"A true story about friendship and a dramatic escape from Iran"

همیشه دوست

Shadow of Tears

OLE DAMMEGÅRD

Testimonies about Shadow of Tears

"Ole, keep on writing..."

Shirley MacLaine, actress/author

"Testimonies like this are important and I hope that this book will reach a large number of people."

Hasse Alfredsson, actor/author

"I started reading this book with certain misgivings after having read the drivel 'Not Without My Daughter'. However, my fears were not realized. To me 'Shadow of Tears' is the best book of the year. "

Arne Akerlund, The magazine Nya Samhället

"The author has truly succeeded in describing his experiences that evoke recognition and which provide a good picture of the complicated life in Iran. His book has now been added to the embassy library and will be accessible to the staff."

Hans Andersson, ex-ambassador in Tehran

"This book is both interesting and fascinating. It felt very personal and the Iranian and, perhaps even more, the Pakistanian society and living conditions there were truly touching. I really appreciated it."

Christina Pamp, ex-Chairman, Swedish Amnesty International

"I could not tear myself away from this fantastic book which revived many memories."

Charla (Iranian refugee)

"I don't think I have ever read a book about real conditions that has touched and upset me this much. It has filled a void, truly. Thank you Ole, from the bottom of my heart."

Ninni Holmquist

OLE DAMMEGÅRD

Shadow of Tears

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ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Ole Dammegård is a multi-artist and inventor, blessed with a family of five. Lives on the Costa del Sol in Spain. Also the author of Coup d'etat in Slowmotion, and the amazing Re-Mind Me.

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"Likt Tårar i ett Regn"
by
Bente Dammegaard

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without whose great help this book
would never have materialized

With eternal gratitude to
the Light of my Life
and my daily Inspiration
Kim "Kamala"

One day, Life knocked at my door
I won't let you in, I said
I am knocking on the inside,
answered Life.
Bertil Martinsson

PREFACE

I HAVE SOMETHING TO TELL.

The room is quiet around me. They have just shown a documentary of the frightening advance of the former American president George W. Bush on Swedish television. After having won the presidential post through electoral rigging for the second time, he succeeded in acquiring almost total power for himself and for the global elite he represents.

That is to say a police / military government which, by using extremely violent methods combined with a widespread network of squealers and complete supervision of all inhabitants, is changing the entire continent into a state where ordinary people are kept as hostages – and the rest of the western world is following close by.

The president is now capable of initiating a war without even asking the Senate for advice. This sounds fantastic but is nevertheless completely true.

Why have so few noticed this? And how has it been possible?

Adolf Hitler claimed to be the absolutely opposite of Josef Stalin – seen in the rear view mirror of time, they appear to

be two sides of the same coin. And what is even more improbable, the similarities between the United States and its former mortal enemy, the Iran of the Ayatollahs, is becoming more and more evident.

USA and Iran? Bush and Khomeini? Is this some kind of bad joke, or what?

I have had the 'advantage' of feeling the Iran of the Ayatollahs on my bare skin, so to speak, a society where the citizens did not react in time to allow themselves to listen to ordinary common sense until it was too late. They were like blind people who permitted apparently benevolent forces in seductive disguise to sneak in and seize total dominion.

Khomeini was welcomed as the new saviour, the Messiah, just like Barack Obama. But what happened next? When are we going to learn? When are we going to wake up and take responsibility for the dark side of ourselves?

I have something to tell, something that concerns one of them and one of us. A story filled with violence, oppression and death but also true friendship and warmth between people, people of flesh and blood, people like you and me. You and me.

This book is not romanticized, it is not a novel. What you are about to read is what actually happened. Some people have been given pseudonyms or nicknames and photos have been masked to ensure their safety. Apart from that nothing has been changed.

It is sometimes painful to confront memories but I have chosen to tell my story because I cannot stand by quietly watching history repeat itself. Not again.

When will we learn from what has happened? When will we accept responsibility for the darkness inside ourselves?

It takes guts to change.
I have something to tell.
Dare you listen?

PS.
Due to some difficult experiences, I let myself feel very negative about Pakistan. If my words are in any way offensive concerning the people of Pakistan, I ask their forgiveness. It is not my intention to pass judgment.

PROLOGUE

THE JANUARY NIGHT in 1985 was dark and icy cold. The white snowy landscape whizzed by outside only lit by the passing train. A train that was carrying me and my Iranian friend Majid into the unknown. The escape across borders, through military checkpoints and police roadblocks had torn our nerves to shreds and now we were both totally exhausted.

We had left East Berlin a couple of hours before midnight, well aware that our transit visa expired at this hour. With this insight we laid our heads on the block. We simply had no other choice.

The throbbing of the rails was a lullaby singing us to sleep. Now there was only about one hundred miles before the final test. What were the police going to do? Would Majid be deported back to Iran and what would happen then? I focused my entire strength on preventing a possible deportation by any means. Over my dead body.

One year ago this expression had been nothing but mere empty words to me. Now at the age of twenty-six I was willing to risk everything, everything ...

Suddenly the door to the compartment was flung open and

some East German soldiers stomped noisily in with their guns at the ready. In far from perfect German I tried to ask what was going on. Instead of getting an answer, I looked the muzzle of the gun straight in the eye.

"Ausweiss! Ausweiss!"

The presence of the gun shattered the fog of my dreams and within seconds I had found my passport. I told Majid to do the same. The officer looked quickly through our passports, once again doing his best to bust our eardrums and left with his sidekicks. I was too weak to object to his having taken our passports, so I leaned heavily on the hard upholstery.

How had I landed in this situation? What had brought me into this phase of my life so very different from all earlier experiences? The questions churned in my tired head as I at last slid into the world of dreams.

Here all logic ceased and within a couple of seconds I had moved back in the vortex of time to remember how it all started so very very long ago...

ON TWO WHEELS THROUGH EUROPE

THE IDEA FOR the trip had come to me one dark evening at the beginning of January the previous year. It was there in my head all of a sudden. Not as some half diffuse dream but as a finished plan ready to be carried out.

It was almost one year since I came back from six months in Iceland. And after the fantastic experiences there, both good and bad, it had been very difficult to get rid of the restlessness that grasps you when you are faced with ordinary trivial life. When you have discovered how intense the twenty-four hours of each day can be, it is almost impossible to accept grey everyday humdrum passing by month after month.

The reason that decided Africa as my goal was that my brother was on board a freighter by the coast of West Africa. How thrilling it would be to go there and see him. So, what do you do if you want to cross thousands of miles and have no money to speak of? What type of transport do you choose?

Car? Forget it.

On foot? Too slow and painful.

Motorbike? Too expensive and noisy.

Moped? Well...

What remains? An ordinary bike.

That sounded sweaty but not quite impossible. I had earlier heard of a Japanese man who had crossed the Sahara on two wheels without an engine. So why not a Scandinavian fool.

As soon as I made up my mind, I gave notice at my job. I spent countless dark winter nights fitness training well aware that I would need all the strength I could muster. However, two days after I gave in my resignation, I received the news with very mixed feelings that my brother had left his ship and was on his way home.

A couple of weeks later, I was at the hospital as a blood donor. The nurse and I were chatting when I mentioned that this would probably be the last time I was coming. My vaccinations would affect my blood so that it would not be safe for others.

"Where are you going," she asked.

"I don't really know, but most probably Africa."

"Really! My daughter works at a medical station in Swaziland in South Africa. Why not go there? I myself am going to visit her in February and we are going to rent a car to drive around in their fabulous national parks. If you can get there on time, you are more than welcome to join us."

So I decided on South Africa, an apparently impossible trip through all sorts of countries and types of climate. But challenges fascinate me and I found the idea intriguing.

At home I unfolded my worn maps and studied this new itinerary. Africa is an extremely difficult continent to tackle and I started thinking that my head perhaps needed examining before I left.

I spent several months with my nose buried in all sorts of books on the topic trying to figure out the best-suited equipment to take along. I had stacks of brochures on first-class

equipment but when I was finally ready to leave, my entire pack consisted of cheap compromises. Due to my economic situation I had at a very early stage to make a decision. Either I made do with what I could afford or stayed at home.

I studied the few possible routes through Africa. Apart from starvation, wars, corruption, tropical diseases and closed borders, the Sahara seemed to present the greatest danger.

Cyklar mot Afrika

– Ett sätt att få ut mer av livet

Nu börjar äventyret...

Ole Dammegård, 26 år, tänker låta framhjulet på sin cykel få bestämma den närmaste tiden. Ole har nämligen bestämt sig för att lämna Tranås och cykelluffa genom Europa och kanske så småningom nå Afrika.

A newspaper article about my trip

During those days I didn't appreciate jokes about sandstorms, vultures and desert spiders. If I made my way through this enormous desert, thousands of miles of wilderness were waiting on the other side.

To my mind the only sensible thing would be to get rid of the bike somewhere in North Africa and then go on as best I could.

I was open to anything from camel caravans to rally freaks on desert holiday.

Slowly but surely the magic date approached when it was time to get going. I was ready.

The rain was pouring down from a dark grey dismal sky the

way it had been every day since I left home. Both my pack and my clothes had been drenched for a long time. Tiredly I wrung out my shoes in a vain attempt to regain feeling in my watered-down toes. Why had I put off leaving so long? Originally I had planned to start at the end of May and the calendar now showed September.

Under me the wheels of the bike cut one deep puddle after the other in two and I didn't even bother to lift my feet any more. What a wonderful way to start a long trip.

All the way south I had been saying goodbye. Goodbye to family and friends, to my cosy flat, to the cows in the meadows and the birds that were busy preparing for their own departure.

Emotionally I was torn between exhilaration at being on my way at long last and a deep melancholy which tried to make me give up the insane idea. I had consciously given up planning. I focused on making the journey for the sake of travelling and not because I felt obliged to go in any special direction.

I would make the most of the here and now, day by day, hour by hour, always open to new proposals and new goals.

One of my intentions was to shake off old routines and patterns. In my opinion these are the greatest enemies of clear consciousness.

Officially the final goal was South Africa, but I might just as well end up in Java. My inner compass would help me find the direction.

At long last on my way into the unknown

THE FIRST MEETING

APPROXIMATELY two months later I was sitting on a dusty bus enjoying the fact that I could stretch my legs and watch the miles pass by. My biking trip through Europe had been extremely hard and it was wonderful to avoid lactic acid and aching muscles.

Aided by my faithful pedals, I had gone from Sweden via Denmark, West Germany, Austria, Hungary and Yugoslavia to Greece.

My knees had been ruined by the gruelling trip over the snowy Alps and, after about nineteen hundred miles, I had no other choice: my beloved friend and bike, Rolling Antero, had become a Greek citizen and was most probably by now chasing beautiful Greek ladies' bikes.

My trip had continued thumbing lifts until, in Istanbul, I was faced with yet another choice. Where was I going now? Syria and war torn Lebanon cut off the road south, if I didn't take a boat to Israel. But there they were still fighting Egypt, which in its turn had problems with its African neighbours.

However, a small notice in the window of a tiny Turkish travel agency revealed a new solution: Istanbul - India... for only

twenty-seven dollars. That was next to nothing!

Within a couple of minutes, I had made up my mind. Why not? If I only went to the Pakistani border and back again, that in itself would be an adventure.

I had spent some days trying to absorb as much as possible of the atmosphere of this legendary city. It was my first encounter with Asia, both tantalizing and frightening with its foreign smells, dark-skinned people and different architecture. I had been lucky enough to find a cheap youth hostel, Yücelt Youth Hostel close to the world-renowned Topkapi Palace. The beds of the hostel were sheer luxury after sleeping outdoors for such a long time and, into the bargain, the showers had both cold and icy water.

The Topkapi Palace had a magnificent view of the sea. But, with its incredible riches, the treasury was of course what attracted everyone's curiosity.

What do you say about a pair of massive candlesticks made of pure gold? Weighing one hundred and six pounds each! Or a suit of armour decorated with six thousand and sixty-six diamonds? For the more fastidious visitor, green emeralds weighing more than six point six pounds were placed on black velvet lit by spotlights.

The Palace even had a big section exhibiting rare objects from the empires and harems of the different sultans.

The magnificient view over Istanbul

Here you could see especially handmade china, which

changed colour if the food served on it contained poison.

On the horizon, the impressive Sultan Ahmet Caiinin-mosque reminded me of a rocket base with its six minarets silhouetted against the evening sky.

The Sultan Ahmet Caiinin mosque

In everyday speech, it was referred to as the Blue Mosque because of the fabulous ceilings completely covered in blue mosaic with quotes from the Quran in gold inlay. The floors were covered in thick red prayer mats and the luxurious chandeliers hanging from the cupolas high above might have been taken directly from Arabian Nights.

As it turned out, it was extremely difficult to get visa to Iran, the first country in the east I had to cross on my way to India. Officially, waiting time was two months but rumour had it that they didn't want any westerners inside their borders at all. For some unknown reason I had a strong feeling that this trip was important and after about a week of my persistent harping, an official finally agreed to open the gates of the country.

The walls of the consulate were full of political propaganda and gory pictures from the ongoing war with Iraq and around me weeping women were trying to appease the bureaucrats behind the glazed-in counters. In an attack of doubt I kept looking at the photographs. My knowledge of Iran was limited to the horrifying reports I had read in the papers at home.

Like so many other foreigners, I associated this country with senseless murdering in the name of Allah. The religious leader of the nation, Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini, had done

his utmost to spread this impression.

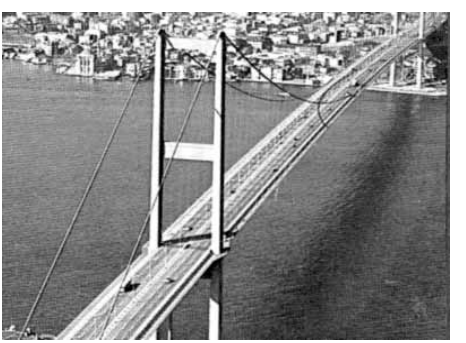
How great was the risk of entering the hornets' nest? What was driving me? I might have gone on sitting there evaluating risks indefinitely but, at an early stage, I decided this trip was to be a school with the focus on my fears and emotions.

So, there I was in an old bus on my way to Iran. In my hand a ticket with the text Uluslararasi Otobüs Isletmeciligi.

We had left Istanbul late and darkness had fallen when we passed the famous Bodaziçi Köprüsü bridge across the Straits of Bosporus that separate Europe from Asia. Innumerable glittering lamps reflected beautifully in the waves far below us.

Originally, the Straits of Bosporus had been named by the Greeks and means the ford for cattle. It is eighteen miles long and two and a half miles at the widest point and there is only roughly eight hundred and twenty-five yards between the ancient Ottoman castles of Anadolu Hisari and Rumeli Hisari. Together with the Sea of Marmora and the Dardanelles this makes up the connection between the Black Sea and the Mediterranean.

I was the only European on the bus, the rest were Iranians and a group of Turks on their way to the oil fields near Bandar Abbas in the south of Iran. From the very start, the wondering eyes of my fellow passengers watched me.



The bridge between Europe and Asia

Thousands of people were trying to get out of Iran and here, out of the corner of my eye, I noticed several people whispering while

they looked at me compassionately shaking their heads.

We had had a couple of engine failures and outside the scratched bus window, the sun-scorched landscape was resting in the dark accompanied by the pulsating, rather drowsy sound of thousands of crickets. I curiously studied the faces around me. Close to me were an old man and his son who looked as if they had been taken directly out of the Old Testament. Several times I tried to get a conversation going but they politely refused in a firm but friendly way. The rest of the passengers were as wary towards me as I was towards them.

This went on until one early morning we stopped outside a small restaurant for breakfast. Round the small village, greyish olive groves joined forces with pine trees to take root among the barren rocks. Under the old olive trees, blood-red poppies were as numerous as the anemones in spring back home.

Yellow mimosa, fragrant lemons and a few brave orange trees lit up the small gardens in incredible contrast to the deep blue sky that predicted yet another hot day. Turkish summer, Turkish heat.

Since I wasn't hungry, I left to watch the attempts of the yawning morning sun to wake the inhabitants of the village. I had taken off my shoes and the soles of my feet were starting to feel the heat of the burning ground that was covered in pine needles. I preferred to sit down in the shade of an old olive tree to wiggle my toes.

Absentmindedly I took a couple of deep breaths and looked around. I thoroughly enjoyed just taking it easy.

Some lonely donkeys were braying far away and, as in so many of the small villages, here were two minarets from where the messages of Allah were spread five times a day. Three huge birds of prey were starting their silent upward circling high in the sky on the lookout for rats and wild rabbits.

Here and there scrawny farmers appeared in the small fields

Together vith my bicycle Rolling Antero I went from Sweden via Denmark, Germany, Austria, Hungary, and Yugoslavia to Greece and Turkey.

for yet another long day of hard work. Behind them came rickety horse-drawn carts loaded with tools and after them the rest of the family. Everybody joined in. School had to wait.

There was a silent natural harmony over the barren landscape where thorny vegetation struggled to survive on a minimum of nourishment and water since the beginning of time.

My legs were grateful for the opportunity to relax after the innumerable miles of pedalling. On my way down through Europe so many muscles had ached that I didn't even know I had. So the time had come to rest. I closed my eyes and slowly inhaled the warm air that was spiced with the fragrance of citrus fruit and sheep manure. It was simply wonderful.

The last of the Arabic prayers was echoing away in the distance as one of the Turks came over, hunkered down and started talking to me. I took his proffered hand and sat up.

"Hi, I'm Türkischer Hassan," he explained with a smile and handed me some sun-ripe tomatoes.

His eyes were amazingly blue in his weather-beaten face. He glanced curiously at me as he cut a large slice of newly baked bread with his pocketknife.

"I have lived for many years in West Germany so we can surely understand each other."

I had difficulty understanding his German accent but he gave a satisfied nod as he continued to share his bread and tomatoes with me.

He had hardly uttered these words when the rest of the passengers surrounded us. They had finished their breakfast and were returning to the bus. Apparently they had all been interested in "the foreigner" but, at the same time, been too shy to take the initiative.

While we were talking, a young guy pushed his way towards me and, in an irritated manner, started to ask me why Sweden didn't give visas to people in spite of the fact that all demands

had been met. I had no idea how to answer, so he soon disappeared again.

Several times the old bus broke down

"But why are you travelling in this way," asked Hassan curiously scratching his unshaven chin.

"Because I want to find out," I said with a crooked smile.

He gave me a scrutinizing look as he dried his knife on his shirt sleeve.

"Find out what?"

"Finding out why I do it," I explained slowly. Then I got up begging his pardon.

This may sound a little strange, but that was exactly how I experienced it. Sometimes the answer came to me and, on those occasions, my trip needed no justification, the only important thing being that I was exactly where I was, knowing what I knew, present in the eternal now.

On other days, I felt mostly lost and confused. Then the memory of the good days usually changed my mood so that I felt strong enough to face the problems that needing my attention.

The Iranians disappeared while I again sought the shade under my old olive tree. Lying on my back with a grass straw between my teeth, I squinted through the grey green leaves on the knotted branches above me. The night frost and the approaching winter had not yet succeeded in picking off the leaves that clung on persistently.

I closed my eyes and stretched out on the dry grass.

Later the young guy turned up again and we soon discovered that we enjoyed each other's company. His name was Majid; he was about twenty-five, fit, about five feet seven and had dark, close cropped curly hair and a small scar across his right eyebrow. He wore grey corduroy trousers and a light sweater. It was obvious that he was both educated and intelligent. His voice, face, gestures and body language were quiet and pleasant. But what struck me most were his eyes which expressed both deep sadness and an intense love of life.

My bond of friendship with him started one sunny afternoon somewhere in the middle of Turkey when the bus had stopped at yet another small roadside restaurant. I have always been somewhat of a loner, so I withdrew to write a letter home. At the same time, I took the chance to bury my press card behind some large boulders. Foreign journalists were not popular in Iran and it felt stupid to run unnecessary risks.

An unexpected sound made me turn around.

"Salam," said Majid who had approached without my noticing.

He looked at me with his quiet smile.

"Hi," I answered, placed a few more rocks on top of my buried identity card and moved over so that he could sit down.

Somewhat hesitantly we started to get to know one another accompanied by the song of a bird in the tree above us. His English was relatively good so, aided by a small, worn dictionary, we started comparing the names of different things in our respective languages. Where I come from, people might wonder about such words as car, house and boat.

The words Majid asked about were: "Love," "Flower" and "Friendship."

In the middle of the pitch-dark night we were all awakened by the grumpy driver who had apparently decided that we should spend the night at one of the hotels in town.

"But ... it is ridiculous to spend money on a hotel room so close to the border." I rubbed my eyes and stretched. "It is almost three o'clock and we will be at the frontier before seven."

Majid got up stiffly from the bus seat and started to gather his things.

"It is not unusual that the drivers make deals with hotel owners to stop at their places," he replied sleepily. "And then they split the profit."

"But this is crazy," I said sourly shrugging my shoulders. "There are two drivers on the bus. Can't the other guy drive instead?"

"I'm sure the profit can be split in three," said Majid with a yawn and started to make his way to the exit. I followed him reluctantly.

Furthermore, the hotel turned out to be the local prison where the "host" got busy relocating all his sulky "guests" from the cells facing the street to the darker accommodations further into the building.

The rooms were small and dirty with no lights, no heating and no curtains. There were large spots of moisture on the yellowish walls, here and there the paint had peeled off and thick clusters of cobwebs hung from the ceilings. The finishing touch was the heavy pungent smell of mould that irritated both throat and nostrils. The beds were just as dirty with dark grey sheets and after a closer inspection of things, we both decided to sleep with our clothes on.

Before we fell asleep, we chatted quietly about what would happen at the border when suddenly a skinny, moth-eaten old man in baggy long johns and a tatty undershirt appeared at the door. He was unshaven, half-asleep and seemed to be one

of the jailbirds that had been forced to leave his bed to us. His bloodshot eyes peered at us.

"Shut up! There are people here who want to sleep!"

With these words he sourly banged the door shut without noticing that the glass in the door had been missing for a very long time.

Before the sun had risen, we arrived at the frontier only half awake. Just before that we had passed the fantastic Mount Ararat which, with its sixteen thousand nine hundred and forty-five feet, was a suitable climax to the long bus ride through the East Turkish Mountains.

Mount Ararat is as pure in shape as Mount Fuji in Japan but actually has two peaks and it was on one of these that Noah is said to have run aground with the Ark so very long ago.

The last stretch of the road had been very steep and the clutch still smelt. Several times, the old bus engine had threatened to boil but the driver had stopped just in time to let it cool off before starting again.

I had been awakened by one of the passengers shaking Majid.

"Wake up, we are collecting money to bribe the customs officers," the man explained as he roused the other passengers. "If we don't pay, we may have to wait here for days."

One look out the window confirmed his words. Hundreds of busses and lorries were parked all around us in end-

The fantastic Mount Ararat

less rows and it was obvious how simple it would be for the Turkish customs officers to place us last in the queue at regular intervals. Well aware of their upper hand, the customs people had demanded a considerable sum of money for closing their eyes and letting us through to the massive frontier outpost of Iran.

With a deep sigh, I jumped off the bus and looked slowly around. Lately, the outpost of Bazargan had expanded tremendously because of the war against Iraq, which forced the oil producers to transport their valuable cargoes by road instead of by colossal tankers as they had in peacetime. The result was that Bazargan had become notorious for the delays that might last several days.

From a distance, I noted how our man handed over a thick envelope to one of the uniformed guards who turned on his heel to deliver the bribe to his superior. A quarter of an hour later the guard reappeared, nodded at the driver and waved our bus forward in the line. The wait was over.

When we had crossed to the Iranian side, everything felt different somehow. Maybe it was because of the Islamic propaganda decorating all the walls.

"NO EAST – NO WEST – BUT A UNITED ISLAMIC REPUBLIC" was painted in loud colours close to a large portrait of the religious leader of the country, the charismatic Ayatollah

No east - No west"

Ruhollah Khomeini, whose stern eyes with the bushy eyebrows were less than welcoming.

"Are you hungry?" asked Majid who had quietly appeared beside me. "There is a restaurant opposite the customs office."

"Sure," I nodded.

The restaurant consisted of a huge, bare room furnished with old rickety wooden chairs and square tables. In the din of loud talking and spoons on plates, many people were digging into their food.

After we had fetched our portions of greasy rice and mutton on dented metal plates, we sat down at the worn and wobbly table. The man beside me had eaten about half his meal when he looked up at me and shyly started asking questions.

But no sooner had he looked away from his plate than a tiny kitchen hand sauntered past – and presto! Both the man's food and teacup had disappeared.

The kitchen boy seemed tired of both his job and life itself as he listlessly emptied the tea slop onto the floor before continuing his search for plates. The man could only look helplessly on. We looked at each other, grabbed hold of our own plates and continued our meal in silence.

Following continual hassles at one control after another, we were at last allowed to continue. Quite some time before we reached the frontier, the women on the bus had put on their black *chador*, veils which according to Islamic law must cover everything except the hands and face.

Later on I was told that *chador* really means tent in Farsi, the official language of Iran, and consists of a circular piece of cloth without openings. Instead it is held together at the front by the teeth or with one hand. Earlier there had been quite a few women on board the bus, but now they had all disappeared behind dark drapes.

The sun had been long gone behind the horizon, when Khomeini's much-feared Special Forces, the *pasdaran*, stopped us for the first time. Dressed in dark olive uniforms, army boots and with heavy automatic weapons, they stood at regular intervals round roadblocks and waved all vehicles to the side of the road.

Big piles of sandbags and special barbed wire increased the impression of power.

The tense atmosphere was heavy as lead as everyone was ordered outside while the soldiers went through the bus with a fine-tooth comb. We were to have four more stops like this before the night was over and each time the granite-faced men appeared, fear invaded the bus.

"Beware of those," the man beside me whispered in broken English. His voice shook slightly when he continued. "They are proper swine who do exactly what they feel like and nobody can do anything about it. If you happen to utter one wrong word, you may have had it..."

One look at the armed *pasdaran* convinced me that he wasn't exaggerating. Their empty eyes stared coldly at us and I now understood what brainwashing could do to people. These men would not hesitate to kill.

Later, the bus continued through towns, which lay desolate and abandoned in the night. The spooky streetlights lit up walls completely covered in political slogans and pictures of dead soldiers.

The war could be noticed everywhere

Here and there I caught glimpses of

houses destroyed by Iraqi bombs. People had started clearing the debris.

At one place one of the houses was still on fire but nobody reacted. Apparently nothing unusual was going on. Intense thoughts about the meaning of life haunted me into my restless sleep. The bus was cold so I wrapped myself in my jacket and placed my backpack on my stomach in order to keep warm as the bus took us into the unknown.

When the early morning sun woke me up, we were approaching the capital of Iran, a city notorious in history for its violent bloodstained past. I was on my way into the lion's den.

I was on my way into Tehran.

IN THE LION'S DEN

TEHRAN TURNED out to be a huge city where completely different cultures and eras met.

The former ruler and king, the Shah of Iran, had tried to Americanize the country rapidly and now high-rise houses and modern buildings contrasted starkly with houses of older Asian architecture.

Everything looked worn and it was obvious that the war and the internal disturbances were putting a heavy toll on the economy.

Now there were somewhere between seven and fourteen million people in the city, the figure depended on whom you were talking to. The conflict with Iraq had forced millions of people to flee from the border areas and, together with very severe unemployment; the population had increased like an avalanche.

The gigantic city was located at four thousand feet as if in a deep basin surrounded by the rivers Jajrud and Karach and on all sides, mountains prevented the heavy blanket of smog from dissipating. Cars, trucks and people were teeming everywhere; traffic being denser and more chaotic than anywhere

I had ever been before and traffic rules most of all seemed to be a joke. You had to run for your life whenever you got the chance to cross the street. Most of the inhabitants were Persian, but about twenty-five per cent were Azers, Kurds and Gilaks.

The monument Azadi - Freedom

The bus stopped at a large terminal close to an impressive one hundred sixty-five feet tall monument towering against the dark sky resembling a futuristic rocket base. The top was now a museum. The Shah had built this monument but the present regime had taken it over and named it *Azadi* – Freedom.

Majid had invited me to his home and I gratefully accepted. Iran seemed quite frightening and I wasn't keen on being left alone in this incredible megalopolis. After a taxi ride, we got out at Meidan-e-Enghelab – the Revolution Square.

"During late 1978, a revolution broke out in Iran to overthrow our king, the Shah," said Majid as we fought our way along the busy and narrow pavement. "Here at Meidan-e-Enghelab some of the worst fighting took place."

While we were walking, I tried to absorb as much of the city as I could. Everything was so different. In the crowd around us, all the women wore different types of *chador*. Apparently, even the men had to wear their shirts buttoned at the throat and wrists.

Most of the buildings along the streets were colourless, sun-bleached and built of brick or concrete. Propaganda graffiti was

everywhere, from scribbling to fantastic garish works of art. In spite of the beauty of some of these pictures, the political and religious messages were most scary of all.

We passed circular stands with photographs of young men at the top and lots of coloured bulbs.

Mourning stands glowing in the dark

"What are those?" I asked.

"Mourning stands you can rent to show your grief over the death of a loved one. You see them all over the place now that so many have died in the war."

For the same reason, many cars had black mourning bands in the rear windows. After less than half an hour in this city, I had come into contact with death that was ever present here.

It was the first time I had been in a country at war and the sadness of the people engulfed me.

Majid had two sisters and two brothers. Both sisters and one brother and his wife were living at the parents' house.

"These are my sisters," Majid said when we were together later that night.

Zari was just under thirty, tall and slender with a sad, pale face. There was something considerate and caring about her that I immediately liked. Maryam, who was sitting beside her, was younger and reminded me of an Egyptian princess. Fair as a day in June, she was almost always around with her dark, mysterious and mostly laughing eyes.

Sometimes I caught myself watching her when she was reading or absentmindedly twirling a lock of her dark hair between thumb and forefinger.

Life had been hard on the parents.

Majid's father was white-haired, ill and kept to himself a lot. His mother was a worn and tired woman with kind eyes and a soft voice. However, I soon found out that she had a strong will, which was undoubtedly necessary to keep a family together under these difficult circumstances.

Majid's brother, Mammad, wasn't at home, but I met Shadi, his wife, a tiny young woman with a shock of black hair who was always full of fun and games. Her laugh was catching and in spite of the fact that I knew not one word of Farsi nor she one word of English, we soon had long conversations going.

I was surprised to see the western style clothes of the women. In the streets, women appeared as dark ghostly figures moving silently along in their long *chadors* or shorter *rusari*, while at home however they wore jeans and colourful modern clothes.

Majid asked me to stay with him and his family as long as I was in Tehran and I was both happy and relieved. Tehran was huge and rather terrifying, there was a full-scale war going on with bombing attacks almost every night and I was scared of being left alone. Furthermore, it was wonderful to be with this family who showed me such hospitality.

The first days in Tehran I had some very pleasant experiences, as I was introduced to Iranian food consisting of rice, crisp salad and *kuku*, a kind of rissole made of spinach and egg served with yoghurt. Drink: Coca-Cola.

After the Islamic revolution a couple of years earlier, no new bottles were made, so empty bottles had become valuable. On the table were bottles marked Coca-Cola, Canada Dry, Zam-

Zam and so on but with the same content: Iranian Coca-Cola.

The food consisted mostly of rice and fresh vegetables, sometimes varied with some kind of meat, fish or poultry. Each course had its own specific taste due to the combination of spices. The rice was sometimes coloured with turmeric.

Cooking rice appeared to be an art form more complicated and time consuming than I had been used to at home, as the rice was left to soak for several hours in order not to be sticky when served.

The vegetables were usually cooked together with small pieces of meat, and always fresh ingredients were used. A salad was also served with the meal. Different kinds of dips were served with newly baked pita bread with feta cheese and basil or mint. This was put on the "table" as appetizer before the actual meal itself.

Exotic names of wonderful dishes soon became the highlights of the day. *Khoreshte feseynjoon, Ghorme sabzi, Tah chin, Chelo kabab, Borani, Zereshpolo, Sholeh zard, Loobia polo, Khoreshte karafs, Khoreshte baamieh, Khoreshte havij o Aalto* and *Bademjon kashk*. All tasty, most often an appetizing mixture of colours and very, very good. The sourish milky drink, *Duugh*, seemed to be a favourite for most meals.

Cooking took a long time and preparation of a meal that was to be served at three in the afternoon often started in the morning.

Iranian food - both beautiful and tasty

As in many Iranian homes, Majid's family preferred to sit on the floor on a

thick comfortable carpet. With no bulky furniture, the room could easily be converted to anything from bedroom to sitting room to dining room. In the morning you simply rolled up the mattresses and set the "table" for breakfast on a piece of oil-cloth. It seemed very practical and saved both room and money.

In Iran where both rents and prices were sky-high and where most things were rationed because of the war, you really had to economize. Wages were lousy and people had to work very long days indeed to make a relatively decent income, that is to say if you were one of the lucky ones who had a job.

While we were sitting there eating and laughing, I was struck by the difference between the joy in this home and the gloomy depressing atmosphere in the streets.

The contrast was remarkable.

One day when the sun was shining as usual, I went out onto the roof in nothing but my shorts to hang some laundry. Suddenly Majid and his best friend Mohsen came rushing out and hurriedly dragged me back into the house.

"Are you out of your mind!" whispered Majid drawing the curtains. "Don't you know what might happen if one of Khomeini's supporters sees you and calls the *pasdaran*?"

Completely taken aback, I explained that I had no idea what he was talking about.

Apparently I had better get some information about conditions here before somebody got into trouble.

Tehran - a gigantic meeting place

Now followed days of endless tales of the disaster, which over so many years had befallen the country. It was an intense story of hope and longing, oppression and violence. My guides were Majid and Mohsen. I asked questions and they answered.

I had met Mohsen a couple of days earlier and to me he seemed both sullen and somewhat insolent. He hardly acknowledged me when we were introduced but rather went straight to Majid and drew him aside.

Later I understood that his standoffish attitude was due to an earlier row between him and Majid. When this was settled, he came back to me and we slowly and respectfully approached each other. I was, however, soon to become very fond of him.

Mohsen was about a year older than Majid and they had been friends since childhood. Mostly he seemed to be in high spirits and full of jokes. His happy voice and loud laughter might easily have given you the impression that he only lived for the day and didn't care about what was going on around him. Nothing could have been further from the truth.

The earnestness and pain in his black, slightly oriental eyes revealed a very sensitive and passionate person whose spirit had difficulty surviving in the emotional desert forced upon him and the likes of him.

At short intervals, the pressure led to stormy eruptions, which, however, subsided when he had let off steam. Mohsen's background was a poor environment in Djunub-e-Tehran in the south of Tehran and it was obvious that he had had to fight all his life.

His strong sense of justice and equality made him take exception to affluence and abundance. Instead, he praised people who lived simple and modest lives devoting themselves to inner strength and purity.

For long periods, he would be silent and thoughtful and then become intense and passionate. His words and sentences were

so rapid that Majid often had difficulty interpreting.

I sometimes caught myself mesmerized by Mohsen's expressive face instead of listening to his words. Behind the cloud of cigarette smoke, I could see his high forehead surrounded by coal black hair, his light-skinned round face so full of character. Sometimes his burning eyes turned into narrow slits of laughter or anguish. Apart from his eyes, the first thing you noticed about him was his sharp nose.

Like so many other young Iranians, he was very well versed in various areas and mathematics, psychology and philosophy were among his favourites.

One thing all three of us had in common was our search for truth in whichever form we found it and I felt deep confidence in both of them in spite of our having known each other for such a short time.

This became increasingly important, as I had to trust that they kept to the truth since I had difficulty believing many of the things I heard. However, too often reality surpasses fiction, which in this case was terribly tragic.

The first act of the long line of historic events they were to recount concerned the years during which the former emperor, the Shah of Iran, was in power before he was overthrown by the present dictator, Ayatollah Khomeini.

"The Shah had come into power when he was quite young, as the Allies in 1941 had forced his father, Mohammad Reza Pahlevi Shah, to abdicate," explained Majid after asking me one day if I was interested in getting a better understanding of what was happening in Iran.

I nodded eagerly, open to the idea since my feelings for my new friends were growing stronger by the day. Both Mohsen and Majid seemed pleased and I now noticed how Majid slightly changed his way of speaking, with a more intellectual

approach.

"Iran - or Persia as our country was called until 1935 - had earlier been literally torn apart between the great powers Russia and Great Britain."

Reza Pahlevi Shah

He walked across the room to the bookshelf to fetch a handwritten notebook and some photographs, hesitated for a second before he pulled it out and returned to the sofa. I glanced at the worn notebook, while Majid continued.

"However, through a nationalist coup d'état, the father of the Shah succeeded in breaking the foreign hold and, as a dictator, thrown out both parties. But he dug his own grave as he informally supported Nazi Germany – and then things turned out the way they did."

He handed me the book. I had a quick look, but saw that it was all hand written in exotic looking Farsi, so I gave it back.

"Now his son, our current Shah, took over the world famous Peacock Throne at the same time as the United States saw its chance to enter the scene. During World War II, the Allies occupied us but, after the termination of the occupation, the economic, political and military influence of the US started to increase. Because of Iran's strategic position and our oil, we were a morsel waiting to be savoured."

Mohsen cleared his throat, interrupted and continued while Majid did his best to translate.

"For a short period, the then Premier Mohammad Mossadeq introduced a nationalistic government of a democratic model. We absolutely loved him, he was such an honest, colourful and strong character."

Mohsen nodded. I could see that Mossadeq was clearly one of his all time favourites. Majid continued:

"But after a few years, and with the aid of the CIA, the Shah succeeded in ridding himself of his adversary. Mossadeq was put in house arrest to fade away from the historical scene."

Majid opened his notebook.

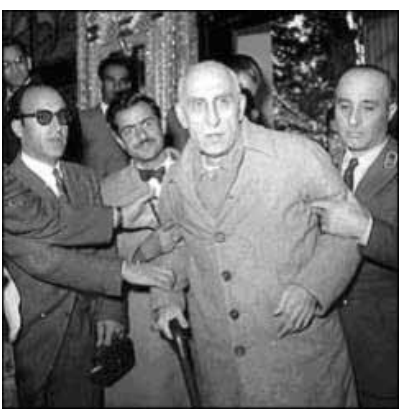
"As I'm sure you are aware of, most official history is normally written by the conqueror, so it's very rarely accurate. Because of this I have written down everything I know in this old book, so that it won't be forgotten."

He took a sip of tea before he started reading out loud.

"Together with the landowner aristocracy, the Shah was now able to regain his former power with the co-operation of the army and the secret police, *SAVAK (Sazman-e Amniyat Va Ittilaat-e Keshvar* - Organization of National Security and Intelligence). Under his government, our country soon turned into a growing totalitarian military power where all opposition was persecuted and crushed."

"The Shah was also dissatisfied with the underdeveloped situation here compared with Europe and the USA, so he concentrated on changing our country into a modern industrial state, this implying a drastic social and economic adjustment for the entire society."

I was beginning to understand, that contrary to the impression given in articles in glossy magazines all over the world, the Shah didn't care that the man in the street was caught in the middle. To the readers of the world's weeklies, the Shah was the King of Kings who did everything for his people.



Mohammad Mossadeq was eliminated

Apparently this wasn't true.

"At this time, high-tech industry and modern agriculture were stimulated particularly here around Tehran at the same time as the country was invaded by foreign experts and military advisers. Multinational companies were the rage of the day. "

Mohammad Reza Shah

Majid looked down before continuing.

"The years passed while development changed our country much too fast into an illusion of success and happiness. All at the expense of our people who could not keep up with the pace and conform. What made this entire material development possible was the oil revenue."

"Seen from the outside, everything might have seemed to progress splendidly. And then, due to a conflict between Israel and Egypt, the Arab countries in 1973 imposed oil blockades on the countries aiding Israel. The set was staged for a dramatic rise in oil prices."

I knew what he was talking about since I clearly remembered how the western world had to ration all oil consumption. The prices quadrupled and a new golden age gave countries like Iran an enormous boost.

"Then in 1975, the Shah introduced a one-party state with the Pastakhiz party, which advocated the monarchy and forcefully united the different peoples in Iran. In the background the secret police *SAVAK* effectively persecuted and silenced all dissidents."

Majid took a silent breath.

"But soon a severe setback was seen. Normal people simply

went crazy in their desire to buy, this resulting in overheating of the economy and uncontrollable increases in prices. Growing demand for foreign luxuries resulted in increasing import expenses and the differences in income widened at a staggering rate."

"People were not prepared at all for these quick changes, were they?" I asked.

Majid shook his head and went on:

"The bazaar owners were traditionally responsible for the main part of the upkeep of the mullahs, you know the priests who today rule our country."

I nodded.

"But when even these got into economic problems, the existence of the mullahs and thus the cornerstones of the entire Shia-muslim society were threatened. On top of this was the increased dissatisfaction among us students, workers as well as racial minorities within the army and other groups."

He looked out the window and frowned.

"At the same time, the agricultural policy of the Shah failed in spite of a so-called "White Revolution." By backing the wrong horse, he had supported modern large-scale agriculture at the cost of the traditional small-scale farms and cattle breeding."

"The results were not long in coming and soon there was an acute shortage of food, which could only be counteracted by increased imports. Massive immigration into our cities then took place."

"It was very difficult times and in this atmosphere, cultural instability spread everywhere and hatred flared against both the western influence and the immense class differences."

Later in the afternoon we continued.

"Due to the negative development I mentioned earlier, the

Shah's enemies increased in number," Majid explained. The political opposition united liberals and left-wing politicians with the mullahs, who had always been a thorn in the flesh to the Shah. Now he retaliated by actively opposing their power. He might even have succeeded had he not forgotten one vital factor: we the people."

The King of Kings

He showed me some of the old photos from years gone by. They all looked like they came from very different era. I passed them on to Mohsen.

"You must understand that even during the years of the Shah regime, we had been brutally suppressed. In this, *SAVAK* the secret police, played the main part with its fear-inspiring prisons and torture chambers. They were awful, absolutely awful."

"*SAVAK* had vast resources at its disposal and was present everywhere in order to keep the people at bay. But their increasingly brutal display of power only resulted in growing discontent and repeated uprisings."

Mohsen nodded in silent agreement.

"I tell you, nobody dared trust anyone else since an extensive network of informers had been established over the years. So only in the mosques could people congregate relatively safely since they were holy places and left alone by *SAVAK*."

"And it was here the foundation was laid to the later so massive influence of the mullahs on the political development."

Among these mullahs was one quite unknown Ayatollah named Ruhollah Moussavi Khomeini."

"Ah, now I am starting to get it," I said. "But would you mind if we take a short break," I asked, stood up and walked over to the window. "It's getting a little difficult for me to remember it all.

Reza Shah and his Farah Diba

"Of course," Majid said and turned towards Mohsen who was whispering something in his ear. Majid smiled.

"Mohsen wants to hear more about your trip on the bicycle. Would you mind telling us some more?"

I nodded

"For sure, I'll be happy to."

I leaned my forehead against the window pane and cupped my hands so as to see more than the glare of the sun. In the street below, a family of five were on their way to a local park.

"Something incredible happened in Greece on my way here," I smiled an closed my eyes as I recalled.

"Do you feel like talking about it? We are all ears," Majid said and sat down beside Mohsen.

The sun filled the room with its golden warmth and the curtain moved slightly with the breeze. A melancholy tune was playing on the tape recorder in the next room. It was the famous singer Googoosh singing about unhappy love.
What I was going to tell happened in Polikastron, a tiny town in northern Greece.

My bike had broken down and I spent a couple of days with

John Little, a Welsh long-distance lorry driver. He had agreed to meet a colleague at a small motel on the outskirts of town.

The gas station outside Polikastron

Behind the main building was a large open parking lot for lorries. Here drivers from all over Europe met and one of them had allowed me to sleep under his trailer. On one of the whitewashed walls the restaurant owner had painted "Ve spik englisch, german und svenska hier."

That night as we entered the bar to have a cool beer, John poked me in the ribs.

"Will you look at that! We have got to talk to her!" he exclaimed and pointed to a girl who was sitting with some mates in the restaurant.

No sooner said than done. We made a beeline for the trio.

"Hi, I'm Kayla," the blond girl smiled. "I'm John and he is Ole," John said and ordered a round for us all.

"And who are your friends?"

"Peter and Eddie," was the answer. The two men didn't seem pleased at our intrusion.

I felt tongue-tied and shy before the glittering eyes of the girl.

As beer and wine were ordered, the atmosphere improved. I preferred keeping in the background and watch Kayla as she made a one-woman show to the delight of everyone. The other guests were captivated by her infectious laughter and crazy performance on, beside and round our table.

It turned out that she had hitch-hiked all the way from England via Italy where she had nearly been raped. Here Peter had saved her and since then he had been acting as her 'daddy'.

Beautiful Kayla

A few hours later, Peter and Eddie decided to turn in. They had a long stretch the next day and had already had a few too many.

"Good night and sleep well," Kayla shouted after them. "I'm coming in a little while."

"You make sure it is not too long," Peter mumbled in a surly manner as he slouched off. Soon the party was going on again and as time passed, Kayla moved closer to me.

I became increasingly aware of her. The wine eased my tongue and we had a great time. The hours flew by and soon the owner insisted that it was way past closing time. Not even Kayla's flirty eyes could make him change his mind.

"Okay, then let us go," she said and took John and me by the hand.

By the lorries she hugged us.

"Thanks for tonight, it has been great meeting you both."

Holding her was wonderful. I was about to give her a good-night kiss, when she stood on tiptoe and whispered something in my ear. Then she was gone in the dark. Blushing and dumb-founded I repeated the words that lingered.

"I'm coming back..." That was surely what she had said, wasn't it...?

Just the thought of what this might mean made my body tingle. I went back to the truck trailer, rolled out my sleeping bag and tried to get as comfortable as I could behind one of

the massive wheels. The night was cold, the wind so strong that dust was whirling. Slowly but surely it penetrated both zipper and clothes while I was restlessly waiting in the dark. Was she really coming?

A quarter of an hour later, I saw something moving close by.

"Kayla, is that you," I asked quietly and peered out into the dark of the night. But instead of Kayla, an old moth-eaten mongrel turned up. Lost and frozen it nosed around me, whimpering and with pleading eyes.

"Alright then," I sighed and opened my sleeping bag. We were both cold but an armful of friendly dog helped. No more was needed and soon he curled up in the sleeping bag. Where there is room in the heart, there is room in the house.

However, I got annoyed as I came back after answering the call of nature and was met by a growl.

"Oh no, enough is enough," I growled back.

Too tired and cold to argue with a surly dog, I turned the sleeping bag upside down. But where was Kayla?

An eternity later, I gave up hope, curled up with my back towards the wind and started counting sheep. Then it had just been empty talk...

"Ole, where are you?"

I awoke with a start, pricked my ears and looked around. My heart started pounding.

"I had a really hard time finding the right trailer," she giggled as she pushed herself down in the sleeping bag. The contact with her warm skin made the hairs on my arms stand on end while I enjoyed her hand in my hair and her soft kiss.

We were beginning to know each other better when we heard the door of a lorry slam shut.

"Damn. That must be Peter looking for me," Kayla whispered. "You have to think of something to get rid of him."

With these words she disappeared into the bottom of the bag.

"But, I'm hopeless at lying," I stammered.

"Then you have a great chance to learn now."

Kayla and I later became a real couple

In a cold sweat I waited for Peter who was angrily stomping around among the lorries. Soon I was staring at his dirty shoes, heavy fists and flat boxer's nose.

"Have you seen Kayla?" he asked sternly riveting his eyes on me.

"Nooo," I answered hesitantly.

Slowly he let his eyes wander over the almost bursting old sleeping bag. In spite of the poor light, I knew that he understood.

Now there was no way out and I prepared myself for trouble.

But after he had thought for a while, he suddenly turned and left.

"Wow, that was close," I breathed and dried the sweat off my forehead.

Only then did I realize what Kayla was up to in the bag and it didn't take long for me to return to the seventh heaven with the lyrics of an old song in my head: "What happened next is private. It is also very rude."

When I woke in the morning, she was gone. The only thing that was left was a scribble in the sand.

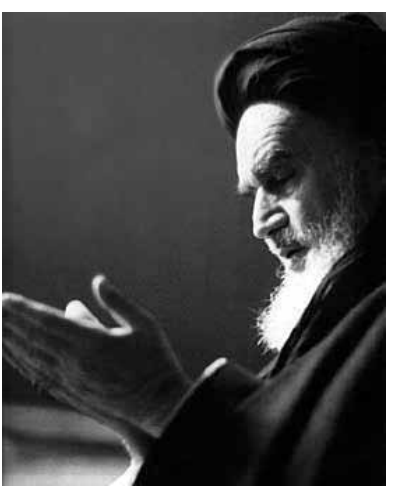
“May there always be trailers and sand storms...”

THE NEW SAVIOUR

AYATOLLAH AL-UTHMA SYYED Ruhallah al-Musavi al-Khomeini was born in 1901.

"His father was an Ayatollah and his mother was the daughter of Ayatollah Mirza Ahmad," explained Majid one day when we had been out driving.

"The black turban showed that his father was *Seyed*, that is to say a direct descendant of the Prophet Mohammad. However, the Shah had the father executed as being a danger to the government."



Ruhollah Khomeini

Mohsen stopped the car in the alley outside Majid's home. We got out and greeted his parents who came to open the door for us. Then we went upstairs.

Majid went to get his notebook, while his sister

Maryam served us some *chai*.

"It is said, that at a very young age Khomeini learned to read and write, and in fact, that he knew the entire Quran by heart at the age of seven. He had a burning interest in religion and soon decided to study at the theological university at Qom. Later in life he was one of the very few learned men who openly stood up and criticized the regime. In one speech he even threatened to remove the Shah."

This was totally unheard of, the result wasn't long in coming and he was soon imprisoned. When this news reached the people, violent demonstrations took place in cities like Tehran, Qom, Mashad, Shiraz, Isfahan and Tabriz where demands were made that Khomeini be released at once.

"The Shah then declared a military state of emergency and sent in troops that brutally harassed the demonstrators and opened fire on the masses in order to keep them quiet. Most of them ran for their lives, but according to some reports, about fifteen hundred people lost their lives in Tehran alone."

"The uprising was soon crushed and after his arrest in November, 1963, Khomeini was exiled to Turkey. On the morning of that day, the inhabitants of the religious city of Qom were not allowed to appear in the streets as the troops of the Shah encircled the homes of the religious leaders. The top people were put in prison and almost all the remainder given house arrest."

"Soon Khomeini was even banished from Turkey to neighbouring Iraq from where he some fifteen years later, was motivating us in our struggle to get rid of the Shah."

Discontent was escalating, strikes and rioting intensified and, in sheer desperation, the Shah finally abolished all political parties and thus became an absolute dictator. Now the stage was set for the final cruel act.

The act that was to result in the downfall of the Shah.

"If you help me overthrow the Shah, I will give you a free Iran where the prisons will be turned into museums. Islam shall rule. We shall rid ourselves of the USA and together create a new realm!"

In 1978, promises like these enticed the divided resistance groups into uniting behind Khomeini who was now tremendously popular in spite of the fact that the only thing they had in common was their hatred for the Shah.

"The initial phase joined all opponents of the monarchy," Majid explained. "At this point, no-one could seriously imagine that Ayatollah Khomeini had any political ambitions and socialists, liberals and islamists fought side by side."

"The revolution started with a few minor demonstrations and riots, which were brutally crushed by the Shah's soldiers. The army wasn't lenient and many demonstrators were severely injured during this period."

"But now the Shah made the fatal mistake of forgetting that we Iranians are Shia-muslims who traditionally revere martyrdom. One of the traditions implies that, on the seventh and the fortieth day after somebody dies, family and dear friends gather."

"So when the soldiers murdered some who were demonstrating, an irate crowd gathered on these dates."

"The army was sent out again, killed a few more

The Shah was quick to use his troops

whose families and friends in their turn gathered in grief and rage at the same time as the relatives of the first victims turned up again on the fortieth day."

"And so everything was set in motion," Mohsen sighed.

It was like a tiny snowball starting a massive avalanche. The revolution was to prove just as difficult to stop.

Horrible scenes

"Initially, only rather peaceful demonstrations took place where people got out into the streets to protest against the oppression and the situation in which we were forced to live."

"But, starting here in Tehran, uprisings spread like wildfire and via the network of mosques, soon the whole country was in uproar. The revolution was a fact and our Prime Minister Hoveyda was forced to resign. Simultaneously a six-month curfew was introduced in Tehran and eleven other cities. Now we felt that nothing could stop us. "

Millions of people defied both police and military by violating curfews and barriers. Every day, an endless stream of infuriated people flooded the streets in a massive demonstration of protest. The regime countered by sending out army trucks filled with well-trained troops armed with American weapons.

"Thousands of people were arrested as a warning and the brutal soldiers did their best to crush the resistance. But in vain."

I looked down at the violent photos in front of me on the table. Truncheons, tear gas, riot fences, water canons and rub-

ber bullets were not enough. Not even live ammunition could stop the riots.

For every dead demonstrator, a hundred new ones appeared armed with heavy cobblestones and Molotov cocktails ready to sacrifice their lives in the struggle.

The devastation was indescribable. Bleeding corpses, burning cars and broken shop windows underlined the feeling of desperation mixed with an intense longing for a better future. The smoke was dense over the city centre.

"However, not all chose violence as a weapon. Many tried to convince the army. Some women carried large bouquets of flowers and garlands which they placed at the feet of the heavily armed soldiers."

"Often Ayatollah Khomeini encouraged us to be friendly towards the soldiers and the two fighting sides sometimes encountered each other in awkward attempts to communicate. Brave women stuck red roses down the gun barrels and certain soldiers broke down and started to cry. On other occasions, the flowers were met by flying lead."

Millions of people in the streets

Confusion was overwhelming and many officers did their best to spare lives. Through their megaphones they desperately tried to get the throngs off the streets.

"Please go home, they pleaded," remembered Mohsen. "We

don't want to harm you. Please don't force us to shoot!"

"Banderols with slogans such as "The people and the army join through the Quran," "The army is our brother, Khomeini is our leader," "Now we know the real role of the USA in Iran" and pictures of Khomeini could be seen everywhere and many soldiers broke down under the pressure and decided to desert."

The Shah's soldiers stood helpless

"Every soldier who changed sides was celebrated and treated like a hero. We started to feel that we were winning," he added with passion.

As a result of this, in the autumn of 1978, a state of emergency was proclaimed and military government replaced the civilian one. But, by then, insurrection had spread over the entire country and now Khomeini appeared as a charismatic unifying leader. From his exile in Paris, he was now able to instigate the final phase of the Shah regime by speeches

The mullahs were gaining more and more power

and pamphlets smuggled into the country.

Death and dead bodies - always present

"The incredibly fast expansion of the revolution astounded both us as well as the rest of the world and, as time passed, the Shah became increasingly desperate. For too long, he had hesitated with the really tough measures and now the situation was ominous."

"With the aid of brutal officers, such as general Ovejci, he decided to strike back full force. Heavily armed helicopters were launched to fire at the crowds from the air. Entire districts were cordoned off by tanks and thousands of people perished. Dead bodies could be seen everywhere but by now there was no way we would give up. In that case we might as well have died right there and then," he said.

"One of the worst massacres took place on September 18, 1978 (17 Shahrivar 1357, Iranian calendar), at the Jaleh Square in Tehran, where four thousand two hundred and ninety people are said to have been killed. Now this date is called Black Friday."

"Hey, but wait a minute...," I said as it dawned on me that I needed to rewind my memory a little.

"Tell me if this becomes too much at one time," interrupted Majid when he noticed that I had difficulty following all the rapid changes.

"It is OK, just go on," I answered even if my brain cried out for a holiday. I pushed my small, decorated glass of tea away

and rested my tired head in my hands.

The secret police *SAVAK* were not idle but handled the uprising their own way. For instance a raid was made on the Rex cinema in Abadan where at least three hundred and seventy-seven people were gathered.

"After the exits had been barricaded, incendiary bombs were thrown in. The horrible, heartrending screams of men, women and children who were being burned to death in the flames sent shock waves through the entire country. There were no survivors."

Mohsen shuffled his chair and handed me some more horrific photos. I could hardly force myself to look at them.

"Pictures like these of the charred and stinking bodies that had been lined up in long rows were spread in the mass media. The result was a dreadful public outcry that further roused the crowds."

Majid now turned the conversation to the next step in history.

The Iranian people didn't surrender but initiated a fatal blow against the Shah in the form of one of the longest general strikes in world history – and this in a country where the average production of oil was about three million barrels a day.

In the middle of January, the defeated Shah finally acknowledged his hopeless situation and left the country on a so-called tourist trip to USA.

"We had won, against all odds! We did it!"

Not even tanks could stop the riots

Both Majid and Mohsen's eyes were shining while remembering the feeling of having turned something totally impossible into something real.

The people was going wild in the streets

"Don't kill more people than you have to," were the Shah's last words before he entered his private jet plane together with his wife, Farah Diba. Behind him he left his generals and other supporters, who were now abandoned to their own devices and dispersed to avoid the revenge of the people.

However, his ally, the USA, now turned its back on him and refused to allow his plane to land. Instead, the fallen monarch had to go to Egypt where he later died of leukemia on July 27, 1980.

"President Anwar Sadat later gave him a pompous state funeral after which his son, Reza Pahlavi II, was declared our new shah in exile," Majid said.

The Shah's mausoleum in Cairo

Now the time had come for the black turbaned, white-haired Ayatollah to enter the stage. "You look tired," said Majid and gave me a concerned look. "Are

you okay?"

I nodded. "For sure, but it would be great if we can take a break."

"In the meantime, how about telling us some more from your trip? You said something about a public convenience?""

"Okay," I said and let my thoughts wander back several months.

This happened at the beginning of my pedalling and I had just spent the night in a humid fir forest. The minutes I had succeeded in sleeping that night could be counted on the fingers of one frozen hand. All my joints were stiff and sore and in the early morning mist I had had problems just getting onto Rolling Antero. Rolling Antero was the name for my bow-legged friend.

The white September fog was slowly lifting, the grass glittered with dewdrops. Here and there, drowsy sun rays were reflected in drop-heavy cobwebs.

I had not even pedalled ten miles when, as so often happened, a shower beat down as if to test the quality of my rain wear.

"Oh no, I've had it," I thought and looked around in despair.

To the right of the road was a public convenience building which at closer inspection turned out to be for handicapped people and thus extra wide. Yiiippiiee! It was perfect for both the bike and little old me.

Less than one minute later we were in safety. It felt great to hear the rain patter on the roof instead of on my head and with a satisfied sigh I sat down on the floor and leaned back on the toilet.

The showers had frightened away the sun and I slowly became aware how cold it really was. Matters were not improved by the fact that all my clothes including socks and shoes were dripping wet.

But then I had a brainwave. If I took the steel-netting waste-

basket, put it upside down and placed my small LPG heater underneath, it might work as a drying frame. No sooner thought than done. Shortly, warmth was spreading in my new home accompanied by the restful sizzling of my well-done socks. Satisfied by my own inventiveness, I slowly dozed off when the LGP went out with an almost inaudible ploop.

"Damn it," I mumbled and sat up with a yawn.

Cautiously I waited until the embers had died down before I tried to pour in some more fuel. I knew it could be dangerous so I had better be careful.

POFF!!!

It all happened within one tenth of a second and before I had time to react, large flames flared from the heater. Apparently there had still been some live embers!

Startled I dropped the bottle as the blaze licked my fingers and soon the burning liquid covered the entire floor. In a hurry I jumped up onto the toilet seat and stared wide-eyed at the fire. The catastrophe was a fact.

"Don't panic, just let it burn. There is nothing else here that can catch fire," I mumbled reassuringly to myself.

However, in one corner was a small drain which proved to be fatal. One second later flames flared through the grating and a heavy stench of poisonous plastic fumes spread through my little home-sweet-home.

Furthermore, the burning LPG had trickled in under the hand basin, which was framed by a steel plate. This plate went all the way down to the floor and, helplessly, I heard how the fire tried to devour what was behind there. My desperate attempts at putting the fire out with water only resulted in the pungent smoke becoming thicker and blacker.

Half blinded and coughing, I gave up and fumbled towards

the door.

But I had hardly opened the door ajar when it was time for shock number two: out there was a handicap-adapted car, its owner impatiently waiting for the toilet to become vacant. I slammed the door shut and, with a soaked scarf round my head, crept back under the smoke to try and wait for him to leave.

The sizzling and growling from the grating continued without any sign of abating and, in my mind's eye, I could see tomorrow's headlines:

"Bicycle pyromaniac strikes at public convenience building for the handicapped!" "Six months in jail for assault on public convenience by pyromaniac!"

But what was that? Did it not sound as if...? Sure. With a faint wheezing sound the fire slowly died.

"Thank you, dear God!"

But even if the worst was over, I was still in a fix. Outside the car was still chugging and it would only be a matter of minutes, before the owner noticed the whiffs of black smoke oozing from the crack of the door.

Now it was kill or cure. The air was getting scarce and I had to get out!

Coughing and sputtering I collected everything in my panniers and, after taking my courage in both hands, jumped on Antero and kicked the door open. The sight must have been indescribable for the poor driver. Here he was in distress twiddling his thumbs when the door bangs open and a sooty bandit shoots out on a bike in a huge cloud of smoke.

With an innocent whistle I quickly left the scene of the crime.

Majid and Mohsen doubled up with laughter when I finished talking and more than once I was taunted with remarks about idiots with handicapped heads and toes.

After a nice late dinner together with the family we continued

our history tour.

"It was an incredible experience to watch Ayatollah Khomeini return," Majid remembered. Mohsen and I together with our friends and thousands of other young men kept back the enormous crowds when the liberator, hero and obvious leader of our country and his escort drove through the streets of the capital. It was amazing, totally amazing and everybody was filled with absolute joy. To finally see our Saviour in person was unforgettable."

Ulf Nilsson, a well-known Swedish journalist was in Tehran at the same time and later described it all as follows, seen through the eyes of a perhaps uncomprehending Westerner.

"After having listened to the words of the old priest for about half an hour, I had to go back to my hotel. It was one of the scariest walks of my entire life – a discovery of the unimaginable.

I had to walk about a mile through narrow alleys winding between dirt-brown buildings, the sad mixture of clay and desert dust of Tehran. Every yard, every nook and cranny was crammed with people, every cobblestone covered by feet, every entrance crowded. In order to advance, I was forced to jostle, shove and push, plead, ask and scream.

The air became difficult to breathe, the stench of sweat was overwhelming, I must have touched a thousand people that morning, or was it ten thousand?

Their black eyes were burning, their lips moved mumbling invocations. With intense – or rather terrible – concentration, they listened to the words of

Khomeini returns from Paris

Khomeini from the loudspeakers, but the one with whom they were communicating wasn't the Ayatollah but – I suddenly realized – some unknown and terrifying god, a being beyond both common sense and description. It was as if they had all grown out of the eyes of Khomeini, full of dark grief and anger aimed at realities I could not grasp.

Everything changed

I was suddenly afraid.

As a reporter you are often subjected to dangers, but this was the first time I experienced that people might tear me to pieces with their bare hands so that I would disappear from the face of the earth."

For the Iranian in the street, the experience was completely different and Majid's eyes shone in excitement as he continued:

"We had succeeded in accomplishing the impossible and our happiness was monumental. Now - at last – no more oppression or exploitation of the country. We were free, free at last! That is what we thought ..."

He moved closer and lowered his voice:

"Blinded by our hate of the Shah, we had forgotten to scrutinize Khomeini, an oversight that was soon to prove disastrous."

The following period was wonderful for the Iranians. Everything seemed fine, but somewhat confused. At long last it was possible to talk freely and Islam was ruling. Voluntarily, the women put on their black *chador*, the different resistance groups imagined that they were safe and quite openly, people made speeches in the squares and handed out political and religious

pamphlets.

At the same time a brutal purging took place among Shah supporters within the entire society.

"Members of the *SAVAK* were hunted down and many were executed without trial," Majid added. "For a long time, the front pages of the most daily newspapers consisted of illustrated lists of the executions of the previous night."

Arrested SAVAK-officers

"But, and this is a big but: What nobody knew was that other members of the *SAVAK* had saved their skins by committing their jobs to Khomeini. So all supervision and registration of the inhabitants continued just as before, but now in total secret."

"Oh my God," I whispered. "So that means that.."

I didn't finish the sentence.

"Yes," Majid answered. "Talk about being had," he sighed and shook his head. "We had been so focused, but at the wrong enemy."

Concurrently, an intense offensive was initiated against all Western values. Particularly Israel and USA were subjected to a fanatical campaign of hate, the objective of which was mostly to divert attention from the new government which had growing problems with schisms.

The hatred of the Shah continued even though he had left the country. In an attempt to force him back to face charges for his deeds, enraged students occupied the American embassy

and took fifty-three people hostage.

"Reactions included severe international sanctions against our oil export. But they did not know who they were up against. Not even when the Shah passed away, did Khomeini give up but encouraged the occupants to continue since USA had frozen several billion dollars of our assets in the States."

I nodded, since I remembered from the newspapers back home that only after four hundred and forty-four long days, the hostages were released in exchange for the Iranian billions.

At the same time everything finally seemed fine and people could breathe out and feel that life was worth living.

"But then things changed dramatically."

For now Khomeini thought the time had come to test his strength on his allies, the different resistance groups.

"Without anyone noticing, his new secret police had mapped out the entire political resistance, group by group, person by person," Mohsen explained while carefully peeling an orange, then kindly offering me half. I accepted with a smile.

"At the same time, the *pasdaran* corps had been established, an equivalent of the SS troops, you know, quite a lot like Adolf Hitler's feared private army. Most of us happily joined to serve our new commander and at that point this massive power factor consisted of tens of thousands armed soldiers."

Mohsen threw another orange to Majid.

"So, seven months after the downfall of the Shah, they struck simultaneously everywhere," he explained sadly as he paced up and down the room. In

The big influence of the Quran

the background I heard the current reports from the ongoing war with Iraq.

He stopped and looked directly into my eyes.

"We were totally unprepared. Nobody could believe what just had happened, or the level of deceit. Within a very short time, almost all political and religious resistance groups as well as many outspoken and critical individuals had disappeared."

"Not only did they put the suspects in prison," Mohsen muttered and spread his arms in a gesture of sheer despair. "But, in order to avoid future problems, even their children, parents and friends suffered the same fate."

He averted his eyes to avoid my noticing the tears in his eyes.

"In one fell swoop, Khomeini had summarily dealt with all his former supporters. Every single part of his plan had been successful and now the road was open to his religious fanaticism."

For the Iranians, this was like jumping out of the frying pan into the fire. Who could have predicted this terrible turn of events, who could have suspected that Khomeini wasn't what he pretended to be?

"But now it was too late. The trap had snapped shut and, once again, we were caught in the grip of a dictator."

I moved in my seat, there was no way I could truly grasp the content. Instead of just hearing words, I physically felt their pain. I looked out the window and took a few deep breaths.

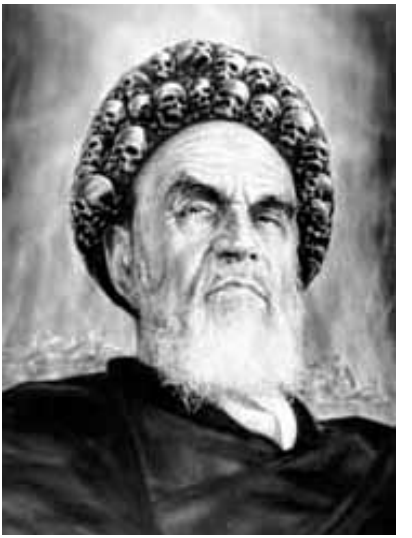
"And this was only the beginning. Slowly but surely our society changed through one restriction after the other."

At this point, the power of Ayatollah Khomeini was practically unlimited. According to a new constitution, he was God's sole representative on earth and had the right to put a veto on all important decisions and appointments.

"Now he was no longer responsible to the people but exclusively to God, whom he alone is said to know."

Mohsen shook his head in despair.

A foreign journalist described it as follows: "For the first time since Jesus Christ, a human has succeeded in attaining the position of God. Furthermore, he now acts as supreme commander with the right to issue declarations of both war and peace and, as long as he lived, his position was ensured."



The powerful new Saviour

"So as it is today, there is no way out for the Iranian people." Majid sat down in the sofa and leaned back with a deep sigh. "No way at all."

"We overthrew one regime, but have instead got another one which has proved to be many times worse."

A GIGANTIC MEETING PLACE

THE SUN WAS SLOWLY rising behind the ghostlike mountain range in the east and a shimmering haze quietly spread over the gigantic capital of Iran. Weak and delicate, the dazed sun rays attempted to penetrate the layer of exhaust gas while the light of dawn slowly recaptured what the night had tried to hide.

Judging from the moist streets, a shower had passed during the dark hours. The breeze made the autumn leaves dance a gay, though somewhat melancholy, waltz. It felt cool and fresh.

Around me the whitewashed houses struggled for room with their grey neighbours between the tiny narrow streets, which, in spite of the early hour, had already come to life. On

The gigantic Iranian capital Tehran

the flat roofs, thousands of TV aerials reached for the crimson sunrise like dead branches. Here and on the countless balconies, long garlands of drying laundry were moving idly in the wind.

I had woken early. After a restless night, it was a relief to roll out of my worn sleeping bag and go out on the roof to partake of the morning. It wasn't yet five o'clock and in the room below me, I could hear Majid's parents preparing to leave in order to join the endless queues at the food shops. They were both old and frail but no complaints or quarrels were heard, only small talk about how to distribute the work.

From the autumnal trees along the streets, the carefree birds were chirping happy to meet the new day while old weather-beaten street vendors were slowly laying out their goods on the pavements. The night had been quiet and the inhabitants of Tehran seemed grateful for yet another night without Iraqi bomb raids.

It was now several weeks since the latest air raid from high altitude where the Iraqis released their rockets indiscriminately killing everything in their way. Every hour of undisturbed sleep was important and I could feel the relief in the cool morning air.

Yawning I attempted to stretch my sore shoulder muscles. Ever since I arrived in Iran, I had had the feeling I was carrying at least a ton on my tired back. The rest of my body felt stiff and sore with mental tension and I was beginning to long back to Istanbul with its Turkish baths and masseurs.

Instead, I had to make do with the laughter from a young couple in the street below me. I was glad to hear their happy voices and this helped to ease my gloom.

In the alley below, I saw Mohsen wave, jump into his pale-blue car and drive off towards the nearest crossing. As usual he had a very long day ahead of him and I wished I could relieve his burden, but he had refused my offer with a kind but firm

gesture.

"Bikhialesh. Alân bâyad beram sare kar."

If I had understood his words, signs and eyes correctly, the best help I could offer him was to be there in the evening when he returned so that we could talk about life and people in Europe. Even if he rarely showed it, I felt his longing for a place on earth, anywhere, where life could be meaningful and not just a fight for survival. I waved back while the car disappeared round the corner.

Myself, Mohsen and his light-blue Peykan

Just like most others, Mohsen's car was a Peykan, a native version of the old British Hillman Hunter.

In the dense and chaotic traffic, many cars showed signs of the earlier British influence. Especially the large dark-green double-decker buses made me think of Big Ben and London.

Here and there more modern buses of different colours could be seen. These were special buses for soldiers who had been crippled in the war. The regime took very good care of its war veterans and this was only one of many "benefits".

But motorbikes were nowhere to be seen. After some raids by the Mujahedin, all heavy motorbikes had been prohibited. This resistance group had several times attacked priests by two men on a motor bike driving up beside the private limousine of some mullah and the man in the rear seat of the bike pulling out a sub machine gun blowing the car to smithereens.

The dawn was giving way to daylight and during the past

half hour the streets had cluttered up by morning-sullen drivers. Here the law of the jungle prevailed and my impression was that many tried to prove their virility and at the same time give vent to their frustration by driving as callously and ruthlessly as possible.

The stinking traffic was totally crazy

For example, by the traffic lights people stopped almost in the middle of the busy crossing without giving one thought to anybody else.

When the traffic in the other direction then retaliated in kind, the situation soon became chaotic, this in turn resulting in hour-long queues.

From where I was sitting, I could see that certain streets were blocked to ordinary traffic. Here only orange taxies and other cars with permits were allowed. However, this didn't prevent many others from trying. In one of the crossings closest to me I saw no less than six police officers fighting desperately to cope with the never ceasing flood of opportunists. Fines were scribbled down at lightning speed but it was apparently worth it. Anything to avoid hours in a queue.

"Khomeini! Khomeini!"

The shrill cries from a girls' school near by distracted me from the traffic. Between the roofs to my left I had a glimpse of a tall wall that prevented all observation, but the noise from the schoolyard echoed along the narrow street and, in spite of my bad Persian, I understood that it was the head mistress

drilling the pupils using a megaphone.

"Who is our great leader?"

The militant question was instantly answered by the unanimous, monotonous cries of the young children, "Khomeini! Khomeini!"

The previous day, I had heard the same on the radio in the Iranian children's hour. Even there the cries were "Khomeini! Khomeini!" and "Allah! Allah!"

It scared me that not even the children were left alone. In addition, I had seen public tribute being paid by the Ministry of Propaganda to children's drawings showing scenes from the war. But, at all times, dictators have known how impressionable children are and exploited it brutally.

"By the way, did you know that according to Islam it is legal to marry a nine-year old," Majid had asked me in passing the night before.

When he noticed my bewildered expression, he laughed and calmed me by saying that nowadays this kind of marriage is very unusual. According to Majid, it was the Quran itself, which considered small girls marriageable. It was also the Quran, which stipulated that girls should dress in accordance with Islam before their tenth birthday. But this book had been written in the seventh century and now we were in 1984 or rather 1363 according to the Iranian calendar. Maybe 1363 was more appropriate since, to my mind, these type of rules belonged in the Middle Ages.

Children's drawings full of war

The Islamic way of looking at

marriage was totally different from what I was used to. Here no particular attention was paid to falling in love. Instead, the importance of bread winning and other practical details were stressed - as well as the love and solidarity within the family. In a country with no social protective measures, people had to have other priorities than in the west.

Narrow alleys in South Tehran

Another difference was that a man had a legal right to have up to four wives. Simultaneously. This made me think of the Japanese pictogram for problem: two women under the same roof.

"In the rough circumstances of today, only very few have more than one," Majid had explained.

From the beginning, the objective of this had been that a man could take care of his brother's widow. Marrying a woman who had been married before and who maybe even had children was otherwise a great problem in the Iranian society but, in this way, life could go on without anyone losing their honour. A couple of generations ago this practice had been quite widespread and I sometimes heard of one grandfather and three grandmothers in the same family.

I soon realized that many circumstances in the Islamic society which at first shocked me often had very sensible explanations if I took the time to look behind the screens.

There were, however, certain things I had difficulty ac-

cepting. One was *sighe*, a so-called short-term marriage that was rather common particularly in religious cities like Qom and Mashad. By going to a mullah you could marry a chosen woman for an agreed period of time, for example a few months. At the wedding, the woman and her family received a sum of money before the actual ceremony. When the time expired, the man could look for a new wife if he wasn't satisfied enough to want to prolong the contract.

To my western ears this sounded most of all as a type of prostitution in spite of the fact that these women were highly respected in society. It was often mullahs, wealthy men, foreign businessmen or lovesick youngsters who utilized this possibility.

But who was I to judge coming from a country where almost half of all marriages broke up within a few years. Maybe this was a good idea.

"There is truly a lot which differs from one country to the next on this strange earth," I muttered with a sad smile as I let my eyes wander over the colourful city.

By now, Majid's father had come back and the smell of newly baked *barbari* and tea filled the house. The others were waking up in there and my stomach rumbled with yearning.

The more we got to know each other, the more honest and intimate became our conversations.

Apparently I was the first European Majid and his family had ever met. And I myself had never talked to Iranians until I entered the bus from Istanbul.

Therefore I was often asked rather strange questions. Some of the favourites were what I thought of hippies, skinheads and punks, if there were icebergs in Sweden and if the Swedes were really as keen on keeping nature as clean as rumour had it.

Otherwise most questions concerned political issues, my opinion about Margaret Thatcher and Ronald Reagan, about

aid to Third World countries, about the CIA and KGB or Israel's role in the Middle East. I answered as best I could and sometimes caused reactions that were difficult to interpret. Both Majid and Mohsen were quite intellectual and liked to discuss subjects where I felt myself an outsider. Jean Paul Sartre, Maurice Maeterlinck, Karl Marx and Bertrand Russell were names that kept turning up in their conversations.

Their sisters on the other hand were interested in completely different things, such as my blond hair and blue-green eyes which were a constant source of curiosity. Particularly Mohsen's older sister was fascinated by my hair and often asked if she could touch it.

In Majid and Mohsen's spare time, we took the car and visited their relatives and friends. This was exciting and mostly I enjoyed it. However, I sometimes felt like a trained monkey to be shown off. It could even talk!

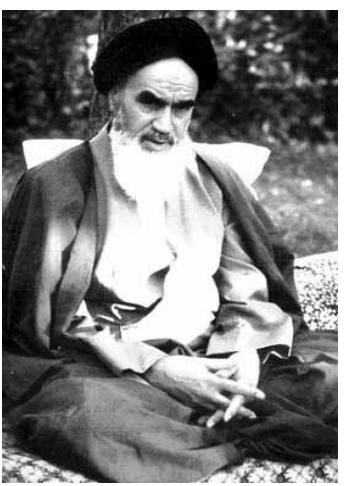
"But say something," I was asked repeatedly until I with a forced smile voiced some of the few Farsi words I had learned.

The result was always cheers and pats on the back.

"Kheily khube! Alie! Fantastic! Wonderful!"

After this it was often question time when Majid asked the questions to which my answers had satisfied him.

It annoyed me being treated as a child and sometimes I withdrew somewhere to avoid playing Clever Idiot. I started to understand what it was like to come as a foreigner to Sweden where I had seen the same scenes performed with poor



Ayatollah Khomeini

Africans who had landed in wintry Scandinavia.

But on the whole everything was fine and I enjoyed being with my new friends. The ever-present cordiality, their loving way of receiving me and the consideration I was shown never ceased to surprise me.

This consideration was expressed in many ways, everything from my shoes suddenly having been shined to my clothes lying washed, fragrant and ironed beside my bed when I woke up one morning. Once I happened to mention that I liked a certain kind of sweets and from that day on there was always a bowl of them on the table. These small gestures were always made quietly without a fuss but as a matter of course.

Otherwise what Majid called *tarôff* was usual among Iranians, that is to say inviting and pressing food on the guest and, after he had accepted and left, talk about him behind his back.

Since I didn't know Iranian culture and traditions, I sometimes made a fool of myself. But I was "the foreigner" so most of them were a little extra indulgent with me.

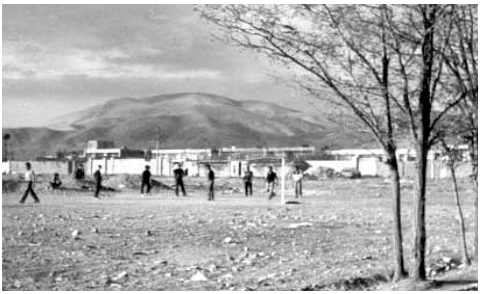
I remember one time when we had been invited to a family reunion in Karach, a city north west of Tehran. It was exactly one year since the demise of a beloved uncle and people gathered to commemorate him.

We arrived at the house that was situated among brown parched hills at the outskirts of the city. Relatives and friends had come from near and far and cars were parked all over the garden. Most of the guests were already congregated inside.

I felt somewhat nervous and uncomfortable but after entering the welcoming home, I cleared my throat and advanced to say hello to the host and hostess as well as the other guests.

The men were seated at a sofa table; the women were gathered along the walls. In my nervous state I forgot to watch Majid and Mohsen's behaviour and, in an attempt to be polite,

I instead walked straight towards the first group of women.



After the reunion we played football

Without thinking I happened to clump across the dinner table that had been rolled out on the living room carpet. Then I advanced to shake hands with some of the women dressed in black. One of them I had met before so she even got a kiss on the cheek. Dumbfounded and hesitant they took my hand and lowered their eyes in confusion.

Not until later was I told that a man was under no circumstances allowed to touch a woman in mourning.

That was a little late in the day.

In the evenings we were sometimes watching the stars or rather we tried to find the few that penetrated the thick exhaust blanket over the city. Maryam and I used to fantasize that we might one day sit together in Sweden and look at the same stars.

To me Maryam was very beautiful. Her even features were framed by long black hair often parted in the middle or combed back in a bun. Her face radiated warmth and I really liked being close to her.

Mostly, however, the girls kept to themselves when they were not busy in the kitchen. Most of the time I was with Majid who had some difficulty understanding that I would like to spend more time with his sisters, since male visitors according to tradition didn't associate with the female members of the family.

The three-floor house was rather sparsely furnished with

lightly coloured walls in both rooms and halls. The curtains were mostly drawn. Apparently Iranians didn't like other people to look into their houses. A wall surrounded even the small garden at the front.

Before meals a cloth was placed on the floor where the family sat cross-legged to eat after which the cloth was wiped clean and folded neatly until next time.

A narrow staircase led to the upper floor. Mostly the doors to the stairwell were closed. The room where Majid, Mohsen and I slept was furnished with a rather worn sofa, some armchairs and a small table. The walls were decorated with a few paintings with motifs from the famous poet Omar Khayyam.

On the floor colourful Persian carpets and, at the far end, some wardrobes and cupboards where we used to keep our mattresses and bedding. The cushions were pillows at night and backrests during the day.

The kitchen contained a sink, an LPG stove and a large heater on the floor. It was neat and well-kept. This was where Majid's mother spent most of her days preparing the meals for the day. If any visitor turned up, you had to be prepared to share since generosity and hospitality were an integral part of the national tradition.

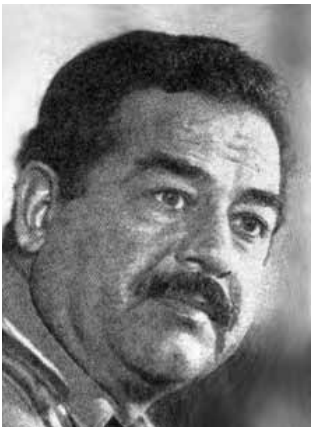
The bathroom and toilet were on the first floor. The toilet was small and tiled without a W.C. Instead there was a tiled plate with a hole in the floor and a chromed water hose beside it. There was also a water-jug so you could wash yourself.

The bathroom was always as clean as the rest of the house and usually smelled of flowers, most probably originating from one of the spray bottles on top of the bathroom cupboard.

It was rather late in the year but the weather wasn't cold and at nightfall, the air became cool and clean. Therefore we often went up onto the roof to relax. This was usual among the inhabitants of Tehran, particularly during the summer when

the roofs were a natural meeting point and during the Iraqi air raids, which had increased lately.

"Tehran must be turned into ruins," the Iraqi leader, Saddam Hussein, had broadcast via the international mass media and the last few days they had poured missiles over the Iranian capital.



Saddam Hussein

It was regarded as very ominous that Iraq had started using missiles in what was now called "the War of the Cities."

In an attempt to convince Iraq to stop attacking civilian targets, Iran had approached the secretary general of the UN, but without avail.

"We shall continue until Tehran is completely obliterated," Saddam Hussein threatened. "The opinion of the rest of the world is not important to us. We will continue the Holy War at the same rate until our Iranian enemy has been wiped off the face of the earth."

"If I'm going to die, I will do so with my back straight and my eyes open," Mohsen declared earnestly while he was looking up towards the big sky above the huge city. "I want to see the bomb with my name on it before it hits me."

Most other people ran for shelters or basements when the alert was sounded. There they spent night after night endlessly waiting while the bombs were raining down from the sky. Nobody knew when his time had come. The Iraqi planes were usually very high up and you could only see them as tiny silver dots in the sky.

Sometimes the Iranian guns noisily retaliated but they were mostly quiet. Rumour had it that the strategic targets where

the guns were located must not be revealed.

Earlier on the Iraqi air force had proved to be far superior to that of Iran which suffered a catastrophic lack of spare parts and tyres. If a vital part was damaged on a plane worth millions of dollars, it remained on the runway like a sacrificial lamb.

However, the fighter planes in working condition fought the enemy and violent duels were often carried out above the heads of the inhabitants of Tehran. White contrails from the tormented fighter planes crisscrossed the deep blue sky in a pattern both beautiful and frightening.

It was like a modern gladiatorial combat.

MADNESS IN IRAN

ONE DAY MAJID AND I were walking through Park-e-Mellat, a beautiful area in northern Tehran, one of the more than seven hundred parks in the city, and Majid was telling me about the difficulty of being young in Iran. While we were talking, we walked along an avenue of trees glowing in all the colours of autumn. I pulled off a large leaf and quietly studied this wonder of nature.

"Guys and girls are never allowed to be together in the open if they are not relatives. Everywhere you can sense watchful eyes just waiting to swoop down like hawks if anyone sees something suspicious.

According to Islam, our parents choose whom you marry. You are not allowed to meet your spouse to be until the wed-

Taking a walk through Mellat Park

ding. Before this, the parents meet and the mother of the groom has the chance to examine the bride.

But nowadays, most young people try to find their own wives, and this is easier said than done when all social life outside the family is forbidden. For the same reason, the regime is doing its best to prevent single men from having their own apartments."

I could feel Majid's sadness as we climbed the impressive marble stairs designed many years ago by the landscape gardeners of the Shah.

"If, for example, a guy and a girl walk in the street together, they may be stopped by the *pasdaran*. Some female *pasdaran* deal with the girl, the others take the man to one side. They are subjected to separate interrogation about their family relation, how they know each other and so on. Then their answers are compared and, if they don't agree, they have had it.

In that case, the two of them are taken to a special office where they are further interrogated after which, at best, their parents are sent for and made to sign a paper swearing that the two will never meet again. If the worst comes to the worst, they are both flogged and then forced to marry."

"Something like that happened one of my brothers. He was out with some friends when they were caught by a patrol. In the confusion that followed, he and a girl had to lie about their relation. Their lie was exposed and, as a result, they are now married."

Women were treated stricktly by the regime

Majid and his girlfriend had also been stopped by

these patrols.

"We were tailed by a man in civilian clothes with a basket in his hand. After a while, I noticed a small aerial in his basket. Apparently he was in contact with a group who later interrogated us but luckily we had rehearsed a story they bought."

"Another time we had to run for it when they turned up," Majid added with a smile. "It is easy to laugh at afterwards but it was really nasty when it happened."

"But how do you meet?" I said. "Don't you ever have parties?"

"Sure, but parties with dancing have been illegalized," Majid continued. "And the few times they do occur, everybody is scared that *pasdaran* will make a raid. Western music is forbidden and, if you are unlucky, punishment can be very ruthless."

He gave me a quiet smile that even reached his dark brown eyes.

"However, this does not deter us and, particularly among the rich in Shomal-e-Tehran in northern Tehran, secret private parties are being held."

"We have big class differences here and reprisals are often much less harsh there than in the case of poor teenagers from the south of the city."

So music was forbidden but, in spite of that, I noticed several cars with stereos. It was rather amusing to see how many drivers made identical movements when *pasdaran* showed up: move right hand fast to turn down the volume. As soon as the enemy had disappeared, everybody turned it up again. It was like one huge theatre.

"If you park at a street corner and just sit there talking, you may be arrested for watching women. The same applies if you stand outside a school. They plan to build concrete subways to prevent all view of the girls going to and from school."

This reminded me of an incident I had witnessed a few

days previously when a pimpled youngster was caught in the act looking at some girls his own age.

The beaches were divided by fences

"This might teach you," his mother had yelled as she pulled the unfortunate kid home by the ear, his cheeks burning as the girls giggled.

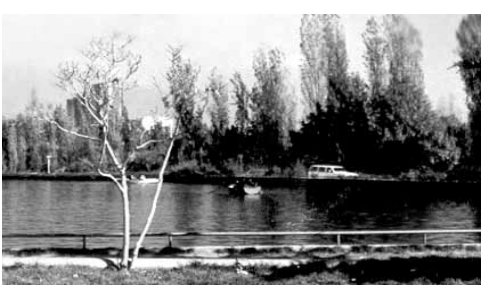
I had read an article where the head mistress of the Fatemeh High School in Tehran announced that not one of her fourteen hundred pupils had a boyfriend.

"But this is crazy," I said shaking my head.

"If we want to go swimming with our family, we must go to separate beaches. The women's beach is guarded by *pasdaran* and, of course, the women are not allowed to undress but must be fully dressed when they swim, and so on and so forth..."

Majid and I were sitting on a bench talking when some cars appeared from behind the bushes a couple of hundred yards away. A white four-wheel drive Nissan closely followed by a Peykan.

On the doors the *pasdaran* symbol was painted in black, a fist holding a sub machine gun with the earth as background. Majid immediately shut up.


On the other side the pasdaran are coming

"There they are," he whispered and placed a warning hand on my arm. "Relax and leave the talking to me."

He paused and I didn't take my eyes off him.

Female pasdaran were just as feared

Sure enough, the two cars slowly approached and stopped in front of us. The big car was full of male *pasdaran*, four female colleagues dressed completely in black sat in the Peykan.

I had a quick glimpse of two sub machine guns between the seats.

We waited apprehensively.

"Bia, baradar!" one of the men shouted and waved Majid to him. He looked straight at me.

Behind him his tough colleagues were watching. I felt suddenly cold.

"Does your friend not know what our leader Ayatollah Khomeini has said about western ways?" His eyes didn't leave me for a second even though he was talking with Majid. It was obvious that he didn't like what he saw.

"Does he not know about the heroic fight of the Islamic revolution against USA, the Great Satan?"

"Yes," Majid answered quietly.

"Why, then, is he wearing both earring and necklace," the soldier continued and nodded towards me. "Jewellery is symbolic of our enemy, isn't it? Tell him about our revolution and make sure that he takes off his trash!"

With these words, the soldier started the car and drove off followed by the Peykan.

With a smile Majid returned to me and sat down.

"They're nuts," he sighed.

Until then I had worn my earring out of sheer defiance. Now I suddenly realized that not only I but also my Iranian

friends could get into trouble because of my foolishness.

"I understand if you feel offended but you should be happy that they were in a good mood. Sometimes a silly detail like a piece of jewellery is enough since it can be seen as an attack on the ideas of the Quran. Resistance can be expressed in many ways."

"For instance, passive resistance is widespread here in Tehran," Majid went on while I put my earring and necklace in my pocket. "Particularly many girls are brave. By dressing in loud colours or turning up their trouser legs, they show their contempt of the regime. We jokingly call them punks. But if the *pasdaran* notice them, they can be in real trouble."

The more I learned about this strange society, the more I understood of what I was observing around me. My head felt as if it was starting to explode when the extent of the oppression dawned on me.

On our way home in the bus, I noticed more weird things. Seats had been removed to avoid men and women coming into contact with each other and you very rarely saw people of opposite sex sitting beside each other.

And, if so, they were either married or relatives.

"In small towns, they have different entrances for men and women," Majid said. "The smaller the town or village, the stricter the rules and punishment. There are even towns where unfaithful women and homosexual men are stoned to death."

"The Iranian interpretation of Islam is truly severe," I muttered.

"That is right," Majid answered quietly. "In certain places, the regime is even trying to make women sit facing the wall with a finger in their mouth when they speak, all intended to make them as invisible as possible."

On the walls special patrols had painted slogans and propa-

ganda. A lot of the paintings were impressive works of art but the subjects were depressing, mostly prominent mullahs, dead soldiers or scenes from the Quran.

Here and there in the chaotic city, tessellated turquoise cupolas and ornamented minarets of beautiful mosques reached for the sky. The decorations of these buildings consisted of magnificent mosaic in white and various shades of blue.

The austere face of Khomeini and religious quotes were everywhere.

"In every shop and in every home there are pictures of the Ayatollah, most often not because people love him, but because they are afraid. Quite frankly I think that between sixty-five and seventy-five per cent of the people today are against Ayatollah Khomeini and his followers, maybe more," Majid continued sadly.

"But his supporters have both the power and the arms, so it is almost impossible to change the situation."

On the pavement close by, the American, British and Israeli flags had been painted. So now every pedestrian trod on them in a symbolic act of contempt, as the regime had it.

And in a town outside Tehran there was a fountain splashing blood as a tribute to the martyrs killed in the war. To European eyes this was sick, not to say bizarre. But

Meidan-e-Enghelab

that wasn't all.

"What you call civilian legislation in Europe is abolished in Iran and has been replaced by religious courts with laws taken directly from the Quran. Today only these sharias are valid."

"We defend the oppressed and fight the oppressor"

We were now approaching Meidan-e-Enghelab, the Revolution Square. The Shah on top of this monument had been replaced by a sculpture shaped as the word Revolution and a huge mural to one side of the round-about said;

"We defend the oppressed and fight the oppressor."

"This is where we get off," said Majid, ran his hand over his hair and pressed the button which, where I come from, normally lights up the word "Stop".

In Iran it read:

"DEATH TO THE USA."

KILL ALL WESTERNERS

ONE FRIDAY, I TALKED Majid and Mohsen into taking me along to the University of Tehran. Over the years, this had become a centre for the resistance against the Shah and, after the revolution; it became the meeting point of the Khomeini regime. Every Friday, the holy day of the Muslims, tens of thousands gathered here to listen to the religious leaders who, with a sub-machine gun in one hand, vented their venom on the western world, primarily the USA and Israel.

Majid had not been enthusiastic about my idea, since under no circumstances he wanted anything to do with the regime, but he let himself be talked into it. On the other hand, especially Mohsen saw me as a possibility to relay to the rest of the world what was really going on in the country.

The huge Friday prayer in the university

Those in power censored all news released outside the borders.

We were driving quietly towards the university, when I noticed that certain streets had been cordoned off and only women were allowed there. Now they came in droves dressed in black all-covering *chadors* (see the circle in the photo below).

"It is the same in the actual campus," Mohsen told me. "There they have even built a wall to separate men and women."

The street from Meidan-e-Enghelab to the university was full of people and I surreptitiously took a few photographs.

However, Mohsen warned me and whispered that it would be safer to ask first. Close by, a *pasdar* with a Colt .45 Automatic in his belt was watching the crowds.

Cautiously Mohsen explained that I was a tourist who was very interested in Islam and therefore wanted to take some pictures. On condition that I didn't photograph him, he hesitantly permitted this.

"He is scared of being photographed since it might be used as evidence if the regime is overthrown. That is what happened to supporters of the Shah."

After having queued for a long time outside the famous entrance, we were frisked and my camera was confiscated with the motivation that I needed a permit from a higher authority.

The street cordoned off for women only

Loudspeakers broadcast the speech of the influential Speaker of the Na-

tional Assembly, Hashemi Rafsanjani who, as rumour had it, might be the half brother of Khomeini on his mother's side.

However, it was difficult to see any family resemblance. Rafsanjani was the only mullah who didn't have a full beard.

Due to poor growth of beard, he had to make do with a thin moustache and a pitiable goatee, this making him a suitable victim of the people's humour.

Up until now, an Ayatollah named Hussein Ali Montazeri had been appointed successor of Khomeini at his demise. But after some internal controversies, Montazeri had decided to withdraw. Khomeini accepted his resignation and thus started a drawn-out battle for power among his own followers.

Later Rafsanjani was to emerge victorious from the game and step into Khomeini's shoes as leader of Iran. But that was still far into the future. Just fifty years of age, he was one of the youngest in the leading echelon of mullahs but he had already made many enemies. After he had survived several attempted assassinations, it was rumoured that he had nine lives and was immortal.

At each Friday prayer meeting, he stood at the front on a dais and attacked the western world. A fine-mesh net was placed in front of the podium to prevent hand grenades from reaching their target. Quietly we sneaked past the rows of thousands of Iranians who were listening seated on their prayer rugs.

Hussein Ali Montazeri

A faint smell of sweat mixed with madness lay over the crowd and I felt a wave of discomfort through my body.

"This is just a lot of propaganda and accusations against other countries to divert people's attention from the actual situation here

in Iran," Mohsen whispered when we stopped at the periphery of the congregation. "At most workplaces there are informers who keep constant check on the employees. Many people are present because they are afraid. It is particularly problematic if you work at a state institution and don't show up here."

In honour of this day, Hashemi Rafsanjani touched on the problem with Scandinavia, a part of the world that many young Iranians were dreaming of.

"Ravâbet-e kasif-e Djensi! Swedish women think only of sex and of exposing their bodies to men," he thundered. "The Swedish state exploits the women and export their bodies abroad for profit. As if this is not enough, I have received detailed reports on how this country sells aborted embryos to the cosmetics industry! It is a scandal! Where is the solidarity and interest in other countries suffering oppression and starvation?!"

USA and Britain were next on his list of subjects to hate and, all of a sudden, the atmosphere round us became very unpleasant. The situation made me conscious of my fair hair and blue eyes.

Somewhat nervously, I looked around while Rafsanjani continued his contemptuous attacks on the west.

A couple of years later, this same Hashemi Rafsanjani was to attack Israel and encourage Muslims all over the world to: *"Kill all westerners, hijack air planes and blow up factories in the west! For every Palestinian martyr that is killed by the Israelies, five Americans, British or French should be executed."*

Heshemi Rafsanjani

The spokesman for the White House had immediately answered the

threat: "This mad incentive to murder and terrorism is unworthy of all civilized nations."

Iranske talmannen Rafsanjani:

Döda västerlänningar och spräng fabriker

"Kill all westerners and blow up factories..."

"I'm completely insensitive to the possibility of being seen as an advocate of terrorism," was Rafsanjani's cold response.

"I think we had better get out of here," Majid whispered nudging me in the ribs.

A quick glance at the *pasdaran* posted round the area convinced me that he was right and soon we were out in the street again. Behind us the enraged shouts from the crowd echoed in the air.

"*Marg bar Amrika!* Death to America! *Marg bar Amrika!*"

"Come on, let us have lunch with my brother instead," Mohsen said soberly.

Like everyone else, Mohsen's brother had been an ardent supporter of Khomeini. But now he was totally disillusioned and kept clear of the regime as best he could.

On several occasions I saw the true face of violence at close range. It was as if some malevolent higher power had cupped its hand over the country in the way that a child may cup its hand over a fleeting image. No-one was to be able to escape.

Once we were climbing the foot of the mountain Tochal when a white four-wheel drive Toyota braked to a stop close by us. Out jumped four armed *pasdaran* and fell upon two boys about twelve years old. Before we knew what was happening, the boys were handcuffed, blindfolded and thrown into the rear of the car. It was all over in a few seconds.

"No-one dares react for fear of their own skin," Majid explained quietly and lowered his eyes. "Nobody knows what will happen to them."

"Maybe they will be added to the list of murdered dissenters. The official figure for people executed since the revolution is five to six thousand but the true figure is many times that."

Another time I saw a woman being thrown up on the back of a lorry. When I asked a passerby what was going on, I was told that she was probably guilty of laughing or other disorderly conduct, since this was forbidden on official days of mourning.

On the anniversaries of the death of the prophets, such things as laughing, whistling or shaving were forbidden. The latter because all prophets had beards.

I remember once, when Majid and I were on our way through the centre of Tehran on a bus, I noticed three *pasdaran* molesting an old man. After having pushed him up against a wall, they submitted him to brutal frisking, finishing it off with a hard blow in the face. I never found out what happened after that since the bus turned a corner leaving the poor man to an unknown fate.

In order to be on the safe side, the regime had established a network of so-called *kommiteh*, civil councils officially to help the people with their daily problems. There was usually a *kommiteh* in each block. Many of the members of these *kommittehs* came from the Hezbollah, a group of fanatic Khomeini supporters who hated all things from the west.

I often heard of their brutal methods which could be quite grotesque, such as attacking women in western clothes. After their clothes had been cut to shreds, the unlucky women might be clubbed down or have their faces marked with acid. It sometimes happened that the *pasdaran* had to interfere.

In the case of ordinary arrests, the *pasdaran* tried to control

themselves while people were watching. The person was simply asked very politely to come along and only in the privacy of their offices, they removed the kid gloves.

According to the investigations by Amnesty International, almost all prisoners were tortured. There was new evidence of secret executions in the numerous prisons. Andres Aquilar from the UN Commission for Human Rights had sent a detailed request to the leaders of Iran concerning two hundred and eighty-two people who, according to information, had been summarily executed during the latest months and seventeen others who had apparently died due to brutal treatment.

The answer he got contained nothing but general information about the paragraphs in the constitution and legislation concerning human rights. Nothing was mentioned about the actual cases. The regime and *pasdaran* simply did as they pleased without bothering about their victims or the reactions of the rest of the world.

Slowly I started to comprehend the immense terror they were spreading. But not only the people feared the *pasdaran*. By this time, this militia numbered tens of thousands of heavily armed men and women and, in spite of the fact that they acted as the guardians of the regime, even Ayatollah Khomeini was conscious of this concentration of power.

Therefore, he repeatedly replaced the head of the force in order to prevent any attempts at a coup.

One of Majid and Mohsen's best friends was called Saied and one day we went to visit him and his family.

Saied was one of the kindest and most considerate people I have ever met. About six feet tall he needed a hefty body to contain his big heart that wished everybody well.

Like so many other Iranians, he had thick black hair and a well-kept beard. His hoarse voice and warm smile made eve-

ryone near him feel good.

Mohsen loved hugging him and patting his large stomach.

"Saied is mister Number One," Mohsen laughed. "I love him tooo much."

However, to Saied himself his overweight was a tragedy and he usually lived on green lettuce and yoghurt in an attempt to lose weight.

But there were also advantages in having a large body, for he never felt the cold, which was fine since he spent most of his days by his small outdoor kiosk. He went around in his thin shirt-sleeves while we crowded round his LPG stove.

Saied's tiny kiosk consisted of a rickety movable frame and he usually put it up not far from the dreaded underground Evin prison.

Here he sold everything from cigarettes, soda pop, crisps and chocolate to Kleenex and chewing gum. Beside the kiosk, he had soda cases and a freezer with ice cream.

This tiny enterprise enabled him to, slowly but surely, save up for his trip to freedom. He and his best friend had plans to try to get to Canada where his friend had relatives.

When none of the others was watching, Saied often on the sly threw me a candy bar or two.

"Merçi, kheyli khoshmaze hast," I said in my very best Farsi.

"Khahesh mikonam!"

His husky laugh rumbled through his black beard when I

All friends gathered in Saied's kiosk

thanked him by performing small tap-dances on the pavement. We liked each other.

That is more than I can say about me and his younger brother Hadi. Before we even met, I had been told that he worked as a *pasdar*.

"Just after the revolution, it was popular and cool among young men to be a *pasdar*," Majid had said. "I was in the force for a while myself but was lucky enough to get out in time."

Hadi had not been as fast and now Saied hated what he was doing. This meant that within the same family, there was a brother on each side. What a dilemma.

Hadi seemed both nervous and uncomfortable by my presence and he greeted me with shifty eyes and sweaty hands. His welcome wasn't very convincing.

"At heart he is a good guy who is just caught in an impossible situation," Mohsen whispered. "If he breathes one word that he wants to get out, this is considered opposition against the regime. And if he stays on and there is a coup, he and his colleagues will be slaughtered by the people."

"On top of that he is now being sent back and forth to the front and has been wounded several times. No wonder he is nervous."

One night when Majid and Mohsen came to see Saied, Hadi's strained nerves had played him a trick. While they were waiting by the door after having rung the bell, Hadi had suddenly appeared out of the dark with a gun in his hand.

Saied and a tiny friend

"One false move, and I blow

your brains out," he had yelled before he realized who they were and guiltily begged their pardon.

Later that evening I had a look in Hadi's photo album and I realized what empty and meaningless lives many *pasdaran* had.

Page after page of other *pasdaran* and innumerable small black marks over friends who gone to *Behescht*, paradise. There was even a strange double exposure of Hadi and some of his friends. Nobody understood how this had happened.

The double exposure

There seemed to be some standard types within the feared *pasdaran* corps.

One consisted of tough, poor, unemployed men with no education, another was people like Hadi who had joined at an early stage and now had no other option than to stay on.

The third group was the scariest. Here were ambitious men driven by a lust for power and who enjoyed the fear of other people.

A picture from Hadi's private album

The uniform enabled them to act exactly as they pleased. People had here been forced to show their true faces in their choice between good and

evil and, it made me feel really bad to note who had chosen the dreaded dark green uniform, and who had chosen to be the henchmen of the regime.

The hairs at the back of my head stood on end when I compared these faces with faces I knew at home.

How would I myself and the people back home choose in a similar situation in Sweden? Who would let their personal interests dominate and turn against their own?

I was reminded of a story I once heard about an old Cherokee Chief who was sitting by the camp fire with his grandson telling him about the battle that goes on inside people.

"My son," he said. "The battle is between two Wolves inside us all. One is Evil. It is greed, anger, envy, jealousy, sorrow, regret, arrogance, self-pity, guilt, resentment, inferiority, lies, false pride, superiority and Ego."

"And what is the other one", asked his grandson.

"The other one is Good. It is joy, love, hope, serenity, humility, kindness, benevolence, empathy, generosity, truth, compassion and faith."

The grandson thought for a moment and then asked his grandfather,

"Which wolf wins the battle?"

The old Cherokee replied simply, "The one you feed."

Out of the corner of my eye I watched Hadi. What was it within him that enabled him to keep the hell in Iran alive?

What was the reason that he had chosen the other side?

FORCED TO ESCAPE

BY THIS TIME I had begun to understand that Majid's life was in danger.

"I simply have to leave Iran," he confided in me one night as he was searching through a cardboard box with important papers. He lifted his eyes and looked straight at me.

"I simply have no other choice."

Even if I was in a way taken aback by his words, they didn't really surprise me.

"Here they are," he said triumphantly and placed a worn file on top of the table.

He got up and went over to close the door. The rest of the family had already gone to bed.

When I asked him why, he answered reluctantly, "The less you know the better."

It turned out that he and Mohsen had been planning to escape for four years. Four years of endless planning that had led nowhere.

"Wait a moment," he said and went out to get some other documents he had hidden in the car.

I leaned back and looked around me at the few pieces of

furniture, the sand-coloured sofa, the low table with the glass top, the wardrobes where our rolled-up bedding was hidden, in the corner an antique mirror with its sandblasted pattern. My head was a chaos of thoughts.

To me it was obvious that my knowledge about different countries, my contacts and travelling experience would be a great asset and I didn't hesitate to offer my assistance.

"Please let me help you," I said.

Majid and Mohsen looked at each other, nodded and accepted my offer.

Soon we were working around the clock trying to find a way for them to leave. Sweden was to be the final goal.

We started by a round trip to the Scandinavian embassies but their only help was to confirm that Majid had no chance of leaving the country legally.

"If we were to help all who really need it, we would have twenty million refugees at the border tomorrow," an exasperated official said as he closed the file in front of him. He leaned back in his chair and pulled lightly at his trouser leg before crossing his legs.

I looked into his eyes and realized that here was a man who honestly cared. It was evident that he wanted to help but that he was caught in a net of bureaucratic rules and regulations. The Swedish Monarchs were looking reproachfully at us from their frame on the wall behind him.

"There is nothing for you here. Absolutely nothing. We are completely restricted by our firm rules."

He pushed his coffee cup a little further onto the table as if to indicate that he could do no more and that it was time for us to leave. He sadly shook his head, got up, shook our hands and walked us to the door.

"I'm truly sorry but you will have to find your own way, if

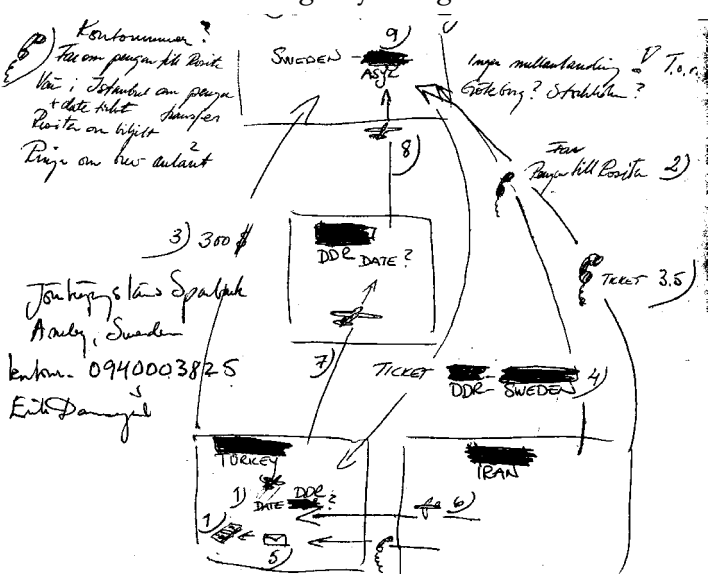
you understand what I mean. I wish you the very best of luck."

We understood his dilemma. There was absolutely no legal way of leaving the country. We could not expect any help from anyone or anything. We had to rely on our own inventiveness and after many long evenings and nights, our plan began to take shape. It was very complicated but feasible. However, many details had to work perfectly if our project was to succeed.

This is what we planned:

Earlier, Majid had been lucky enough to get visa for East Germany. Another advantage was that he, as an Iranian citizen, needed no visa for Turkey. Therefore we chose an escape route through these two countries. Since it was impossible to get air tickets the legal way, we would try to have one of Majid's friends in Turkey buy him a ticket from Istanbul to East Germany.

Simultaneously I should phone my sister Rosita in Sweden who worked at a travel agency and get a ticket from East



Part of our intricate plan of escape from Iran to Sweden

Germany to Sweden. Payment would be made by me selling off some things at home. This round trip ticket, bought in Sweden so as to avoid having to show a visa there, should be sent to the friend in Istanbul. Sending it directly to Iran was out of the question.

One important thing was to coordinate the time between flights in East Germany so that it didn't exceed the short duration of a transit visa.

Furthermore, Majid had to get a ticket from Tehran to Istanbul in order to have time to pay his friend, fetch the ticket, which had hopefully passed the Turkish postal customs and then catch the plane for East Germany.

Does that sound complicated? It was.

Very.

Everything seemed to be against us, and we repeatedly ran into the weirdest things that postponed our planning.

"Isn't it just typical," I sometimes murmured sourly. "Exactly what we needed."

"Sure thing," God answered as he passed by far up in the sky but so quietly that I didn't hear him.

Late every night we went to the tele-terminal at the centre of town to phone. Some months previously a bomb had detonated here and the buildings in the entire area had visible scars from the explosion. Hundreds had died but luckily the terminal itself had not been damaged. Outside the building a fifty foot crater had appeared in the street.

Rumour had it that one of the resistance groups was behind the event but Mohsen and Majid had their own version of the story.

"Every time the Mujahedin and other groups start becoming too popular, the regime itself plants bombs. They then blame the opposition for the subsequent carnage. Thus Khomeini

wins two things: one, that the popularity of the resistance diminishes and two that the people are again in a state of fear and keep quiet."

Many phone calls were made to Sweden before we succeeded in arranging a plane ticket and payment. Most calls here were tapped and we sometimes had to speak in code. But we made it and finally the only thing missing was the date. We still didn't know when and if there were any tickets from Turkey to East Germany.

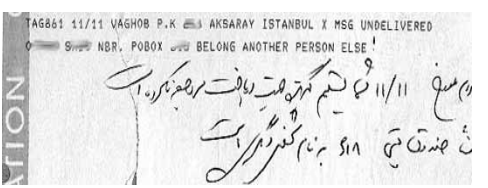
Now a prolonged chase was initiated for Majid's friend in Istanbul. Several times each night we tried to phone his hotel but the number was either engaged or else no-one answered. Finally we saw no other possibility than to send a telegram. Four days later it came back with a note saying that the post box belonged to somebody else.

So we instead tried to identify the hotel address with the aid of a worn map of Istanbul. After a lot of trouble we succeeded in finding the block and took the chance of sending another telegram. And this time we were lucky.

Late one night, the friend phoned wondering what was going on.

In order not to ruin him, Majid got his number and was just about to call him when it turned out that the number he had been given had one figure too many.

After a while Mohsen had the bright idea to skip a zero in the middle of the number. That was a brainwave and soon we had contact with the friend once again. However, this time the call was suddenly cut. Stunned Majid just stood there and stared at the receiver. He felt empty and confused.


TAG861 11/11 VAGHOB P.K AKSARAY ISTANBUL X MSG UNDELIVERED
NBR. POBOX BELONG ANOTHER PERSON ELSE!

The postbox belonged to somebody else

"Shame on him who gives up," I tried to joke. "Let us go and have a cup of tea and a game of *takhte nard*, backgammon, then maybe we have better luck next time."

Over the following weeks, we repeatedly tried to phone both Sweden and Istanbul. Now and then all the pieces seemed to fall into place but as soon as our hopes had been kindled, they were crushed again. And every time we felt knocked out. It became more and more difficult to get up again.

We never had any rest. The whole time the time factor pressed on us and I became increasingly exhausted. My visa expired shortly and I would have to leave the country. And I was the only one who could manage the contact with Sweden.

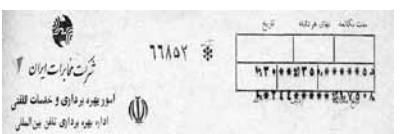
When I met my own eyes in the mirror, I got a shock. I could hardly recognize my own face. I had lost a lot of weight in spite of the Iranian food that tempted me to overeat. My hair was dull and worn, my eyes swollen and bloodshot and the dark shadows under them accentuated their expression of sadness.

I laughed joylessly. It sounded most of all like a hoarse cough.

My whole body screamed for peace and quiet. Would it not be wonderful to give up, forget about it all and just give up. It was hopeless anyway.

When would we get it through our thick skulls that we were only fooling ourselves? The dream of a future in Sweden was just a fantasy with no basis in real life.

My arms felt leaden and feeble, most of the time I was cold. Majid and Mohsen thought it strange that I who came from icy Scandinavia with "polar bears and icebergs" should feel cold here. None of them



One of the telephone receipts

understood that the cold that haunted me came from inside.

How long was this going to go on? With each day that passed, I felt weaker even though I tried to keep up appearances. The awareness that they had lived for years under these conditions made me understand their repeated attacks of apathy and resignation. Who has the stamina to go on indefinitely when everything is constantly against you and each step seems futile.

I was especially afraid of the nights when darkness came and there was nothing more to prevent me from facing my fears and misgivings. I could not fall asleep; my thoughts were chaotic and showed me nothing but despair.

Beside me Majid and Mohsen were sleeping. Their irregular breathing broke the silence. Dawn was far away.

A feeble light from the street lamps forced its way through the heavy curtains and made hazy shadows on the ceiling. At intervals I heard the sound of raindrops that had lost their way. Mohsen was tossing and turning and sometimes I noticed that he had nightmares. Fearful sweat made his forehead and taut upper lip glisten. Now and then I heard him gnashing his teeth in despair. That was the kind of sleep he had.

I got up quietly and went over to the window. With my forehead resting against the cool glass, I tried to divert my thoughts.

"How am I going to cope," I thought ready to drop with fatigue. I felt completely alone in the dark, exposed to myself and the doubt that threatened to engulf me. Mohsen groaned in his sleep, turned again and soon his breathing was once again heavy and regular. Maybe he would finally get some rest.

What was it all for anyway? We would never make it no matter how hard we fought and tried. The road was too long and I was too tired.

"Help me, please help me," I whispered into the night, closing my eyes and pressing my fists against my eyelids.

To start with, the plan had included Mohsen but now another problem had turned up. On an earlier trip to Turkey, he had received a red stamp in his passport instead of a green one.

These stamps were given completely at random with no-one reacting until recently when the authorities, without any warning, had introduced new rules implying that those who had a red stamp in their passport were not allowed to leave the country for a long time to come.

We were all three devastated over this damned stamp, which for Mohsen meant a further delay of at least eight months. Buying a false passport was both too expensive and too risky since the quality was mostly poor and the border controls extremely dangerous.

"What a thriller," we sometimes said to each other when we were torn between hope and despair.

"Somebody ought to make a film about this," Majid joked one night. "Or maybe write a book..."

At night while we were waiting to go to the tele-terminal, we often played football in the narrow alleys or went to see our friend Saied.

The streets of Djunub-e-Tehran were narrow and dusty with old cars and lorries parked on both sides. Dirty children romped about happily between the houses. The blocks were sepa-

A cosy evening in Mohsen's home

rated by paved alleys, which were divided by gutters down the middle. Here and there women in black appeared on their way to the bazaar or to visit a friend.

Sometimes we played football in the streets

The oldest parts of Tehran were located in the south.

Here were many industries and as well as the huge bazaar, the Sepasalar-mosque and the Golestan-palace.

This was a poor and tough neighbourhood where everyone knew everyone else and where friendship was more important than anything else. If an outsider came and tried to pick a quarrel, everybody gathered to get rid of the intruder. The code of honour was important.

Mohsen and Saied both lived here. Even if Mohsen's parents had their own house, he preferred to stay with his sister Masoumeh and her husband. She was a small plump woman of about forty and usually didn't make a lot of fuss. She had a good-natured smile and a face that didn't accept any fooling. If she became angry, her coal black eyes flashed and few dared contradict her sharp tongue.

On the other hand, her husband Ghasemi was a peace-loving, very gentle man with kind eyes and a warm smile. Usually he let his wife have her own way but when necessary, he was like a rock. It was obvious that he was one of the people for whom Mohsen had the highest regard.

His entire presence spread a kind of light and his way of treating the people around him reminded me of a story I once

heard:

A woman was in a grocery store in the States, buying some potatoes. She noticed a small scrawny boy, ragged but clean, who was hungrily appraising a basket of freshly picked green peas. Pondering the peas, she couldn't help overhearing the conversation between the store owner and the ragged boy.

"Hello Barry, how are you today?"

"Hello, Mr Miller. Fine, thank ya. Just admiring them peas. They sure look good."

"They are good, Barry. How's your ma?"

"Fine. Getting stronger all the time."

"Good. Anything I can help you with?"

"No Sir, just admiring them peas."

"Would you like to take some home," asked Mr Miller.

"No sir. Got nothing to pay for them with."

"Well, what have you to trade me for some of those peas?"

"All I got's my prize marble here."

"Is that right? Let me see it," said Miller.

"Here it is. She's a dandy!"

"I can see that. Hmmmm, only one thing is this one is blue and I sort of go for red. Do you have a red one like this at home?" the store owner asked.

"Not zackley, but almost," the kid answered.

"Tell you what. Take this sack of peas home with you and next trip this way let me look at that red marble," Mr Miller told the boy.

"Sure will. Thank you, Mr Miller."

Mrs Miller, who had been standing nearby, came over to help the woman. With a smile she said:

"There are two other boys like him in our community, all three are in very poor circumstances. Jim just loves to

bargain with them for peas, apples, tomatoes or whatever. When they come back with their red marbles, and they always do, he decides he doesn't like red after all and he then sends them home with a bag of produce for a green marble or an orange one, when they come on their next trip to the store."

The woman left the store smiling, impressed with this man. A short time later she moved to Colorado, but she never forgot Mr Miller, the boys and their bartering for marbles.

Several years went by, each more rapidly than the previous one. Just recently the woman had occasion to visit some old friends and while she was there, she learned that Mr Miller had died. They were having his visitation that evening.

Upon arrival at the mortuary the woman fell into line to meet the relatives of the deceased and to offer whatever words of comfort she could.

Ahead of her in line were three young men. One was in an army uniform and the other two wore nice haircuts, dark suits and white shirts, all very professional looking. They approached Mrs Miller standing composed and smiling by her husband's casket. Each of the young men hugged her, kissed her on the cheek, spoke briefly with her and moved on to the casket.

Her misty blue eyes followed them as, one by one, each young man stopped and placed his own warm hand over the cold pale hand in the casket. Each left the mortuary awkwardly, wiping his eyes,

Then it was the woman's turn to meet Mrs Miller. She told her who she was and reminded her of the story from so many years ago and what she had told her about her husband's bartering for marbles.

With her eyes glistening, Mrs Miller took her hand and led her to the casket.

"Those three young men who just left were the same boys. They just told me how they appreciated the things Jim 'traded' them. Now, at last, Jim could not change his mind about the colour or size... They came to pay their debt. We've never had a great deal of wealth in this world," she confided, "but right now, Jim would consider himself the richest man in Idaho."

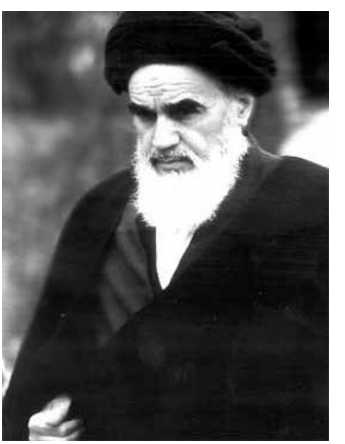
With loving gentleness she lifted the lifeless fingers of her deceased husband. Resting underneath were three exquisitely shining red marbles.

Ghasemi was just like this wonderful man and he became a source of inspiration to me in the future. We spent many fine evenings together and I enjoyed immensely being with him and the rest of the family.

In the evenings when he wasn't at home, we watched TV but the programmes were mostly political propaganda; pro the regime, against USA.

On top of this, only Arabic was spoken on TV after ten at night. The Quran, the holy book of the Muslims, is written in Arabic, so the people must learn this in spite of the fact that it was as foreign to them as Serbo-Croatian to a Swede.

It was understandable that most people preferred to watch video, which was of course also prohibited. It was quite shocking to see the kind of films for



Present everywhere

which people dared defy the prohibition. Were they maybe sex films or political resistance?

No, ordinary people gathered round the colour TV to watch the Iranian version of Tommy Cooper. People only wanted some distraction from their daily lives, some laughs and music.

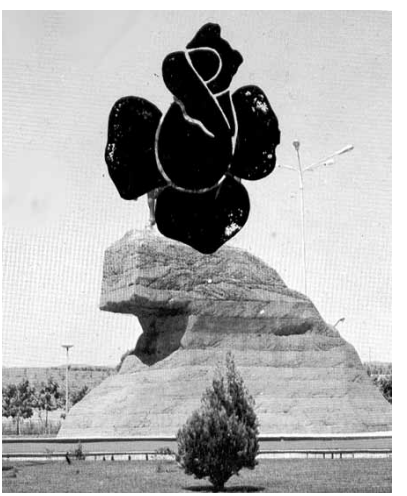
But the regime had other wishes, so now you had to smuggle the VCRs in a suitcase in the trunk of the car. Small paper bags for fruit concealed the cassettes.

It was tough to see how widespread the oppression was. Postcards were censored; even the postage stamps showed blood and mutilated bodies on their way to paradise.

Wherever you looked, you were constantly reminded of Khomeini. I quite frankly didn't wonder that I was more or less the only westerner I had seen during my stay in Iran. Rumours about the war, Ayatollah Khomeini and Muslim justice had frightened everyone else away.

An eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth, the Quran says, exactly like the Old Testament. It is not only in Muslim countries that this is a basic idea.

In the Iranian interpretation this implied that if I, for instance, were to break somebody's arm, by law he is justified in doing the same to me. This applied to everything from minor offences to murder where the victim's family had the right to decide about the execution.



Censured postcard

Thus the holy book of Islam can be very hard but even considerate. For

example, the Quran says that if a man steals food because he or his children are hungry, his neighbours are to be questioned why they have allowed their brother to go hungry.

Man accused of theft has hand amputated in special ceremony

A shocking report on the amputation of the hand of a man accused of theft was carried by *Khorassan*, the daily newspaper of Khorassan province in north-east Iran, on May 1. A photograph of the horrific scene of the amputation, carried out in the province's capital, Mashad, was also printed.

The report said that a big ceremony was organized in the courtyard of the city's police headquarters for the implementation of the sentence. Members of the Supreme Judicial Council, a number of officials of the legal apparatus and a group of prisoners were present.

Mullah Hossein Bara-

Thief having his fingers amputated by the special hand guillotine. (Picture from the Sarasan newspaper, Khorassan)

hermeni apparatus. In a split second, four of his fingers were severed at the point required. With

Karaj, a town north-west of Tehran.

Announcing the news,

"religious", Mullah Mir-Emadi, the Public Prosecutor of Tehran, described the contempti-

The effective finger saw

But repeated theft and other crimes were sometimes punished very severely with fingers and hands chopped off.

Once in the newspaper *Khorassan*, I saw an article about a completely new finger saw which had successfully been tested in the city of Mashad. According to the journalist, the wound surface was both smooth and clean so as to facilitate healing. Furthermore, blood loss was reduced considerably.

At the same time, mullah Hussein Barahani held a long and fiery speech about the advantages of this type of punishment.

"We don't care at all what the western world thinks of our methods," Barahani explained proudly to an impressive gathering of mass media. "We do this to please the people and show them that this regime not only talks but also acts!"

After this, the newspaper described how the thief with the amputated finger was hurried to the Qaem hospital for care.

"A most effective way of fighting crime!"

Or would Mahatma Gandhi's words "an eye for an eye makes the whole world blind" be more appropriate?

Now and then the whole bizarre situation became too much and we all badly needed to laugh. Mohsen had a very special kind of humour which took some time to understand. He loved telling stories with a strange point. Here is a favourite:

"One man standing corner of street. Another man come, asking first man: Are you donkey? One man answer: Yes!"

Mohsen always doubled up with laughter when he told this one while I could only sit there feeling foolish.

Another evening he was to give an exhibition of something he called Marusaw.

The show started by his sitting for a very long time in the lotus position with eyes closed and Majid's samurai sword in front of him. We waited in expectant silence when, all of a sudden he jumped up with a hoarse yell and crazy eyes. He swung the sword in wide, uncontrolled movements in the narrow room.

The sharp edge endangered the lives of everything from bric-a-brac to flies on a picnic, when, with an elegant gesture, he put the sword back in its sheath, shut his eyes and folded himself down into the lotus position once again. His poker face didn't at any moment reveal the joke.

Another time he confided in me that his father was actually Korean but had been dead for many years.

Imagine my surprise when one week later we were invited to a family dinner and I faced his father, very much alive and with typical Iranian features!

I used to tell them about different experiences I had had on my journey through Europe, such as the time I got a lift on a barge on the Danube or when the Hungarian police chased me for "illegal bicycling."

Majid's sister-in-law, Shadi, also lived in the family house, and she and I had a lot of fun together.

She was always in high spirits and loved it when I played a transvestite in high heels while she was cooking.

We mostly gathered in the kitchen and I did my best to assist. However, the only thing I could was the dishes.

At other times we sat on the stairs to the room she shared with her husband while she tried to reveal the secrets of the Persian language to me.

Shadi with a little cutie

"Chesm," she said slowly and put her finger on my eyelid. She straightened a lock of her hair and put it behind her ear.

Delam – my heart, *khoshamadid* – welcome and *damet garm* – your "inside is warm" were some of the expressions she taught me. Her hands and face led the way and explained the words.

Persian, or Farsi as it is really called, is a soft and emotional language, which I liked from the very beginning. It was pleasant to speak although rather hard to pronounce but I did my best.

The main thing was that the will was there – the will to understand each other.

POISONED

DURING ALL OF MY stay outside Western Europe, I was most careful particularly with water in order to avoid stomach trouble. Even if I was vigilant, it was like a constant tightrope dance, since I didn't want to miss the local cuisine. Iran is in many ways a very clean country, but I was still aware of the risk every time I broke the rules of reason. So...

One day Majid and I passed one of the huge bazaars which is a whole district of the city with a multitude of small shops where you can buy almost anything.

It was such a strange experience to step from the modern city into a completely different era.

The bazaar in Tehran had not changed in any significant way for centuries.

The bazaar was full of life and movement

Here the prices were relatively reasonable, at least compared with the shops in the northern districts. We pushed our way through the crowd between stands with textiles, spices, vegetables, watches, shoes, bric-a-brac, nuts, fruit and lots of other things all contributing to both atmosphere and exciting smells in the narrow alleys. From the dome-shaped roof colourful signs, transparencies and garlands of red and yellow bulbs were suspended.

Hundreds of people were haggling and bargaining so for a while I forgot where we were. But soon all black *chador* and sad eyes brought me back to the reality of Iran and my head started throbbing.

"I have to get some fresh air," I said to Majid who nodded and started towards the outskirts of the bazaar.

Soon we were out in the teeming throng of the city and, in spite of the exhaust fumes, my headache eased a little and I even felt rather hungry.

"Would you like something now or shall we wait until we get home?" asked Majid on our way to the nearest bus stop.

"I wouldn't mind one of those," I pointed to some doughnuts sold by a street vendor.

"Don't worry, I will fix that," Majid said and turned back.

Within seconds I had wolfed it down even if it tasted a bit funny.

Everything seemed fine until we entered the bus and were on our way home. At first I just felt out of sorts but as the minutes ticked by, I felt increasingly worse. After an eternity, we at last reached home and a wonderful meal was laid out for us on the sitting room floor.

But by now I had no appetite and was just poking at my food with my fork.

"What is the matter?" Majid worried.

"I don't really know," I answered.

"Probably nothing. I just need to sleep a while."

However, Majid wasn't satisfied but fetched Zari who was a registered nurse. After a quick examination, she spoke quietly to Majid and then fetched the Persian-English dictionary, leafed through it and showed me her diagnosis:

POISONED...

I slowly shook my head.

"Oh no, I'll soon feel better," I insisted and bit my lip, but Majid had already gone to get the car and within minutes the three of us were on our way to the hospital. It didn't take long for me to realize that Zari was right, for when we got there my head was swimming.

The hours that followed I only remember in a haze. I felt terribly nauseous and had a hard time not to vomit as Majid and Zari led me through the long corridors of the hospital looking for a doctor.

When the Khomeini regime had started showing its true face, many doctors had left the country while there was still time. The present war had claimed many of the ones who remained and now there were not many qualified doctors left here. Resources had been drastically cut and it was impossible for the remaining staff to offer effective nursing.

One result of this was reduced hygiene and in a corner I noticed a large pool of blood that someone had tried to wipe up with an old newspaper. Beside the half-dried spot were the remains of what was once a shirt either stabbed or shot through. My legs felt weak and wobbly.

In my condition, I really could not care less and, sick as a dog, I stumbled towards the nearest toilet. I bumped my hip against the edge of the washbasin when I fell to my knees on the tiled floor. That the drain was clogged up didn't improve things.

However, I was grateful that I had made it to the bathroom in time. Nausea invaded my body like a huge wave as the con-

tents of my stomach regurgitated so violently it hurt and my muscles cramped in its attempt to get rid of the poison.

After a couple of minutes of intense nausea, I heard someone call my name, stop outside the door and knock on it. The inside of my head felt like a sledgehammer and through the fog in my head, I heard Majid's impatient voice.

"Ole, please come out. We have found a doctor. Come on out now!"

"I can't, not just now," I moaned weakly through the chink before I had to renew my intimate conversation with the toilet. In the background I heard Zari discuss with him, a door was shut and their footsteps disappeared with an echo along the corridor and down the stairs.

I felt awful, closed my eyes and rested my forehead on the cool floor. The mixed stench of acrid disinfectant, concrete and cleaning plus the stale smell of diseased bodies made my stomach turn. I felt as if my body had ceased to function and I had difficulty breathing.

Far away in the background I could hear metal trolleys clattering along loaded with food or operating tools. I moved a little and the tiles cooled my cheek. I must have slept a while, curled up like a fetus.

A couple of minutes later, there was another knock on the door. Again I heard Majid's voice, first from far away and then suddenly quite close.

"Ole, come on out now!"

"Impossible ... please just let me die in peace...," I groaned and caught sight of my face in a broken mirror. Dark rings under the eyes, skin light green rather than white. Even my lips seemed lifeless. I was starting to feel sorry for myself, when Majid's voice again penetrated the door.

"But you have to! You must understand that you cannot keep the doctor waiting."

At that point I could have strangled him.

After an attempt to examine me interrupted by me once again having to fumble my way to the toilet, the kind doctor confirmed Zari's diagnosis. He was about middle-age, short, slightly overweight and with a rather haggard look. His pale face was in sharp contrast with his thick greyish hair and moustache. His coat was bloodstained and he was washing his hands in a washbasin. The gurgling sound from the loose water pipe under the basin echoed in the corridor.

Round his neck he had an old stethoscope and a number of pens were fighting for room with a notepad and a pair of glasses in his pocket. Behind him a nurse was peering compassionately over his shoulder. Her face was framed by a black veil.

"Put him in bed eighteen," the Iranian medicine man said, as he buttoned up his coat, pushed his stethoscope in place and hurried on to his next patient closely followed by the nurse.

Most of his colleagues had already left the country in sheer desperation over the frightening developments, and the burden of work on the few who were left was indescribable.

The next thing I remember is being placed in a soft hospital bed and Zari's sensitive fingers piercing the vein on the back of my hand with a thick needle.

She was sitting on the edge of my bed and looked at me in silence. On the wall above the door was a large clock. The long hand trembled a little each time it had to jump to the next mark and the ticking sound made my head throb.

In the case of food poisoning, one of the worst risks is dehydration. Therefore the doctor had prescribed three pints of intravenous drip. Soon a chromium-plated stand was beside my bed with a plastic bag full of a colourless liquid.

As the fluid spread in my blood, the worst nausea started to fade away and half an hour later I dozed off. Before that, however, I noticed Mohsen who had hurried to the hospital

when he heard what had happened.

Darkness. And then more darkness and an intense growing pain in my stomach. A gentle hand on my shoulder woke me when the evening had long since turned into night. It was Zari who in her halting English and aided by a dictionary and sign language tried to explain the situation to me. As far as I could make out, this is what she said:

"I have just talked to the doctor. He says we can take you home if we continue the drip."

Weak but happy I was aided out of bed by Majid and Mohsen. I felt somewhat better when at last we were home again.

In the car I had the needle in the back of my hand and Majid had been holding the drip bottle over my head.

His mother shyly patted my cheek, shook her head and then went into the kitchen to warm me some milk.

I stretched out in my sleeping bag on the thick Persian carpet with its intricate pattern and someone placed a soft pillow under my head.

Majid fetched an old hat stand that was converted into a drip stand. The sand-coloured curtains were closed and the faint noise of the traffic in the street outside was almost inaudible.

"Take it easy and you will soon feel okay," Zari whispered before she put out the light and disappeared through the door.

I closed my eyes,

The hat stand worked fine

moved by the fact that I was surrounded by such lovable, caring people. My heart swelled with gratitude.

Some days later, Mohsen and I were on our way home from his job. I started feeling somewhat stronger after a couple of days in bed and it was nice to be on my feet again. Outside the car window the depressing bleached concrete buildings were silhouetted against the dark sky. The weather was grey and I felt sad.

My friend had stopped at a park and was now standing beside the car fumbling with a box of cigarettes. His fingers refused to cooperate as he in vain tried to light his fag.

A cinder from the cigarette fell on his trousers. He started, jumped up and tried to brush off the smouldering ash before he had another try. But the air was humid and his matches didn't work. At last he gave up, crushed the box and threw it in the gutter.

He got into his Peykan and turned the key. He raced the engine as if to drown his thoughts in the noise. I saw how he was fighting his mental battle and I could almost hear his inner dialogue. Without a word he stretched over to find a cassette tape in the glove compartment.

By now I had been there almost one month, a month where I in vain had attempted to understand what it was all about. What was it all for, all this suffering, all this misery? Why must it be so difficult for us human beings to live together, without quarrelling, without having to fight each other?

The rain dropped heavily on the scratched windshield accompanied by the monotonous sound of the wipers. On the pavements, people hunched against the wind as they hurried home to their loved ones. Along the edges of the pavement, the raindrops collected in deep gutters that drained away the tears of the sky.

Mohsen sat quietly swearing as the line of cars didn't budge. He looked terribly haggard, his skin was pale and there were dark patches under his eyes. We didn't permit the silence between us to become troublesome. He had had a long and trying day and only wanted to get home.

At his workplace he had as usual had an argument with his boss who had no understanding of mental stress but only wanted results.

Work, work, work, without thinking, without feeling. That was his tune.

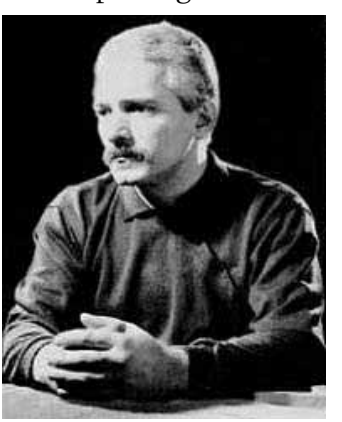
But Mohsen wasn't like that.

A couple of minutes previously I had asked him to translate the lyrics of a song, the rueful sadness of which had enfolded my heart. Both tune and lyrics were by a famous singer named Farhad.

Farhad had been active even during the time of the Shah when he had been persecuted and thrown in jail for his songs.

In spite of the change in regime, his forbidden songs were as appropriate as ever and Mohsen loved to withdraw into his own thoughts with the mournful music pouring out of the loudspeakers.

Mohsen's knowledge of English was limited to phrases like 'Hello, Mrs. Brown' and 'This is a black cat' but thanks to his incredibly expressive face and gestures, I understood him. The emotions of the song and of his heart were burning with a clear flame far beyond words and stumbling explanations.



Farhad - the composer

The song was about a discon-

solate lonely man who was looking at himself in the mirror. Tired of living, he desperately threw the mirror on the floor. The glittering fragments scattered all over, each reflecting parts of his face.

But which one showed his true face?

Who was he?

During this intense period, I was emotionally on a switchback. On the one hand, I loved being here.

Majid, his loving family, Mohsen and Saied were wonderful and, in spite of all the hardship around us, we had lots of fun together.

On the other hand, I was perishing. The shock of facing a country like Iran had not left me and I was being torn apart inside when I saw all the despair and misery around me.

Lately the enemy had intensified their bombing attacks and, night after night, people were being kept awake by the dull rumble of the explosions and the screeching of glass and metal splinters that tore both buildings and bodies to shreds. No-one knew whose turn it was next. The bombs were released at very high altitude and could hit anywhere.

On some of the central streets, white lines had been painted diagonally across the pavement. At the Friday prayers, the faithful gathered here along the parallel lines that were all pointing towards Mecca, the holy city of Islam.

A little further down the street, some courageous anti-war demonstrators were being shoved along by armed *pasdaran*. And at the same time,

The massive capital was spreading out

some of their colleagues were harassing a group of terrified teenage girls because of their dress.

It was a completely normal Wednesday afternoon in Tehran.

BLOOD, SWEAT AND TEARS

THE COVER OF THE book was red – the shade which for so long had been colouring life in Iran. Over the years, the dictators had changed name and direction but the oppression was unaltered.

This was an illegal book compiled by the resistance movement Mujahedin. It contained the names and pictures of thousands of people who, during the years 1980 to 1983, had been the victims of Khomeini's butchers. A total of twelve thousand twenty-eight names of people of flesh and blood, with emotions and passions, problems and happiness.

I took a deep breath and starting leafing through it. From the white paper, thousands of dark eyes were looking straight at me. Page after page of pictures organized in alphabetical

Human lives did not seem to matter

order. Tables showed their names, occupation, resistance group, where they had died and how.

Endless numbers of teenagers as an appalling manifestation of a people's desperate resistance. My heart filled with grief when I thought of all this suffering which, to crown it all, seemed to lead nowhere.

How does one go about fighting evil and oppression? Over and over again, history has proved that violence only breeds violence; difficult situations only result in increasing bloodshed so that, in the end, it may be hard to decide which side is worse.

Is it really possible to touch people who have lost their respect for life and integrity? Who only understand violence and fear? We, the living, close the eyes of our dead but when will the dead open ours?

The faces in the book gave me no answers. They had all chosen to protest in some way and now they were gone forever.

"But how can a twelve year old deserve a death sentence?" I asked Mohsen, my eyes brimming over with tears. He was sitting beside me on the brown couch. He slowly shook his head and avoided looking into my eyes.

"In his pursuit of dissidents, Khomeini is totally unscrupulous. Most of these youngsters were maybe just handing out illegal leaflets. What do I know? There is no ordinary logic in Iran any longer."

Mass executions had sky-rocketed in June 1981 after the guerrilla Mujahedin had detonated a powerful bomb in the headquarters of the mullahs. Seventy-two top members of the priesthood had been killed.

In retaliation, hundreds of prisoners were lined up in the prisons and mowed down in cold blood. The prisoners were often chosen at random, children and youngsters, adults or aged, it made no difference.

As a final affront, the families of the executed had to pay for the bullets.

I slowly continued turning the pages without really daring to meet the eyes of these faces. In my imagination I put in pictures of myself, Mohsen, Majid and his sisters among all the others, only a few in the multitude. What did another five lives matter when you were talking about thousands.

The face of revenge

I remembered something my father once said, "If one person dies, it is a tragedy. If one million die, it is statistics."

Certain photos showed what the bodies looked like after the torture of *pasdaran*. Red hot irons, electro shocks, water torture and flogging with straggly copper cables were normal methods of interrogation.

One of the victims was a sixteen year old girl suspected of being a member of the Mujahedin. *Pasdaran* had done their very best to make her reveal what she knew about the organization. During these sessions, the girl died in excruciating pain but first she had been raped by the *pasdaran*. According to the law, a virgin may not be executed.

In the picture, her bruised and bloodstained body was lying in a plastic bag ready to be hauled off to a secret mass grave outside Tehran. Rumour had it that *pasdaran* used a desolate lake with very corrosive water to get rid of embarrassing dead bodies.

Sometimes my sorrow over the situation of the Iranians became so overwhelming that my head felt on the verge of bursting. My soul could not cope with being in such close

contact with the fate that had befallen these people.

When I looked into Mohsen's eyes, I understood that there was a risk that even he might soon get into trouble. His fiery temperament and unwavering commitment against injustice was a dangerous combination in this country. In private, I had been told that he, on several occasions, had wanted to take his own life but that Majid each time had succeeded in talking him out of it.

He showed his defiance in many ways. For example, he always smoked American Marlboro cigarettes with an elegant holder, the nail on his little finger was long and pointed and his car stereo blared out illegal copies of cassette tapes with Michael Jackson and Pink Floyd. On one occasion, he left the car with the stereo turned up in an area where *pasdaran* were constantly patrolling.

Another time, he threw a mullah out of his parents' home. He didn't care that this jeopardized his life. He simply had to react.

One night when Mohsen came home after an exhausting twelve hour day, I felt that this had been worse than usual.

One of his biggest problems was that he could never escape from his thoughts.

He was haggard and hollow eyed, his black stubble contrasted his deadly pallor.

But worst of all were his eyes, these bottomless black pits of suffer-

"Never before so well off...."

ing.

On the table before him was the newspaper Keyhan. On the front page was Khomeini's stern face and the headline "NEVER BEFORE HAVE THE IRANIAN PEOPLE BEEN SO WELL OFF AS NOW!"

"Give me one good reason to live," he whispered hoarsely and slowly sat down in the sofa across from me. Outside the window it had started to rain. He turned his empty eyes towards me.

"Just one. That is all I ask."

Back home, I could have given him several.

In the Iran of Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini I remained silent.

"And what do you want?" the police officer snapped.

For the second time in two weeks we were at the passport office of the police station trying to extend my visa. The first time there had been no problem but this time Majid had to tell a fib.

"My brother is getting married next week and we would be very happy if my friend could attend the wedding."

"Mmmm," the police officer mumbled absently as he scrutinized my passport. Then he carefully looked through my visa documents and nodded.

"That is all right. You only need to show the marriage licence here."

But Majid's brothers were already married. How in the world could we conjure up such a document? This time, however, luck was on our side in the form of a holy day postponing our meeting with the police. Still uncertain about what to do, we turned up at the office exactly two days later.

"Look there," I whispered and poked Majid with my elbow. "It is not the same guy here today."

"You see," he answered. "If you expect problems, you get problems. But if you take it easy, things tend to work out."

"Sure, but it sometimes takes a little more than that," I said and laughed remembering the difficulties I encountered getting a visa for Iran.

At the consulate in Istanbul, they had insisted on a written recommendation from my Danish embassy. It had taken me many days of persistent pestering, until I had the paper in my hand. It went something like this:

"To our most exalted colleagues at the Iranian Embassy in Istanbul. Allow us first to express our eternal admiration and submission to the greatness of your religious leader. No-one except maybe Allah is greater and we will do anything to most humbly earn His esteem.

The reason why we venture to approach you is that a citizen of our small and most inconspicuous country wishes to experience the beauty and culture of your vast and fantastic empire. We wish to express our most heartfelt gratitude in advance and hope that you, most honourable colleagues, have not taken offence at our approach."

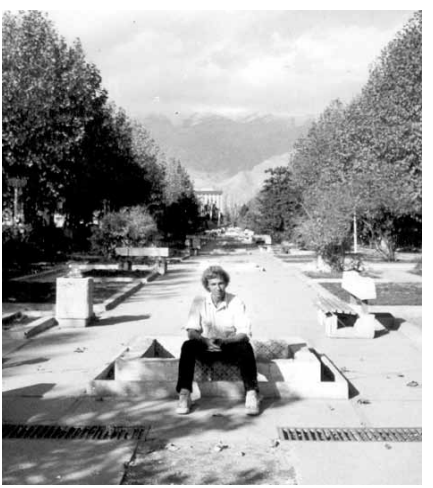
The letter was signed "Yours on all fours in the dust constantly grovelling Consul-General George Insignificant. Allah is great."

ALL THE WAY TO THE TOP

THE ELBURZ MOUNTAIN RANGE encircling Tehran is crowned by the two peaks Tochal and Damavand, the latter being the highest in Iran with its impressive seventeen thousand feet. Glittering in dazzling white snow on a background of an azure sky, it was one of the most splendid sights I have ever seen.

During my first time here the weather had been overcast and I had difficulty understanding Majid's big enthusiasm every time he mentioned the word Tochal.

The longing for freedom always lit up his eyes as he dreamily described this peak, which he had climbed several times.



Behind me the beautiful mountains

Now the sky was like crystal and I was truly impressed by the majestic giant only half a dozen miles north of the capital city.

A ropeway with a gondola went up to about eleven thousand seven hundred feet and some further ski-lifts from up there had made Tochal into the fifth highest skiing locality in the world.

"Are you really serious?"

Majid's voice was doubtful when I suggested that we should try climbing the peak together. "Then we had better go into training first."

So, the next day Majid, his two sisters Maryam and Zari, Mohsen and I set off on a training excursion up the steep slopes. It was a marvellous late autumn day and it felt good to have a break from all the serious business.

We had started at dawn in order to reach Shirpala around noon. Shirpala was the last outpost, a small restaurant about halfway up the mountain by the snow line. Our dream was hot tea with fried eggs and nun, Iranian bread served in thin slices.

Every Friday thousands of young people invaded the mountain to try to exhaust their bodies and so get rid of all frustration and bottled-up anger. This was one of their few possibilities to breathe freedom. But not even up here were they left alone.

The distant sound of the muezzins, the famous prayer criers, echoed among the rocks and at regular intervals small groups of *pasdaran* appeared.

Shirpala, the perfect place for a picnic

We even met

a unit of *Basij-e-Mustazafin* who came running in two files singing about Allah and their great spiritual leader. All had a picture of Khomeini pinned to their green army shirts.

Basidj-soldiers before combat

Basij was a special army fraction consisting primarily of children. Boys between the ages of eleven and eighteen had to learn how to handle weapons and young guys between fifteen and seventeen were forbidden to leave the country. For propaganda reasons, the regime often showed small children in full army gear.

By different tricks and ruses, children were lured into enlisting in the holy war against Iraq. With a tin key on a string round their neck, they were sent forward, sometimes in attacks of sheer madness, sometimes as human mine-sweepers. The key was intended for the pearly gates.

Something between fifty thousand and one hundred thousand Iranian boys had already had the chance to use their keys.

This reminded me of an evening when I had gone with Majid to his karate club. Among the audience was one man who looked unusually sad, even by Iranian standards. His eyes rested on me from two grey sockets above his unshaven cheeks.

I sat down beside him. He hid his face in his hands. Perhaps he was crying, it was difficult to see. I put my arm around his shoulder.

After a while he looked seriously at me and, with tears in his

eyes, handed me a booklet with a worn and stained cover.

It was a so-called *Basij*-passport. His son's passport.

In the hundred page thick passport which had been found beside a small mutilated body in a swamp near the Iraqi frontier, I found sections appealing to the owner to become a martyr, speeches by Ayatollah Khomeini and Speaker Hashemi Rafsanjani plus moral examples from the holy lives of priests.

An army of boys

Some pages consisted of long rows of questions such as these:

* What are your favourite prayers?
* What are your feelings for Imam Khomeini?
* Why were you given the honour of going to the front?
* What truths have you discovered here?
* How many of your friends have become martyrs?
* Give a detailed description of the sacrifices of your friends, their last words.
* Have you had problems with your friends? If yes, which? Give the names of your friends.
* Tell about miracles you have seen or heard of. Time and place of the miracle.
* After our divine victory, which changes are you prepared to support in the Islamic republic?

The old worn basidj-passport

On the last pages

was a testament to be filled in by the holder. Little Ali had, however, not had time to do that.

He had only had time to die.

The way to Shirpala was difficult as only narrow paths led up the steep mountainside. In many places fences and small suspension bridges had been put up, yet it wasn't unusual that someone was careless, tumbled down and was killed.

I have never been much of a hero with heights and, to test how much I could cope with, we decided to try on a real mountain climbing.

Majid was very lithe and strong so he went first. He was even experienced and quickly and surely showed me the right places for both hands and feet.

Bumps and cracks were the only possibilities for footholds and soon my body was full of adrenalin.

After a while Maryam got scared and was close to tears but, after having reassured her, we continued up. Where there was no foothold, Majid grabbed hold of the uneven rock face and let Maryam use his hand to stand on. He never moved a muscle to let on that her ribbed boot was almost crushing his fingers. Instead he kept talking to her quietly and calmly. Day by day, my respect for him increased.

Majid used his hands as support

One after the other we slowly ascended, one

stage at a time. Majid first, then we others. A couple of yards could be fine and the next turn out to be sheer hell.

I was particularly impressed by Maryam who, in spite of her fear of heights, was firmly determined to go through with the climb.

Zari, on the other hand, showed no signs whatsoever of insecurity. They were brave girls and their courage helped me overcome my own fear.

Our arms were trembling with strain when we were sometimes hanging on nothing but our fingertips and tried to swing across wide crevices. The main rule was to never look down but instead concentrate completely on the task.

At long last we reached a place where we could rest and I was intoxicated with joy which made my blood bubble like champagne. At that moment I knew that we could conquer Tochal.

Sooner or later.

Preparations for the real challenge took almost a week. Time and again Majid asked if I was serious about the climb.

"You just try and stop me," I answered enthusiastically.

Friday morning at three o'clock was the decisive hour when everything was at stake. What worried us was the weather which, at high altitudes, might change without warning. A beautiful sunny day could turn into a freezing inferno as if by a stroke of magic.

The previous evening conditions had been perfect. Would the weather gods be on our side when morning came? Wide awake I tiptoed to the window and peered out. Crystal clear and an almost full moon!

Quietly I went into the next room and woke the others.

After a simple breakfast, Zari, her friend Masoumeh, Majid and I quickly gathered our equipment after a final check that

we had everything. For safety's sake I took a compass and a metal foil blanket that reflects body heat. Two years ago five Japanese mountaineers had frozen to death close to the summit when they had lost their way in a snowstorm, so being prepared was a good idea.

Majid's brother Mammad got up in the middle of the night to take us all the way to the foot of the mountain. Talk about kindness.

"Have you seen the fantastic moonlight?" he said and leaned forward to peer at the sky. "You are truly lucky with the weather. You are going to do fine!" he added and patted my shoulder.

We got our gear out of the boot, checked that we had not forgotten anything and then each gave him a hug.

"Take care," he said and winked at us before he went back home to Shadi and their warm bed.

The cold night air hit us and scared away all traces of sleepiness. We looked at each other.

The time had come.

The grandeur of morning changed the starlit night to crimson dawn. Far away the lamenting sound of the muezzins echoed over the distant roofs. The stillness was complete.

Guided by Majid, we took a shortcut up the demanding mountain. The moon lit up the ground sufficiently for us to find foothold and without a word we found our way up. Only our laboured breathing could be heard in the dark.

We kept a fair pace and about six-thirty we reached our first goal, Shirpala, with its frugally furnished restaurant, wonderful newly baked nun and hot tea. We ate a simple breakfast before we started again. Now the true challenge was to begin.

The climbing boots Mammad had lent me turned out to be a little too small and soon I had to put plasters on both feet.

The zipper was defective and it didn't take long for the snow to make my feet numb. They felt as if they were disappearing. I tried to move my toes but the boots were too narrow. The one thing to do was to keep a stiff upper lip.

The hours passed while we fought our way up. According to Majid, there was only one safe way to the top. We were to follow a crest winding its way towards our goal.

At intervals, we stopped to check that we were on the right course.

Luck was with us this day and the sun was brilliant. The view of the immense capital was stunning and the glittering snow breathtaking.

The sharp sunlight spread over the snow and made the world almost painfully bright. Beautiful.

But the higher we got, the stronger the wind and sometimes we had to seek shelter behind each other to withstand its icy gusts.

The piercing biting wind swept over the snow, evening out the mountainsides and we had to fight to keep our balance.

We hunched our shoulders against the wind and kept our heads down like attacking bulls. The cold found its way in under our clothes and I sometimes had the feeling that clothes pegs had fastened onto the tips of my nose and ear lobes.

So much snow was

On our way to the top

blown into our faces that we could hardly see. Tiny particles whistled around us like a swarm of sharp arrows and our sunglasses did their best to protect our eyes.

Our extra clothing came in handy and after a while, we took the opportunity to rest behind some rock overhang. We sat down and stretched our tired legs.

"Well, what do you think?" Majid asked, as he took off his gloves and adjusted his jacket while cleaning his sunglasses. He lifted them to ascertain that he had removed all grease stains.

"Wonderful, maybe a little cold," I answered breathing on my stiff and icy fingers. "Have you any idea how far we have left?"

"What do you mean?" Majid laughed. "Are you getting tired?"

He handed me a thermos with tea and its fragrance mixed with the smell of wet socks and gloves. Carefully I sipped the hot drink. I could feel it warming my body all the way to my icy feet.

"Well, no gain without pain," I smiled back and helped him to his feet. "But I worked up a fair condition when biking, so I guess I can make this too."

Zari was removing her backpack and squatted down with a loud sigh. Majid rearranged the packs to relieve her burden. We still had far to go and it was necessary to preserve our strength.

The wonderful peak - 12,000 feet

After about a quarter of an hour, we set off again. Soon we had passed

the nearest crest.

"Can you see Tochal up there?" asked Majid and pointed to a blurry peak outlined against the sky.

The wind abated a little and the sun was warm. I pulled on my gloves, adjusted my dark sunglasses and nodded, as I single-mindedly stomped on through the deep snow.

It was a tough and wonderful day and I was enjoying myself immensely.

Snow and sunshine

After more than seven hours we were approaching the peak of Tochal. The air had thinned perceptibly so all movements were slow and our limbs felt like lead.

Exhausted we forced our way about twenty yards at a time and then took a break. For every crest we passed, we hoped to get a glimpse of the summit. But that was still far away.

Majid had fallen some time before and was now limping. I began to realize how expeditions can be forced to give up close to their goal because they have no strength left.

Experienced mountaineers had marked out the last couple of hundred

The wind was incredibly strong

yards and a long row of orange sticks showed the way through snow two feet deep.

Panting we fought our way from stick to stick and I noticed how Zari had a hard time fighting back tears of both cold and exhaustion. But now the goal was near, within reach. We only had to forge ahead.

And there it was, at last, the peak with its characteristic igloo-shaped resting station!

Far down below us the clouds were like a thick white cotton blanket and around us the most fantastic views appeared.

I was happily stumbling on when I noticed that Majid was far behind.

With only twenty yards to go, I turned to help him.

If we had gone all this way together, we were going to finish together.

It should have been an incredible feeling to climb this more than twelve thousand feet high peak but I was too exhausted to appreciate it and, after circling the peak in an attempt to absorb

The view was magnificient. Behind us Mount Damavand

the barren beauty, I crawled into the worn igloo.

Part of the surface was missing, but it still provided some protection and we huddled close together, got out our thermoses and let the foil blanket envelop our aching feet.

For obvious reasons, going down was much faster. Sometimes on feet and sometimes on bottoms we slid down at tremendous speed, the snow in glittering cascades around us.

It is said that it is more strenuous climbing down than up and I soon realized this truth. With several thousand feet to go, my knees started giving me ominous warnings. Rather worried I stopped and tied a scarf round one of them.

Bad luck struck as we had just passed Shirpala. Dusk was falling as an excruciating pain shot through my right leg and I fell headlong.

"What happened," Zari shouted from in front of me.

"It is probably not all that bad," said Majid and waved her on. She was in a hurry as she was going directly on the night shift at the hospital!

Again and again I tried to get up but the pain stabbed my knee like a knife and I had to lie with my head low so as not to faint.

"Take it easy and rest then perhaps it gets better," said Majid after having checked that no bones were broken.

"It may not be broken, but it still hurts like hell," I groaned.

Twenty minutes later I at last succeeded in getting up

My knee on the way down

and staggering a few steps. But I could neither stretch nor twist my leg. Every time I tried, everything went black.

However, we discovered that I could crawl, walk on my knees or slide on my backside. Foot by foot I descended the sharp rocks. Night was close and we understood that this was going to take forever.

"Here! Hold the torch and get up on my shoulders!"

"Oh no, you will never make it," I protested feebly.

Clumsily I got up onto Majid's shoulders and he started the wearisome descent without one word about his own aching knee. Darkness had fallen long ago and the flickering light of the torch was his only aid in finding footholds.

Every twenty yards, he had to stop and rest since my twelve stone did their utmost to draw the pith out of him. He wasn't a big guy, but he was strong and tough and he didn't give up.

A little later, in the dark of the night, we heard the murmuring ripple of a brook dancing its way down the rocks and we got on our stomachs and drank thirstily of the clear cold water. After a rest, it was time to resume the toil.

On the less steep passages, I crawled or dragged myself along to give Majid a chance to recover, this resulting in a hole in the back of the windproof trousers I had borrowed. I felt terrible wearing out both his back and his equipment.

The whole time the lit streets of Tehran were beckoning far down below us. Alone in the dark we opened our hearts to each other and I started to understand how life in Iran had developed a spectrum of emotions far wider in both depth and shades than I was used to at home in safe and sheltered Sweden.

After many long hours we finally approached our starting point and completely worn out I dragged myself the last couple of hundred feet while Majid left to phone Mohsen.

A stone stairway led down between the first buildings and happily I fought my way towards the goal when an ancient man with a stick overtook me. Then there were more buildings and the dirt road became a street. Soon the smell of wet tarmac hit my nostrils.

It was wonderful to see Tehran again

Tired but almost euphoric I then sat down on a low wall with a view over the northern parts of Tehran which with all its lights looked like any large city anywhere.

I turned my face towards the sky and let the snowflakes land on my cheeks and eyelids. What a luxurious feeling. In mountaineering gear, hat and mittens I was a picturesque part of the glittering townscape. But what did I care?

I filled my lungs with air and uttered a muffled but happy howl.

We had climbed Tochal!

SPREAD THE TRUTH

OUCH, MY BLASTED leg!

After a couple of days' rest I could begin to walk again even if I had to use crutches. I had probably strained a tendon combined with my already bad knees. The aches and pains in the rest of my body did their best to make my life miserable when one cloudy day Mohsen, Majid and I went to the police to try once more to extend my visa.

After almost an hour of struggling through narrow, traffic-jammed streets, we finally got there. Mohsen had to support me all the way to the entrance. From here it was important that I made it single-handedly, or rather single-leggedly, since we had already strained the patience of the police and if I could not stand up, it would look as if I was simulating a broken leg in order to get permission to stay.

Our steps echoed in the stairwell on our way to the third floor.

"But come on now!" I muttered to myself as I fought my way up with my arm round his neck. Here it wasn't a question of wanting to or not, it was just: get it over with, just like a visit to the dentist. Grin and bear it – get it over with as fast

as possible.

A couple of minutes later, we were outside the office. I was placed in a corner as Majid tried to find the right door. All the doors looked the same with small brass plates with the names in the same style. The door in front of us smelled of old polish.

I suddenly had the idea that we ought to turn back, that something terrible was going to happen. What if our plans were revealed? What if somebody had phoned and grassed on us just to be spiteful? What if I happened to say the wrong thing?

Over his shoulder, Majid gave me a reassuring look, nodded and knocked on the door. I swallowed and stifled my impulse to turn around and go down the stairs again. My throat was dry and my voice hoarse.

The door was opened from the inside by a grim-looking man in uniform. My Iranian friend introduced himself and showed his identity papers after which he modestly explained the situation.

"And where is this Dammegård now?" the policeman asked irritably.

Like jack-in-the-box, I poked my head through the door and waved. Apparently satisfied with what he had seen, he again turned his attention to the documents and soon I heard the characteristic sound of a stamp in a passport.

However, the next time we had to go to this office, we were in for trouble. Another foreign citizen had arrived before us and was now being questioned. What we didn't know was that he had given them the same nationality and profession as I. When my turn came, the police officers became suspicious and phoned the guard to stop the man. However, the police soon discovered that it was only a strange coincidence.

"Wow, was I ever getting nervous," I whispered when, at last, we were out in the street again.

"Me too," Mohsen laughed, crushed the butt of his cigarette with his foot and unlocked the car. "But now you can stay on another week so it was worth it, wasn't it?"

Later that same day, Majid reluctantly took me to the real heart of the Khomeini regime, the Islamic *Office Daftar-e-Ershâde Eslami,* from where all propaganda material was distributed. This was located not far from the closely guarded parliament Madjlef. It was definitely not without risk going there but, on the other hand, I needed pictures of Khomeini for the articles I was going to publish as soon as I returned home.

In Iran there was "freedom of the press," however, within the framework of the principles of Islam. In reality, this implied that all mass media were subjected to severe state control. The regime was also very strict with foreign journalists.

A tall pointed iron fence surrounded the large white building heavily guarded by armed soldiers. Here we had to pass double controls including frisking before we were allowed to cross the open yard.

Slowly we approached the stairs, which led into the largest cancer tumour of Iran.

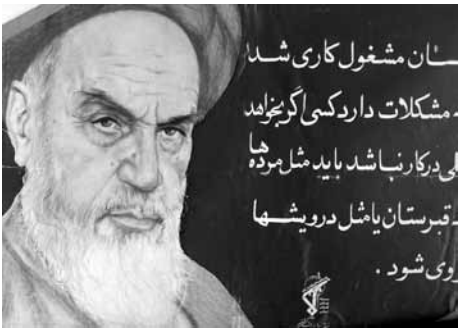
"This way," said Majid scornfully and waved. "I had never imagined that I would come here."

Well inside the enormous building, we were going to take the lift up to the third floor. I pressed the button and the door opened with a faint sound.

Pictures of dead soldiers everywhere

The dark corridor outside was almost

empty and soon we were in a small office where people were busily sorting posters and leaflets. The grey sky outside darkened the daylight so the room was gloomy. A man in uniform with kind eyes turned towards us.



One of the posters I was given

"Excuse us for intruding, but my friend here is very interested in our great leader," Majid explained as I shook the man's hand.

"Therefore he would be most grateful if he might have some pictures of Khomeini so that he can spread his message when he returns to his own country."

Majid's request seemed to fall onto good ground and after a while I was given a dozen political posters to choose from.

"Brother, promise me that you will speak the truth about Khomeini and The Holy Revolution," the man said and put out his hand to confirm the promise.

"I promise," answered Majid without lying.

One of the last evenings we had together, we decided to drive past the old palace of the former king and Shah, Niavarân.

It was exciting to come into direct contact with the past and a strange feeling filled me as we drove along the high wall.

Now that the regime had taken over the area, the gates were closed and it was impossible to look in. Instead Mohsen suggested that we drive past Djamarân where Khomeini lived.

Here heavily armed *pasdaran* had cordoned off the entire

quarter.

In the dark of the evening, we saw them huddling round empty oil barrels where they had made up small fires. The foggy street lamps spread an eerie yellowish light over the scene where the soldiers were strategically distributed along the street and by the different roadblocks.

The entire area was guarded by soldiers

Around the clock they were ready to cope with possible intruders and suspicious eyes and black gun muzzles followed our car. The fact was that even the mountainside behind this area of the city was cordoned off and guarded, all to prevent attacks.

"Khomeini claims to be loved by his entire people," Mohsen quietly said when he turned away from the sturdy roadblock. "Why then is it that he has not shown himself among the people for so long? The only times you see him is on TV. Sometimes people have even thought that he is dead and the person shown on TV is a double."

"Anyway he is becoming increasingly senile," Majid interrupted.

"Nowadays when he is making a speech, it is very hard to understand his incoherent sentences and many people are convinced that he is no longer the one who governs but rather a shoal of sharks at the top of the regime."

"The only contact Ayatollah Khomeini has with the outer world is through his son Ahmed and his closest advisers. Who knows what they might talk him into believing?"

"At the start of his reign, he was very powerful but now he seems to have lost his former strength and become both weaker and more frightened. The big noises among the mullahs are almost as scared and mostly they sweep along the streets of Tehran in their Mercedes with darkened windows and lots of bodyguards."

Ahmed Khomeiny

The *pasdaran* controls were always increased after dark so we needed to get home. A rather strange day was now ending and we were tired.

Some hours earlier we had decided to go to the movies.

"Cinema is very good," Mohsen had said with a big smile.

The posters outside the cinema announced that tonight's movie was about the life of Tchaikovsky, the composer.

Majid, Mohsen and I were now waiting for Saied, when suddenly there was a loud crash just in front of us. Opposite where we were standing, two police cars had smashed into each other.

"But what in h...," one officer yelled and shot out of his smoking car. "How do you think you are driving, chicken brain!"

The officer in the other car had a gash on his head, otherwise he was unharmed. Now he was staring at his fine official car, which seemed to need much more than a paint job.

"How I drive...? You bumped into me, you filthy *kesâfate hammal!*"

Their hot-tempered argument soon changed to blows as one officer slammed both fists into the bonnet of the other car whose owner retaliated by grabbing his car keys.

"You wouldn't dare..."

But he did dare and the next second the keys whizzed through the air and disappeared in the dark.

Majid was well trained in martial arts

His opponent tottered, raised a threatening finger and screamed.

"Now you ..."

At this moment, a small crowd had gathered round the adversaries who were now lashing out at each other.

"Here," Majid said quietly and handed me the programme after which he jumped into the middle of the fight.

Well trained in martial arts as he was, he didn't hesitate to interfere. The two police officers were large men, Majid only about five feet seven but, using both hands and feet, he managed to keep them apart until they eventually calmed down.

"Hi," said Saied who turned up a couple of minutes later. He opened the window of his car and with a big smile asked,

"What has your day been like?"

"Nice and quiet," answered Majid brushing the dust off his sleeve.

"I hope you know something about Tchaikovsky before we see the film. Otherwise you might be somewhat confused," Majid said when we had sat down. "The censors are usually rather harsh so you need a lot of imagination to figure out what it is all about."

In this case he was right. Forty-five minutes of the film had

been cut away! Every time a woman turned up on the screen, they had been there with their scissors. So one minute you saw the young composer writing love letters to his beloved and the next minute he was old and grey sitting by the grave of his second wife. Furthermore, the film was dubbed and I therefore spent the time with my thoughts and myself.

I felt sad, truly sad. Imagine the strange ways of life. Only one month ago I had been scared stiff of this apparently mad country and now my very core was weeping at having to leave it.

I leaned my elbows on my knees, rested my forehead on my folded hands and closed my eyes.

Why did life have to be so hard? When your head is buried in a mire of apparently important details, you so very easily lose the general view and the distance, which give life meaning and in retrospect disclose the importance of our experiences and emotions.

I balled my hands into fists against my cheeks and tried to extract a sensible thought from my poor head.

I had changed during my time in this so very different country. I wasn't quite sure how and what but, when I looked into my eyes in the mirror, I saw something there which had not been there before. Contact with life in Iran had penetrated my inner concrete shields that had protected me against outer pain ever since I was a child. But now I was at last in real contact with my innermost. The pain was intense but clean and pure. And I felt a strange joy at having

One of the many beautiful mosques

reached my core.

Mohsen tore me out of my reverie when he poked me in the side and offered me some popcorn.

I looked up at him with a pained expression.

"Here, you had better watch out or we will finish it all," he seemed to say with a wink and fumbled in his pocket for his cigarettes.

My visa was expiring in a few days and we had no idea what the future would bring. The unknown was waiting, all we could do was try to be brave and meet it with our heads held high.

The rest was up to higher powers.

A SAD GOODBYE

SO, NOW IT HAD COME, the terrible day when I had to leave my friends in Iran to an unknown fate. In spite of more than one month of intensive planning, there were still several details that might jeopardize the escape.

In two days Majid was to take a plane to Istanbul to get the ticket to East Germany from his friend and then wait for ticket number two from Sweden, a ticket that would, hopefully, take him from cold East Berlin to Gothenburg in Sweden where my mother and brother were to meet him.

For safety's sake, we had sent a photo so that they could recognize him.

The photo we sent to Sweden

Having to go now was like running a Marathon race and giving up two yards from the finish.

More than anything else, I wanted to stay on so that we together could see

everything working out.

But by now my worn passport had so many Iranian stamps that the police were increasingly suspicious every time we showed up.

Nothing should endanger Majid's safety. Now I had only about twenty-four hours to leave the country and the previous night I had decided to head for Pakistan, Iran's neighbour in the east.

Majid was gone most of the morning. He was at the bank trying to change his money into dollars while Mohsen stayed at home to be with me. We played a couple of final games of backgammon in order to pass the time.

The night before I had said goodbye to Maryam who had entered while I was packing. Her large dark eyes were sad.

"Delam barât tang mishe. I'm going to miss you," she said as she stood only a few feet from me.

I simply could not say goodbye. Instead I went up to her, gave her a hug and a tender kiss on the cheek. I knew that this was contrary to Iranian customs but it was vitally important for me to show her just how much she had come to mean to me.

On her way through the door, she stopped and glanced uncertainly at me over her shoulder.

I never really understood what her eyes were saying at that moment. A few seconds later, she was gone. None of us had any idea of the tragic events that were ahead of us.

As it turned out, it was just as hard to part with Mohsen, Shadi, Majid's parents and his other sister Zari. They had all become like a new family to me, thousands of miles from my own relatives.

When finally the time had come, I could not keep the tears back.

"Please, let us get this over as fast as possible," I mumbled weakly to Majid who wasn't slow in agreeing. I gave his mother one last hug and let my eyes take in Maryam and Zari who were holding on to each other. Nobody looked up.

Soon he had fetched the car and loaded my luggage into it. He walked round and slowly opened the car door. I jumped in and shut the door after me.

"OK, it is time," he said with a joyless smile.

He turned the key.

"Khoda hafis, dustaye azizam..."

I waved one last time before we backed the car out of the alley into the street. We zig-zagged through the enormous capital where only the law of the jungle applied in the traffic. Majid proved his experience as a taxi driver by finding his way through tiny alleys and streets in order to avoid the larger thoroughfares where the queues of cars always caused traffic jams.

We didn't say much on the way. Everything had been said and done and now our paths were separating.

In my hand I had a bus ticket purchased for me by Mohsen's brother-in-law some days earlier.

"Since we had no time to give you a farewell party, we thought that you could maybe use this," he had said with a wink.

We were approaching one of the four gigantic bus terminals surrounded by a parking space for hundreds of buses.

The last meal with the family

The huge science fiction-like building was remi-

niscent of the Shah's attempts to modernize the country. The oblique edged roof reminded me of a slice of cheese left too long in the sun. A concrete bridge led into the centre.

My ticket from Mohsen's brother-in-law

Many of the travellers were soldiers who had just returned from the war or were on their way back into hell. The different colours of their uniforms indicated their units. Beige, green, blue and camouflage coloured - they were all in the same impossible situation – a situation that would sooner or later cost them their lives.

What was the difference between the faces of these young soldiers and my own? They were on a journey towards death, I was on a trip "for fun."

Majid saw me all the way to the bus.

"Goodbye my friend," I said quietly and gave him a warm hug.

"Goodbye," he answered.

I entered the bus. These few steps removed me from his life, a life that had come to mean so much to me. Only the windowpane was between us but it might as well have been a concrete wall. I felt how my face turned into an immovable mask.

Our separation was a fact.

BLOODY WAR

THE HOURS THAT FOLLOWED turned into days while the dry and scorched steppe lands slowly changed outside the bus window. The farther south we got, the more barren and desolate the landscape, until we were completely surrounded by an endless desert.

At regular intervals *pasdaran* or police stopped the bus. It was strange to see the different reactions of people to them. If an ordinary police officer came on board, everybody laughed and joked and waved their passports.

But when the dark green uniform of a *pasdar* was outlined in the door, a frightened silence descended on the passengers.

Drilled by prayers and violence

Outside the bus a couple of armed *pasdaran* were always watching the vehicle while two others took care of

the passengers. Slowly they proceeded down the middle, their stony eyes coldly studying each single passenger. Many were sweating profusely even though the sun had long been gone. Who would the soldiers take this time?

"This is really horrible," a man commented silently as we watched the *pasdaran* examining the bus inch by inch. "If you lower your eyes, they think you have something to hide. If you stare straight ahead, they may say that staring is suspicious. And in both cases you might be taken away for interrogation."

He ended the sentence with a sad shrug and slowly shook his head.

I knew exactly what he was talking about since I myself had seen this happen to five or six people. Most of them had come back but nobody knew what had happened to the last one. And no-one dared ask.

"Passport!"

I was torn out of my thoughts by one of Khomeini's henchmen. By habit I already had my passport in my hand and now gave it to him without a word.

He was small, swarthy and brutal-looking. This was a nasty one, no doubt about that. I felt the skin round my mouth and chin tighten.

For one long minute he stared at me with his empty icy cold eyes while he leafed through my passport.

One of the basic rules seemed to be "Stare at them until they reveal themselves out of sheer nervousness." His face seemed made of wood.

The seconds passed very slowly when I suddenly noticed something that caused laughter to bubble in my throat. He was holding the passport upside down!

However, I controlled myself and, after a few more minutes, he returned the passport. At long last the soldiers seemed satisfied and soon we were on our way again.

Everyone sighed with relief and people resumed their conversations.

The man beside me was a soldier of about twenty-five. I tried to engage him in conversation but he politely turned away and finally I gave up. Time and time again I caught myself staring at him out of the corner of my eye. He was so like my brother.

What a weird world we are living in, I thought, when a religious fanatic can order loving hands like those to kill. How easily could a tragedy like this happen in my native Sweden, maybe with a different background but still...? In that case it might have been my brother who was on a bus on his way to a senseless war.

The war against Iraq had started one year after the end of the revolution in September 1980. However, the real cause of the war seemed shrouded in uncertainty since both sides had their own version but this is just about what happened.

After Ayatollah Khomeini succeeded in overthrowing the military dictatorship of the Shah, he gradually started instigating people in the surrounding countries to follow his example, overthrow their dictators and spread the Islamic revolution.

One who very much resented these provocations was the president of Iraq, Saddam Hussein.

Simultaneously, repeated disturbances occurred along the river Tigris, which is so vital to trade, and the border between the two countries.

This river has for centuries been the cause of many skirmishes and now the Iraqi leader wanted to bring matters to a head so, in secret, Saddam Hussein started planning an invasion of Iran.

After the assumption of power, Khomeini had dealt summarily with most of the Shah's supporters who had not fled.

Among these were twelve thousand generals and military leaders. This implied that the Iranian army was almost devoid of capable officers who could organize resistance. If Iraq were to accomplish an invasion, they would never have a better chance than now.

Therefore, soon the Iraqi army initiated an attack on their neighbour to the east who was caught napping. For a short period the Iraqi was successful but when the Iranians realized what was going on, they mobilized a resistance, which effectively stopped the enemy.

After about a year and several severe battles, the frontline was back to the areas that had earlier been the natural border between the two countries.

But this wasn't enough for Khomeini. Not only had the Iraqi troops been pushed back, but he also saw the alluring chance of taking over their country. For this reason, he continued to incite his troops in a "holy" war that had now been going on for five long years and cost about one million lives.

Furthermore, millions of civilians had fled from the senseless killing which impoverished both antagonists.

Iraq borrowed an average of one thousand million dollars a month to keep the war going.

The banks round the world hugged themselves and were happy to accommodate.

Here was a chance to let the Muslims kill each other.

Not bad considering how scary the image of Islam had become after Khomeini ap-

Iranians fighting back

peared on the stage.

As for the Iranians, they refused to ask for loans abroad but instead relied on their larger population. If they ran out of men and boys, women soldiers were ready to replace them.

Veiled women with automatic weapons became increasingly usual at military parades.

As far as I knew, no woman had yet been sent to the front but one million Iranian women had already been trained in the use of arms.

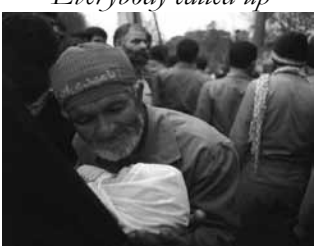
Ayatollah Khomeini had personally ordered the creation of military units for women and about ninety training camps were now established.

Mobilization campaigns were constantly going on all over the country with the following slogan:

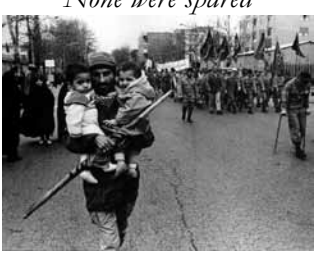
"Our Muslim sisters are being trained to defend the cities if the forces of the Devil should dare attack again."

For this, more weapons were needed and during the war no less than twenty-eight countries exported weapons to this conflict. The subsequent scandals have

Everybody called up



None were spared



The war touched all

Lengthy fighting

shown that not even neutral countries like Sweden kept their hands clean.

Several of the great powers even took the opportunity of exporting to both sides at the same time. Truly tasteful and morally justifiable.

However, in spite of its superior air force and previous successes, Iraq was encountering serious problems.

The terrible carnage of the war

Saddam Hussein had tried to make peace three times but Khomeini didn't yield. In a TV speech he declared that the war would continue for at least another twenty years. Twenty years!

This would mean the slaughter of an entire generation of young men and children.

Most of the people I talked to agreed that this was a war between two regimes and not between two peoples.

Both countries are primarily Muslim, many Iraqi had settled in Iran and many Iranians lived in Iraq.

According to soldiers I met, it wasn't unusual that the armies were facing each other without one shot being fired.

Not until Ayatollah Khomeini's private army turned up, did the fighting start again.

Saddam Hussein

As I could see it, there were several reasons why Khomeini kept all this killing going, the primary one being that he simply didn't dare stop it since his people might then regain their strength sufficiently to make him answerable for all he had on his conscience.

However, using the war he could keep his people suppressed.

Grief, blood and tears coupled with oppression, high inflation and high unemployment rates were ingredients in the mess that kept him and his mullahs in power. Furthermore, the war was an excellent chance to get rid of as many opponents as possible. If anyone was becoming embarrassing, you just sent him to the front as cannon fodder.

The morale was high

Many dead and wounded

Now and then my thoughts were interrupted as we passed through small poor villages. How they survived in this barren country was more than I could fathom.

We went through sand dunes that in lovely gentle curves made up beautiful and intricate patterns continuously changed by the hot desert wind. It was fantastic to be able to see infinitely far in all directions.

Sand, sand and more sand as far as the eye could see.

Here and there the desert flowered into verdant oases in the middle of nowhere. Since the palms retained the subsoil water with their roots, they were cherished and were rarely used for timber or firewood. Instead the houses were built of reddish-brown clay mixed with sand and water. As the people had no wood for roof trusses, they shaped the roof into a self-supporting cupola.

December was approaching but the heat was still oppressive and the brown and purple colours blended into each other in the parched landscape where all greenery had long since perished.

One of my fellow passengers gave me a short lesson concerning the extreme variations of the climate in Iran. The summers are often very hot and temperatures of up to one hundred thirty degrees Fahrenheit are not unusual.

However, due to the altitude of the plains, the winters are much colder than could be expected from the situation of the country and you might experience down to minus twenty-two degrees Fahrenheit in the Zagros Mountains.

Violent winds increase the differences in temperature and, during the summer, particularly the eastern part of Iran suffers from the so-called "120-days wind" that can reach velocities of up to one hundred miles/hour. The climate in the north and northwest is hot and humid but here it hardly ever rained.

Poor villages in the endless desert

Just as the sun was setting and the shadows be-

came long and heavy, we passed through a narrow pass in the mountains where the colours created by the clear red sun were simply indescribable.

My beach outside the town of Kavala

Even the night in the silent desert proved the immensity of nature and, at the rate the temperature sank, a perfect full moon rose in the starry blue-black sky. It was truly a bewitching night.

This reminded me of another landscape I had seen on a wonderful beach outside the town Kavala in northern Greece.

I had fallen peacefully asleep in the sand with the sky as my cover and the moon as my bed lamp.

The dawn that followed arrived with a radiant blood red orange as pathfinder and in the middle of this fireball stood a lonely fisherman far out in the shimmering sea. In water up to his waist, he was catching fish with a spear and a tin with which he could look through the surface.

In the evening this strange scene was repeated. Now he threw out a long line with hooks and then sat down by a small fire to wait.

His faint singing reached my heart and I will never forget him.

THE BORDER – AN IRON GATE

FROM THE SMALL TOWN of Zahedan there are about sixty miles to the Pakistani frontier and apparently it was up to everyone to cross the desert as best he could. The locals cautiously kept to themselves since the whole area was patrolled by *pasdaran*.

On the trip I had met a group of young Pakistanis on their way home from a so-called business trip.

One of them was very kind and we soon got to talking. His name was Shah-Shah and I was later told that he was on his way home after two years of fighting together with the PLO in Lebanon.

"Come on, I will buy you dinner," Shah-Shah said with a gentle smile. "I know a Pakistani who owns a good restaurant here."

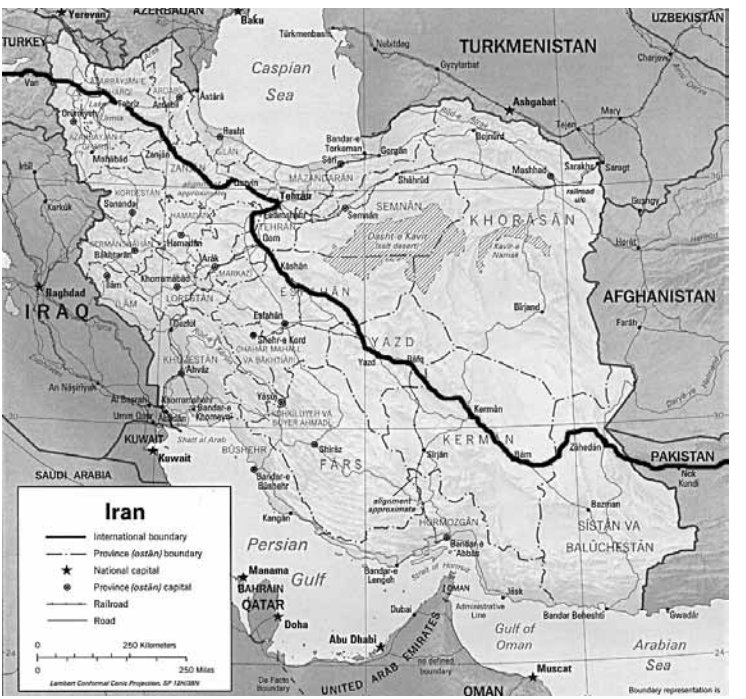
Shah-Shah had just returned from Lebanon

This was to be somewhat of a fore-

taste of what was in store. The restaurant consisted of a dirty room where they had made a hole in the wall to the kitchen. Through this a small guy crawled back and forth with orders and food. Were they going to enlarge the hole, as the waiter grew bigger?

The grey face and hands of the boy indicated that he had not been near water for a very long time and I quietly wondered what the health authorities back home would have had to say. Full of doubt we ordered the speciality of the place consisting of greasy rice and mutton.

A couple of minutes later, the mini-waiter crawled groaning through the hole, plaster loosening round him in large chunks, thus adding some extra spice to the food.



The long trip from Tehran to the border town of Zahedan

Dusty plates were placed on the rickety table in front of us with a couple of bottles of Coca-Cola. With a less than elegant gesture the waiter bent off the top and dried off the bottle with his hand and I was just about to gulp down the dust of the journey when I caught a stench from – the bottleneck. Then it was true what I had been told about the left hand and no toilet paper.

Discreetly I did my best to clean the bottle before I took heart and tackled the delicacies. In Pakistan it was apparently going to be difficult to get away with my health intact.

In the evening we were six men sharing one room chatting away. I would have preferred to be alone with my worry for the friends I had left behind in Iran. I tried in vain to get rid of my feeling of abandonment and once again went over the details of the escape plan. How had things worked out for Majid? Had our plans gone off all right?

As I lay there absorbed in my thoughts, I became acquainted with one of the national sounds of Pakistan: a loud hawking and rattling followed by a huge gob. Apparently it didn't matter where it landed even if many were master marksmen. Here you simply folded up the edge of the mattress and spat on the floor.

At dawn we got up to find someone to provide us transport to the border. The Pakistanis thought that the best thing would be to hire somebody to drive us to the small frontier town of Taftan. We stopped a dozen pickups before one rose to our bait.

Conference concerning our transport

Like everyone else, this driver was afraid of the many *pasdaran* roadblocks but a wad of money convinced him.

After some discussion, we figured out that we should each pay eighty-five toman.

Eagerly we threw our luggage onto the back before jumping up ourselves.

Now at least we were on our way – we thought.

All set to go to the border

Some minutes later the price had in some mysterious way risen to one hundred toman per head. Enraged and exasperated, the Pakistanis started a row and soon we were again standing at the roadside surrounded by a large pile of luggage. The hunt for a driver was resumed and half an hour later we at long last got going on a new pickup.

The price? One hundred toman.

The town Taftan turned out to be a small, dirty collection of dilapidated hovels in the middle of the desert.

Not far from the town was an Iranian passport office and an army camp. On the crumbly, whitewashed wall somebody had painted "ISLAM IS VICTOR" and the symbol for Allah.

Tired and dusty we jumped down and started unloading when the *pasdaran* turned up. Soon they had hauled me into a dark office.

"Who are you? What do you want here? How much money

have you got? What is your opinion of Islam? Are you a USA sympathizer?"

The questions were pouring over me while I tried to answer.

Taftan - the border station

I mumbled and let my hand smooth my hair. It did feel strange being questioned as I was trying to leave the country, entering had been much easier.

The sharp desert sun hit me when I emerged. Here the sun was at the zenith and there were hardly any shadows. Dizzily I trampled along to the next office where I was to get an exit stamp before I finally reached the renowned border – an iron gate.

Here we had come hundreds of miles through the desert and they had a small iron gate as frontier.

You only needed to walk half a dozen yards to either side to cross the border without hindrance. If you disregarded the soldiers posted there. Between the gate and the tiny town, dromedaries were rooting in a rubbish dump together with brown and white goats with horns, goatees and the longest ears I have ever seen. The heat was unbearable and irritating flies swarmed around in clouds.

The hours passed while I waited for the five Pakistanis to be let through and after a lot of nonsense, we finally all met on the Pakistani side. That is to say, all except one.

"He has worked in Iran for a year without permission," Shah-Shah said. "And now he has to pay the price."

"But what are they going to do to him?" I asked nervously.

"Will he go to prison?"

"No, it is just a matter of cash," Shah-Shah shrugged. "He has made lots of money in the oil fields and now he has to share part of his savings. That is only fair."

Our beautifully decorated bus

Between the small clay houses was an ancient Bedford bus. Never in my life had I seen anything like it. With hundreds of bulbs, lots of chrome, spectra tape and glittering hand-hammered extensions, it looked like a rolling Las Vegas discothèque.

The interior turned out to be the same with mirrors and little lamps hanging from the ceiling. Every small detail was handmade and the result was truly overwhelming.

Stunned I entered saying hello to two men who had already occupied their seats.

"When will the bus leave?" I asked one of them.

"In an hour."

About an hour later I asked the same question.

"In an hour," was the imperturbable answer.

Five hours later I was still in the same seat. Still no driver. My patience was gone long ago. Where was he?

"He is asleep," the man said who had answered me before.

"But when are we leaving?"

"In an hour."

Darkness had fallen when we at last got moving. The bus proved to be as uncomfortable as it was magnificent. The

seats were made for midgets and there was no possibility of having room either for your legs or for your behind. Instead I switched places with a Pakistani on a collapsible camp-stool in the narrow space between the seats. I soon realized why the man had been so eager to swap. No backrest.

"Come lean on my arm," said Shah-Shah and got hold of the seat on the other side.

The moon had ascended its throne, the divine light illuminating the soft sand dunes along the so-called road which was but two deep ruts in the sand.

We were on our way to Quetta, the only city in southwestern Pakistan besides Kalat. Slowly we moved along the border of Afghanistan and we regularly passed refugees on their way from the horrors of war. For lack of better solutions, they had sought refuge in the desert, the small fires revealing their shabby tents.

A number of controls occurred on the Pakistani side as well.

Smuggling was one of the most lucrative enterprises in the area and the authorities had their hands full trying to stop illegal trade. Roadblocks were countless and every time we had to leave the bus while the Pakistani officials searched it.

A lone watchtower in the desert

In the middle of the night, I was awakened by the bus stopping, after which both young and old performed their rituals on their prayer rugs in the

sand.

The saying has it that if you are completely still and listen to the voice of the desert, Truth will be revealed to you.

Stop to listen to the silence of the desert

The silence was overwhelming and the world seemed in perfect harmony.

We woke at dawn, aching and shivering with cold. Hundreds of miles in a Pakistani bus does not ensure good health, particularly as our driver had insisted on having the window open in spite of temperatures below freezing.

The temperature changes between day and night were incredible and my unaccustomed body had a hard time of it.

We had stopped by a small restaurant in the middle of the desert far from anywhere. No sooner had the bus stopped in front of the house than the pride of the inn was turned on. With a deafening din, a diesel-driven generator started and the splendour of hundreds of electrical bulbs dazzled our eyes. With a sweeping gesture and a cough, the innkeeper proudly pointed to the latest wonder – electrickery!

Many Afghans were fleeing

It seemed to matter less that the smelly diesel fumes threatened to

suffocate his customers.

Quetta turned out to be a cacophonous inferno and the difference between the peaceful soundless desert and this squalid city was shocking.

Everything here seemed to be in total chaos as cars and small moped taxis, so-called rickshaws, did their damnedest to run over pedestrians, cyclists, donkeys and occasional dromedaries.

To the Pakistanis around me this was home-sweet-home and it slowly dawned on me that no matter where I was in the world, no matter how exotic and strange the environment, it was normal everyday life to the people who lived there. In exactly the same way, my dreary life back in Sweden would be unfamiliar and exciting to them.

Was my entire trip in fact nothing but a change in attitude?

In Quetta I fell for the temptation of comfort and located the nearest hotel sign.

At the back of my head was a gnawing suspicion that I, instead of a clean bed with freshly ironed sheets, would end up in a trash container with roof.

It was also the time of day when I usually had hallucinations about food: appetizing food accompanied by soft music and served by a lovely girl. As it was I soon found myself in the container with a lukewarm Coke and a chunk of stale bread.

A few days later I entered a train so thronged with people that they were hanging onto the sides and sitting on the roofs. I fought my way using both elbows and knees to my seat, which turned out to be taken.

The man arrogantly refused to move and finally I saw no other solution than to call the conductor.

Followed by an armed guard, he showed up in the door to enquire what was going on.

No sooner had he heard our different stories than he ordered the soldier to shoot the Pakistani.

"No, no, please let me go!" the terrified man screamed and crawled out of the nearest window.

By train towards the city of Lahore

"This always works," the conductor added before he continued through the pandemonium.

The long trip to the city of Lahore at the Indian frontier was worse than I could ever have imagined.

Never in my life had I experienced so many people crowded together in such a small and narrow space.

A young guy was squatting on a backrest in the vain hope of getting some sleep. On six seats were thirteen people plus their luggage. It wasn't even possible to drop a cigarette butt on the floor. At the same time the icy night air blew in through the open windows and all the cracks in the walls. It was indescribable.

When we at long last reached Lahore, it was still dark and I had quite a few problems before I succeeded in finding a hotel, or rather a place to sleep on the roof of a three-storey building. About fifty other guests were fighting for room around me and I had difficulty falling asleep when I noticed the undue interest shown my luggage by some of the others.

Travelling alone in a country like Pakistan turned out to be an incredible mental strain. In Iran I had felt calm in spite of the imminent danger but here I was constantly being watched.

No matter where I was, I immediately turned into everyone's property.

"Hello, mister! What is your country name? And your own good name? You are wanting a cheap and excellent hotel, isn't it? Where are you going? Ah, what a coincidence, I'm going there too. Please bring your better self and your luggage! I will be too happy to have you as a guest and you are almost welcome!"

It frequently happened that I got a companion who with an ingratiating smile started following me around. Not a word was said but the smile remained.

He scrupulously supervised my every move and finally with an all-encompassing gesture exclaimed, "Now you may give me rupees. You see, I'm a collector of money."

To start with I had answered politely but I soon realized that no-one was interested in my answers. Naively I had handed out coins right and left but not once had I seen a glimpse of gratitude or warmth in their eyes. A few minutes later I was again besieged by the same old questions:

"Hello, mister! What is your country name? I'm very excellent first number Lahore guide. My brother works in London and is very famous. His name is Ali. Would you like a cup of tea? Massage? A guide?"

I soon became a local celebrity

I lifted the corners

of my mouth in a forced smile, waved deprecatingly and tried my very best not to allow myself to be provoked.

"No, no! NO!"

Once I even timed how long I was left alone when I ventured out. Thirty-two seconds. Just one half minute...

The last straw was when an apparently wealthy man threw himself round my leg and let me drag him along in the dust in the hope that I would pay him for his trouble. But by then I had had enough. Instead of rupees the guy got a good kick in the butt.

"Just fuck off!"

A GIFT FROM ALLAH

SICK WITH WORRY late one night I decided to phone home since I still had no idea what had happened to Majid. If all had gone well, he would by now have spent about one week with my family. If all had gone wrong, it might even be impossible to trace him. I simply had to find out.

Outside the night was silent and clear, only few cars were moving in the narrow streets. A beautifully decorated rickshaw stopped and five minutes later I jumped down in front of the telephone terminal. As a reward for his effort, I gave the kind guy a five-rupee note.

"We might meet again," he shouted as the rickshaw sputtered off along the deserted street.

"Who knows," I mumbled and waved goodbye. I then turned around and approached the small telephone office which might have been taken right out of a scene from the England of World War II. Everything seemed to be from the 1940's including the phones.

One entire side of the office was dominated by what looked like a dining room suite in dark mahogany with silver candlesticks and hand painted china. From the ceiling hung a

wonderful crystal chandelier.

On the other side was a row of telephone booths, all made of the same fine wood. All was beautifully clean and neat.

I cleared my throat and went up to the desk.

"Good evening, I would like to make a long-distance call to Sweden."

The man behind the counter hardly looked up from his worn paperback.

"Well, I would like to make a phone call to Sweden."

"That is impossible," was his curt answer.

"Of course I pay cash," I continued.

"That is impossible," he said with a vacant stare.

There were five booths in the office so one of them ought to be in working order.

"Can I send a telegram instead?"

"No, that is impossible," the man repeated monotonously.

"Why not?" I asked confused.

"It is impossible to get through on the lines."

"What about a telex then? Do you have telex?"

"Of course," his voice sounded offended.

"But then I can send a telex?"

"No, that is impossible."

"Why is that?"

"It is too late. The only way to contact Sweden at this time is by phone."

My voice was soft but my smile didn't reach my eyes.

"Well, can I make a phone call?"

"Yes."

Majid had not arrived!

What had gone wrong? I suddenly shivered. My mother had sounded strangely evasive on the phone and I had only understood that he had not turned up at the airport in Goth-

enburg. No-one knew what had become of him and now my poor tormented head was in turmoil. What had happened?

No sooner had I hung up than I tried to phone Iran. But without avail.

"All contact with Iran was cut off long ago," the man explained in a disinterested voice. "Ever since the war we have hardly ever been able to get through on the lines. Write a letter instead."

The mere thought of what might have happened to Majid made me sick and I could not think straight.

Totally lost I stepped out in front of a rickshaw that with screeching tyres abruptly brought me back to reality.

"Oh, I'm sorry, I didn't look where I was going," I stammered to the driver who gave me a wide smile. To my astonishment I realized that it was the man who let me off half an hour earlier.

"Are you on your way back to the hotel?" he asked politely. "In that case I would consider it an honour if I may offer you a cup of tea first. You look as if you need it."

Warmed by his kindness I accepted.

I was, however, somewhat on my guard as I jumped in and soon we stopped in front of a small café.

"Welcome," my jolly driver smiled opening the door for me.

After having ordered he expectantly sat down opposite me. Soon a waiter appeared with a tray held high. Instead of tea he served a cup of something I could not quite identify.

Me and my rickshaw friend

It was hot milk with chopped nuts, raisins and a pink powder on the surface.

I took a sip.

"Lovely, this is really good."

His eyes sparkled as he accepted my compliment.

The five-rupee note I got back

"I'm happy that you like the speciality of Lahore. It is famous in large areas and has spread health and joy among many people."

Chotallal was a rather sturdy man in his early thirties with a moon face. The corners of his mouth were pointing upwards all the time. An impressive moustache adorned his upper lip and he never missed an opportunity to twirl the bushy ends between his fingers.

Much later he dropped me in front of my small hotel. Not only had he diverted my sad thoughts, he even refused payment for the ride. Instead he returned the rupee note I had given him outside the telephone office.

"I accepted this payment before I knew the two of us would become good friends," he explained with dignity. "Between me and my friends there is no such thing as money."

"OK, but please do me a favour and write something on it then I promise I will frame it when I get home."

Delighted he attacked the note with a ballpoint pen.

No sooner had I waved goodbye to Chotallal than a talkative young man about twenty apparently on his way home stopped me in the dark of the night. He introduced himself as Ramzan Khan and after all the usual questions about my name, where I

was from, etcetera, he casually asked where I was going.

"I don't know," I said. "Maybe back to Iran, maybe on to India."

"India! That is interesting! You see, I'm myself on my way there. If you like we could go together to the Indian embassy in Islamabad. I can help you with all the visa bureaucracy."

"That sounds like quite a good idea," I answered. "Let us meet tomorrow night and talk about it."

The following night all of Lahore was one glittering sea of lights.

It was *Eid-i-Mila-un-Nabi,* a feast in honour of the Prophet Muhammad and the entire country was celebrating with a fantastic show. From all buildings hung long garlands of coloured bulbs and in the streets orchestras were playing in honour of the Prophet.

"It is the same thing every year," Ramzan Khan explained while he led me through the crowds.

"But come on, let us go and have a bite to eat."

The food consisted of cold spaghetti with a hot spicy sauce mixed with ice cubes. It was an unusual experience but I was hungry and soon my plate was empty. Happy and full I let Ramzan Khan show me round the merry city.

Later I got the address of a cheap hostel and tired after a long day I took a rickshaw to my new home. I was told that it had once been an old palace, which had been converted into a youth hostel. It was

The entire city was illuminated

much the worse for wear; what had been the swimming pool was now a garbage dump and inside the floors had been torn up for no apparent reason. But I didn't care, I was just glad to have found a place to spend the night in peace and quiet.

The next morning I woke up to an infernal noise from one of the trees outside my window. It turned out to be a flock of wild parrots, which in a few minutes massacred the entire treetop. Twigs and leaves whirled about when suddenly...

The white birds shut up in surprise and fluttered away as the man below, annoyed, brushed himself off. Dressed in beautiful silk clothes and shiny newly polished leather boots he had been relaxing in the sun.

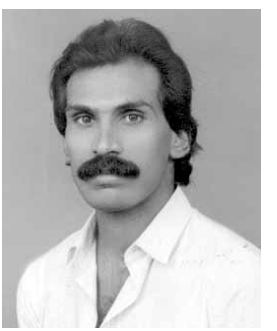
His name was Agha A.R. Adill and it soon turned out that he had royal blood.

His elegant ways confirmed this and it felt wonderful talking with someone who didn't scream and yell all the time.

"In Pakistan we consider guests to be a gift from Allah," he claimed gesturing for me to sit down. "I should be most happy to be at your service while you are here."

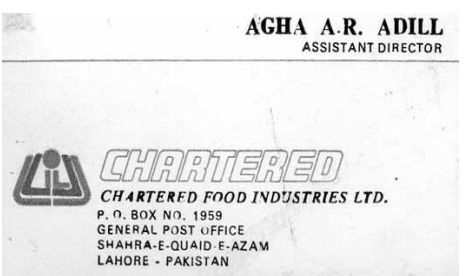
CHEATED AND ROBBED

AGHA ADILL HAD certainly led an exciting life. Having been born on an airplane at the airport of Cuba, he grew up in Pakistan, Switzerland and Liechtenstein. His father was a brigade general in Luxemburg and his mother a UN secretary in Sydney.



Agha A.R. Adill

Now Agha was living in one of the better districts of the capital Islamabad where he had four servants and a chauffeur. As assistant director of the company Chartered Food Industries Limited in Lahore, his income was about nine hundred thousand rupees.



AGHA A.R. ADILL
ASSISTANT DIRECTOR

CHARTERED
CHARTERED FOOD INDUSTRIES LTD.
P. O. BOX NO. 1959
GENERAL POST OFFICE
SHAHRA-E-QUAID-E-AZAM
LAHORE - PAKISTAN

The business card of Agha Adill

His elaborate

business card and well kept passport added credibility to his words.

All this I was told during the first hours of our time together. There was something a little strange about such a prominent person staying at a youth hostel at twelve rupees a night but he explained how he had been robbed repeatedly in more expensive hotels.

"Thieves and bandits swarm round the larger hotels so it is much safer for me to stay here when I'm on business trips. Also it is nice to get away from the luxury now and again."

The following evening Chotallal came to see me. Dressed in his very best he took me on a tour of Lahore. In honour of the day he had replaced the rickshaw with a mirror-finish scooter.

However, I didn't feel very well and felt quite green about the gills when we crisscrossed through the heavily trafficked streets. So about half past nine I asked Chotallal to take me home.

"How are you feeling?" Agha asked with great concern a few days later.

He slowly sat down on my bed and gingerly touched my forehead.

A headache was hard at work like a chisel behind my eyelids and I massaged the root of my nose with thumb and forefinger.

"But you have a high fever! I think I had better get a doctor."

Chotallal

It had started with slight dizzy spells and diarrhoea but by now I felt really terrible. Twenty minutes later he returned.

"There is a doctor quite close by. Do you think you can manage to walk? Otherwise I can carry you," he offered kindly.

The few hundred yards felt like several miles and when at long last we got there, the doctor turned out to be a beefy man in his fifties with a self-important face.

At least his fee was atrocious but on the wall was a sign that explained it all. The engraved text was truly impressive. "Dr. (Capt.) Asghar Mirzahan, M.B.B.S. (P.B.) R.M.P. ex-chief medical officer, ex-deputy director chest hospital, regd. no. 2036 (S.A.), Chest Physician."

After waiting for half an hour, it was my turn.

"And how are we here then?" the doctor asked in broken English. His age was beginning to show in a deep furrow between his eyebrows and two hard angles round the corners of his mouth. These deepened as he scrutinized me.

Exhausted I explained my symptoms.

"Aha," the man exclaimed slowly with a thoughtful face. "Then you also have a bad cough, haven't you?"

"No," I answered.

His answer surprised me.

"Cough!"

"What," I wondered confused.

"Cough!"

I coughed.

"There! You see! You do have a bad cough," the doctor observed in a dry voice as he wrote out a prescription and sent us on our way.

The pharmacy was located in a small shed on the outskirts of the city. The pharmacist appeared to be illiterate and didn't even glance at the prescription. Instead even he went through my symptoms and then slowly rummaged through his boxes

till he found what he was looking for.

"Take four of the pink pills and two of the blue ones three times a day," he said with a confidence-inspiring wink.

You might call it cowardice, but I decided to get well on my own.

One day Ramzan Khan turned up at the hostel. He brought with him his visa documents with photos and was ready to go at any time, so we agreed to leave the following day by a special bus called the Flying Coach.

"Why don't we meet some time," I said to Agha Adill when he mentioned that he was also on his way to Islamabad.

"Sure, that would be nice," he answered with a charming smile, took out his cheque book and made out a cheque for one thousand rupees.

"Take this as a small token of our friendship," he added and put the cheque into my breast pocket.

Overwhelmed but still weak from my fever, I tried to protest but he waved disarmingly. Instead we parted with a warm and friendly handshake.

He and Ramzan Khan had agreed on both the time and place for us to meet three days later.

I felt great not to be alone and with peace of mind I entered the bus together with Ramzan Khan. Ramzan was wearing the traditional Pakistani attire of silk and cotton. On his feet he had glittering plastic sandals and on his head a small hat decorated

Agha Adill's checque for 1000 rupees

with gold threads and small mirrors.

On the way we talked a lot about friendship and love and he gave me many new points of view seen through Muslim eyes. I was really happy to have met him.

"There is just one thing before we arrive," Ramzan confided in me as we approached Rawalpindi, a city only a couple of miles from the capital Islamabad. "There will soon be a presidential election in the country and our secret police are on the lookout for all contacts made with foreigners. So I ask you to pretend that you don't know me. Otherwise I may get into trouble. Okay?"

"Sure," I nodded.

When at long last we arrived at Rawalpindi, it was pitch dark. Ramzan disappeared in the dark looking for a taxi. We were both tired and l longed to stretch out on my back.

"Come on, Ole," I heard him shout and a moment later I saw him in the front seat of an approaching taxi. Relieved and grateful I sank into the back seat and shut my eyes while Ramzan made sure we found a hotel.

Soon the taxi slowed down by a small obscure entrance dimly lit for the night. When we had paid, Ramzan led me up the stairs all the time tensely on the lookout to both the left and right. To me it was somewhat exaggerated but what the heck, why not? If I only got a bed to lie down on.

The next morning Ramzan Khan turned up in my hotel room as agreed. He was pale and nervous and when I asked him why, he told me that he had been frisked just outside the hotel. Furthermore, he had some stomach trouble.

"Would you please go out and buy some bread and milk," he asked in a plaintive voice. "That usually takes care of my stomach cramps."

"Sure," I said and got up to leave.

"And... Please lock the door so no-one discovers that I'm here."

"If that is what you want," I said and shut the padlock on the outside of the door.

Two minutes later I returned with breakfast. I knocked quietly on the door and heard a key being turned in the lock, then I saw Ramzan's worried eyes in the chink of the door. To my surprise he seemed much better all of a sudden and when we had finished our meal, he suggested that we leave separately and go on separate buses to the embassy. In that way the risk of being seen together would be minimal.

Gullible me accepted this somewhat strange proposal. Soon the door was closed again and I heard his hurried footsteps down the stairs. I waited a while and then left in order to find a bus.

It was about three in the afternoon and Ramzan had not turned up yet. Restlessly I paced the street worried sick that something might have happened.

On the road between Rawalpindi and Islamabad soldiers were posted. The authorities seemed nervous. I myself had been questioned several times during the last few days and the ineptitude of the men disclosed that they were spies.

"Hello, mister! What is your country name? What do you think about terrorism? What do you think about the president? Is USA doing the right thing supporting countries in the third world?"

Tired I pretended not to speak English and after a while they quit. The owner of the hotel was also a bit on the inquisitive side and I soon realized that even he was on the payroll of the police. This fact was later confirmed by people at different embassies.

The cities of Rawalpindi and its elegant neighbour Islamabad with its five hundred and thirty thousand inhabitants were situated on the edge of the Potohar plateau. Rawalpindi was first known under the name of Fatehpur Boari which was, however, completely destroyed with the Moghul invasion of the area. Not until the middle of the seventeenth century, was the city built up once again by a Sikh named Rawal Jogi, and in order to express their gratitude, the inhabitants named the city after him.

The former favourite of the Punjab province was now apparently in total chaos with about one million four hundred thousand people who had come from everywhere along the slopes of the north-western chains of the Himalayas and the rivers Indus, Leh and Jhelum. Other information told about a population of more than three million.

A worn brochure described the city in the following way: "Rawalpindi is located in the Punjab province, one hundred and seventy miles to the north-west of Lahore. It is the administrative seat of the Rawalpindi District. Rawalpindi is famous for its numerous and endless shopping bazaars, parks and cosmopolitan population, attracts shoppers from all over Pakistan and abroad.

Rawalpindi is also the military headquarters of the Pakistan Armed Forces and served as the nation's capital while Islamabad was being constructed. The city is home to many industries and factories. "

But what did I care about that kind of detail just now. I was most concerned about the whereabouts of Ramzan Khan.

At a quarter past four I had had enough. Upset and worried I started walking towards the nearest bus stop when I suddenly realized that I had no idea at which hotel I was staying.

Ramzan had organized everything and the night had been totally dark when we arrived at Rawalpindi. It had not occurred

to me to look at the hotel sign. In the morning we had left together and even then I had had other things on my mind.

I sighed deeply.

The horrible truth was slowly dawning on me without my being able to do anything about it.

The fact was that I had no idea what the hotel looked like, not to say the name or the street.

"Of all the idiots in the world, I'm the worst," I muttered to myself and rubbed my sweaty forehead in despair.

The woman at my embassy stared incredulously at me before she exploded in a grin. She grabbed the door post and with tears running down her face, she wondered if she had heard me correctly. She almost choked with laughter, beat her knees and held her stomach.

"You actually mean to say that you don't know where you are staying?" she nearly gagged laughing.

Sheepish and crestfallen I had to let myself be humbled. And quite rightly too.

Her name was Susanne; she was about thirty-five with red hair and pale skin. Judging by the wrinkles round her eyes, her life had been hard at times but she was apparently always ready to laugh.

At long last she pulled herself together and sat down behind her desk.

"Go back to Rawalpindi and see if you might be able to find your way home," she said, getting out a note pad and writing down her phone number. "If you are still homeless at five o'clock, phone me. We can meet at Hotel Intercontinental."

It turned out to be completely impossible to find the hotel. Just before five I therefore asked my way to the Intercontinental. However, to be absolutely sure, I asked five different people

before I at last trusted that I had the right directions. One simply had to jiggle the answers as best one could and then draw a conclusion.

The hotel was one of the most luxurious I had seen and I felt rather out of place as I strode towards the enormous reception. A short telephone call confirmed that Susanne was on her way.

Three hours later I was still staring in front of me.

"Hi, sorry to have kept you waiting. I'm afraid I'm a little late," Susanne explained indifferently when she eventually showed up. She smiled at me, an open smile with glittering eyes and my irritation vanished like dew in sunshine. Then she lowered her eyes and showed me the way to her parked car.

She turned out to be an excellent but speed-crazy driver and I had to hold on for dear life at the curves as she sped through the alleys of Rawalpindi.

Some hours later we still had not found my hotel.

"This is absolutely incredible," Susanne sighed and threw a cigarette butt out the window. She wasn't amused any more.

She felt my worried look and she herself began to feel anxious. She was silent for a while and then she burst out, "But didn't you have another friend here?"

I nodded.

"Ah, you mean Agha Adill? I never thought of him."

Tracing him was equally difficult. Ac-

An impressive rickshaw

cording to his visiting card, he lived with his servants on Street No. 27 in Islamabad. The house address was number 63.

However, the whole city was divided into sectors identified by letter combinations, and worst of all, every sector had a Street No. 27.

"The only thing to do is to check the whole lot," Susanne muttered to herself starting the car with screaming tyres.

Four hours later, she stopped the car, leaned back and applied the hand brake.

"You might as well face it, your friend Agha Adill does not exist. He is a fraud."

Taken aback I stared at her. Deep in my heart I knew she was right. Not one of the people we had asked knew who he was, there was no Street No. 27 with 63 houses and there was one zero too many in the telephone number.

"This part of the country is lousy with swindlers," Susanne continued. "It would be strange if someone who cannot even find his own hotel is not ripped off."

Her jokes failed to amuse me so I asked her to take me back to Rawalpindi where I would try to find somewhere else to spend the night.

"Go on," Susanne said. "Of course you can sleep at my place."

Her home was exclusively furnished with beautiful carpets, and a fantastic stereo. Imagine my joy when I found a record by the Danish singer Anne Dorte Michelsen. Soon

Even Agha Adill...

the room was filled with wonderful music. It was balm for my soul to have found a place where my nerves could recuperate.

Later when we were chatting, I had an idea.

The previous night I had ordered a phone call from the hotel to Sweden. Maybe the Pakistani telephone company had registered the number? It was a little far fetched but everything was worth a try. Hurriedly I dialled the number Susanne had given me.

"Hello, my name is Dammegård. I ordered a call to Sweden last night. Could you possibly see the number I called from?"

A long silence followed. It wasn't difficult to imagine the thoughts of the operator. Then I again heard the young man's voice. However, he asked me to wait and two minutes later I had the number in my hand. Eagerly I dialed the new number.

"Hello?"

"Well, hello, it might sound a little strange, but would you please tell me where I'm calling?"

"This is Seven Brothers' Hotel in Rawalpindi," the voice said at the other end of the line.

Hastily I scribbled the name, which rang no bells in spite of the fact that I apparently stayed there.

"And the address?"

"Liaquat Road, Bara Bazra. How so?"

"It does not matter," I answered squirming, too ashamed to explain my clumsiness.

Half an hour later we parked in front of the hotel which had a huge neon sign. The building had two entrances and I recognized the smaller one. That was why I thought it was a small hotel. I placed both my hands on top of my head as if to comfort myself.

With a tired sigh Susanne looked at me.

"Do you think you can find your room on your own?"

The next day I went to see her to thank her for her assistance. I brought her a small flower.

My longed-for hotel room in Rawalpindi

"We have had a closer look at your good friend Agha Adill," Susanne said when we were having tea a little later.

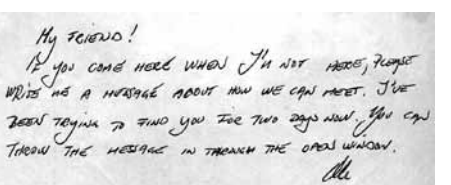
"As far as I can see, not one word he has told you is true. The company where he is supposed to be assistant director only exists on his business card. The cheque you got is no good and on his bank account is exactly 0.0 dollars and the same amount in rupees."

"I'm sorry my friend, but you have been well and truly had."

The following days I lay with a high fever, anxiously waiting for Ramzan Khan.

I hardly dared leave the hotel room as he might turn up while I was gone so I put a note on my door.

Ever since I had arrived in Pakistan I had been ill with vomiting and diarrhoea so I started to suspect that I had caught dysentery. To enhance all this I was kept awake every night by awful noises of vomiting from the next room. Apparently I wasn't the only one to have submitted to the Pakistani bacteria.



My friend!
If you come here when I'm not here, please write me a message about how we can meet. I've been trying to find you for two days now. You can throw the message in through the open window.
Ali

My note for Ramzan Khan

"What on earth am I doing here?" I moaned as I writhed on my bed thinking of Majid, Mohsen and Saied. I should be with them. What had gone wrong?

What had become of Majid?

In one way or another I had to contact Iran to find out once and for all.

With a start I woke in the middle of the night. A horrible thought had shaken me awake. The understanding fell like a rock in a black sea, through the muddy waters and found its place securely on the bottom. The ripples on the surface stopped and all of a sudden I could see the picture quite clearly.

"No, it can't be true," I mumbled as I tossed off my blanket and lit the bedside lamp. I jumped out of the bed which squeaked in answer and wobbled on unsteady legs over to my backpack. I shook my head, as I fell to my knees and with unsteady fingers fumbled with the worn straps. " He couldn't have... He wouldn't...?"

Feverishly I went through all the different pockets and at last found the folder containing my traveller's cheques. So I had been wrong. Or...?

"No. No! No!! The bastard has robbed me blind," I screamed in despair at the naked walls.

My heart was beating like a sledgehammer, my hands felt fumbling and clammy and my lungs fought for air.

In my hand I held the empty folder, which Ramzan had left. Within a few shattering seconds my entire life was torn apart and sobbing I collapsed in a corner. All the time we had been together he had been planning this. First Agha Adill and now Ramzan Khan. Everything here in Pakistan seemed like one grasping voracious play where the final act was to skin you alive. They could just fuck off, the lot of them!

I shuffled backwards and sat with my back to the edge of

the bed. I hid my face in my hands and wagged my head from side to side.

How could I have been so unseeing, so gullible? All my thoughts had been in Iran so I had wandered around in a fog and like a sacrificial lamb walked straight into the trap. Nothing in his demeanour had hinted at the fact that he was lying, or …? Like bubbles, one situation after the other surfaced in my mind, small details that I had shrugged off earlier but which now stood out in their true light.

I was filled with an overwhelming homesickness and if I only had money, nothing could have stopped me. What was I doing here?

In the middle of my misery, I congratulated myself on my forethought. In the money belt I wore round my waist I still had more than sixty dollars.

Exhausted I threw myself on the bed. I could not sleep. My soul was full of tears. The room was as silent as a grave, the only sounds were my hoarse breathing and the monotonous whirring of the fan that was rotating on its lopsided axle in the ceiling.

"Oh God, I cannot sleep now," I thought staring exhaustedly at the ceiling. Seconds later I had fallen into a deep sleep.

I spent the next twenty-four hours in a dreamlike haze where all I wanted was to sleep my way out of it all. It was as if my brain was showing horror movies nonstop. One nightmare followed the other and I woke time and again wet with sweat and twisted into the grimy sheets. Too feeble and disillusioned to tackle reality, I instead tried to dream myself back to good old Sweden, so far, so very far away.

CAPTAIN MEHBOOB

AS SOON AS I was strong enough to stand on my feet, I wobbled out in order to report the theft to the police.

"Excuse me, but could you show me the way to the nearest police station?"

In front of me was a smiling policeman. He – if anybody – should know and using gestures and lousy English he had soon given me detailed instructions. It seemed to be rather far, so I increased my speed.

Twenty minutes later I was standing in total confusion outside a tiny house on the outskirts of the desert.

The police office on the outskirts of town

Inside were four brutal looking men. This had to be it. I cleared my sore throat and approached the quartet.

The conversa-

tion concluded in one of the officers taking me on his motorbike to the headquarters. For some strange reason he took exactly the same road that I had come. Soon we passed the smiling policeman and turned just behind him through the entrance to the headquarters...!

In the yard were a small table and some chairs. On one of these sat a slightly overweight officer admiring himself in a mirror. After a while he succeeded in tearing himself away from his captivating reflection.

"Be greeted. My name is ... Captain Mehboop!"

Somehow he made his name sound like a theatrical line.

"With what can I be of service to you?" he continued with an ingratiating smile showing me a row of flashing white teeth. He seized the opportunity to brush off some invisible crumbs from the table in front of him with his slender hands with the well-manicured fingernails.

I told him how Ramzan Khan had robbed me and was just about to describe him, when Captain Mehboop interrupted me.

"Thank you, thank you, that is enough, that is enough," he exclaimed defensively and spread his arms in what was supposed to be a convincing gesture.

I got the impression that he had perhaps dreamed of a career in the neighbouring film metropolis of Bollywood but had, for some unknown reason been forced to enroll in the police corps instead.

He looked around him as if to let me appreciate his self-appointed empire. This belonged to him. The only thing still missing was that the rest of the world recognize his grandeur, light the spotlights and let him sail into fame and glory. His dark eyes shone.

"We are sure to catch him shortly."

"But how? You don't even know what he looks like," I said full of doubt.

He summoned his assistant and the small uniformed man came shuffling with his shoulders around his ears as if he was cold. His eyes never left the ground. He was carrying a large pad and a pencil.

Unconcernedly the captain continued.

"That does not matter, he will soon be behind bars. Just one small thing before you go," Captain Mehboop added. "We have to change your story for our report."

"Change... my story..."

"Yes, it would be best for all if you said that you have lost the money in the bazaar and not that it was stolen," the captain said with his dazzling smile.

It slowly dawned on me what he was after. If I claimed that I had lost my cheques, the police would not have to play at chasing thieves including all the paperwork. But this was madness! Ramzan had sneaked off with almost every rupee I had and here was Captain Mehboop just twiddling his thumbs. I slumped down on one of the rickety chairs with a tired sigh.

About one hour later I finally changed the report in favour of the police. I was simply too exhausted to argue. The only thing I wanted was new cheques. Mehboop's assistant threw himself into the demanding job of typing out the adjusted report while I exhaustedly reclined in the sun fighting off the maddening flies.

Report in hand I set out for the bank in neighbouring Islamabad. On the way I heard an English voice behind me. Astonished I turned and met Tim van der Eyken, a young guy from London. A few days earlier he had apparently had the same experience as I and was now on his way to find out about the promised cheques.

Later he told me how he had been had. By what he thought was coincidence he had met two men in Lahore who had of-

fered to accompany him to Islamabad where they had contacts at the Indian embassy. That sounded faintly familiar. The men had taken Tim for a sightseeing tour before they all went to Rawalpindi.

Like Ramzan, they had taken care of booking into a hotel, of their choosing of course. In the room they had insisted that Tim enjoy the local speciality, a genuine Rawalpindi massage.

"At first I didn't want to," Tim said. "But that made them all the more insistent. Finally I agreed, since they would pay for it. I thought..."

A few minutes later one of the men had fetched a masseur. Tim, on the other hand, was suspicious and kept his money belt on until the masseur demanded that he take it off. Reluctantly he removed it and placed it beside his head.

After a while, however, the masseur turned his face the other way to get at the back of his neck. All the time Tim's two friends sat beside him chatting away.

Two minutes later the massage was over and Tim could dress again. Before that he carefully checked that the booklet of cheques was still there. Sure enough, through the fabric he could feel the cardboard folder.

Reassured he put on his clothes and they all decided to go and get something to eat. But after a few minutes, the two Pakistanis suddenly changed their minds and kindly but firmly backed out.

"Instead I was given fifty rupees," Tim told me. "When I protested that I didn't need that much for a meal, they answered: Don't be so sure, tomorrow is another day."

It wasn't until several days later that he discovered he had been ripped off.

"They must simply have taken it while my head was turned the other way," Tim explained bitterly and shrugged his shoulders. "I remember that I heard someone go to the toilet. Surely

that was when he swiped the money belt, emptied the cheque folder and put it back before I could notice anything."

"Since then I haven't seen the least trace of any of them..."

At the bank we were in for a rude awakening.

"Unfortunately we cannot accept this police report," the bank man said nonchalantly, taking off his glasses and pulling a silk handkerchief out of his pocket.

"Your cheques were from Thomas Cook and not American Express as it says here."

Then the police had after all got it wrong in spite of the fact that I had repeatedly explained exactly what to write in the report.

My pulse increased somewhat.

"But that cannot be true," I stammered but without getting any answer.

Instead I had to go back all the way to Rawalpindi in a fury.

But the police were the same as ever.

"Oh no, it does not matter if it says American Express and not Thomas Cook," I was told in an indifferent tone of voice.

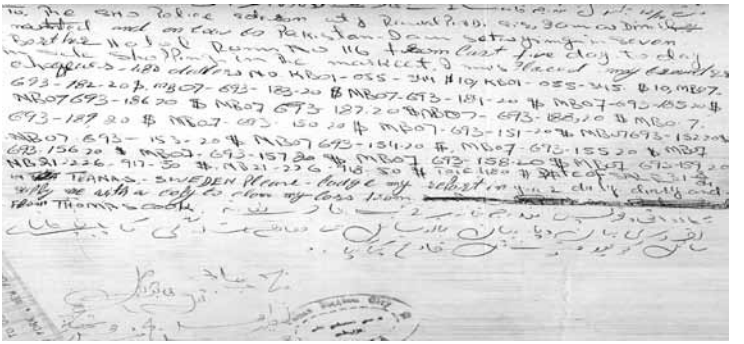
My forced smile died on my lips as I tried to hide my impatience.

"But I come directly from the bank." I clenched my teeth almost audibly. "There they insist that another report must be made out."

"I'm the police here, and if I say it is not necessary, then it is not necessary!" Captain Mehboop yelled so that his forelock became ruffled.

Nervously he straightened out the disaster. He compressed his lips as he took out a silver case with gold-tipped cigarettes.

But now I had had it. I placed both fists on the table between us and heaved myself to my feet. Anger shot through me like a



The incredible and hand written polic report

welding flame, my voice was trembling and my words gushed forth.

"That is just a load of bull! You fix this now or else I shall go to my embassy to make sure that they do something," I snarled.

For some seconds we stood there silently staring at each other. His audible somewhat fast breaths were only interrupted when he moved his cigarette to his lips and concentrated on inhaling the smoke. I refused to give in. Enough was enough!

At long last, Captain Mehboop looked away.

Apparently my threat hit home and, blushing furiously, he once again summoned his assistant whose nervous eyes wandered from his boss to my face and back again. Before I had time to fire my next salvo, the Captain nodded with flaming cheeks. His voice had lost all traces of friendliness. He inhaled deeply through his nose, straightened his back, exhaled and lowered his shoulders.

"Okay, okay," the words sounded most of all like swearing.

He swallowed several times, and then he adjusted his forelock. He looked tormented.

"Help this man with a new report," he ordered brusquely before he returned to his office and the waiting mirror.

More than an hour later the policeman had finally finished the

new report. Impatiently I checked the paper before I would return to Islamabad.

"But this is bloody incredible," I moaned in despair.

The moron had copied the entire report except for a few minor changes in language. And now it read "American Express of Thomas Cook." Wearily I stomped into Captain Mehboop's office to confront him with the proof of the impressive capacity of his professional colleagues.

At long last all papers were ready, the bank was satisfied and now I only had to wait for a reply from the head office of Thomas Cook. I was totally exhausted and returned home to rest.

The fever had regained control and I could feel my strength oozing out of me. I had lost far more than one stone and my body felt dehydrated, sore and tender. I could see my breath in the dim light and, to crown it all, my sore throat prevented me from swallowing.

My insurance company had been good enough to give me a brochure of all the diseases of the world and I fell for the temptation to look through it.

Soon I was convinced that I was suffering from jaundice, dysentery, malaria and numerous other tropical illnesses. Tim was in a similar state and his violent cough led my thoughts to pneumonia. We were truly a wretched pair.

However, my acquaintance with Susanne opened a completely new world to us.

The people at the different embassies were cut off from the Muslim system around them and at least twice a week they had parties with disco dances and an abundance of food and drink.

It was a wonderful and rather strange experience to return to Europe for a night. The booze eased the mental stress and we could enjoy the luxury of relaxing. Here were people from

all over the world in one place and I was happy to see how well they all got along. In a way this seemed to be a small private world in the world.

Who could have predicted that we would end up among the jet set of Pakistan?

Every single minute I didn't have to spend alone and ill in the freezing room in Rawalpindi was a godsend.

All this took place in the capital Islamabad that had been built during the 1960's to replace Karachi as the capital of the country. This unique city was built on what used to be the two sleepy villages of Saidpur and Nurpur and everything was erected exactly according to the architectural drawings, just like Brasilia in Brazil, Canberra in Australia and Washington in the USA.

The man responsible for the building of the new city was the renowned city-planner Constantinos A. Doxiadis and highly influenced by other famous names such as Ponti and Edward Durell Stone.

Islamabad is a modern city and, considering the economic and social situation of the country, a very clean city. It is very well organized and split up into sections with well-known buildings such as the enormous Faisal mosque and the Quaid-i-Azam university.

There were thousands of parks and, according to one brochure, about fifty per cent of the city area was intended to be green open spaces.

However, just like Brasilia most of all it looked like a huge fiasco. There were hardly any people on the streets, the water in the fountains had been turned off and many beautiful buildings looked deserted. Rumour had it that even the presidential palace was empty. In front of the palace was a six-lane avenue. I never saw more than three cars there at the same time.

What a weird phenomenon – only about seven miles from

the capital was Rawalpindi with its narrow streets and alleys where thousands of people were jostling in the seething throngs of cars, horses, motorbikes and bicycles in an ear-splitting din twenty-four hours a day.

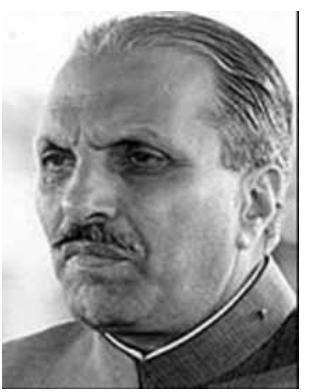
Here in Islamabad I witnessed for the first time an election in a country where western democracy was obviously unknown.

The election was preceded by several weeks of canvassing all over the country.

Every night on TV you could see how the president was greeted by thousands of people throwing flowers and gifts at his huge limousine as it passed them. During the campaign, Zia ul-Haq bestowed on himself a gold medal for his vital contribution to the "islamization."

In this referendum the Pakistani people could choose between Zia ul-Haq and Zia ul-Haq. The election was held with coloured ballots and almost transparent envelopes so the counters of the votes could immediately see the attitude of the voters. Many people were afraid of reprisals and saw no other alternative but to vote for – Zia ul-Haq.

On December 20, 1984, the newspaper *The Muslim* wrote: "We take great joy in publishing that more than twenty one million people expressed their complete trust in President Zia ul-Haq and thereby gave him another five years mandate. This means that 97.71 percent of the voters have chosen the future leader of the country."



President Zia ul-Haq

I later found out that there are more than thirty-four million registered voters in Pakistan. I cannot

tell what happened to the rest of all these people, maybe the armed guards posted by the ballot boxes could reveal more about this mystery.

The country received extensive economic support from the States. If I understood it correctly, they could not officially support a dictator. Therefore this charade.

Particularly after the Americans were thrown out of Iran, it was vital for them to keep Pakistan. In turn, the Russians had invaded Afghanistan in an effort to get closer to the Persian Gulf and the all important oil. It reminded me most of all of a gigantic game of chess.

Zia ul-Haq had taken over the rule of the country with a coup d'état on July 5, 1977, when the popularly elected Prime Minister Zulfikar Ali Bhutto was overthrown. Bhutto, the father of Benazir Bhutto, was accused of having murdered a political adversary in 1974, and he was hanged in spite of his denial.

President Zia ul-Haq on several occasions promised free elections but these promises were never kept. This brutal president died as he had lived and was later killed in a mysterious plane crash.

INTO THE FOG

DO YOU MEAN TO say that you've never smoked hashish? Sima laughed. "Then you have come to the right place, because in Pakistan we have the best hashish in the whole world."

I had met her at a jet-set party and immediately been captivated by her dark beauty. She was petite, had just turned twenty and was the daughter of a former minister from Bangladesh. Several years earlier she had had to flee with her family and she now lived with her parents in the fashionable district of Islamabad.

Towards the fog

"Come to my home some day and I will show you how to smoke a real joint," she said and I accepted rather reluctantly.

Not quite sure what this invitation implied, a couple of days later I took a taxi to the ministerial residence in a district I had never visited before.

Outside the house were two armed guards. Awkwardly I asked if Sima was

in. I noticed their weapons, surprised that they were in a really bad condition. Soon after Sima answered the intercom and told them to let me in. One of the guards stuck by me like a shadow and I had to push the door shut between us to let him know that he ought to remain at his post.

Once inside I was shown into a beautiful sitting room.

"Nice that you could come," Sima said as she appeared in the door. "I will just get daddy so that you can meet first."

Sima's father turned out to be a dignified man who greeted me very kindly.

Thank God that he knows about this, I thought.

"Unfortunately I must go to a meeting," he excused himself before he left us to ourselves.

Sima was very lovely with her light-brown skin and long shiny black hair almost down to her waist. Her clothes were tasteful and expensive and I felt like a bum sitting beside her. She found a large piece of hashish, broke off some bits and with practised hands she crumbled and mixed them with tobacco. Then she rolled it all into an ordinary cigarette.

Slowly I inhaled the acrid smoke and forced it into my lungs. As I wasn't used to smoking, I coughed and this made Sima curl her lips slightly. Her eyes changed rapidly and I noticed that her pupils widened and became blacker than usual. I myself felt nothing but Sima had made up her mind to get me stoned, so she rolled another four powerful joints.

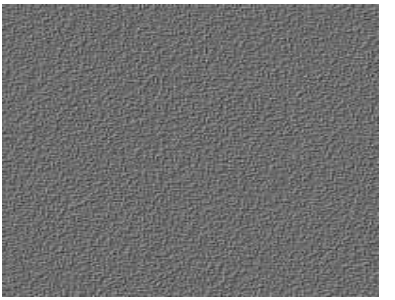
An hour later I caught myself staring vacantly at nothing. Perhaps I had been doing that for more than half an hour. Much too woozy to talk or move, I was now contemplating the structure of the wallpaper with wide unseeing eyes.

"I think you had better leave," said Sima with averted eyes.

"Sure," I mumbled and slowly got to my feet. I let my eyes wander slowly over the long fringes of the Keshan rug. "Sorry

if I have been sitting here like a mummy."

"Bye," she said and closed the door.



The interesting wall paper

In the cold night air I just stood on the stairs, took a deep breath and was about to admire the wonderful starry sky when all natural laws suddenly ceased to exist. My head exploded like fireworks and I was seized by bloodcurdling terror. Without thinking, I had smoked so copiously that I had got a hashish psychosis.

In a frightening way reality disappeared and my perception of time became segmented like a rock video. What am I doing here, I had time to wonder before all was cut off and I again had time to wonder where I was and why.

All around me I heard whispering voices and I tried feverishly to follow distant traffic noises close by. After I had walked about thirty yards straight towards the source of the noise, I now in a panic realized that the sounds came from the opposite direction.

Completely devoid of judgment of both distance and direction, I slowly roved round in the narrow streets.

Once I even stood like a pole and slept until an approaching bus woke me up. Grateful for my salvation I entered without the faintest notion where it was going.

However, luck was on my side and half an hour later I stumbled off somewhere in Rawalpindi. Later I realized that I had paid the driver at least five, perhaps ten times. He had graciously accepted my contributions with a happy smile.

An old decrepit taxi finally took me all the way to my hotel. I chatted incessantly to the driver but I never had the time to

finish a sentence before I had forgotten what I was going to say.

"Oh sure, I have relatives in Copenhagen.... but the colours don't really match..."

I still remember the driver's confused and wary face. An eternity later I found myself standing in the middle of my room with no idea how I got there. Monotonously time stopped and I repeated the same questions: Where am I? How did I get here? What am I doing here? With a whirling, dizzy head I threw myself on my bed and tried to close my eyes but that only made it worse. Not until dawn did I succeed in falling asleep.

"Never again... never ever again," I mumbled in my restless sleep.

One week later Tim and I showed up at the bank in Islamabad. This was the day they had promised to have his cheques for him.

"No, we still have no answer from our office in New York," bank clerk Mister Aziz explained offhandedly and returned to shuffling his paper. He lovingly stroked his well-combed moustache. Annoyed as I was, I thought it looked as if he had glued a dead squirrel under his nose.

"Excuse me, but a customer is waiting." His tone of voice was both supercilious and scornful. He pouted so that the huge moustache stood out like a broom.

"A customer is waiting..." Wasn't Tim a customer? I had lost count of the times we had been there and our patience was wearing thin. Every single time we had been treated with the same condescending indifference. More than once Aziz had promised to send a telegram to the States to obtain authority to issue new cheques and the reply should have been here long ago.

"You come back here or else...!" Tim had difficulty controlling himself. "Now you make out another telegram and get it off while I wait!"

Mister Aziz cringed at the dreadful prospect of having to actually do something. He inhaled sharply, compressed his lips and looked at the ceiling. A few seconds later he lifted a paper that had been on the counter in front of him the whole time.

"Well, well, here is the answer from New York," he exclaimed. "That was lucky!"

"Lucky..." He was lucky we didn't kill him! What was the matter with everyone?

I felt a strong impulse to just walk up to him, grasp his fancy locks, force his head back and make him meet my eyes. Or else just bash him one.

A good half hour later Tim had his new traveller's cheques. This was our lucky day since I had also received mine and we were now free to get out of this weird place. Money may not necessarily imply happiness but it does mean freedom to do what you want.

In the evening we decided to celebrate by going to the pictures.

Pakistani cinemas turned out to be quite an experience. The room was smoke-filled, the seats slashed and everywhere an inch-thick layer of nutshells scrunched under our feet. Exactly as back home they first showed ten minutes of advertisements.

Here are some examples:

1. A well-dressed boss is sitting with his feet on his desk when his secretary enters. She stops as if struck by lightning, staring raptly at his socks, the pattern of which would make a Scottish kilt pale with envy and bursts out:

"Gosh, inside all comfort, outside all beauty!"

2. A man has a dandruff problem. A real problem! They had surely used at least one pound of flour for the recording.

3. A man gallops happily round in his kitchen with a huge poison spray. With a dazzling smile he points out the advantages of DDT in the home!

The next item on the programme was a short film about the founder and national hero of the country, Mohammad Ali Jinnah, and after that the feature film which turned out to have the same high quality as the ads.

We laughed hysterically throughout the evening in spite of the fact that we were probably the only ones who found it funny. The film was supposed to be a historic thriller.

The movie showed how one of the guerrilla leaders of the country revolted against the ruling maharajah. It was, however, the details that made the film so hilarious.

Soldiers armed with rifles with no bore in the muzzles, modern jeeps and guerrilla fighters with digital clocks in a nineteenth century story. When the fighters galloped through the empty desert, you could clearly see the tyre tracks of the camera van and several times the actors had in some mysterious way changed clothes in the same take. At one time the hero was exhausted and unshaven right up to the time he had to make an undaunted speech to the masses.

As if by miracle he was washed, shaved and dressed in newly pressed silk clothes. After the speech, he naturally returned in his filthy rags.

The sound effects were another source of hilarity. As soon as a horse appeared, a clattering drumming machine was turned on until the gee-gee slowed down. Then the racket stopped instantly. Each time a brawl started, extra loudspeakers were added with an ear-splitting din. At first we believed that it was a faulty connection but as soon as the fight was over, the loudspeakers stopped only to start again at the next skirmish.

Another often recurring phenomenon was the song and dance numbers where buxom girls with falsetto voices bounced and undulated their way at an incredible speed across the screen. In Pakistan the ideal of a woman differs slightly from ours in the West. Here girls should be voluminous with

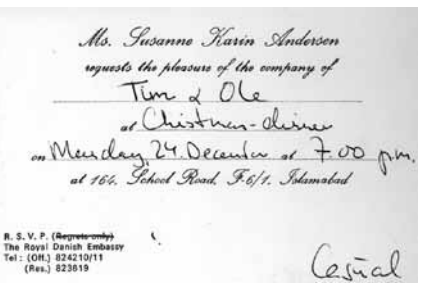
enormous tits and cute heart-shaped faces. An overwhelming belly dancer had the audience mesmerized as everybody tried to follow her tantalizing navel with their eyes.

It was wonderful to be able to laugh again so we felt considerably strengthened when at last we returned to our respective rooms.

"Merry Christmas" ...

Most of all I felt like crying as I stared at the traffic chaos outside the hotel. One cacophonous swarming seething mass of cars, horses, bicycles, pedestrians and donkeys where irritation and anger seemed to be the existing emotions. Why did you never see any smiling people in this country?

The traffic was perilous, particularly to an untrained westerner. There was mainly left-hand traffic, but that seemed to be mostly just a recommendation.


Ms. Susanne Karin Andersen
requests the pleasure of the company of
Tim & Ole
at Christmas-dinner
on Monday 24. December at 7.00 pm.
at 164, School Road, F.6/1, Islamabad
R. S. V. P. ~~(Regrets only)~~
The Royal Danish Embassy
Tel: (Off.) 824210/11
(Res.) 823619
Casual

The Christmas dinner invitation

According to what I had been told, hardly any training was required to obtain a driver's licence. You simply bought it. No wonder that there seemed to be total anarchy in the crowded streets.

A wonderful time at Susanne's home

So today was Christmas Eve and I was close to tears with homesickness. If I had not been invited to a

Christmas party at Susanne's house, I don't know what I would have done.

Susanne - our saviour from distress

Tim and I squeezed into one of the taxi buses between Rawalpindi and Islamabad.

Here I discovered how many people can be crammed into a small Ford Transit bus.

Ten? Fifteen? Twenty-five? No, thirty-one!

Jammed against both the roof and the rear door, I tried to dream myself as far away as possible. Six weeks had passed since I came here and I felt how my wits were oozing out of me.

If I didn't get out of here soon, I could not be responsible for my actions.

At long last we got off, bruised and breathless close to the Danish embassy area.

Taking a step through her door was like entering a completely different world.

Our sweet saviour had made a new dress in honour of the occasion and with tinsel in her ginger hair she came to meet and greet us.

Soon we were seated with glasses of glögg listening to familiar Christmas tunes.

Heaven was near and we had a wonderful evening.

CAUGHT IN CHITRAL

THE SMALL PASSENGER PLANE shook violently as we flew through a narrow opening between the mountain peaks, the only place we could pass since the oxygen further up wasn't sufficient for the engines.

We had decided to make a trip into the mountains and now I was nervously keeping an eye on the sharp snowy edges of the rocks alarmingly close to the wing tips.

It was very cold up here in the western parts of the Kashmir massif and for some reason I remembered a book I had read about a football team that had crashed in the Andes. Their adventure had resulted in their eating the bodies of their dead friends. However, Tim was a little on the skinny side for my taste so I held my fingers crossed hoping that all would end well.

Several of the Pakistanis wiped their foreheads and I understood that this had been the critical point I had heard about at the airport. Under us the mountain range opened and far away I saw a village in a fertile valley surrounded by rice fields and forest.

This was our goal.

The tiny mountain village of Chitral is located at the edge of

the Hindukush range, which forms the border to Afghanistan. Here the narrow valley wound its way between the mountains which were snow-clad all year round.

The icy river at the bottom of the valley

The word "Chitral" is basically translated into "field" in the local language Khowar. It is the name of the tribe, town, valley, river, district and former princely state in the Malakand Division of the Northwest Frontier Province of Pakistan.

We landed safely and all sighed with relief. Just beside the primitive landing strip, a shallow riverbed had formed where the melt water from the peaks forced its way through the valley. During the winter the stream was insignificant but judging from the width of the riverbed, spring here was impressive. According to information, the valley has always been a very important route for many invaders to South East Asia, including Alexander the great, Scythians, Genghis Khan and numerous others.

Here in the mountains we saw people of many different races with skin colours ranging from dark brown to almost pure white. Apart from Pakistani and Afghan traits we noticed mountain dwellers whose ancestors must have come from Mongolia or distant Tibet.

Silently we walked along a narrow gravel road parallel with the Kunar river.

We were the only foreigners and were met by staring faces. It was difficult to know whether they were hostile or

just curious. After a visit to the local police station to obtain permission to stay in the area, we started looking for a place to live. As if by magic the weather had changed drastically and at the airport they announced that all traffic was cancelled until further notice.

After a lengthy search we finally found a small house that rented rooms. Twenty rupees per night was the price for not spending the night out-of-doors. A reasonable sum in a climate like this. However, the hovel had no fireplace or other heating possibilities.

"We might as well nip down to the PIA office and book the trip back on the very next plane," Tim muttered sourly.

The letters PIA stood for Pakistan International Airlines but we soon renamed it "Pain In the Ass."

It turned out that the office was open at the weirdest hours. The first time we went there, a man was squatting outside the small house to all appearances waiting for the office to open. We nodded and sat down to keep him company.

A good hour later we were still there staring into thin air. Finally I asked if it wasn't time for somebody to arrive.

"No, they don't open until two o'clock," the man answered politely.

A glance at the watch told me that it was almost four. I kindly pointed this out to him, after which he quickly changed his answer to 'five o'clock'.

At exactly five o'clock we were back at the office which looked just as shut as before. Our friend was still there. This time he happily informed us that they opened at six. Wrong again.

At a quarter past seven we again passed the alley where 'airline office' was located.

And this time it was open!

The entire bare room was seething with screaming Pa-

kistanis, crestfallen we leaned against the wall behind them. Judging from the voices of some, they had been stranded here for months.

I braced myself, cleared my throat and said something. After one tenth of a second all shouting died away and all faces turned towards me like periscopes in surprise.

"I would like two tickets back to Peshawar as soon as possible," I stammered looking shyly at the crowd.

"Of course," said the man behind the counter. About one minute earlier he had been in a violent quarrel, now he sat quietly making out our tickets.

"You must come here every day to see that there is a flight. As soon as we get signal from the airstrip, we will add your names to the passenger list."

With these words he politely handed over the tickets, after which his already dark face once again changed to a flaming red mask. The brawl returned to square one again and confounded but grateful we pushed our way out into the open air.

Clouds had formed round the mountain peaks but above the silent valley a clear and starry night sky appeared. The cold bit our cheeks and the temperature was rapidly dropping. Some minutes later we were home and quietly we sneaked into our tiny room at the back of a narrow yard.

"Well, let's go in then," I said as I opened the door to Tim.

He nodded as he once more tried to close the zip fastener of his jacket all the way.

We entered the coal-black room. It felt futile to shut the door, as its only function seemed to be to block the view. With frozen fingers I lit a small candle I had found in a corner.

The small boy who had shown us the room had placed a heap of extra blankets here and we were truly grateful for his consideration as we crept fully dressed into our sleeping bags

and covered them with everything within view.

To complete it all we put on our newly purchased wollen caps and gloves. In the neighbouring house we could hear the sound of a fire. The flames crackled in the fireplace and the draught in the chimney formed a lonely squeal that accompanied the wind outside.

Somebody got up and put some more wood on the fire and then stopped the wheezing of the paraffin lamp. The heat tried to force its way through the planks but in vain. That a few yards could make such a difference!

The icy wind found its way through the chinks of our walls and door. I pulled my sleeping bag tight around me and tried to close my eyes.

"Oh my God," Tim moaned in despair as he squinted at the alarm clock in a voice that was hardly any more than a hoarse whisper. "It will be at least twelve hours before sunrise. What are we going to do?"

In my dream I relived a similar night I had spent at the border between Greece and Turkey. I had hitchhiked from the small town of Polikastron on the Greek side and after a lot of problems I had got through and now I was standing alone on the Turkish side of the floodlights in pitch darkness.

Not too sure about how to go on, I started fumbling my way along a hardly visible road. I mostly walked according to the sound of my steps in the gravel along the edges so I could go in an almost straight line.

It was probably about one o'clock and I decided to find somewhere to sleep. Cautiously I left the road and felt my way down a slope on my right. Safely on level ground I was just about to roll out my sleeping bag when I heard a strange rustling at my feet.

The ground was marshy and squishy and to my disgust I re-

alized that swamp rats were squeaking round my feet.

All the horror stories I had heard about big hairy beasts attacking little babies queued in my mind and I swore never again to book accommodation at Hotel Slope.

Sharing my bed with hairy rats

Instead, I continued groping along in the dark. A full moon spread its pale light over the deserted landscape and a handful of bright stars helped improve my mood. A small road caught my attention and in the semi-darkness I passed through some kind of old gate and found a huge mound of sand a few yards further on.

"This is perfect to lie down behind," I muttered sleepily.

In the middle of the night I woke up to bellowing voices a few yards away. I had not heard them coming and now lay clutching my knife in a sweaty hand. Torch beams swept to and fro over my hiding place and I was convinced that I had been discovered. I was a little too close to the frontier and to be discovered by a patrol might not be very healthy.

However, the minutes passed without anything happening. The quarrel continued and the light wobbled on through the night. About one hour passed. After I had mumbled a silent prayer to be left alone, I heard an engine start and with screeching tyres, the car sped off. I returned to my contacts with the sandman.

But soon I was woken again, now by a pack of wild dogs yapping round in the dark. Many Greeks had warned me of two things in Turkey: Snakes and dogs. There were quite a number of rabies cases in these parts.

"Go away! Shoo!" I hissed in the dark waving my knife.

Their barking convinced me that I was surrounded but they never came closer. At long last I was so exhausted from being afraid that I filled my ears with cotton wool and fell asleep. My sleeping bag wasn't very good quality and when I felt the cold creeping through I bitterly regretted the sum I had saved which at the time had seemed so important.

One of the longest nights of my life was coming to a close and as dawn finally arrived, my tormentors disappeared. The sun was slowly changing the blue-black night sky into an el-dorado of colours, when I noticed something that made my hair stand on end.

I was in the middle of a fenced-in military area!

About twenty yards from my sand mound was an army barracks surrounded by military vehicles. Some drowsy soldiers were sitting with their backs towards me smoking a morning cigarette. It was no doubt only a question of time before roll call. Warning signs in Turkish convinced me that I had better get out of there, p.d.q.

It was in situations like this that I asked myself what I thought I was doing.

The days passed as we tried to tire out ourselves as much as possible so that we could fall asleep at night. Chitral is a small town with a single street bazaar and a few hotels. At the end of Bazaar on the river side there is the Chitral Fort and the Palace of Mehtar.

In front of the Fort is the Jami Mosque with its impressive architecture, beautiful inlays and decorations.

Mostly we walked along the river. Its icy green water made us forget all thoughts about washing. Furthermore, the dirt helped keep us warm.

One day we had gone far from the little village. The sun was shining, the sky a deep blue and the snow-clad peaks even more

impressive than ever. Far away the highest peak of Hindu Kush, the twenty-five thousand two hundred and thirty-six feet Tirich Mir, towered above all the others as the undisputed ruler of the massif of Hindukush. We had been told that the valley itself was at an altitude of more than three thousand feet and the whole area breathed majestic beauty. Only the quiet murmur of the river broke the silence.

Lovely green rice paddies in the valley

"Look!" said Tim who had just noticed two huge birds of prey circling on their impressive wings.

Slowly I filled my lungs with fresh cold mountain air as I stared in fascination at the spectacle.

Time seemed to stand still. A moment of total oneness with nature.

I was filled with awe and forgot all around me – when suddenly a rifle shot tore the silence.

I looked around in alarm while Tim hid behind the nearest boulder. Only two days before, the Russians had bombed Afghan refugee camps close by. Even before the echo had died out in the valley, we noticed the gunman who was approaching us. The bullet had struck close by; we were not the target but a wounded hare.

With his white turban and a spotted hunting eagle with a leather hood and tiny bells on his arm, he seemed unreal as if taken directly from the Arabian Nights. A slow smile spread over his proud face as our eyes met and I had to pinch my arm to ensure myself that I wasn't dreaming.

Later I was told that there were even snow leopards in the area. The snow leopard (Uncia uncia), sometimes known as the ounce, was well known for its beautiful fur, a whitish-tan coat with ringed spots of dark, ashy-brown and rosettes of black. Its tail is heavy with fur and the bottoms of its paws are covered with fur for protection against snow and cold. The big furry feet act as snow-shoes, just like those of the lynx.

But as so many of the wonders of nature, this magnificent creature was extremely shy so only very few had seen it.

"What are we doing up here?" Tim was pacing the dirty earthern floor.

One minute earlier he had renamed Chitral to Shittrall and even if I shared his view, I was somewhat calmer. What use was it cursing the valley for a whole year? The fact remained: the weather was still bad in the mountain passes and we would have to wait for quite some time yet before we could go back to so-called civilization.

Instead I tried to find positive things to enjoy. For example I was now able to eat properly for the first time since I arrived in Pakistan. Every day we had a simple meal of some meat with sauce and a piece of bread, and I was grateful to feel my appetite returning.

This day the PIA office was closed as usual even though we had been promised the opposite. Moodily we swore at the weather gods and this unreliable airline. I was swearing quite a lot these days, in rather an unimaginative way but with all the more feeling.

Dejectedly we started to walk down the valley when a jeep slowed down beside us.

"Hello, mister! Are you on your way to the magnificent valleys of Kalash? For a very favourable price I take you to Bamburet, Rumboor or Birir," the driver said ingratiatingly.

"Special price for you my friend. Only five hundred rupees!"

Five hundred rupees... The previous day we had checked the jeep price with the local people and been told a total sum of sixteen rupees. Tiredly I shook my head.

On our way we passed an old railway bridge which was now the connection to the villages further down the valley. The bridge was built of sturdy, red-painted U-girders welded together like an accordion.

This day we got much further down into the valley than before. The mountain air had improved our mood and we were chatting as we walked along. Tim showed me how to juggle with some pebbles and an orange. I had just made some vain attempts, when we turned a corner and suddenly faced a group of Afghan guerrillas.

Without knowing it we had walked straight into one of the refugee camps and on the slope armed guards were posted. Behind them was an area with newly dug graves.

The graves beside the gravel road were mounds of earth with a flat rock at each end.

No names revealed who were the victims of the bombs, a worn Afghan guerrilla flag fluttered over the burial site.

Everywhere children in rags were playing.

Everyone was filthy dirty and not even wearing shoes.

Without a sound the weather-beaten men stared at us. In spite of all adversity and misery, the determination in their eyes was unabated and I understood why the Soviet troops had not been able to suppress their resistance after five bloody years of war.

Their hard eyes never left our faces and I noted how the small hairs in my neck and on my arms slowly stood on end. Behind us I could hear someone cocking an AK-47, the automatic carbine which was invented by the Russian soldier Mikhail

Timofeyevich Kalashnikov and which later on has become the most popular firearm. I resisted the impulse to turn my head.

The refugee camp by the river

"Let us just walk straight on," I whispered to Tim who reluctantly came along.

With heavily pounding hearts, we approached the group who grudgingly stood aside.

Apparently some aid had come all the way here since almost all the tents bore symbols of some relief organization.

"Excuse us, we don't mean to intrude," Tim tried, but no-one reacted.

Their dark faces showed something I had never encountered before. It was impossible to imagine what they had seen and experienced, but the stories about their courage in war were innumerable.

In silence we continued through the camp and all the time the Afghans followed us. Not until we were quite a distance from the camp did they stop. We continued along the gravel road without looking back.

The worn, moisture-stained diary in Tim's backpack showed December 31, New Year's Eve. Who could have predicted that I would be celebrating the New Year here, far up in the Pakistani mountains?

As usual we had gone to bed early, Tim had fallen asleep and was as usual coughing and snivelling in his sleep. I myself was wondering what had happened to my travelling plans. I had been on my way to Africa and instead I found myself here.

All the way through Europe and Asia I had had a growing realization how circumstances around me in some weird way seemed to be guided from within me. The weather, the people, all events seemed to be there just for me, for me to share their essence, for me to learn from.

Tim in the fabulous mountains

In my ordinary day-to-day-life this had not been so obvious. Not until I had dared let go of the numbing security had this insight revealed itself. Isolation and loneliness were decisive factors and the lessons were often painful. But I had chosen my path and was grateful for the result.

On evenings like this my thoughts went to my dear ones in Sweden and to my friends in Iran. So very much had happened since I last saw them. With their increasingly dim pictures on my retina, I at last fell asleep just as the alarm clock started in the middle of the night. It was 4.00 am in Pakistan. In Sweden it was exactly midnight on New Year's Eve. Sadly I untwisted one arm from the mound of blankets.

"Cheers and happy New Year," I mumbled tiredly and slowly sipped at a glass of milk and popped a sweet into my mouth.

Every morning goats and cows were taken to be slaughtered and the villagers gathered on a gravel patch outside the village. The butcher was a man about forty dressed in pink with a brown sweater and cap. He looked hard and never hesitated when sending the animals to the happy hunting grounds. The

rock and river were soon red with blood. For every chop of the axe, the audience shouted and laughed while the remaining animals watched in terror.

The impressive Hercules plane

I had difficulty looking and turned away when something glittered faintly in the distance.

At first it looked like the distant headlights of a tiny jeep. But they were way up among the clouds – and as far as I knew nobody had succeeded in building a road there.

We stood silently wondering at the phenomenon. The two lights seemed to grow until suddenly the dawn mist revealed its secret. With noisy engines a large Hercules plane swept by just above us. The narrow valley had absorbed all sounds.

"Come! Come on now!" shouted Tim who was already on his way. Together with a group of Pakistanis we ran the long way to the airstrip which was guarded by anti-aircraft guns.

When we arrived the massive plane had just landed. Hundreds of soldiers were grouped round the wide fuselage. A huge hatch in the underside was slowly lowered and we watched dejectedly as a never-ceasing stream of soldiers entered.

Judging from the excitement among the Pakistanis, the army had priority and the loudspeakers bellowed that there was no room for civilian passengers.

It took yet another few days before we could return "home." The previous day we had booked seats, this time to Peshawar. And all we could do now was to keep our fingers crossed that the weather would not change. Full of expectation we went to bed at three in the afternoon armed with a pound of cookies and a large bag of sweets, our only consolation.

"What time is it," Tim asked when darkness fell outside.

I had lost count of the times he had asked and just pointed at the alarm clock between us.

It was to be a long cold night, an appropriate conclusion of our mountain adventure.

But at long last we were getting out of there.

IN LAWLESS COUNTRY

NO FOREIGNERS BEYOND this point.

The decrepit bullet-riddled old road sign spoke for itself as we thoughtfully glanced through the dirty bus window. Tim and I were on our way to the Khyber Pass west of the city of Peshawar where world history has been written. Once the army of the British Empire had been forced to turn tail here.

In the war against the Russians, this pass was still very important and many people had lost their lives fighting for the eastern mountain road.

The historic Khyber Pass

Here and there we saw the distorted remains of a few armoured cars.

Now total lawlessness reigned in the pass, which was the only connection between

Afghanistan and North West Pakistan.

We approached yet another roadblock and huddled up in our seats.

Outside were armed soldiers who thoroughly scrutinized both the bus and the luggage on the top. However, they found nothing and soon we were let through.

"Phew," sighed Tim and took a deep breath.

In the bus several shifty-faced men tried to give us small amounts of narcotics hoping that we would buy larger quantities. Another tried to sell me so called Swedish sex films. But his enthusiasm dwindled visibly when I told him where I came from.

The end station was called Jamrod and had been described to us as a centre for both smuggling and drugs.

As we jumped off the bus, an incredible sight met us: in some shops the shelves were crammed with drugs wrapped in one-pound plastic bags.

Other shops sold everything from handguns to captured Russian canons.

The shops were open to the street and there were weapons everywhere from floor to ceiling. Rifle racks were packed together and on the shelves were piles of pistols and Kalashnikovs.

It was obvious that you had to be armed here since everybody had automatic guns and crossed cartridge belts on their strong chests.

One kind Afghan gave me a generous offer, a Russian machine gun at a very favourable price.

"A wely wely gud gon for you," he said with a tooth-

The guerrillas were all heavily armed

less smile and fired some rounds into the air.

Only Tim and I started. Apparently that is how they did it here, demonstrated the quality of their goods.

Some shops were full of weapons

A little further on I noticed a Russian tank where the red star had been painted over. I might have some difficulty getting it into my backpack, so I kindly but firmly refused when even that was offered me.

It was a strange feeling being in a lawless area where the only thing that counted was who hit the hardest and shot the best. The district was a refuge to many Pakistanis who had fallen out with the law. If you only made it up here, you were safe.

Loud shouting from right behind us made us turn around.

"What are you doing here? Don't you know it is forbidden for foreigners to be here? Do you have hashish? Heroin? Opium?"

The voice in the crowd belonged to a policeman who angrily brandished his baton. The heavily armed guerrillas didn't really take him seriously so now he took his anger out on us. To all appearances he acted as a sort of informer for the frontier police.

"Now you just come along here!" he hollered and led us to another bus. "You go back the same way you came or else...!"

But just as the bus was about to leave, his attitude changed and secretively he asked if we wanted to buy hashish ... from him.

Some time later we were back at the roadblock and this

time the police were a lot more conscientious. Brutally we were pulled out of the bus and taken to the police station that consisted of a few chairs and a wickerwork bed in the open.

Living in a lawless land

Three uniformed policemen dragged us along while asking a lot of questions in a completely unintelligible language. I was truly aggravated when an arrogant police captain ordered a heavy-handed frisking of us.

"Where have you hidden the drugs? You might as well get them out at once," he roared.

One of the policemen discovered my knife with a triumphant grunt. Carefully he tried the sharp edge and pretended to stab someone.

"Yes? Yes?" he asked wild-eyed and nodding eagerly.

"No, no, no," I answered un-amused and took back my knife when they looked the other way.

The first search had been futile and the captain ordered another one. Again the same policeman found the same knife with the same triumphant exclamation. And in the same way I took it back as they turned to start on Tim.

This circus show was repeated until they at long last gave up surprised at all the knives they had found. Sourly one of the policemen asked if we would like a cup of tea.

"Yes, please, that sounds very nice," we answered taken aback by this unexpected change of attitude, whereupon the same man dragged us back to the bus stop without another word.

We never found out what happened to the tea.

Peshawar is the capital of the North West Frontier Province

strategically located at the entrance of the renowned Khyber Pass. For centuries this city has been known as the meeting place of innumerable cultures, traditions and peoples and, since the days of Marco Polo it has been the place where trading caravans met, that had travelled from China and Russia to Iran and the Mediterranean countries.

The inhabitants consisted mostly of the legendary Pathan people, widely renowned for their courage and stamina. They had withstood many sieges, hidden behind the sixteen gates of the city or in the impressive fortresses of Bala Hisar and Jamrod.

Peshawar had a colourful personality of its own that was reinforced by buildings such as, for example, the Mahabat Khan mosque, erected by the provincial governor Mahabat Khan in 1680.

One thing I noticed in Peshawar was the large number of Afghans in the streets. They stood out from the crowd with their white and black turbans, wide trousers and coloured long shawls and many Pakistanis seemed very resentful.

"They are a proper flood," an old man complained sullenly as he sat in the sun with his long white beard stained with henna.

"Ever since the war started we have had no peace and quiet here. I hate these refugees who come here and behave as if they owned the place!"

I recognized these words that sounded so well-known even if the surroundings were very different. Racism can be expressed in so many different ways.

The situation was tough in the villages

"What are they

doing here?" the old man continued. His face was furrowed and leathery formed by a long life under a merciless sun.

Some of the unwelcome refugee tents

"They live in old dilapidated tents without work or dignity. What kind of life is that?" He looked around him with a dissatisfied expression and shook his head uncomprehendingly.

"No, mark my words, it would be much better if they went back home and made peace with the Russians. Then maybe we could have an end to this. Once and for all."

Outside town I had seen the enormous disreputable tent camps populated by many of the almost three million Afghans who had fled here during war. Sanitary conditions were appalling and rumour had it that there were only a few doctors who had to cope with all the wounded men, women and children who were brought across here.

A tired Norwegian surgeon told me that they sometimes received resistance men whose arms or legs had been shot off and who had been carried across the mountains.

Now and then they saw patients with such extensive burns that even their relatives didn't recognize them.

What were the doctors to do with a minimum of medicines and hardly any equipment?

But the Afghans were a proud and tough people who recovered amazingly quickly only to return to the distant rumble of canons on the other side of the dusty mountains.

According to the local people there was, however, a certain risk that the Russians might let their planes pursue the wounded

and attack the camps here, even on the Pakistani side. Everyone was worried. Many people thronged in cafes and restaurants to listen intently to the news on the radio.

And the news was far from quieting. Every other day, Russians planes infringed the air territory of Pakistan. Some people saw this as open provocation towards the USA that was officially supporting Pakistan.

Tim and I looked at each other and decided to learn from what we observed around us and return to the capital Islamabad.

What we were learning was to only take risks when it was truly needed.

MEETING DIFFICULTIES

ONLY A FEW WEEKS had passed since the assassination of prime minister of India, Indira Gandhi, and on the other side of the border, terrible things were occurring.

Five months earlier, a group of militant Sikhs under the leadership of Jarnail Singh Bhindranwale had moved into the most prominent shrine of the Sikhs, the Golden Temple in AMritsar and from there they were directing tough demands on the Indian government. These demands were listed in a document called the Anandpur Sahib Resolution.

Indira Gandhi had had no intention of granting the right to the Sikhs and she finally ordered an attack on the temple whereby eighty-three Indian soldiers and four hundred and ninety-three occupants were killed.

Indira Gandhi

Officially, this incident was named Operation Blue Star.

And now the prime minister herself had had to pay with her

life. The perpetrators themselves – her own body guards – were Sikhs and now a veritable witch hunt was going on on the Indian side. Only in the days following her death, more than two thousand seven hundred Sikhs had been reported dead as revenge for the assassination, and the violence continued.

The border here at Islamabad had been closed immediately and it was impossible to enter India except by air. We had checked with the airlines and everything was booked for the next six weeks.

Another six weeks in Pakistan ...

By now I had had enough. Even if the time with Susanne had been as refreshing as an oasis in a burning desert, it was time to get back to Sweden.

Exhaustion and despair overwhelmed which I found more and more often increasingly difficult to withstand. For this reason I decided to try to get back to Europe via Iran. And then I would even be able to find out what had happened to Majid.

The first stage was the train south.

In order to be relatively sure of a seat we had purchased first class tickets.

At the booking office they had assured us that our seats were reserved but when we pushed our way on board, that was of course not true.

After a few minutes we found ourselves sitting instead in the open

Our exclusive first-class seats

door with legs dangling. The engine was a coal burner and those who had chosen the roof soon turned into sooty spooks.

While the train crawled through the dry desert, I was thinking of what had happened during the last few days.

On our way to Quetta we had stayed a couple of days in Lahore to have a look at the largest mosque in the world, the Badshani-mosque built in 1653 by the emperor Aurangzeb.

In the centre of Lahore we had asked the way there, too stingy to take a rickshaw. There are about eighty-five million inhabitants in Pakistan and judging from the throngs, they were all gathered here at the same time. But nobody had the slightest idea what we were talking about. Once again anger was bubbling inside me. This was surely the most famous building in Pakistan, and I was just about to curse and swear out loud, when a well-dressed man of about forty came towards us with a briefcase under his arm.

"Excuse me, but could you tell us the way to the Badshani mosque?" I asked hopefully.

"Of course," the man answered politely and gave us a detailed description of the way.

First we were to take the bus from the other side of the street to something called Court Road, change buses at the last stop but one and then the mosque would manifest itself right in front of us.

The huge Badshani mosque built in 1653

Happily we thanked him for

his help and crossed over to the bus stop. Soon the clattering bus approached. Along the garishly hand-painted sides were hundreds of coloured bulbs and on the roof a superstructure exclusively intended for fanciful decorations.

"Does this bus go to Court Road?" I asked the boy who clung to the outside selling tickets.

"Kott Rod?"

"Yes, Court Road?"

"Yes, yes, yes, Kott Rod," he answered energetically and waved us inside the bus.

"Did he really say Court Road," wondered Tim and I shrugged my shoulders. Here everything meant taking chances.

Time went by while the bus fought its way further and further out into the suburbs and eventually it dawned on us that as usual we were on a wild goose chase.

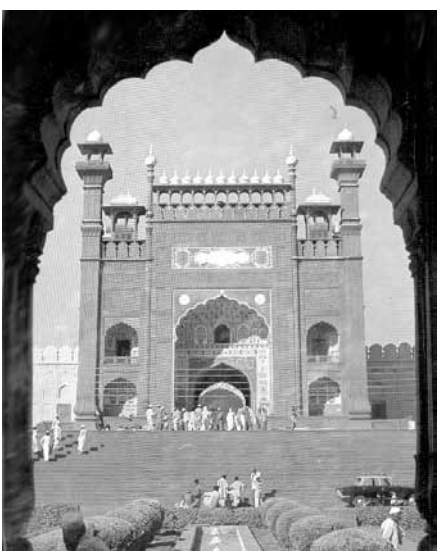
"Kott Rod!" the ticket-collector suddenly screamed and kicked us out at a lonely stop. In the middle of Absolute Nowhere.

"Bloody hell!" Tim exclaimed in despair. "Is it impossible to get a sensible answer in this country?"

Once again I was speechless; I could only shake my head. What was really going on in situations like this?

Or was it my fault entirely?

What was it that prevented us from



The impressive entrance

meeting mentally?

At the embassy some people claimed that the man in the street wanted to pay back for all he had suffered under British rule.

Others meant that it was the Pakistani way of joking, that many were illiterate and suffered from minority complexes in the face of Westerners.

I myself think that we were just "unlucky" and only encountered fools or weird situations we might have needed for our spiritual growth.

According to my way of seeing things, one of the great injustices of the world is that the ordinary, kind and considerate man is always overshadowed by the forward, dishonest and brutal one.

Quite a while later, we stopped a small rickshaw which slowly puttered past us and half an hour later we were at long last outside the enormous mosque which towered high over the rest of the city with its white cupolas and brick-red minarets.

Apparently we had taken a bus in exactly the opposite direction and had paid many times what it would have cost us to take a rickshaw to start with. We had succumbed to our stinginess and we had paid the price for our penny-pinching.

Later that night we wanted to go to the movies but the ticket office was closed so we asked a man close by what time the show began.

"At six o'clock," he answered.

"And when can we buy tickets?"

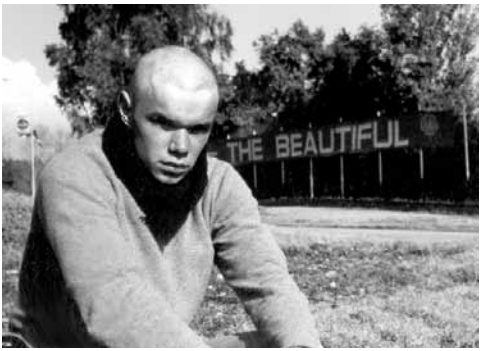
"At half past six."

But before that Tim and I had decided to see a barber. Rumours of lice and fleas had convinced us of the advantages of a short haircut and we soon stood outside a hairdresser's.

One look at the coarse scissors made us toss for who was to

be first. Tim won and I was lucky.

"Cut it pretty short," said Tim to the barber who, before he could protest, had taken out a huge razor and made a wide track right across his head.



With a head like a hard-boiled egg

"Oh no! No!"

Tim moaned grinding his teeth in restrained anger as he realized that he had no choice but to let the man continue and soon he was sitting there with a head as bald and shiny as a hard-boiled egg.

For some reason I changed my mind and decided to keep my curly locks yet another day or two.

Susanne had helped me get a visa for Iran and after waving goodbye to Tim, I jumped on the first bus. The photos for the documents had been taken in a photo shop by the roadside. I felt heavy-hearted at being on my own again. We had grown used to lean on each other, Tim and I.

But now I was alone again and started to prepare myself for my reunion with Iran.

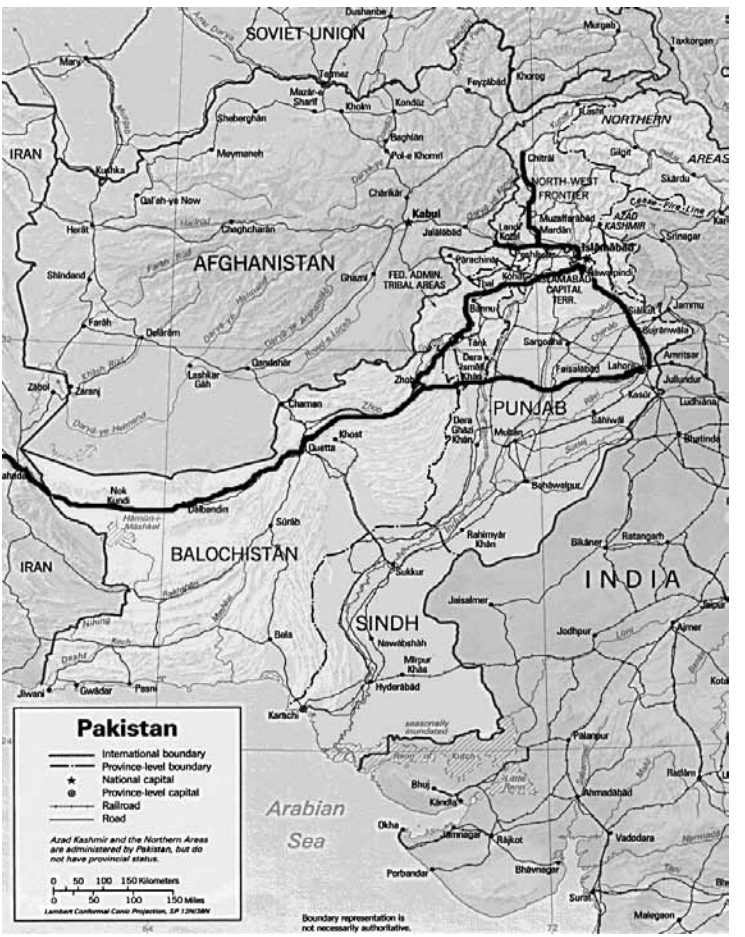
The photo shop at the roadside

I really looked forward to meeting Majid, Mohs-

en, Saied, Maryam and Zari again. It seemed like a century since we saw each other.

And now I would find out what had really happened. The hours passed in a haze on the way back to the dusty border town of Taftan.

The incredibly decorated bus was as crowded as always and



My long and quite tough journey through Pakistan

I had to squeeze myself into a Z.

But it didn't matter. All I wanted was to get back 'home' to Iran again.

Simultaneously I felt strangely sad at leaving this country with which I had had this strange hate-love affair. One time when the bus stopped because of a flat tyre and I was watching one of the most magnificent sunsets of my life, I felt as if it was wrong of me to leave.

I felt a twinge of bad conscience as I realized how harshly I had judged these people.

However, my will to survive mentally made me think again.

One of the passengers was a ragged German tramp of about twenty years old. Like me he had apparently been through a lot. His contact with Pakistan had left its mark and he seemed gloomy and absentminded.

"I think I'm losing contact with reality," he kept muttering.

Judging from his skinny body and burned-out eyes, he, like other Europeans, had taken too many drugs here. However, he had opened his eyes in time and just had to make it home alive. I wished him luck.

At three-thirty in the morning we arrived in Taftan. The small border town lay in darkness lit only by the glittering stars.

The sky was clear and deep blue, and as always it was a fantastic experience to be in the endless desert. The cold was making itself felt and around me drowsy in-

We returned to Taftan long before dawn

habitants were starting small fires in order to keep warm. There would always be time to sleep in the middle of the day when the sun was high.

At dawn I passed the Pakistani side of the border with no problems. Now I had to get back into Iran where the risk of difficulty was far greater. But the control was easy and the customs officers didn't even bother to look through my pack. All the others were subjected to rough treatment and a few courageous people started to object. However, a few threatening rifle muzzles soon silenced the complainers.

We were lucky for this time there was a bus ready and we soon headed towards Zahedan. We met the usual road controls where *pasdaran* searched through both bus and passengers. In a small bag I had a book, my knife, rolls of undeveloped film and some illegal music cassettes I had bought as keepsakes.

When we were ordered out, I surreptitiously took the bag with me.

Outside two *pasdaran* were watching us while their colleagues ransacked the bus. Their hard eyes never left us and not a sound was heard among the passengers. After about five minutes we were encouraged to find our seats again. On returning, each passenger was frisked. We were told to stand with hands held high and legs apart. Apparently unconcerned I walked up to be inspected.

Small green oasis in the middle of the desert

The older of the two went

scrupulously through my clothes from top to toe but without looking up so he never noticed the bag in my hand. The younger soldier seemed new in the force and didn't dare point out the mistake to his superior. Joyful at my victory I re-entered the bus.

The rest of the trip went well until outside Tehran we passed by the site of an accident that gave me nightmares for quite some time.

Two tankers and a car had crashed head on and then exploded. The distorted wrecks were completely gutted and some soldiers were just dragging the charred bodies out of the ashes.

Later a fellow passenger told me that the man in the car had tried to get away from the *pasdaran* and during the chase had tried in vain to overtake without noticing an oncoming lorry. But judging from the faces of the *pasdaran*, they were satisfied to have caught the guy they were after. That other people had lost their lives seemed irrelevant.

It had all been in the name of Allah.

During my stay in Pakistan I had many times tried to phone Majid's family to find out what had happened to him. Was he even still in the country? Imagine my surprise when he was the one to answer my call.

"Hi, Majid, it's me," I exclaimed happily.

"Hi," he answered.

I could feel that he was glad to hear me again, but his tone of voice told me that something was wrong. Seriously wrong.

"We can talk about it when you come," was his short answer.

Full of apprehension I waited for the bus to reach Tehran.

MURDERED

Barâdaram môrde... my brother is dead...

The chilling words echoed without my comprehending what they meant.

Mammad ... dead...? But...

I inhaled sharply.

The shocking truth was too much for me to handle and my subconscious refused to accept this message of death.

Dead... my friend Mammad... dead!

Memories queued up in my mind of all we had shared. Even if we had not known each other for long, I had become deeply attached to this kind, soft-spoken guy.

And Shadi? How would she cope with a tragedy like this? I felt as if something had been torn apart inside.

As soon as Majid and Mohsen came to meet me, I knew that something terrible had happened. Majid had sounded strange on the phone and for a while I had started to wonder if I was the only one who had experienced our friendship as unique. But when I saw them leave their car, I could see that things were much worse than that. Both were pale as sheets with dark circles under their eyes.

"What happened?" was all I could whisper.

"He was murdered..."

Majid leaned his head on the steering wheel and slowly breathed in. It seemed as if he had a lump of pain in his throat that prevented him from talking. At long last he explained what had happened but I had difficulty concentrating.

Apparently Mammad had been stabbed in the back when he and Shadi were standing in a queue. The official version was that a war veteran confused with shell shock had attacked him.

But Mammad had connections within the Mujahedin and rumour had it that the regime used such methods of liquidation to get rid of dissidents in an easy and unobtrusive way. But to me the details were unimportant; my only thought was that Mammad was no longer among us.

Mammad, my friend, all you ever wanted was peace and quiet and time to spend with Shadi. Was that asking too much? What had you done that was so grave they would blow out the candle of your life?

Darkness had descended over Tehran and the gaudy neon lights in the shop windows added a weird tinge to the situation. It had started to rain and the large drops fell like a lullaby on the roof. Mohsen swept his hand over the windshield that was getting misted over. The pain in my chest was becoming unbearable.

How could everyone look so unaffected? How could life go on as usual? Mammad was dead! Dead!

I felt like jumping out and grabbing them, shaking them, screaming into their faces in an effort to make them understand. It was a human life, not statistics or small notices in a newspaper! Life, life, life!!

But what was the point? The sad faces in the crowd made me realize the impact death had in the ordinary life of everybody in Iran. They had all lost someone dear to them and now my

grief blended with theirs like tears in the rain.

Lost in my own thoughts, I had not noticed that we had passed through large parts of Tehran and now we turned into the narrow alley where Majid and his family lived. Outside the home, a black flag was placed above an obituary for everyone to see. Broken-hearted I got out of the car, went heavily to the door and once again faced my Iranian friends.

It was a shock to see what Mammad's death had done to them. Dressed entirely in black with sunken, ashen faces and eyes swollen with crying they greeted me in silence.

In a strange way the pain made the feeling of life brittle but intense and my heart wept with these people who had already been through so much. Would the suffering never end?

Later I was shown into the living room on the second floor while Majid went to tell his mother that I had arrived. A few minutes later he came slowly up the stairs.

"You can go and say hello to her now." He turned around and disappeared down the hall.

Majid's mother and I had become really close and it was difficult to keep the tears back when she despairingly started to tell me about her son who had now been torn from her forever. She kept a photo of him pressed to her cheek in an attempt to get close to her lost child. The others tried to tell her that I didn't understand Farsi, but she continued.

"Leave us alone, he understands me, I know that."

Mammad's mother was devastated

I sat down and

looked at this woman who had been through so much in her life. Her eyes were red and shining.

She bit her lower lip, closed her Quran and dried the tears off her cheeks with the back of her hand as she went on mumbling.

"What kind of mother am I who cannot even defend my own child?"

بازگشت همه بسوی اوست

با نهایت تاسف و تاثر در گذشت جوان ناکام

امیر محمد زورک

The obituary

Her heavy body shook with desolate sobs. Her hands lay like fists in her lap.

"What kind of mother am I who has to carry my own flesh and blood to his grave? Oooh, my son. My wonderful son... My heart is bursting with grief…"

While I was trying to comfort her, it dawned on me what the death of Mammad would imply in the future. If the *pasdaran* had traced him, it was only a question of time before Majid's name turned up on their lists. He had earlier been a thorn in their flesh in different ways.

A glance in his direction confirmed my suspicions. Mammad's death would not be the only thing that befell the family if Majid didn't succeed in getting out of the country in a hurry. But how? We had tried once before without contriving a plan that worked.

Just then Majid's mother was silent, and I had a feeling that she had caught herself speaking of Mammad as if he were still alive.

Later Majid told me what had happened after he left for Turkey. A hijacking in Tehran had had me worried, but had gone unnoticed and not until he arrived in Istanbul, did he end up in something that was to stop everything: a telegram from my Mom. A telegram saying that he could not possibly enter

Sweden legally and that he therefore had better not even try!

She herself had been in contact with the police and had been informed about this obvious fact. But everything had seemed so evident to us from the very start, didn't she realize that this was dead earnest?

Since Majid had not properly understood the implication of the telegram, he became so insecure that he cancelled the entire trip and returned to Tehran.

When I heard this, I found it difficult to control my anger. How dared my mother underestimate us like that!

Enough said, now we had to cope with the present. Judging from Majid's sorrow-stricken but determined face, I knew that he might choose between staking all or perishing.

None of us slept well that night and before sunrise I had made up my mind. Majid had not in any way asked my help but we both knew that his chances would increase considerably if I were with him. I spoke the languages and in Sweden I even had friends within the police force.

"Majid, my friend, I'm with you."

He looked at me with inscrutable eyes and then nodded.

When my decision was made, we again threw ourselves headlong into the planning work and slowly but surely a new plan took shape. One that might work. Earlier Majid had been promised a ticket by the Russian airline Aeroflot.

The intention was that he should fly from Tehran to Moscow, change planes there and then continue to East Germany. He still had his transit visa. From East Berlin to Sweden, a train and then a ferry seemed to be the best alternative.

But in order for me to pay for my ticket, I had to cash all my remaining traveller's cheques and then some.

"If you cash them at a bank, yes," Mohsen broke in. "The banks only pay nine toman for one dollar. If instead you use the

black market in the street, you get fifty-five for the same dollar."

"But at the border, they made a note in my passport of how much money I had and they also admonished me only to change money in a bank," I answered. "How can I get through the controls at the airport?"

"Take it easy, you will figure that one out when it is time," he smiled.

Later that afternoon we drove to a certain street where the many black marketers were queuing to exchange and soon I stood there with an impressive wad of money in my hand.

Okay, Sweden, here we come!

So now I had to get a visa for East Germany otherwise I would not be able to buy a ticket for Berlin. The airline rules were rigorous due to all the unlucky people who tried to get out of the country. But here we were in for a severe setback.

"No, unfortunately we cannot give you a transit visa since you have no visa for any of the neighbouring countries," the woman at the East German embassy explained curtly. "However, if you can show me a visa for Czechoslovakia, Poland or West Germany there is no problem."

"But as a Scandinavian citizen I don't need a visa for West Germany," I tried.

"Makes no difference."

The shutter was banged shut.

Confused and disappointed I had to turn back. I had heard that it

With all the currency in my hand

might be possible to get hold of a transit visa at the airport, so maybe it would be all right. But how could I buy a ticket without a visa?

The last few days were spent crisscrossing Tehran in an attempt to arrange everything including a ticket. If I were to help Majid at all, I had to be on the same plane.

The regime had done their utmost to prevent people from leaving the country and ticket purchase was no exception and when we at long last got the green light concerning a ticket, we had to go to a specific bank to pay for an exit stamp in my passport. This accomplished we went to the travel agency where Majid had booked his ticket.

The guy at the Aeroflot office turned out to be a good man who approved both mine and Majid's tickets in spite of the fact that he was continuously under the watchful eyes of two Russian guards. He obviously understood what we were up to but not a word came over his lips and soon we had our tickets.

It was hard not being able to thank him openly.

At long last our escape plan was ready and one evening we went to a special restaurant in the beautiful Farazâd-district to celebrate.

"Have you ever tasted real Persian kebab?" asked Mohsen with dreamy eyes. "It is quite a treat."

All of us were together that night. In the restaurant you lay at the table looking up at the starry sky. A small fountain and a few tiny trees in the middle of the roofless room completed the feeling of luxury and I thoroughly enjoyed being with my friends.

"You just relax," said Saied before going into the kitchen from where appetizing smells wafted towards us.

My stomach started rumbling and we heartily applauded

Saied when he arrived with a huge steaming dish. The Persian kebab consisted of a row of skewers with specially grilled mutton, onions and tomatoes all wrapped in large thin newly baked bread. It was a moving meal where emotions were lining up inside me under the soft light of the moon.

That night I had a dream. I dreamed that I was knocking on Heaven's Door.

God asked me,

"My child, what can I do for you?"

And I said,

"Father, please protect and bless Majid, Mohsen, Saied and their families."

I sighed.

"And help us make it all the way to Sweden."

God smiled and answered,

"Request granted. You have been destined to make it and you shall surely achieve your goals."

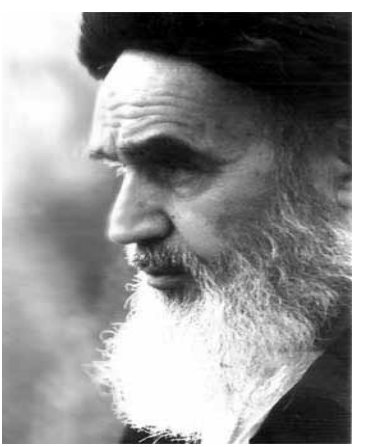
THE GETAWAY

DAMN, WE WON'T BE able to make it!

Majid looked up from his wristwatch. He closed his eyes, inhaled through his nose as he straightened his neck, exhaled deeply and relaxed his shoulders.

Mohsen shook his head and stared out into the seething traffic in order to avoid my worried eyes that were searching for his in the rear view mirror. I discreetly folded my hands in my lap and said a silent prayer.

As usual the indescribable traffic of Tehran had jammed the streets and we could not possibly reach the police office before it closed. My visa had expired long ago and three days earlier we had applied for a retroactive extension and now we were on our way to fetch the official confirmation without which I could not leave the country. I looked at



Ayatollah Khomeiny

the time.

"Almost eleven," I mumbled nervously. "In six hours our plane will leave, with or without us..."

I was surprised myself at how composed I sounded.

Mohsen nodded with clenched teeth, wound down the side window and threw out his half-smoked cigarette.

Ten minutes late we jumped out of the car in front of the police building, passed the guard after the usual frisking procedure, bolted up the stairs and apprehensively approached the department in charge of our case.

Our steps echoed in the stairwell and as we got to our destination, we had to step aside to let a group of armed soldiers pass. In the background, I could hear an out-of-breath vacuum cleaner. Majid raised his fist to knock and sent me an encouraging look.

"Come in," a loud voice shouted irritably when we knocked.

On the other side of the door we had to pass a sentry. The guard was caught up in his newspaper and didn't even look up. Behind one of the desks sat a swarthy man of about thirty-five.

Inwardly I cringed at the sight of his steely eyes. His voice reminded me of ice in November, black cold water swirling under a hard surface. Consciously I lowered my shoulders in an attempt to look relaxed.

After profuse excuses for being late, we explained why we had come, but instead of answering he demanded to see my passport. In a cunningly slow way he leafed through it while his black eyes riveted me to the spot. I could feel the small hairs at the back of my head stand on end.

"How do you know each other?"

The question was asked in Persian, so I had no chance of understanding what was said.

"Well, my brother is studying at the university of Copen-

hagen and that was where they met. Now Ole is here to visit his family and friends."

No sooner had Majid finished his story than the man quickly turned to me and asked the same question, this time in English.

For a fraction of a second, time stood still and horrified I realized the trap we were about to fall into. The thoughts were seething in my head trying to find a way out of this predicament.

My pulse started pounding in my temples, my stomach cramped with fear and I felt cold sweat along my spine. I met his spiteful eyes as Majid touched my arm to pull me back into the now.

"But I have to get home now! My mother is dying and it is only a matter of hours before it is all too late!" I rattled off so fast that he could not follow me.

I glanced at Majid and absentmindedly fingered the zipper of my jacket.

Confused he tried to make out my flow of words. His hesitation gave us the respite we needed. Seemingly indifferent we turned to a map of the world on a wall.

"You know my brother from the university in Copenhagen," Majid whispered almost inaudibly. "You used to …"

"What are you talking about?" the livid police officer suddenly screamed and jumped to his feet. His nostrils and pupils widened as on a war horse. "What did you say to him? *Be gû!* Answer me! Answer me!"

"Oh, nothing," stammered Majid with an innocent shrug.

"What do you mean nothing?" the officer shouted in disbelief and never took his eyes off him.

"Oh, I was just telling him that this is the world," Majid said awkwardly pointing to the map.

"Don't lie! I heard you whisper something else!"

"But I assure you that I didn't say anything," Majid insisted

almost inaudibly. I looked into the shiny eyes of the man and said nothing. The fever behind them was obvious.

The guy started yelling questions at me in bad English and I pretended not to understand. When I didn't answer he returned to looking from one of us to the other. We stood immovable as statues.

From the coffee machine in the corridor I could hear a plastic cup falling into place and then being filled with dull coffee or tea from the loudly-sounding machine. The sound was almost deafening.

Suddenly a door was opened and a guard looked in. It was the same guard who had shown us in and who was now wondering what was going on. The police officer turned around and said something in a low voice. At the same time, Majid and I hurriedly looked at each other behind his back. Hesitantly I took a step forward.

"Well, I thought…"

The officer moved his hand impatiently, fingers together, palm towards us, the gesture apparently meaning that we were to wait.

In a studied way he extremely slowly turned around. For an interminable moment we looked at each other in silence and at long last he gave up. His eyes changed and the hardness disappeared. He seemed to nod to himself considering what had been said.

With a hardly noticeable shrug, he sat down, lit a cigarette and inhaled deeply. He stared tiredly at the mounds of files in front of him and rubbed his solar plexus. He closed his eyes. His fingers touched the file closest to him.

"*Bale, bale*, okay then," he muttered and blew out a cloud of smoke through his nostrils as he started to leaf through the documents once more.

Just then, the other guard was called back to the guardroom.

From then on Majid consistently answered in English while I kept adding details at a furious rate, the result being that the policeman had quite a job following us. On purpose we had even chosen to arrive just before closing time and at long last he gave in so that he could get home to his dinner on time.

Ten minutes later we left the police office. This time with a visa stamp in my passport. Exhausted I wiped the sweat off my brow.

Never again, I swore to myself, never ever again.

On the way back, Majid asked if I minded going to *Behescht-e-Zahra*, a huge cemetery about ten miles south of Tehran. This was where Mammad was buried. I had been lost in my own thoughts and at first I heard his voice from afar and then suddenly very close. I looked at my watch and nodded. We still had plenty of time.

"It is totally impossible for me to grasp that he is dead," Majid said slowly as he steered through the mad traffic.

His eyes filled with tears and I felt my heart becoming heavy in my chest.

"I just can't believe it."

Without moving, I sat on the worn passenger seat and listened intently. At the same time a sad Iranian song was playing on the cassette player.

The road to Behescht-e-Zahra

He confided in me how Mammad's body immediately after the murder had been taken to a mortuary close

by. Hearing what others told him wasn't sufficient for him, so Majid had insisted on seeing his brother's dead body with his own eyes.

"I simply had to."

So in spite of the risk, late one evening he had gone alone to the mortuary and bribed a guard to let him in.

"It was so terrible... to see Mammad's blue rigid body lying there all alone and forlorn... I hardly recognized him when he lay there, all sewn up and washed, pale in the hard glare of the fluorescent lights. The deep stab wound from the knife. Horrible … it was absolutely horrible…"

Majid turned his head to prevent me from seeing his grief-stricken eyes.

With my head cocked I averted my eyes so as to allow him to express his feelings completely. I had a hard time keeping back my own tears and preferred to keep silent the rest of the way.

Behescht-e-Zahra is located in a desolate desert area on the way to the holy city of Qom. Like a small town, the gigantic burial ground is divided into sections to enable people to find their way among the thousands of graves. Round the entire area were trees and in the shade you could park your car. Most of the spaces were already taken.

Long rows of graves to be filled

We made our way

slowly through the throngs of grieving people.

During the last years, most families had lost at least one member in some way. Everywhere you saw weeping women dressed in black with their heartbroken husbands.

At the back I noticed hundreds of open graves gaping hungrily waiting to be filled.

Many mourners by the graves

Weeping and wailing pervaded this place like a heavy fog and more than anything I wanted to get out of there.

On the way we had passed a simple grave, one among all the others, but which was special to Majid. Here lay Abbas, one of his and Mohsen's best friends.

A couple of years previously he was the victim of an Iraqi sniper. Abbas had volunteered for the war as he considered service at the front to be a fine opportunity to help others in a difficult situation.

A convinced pacifist, in spite of the danger he chose to participate in the war in his own way. And now he was here...

Some time later we found Mammad's fresh grave. The only thing that marked it was a black sign with his picture and name in white.

Like a somnambulist Majid squatted down with his aching head between his hands and lost himself in emotions and memories. His exhaustion overwhelmed him. How could

things have turned out this bad?

This might be the last time he would ever have a chance to be close to his brother.

When we returned, Mohsen was waiting in the kitchen. His ashen face was strained and haggard.

"We are all convinced that all will go well this time," he said looking away. "I wish you luck."

I felt so hopeless leaving him in this madness. But the red stamp in his passport put a definite stop to all attempts.

"It is time now," said Majid almost in a whisper before going down to take farewell of his family.

I took a deep breath and followed him.

As far as I could see, his mother was calm and collected as she gave us both a long hug. However, her exterior and interior were in a terrible conflict and she seemed to never be willing to let Majid out of her protecting arms.

Not only had one of her sons just been murdered, now she was on the very verge of losing yet another beloved child.

On the other hand, his father broke down and, with tears running down his furrowed cheeks he looked at me with unspeakable grief and an indefinable expression in his old dark eyes. His white hair and pale face indicated the strength that had been drained out of him.

What a dreadful situation. If we succeeded, I would have taken Majid from them forever – if we failed none of us would come back. My heart was heavy with an odd mixture of responsibility and guilt.

The father's sinewy hands were trembling uncontrollably as he took first the hand of his son – and then mine. As if in a holy ritual he then placed them, one on top of the other as a symbol of an invisible pact. I turned my eyes to the sky and dried off some tears with the back of my hand.

Our red and swollen eyes met. His pain was like a clear flame and I swore a silent oath that I would do everything in my power to aid his son.

"*Khoda hafis, dustaye azizam*. Goodbye my dearest friends."

How could the sun shine on a day like this?

We were approaching Mehrabad, the huge international airport in Tehran. It had been closed for long periods of time due to enemy air attacks but now it was open.

What was going to happen within the next few hours would decide the rest of our lives.

We were nervous but restrained. None of us dared think what would occur if we were revealed.

The minutes ticked slowly by towards the inevitable parting when we had to leave Mohsen and Saied.

We turned into the car park in front of the huge white departure hall. Mohsen parked the car and we stared up at the colossal building. He turned off the engine and lit a cigarette as we silently got out our luggage and went into the hall. Now there was no turning back.

I walked a few steps to the side to let Majid, Mohsen and Saied say their goodbyes. How difficult it must be for them to part.

The only thing I remember of those awful minutes is Mohsen's pale face, as he stood forlorn behind us in the enormous hall. Rarely

Liberty symbol in Tehran

have I felt so utterly helpless as when we turned away from him and I swore to myself that I would get him out of here as well.

Mehrabad international airport

My agonizing thoughts were interrupted when we reached the luggage control. The previous night I had asked if there was anything special that Majid would miss more than everything else. I knew he loved his samurai sword but didn't dare take it along.

"Let me take care of that," I had offered.

Being a European, I had a certain advantage, so I decided to take the risk to try to smuggle it out. Now it burned my back through the fabric. Two *pasdaran* were going through the luggage and slowly sweat started trickling down my back. The others in the queue were pressing on, so I took a deep breath and put my backpack in front of them with the sword downwards.

By a lucky coincidence my *pasdar* seemed blasé and generally bored. Absentmindedly he went through my things, felt the cloth cover of the sword and then put everything back again. But just as the danger seemed to be over, he stopped me. He folded his arms and moved his weight from one foot to the other.

"What is that thing?" he said pointing to the cover which most of all resembled a gun case.

I sent him a bewildered look.

"Oh, that is only a model sword," I slurred in incompre-

hensible English.

He was silent for a moment.

I smiled innocently at him and stepped backwards a little.

"I see," he said disinterestedly and scratched his stubble. He then yawned, waved me on and sat down again. I took a deep breath and lifted down my backpack while my eyes never left the floor.

Majid on the other hand had come up against a real apparatchik who minutely went through both his bags. His watchful eyes missed nothing and I thanked the "Boss upstairs" for my narrow escape.

However, soon another obstacle appeared that I had not considered. The X-ray control of all luggage. How on earth was I going to get this sword through that one? I desperately sought for a solution during the few moments it took us to get to the conveyor belt.

Suddenly I had a brainwave. Just as the bag was disappearing under the X-ray camera, I whistled shrilly. The soldier checking the screen started and looked in my direction as I with a silly smile indicated if I was also to be subjected to an X-ray examination. Apparently he didn't appreciate my joke but sourly shook his head before returning his attention to the screen.

But I had succeeded, the bag was through. Discreetly I wiped my forehead.

"We might as well split up," Majid said quietly. "If anything should happen to one of us, the other must go on as planned. Okay?"

I nodded. It sounded tough but it was the only way.

After yet another scrutiny by uniformed officials, we passed a counter where three *pasdaran* were picking out people at random.

Close to them I noticed a newsstand where they sold Islamic

propaganda and also confiscated documents from the American secret service. Most possibly, the regime had got hold of these in connection with the occupation of the embassy a few years previously. Selling Top Secret documents at a bookstall was yet another way of humiliating the superpower in the west.

Our last difficulty consisted of a dark passage with black material on both sides. In there was a middle-aged *pasdar* armed with searching questions. I soon discovered that he wasn't fond of westerners.

He was particularly interested in how much money I had. In my passport was clearly marked the exact amount I had brought into the country and now he demanded bank receipts as proof that I had not bought money on the black market. Without receipts I could not pass.

"Pull?" the man snapped as he looked through my passport.

"Pull?" I echoed and tried to look innocent. I started to sweat again. I also had some difficulty breathing.

"Money?" he asked.

The soldier scrutinized me from top to toe.

"Money?" I answered.

"Dollars? *Toman?*"

His tone of voice was beginning to sound threatening.

I hesitated a little. His stubborn questions were forcing me into a corner.

"Dollars? *Toman?*" he repeated and threw my passport on the desk between us.

I could hear him breathing heavily through his nose. He wasn't going to make things easy for me, that was obvious.

"Dollars? *Toman?*"

"Geld?" he tried. Now he was really getting angry. He riveted me with his eyes and suddenly got up. A soldier peered out from behind the other side of the curtain to see if his colleague needed assistance. His automatic gun was pointing downwards

but I was very conscious of it. A shake of the head made him disappear once more.

Cold drops of sweat ran down my side as thoughts were whirring through my head in a desperate attempt to find a smart move. But in vain.

"Geld?" I repeated askance and tried to look unintelligent. That wasn't at all difficult.

The knuckles of the soldier were turning white and I had a hard time trying to interpret the expression in his face and dark eyes. He seemed to be torn between believing that I didn't understand what he said and that I was trying to cheat him. My stomach cramped.

"Pounds? Lira?" His voice was tight, his anger palpable.

Without batting an eyelid I repeated his words. "Pounds? Lira?"

Stubbornly I kept on repeating his words until at last he got tired of the game and brusquely waved the idiot on.

I did it! I was through! With both money and sword. I looked eagerly around for Majid who emerged from behind the black curtain after a few seconds.

"We made it," he exclaimed happily and winked at me before going to phone the good news to his family. A little risky as I saw it. The regime was known for bugging phone calls and airports could not be excluded. But Majid himself knew all about the risks implied, so...

One hour later we entered one of the worn passenger planes of Russian airline Aeroflot – destination Moscow. At the top of the stairs Majid turned around for a second to have a last look at Tehran on the other side of the airport.

"Welcome aboard," the kind air stewardess said, interrupting his silent goodbye.

We were politely shown our seats and Majid quietly dis-

appeared within himself as he bent forward to have a last look at the huge city that he might never see again.

Our precious air tickets to freedom

The dark sky was low and the clouds hung low and dense above us. As the sunlight could no longer penetrate them, all colours seemed to disappear and the enormous capital looked most of all like a photo in black and white.

We took off our jackets and Majid pushed his knitted hat and his gloves into his pocket. No words felt adequate and I left him alone.

Just before take-off something gave me goose pimples. The pilot was test-running the engines as the two Russian officials from the office where we had bought our tickets came running across the apron followed by a security guard.

One of them was waving a piece of paper pointing at something at the rear of the plane. The pilot turned off the engines while the stewardess opened the door.

Time to say farewell to Tehran

Had they discovered that we had tampered with Majid's papers? I looked down and

tried to melt into the surroundings as their heavy steps came closer and closer.

But just as I expected to feel a hand on my shoulder, somebody shouted something from the cockpit and they all turned around and disappeared. No explanation was offered, but who cared?

Relieved we sank back into our seats waiting for the start.

Now nothing could stop us.

"Dabro Pasjalovatj na Maskofskom miesjdonarodnom aeroportie!"

When the plane landed at the international airport of Moscow, a snowstorm had gathered courage in the dark and now the snow was whirling round the houses outside.

The capital of the Soviet Union looked cold and uninviting as we taxied towards the terminal.

Shortly afterwards we were inside the transit hall where we encountered soldiers from the Red Army which should really be called the Green Army, considering their colourful uniforms.

We both felt exhilarated and looked about in fascination. We were surrounded by Russians who looked so Russian that they might have been chosen as extras for a movie.

Red Army soldiers

To start with we had intended to spend the night here but when a possibility of continuing on to East Berlin appeared, we didn't hesitate. For safety's sake we decided to double-check so that our luggage didn't disappear on the way.

The airport was huge and our Russian non-exist-

ent, so it took us a while to find the Information Office.

Inside the squeaky door an enormous woman of about fifty-five was surveying her empire. She was dressed in a thick well-pressed dark blue uniform, thick nylons and heavy leather shoes. It was as if she were taken directly out of an old James Bond-film.

White Moscow in winter

Timidly we knocked at the door.

"Excuse us, we wonder..."

"Speak!" she ordered in a rough bass voice. Her thick hair was obviously dyed and framed her square face like a sprayed helmet. A large wart on her upper lip increased her powerful appearance.

"Well, we were wondering if you could check that our luggage is loaded onto the next plane for East Germany?"

Majid looked over my shoulder with an ingratiating smile.

Her eyes didn't leave the dull ceiling of the office and we were beginning to feel invisible, when her bass voice brought us back.

"That has been taken care of," she snarled and turned her back on us.

Apparently the conversation was terminated.

BEHIND THE BERLIN WALL

WE WOULD LIKE TO report a missing bag.

Two hours earlier we had arrived in East Berlin and, as we had hoped, I had been able to get a transit visa at the airport. Everything seemed to proceed according to plan until we discovered that one of Majid's bags had disappeared.

In this bag were several important documents that might help him get asylum in Sweden. Talk about bad luck!

"Take it easy, it will soon turn up," I said while I checked with the customs officers if any more planes were expected from Moscow.

"Sure, there are another two before midnight."

After each landing I went over to check but each time the answer was negative. By now Majid was sitting on a bench staring into vacancy.

"It will be all right," I tried to console him as a male voice close by broke in.

"You cannot sit here. We close at midnight and then everyone has to leave," the uniformed guard barked. "Do you have a permit to stay in this country?"

One look at the clock showed me that it was ten to twelve

midnight. With a hesitating gesture we showed him our transit visa.

"Don't you know that these are only valid until midnight," the guard continued. "You had better hurry on to West Berlin."

There was no time to be lost so after we had been given a description of the way, we ran as fast as we could to get on the last train. I quite honestly don't recall how we managed to get into West Berlin via Friedrichsstrasse but ten minutes later our train passed the Berlin Wall and the heavily guarded mine field.

At the checkpoint we had had to leave our visas which were printed on loose sheets of paper. How were we to get back to the East?

Three stations further on we decided to get off. One of the passengers had explained to us that it was possible to sleep here at a Christian Bahnhof hostel. However, this turned out to be fully booked and some drunks were already sitting in the corridor outside trying to sleep. We remained for a long time outside the stairwell not knowing what to do next.

It was late January and extremely cold but we had no other choice but to sit on a park bench and try to make the best of it.

Our clattering teeth kept the others awake and the night seemed to be never ending while we followed the second hand on the clock on its way towards the dawn. I glanced at Majid. His eyes were

Berlin-Alexanderplatz in East Berlin

closed and his lips were moving as if he was praying.

I closed my eyes – they were dry and burning and it felt good just to let them rest a while.

Outside it was still pitch dark when, on stiff legs and frozen through, we stumbled off to the station. It was seven o'clock and we had had enough.

"But now what?" said Majid as a group of armed special policemen forced their way past us into the station and spread out in the hall. Curiously we followed them with our eyes without understanding what was going on.

"Wait here, I just have to go to the john," said Majid when we were again alone.

I tried to use the time to memorize what we had agreed to say to the Swedish passport police, when I noticed a disturbance among the people at the end of the hall. At that time Majid came running.

"Come on," was the only thing I caught before he disappeared through the door. Confused I went after him and suddenly a shot was fired inside the station followed by total silence.

"One of the cops turned up in the toilet and told me to get out," said Majid who had the impression that there had been a bomb threat in the station.

We never found out why there had been shooting but instead we got on the next train towards the border.

But our bad luck continued and just before the checkpoint, the

The crossing at Checkpoint Charlie

train slowed down and the conductor explained that even the railway line had been threatened. We were told to go to Checkpoint Charlie to get across there.

"This is mad," sighed Majid.

"Will it never end?"

I shrugged my shoulders and was just about to ask the way when a soldier came running. Out of breath he stopped by the locomotive and pointed along the track, after which the train driver jumped off the train and went with him. The other passengers seemed to have decided to wait, so we followed their example.

"Easy, just take it easy. We will probably be able to continue in a little while," the conductor explained. "It is surely nothing but a false alarm."

He was right and with a jerk the train started again. I let my eyes search the grey appearance of Berlin. High above the roofs I saw the characteristic television tower with its glazed cupola and in the streets rush hour traffic was at its worst.

Soon the train stopped at the border station that consisted of building which could only be passed one way. The first obstacle was a passport inspector.

"You have no visa for East Germany," he said dryly.

In my very best school German I tried to explain to him how we had lost our bag on our way to Sweden and how important it was for us to get it back.

"How do I know that you are really on your way to Sweden?" he barked.

"Who would want to stay in this country?" I heard myself answer. I could have bitten off my tongue.

Stubbornly he continued his interrogation until we remembered that Majid had been given a receipt at the lost property office at the airport. This confirmed what we had told him, so he gave us two stamped visa sheets, one for each of us.

Now we were in for the luggage control but I got through without any questions in spite of the samurai sword which showed in my backpack. Majid wasn't so lucky. He was stopped by an East German officer.

"You come with me," I heard the German say. Majid looked about him with a worried look.

"Wait a minute; I'm with my friend here. He does not know any German," I protested as the soldier tried to push me away.

The East-German narrowed his eyes and the corners of his mouth moved downwards as he disgustedly looked us up and down. Mouth open, supercilious eyes. Pupils like open water in a face of ice. He leaned forward and I felt his vodka-stinking breath. I frowned and turned away.

But the officer took that as an insult.

"Raus!" he shouted, taking a step forward.

Full of doubt I stumbled backwards and found my way towards the exit. I opened my mouth to protest but the soldier cocked his weapon. On purpose he was standing too close. Enough said, I'd better be quiet.

There was only a handle on one side. I took one step out on the other side and looked for Majid. However, he was hidden behind the German officer who had started to frisk him.

The opening became increasingly narrow and suddenly the door banged shut behind me and I was all alone in the winter cold with no possibility of going back. I could not move, frozen as an encapsulated scream.

The infamous Wall was covered with graffiti

The minutes that followed were like an eternity, some of the longest in my life. If Majid didn't come out, I might never find out what had happened or where he had gone. I was silently cursing my own helplessness when I heard a well-known voice behind me. I turned around.

"Why do you look so worried?"

His warm eyes smiled.

"Majid! Majid!" I burst out, pressing my voice past the lump in my throat.

We started to laugh at the same time as we met in a huge hug.

It was wonderful to be together again and the horizon which moments before had seemed so dark, was now bright and open. This gave us some hours to find the bag. Full of optimism we jumped on the next train to the airport.

"No, I'm sorry, we have not found it," the woman at the lost property office said and sent me a broad smile. "But don't worry. We will let you know as soon as it turns up."

Once again the darkness of doomsday fell over us and not a word was uttered as we had another date with our old friend Waiting. It became nine and then ten o'clock and still no bag.

At the tourist information we had been told that there were only two trains a day to Sassnitz and Trelleborg in Sweden. One at eleven in the morning and one at eleven at night. The trip to Sweden took about seven hours, so we had to get on the early train, otherwise our visa would expire.

Considering the severity of the East German frontier guards there was no reason to run unnecessary risks. But where was the damned bag?

We wandered on and off restlessly. A quarter past ten. Ten-thirty. Twenty to eleven. A quarter to eleven.

"No, I cannot cope with this any more," I said and walked

once again to the lost property office. The last train for the Central Station was to leave at any minute.

"Excuse me, I wonder if my friend's bag has turned up?"

The man behind the counter looked up with a polite smile.

"Just a minute and I will have a look," he said and disappeared.

Less than half a minute later he turned up again – with the bag in his hand.

"Majid! Majid! They found it," I shouted and gave the man a wet kiss on the forehead.

Majid came to life and ran towards me. With a heart-felt thank you I tore the bag from the man and Majid and I ran for the railway station.

"Look, the train has not left yet," Majid shouted. "We are going to make it!"

Out of breath we jumped into the wagon at the very end of the train and were now waiting impatiently for it to leave. But nothing happened.

The timetable almost knocked us down. We had missed it. This was the evening train which would not leave until eleven at night.

So we were in for a twelve-hour wait in East Berlin. Our visa would expire on the way north but we had no choice. The night train was our last chance. It was in situations like these that I had discovered a new concept of time: one minute = one hour, one hour = one day, one day = one week, one week = eternity.

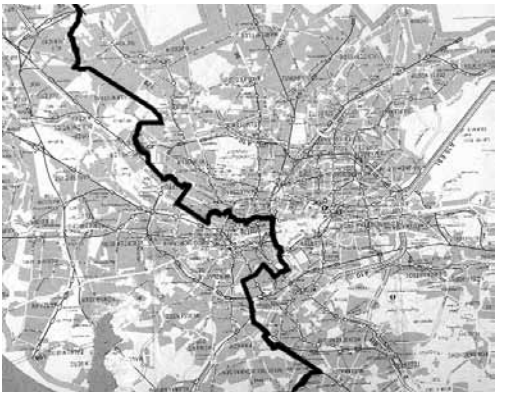
At the same time I was acutely aware of the never-ending HERE and NOW or, as the author Deepak Chopra once said:

"Yesterday is a memory, tomorrow is a mystery, and today is a gift – that's why they call it the present."

However, after we had got the bag everything looked a little

brighter, so we decided to have a closer look at Berlin.

For the last twenty-five years, this strange city had been divided by a thick cement wall that was decorated with colourful graffiti.



The city was split in two by the hated wall

On August 13, 1961, the inhabitants of West Berlin had woken to the insight that they were prisoners in their own city.

For the people of East Germany the wall implied the closing of their last possibility to breathe.

About one hundred miles long and ten feet high it mercilessly cut off streets and parks; it even crossed through entire buildings. Where there were streams, it was replaced by mines and barbed wire.

The wall, or rather, the walls, wound their way in parallel with a death zone of about one hundred yards between them. There were two hundred and seventy watch towers, innumerable mines and automatic machine guns were hidden. Earlier the guards even had specially trained dogs with the primary task of killing.

According to official figures, at least one hundred and thirty-six people were confirmed killed in attempts to cross the Wall into West Berlin.

However, a prominent group of victims claimed that more than two hundred people had been killed trying to flee from East to West Berlin.

A seven-page document dated October 1, 1973, was later

found in an archive in the East German city of Magdeburg, among the worn papers of an East German border guard.

It read *"Don't hesitate to use a firearm, even when the border breakthrough involves women and children, a ruse the traitors have frequently utilized."*

The reason behind this absurd building project was, among other things, the desperation of East German communist leader Walter Ulbricht because of an extensive flight of people to the west. At that time about two point five million had escaped.

Many just walked over to West Berlin which, after the defeat in World War II, was under the control of the allies.

The very same night, the mayor of Berlin, Willy Brandt, claimed in the senate:

"We shall never accept this unnatural split."

He then thought that the western powers would wipe away both barbed wire and cement but the wall remained and was now the very symbol of the struggle between East and West, of the irreconcilability between two political systems, two ideologies, two military pacts.

The differences were immense, not least economically, and it was a weird feeling to have seen modern new cars such as BMW and Mercedes in the western sector and here instead old and worn Trabant and Skoda.

Walter Ulbricht

Even in the shops you could feel the difference in the reduced supply and quality of the goods. In the public conveniences, the paper (if there was any) was either slippery as buttered paper or as coarse as asphalt. The food was grey, brown,

green-brown or off-white like everything else here. No wonder that the man in the street here looked depressed and forlorn.

The snow was more than a foot deep and after a couple of hours we started to look for somewhere to rest our frozen feet.

Tried to escape - shot to death

Soon we were sitting in a cinema that showed Austrian films for a whole week. The show started about noon and continued into the small hours of the night, so the next six hours we partly slept and partly watched festival movies until we at dusk started for the railway station.

When we got there, the train was already at the platform, so we used our tickets to find our seats. The engine was old and worn, the compartments narrow and uncomfortable. But we were on board.

This was it. In about seven hours we would be in Trelleborg meeting the Swedish passport police.

"I have decided to hide my passport," said Majid.

"But don't you remember what the black marketers in Tehran said?" I protested.

They had expressly warned about being caught at the border

with your passport. If you had it, there was a great risk that you would be turned back without any thorough investigation. Then the entire power of decision rested with the local chief of police who could do as he pleased without the immigration authorities interfering.

If, however, you had no passport, the situation changed considerably since nobody could be thrown out without his nationality and identity having been established. This would give us a respite of a couple of weeks, as we could then get hold of a lawyer.

After having considered different hiding places, Majid decided to hide his passport in his left shoe. Outside the January night was dark and icy cold and we were shivering in a futile attempt to get some sleep before meeting our unknown fate.

The monotonous sound of the rails was calming but my worry prevented me from falling asleep. I leaned on the hard backrest and worriedly bit the nail of my thumb.

Without noticing it, I tore off a bit of skin and it started to bleed. I fought both doubt and fear as the fateful hour approached.

NO TURNING BACK

DING DONG. THE FERRY will be landing soon. We hope you have had a nice crossing and wish you welcome in Sweden and Trelleborg.

The crackle of the loudspeakers stopped to be replaced by the strained noise of the engines as the captain reversed.

We had been awake since the ferry left Sassnitz. Before then, however, the East German police had returned our passports, thank God.

Our nervousness had increased and now we were both deep in thought as a slight jerk went through the hull. After all hours of planning and all the risks we had taken, we were now facing the final and decisive test.

The ferry berth in Trelleborg harbour

At the far end of the train a door was opened and foot-

steps were approaching. Each compartment was searched with systematic Swedish thoroughness. I took a deep breath. It was time.

A cold draught swept in through the door as two police officers in blue uniforms entered. The door was closed with a quiet sound.

"Good morning. May I see your passports, please?"

I got up slowly and cleared my throat. "We come directly from Iran," I said. "My friend has no passport. We had to flee …"

The two police officers looked at each other.

"Will you come with us, please."

We were led to an office close by where we were each interrogated. After about fifteen minutes of apparently innocent questions I happened to give an answer that caught the interest of the man and his attitude changed immediately.

I didn't know what I had said, but apparently it was something that had a negative effect on Majid's situation.

I now realized that his ingratiating way had been aimed at luring me into relaxing and saying too much. In spite of my repeated endeavours to explain everything correctly, he didn't give a damn.

After the interrogation was over, I therefore insisted on reading through the report which in several places turned out to be directly faulty. I quickly saw to it that the necessary corrections were made. Just imagine being an ordinary refugee and end up in this situation without even knowing the language.

"Come this way, please," a young customs officer said showing me into another room.

It was frisking time. Piece by piece I undressed and he carefully felt through each single one. I believed that he was on the look out for narcotics, so I felt calm and was just about to throw him my underwear when he put up his hand to stop me.

"That is not necessary. You cannot have hidden a passport there anyway."

"A passport." Terrified I realized how they would undoubtedly find Majid's. I had a feeling as if my heart fell into my shoes

Our escape route via Moscow and East Berlin to Sweden

and my only wish was to shake the man in front of me to try and make him understand or rush in and grab Majid using physical force to get him out of the trap. But according to the orders of the police we were not allowed to say a single word to each other and I had no chance in the world of warning him.

Through the open door I saw him being brought into the frisking room where he had to undress – one piece of clothing after the other, until he was wearing nothing but his left shoe.

One eternally long hour later I was out in the icy Swedish winter. A few minutes ago two police officers had taken Majid along without us even having had a chance to say goodbye. The reason was claimed to be the hidden passport.

Before this one of the officers had barked that "it is no use you trying to commit suicide or something like that. Our Swedish authorities don't fall for that kind of stunt."

"But where are you taking him?" I demanded. "Nothing is to be done without me being contacted first."

He spoke slowly. "We will contact you when and if necessary. The rest is up to the police."

Alone on the pavement, I was filled with worry about Majid. Might he even suspect I had betrayed him during the interrogation? My innermost was total chaos. All I asked was two minutes with my friend. Two minutes. But the police had other ideas.

Now I saw the black police car driving up to fetch Majid. Dragging my feet I walked to the nearest corner when I heard the car door slam shut. As if in a nightmare the car passed by at a distance of a few feet. Squeezed between two sturdy police officers was Majid.

Our eyes met for some long seconds as he turned around in the rear seat staring out of the rear window with a vacant look. The only thing I could do was to first point to myself and

then to him and after that show the Iranian sign for friendship.

Desperate and lost I remained at the street corner. The police car had disappeared long ago and I felt more alone than I had believed possible. I forced myself to try to think rationally. What was the best way to help Majid? The answer was to get myself home as quickly as I could so that I could be near a phone until the authorities contacted me.

By now my family must be beside themselves with worry. We had planned to come to Sweden the previous day. If it had not been for the disappearance of Majid's bag, we would have.

Not until now did I discover that I had no Swedish money. The only coins I had were Iranian *toman* and they would not work in a Swedish phone booth. Crestfallen I had to go back to the customs office and soon after I had a phone in my hand. The signals echoed in my ear.

"Dammegård," said a well-known voice.

"I'm here," were the only words I could muster.

Penniless as I was, my only choice was to stand by the roadside with my thumb up. The sea wind made my blood run faster through my veins but not even the cold could make me come alive. My energy source had run dry.

One lift after the other took me slowly but surely homeward. To me it didn't matter when or if I ever got there. I felt paralysed by all that had happened and it felt as if one single word might make the dams burst that kept my tears back. How would I ever be able to face them?

A violent snowstorm passed the country that day and helpful drivers didn't let me wait very long between lifts. I made time pass by listening to small talk about everything from the price of gasoline to pickled herring. The same thought kept repeating itself in my head:

What had happened to Majid? What had happened to Majid?

The snow caused massive traffic chaos

About five hours after I left Trelleborg, I began to see road signs with well-known place names. My mother and my elder brother had promised to wait for me in a motel close by.

With hindsight, it might seem a little exaggerated but I wasn't yet prepared to meet them and even felt somewhat afraid.

"Would you please stop about half a mile before the next exit?" I asked the driver.

"But this is a busy motorway and I'm not allowed to stop here," he protested.

"Please, it is very important," I begged and soon I was standing at the road side watching the red tail lights disappear in the whirling snow. I needed this time alone to prepare myself. A violent wind tore at my clothes as I slowly started walking towards our meeting. It was almost a storm and the thermometer showed minus four degrees Fahrenheit.

I leaned against the wind and finally reached the exit road, almost blue with cold. There were only some few metres left but the motel was still hidden behind a knoll. My tears were almost choking me as I gathered all my courage and fought on.

"Ole! Ole! Ole!"

It was difficult to hear the shouting in the wind but just

then I noticed something bouncing up and down between the walls of snow. In huge jumps, my brother made a beeline for me over the fence of a small meadow between us. Tears were running down my cheeks as I ran towards him. It reminded me of a Siberian advertising film as we fought our way slowly towards each other through the snowdrifts.

However, just as we were about to fall into each other's arms, we both disappeared into an abyss. The white snow hid a deep ditch. But who cared about that now? So we found each other under the snow and I have a dim memory of hugging him until he was blue in the face. He represented the security and warmth I had been without for so long.

During my time in Iran and Pakistan, I had mostly been the one trying to support everybody else in all conceivable ways. I had simply not dared let go for fear of collapsing. Now I was home again, at least my body was, and all my pent-up grief came to the surface.

Leaning heavily on my brother I made it through the deep snow to the motel. As if through a fog, I saw my mother who stood there with tears in her eyes.

"It is ok now," I heard her say. "You just cry, you are home again."

I only remember the days that followed as if in a vacuum where memories and reality were mixed without any connection to time and space. The only real thing was the pain and the grief. My entire soul felt like an open wound.

My sister has later told me that it was scary to see me shuffle about like a decrepit old man. Mostly I was just sitting wearing a jacket Zari had made for me and listening to Iranian music. Every time I tried to speak, tears welled up in my eyes.

My thoughts were still in Iran, but most of all with Majid.

What was going to happen now?

Where was he?

Would the police deport him without notifying me?

Questions, questions, questions and no answers.

One day passed without anything happening. Two days. Still nothing only more questions. The hours were dragging along. Time and time again my Mom and I sat weeping together. I think that not until now did she truly understand what she had caused when she put an end to our plans to get Majid out of Iran.

On the other hand she told me about her agony before acting as she did. The police had informed her that Majid without a doubt would be deported the minute he set foot on Swedish ground and that he would then never have another chance of coming back. I began grasping her worry concerning what would happen to him if he were forced to go back.

By the irony of fate, the death of Mammad had improved Majid's chances of obtaining asylum. But how cruel is life sometimes? What is the value of freedom if the price is losing a brother? When you must leave everything and everyone that mean anything to you?

Late at night on day three it happened. Outside, the moon was lighting up the snow-clad forest round the house. It was cold.

"Ole, phone for you," my father shouted from the sitting room.

At once I was wide awake. I rushed in and tore the phone out of his hand. The past awoke inside me and I felt rigid with adrenalin. At the other end I heard my mother's voice.

The previous day she had gone back to Gothenburg.

"Majid just called. They have released him. Do you hear me? They have let him go! He is in a refugee camp outside Trelleborg. Wait a second, I wrote down the address. Here it

is: 46, Syster Jennys väg."

The night seemed interminable while I waited to be reunited with Majid. At this time of day there was no possibility of getting to Trelleborg, so I had to be patient. Wait, wait, wait. In some way waiting had become an integrated part of my life.

Before sun-up I was on my way. Nothing could stop me and I felt my strength coming back.

"You just come on!" I whispered to myself while thinking of our future problems with the police in Trelleborg. At last I was on home ground.

After about four hours I was in Malmö where I quickly found the road to Trelleborg. Fortune was with me this morning and a kind driver soon took me all the way to the area where Majid was supposed to be. The wind and the smell of seaweed reminded me that I was at the southern shore of Sweden. I felt exhilarated and restless.

It turned out to be difficult to find my way round the district and I had to ask my way several times before at long last, I stood in front of the right building. For safety's sake I checked the address once more. Sure, this was it.

With unsure steps I went up the stairs. On the ground floor nobody answered the door, so I ran upstairs. One of the doors had no name-plate, so I took a deep breath and knocked.

After a while the door was opened by a small man with watchful eyes and an enormous moustache.

"*Salam, man Ole hastam,* I'm Ole," I said in my halting Farsi.

The man's face changed instantly and in good English he asked me to come in.

"Welcome, my friend," he said with a warm smile and explained that Majid had just gone out to phone me.

What I didn't know then was that I was to become really good friends with several of the men in this dreary flat.

When I entered they were trying to make sense of the latest rumours. They were desperate people who had a long road ahead of them edged with questions. Some of them were to be deported to an uncertain fate, others had a future in a sanctuary and life in so-called liberty, far from family and old friends.

After about half an hour we heard voices outside the door. Everybody looked up in fear. Could it be the police coming for somebody to be deported? But when the door opened, I heard his quiet voice.

"Hi, Majid," I said.
"Hi, Ole," he said.

We were together again.

SMUGGLER – ROBIN HOOD

THE MONTHS AFTER OUR arrival in Sweden were like one unending switchback. Sometimes when things went well, we felt fine but mostly everything seemed dark.

My Swedish friends bid me welcome back and I felt their enthusiasm, which, however, after a few minutes returned to the same old everyday talk as before I left. They refused to accept what I tried to impart. I told them about my travels but it was like dragging along an unwilling dog on a leash. My experiences frightened them.

Still they gave me a feeling of security, they reminded me where I came from, of my old life and of my inner change.

When I was alone, I was, however, torn to bits by a real chaos of emotions. What had been the meaning of everything that had happened?

My Welcome Home cake

Restlessly I searched through all the events.

The feeling of freedom I earlier had built up in spite of difficulties now suddenly evaporated. All my experiences and emotions seemed so distant and strange. I was simply burned out.

These months were tough for both Majid and me. However, what were my worries compared to his?

Mostly he withdrew into the world of memories. I could feel how hard it was for him to justify to himself that he had made it while others were still stuck back there, without hope, without joy, without life.

So this was the goal he had fought so hard for over so many years. A struggle aimed at a paradise somewhere far away. Now he was here and all he could feel was sadness.

He simply could not allow himself to taste life but remained in the chains. Sometimes he disappeared in deep depression where he was almost unreachable.

His dark eyes were pools of grief the likes of which I had never seen. The difference between his life and that of any ordinary Swedish twenty-three year old was indescribable.

How many of us realize how good our life is up here in the west? I thought while trying to make head or tail of all that had happened. How important are liberty and democracy? Concepts most of us take for granted. In other parts of the world people die for privileges that we often don't even appreciate.

The days passed while we tried to solve the problems that turned up along the way. But we had hardly passed one hindrance before another one appeared.

However, Majid never allowed himself to be happy at what we accomplished. Nothing seemed to satisfy him. No matter what we did, it should have been different.

Sometimes it went so far that I became both sad and angry. Later on I was to see similar reactions in other refugees whose anxiety was expressed in the strangest ways.

At regular intervals Majid was summoned to interrogations at the police station. Here we met a wonderful female police officer named Brita Appelquist who supported us in many ways during the time to come. It was she who, together with her superiors, later had a deporting order for Majid cancelled.

The Trelleborg police didn't consider Majid entitled to political asylum. Apparently, they demanded that you had a bullet in your head even before you crossed the border.

When at long last we had done everything we possibly could, there wasn'thing else to do but wait. This time for the final decision by the Immigration Authorities.

There had been some kind of culture shock between my mother and Majid which started the very first time they met, when she spontaneously went up to him and gave him a welcoming hug. Majid had become stiff as a board and his eyebrows reached the roots of his hair. Or as he himself so poetically expressed it:

"It was like something between shock and death."

But as time passed they had become very close and one day they went together to Gothenburg

Under de iskallas ögonen av en förtryckare

Iran – ett land utan hopp

One of the articles I got published

where Majid had decided to try and make a new life for himself.

For myself I tried to return to everyday life. I spent the days working while using my spare time visiting schools, organizations and churches in order to prepare the Swedes for the problem with refugees that was now increasing.

It felt extremely important to tell people about the tough conditions from where the Iranians were coming, anything to try to counteract racism and prejudice.

At the same time, I succeeded in publishing articles in different newspapers where I used the pictures we had been given at the Ministry of Propaganda in Tehran.

When I came home from work a couple of months later, my mother had left a message on my telephone answering machine. I had no doubt what it was about. Asylum or deportation? These were the only two alternatives.

I took a long deep breath, lifted the phone and dialled the number. The signals echoed in my ear.

"Hello?"

"Hi, Majid!"

"*Salam. Hâlet chetore?*"

"Thank you, just fine," I said. "And you?"

"*Merçi, kheyli khubam*. Were you upset when you heard our message?"

"No," I answered in spite of the fact that I had been worried sick.

After some small talk we approached the most important issue of all.

"You know, I have been thinking very much about the days we spent together. Do you remember the time in Tehran? The thriller? How worn and exhausted we felt? Do you remember?"

"How could I ever forget?" I sighed.

"Try to imagine that it all turned out well. I would be feeling very strange. Just like now. My entire body would be full of an indescribable and wonderful feeling. Do you understand what I mean?"

"Sure," I said and let my thoughts go back to all that had happened after we met on the bus in Turkey so very long ago.

"With all that behind us, there is something that I want to share with you," Majid continued slowly.

He kept silent for a few seconds before he let go the fabulous news.

"My permission to stay!"

"You are joking!"

My doubt changed to a scream of joy.

"No, my friend," Majid laughed happily. "Now we don't have to fight any longer. It is over! I have been given a passport that is automatically renewed every three years for the rest of my life. My friend, all this you have given me. If you only knew how I would love to have you here right now!"

"Ooooooooh, you've just knocked me out," I replied, tears choking me.

"I promise that you are here in my heart and I hope to see you really soon. I shall never forget the time we have shared. Now I'm free. Thank you, my friend."

"Welcome to Sweden," I whispered as I slowly put the receiver down and gave in to my emotions.

Majid was free, free, free at long last!

"Tehran April 20, 1985

Ole and Mohsen friends forever.

Hello my friend, dear Ole! I hope you will be good and always be happy and have a nice life. I have received your letter and I become very happy.

Dear friend, when I read your letter I remind that nice days which we had me, you and Majid. I hope will be able to come there and repeat those days which we had before. I'm glad for have good friend like you. I hope see you again. My family has great hello to you and I great very hello to your family.

Your friend Mohsen

VIVA L'AMORE!"

I was desperately scratching my head. I was surrounded by mounds of notes, flight timetables and travel brochures.

From Tehran with Polish airline Lot, via Moscow to Warsaw. then on by train to Copenhagen and then cross the Sound to Malmö?

Or we can buy a ticket taking him out via Damascus to Copenhagen and then fetch him by car?

But how about passport and visa?

The months quickly passed while we did everything we could to find a way out of hell for Mohsen.

The stream of refugees to Western Europe had increased like an avalanche and each of the

Alternative escape routes

countries was now trying to stop the invasion.

Day by day the situation became increasingly difficult and we seemed to need a miracle to get him out. Time was limited and if we were to have the least chance, we had to act quickly. But how?

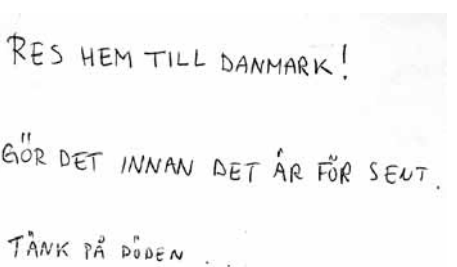
Not a day passed without Mohsen occupying my thoughts and I felt anxiety sneaking up on me as I watched how the authorities stopped one loophole after the other. Racism was beginning to grow in Sweden and the government used dirty diplomatic tricks to choke the flow of refugees.

And as if that wasn't enough, after my mother had written a refugee-friendly letter to the press, she received the following anonymous letter as well as similar phone calls.

"GO BACK TO DENMARK!
DO IT BEFORE IT IS TOO LATE.
THINK ABOUT DEATH!"

Simultaneously things had gone from bad to worse in the life of Mohsen. Air raids against Tehran had increased and several times bombs had landed only a few blocks from his home, which was close to a large oil refinery.

Furthermore, Iraq had again started sending Scud missiles at the Iranian capital, missiles that Saddam Hussein threatened to arm with chemical warheads. The mere thought of the effect in a multimillion city like Tehran made my hair stand on end.


RES HEM TILL DANMARK!

GÖR DET INNAN DET ÄR FÖR SENT.

TÄNK PÅ DÖDEN . .

The anonymous letter to my Mom

On top of this, the regime had started another tough

offensive towards the opposition. In a newspaper article, the Iranian minister of the interior Ali Akbar Mohtashemi had claimed that all dissidents in the prisons all over the country had been executed.

"Let us make this clear once and for all. All who have been arrested as well as those who have any connection to them have been executed since they had declared war against the Iranian people."

According to reports from Amnesty International and the UN this concerned several thousands of people whose lives had been wasted in this way.

The few times we succeeded in getting through to Mohsen on the phone, we tried to cheer him up. But words and reality are two different things. In the background, we could sometimes hear the Iraqi bombs detonating close by.

Since he had been left behind alone, his despair had increased and there was great risk that he might do something stupid, something that could cost him his life.

Now and again it seemed as if the only possibility was for me to go back to Iran. While I was there I had established contact with some people who were now said to have found a safe way across the mountain massifs into Turkey.

But here the risks were overwhelming for the *pasdaran* had increased their surveillance of the winding mountain paths. As a terrible warning, they had at least once shot down captured refugees. These had been lined up at the frontier station of Bazargan and mowed down in cold blood in front of ordinary travellers. So we decided to leave this as the very last resort.

I had also come into contact with Kayla again, the lovely girl I had met in Greece and she had unselfishly offered to come to Sweden and then go with me to Iran and marry Mohsen, thus

giving him "access" to England. Anything to rescue him. What guts and what a human being. And to offer this for someone she had never even met!

AKTENSKAPSCERTIFIKAT
1986-11-04 FB 3553
Dammegaard, Olee---
580730-9355
Danmark
Torsg. 16 573 00 Tranås
McGarvey, Michaela Anne---
640718-3349
Storbrittannien
Torsg. 16 573 00 Tranås
Katarina Hallefjord, kyrk. kom.

Kayla's and my "marriage certificate"

But for us to travel together, we needed papers showing that we were married, otherwise we would not even be able to sit beside each other on the bus, stay at hotels, etc.

We could later get rid of these documents before we contacted the Iranian authorities for the marriage to Mohsen. However, thanks to a local priest with guts we were soon armed with documents full of very official looking stamps and signatures that seemed to prove that we were a married couple.

Several times, we went to refugee camps to find out how the latest arrivals had made it into the country. Most of them gave us the same answer. A smuggling organization had opened possibilities for Iranian refugees to go via Dubai and Turkey to Sweden. Slowly it dawned on us that this was the best possible solution at this time. It would cost quite a lot of money but what was money compared with the life of Mohsen?

After some phone calls to the Human Helpers as they called themselves, we succeeded in solving the problem. Money changed owners and the responsibility was placed in the hands of the smugglers.

We could do no more than wait – once again.

The leader of this smuggling gang was a man named Amir Heidari. After he came to Sweden in 1979, according to what he claimed himself, he had baffled both police and authorities by getting between fifty and sixty thousand people to Scandinavia, Canada, USA and Spain.

"My incentive is solely political and humanitarian," Heidari claimed in several newspaper articles where he openly put his cards on the table and explained what he was doing.

"The industrialized countries are making fortunes at the expense of the poor people. And now the refugees demand some of what has been stolen from them. It that so strange?"

According to the police, Amir Heidari had personally made approximately six million Swedish kronor from his human smuggling.

"That is not so," was Heidari's reply. "I make nothing on this, on the contrary I personally run great risks in my efforts to help my countrymen. On the other hand, I don't deny that the money is mine. This money is the basis of my enterprise. In fact it involves much larger sums. Mostly I'm juggling about twenty million kronor in order to keep things rolling. But I have nothing to hide."

Amir Heidari

The smuggling of people from Iran to Scandinavia happened in almost the same way every time and Amir Heidari's price was between six hundred and fifty and fifteen hundred dollars per head, sometimes more.

"The price depends entirely on who is escaping. A rich person pays more, a poor one less."

After our negotiations with him, I knew that this was true. I had person-

ally seen how Heidari had accepted to smuggle in some people completely without payment.

The escape package covered: transport on lorries to small towns close to the Turkish border. After that between two and five days walk across the closely watched mountains into Turkey. After this the small groups of refugees were collected on the Turkish side in buses that took them to Istanbul where they were placed in flats waiting for the completion of certain formalities.

"I pay at least three hundred dollars for one false passport," explained Heidari. "On top of that is the plane ticket which costs twice the normal price, bribes to police, passport inspectors, personnel at airports, etc.

Everybody is aware of what is going on, so we simply have to buy the entire system."

From Istanbul the trip continued by air to either Denmark or Germany. Here Heidari had several hotels of his own that took care of the refugees and on the way each one was told what to say to both police and other authorities.

"Every time we arrest somebody who motivates his application for political asylum with "humanitarian reasons" we know that Heidari is behind it," the police explained irritably.

"Bureaucrats are like robots," Heidari continued unaffected. "If they don't understand the connection at once, the result is immediate deportation. That is why it is so important to express yourself in the right way."

"In Sweden, for instance, bureaucracy rules and not humanitarian consideration for the welfare of the individual."

"The police might as well be aware that I shall always be one step ahead of them," he went on. "Even if Sweden were to build a Chinese wall round the entire country, it still would not help. The stream of refugees is like an epidemic that cannot be stopped."

A law had already been named after Heidari, Lex Heidari, and innumerable police officers wanted nothing better than to see him behind bars.

"But I don't care," Heidari explained. "I'm not afraid, a couple of years in prison will only give me time to read some books and recuperate. I need a holiday and the organization goes on without me."

"The Cause is the most important thing. The right of people to escape from oppression and misery.

With Mohsen constantly in my heart and thoughts I could only agree. Later on there was quite an uproar in connection with the court trial of Amir Heidari. After the prosecutor had mentioned all the indictments, the judge asked about Heidari's own opinion concerning the trial.

The Iranian got up and opened a four-page manuscript.

"Please be seated," the judge protested.

"Thank you, I would rather stand," the accused replied turning to the journalists and public in the courtroom and started to read: "Ladies and gentlemen."

This became too much for the court and the proceedings were interrupted for some hours, until it was agreed that he be allowed to read his speech. In so many words he claimed that he, Heidari, was completely innocent and that he could not accept that the court interfered with his business with his own countrymen.

Människohandlaren vände ryggen åt rätten

AFTONBLADET

Människohandlaren

"Ni ska inte lägga er i mina affärer"

Tjänade minst 4 miljoner

Heidari turned his back on the court

After this, he

sat down with his back to the court and started to read a thick book, totally uninterested in what was going on in the courtroom.

Stormrik på flyktingar

Polisen: Han tjänade 90 miljoner på människosmugglingen

Polisen tror att han tjänat 90 miljoner kronor på människosmuggling. I morgon inleds rättegången i Uppsala mot Amir Heidari, 36, som smugglat tusentals iranier till Sverige. Själv hävdar han att han gjort det av ideella motiv. Om åklagaren inte kan bevisa att han gjort det i vinningssyfte kan han inte fällas.

SIDORNA 6–7

Amir Heidari – affärsman eller idealist?

The Heidari case made huge headlines

He was later given a prison sentence and at the same time several other countries were queuing up to have him extradited and dragged into court.

A crafty smuggler of people – or a contemporary Robin Hood?

THE TRELLEBORG DRAMA

THE FOG WAS DENSE over the flat lands of southern Sweden as we were on our way towards Trelleborg at the beginning of October 1985. In front of us cars appeared out of the secretive morning veil.

We were four in the car. Apart from myself and Majid, there were my mother and Mohammad, one of the guys we had met earlier in the flat on Syster Jennys väg.

Now and again I looked in the rear view mirror and noticed how changed and strong Majid had become during the last months. Not long ago the slightest problem had been enough to knock him down. Now he was chatting and joking with Mohammad and that felt great. If something went awry, we would not let ourselves be stopped but would continue to find other possibilities. "Never give up" had become our motto.

The last time we had talked to the smuggler, he had explained that Mohsen was coming on the ferry from Sassnitz at about eight. The interrogations might take quite some time, so we considered that we were out in good time.

Now we passed the first road signs showing the name of the city; "AT LAST – WELCOME TO TRELLEBORG." The

words rang false somehow.

The closer we came to the ferry berth, the more silent we became. We all knew that the moment of truth was approaching. Had he made it?

A large white ferry was at anchor at the quay but the entire area seemed deserted. I looked at the others. It seemed to be the wrong ferry. Disappointed we got into the car again and drove off to the housing area where Majid and I had met again so very long ago.

The road circled the area that consisted of brown two-storey buildings. We parked the car and went out into the cool autumn wind. All the time we were on the look-out for the dark blue VW buses that transported the refugees to the camps.

"We might as well be discreet," said Majid. "There is always the risk that Mohsen's situation gets worse if the police find out that we have been waiting for him."

Everything here was quiet and most of the flats seemed empty, but if you let your eyes wander over the buildings, frightened faces could be seen in the shadows behind the windows.

"Wait a minute, I will be right back," said Majid and disappeared between the buildings in an attempt to find out something about Mohsen.

"I don't understand this," he said worried as he came back. "Nobody has arrived today. But an Iraqi guy told me that there is a hotel in town where some of the new-comers are taken after their first interrogation. Should we go there and check?"

On the way to get Mohsen

Ten minutes later we were outside the "hotel" which turned out to be an old block of flats. Inside we encountered several

Iranians who looked at the visitors in open-eyed wonder. Apparently it was a rare occurrence to see Swedes in this place. We asked everyone we saw but nobody had seen or heard anything about Mohsen.

"I'm going to call the police," I suggested as I descended the stairs in five strides. "They must know what is going on."

Said and done. Soon I was in a phone booth with the receiver in my hand.

"Please be careful," whispered Majid.

"Don't worry," I calmed him. "I know what I'm doing."

"Police," said an anonymous woman.

"Hi, my name is Peter Larsson. I work freelance for the paper Svenska Dagbladet and would like to interview some of the latest arrivals from Iran concerning the East German police system."

I was connected to a male police officer.

"Jakobsson," said a man with a local accent.

After my explanation I was told that this wasn't a matter for the police but for the social authorities. I put in another coin to try again.

Even this time luck was against me. The woman in charge of the newcomers wasn't in at the moment and the girl at the exchange had no information. But she was sure that no new refugees had arrived during the night. Sweat broke out on my forehead. What had happened? Why had he not come?

We decided to wait for the woman from the Social Office to return. After about one hour, I tried again.

"I'm sorry, she is still out," said the girl at the exchange."

Who could help us out of this? Why not the Tourist Information? Maybe they had the address of the refugee camps or a timetable for the ferries. It was worth a try. We walked hurriedly to the Tourist Office where a kind woman helped us with everything we needed.

I looked through the timetables. There were five ferries per day. One started from Sassnitz at eight o'clock. Slowly I came to understand that it might all depend on a misunderstanding. The ferry left Germany at eight o'clock and didn't arrive at eight o'clock. That meant that we still had a chance. This ferry was to arrive at five to twelve, so we went off to find somewhere to pass the time.

The hours dragged by and several times I shook my wristwatch to see whether it was still working. After an entire lifetime, it was at last five to twelve and we went out to meet fate.

However, the ferry wasn't only on time, it was early.

During some strained and silent minutes, we let our eyes wander over the ship trying to see Mohsen. And there – on the gangway. I nudged my mother with my elbow.

"The guy over there in the red jacket looks very much like him."

But as he, according to information, was supposed to be with ten other refugees, I let go of the thought until Majid came running excitedly claiming to have seen Mohsen. Could this really be true?

It was. However, our joy abated somewhat when we saw Mohsen drag his feet along on the huge open asphalt space with three large police officers around him. His face was sunken and pale with dark rings under lifeless eyes. He was skinny and his hair was dull. Twenty-five years old and already an aged shadow of his former self.

My eyes filled with tears of both joy and sorrow while we watched his long walk to the police office. It was like seeing a man walking to his execution. But for his own sake we could not reveal that we were there.

"Just imagine that! He really is here after all. It is incredible," I burst out and gave my mother a huge hug, as Majid suddenly

came running this time with an ashen face.

"I think they are going to deport him. The police have just taken him to the other ferry berth where another ferry is waiting."

Now we had to act fast. While we were running towards the police office, a plan formed in my head. Our chance was that I went in and introduced myself as a representative of Amnesty International with the task of receiving Mohsen. Hopefully this would prevent him being deported.

During all my life I have been taught not to lie but during this year where I had faced threats, oppression and violations of human rights, I had learned to allow the law of my heart to decide what was right and wrong.

When I arrived at the building where Mohsen and the police officers had disappeared, I was faced with a sign "No admittance for unauthorized persons." I took a deep breath and was preparing myself, when a uniformed civil servant turned up.

"Well, hi there. Are you working here?" I asked pretending to know the man.

Before he could answer, I asked the next question.

"Do you know if Peter is at work today? He forgot his driver's license at home, so I have come to give it to him."

"I honestly don't know," said the man. "But come with me, we can ask at reception."

The doors opened in front of us. He entered and walked down a short flight of stairs and past the reception closely followed by me. I was inside!

Our footsteps echoed in the corridor with its fluorescent lights. I glanced furtively around me while exchanging a few words with the kind guy. My hands were clammy and cold. Then I took the chance.

"But look! There he is." I exclaimed and patted him grate-

fully on the shoulder. "Thanks a lot for your help."

With these words, I disappeared round the nearest corner.

Now I had to find Mohsen. I walked along the corridor pretending to be at home. One office after the other on both sides but everywhere I just saw people in uniform.

"Where are you?" I muttered nervously as I searched on. Where are you, Mohsen djan?

I had almost given it up when out of the corner of my eye I discovered the colours of a police uniform as well as Mohsen's red jacket. I stepped back and leaned against the wall so that he would not see me. Then everything was under control.

As long as he was being interrogated, there wasn'thing to fear. The main thing was that he had not been forced on board the ferry back to East Germany.

Relieved I walked back the way I had come and nodded happily at the man who had helped me in.

"Everything ok?" he asked kindly.

"Sure, now everything is fine."

The cold autumn wind hit my face as the automatic doors once again opened. The immediate danger was over and at the reception I had been told that the other ferry didn't leave until nine at night and was destined for Travemünde. In West Germany.

According to Swedish law, the police could only deport a refugee back to the country from which he had come, in Mohsen's case East Germany.

On the other side of the transit hall I noticed Majid behind a wall signalling me to come over. Thinking back I think we waited at this cement wall for a couple of hours, but when we were in the middle of it all it felt like years.

"There," whispered Majid suddenly pointing his finger.

Sure thing. There was Mohsen with a woman of about

thirty-five, most probably from the Social Office. They walked towards the cars in front of the building. In excited silence we waited until they got into a yellow VW Golf before we ran back to our own car. I believed that they were on their way out of Trelleborg, so I turned with screaming tyres and drove to a filling station close by.

"Don't let him see you," I warned the guys in the rear seat.

"But, damn it, she is going the other way," Majid exclaimed.

Screaming tyres once again when we crossed the street. Instead of going out of town she had driven over the crossing and was now disappearing among narrow one-way streets.

"She might be on her way to the old block of flats," said my mother and sure enough, the Golf stopped by the "hotel."

If the tricks work in movies they should work even in real life, I thought. I parked the car and sneaked up to the street corner. So that Mohsen would not discover me, I pretended to look in a shop window and reflected in the windowpane I saw them approach. I turned around and pulled up my collar as they passed right behind me. It was really he. Large as life, just a few yards from me.

My heart was pounding as I ran back to the car.

They had just disappeared through the door of the old block of flats.

So close, after such a long time, so much work and worry.

Fifteen minutes later it was time to act. Since nobody would recognize my mother and Mohammad, they went first to check the situation. Majid and I were still in the car. We tried to talk but the words stuck in our throats. Instead I felt his strong hand on my shoulder.

Some unbearable minutes later, we heard Mohammad whistling shrilly. I almost flew out of the car with a joyful lump in my throat. The street seemed to quake under my feet during

the last steps to the building. The last steps. Through the door, up the stairs two steps at a time.

My pulse was pounding. Two doors in front of us but which one? Majid fumbled with the doorknob. The door opened squeakily.

"Mohsen!" we exclaimed with one voice.

The old man sat huddled up on a kitchen chair. When he slowly turned towards us I was once again shocked to see what life had done to him.

Slowly his dull eyes recognized us and an exhausted smile lit up his sunken face. We hugged and cried.

One long year was over.

And the circle had been closed.

This was reality.

He was here.

Here, here, here!!!

At last Mohsen was here!

Reporter:
"Mister Gandhi, what do you
think of western civilization?"

Mahatma Gandhi:
"I think it would be a great idea!"

REFLECTIONS

IF WE HAD ONLY known…

Sweden 1929: in a memo from the Ministry for Foreign Affairs the passport officials are requested to be extra vigilant concerning the religion of German travellers.

Sweden 1933-1939: an increasing number of Jews is leaving Germany but the Swedish authorities "don't want to create an anti-Jewish opinion" by allowing large immigration. The finishing touch was on September 1, two days after the outbreak of World War II, when a whole boatload of Jewish refugees was turned away from Swedish territorial waters.

In the summer of 1945, Sweden slowly begins to realize what had been going on in the German concentration camps. "If we had only known…"

The Western World today: new wars and new refugees at the frontiers. How do we react this time? Have we learned anything from the terrible things that happened so long ago?

At regular intervals I long back to my earlier life where "standing up for people with problems" meant putting a coin in a

collection box. It is always so much easier to pay your way out of a bad conscience than to actually do something yourself.

"Of course we must help our fellow human beings wherever they are," say countries like Sweden and send one million after the other to projects in countries far, far away from our own borders.

One example was the economic support to certain industrial projects in Vietnam to which we sent more than three hundred million Swedish kronor every year without anybody raising an eyebrow. But if someone with dark hair and terrified eyes knocks at our door, the tune changes suddenly.

"Bloody wogs, refugees of convenience who come here only because of our welfare state. Drug dealers, pimps, terrorists and murderers, what do they think they are doing here?"

Yes, what are they doing here, in the stronghold of liberty and democracy where curate Nils Sjöström some years ago was nominated as "the Bravest Man in Sweden"? Only because he had done the only decent and humane thing – helping his fellow human beings, in this case refugees.

"I wouldn't call myself a racist, but… "

Do you recognize the tune? Sure thing. And if we are completely honest, these feelings exist within all of us, to a greater or lesser degree. But at the same time we deny this by vehemently talking about "what the white man did to the poor Indians. It makes you ashamed to be white."

The Apartheid in South Africa is another example of how we were horrified at the racism of the world while we the next moment change the subject by saying, "By the way, have you heard what the Gypsies did the other day?" or "Sure they work hard in that pizzeria but how can they afford a new Volvo? I don't want to say anything but we all know what those people are doing, don't we?"

Then there is of course another category among us who say nothing since they would then get a stamp on their perfect white image, but who instead think all the more. Or what about those who "really stand up to help our poor refugees" in a colossal ego-trip in the face of the world."

"Aren't they just wonderful? Imagine being able to learn a new language so fast. Fantastic, incredible" patting the refugee on the head and treating him as it he was a sort of feeble-minded underdeveloped being.

Which is worse? I don't know. But what I do know is that it would be so very much easier for all of us if we stopped being afraid and instead started seeing each other as individuals instead of as "one of those."

We are all different, with both good and bad inside, and there is no great difference between a local scumbag and a scumbag from somewhere else. And what is there to say that the person I see as a fine guy measures up to the evaluations of somebody else?

The Bible tells us how important it is that we dare see the best in the people around us.

"Yes, but they only come here to take our jobs. And they are given so bloody much! They all have new clothes, fine flats and colour television. That is more than what we ordinary people get, and we have been working our guts out all our lives and paid our taxes!"

How often have I encountered these, by now rather worn, arguments. And sure, I have sometimes felt these emotions myself. So why not try to elucidate the concepts a little.

If, for example, we take Iran which is only one of many countries that suffered and is still under a very strict regime, it is important to point out that the majority have escaped from Iran and not to Sweden.

But through our own propaganda about freedom, democracy and peace to the world around us we ourselves have made Sweden seem like paradise on earth. Who can then reproach these people that they choose Sweden and not other countries? After all we ourselves have given them the impression that we are so wonderful.

The refugee is an individual whom the Swedish man in the street most of all would like to see as a sort of beggar. We prefer to look at him from head to toe where he is sitting in his misery so that we can buy our way out. But if he is strong, proud and without scars from torture, we find it much more difficult to cope with the situation.

Most of us have become so paralysed by the system and the life we are living, that we have lost the capacity to just sit down and listen, really listen, when someone is trying to tell us about his difficult life.

Dare we look into his eyes when he explains what he has lost in the fight for life where the great powers much too often decide the rules of the game and where we by our way of thinking and our international industries have responsibility for the misery? Money talks, and nothing else.

For a very long time I lived with the impression that the people of this country had a generous attitude towards others, an attitude that was supported by competent authorities. Today, however, I know better. Now I have experienced how authorities pervert the law when things get tough, how they twist what is right to become a shield for themselves and not an aid to the individual.

Naturally one should not only complain.

Economically we give the people who come here seeking asylum within our borders a good new start in life. But even this is done in an exaggerated way that only enhances the prejudice

of Mister Svensson of Sweden.

Materially there is nothing to complain about, on the contrary. But what value has a new pair of trousers if people hurry past you when you try to ask the way or if they would rather stand in the bus instead of sitting down beside you?

Sure, the refugees get quite a lot, but no more than an ordinary man on the street who is entitled to social welfare. And who is making the decision about how much to give them? You and I through the politicians we ourselves have elected. So don't blame the refugee for the system we have organized ourselves.

Even though this happened quite a few years ago, I still remember several examples of how a refugee was almost forced to accept things he would rather be without. And as far as I know, little has happened since then.

A four-room flat was assigned to a friend of mine as that was the only kind of flat available. Every single one of my friends got this.

Furthermore, a bed, a sofa, a table and a couple of lamps were allotted to them so that they could try to make a sort of home in the empty space. So there he and all his friends sat each in his own huge flat that echoed every time he moved

"But couldn't I share a flat with one of my friends instead," my friend asked the people at the Social Office. "Then you can give this fine flat to somebody who needs it more than me."

But, that was impossible. The regulations had it that every single person should have his own flat, so there. It ended by my friend moving in with his pal so that they could furnish one flat with their combined furniture. The other flat is, as far as I know, still empty, with the heating on and rent paid with our tax money.

We should not forget the Swedish families that live in their two and three-room flats and who look at the refugees with envy in their eyes wherever they go. Due among other things

to the "four-room flats."
Another example is when Mohsen was to be given spring and summer clothes. He already had some trousers and shirts. The only thing he wanted in Sweden was his freedom and the possibility to breathe, to exist. He was totally uninterested in clothes and other material things.

But he wasn't going to get away with that. You see, the State Immigration Authority paid back to every single municipality all they had paid to their refugees during the year. Every single refugee had to get exactly the same, neither more nor less. If there wasn't a cross in every box on the form, the Immigration Office wasn't going to pay.

"But I don't need these clothes. It is much better that you give the money to some Swede who needs it or to the starving people in Ethiopia," he repeated to the responsible woman at the refugee camp. This woman was much more flexible than some of her colleagues but she kept on insisting. If he didn't accept the clothes, none of the others would get any (because of the forms). After a lot of nagging, he finally accepted a pair of bathing trunks. But when he left the shop the following day, he was carrying a bag of clothes.

Many other customers had made horrified faces behind his back at the figure on the cash register and now they were in a hurry home to tell all their neighbours.

This is only one small example of how bureaucracy takes over and how we, in the long run, make a rod for the back of the refugees instead of helping them.

Of course, not all of them are as persistent as Mohsen, but gladly accept what is offered them. And who can blame them? Who wouldn't?

The human being is truly a strange creature. And one of the weirdest phenomena is the fear of the unknown, a fear that has

become very tangible after the start of the debate concerning refugees.

But isn't it time that we open our eyes and dare look at what is going on in our beautiful country? Sure, we have difficulties with unemployment and inflation. There are even people who talk about the "Poverty West."

And it is in situations like this that we humans start looking for scapegoats. If there are no wogs or Jews available, it will soon be people with a southern or northern Swedish accent, or fat people or redheads who are being harassed. When the pent-up fear and hatred well up inside us, it does not matter who the scapegoat is. And then what is the difference between this and what happened in Nazi-Germany even if the proportions differ?

It is truly a shame that so much prejudice and racism are allowed to ferment. How much is not due to sheer ignorance? Of all the people who with great conviction can judge entire peoples – not single individuals but peoples – how many of us has had personal contact with a refugee?

How many have dared to start talking with "one of those" in an attempt to find out who this person really is behind the shell of prejudice and rumours? How many?

All too few, which is a shame for both us and the refugees. Because among these wogs and others there are lots of wonderful people who could become your friend and neighbour if you only dared. There is so much we can learn from each other and which could help us make the world a better place.

How easy is it not to sit in a rich and perfect country like ours and judge?

"He is somebody's son" – have you ever thought about this properly? Whoever you meet, he or she is somebody's son or daughter.

Somewhere in the world there is a parent or parents who worry about exactly this person, hoping with all their heart that their "offspring" will be seen and acknowledged by their surroundings as the unique and wonderful human being that they are?

Klippan is a small town in the south of Sweden where a murder was committed some years ago. A young black man was passing through town and happened to meet a gang of skinheads who stabbed him several times.

Afterwards he was lying in some shrubs calling for help but nobody heard him or helped him. So he died.

On TV they had an interview with a friend of one of the perpetrators, a skinhead wearing black boots and obviously a very convinced neo-Nazi who shrugged and said, "Just too bad. That guy was in the wrong place at the wrong time, so what?"

He was very stuck-up and apparently didn't care in the very least what had happened to the black man.

A few months later I happened to turn the TV on and there was this youngster again, completely transformed and I hardly recognized him. There was a gentleness about him that was beautiful and he was saying, "I saw myself in that programme and suddenly discovered that I could not go on living with all that hatred in me."

"So I decided to change. I left my former friends – with no animosity. Instead I found a group of young immigrants my own age and found new friends among them. And now I feel so much better about myself."

Another story which inspires the same kind of hope for the future: on the Oprah show was a young guy from an abusive home who had found a place for himself among skinheads and racists where he was made to feel important. He later came to a foster family where he received honest appreciation and

love, and to quote Oprah's young guest, "My foster mother then loved all the hate right out of me!"

It all goes to show us that love is always stronger than hate, and hate has its origin in fear. So if we stop being afraid of each other, the hate will disappear.

I'm very grateful towards life. Are you?

"The opposite of love is not hate
– but indifference"
Elie Wiesel

SO THEN WHAT HAPPENED?

Many readers often ask me what happened to us all, if we are well and still in touch. Well, I'm very happy to say that we manage to get out all of our friends and closest family described in this book, most of them to Sweden.

Today all three of us are blessed with beautiful families and kids. Majid is working as a cardiologist (his life-long dream come true), Mohsen is second in command at a rehab-centre for drug addicts, and Maryam, Zari and Shadi and their families are all safe and fine in Sweden as well.

Unfortunately we lost wonderful Saied and beautiful Kayla to cancer. Both died far too young. Saied in Canada and Kayla in Switzerland. Extremely tragic and very very sad.

But their beautiful memory lives on in our hearts.