bill.’

‘Jesus!’ Paul said. ‘Ninety million tomans is . . .’

Abolhasan worked it out on a scrap of paper. ‘A little under thirteen million dollars.’

‘You’re kidding!’ Bill said. ‘Thirteen *million*? A murderer’s bail is twenty *thousand*.’

Abolhasan said: ‘He asks whether you are ready to post the bail.’

Paul laughed. ‘Tell him I’m a little short now, I’m going to have to go to the bank.’

Abolhasan said nothing.

‘He can’t be serious,’ Paul said.

‘He’s serious,’ said Abolhasan.

Suddenly Bill was mad as hell – mad at Dadgar, mad at Lou Goelz, mad at the whole damn world. It had been a sucker trap and they had fallen right into it. Why, they had walked in here of their own free will, to keep an appointment made by the US Embassy. They had done nothing wrong and nobody had a shred of evidence against them – yet they were going to jail, and worse, an Iranian jail!

Abolhasan said: ‘You are allowed one phone call each.’

Just like the cop shows on TV – one phone call then into the slammer.

Paul picked up the phone and dialled. ‘Lloyd Briggs, please. This is Paul Chiapparone . . . Lloyd? I can’t make dinner tonight. I’m going to jail.’

Bill thought: Paul doesn’t really believe it yet.

Paul listened for a moment, then said: ‘How about calling Gayden, for a start?’ Bill Gayden, whose name was so similar to Bill Gaylord’s, was president of EDS World and Paul’s immediate boss. As soon as this news reaches Dallas, Bill thought, these Iranian jokers will see what happens when EDS really gets into gear.

Paul hung up and Bill took his turn on the phone. He dialled the US Embassy and asked for the Consul General.

‘Goelz? This is Bill Gaylord. We’ve just been arrested, and bail has been set at thirteen million dollars.’

‘How did that happen?’

Bill was infuriated by Goelz's calm measured voice. 'You arranged this meeting and you told us we could leave afterwards!'

'I'm sure, if you've done nothing wrong—'

'What do you mean *if?*' Bill shouted.

'I'll have someone down at the jail as soon as possible,' Goelz said.

Bill hung up.

The two Iranians who had been hanging about in the corridor all day came in. Bill noticed they were big and burly, and realized they must be plain-clothes policemen.

Abolhasan said: 'Dadgar said it would not be necessary to handcuff you.'

Paul said, 'Gee, thanks.'

Bill suddenly recalled the stories he had heard about the torturing of prisoners in the Shah's jails. He tried not to think about it.

Abolhasan said: 'Do you want to give me your brief-cases and wallets?'

They handed them over. Paul kept back a hundred dollars.

'Do you know where the jail is?' Paul asked Abolhasan.

'You're going to a Temporary Detention Facility at the Ministry of Justice on Khayyam Street.'

'Get back to Bucharest fast and give Lloyd Briggs all the details.'

'Sure.'

One of the plain-clothes policemen held the door open, Bill looked at Paul. Paul shrugged.

They went out.

The policemen escorted them downstairs and into a little car. 'I guess we'll have to stay in jail for a couple of hours,' Paul said. 'It'll take that long for the Embassy and EDS to get people down there to bail us out.'

'They might be there already,' Bill said optimistically.

The bigger of the two policemen got behind the wheel. His colleague sat beside him in the front. They pulled out of the courtyard and into Eisenhower Avenue, driving fast. Suddenly they turned into a narrow one-way street, heading the wrong way at top speed. Bill clutched the seat in front of him. They swerved in and out, dodging the cars and buses coming the other way, other drivers honking and shaking their fists.

They headed south and slightly east. Bill thought ahead to their arrival at the jail. Would people from EDS or the Embassy be there to negotiate a reduction in the bail so that they could go home instead of to a cell? Surely the Embassy staff would be outraged at what Dadgar had done. Ambassador Sullivan would intervene to get them released at once. After all, it was iniquitous to put two Americans in an Iranian jail when no crime had been committed and then set bail at thirteen million dollars. The whole situation was ridiculous.

Except that here he was, sitting in the back of this car, silently looking out of the windows and wondering what would happen next.

As they went farther south, what he saw through the window frightened him even more.

In the north of the city, where the Americans lived and worked, riots and fighting were still an occasional

phenomenon, but here – Bill now realized – they must be continuous. The black hulks of burned buses smouldered in the streets. Hundreds of demonstrators were running riot, yelling and chanting, setting fires and building barricades. Young teenagers threw Molotov cocktails – bottles of gasoline with blazing rag fuses – at cars. Their targets seemed random. We might be next, Bill thought. He heard shooting, but it was dark and he could not see who was firing at whom. The driver never went at less than top speed. Every other street was blocked by a mob, a barricade or a blazing car: the driver turned around, blind to all traffic signals, and raced through side streets and back alleys at break-neck speed to circumvent the obstacles. We're not going to get there alive, Bill thought. He touched the rosary in his pocket.

It seemed to go on for ever – then, suddenly, the little car swung into a circular courtyard and pulled up. Without speaking, the burly driver got out of the car and went into the building.

The Ministry of Justice was a big place, occupying a whole city block. In darkness – the street lights were all off – Bill could make out what seemed to be a five-storey building. The driver was inside for ten or fifteen minutes. When he came out he climbed behind the wheel and drove around the block. Bill assumed he had registered his prisoners at the front desk.

At the rear of the building the car mounted the kerb and stopped on the sidewalk by a pair of steel gates set into a long, high brick wall. Somewhere over to the right, where the wall ended, there was a vague outline

of a small park or garden. The driver got out. A peephole opened in one of the steel doors, and there was a short conversation in Farsi. Then the doors opened. The driver motioned Paul and Bill to get out of the car.

They walked through the doors.

Bill looked around. They were in a small courtyard. He saw ten or fifteen guards armed with automatic weapons scattered about. In front of him was a circular driveway with parked cars and trucks. To his left, up against the brick wall, was a single-storey building. On his right was another steel door.

The driver went up to the second steel door and knocked. There was another exchange in Farsi through another peephole. Then the door was opened, and Paul and Bill were ushered inside.

They were in a small reception area with a desk and a few chairs. Bill looked around. There were no lawyers, no Embassy staff, no EDS executives here to spring him from jail. We're on our own, he thought, and this is going to be dangerous.

A guard stood behind the desk with a ballpoint pen and a pile of forms. He asked a question in Farsi. Guessing, Paul said: 'Paul Chiapparone', and spelled it.

Filling out the forms took close to an hour. An English-speaking prisoner was brought from the jail to help translate. Paul and Bill gave their Tehran addresses, phone numbers, and dates of birth, and listed their possessions. Their money was taken away and they were each given two thousand rials, about thirty dollars.

They were taken into an adjoining room and told to

remove their clothes. They both stripped to their undershorts. Their clothing and their bodies were searched. Paul was told to get dressed again, but Bill was not. It was very cold: the heat was off here, too. Naked and shivering, Bill wondered what would happen now. Obviously they were the only Americans in the jail. Everything he had ever read or heard about being in prison was awful. What would the guards do to him and Paul? What would the other prisoners do? Surely, any minute now someone would come to get him released.

'Can I put on my coat?' he asked the guard.

The guard did not understand.

'Coat,' Bill said, and mimed putting on a coat.

The guard handed him his coat.

A little later another guard came in and told him to get dressed.

They were led back into the reception area. Once again Bill looked around expectantly for lawyers or friends; once again he was disappointed.

They were taken through the reception area. Another door was opened. They went down a flight of stairs into the basement.

It was cold, dim and dirty. There were several cells, all crammed with prisoners, all of them Iranian. The stink of urine made Bill close his mouth and breathe shallowly through his nose. The guard opened the door to cell number nine. They walked in.

Sixteen unshaven faces stared at them, alive with curiosity. Paul and Bill stared back, horrified.

The cell door clanged shut behind them.