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legged in front of us. Our knees almost touched. He answered simply at first. He was born in Azerbaijan. His father was a very religious man. His father was a farmer.I asked, "Did you help your father?" "I was a shepherd when I was a boy." And then he began to clown. Raising his voice, making a gesture, he said, "Right now I know how to cut off a sheep's head." And the Iranians in the room—including some of his bodyguards—rocked with laughter. "I did every kind of job. Even selling. I know everything."But how did the shepherd boy become a mullah?"I studied for thirty-five years."That was all. He could be prodded into no narrative, no story of struggle or rise. He had simply lived; experience wasn't something he had reflected on. And, vain as he was ("I am very clever, very intelligent"), the questions about his past didn't interest him. He wanted more to talk about his present power, or his closeness to power; and that was what, ignoring the remainder of the written questions, he began to do.He said, "I was taught by Ayatollah Khomeini, you know. And I was the teacher of the son of Ayatollah Khomeini." He thumped me on the shoulder and added archly, to the amusement of the Iranians, "So I cannot say I am very close to Ayatollah Khomeini."His mouth opened wide, stayed open, and soon he appeared to be choking with laughter, showing me his gums, his tongue, his gullet. When he recovered he said, with a short, swift wave of his right hand, "The mullahs are going to rule now. We are going to have ten thousand years of the Islamic Republic. The Marxists will go on with their Lenin. We will go on in the way of Khomeini."He went silent. Crossing his legs neatly below him, fixing me with his eyes, becoming grave, appearing to look up at me through his glasses, he said, in the silence he had created, "I killed Hoveyda, you know."The straightness of his face was part of the joke for the Iranians. They—squatting on the carpet—threw themselves about with laughter.It was what was closest to him, his work as revolutionary judge. He had given many interviews about his sentencing of the Shah's prime minister; and he wanted to tell the story again.I said, "You killed him yourself?"Behzad said, "No, he only gave the order. Hoveyda was killed by the son of a famous ayatollah." "But I have the gun," Khalkhali said, as though it was the next best thing.Again the Iranians rolled about the carpet with laughter. And even the African, never taking his glittering eyes off Khalkhali, began to smile.Behzad said, "A Revolutionary Guard gave him the gun."I said, "Do you have it on you?" Khalkhali said, "I have it in the next room."So at the end he had forced me, in that room full of laughter, to be his straight man.It was fast-breaking time now, no time to dally, time for all visitors to leave, except the Africans. For some minutes young men had been placing food on the veranda floor. Khalkhali, dismissing us, appeared to forget us. Even before we had put our shoes on and got to the gate, he and the African couple were sitting down to dinner. It was a big dinner; the clown ate seriously.And at last our Lar driver could eat, and Behzad could repeat the sacramental moment of food-sharing with him. We drove back to the center of the town, near the shrine, and they ate in the cafe where we had waited earlier in the afternoon, in a smell of cooking mutton.They ate rice, mutton, and flat Persian bread. It was all that the cafe offered. I left them together, bought some nuts and dried fruit from a stall, and walked along the river, among families camping and eating on the river embankment in the dark. Across the road from the embankment electric lights shone on melons and other fruit in stalls: a refreshing night scene, after the glare and colorlessness of the day.When I was walking back to the cafe, and was on the other side of the river, I passed an illuminated shoe shop.It had a big calved photograph of Khomeini. I stopped to consider his unreliable face again: the creased forehead, the eyebrows, the hard eyes, the sensual lips. In the light of the shop I looked at the handful of nuts and kishmish raisins I was about to put in my mouth. It contained a thumbtack. Without that pause in front of Khomeini's picture, I would have done damage to my mouth in ways I preferred not to think of; and my unbeliever's day in Khomeini's holy city of Qom would have ended with a nasty surprise.BEHZAD came from a provincial town, one of those famous old towns of Persia. His father was a teacher of Persian literature. About his mother Behzad had nothing to say—he spoke of her only as his mother—and I imagined that her background was simpler. He had studied for some time at an American school and he spoke English well, with a neutral accent. Now, at twenty-four, he was a science student at an institute in Tehran. He had an easy, educated manner, and a Persian delicacy. He was tall, slender, athletic. He went skiing and mountain-walking, and he was a serious swimmer.The provincial background, possibly purely traditional on one side, the American school, the science institute in the capital, the athletic pursuits: it might have been said that for Behzad, living nearly all his life under the Shah, the world had opened up in ways unknown to his grandparents. But that was my vision. I was twice Behzad's age. I had been born in a static colonial time; and in Trinidad, where I spent my first eighteen years, I had known the poverty and spiritual limitations of an agricultural colony where, as was once computed, there were only eighty kinds of job. I therefore, in places like Iran, had an eye for change. It was different for Behzad. Born in Iran in 1955, he took the existence of national wealth for granted; he took the expansion of his society for granted; he had an eye only for what was still unjust in that society.I saw him as emerged, even privileged. He saw himself as poor, and as proof he said he didn't own a jacket; in winter he wore only a pullover. The idea of poverty had been given Behzad by his father, who, as a communist, had been imprisoned for some time during the Shah's rule. And that idea of poverty was far from mine in Trinidad twenty—five years before.When he was a child—it would have been in the mid-sixties—Behzad had one day asked his father, "Why don't we have a car? Why don't we have a refrigerator?" That was when his father had told him about poverty and injustice, and had begun to induct him into the idea of revolution. In Behzad's house revolution had replaced religion as an animating idea. To Behzad it was even touched, like religion, with the notion of filial piety. And Behzad, in his own faith, was as rigid as any mullah in Qom in his. He judged men and countries by their revolutionary qualities. Apart from Persian literature, for which he had a special feeling, he read only revolutionary writers or writers he considered revolutionary, and I wasn't sure that he could put dates to them: Sholokhov, Steinbeck, Jack London. He had never been tempted to stray.He told me, as we were walking about central Tehran two days after our trip to Qom, that there was no true freedom in the West. The workers were oppressed, exchanging their labor for the barest necessities. True freedom had existed only once in the world, in Russia, between 1917 and 1953.I said, "But there was a lot of suffering. A lot of people were jailed and killed."He pounced on that. "What sort of people?"He had no religious faith. But he had grown up in Shia Iran, and his idea of justice for the pure and the suffering was inseparable from the idea of punishment for the wicked. His dream of the reign of Stalin was a version of the dream of the rule of Ali—the Prophet's true successor.I said, "Have some of your friends changed sides now and decided that they are Moslems?" "A few. But they don't know what they are."He showed me the city of the revolution. On this tree—lined shopping avenue, in that burned-out building (its blackened window openings not noticeable at first in the fume-stained street), the Shah's soldiers had taken up their positions. They had fired on demonstrators. And here, in this doorway, a man had died. After six months the blood was barely visible: just dark specks on the dirty concrete. In two places someone had written, with a black felt pen, in Persian characters of a size that might have been used for a private note: This is the blood of a martyr. "Martyr" was a precise religious word; but Behzad could also read it politically.On Revolution Avenue, formerly Shah Reza, opposite the big iron-railed block of Tehran University, were the publishers (mingled with men's shops) and the pavement book-sellers and cassette-sellers and print-sellers. The cassettes were of speeches by Khomeini and other ayatollahs; they were also—in spite of Khomeini's ban on music—of popular Persian and Indian songs. Some booksellers had books in Persian about the revolution, its ideologues and its martyrs. Some had solider piles of communist literature—Persian paperbacks, and hardback sets of Lenin or Marx in English, from Russia. One revolution appeared to flow into the other.And there were photograph albums of the revolution. The emphasis in these albums was on death, blood, and revenge. There were photographs of people killed during the Shah's time; photographs of the uprising: blood in the streets, bodies in the morgues, with slogans daubed in blood on the white tiles; galleries of people executed after the revolution, and shown dead, page after page, corpse upon corpse. One corpse was that of Hoveyda, the Shah's prime minister; the black bullet hole in Hoveyda's old man's neck was clear in the photograph.All the buildings in the university block—founded by the Shah's father—were disfigured with slogans. The university was the great meeting place of Tehran, and even on a day like this, a day without any scheduled event, it was full of discussion groups. Behzad said, "It goes on all the time." What did they talk about? He said, "The same things. Islam, communism, the revolution." It looked a pacific campus scene; it was hard to associate these young men in jeans and pretty shirts with the bloodiness celebrated in the books and albums across the road.But violence was in the air, and just after we came out through the main gate we saw this incident. A student in a white shirt, small and with glasses, inexpertly and with some comic effort taped a leaflet onto the iron rails of the gate. The leaflet was a protest about the closing down of Ayandegan, the paper of the left. A workman near a food stall at the edge of the pavement walked slowly over, drew a red hammer and sickle on the leaflet, crossed the whole sheet with an X, slapped the student twice, in the middle of the pavement crowd; and then, without hurry, taped up the defaced leaflet more securely.The student had ducked to save his glasses and his eyes. No one moved to help him. Even Behzad did nothing. He only said, as though appealing to me for justice, "Did you see that? Did you see that?"The two revolutions appeared to flow together, the revolution of Khomeini, and what Behzad would have seen as the true revolution of the people. But they were distinct. The previous weekend Behzad and some of his group had gone to a village to do "constructive" work. They had run into trouble with the Revolutionary Guards: every village had its komiteh, young men with guns who were now the law in parts of Iran. The Guards, Moslems, didn't want communists in the village.Who were these Moslem militants? Behzad said, "They're lumpen. Do you know the word?" The village Guards were lumpen, like the workman who had slapped the student. The doctrinal word helped Behzad; it enabled him to keep his faith in the people.I was going on to Pakistan. My first plan had been to go by bus, to drop down south and east in stages, through old towns with beautiful names: Isfahan, Yazd (important to Zoroastrians, Persians of the pre—Islamic faith, long since expelled, their descendants surviving in India as Parsis, "Persians"). Kerman, Zahedan. But Qom had given me enough of desert travel in midsummer; I didn't want now to run into komitehs in out-of-the-way places; and I could get no certain information about transport across the Pakistan border. I decided to go by air, straight to Karachi.There were not many flights. The one I chose left at 7:30 in the morning, and Pakistan International Airlines said it was necessary to check in three hours before. I was on time, and I thought I had done the right thing. I was quickly through, with my little Lark bag. Half an hour later, when dawn was breaking, the queue was long and moving very slowly just as, at Heathrow, the flight pen for Iran had been full of Iranians who had done their shopping in Europe and the United States, so now the Tehran airport was full of Pakistani migrant workers who had done their shopping in Iran. They were taking back a lot: boxes, trunks, big cardboard suitcases tied with rope, brown cartons stamped with famous names—Aiwa, Akai, Toshiba, National, names of the now universal bazaar, where goods were not associated with a particular kind of learning, effort, or civilization but were just goods, part of the world's natural bounty.The plane that was to leave at 7:30 didn't arrive until ten. We began to taxi off at 11:25 but then were halted for a further hour, while American-made Phantoms of the Iranian Air Force took off. I thought they were training. They were in fact taking off on Khomeini's orders to attack the rebel Kurds in the west. Later, in Karachi, I learned that two Phantoms had crashed, and the news was curiously sickening: such trim and deadly aircraft, so vulnerable the inadequately trained men within, half victims, yet men that morning obedient to the will of God and the Twelfth Imam and full of murder.To Kurdistan, following the Phantoms, went Ayatollah Khalkhali, as close to power as he had boasted only ten days before in Qom. In no time, moving swiftly from place to place in the August heat, he had sentenced forty-five people to death. He had studied for thirty-five years and was never at a loss for an Islamic judgment. When in one Kurdish town the family of a prisoner complained that three of the prisoner's teeth had been removed and his eyes gouged out, Khalkhali ordered a similar punishment for the torturer. Three of the man's teeth were torn out on the spot. The aggrieved family then relented, pardoned the offender, and let him keep his eyes.It was Islamic justice, swift, personal, satisfying; it met the simple needs of the faithful. But we hadn't, in the old days, been told of this Iranian need. This particular promise of the revolution had been blurred; and we had read, mostly, Down with fascist Shah. Only Iranians, and some foreign scholars, knew that when Khomeini was a child—while the Qajar kings still ruled in Iran—Khomeini's father had been killed by a government official; that the killer had been publicly hanged; that Khomeini had been taken by his mother to the hanging and told afterward, "Now be at peace. The wolf has attained the fruit of its evil deeds."In an advertisement in the New York Times in January of 1979, when he was still in exile in France, Khomeini had appealed to "the Christians of the world" as to people of an equal civilization. It was a different Khomeini who said in August, on Jerusalem Day (the day the Phantoms were sent against the Kurds): "The governments of the world should know that Islam cannot be defeated. Islam will be victorious in all the countries of the world, and Islam and the teachings of the Koran will prevail all over the world."That couldn't have been said to the readers of the New York Times. Nor could this, spoken on the last Friday of Ramadan (and a good example of the medieval "logic and rhetoric" taught at Qom—certain key words repeated, used in varying combinations, and finally twisted): "When democrats talk about freedom they are inspired by the superpowers. They want to lead our youth to places of corruption . . . If that is what they want, then yes, we are reactionaries. You who want prostitution and freedom in every matter are intellectuals. You consider corrupt morality as freedom, prostitution as freedom . . . Those who want freedom want the freedom to have bars, brothels, casinos, opium. But we want our youth to carve out a new period in history. We do not want intellectuals."It was his call to the faithful, the people Behzad had described as lumpen. He required only faith. But he also knew the value of Iran's oil to countries that lived by machines, and he could send the Phantoms and the tanks against the Kurds. Interpreter of God's will, leader of the faithful, he expressed all the confusion of his people and made it appear like glory, like the familiar faith: the confusion of a people of high medieval culture awakening to oil and money, a sense of power and violation, and a knowledge of a great new encircling civilization. That civilization couldn't be mastered. It was to be rejected; at the same time, it was to be depended on.

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