

*Against the dramatic landscape of world-altering events,
Reza's heroic journey unfolds.*

As it is your interest to be involved with powerful works impacting society, I invite you to review a story unlike any you've ever experienced.

Introduction

A hero's story is timeless for it strengthens the pillars that make us human. In *American Wings, Iranian Roots* the hero is real. In this nonfiction narrative, inspired by the life of gold-medal wrestler and Hall of Fame Coach Reza Abedi, the classic heroic journey authentically comes to life.

Interlaced with my American point of view, *American Wings, Iranian Roots* connects our two societies with meaning and purpose—thus creating the perfect platform for conversations regarding the relationship between Iran and America.

The outstanding feature of this work is the narrative itself. Alongside Reza and his family, readers will experience the events before, during and after the 1979 Revolution thus procuring understanding and compassion only possible through authentic experience.

The arch of Reza's journey unfolds against the impact of these world-altering events. Although Reza is introduced as one of ten children in a humble family, his father's early recognition of Reza's innate wrestling skills foreshadows Reza's calling. Reza's early training to be a world champion wrestler demands a physical and mental discipline only the elite class of warriors known as "The Pahlavan" can attain. A training he'll need to save his life.

As Reza comes of age, his nation falls into political turmoil and fate calls him to face significant emotional and physical challenges. The value of Reza Abedi's life is not only redefined on the vast page of history, but also reflected within the most critically misunderstood event of contemporary human experience—the 1979 Iranian Revolution.

After leading bloody battles in the 1979 Iranian Revolution and witnessing the carnage of the Iran-Iraq War, Reza desires a fate beyond Ayatollah Khomeini's Iran. In 1982 with the help of American wrestlers at an international tournament, Reza and three Iranian teammates created International News when they defect. Freedom comes at a tremendous cost. The wrestlers' families are made to suffer in Iran for the shame the defection brought upon the Iranian Regime.

Reza's young brother is imprisoned, his father interrogated by Khomeini's notorious secret police Savak and his younger sisters live in daily fear. In the organic completion of the hero's journey, Reza risks his life in an impossible rescue attempt.

Beyond the images of the blindfolded American hostages and the bearded cleric Ayatollah Khomeini, there are millions of men, women and children who desire to live with freedom and dignity.

This story is their voice.

The Complete Book Proposal

The 88,000 word nonfiction narrative [*American Wings, Iranian Roots*](#) was first independently published in 2011. It is currently available as an Ebook, print book and ACX Audible on Amazon.

I am reaching out to you with the interest of a partnership to take this critical work to the next level.

My websites, [Kristin Orloff](#) and [American Wings, Iranian Roots](#), provide additional photographs, reviews, educational support material and featured articles. As technology has a tendency to be more whimsical than magical, both websites can be reached through your web browsers by the www.KristinOrloff.com or www.AmericanWingsIranianWings.com.

Additionally, I have "bookmark linked" the following information within this document for your review:

- [Thumbnail Synopsis](#)
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Thumbnail Synopsis:

A gold medal wrestler, Reza's inspiring life celebrates honor, family and freedom. After he leads bloody battles in the 1979 Iranian Revolution and serves in the Air Force, Reza desires a fate beyond the suffocating suppression of Ayatollah Khomeini's Iran.

On the last night of the 1982 Military World Wrestling Championships, he grips his gold medal, knowing American wrestlers wait minutes away to help him defect. He must choose between his own freedom and the possible revenge killing of his thirteen year-old brother locked in Ayatollah Khomeini's prison.

After his harrowing escape from the notorious Revolutionary Guard, Reza seeks asylum in America. In his second year in college, he received a phone call from his younger sister. Their father had hired smugglers to take his sisters out of Iran, but they were robbed and abandoned in Istanbul. She reminds Reza, “It is not safe to be three girls and an old man without money in Istanbul. You know what will happen to us.” Reza must secure false documents to return and attempt to rescue his family.

Beyond the dramatic thrill of Reza’s story, *American Wings, Iranian Roots* is unique to every other ‘escape from *insert name* of country’ book. I chose to not only write Reza’s story in third person, but also to intersperse first person chapters describing my changing perceptions of Iran. I take great care to find opportunities for readers to ‘discover’ Iran as I did. With as much detail as possible, I share the rich culture, clarify misunderstood historical events, and explore the continuing impact in our world.

[*Return to Complete Book Proposal*](#)

Detailed Synopsis

Men dream. REZA ABEDI's dream is simple—to attend a university and become a teacher. When Ayatollah Khomeini comes to power in 1979, that dream dies. On the last night of the Military World Wrestling Championships in Venezuela 1982, Reza grips his gold medal and makes a choice. More than just choosing to risk his own life by defecting, he risks the revenge killing of his younger brother locked in an Iranian prison.

But in the peaceful Spring of 1963 when Reza is born, the fifth of ten children, life is simple. His parents, although illiterate, emphasize education, hard work and character. Reza's father nurtures his natural wrestling skills and soon Reza is competing against the strongest wrestlers in Iran.

At thirteen, Reza qualifies to compete at the Nationals in Tehran. He collapses on the scale due to his extreme efforts to make weight and loses to MASHIDI AGHEE in the championship match. Reza returns in shame, but is surprised when greeted by family and friends proud of his efforts. He rededicates himself to his first passion—education and continues his intensive training on the wrestling mats.

In January 1979, Iran's Shah steps down and previously exiled Islamic cleric, Ayatollah Khomeini assumes power. In the violent months that follow, Reza organizes a band of the toughest wrestlers from his neighborhood. He directs them to throw molotov cocktails to combat Shah's police, leads bloody market raids for food and storms the local prison for weapons.

In May 1980, just a few months after Ayatollah Khomeini proclaims all universities must be pure in their Islamic teachings, Reza applies for admission. His transcripts reflect his academic performance at a stellar level. During the final interview with the Mullah, Reza cannot prove his allegiance to Islam. His admission: denied.

For young men like Reza at this time in Iran, one can attend the Muslim universities or become a soldier. Reza follows his oldest brother into the Iranian Air Force and for several months, he drives an ambulance to collect both wounded and dead soldiers from the battle front of a war he does not understand.

At eighteen, Reza knows he cannot live as an arm to the machine of death, fear and suppression. His only hope to defect lies in making the Military Wrestling Team and escaping when they travel to compete in other nations. Through excruciating matches, he earns his place on the team.

In June 1982 he returns home to announce he will be competing in Venezuela at upcoming International Military World Wrestling Championship. However, he returns to a family grieving the imprisonment of his thirteen year-old brother HOUSHANG; his crime—bringing food to starving Kurdish children.

When Reza returns to the base, he is told his place on the team is being challenged by Mashida Aghee; the same wrestler who beat him in the National Championships four years earlier. Fighting the visions of his disgraceful defeat, Reza takes the mat.

Reza wins the first match, but Mashida Aghee, Ayatollah Khomeini's personal body guard, is declared the winner. Reza insists on a rematch and again, Reza wins. And again, Mashida Aghee is declared the winner. With only twenty-four hours before the team is to depart for Venezuela, Reza risks court-martial by demanding a third match. Reza steps onto the mat for this final battle and pins Mashida Aghee.

At the Military Championship, teams from all the other nations stay together in comfortable dorms. The Iranians report to the fourth floor of a guarded barrack with barred windows and little hope of escape. Reza notices a fellow teammate, SAAM, whispering with American wrestlers in the far corners of the gym. He approaches the teammate in the shower. "I want to defect too," Reza whispers. With the help of the American wrestlers, Reza and two others plan to defect on the last night.

On the second to the last night, Reza sneaks out and goes to the nightclubs of Caracas with a local. Although tempted, he knows if he doesn't return then the plan of the final night will be impossible for the two others. He returns at 1 a.m., faces military court-martial and fears he will be executed.

Moreover, his best friend Ardeshir has been questioned extensively regarding Reza's absence. Just before sunrise, Ardeshir sneaks into Reza's bunk and whispers, "They're going to kill us both the second we get home." Reza knows Ardeshir's father is a personal bodyguard for Ayatollah Khomeini and Ardeshir would bring extreme shame to the family if he defected. Trusting Ardeshir's loyalty as a friend more than his loyalty to his Iran, he replies, "Don't go back. Stay here with me."

It is 2 a.m. on the final night. With thoughts of his little brother suffering in prison, Reza wraps his clothes around his gold medal and pushes them through the bars from the fourth floor bathroom window. In only his underwear, he approaches the guard and asks to go downstairs for a drink of water. Reza escapes to join the others in the van driven by the American wrestlers. At the last minute, Ardeshir joins them and the four are driven to a safe house.

Disguised as OPEC dignitaries, the Revolutionary Guard is sent to Venezuela to assassinate the wrestlers, but the wrestlers are locked into a prison cell for their own security. After a Jewish translator misrepresents the wrestlers, they are granted a six month Visa for religious, not political asylum. The wrestlers move into a cheap, leaky apartment and search hotel trash cans for food. Although the American and British embassies provide some money to the wrestlers, no country will grant them admission for religious asylum.

Meanwhile, Reza's family is interrogated daily and his father loses his job. Reza's older brother is able to buy Houshang's freedom, but he must leave Iran immediately. Reza's two older sisters escape with their husbands by falsifying business deals in Belgium, but the others remain trapped in Iran. The strain takes a toll on Reza's mother who dies in her sleep.

Desperate to leave Venezuela, Ardeshir conceives a plan wherein they turn themselves into the Iranian Embassy, say they were stupid kids and now they want to come home. Without money, this is the only way they will get a plane ticket and paperwork to leave Venezuela. Knowing there is no direct flight from Venezuela to Iran, they plan to escape in the international airport of Madrid before boarding the second plane. Reza hides a sharpened can opener in his pocket; if they are caught in Madrid, he plans to slit his wrists.

The plane has an unexpected delay in the Canary Islands which throws off the Revolutionary Guards waiting for them in Madrid. The four are able to elude capture by hiding in a bathroom and finding an Iranian Mujahideen who is selling newspapers in Farsi. In exchange for doing an international press conference exposing the terrors of Ayatollah Khomeini's regime, the four wrestlers are given food, clothes and a guarded apartment in Madrid. In the next year, Reza and Ardeshir are granted Visas to live in Southern California. Reza and Ardeshir earn wrestling scholarships to attend Cal State Fullerton. Only one phone call could rip Reza away from achieving his dream.

In Iran, Reza's older brother hires smugglers to take his father and four sisters out of Iran to join the older sisters in Belgium. It is late December. While in Turkey, all of their money is stolen and Reza's sister, SOROYA places a desperate call to Reza. He secures false paperwork from a Mexican CSUF teammate and flies to Belgium to develop a plan with his sisters. Although he can pass as "Jose Martinez" in the European airports, in Turkey they will recognize him as an Iranian and jail him immediately for having false paperwork. But there is no other way, and Reza boards a plane to Istanbul.

He escapes detection in the Istanbul airport, finds his family and hires new smugglers to take them to Germany. Reza returns to Belgium to await their call from Germany, but instead he receives a call from Vienna, Austria. He drives to Vienna, gathers his family and gets arrested at a checkpoint at the German-Austrian border. Reza is sent to prison and his family is transferred to an Austrian refugee processing camp.

After Reza's false paperwork is processed, he's freed. However, his family is quarantined in the Austrian refugee camp until their identities are processed (at which time they will be sent back to Iran). For five days, Reza searches for a road that will go from Austria to Germany without passing through a checkpoint. He sleeps in his car and steals food to stay alive. At a gas station, he befriends a drug smuggler who provides him with a map of trails that will take his family to Germany. But the trails are covered in ice and snow and the German guards watch the mountain passes from guard towers. If he can get to Germany, he has a chance to drive them through Holland and into Belgium where border crossings are not as strict.

With a map in hand, he arrives at the refugee camp in the middle of the night. Through a broken window, he is able to get his family out. The exhausted family stands at the side of the frozen river. A smoker, his father coughs and gasps for breath. One younger sister suffers with a broken foot while another sister shivers with fever. Reza struggles to bring the family along the narrow and frozen mountain trails while staying unseen by the Germans guards.

His sisters forge ahead, while Reza carries his father down the icy path. “I will not let you die here,” he says to his father who begs Reza to leave him. Stumbling, Reza continues through the frozen darkness until he reaches his sisters. He lays his father to huddle with them and returns with the car. Through a snowstorm, he drives his family to safety in Belgium. The next day, he boards a plane back to America. He wants to go back in time and take his course finals.

In 1994, Reza Abedi graduated from CSUF with a teaching credential and currently works as a Spanish teacher and Head Varsity Wrestling Coach at a high school in Southern California. In 2000, his colleagues nominated him for “Teacher of the Year.” He lives with his two sons; his oldest currently competes on his Varsity wrestling team. In 2019, Reza was inducted into the elite National Wrestling Hall of Fame.

Within this extensive story is the opportunity for a complete [Trilogy](#) as well as a [Cinematic Vision](#). Additional information regarding both these concepts will be found on the [American Wings, Iranian Roots page](#) of my [Author’s Website](#).
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Author Biography

The literary bond I share with readers is to take a complex swath of history, unravel it and then weave it back together with the threads that we all share. You will learn, laugh and genuinely miss the characters after you close the final page.

I hold a Masters degree in Education, a B.A. in Language Arts and currently serves as an educational administrator. I have published several works, mentor young writers, and engage as an active member in my local writing community.

In the nonfiction narrative [American Wings, Iranian Roots](#), my passionate commitment to create opportunities for authentic conversation regarding Iranian culture, history and identity began with a simple conversation at a Little League field. This conversation with Gold Medal athlete and Hall of Fame coach Reza Abedi, changed not only my life but impacts all those who come to know it.

A second work, [Harmony](#), is based on the events of 2008 wherein a middle class family struggles to survive not just financial ruin, but deception, the crushing of dreams and even murder. Popular with book clubs, [Harmony](#) will not only make you laugh, but touch your heart in places you'll be grateful to reawaken.

I *know* these stories need to be told. I do so with a confidence and an authenticity only personal experience can achieve.

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Three Comparative Titles

1. *Kite Runner*: (Khaled Hosseini). Like *American Wings, Iranian Roots*, *Kite Runner* is written against a backdrop of history that has not been told in fiction before. *Kite Runner* is set in Afghanistan whereas *American Wings, Iranian Roots* is set in Iran. Both *American Wings, Iranian Roots* and *The Kite Runner* describe the rich culture and beauty of a land in the process of being destroyed and find hope and courage in the devastation. Both stories connect the American experience, but *American Wings, Iranian Roots* explores the complex American-Iranian experience with the added lens of an American author.
2. *Reading Lolita in Iran*: (Azar Nafisi) Set during the 1979 Iranian Revolution, Nafisi's work is a remarkable exploration of resilience in the face of tyranny. Both *American Wings, Iranian Roots* and *Reading Lolita in Iran* humanize this significant period in contemporary history. Unlike *Reading Lolita in Iran* and most works written about Iran, *American Wings, Iranian Roots* is viewed through a male the point of view. Additionally, *American Wings, Iranian Roots* combines the viewpoint of an American Author.
3. *Funny in Farsi*: (Firoozeh Dumas) In 1972, when she was seven, Firoozeh Dumas and her family moved from Iran to Southern California. Similar to *American Wings, Iranian Roots*, *Funny in Farsi* presents an Iranian family as an 'every family.' It is these ties that bind people together far beyond the differences. Both unforgettable stories of courage, discovery, and the power of family love, both will touch the hearts of every reader. *American Wings, Iranian Roots* has the added gritty component of the historical perspective.

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Marketing and Featured Reviews and Publications

Today's marketing plan must include a Social Media platform. Additionally, Reza's story has been featured in many prominent publications that can be accessed [Featured Articles in International Publications](#).

Social Media and featured articles:

[Facebook Page](#)

[The Iran Times](#)

[The Iranian](#)

[Kayhan Life](#) (article when Reza was inducted into U.S.A Wrestling H.O.F)

[Kayhan Life](#) (article about the book)

[The IranWire](#)

[GoodReads](#)

Educational Opportunities

We have presented at local colleges, book clubs, high schools and libraries. The article linked here [CSUF](#) covers our presentation to students and staff at California University, Fullerton.

The void of literature available to facilitate educational conversations regarding not just Iran, but the Middle East is concerning. The rather Euro-centered study has led to stereotypes and misinformation. Committed educators, *American Wings, Iranian Roots* is supported by a rigorous secondary curriculum which is both “turn key” and adaptable for the study of: Iran, the Middle East, contemporary history, revolutions, the hero’s journey, and other related topics.

[The Complete Support Curriculum](#)

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Three Unique Takeaways

At a tender age, Reza mourns the loss of a country he longer recognizes; yet, he’s driven to possess the course of his own fate. The truth of everything he’s ever known—pride, honor, loyalty and love—lay shattered. It is only a mythological hero’s journey that will dare him to trust the Americans, fight to live and return to rescue his family.

Although this is a story about becoming a champion, it is first and foremost the story of a man who, oppressed and terrorized, embarks on a journey of courage.

1. The Hero’s Journey

Identified by the American scholar Joseph Campbell, the Hero’s Journey is a structured pattern of narrative used in drama, storytelling, and myth. The Hero faces seemingly insurmountable challenges and achieves great deeds on behalf of the group, tribe, or civilization. Although the pattern will vary, the hero’s external and internal journey follows a similar prototype.

Reflective of the literary Hero’s Journey, Reza’s story connects with readers through authentic grit, humanity and courage.

Reza’s story through the lens of a Hero’s Journey:

1. The ordinary world: Reza is an ordinary kid born into a working class family of 10 children in Kermanshah in 1960s.
2. The call to adventure: In his teens, Reza is forced into bloody battle of the 1979 Revolution.
3. Refusal of the call: Unlike many of his friends and neighbors, he questions the promises made by the Ayatollah Khomeini .
4. Meeting with the mentor: Both Reza’s father and a favorite teacher at school
5. Crossing the threshold: As is expected of young men his age, he is forced to join the Air Force to fight Iraq. A gifted wrestler, he knows his only chance to defect is to make the National Wrestling Team and escape when they travel to another country to complete.

6. Tests, allies and enemies: Reza has to make the team by beating a wrestler of superior skill who has beaten Reza in a previous tournament. He is faced with war, death and the imprisonment of his 13 year-old brother, Houshang.
7. The ordeal: He makes the team and travels to Venezuela to compete. He tells no one of his plan to escape. He notices a teammate talking to American wrestlers and approaches the teammate in the shower. He says he wants to defect too. The teammate tells him of the danger and reminds him of Houshang.
8. The reward: Reza and 3 other teammates, including his best friend whose father is a personal body guard for Khomeini, escape. After 6 months of near starvation in the streets of Venezuela, the wrestlers lie to the Iranian Embassy and ask for a plane ticket to Iran (knowing they would need to change plans in Europe). Barely escaping the Revolutionary Guard, they find refuge in Spain. Here, they hold an international press conference and are among the first to tell of the broken promises of the Iranian Revolution. They apply for American Visa and are admitted into the U.S. Reza qualifies for a College Scholarship as a wrestler.
9. The road back: Settled in America, Reza is on his way to earning his college degree and fulfilling his dream to become a teacher. He gets a call from his younger sister—his ailing father and 3 younger sisters have been smuggled from Iran to Istanbul. In Istanbul, the smugglers stole their money and left them. Reza’s sister says “We cannot be young girls here without money. We will be sold.
10. The resurrection: Reza must risk everything he has sacrificed and worked for. He must falsify documents to travel and rescue his family. Stopped at a checkpoint, the sisters and his father are taken to a refugee center in Germany. Once they are discovered to be Iranians, they will be sent back to Iran. Reza helps them escape and carries them through the snow along mountain paths
11. Return with the elixir: Reza and his family are free.

2, International Recognition

Reza’s incredible life’s story is featured in international publications including [Inspiring Iranians](#), [Kayhan Life](#), [The Iranian and Iranian Wire](#). Moreover, in 2018 Reza was inducted into the National Wrestling Hall of Fame alongside U.S. Presidents and Olympic athletes.

3. Educational Opportunities

Reza and I have presented our dual journey at Concordia University, Cal. State Fullerton, The Saddleback Emeritus Institute as well as many high schools, libraries and organizations. Moreover, to enhance the study of Iranian history, culture and politics, we have created a huge variety of excellent free resources on the [Educational Website](#). Committed career educators,

Reza and I recognize education to be the starting place to challenge stereotypes, foster compassion and build knowledge.

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Three Target Markets/Target Audiences

1. College Educated and Curious Readers

One of my goals is to present the Abedi family as any family you might meet in America or elsewhere. I establish relationships between the siblings and parents and illustrate how they would interact at dinner or during other ‘regular’ family routines. In so many ways, the Abedis are like millions of families--and as the reader gets to know them, they are then thrust into the surviving The 1979 Revolution with them.

In 1972, what could be more universal than a brood of siblings jockeying for position in front of the crackling television set while the father tinkers with knobs and buttons? From this scene, the Abedi family will be the vehicle to invoke a human dimension of international attention on Iran.

2. Secondary Educational Settings

Reza’s story is rich in themes infused in everyday discussions. Classes around the globe will engage in lively discussions regarding: family structure, definition of freedom, role of government, international relations, rights of women, influence of parents, bonds of siblings and many more.

The tremendous void of literature dealing with Middle Eastern issues is inherent in the general lack of understanding of these cultures. As more and more students from international backgrounds attend the public schools, there will be increased demand for appropriate literature.

American Wings, Iranian Roots addresses critical standards in both the Social Science and Language Arts curriculum lending opportunity for a myriad of educational activities. The [Education Resources Website](#) is an extensive source of resources.

3. Shared Experiences

The book is particularly well received by second generation Iranians. So many have thanked me for sharing Reza’s story in saying their parents survived the Revolution too, “but never told me this much about it. I was always so curious.” Beyond this audience, Reza’s story connects with immigrants from countries around the world. The shared experiences of courage, hope and sacrifice universally connect people through time and place.

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Detailed Chapter Outline

Chapter 1

August 1982, Venezuela

The first page is an excerpt from the night Reza will defect.

March 8, 1971

Overview: Reza's father, Abbas, recognizes and begins to develop Reza's innate wrestling skills. A scene in the family home, wherein they struggle to operate their first TV to view the Muhammad Ali vs. Joe Frazier rematch, introduces both setting and family within a framework universal to "every family". Reza's decision to reach over the roof for a dropped antenna wire, resulting in his falling from the rooftop, ascertains his willingness to risk himself for the greater good. Reza is mesmerized by the American warriors in their epic boxing match.

Socio-Political References:

- Reza's father's concern about Reza's 10 year old sister walking in public without her hair covered.
- A portrait of Shah hangs over the new TV.

Chapter Two

July 1975

Overview: Now 13, Reza sneaks into a hotel and meets teenage American wrestlers who have come to Kermanshah to compete in an international tournament. Contrary to how the government portrayed Americans, Reza finds the wrestlers to be as friendly as they are competitive. Abbas introduces Reza to an Iranian wrestler named Ali. Like Reza, Ali is a gifted wrestler and tenacious competitor. They begin a life-long friendship.

Socio-Political Reference:

- On the anniversary of Shah exiling Khomeini in 1964, students stage a three day protest in Qum. The Shah's police shoot and arrest several of the protesting students.

Chapter Three

Spring 1976

Overview: Reza's mother and sisters prepare a traditional family dinner revealing the family dynamics framed in Middle Eastern traditions with specific emphasis on Reza's relationship with his mother. Reza convinces his mom to let him cut weight to compete in his first National tournament. He and Ali train in the Tagh-e Bostan mountains by climbing along ancient carvings of the Sassanid Dynasty and King Darius.

Socio-Political Reference:

- The perception of some Iranians that Shah is stealing oil profits.
- Shah changes the legal age of marriage for girls from 15 to 18.
- Reference to ancient dynasties revealed from carvings in the Tagh-e Bostan mountains.

Chapter Four

Spring 1976

Overview: Reza travels to Tehran to compete in Nationals. Due to his extreme effort to lose weight, Reza collapses on the scale and his brothers fear he will not have the strength to compete. However, he battles his way to the Championship match.

Socio-Political Reference:

- Shah's presumed influence from the West
- His controversial decision to change Iran from the Islamic calendar to a Secular calendar.
- He mandates the right to vote for women.
- He makes education, health care and owning land available to all citizens.

Chapter Five

Spring 1976

Overview: Reza's mother goes into a dangerous labor with her tenth child, Mariam. Mariam survives but her twin sister does not. Reza experiences a humiliating loss in the televised Championship match. Days later, he and his cousin Farid consider Reza's loss and the Mohammad Ali v. Frazier fight. They conclude the true meaning behind pahlavan warriors is in their will to never, never, quit.

Socio-Political Reference:

- Reza's sister, Soraya is admonished by her older sister for not properly wearing a head scarf.
- Reza brings up his concern about Shah's secret police, Savak whom he thinks he saw in Tehran.

Chapter Six

January 10th 1978-June 1978

Overview: The political strife, previously lingering around the Abedi family, begins to have direct effects. The rising tension in Iran between those loyal to Shah and those loyal to Khomeini escalates to cause the first palpable changes in the lives of ordinary Iranian families. Abbas warns Reza and Houshang to be careful with whom they are seen and charges them to come directly home from school. Reza's older brother Mostafa, who is active in the political underground, comes home with severe facial lacerations from his participation in a protest. Reza is stopped by Savak when returning from after-school tutoring and is saved when Mostafa bribes them for his release. Abbas begins to listen for news from the forbidden radio's BBC. Reza spends time with a favorite liberal teacher at school, Mr. Mehdian. Through their conversations, Reza works to untangle events in Iran.

Socio-Political Reference:

- An article in the widely read National Newspaper Ettela'at proclaims Khomeini to be a homosexual. Many citizens believe this accusation was perpetrated by Shah in an attempt to discredit the cleric and demonstrations rock major cities in Iran.

- Clashes with Shah's police become more violent as students are showing less fear in their demands for change.

Chapter Seven

June 1978-January 1979

Overview: Reza's siblings are afraid to walk home from school without him. Reza meets again with Mr. Mehdian and discusses both the political events and options to leave Iran. Martial law is imposed due to the violent clashes in the cities. Reza's mother, Nimtaj, gives her gold bracelets to Abbas to sell on the black market for food and medicine. Reza leads a raid on a market place and engages in a bloody battle with police. Mostafa and his band of men from the underground visit the family bringing photographs, cassettes and documents. The Abedi's watch Shah's TV addresses where he pledges free elections, then denounces the Revolution and finally departs from Iran.

The political turmoil in Iran permeates every aspect of daily life. It becomes clear that leaving Iran is nearly impossible. Families' struggle for basic necessities as schools, markets and banks are forced to close. Men who conduct raids are expected to bring the supplies to the Mosques to be distributed by the Mullahs to the needy families, but this soon deteriorates into a greed-based black market. The first promises by the Mullahs are broken. Access to information is restricted by Shah and the Abedi's listen to the BBC at risk of being imprisoned. Mostafa's documents reveal Khomeini's strategy for a return to power. Abbas has doubts about Khomeini's intentions to honorably serve the people of Iran. Reza can only dream about returning to finish his last year of school and attend a university as ordinary life has been shattered.

Socio-Political Reference:

- Reference to CIA's 1953 Operation Ajax which restored power to Shah after World War II in an attempt to both Westernize and stabilize the Middle East.
- Shah pledges free election and imposes of martial law in response to growing riots.
- The replacement of Prime Minister Jamshid Amouzegar (loyal to the Shah) with Jafar Sharif-Emani (fundamentally conservative) indicates Shah, despite his efforts, is losing his control.
- Jafar Sharif-Emani immediately imposes laws closing casinos, abolishing the secular calendar and declaring Islam as a political party with the right to rule Iran.
- September 8th, Black Friday, Shah orders tanks and helicopter gunships to battle rioting students killing thousands, including women and children.
- November 5th, Shah denounces the Revolution.
- January 16th, 1979 Shah and his wife depart for medical treatment and never return.
- The nation designates into violence and chaos.

Chapter Eight

February 1st, 1979-Spring 1980

Overview: The Abedi's listen to the BBC's account of Khomeini's return to Iran where he is greeted by the cheering of millions in Tehran. Khomeini's return does not immediately bring peace, but increased violence. The Abedi's have run out of kerosene to heat their home and Reza's little sister, Pari, is sick. Reza and Houshang go after curfew to get the kerosene they have hidden and are nearly caught by police. Mr. Mehdian is taken from his home and shot in front of his family. The news devastates Reza. Desperate for supplies and weapons, Reza, Houshang, Farid and Ali join a raid on the local prison. Later that night, they discuss the news they have heard about the taking of the American hostages.

Socio-Political Reference:

- Houshang makes reference to a November night in 1978 when millions of Iranians cheered in the streets when they thought they could see Khomeini's face in the full moon.
- Khomeini proclaimed a jihad against the Iranian armed forces still loyal to Shah.
- In February 1979, The Foundation of the Islamic Republican party is established by revolutionary clerics and led by Khomeini. Potential opposition leaders are killed by Khomeini's men.
- There is a staged election in April wherein it is reported that 98% of Iranians voted for the Islamic Republican Party.
- The national paper *Ayandegan* printed anti-Khomeini articles and is shut down.
- The American Embassy is stormed in Tehran and Americans are taken hostage.

Chapter Nine

March 1980-Sept 22nd 1980

Overview: The Abedis try to return to a 'normal' life, but the influence of Khomeini's fundamentalist ideas are apparent in their everyday routines. Reza is denied admission to the universities which must be 'pure in their Islamic teachings'. Later that night, Ali finds Reza alone on their mountain top. Ali says that he must join The Revolutionary Guard, like his father. The young men realize they have no other options if they remain in Iran but to become Khomeini's soldiers. Reza and Farid view a public hanging of three men accused of being homosexual and question the intentions of the new regime. Reza, like his older brother Amir, joins the Air Force. Reza takes Nimtaj to the holy city of Qom and there they hear that Iraq has declared war on Iran. A border town with oil refineries, Kermanshah is a ripe target for Iraq throughout the conflict. While training for the Air Force in Tehran, Reza stays with his aunt. She shares with him an event she witnessed wherein the Basiji (a police force charged with enforcing Islamic rules) threw acid in a young girl's face for walking unescorted. .

Socio-Political Reference:

- In Ayatollah Khomeini's New Year's speech, he declares all universities must be pure in their Islamic teaching.

- There is additional discussion regarding velayat-e faqih: the law Ayatollah Khomeini added to the Iranian constitution after it was ratified which imposes strict Islamic laws.
- Suppression and control through violence and fear permeates every aspect of life for Reza and millions of Iranians.
- Kermanshah becomes a prime target for Iraqi bombing raids.

Chapter Ten

March 1982

Overview: Reza earns his place on the Air Force's wrestling team. His official military assignment is to drive pilots to their planes. He feels like a coward in this assignment and convinces Amir to change his assignment to driving an ambulance to the front lines. Kahn, the slightly unbalanced ambulance driver, enjoys Reza as a captive audience for his colorful diatribe about the history of Iran. Kahn uses soft sexual references as a metaphor for Iranian history. Reza's stint with the ambulance driver provides a historical framework regarding Iran.

Socio-Political Reference:

- Post revolution Iran exhibits excessive control over the choices available to the Iranian citizens.
- Throughout the ambulance drive, Kahn gives a unique historical overview making reference from Achaemenes, Cyrus and Darius, to the Ottomans and Persians of the 16th Century, through middle ages, both World Wars and the current Iran-Iraq War.

Chapter Eleven

March 1982

Overview: Although Reza dislocates his shoulder during the match, he makes the Air Force's National Wrestling Team and will travel to Venezuela for the upcoming World Championship. He returns home on leave and discovers Houshang has been imprisoned for bringing food to their Kurdish cousins. The family is in deep despair; Nimitaj has torn flesh from her face. Reza accompanies Nimitaj on her weekly visit to the prison. Reza's decision to defect at the upcoming World Championship is complicated by Houshang's imprisonment for Reza understands Houshang may be hung in revenge.

Political Reference:

- The political, cultural and spiritual suppression of Iranians in post revolution Iran, 1982.

Chapter Twelve-Chapter Twenty Three

March 1982-Winter 1985

The first eleven chapters not only weave into the framework of Reza's story the informative socio-political backdrop, these chapters also lay the foundation for Reza's journey—a journey which organically follows the literary arc of the classic hero's.

Chapters Twelve through chapters Twenty Three recount the dramatic sequence of events that made international news when Reza and three teammates escaped defected from the World Wrestling Championship in Venezuela.

At the Military Championship, teams from all the other nations stay together in comfortable dorms. The Iranians report to the fourth floor of a guarded barrack with barred windows and little hope of escape. Reza notices a fellow teammate, SAAM, whispering with American wrestlers in the far corners of the gym. He approaches the teammate in the shower. "I want to defect too," Reza whispers. With the help of the American wrestlers, Reza and two others plan to defect on the last night.

On the second to the last night, Reza sneaks out and goes to the night clubs of Caracas with a local. Although tempted, he knows if he doesn't return then the plan of the final night will be impossible for the two others. He returns at 1 a.m., faces military court-martial and fears he will be executed.

Moreover, his best friend Ardeshir has been questioned extensively regarding Reza's absence. Just before sunrise, Ardeshir sneaks into Reza's bunk and whispers, "They're going to kill us both the second we get home." Reza knows Ardeshir's father is a personal body guard for Ayatollah Khomeini and Ardeshir would bring extreme shame to the family if he defected. Trusting Ardeshir's loyalty as a friend more than his loyalty to his Iran, he replies, "Don't go back. Stay here with me."

It is 2 a.m. on the final night. With thoughts of his little brother suffering in prison, Reza wraps his clothes around his gold medal and pushes them through the bars from the fourth floor bathroom window. In only his underwear, he approaches the guard and asks to go downstairs for a drink of water. Reza escapes to join the others in the van driven by the American wrestlers. At the last minute, Ardeshir joins them and the four are driven a safe house.

Disguised as OPEC dignitaries, the Revolutionary Guard is sent to Venezuela to assassinate the wrestlers, but the wrestlers are locked into a prison cell for their own security. After a Jewish translator misrepresents the wrestlers, they are granted a six month Visa for religious, not political asylum. The wrestlers move into a cheap, leaky apartment and search hotel trash cans for food. Although the American and British embassies provide some money to the wrestlers, no country will grant them admission for religious asylum.

Meanwhile, Reza's family is interrogated daily and his father loses his job. Reza's older brother is able to buy Houshang's freedom, but he must leave Iran immediately. Reza's two older sisters escape with their husbands by falsifying business deals in Belgium, but the others remain trapped in Iran. The strain takes a toll on Reza's mother who dies in her sleep.

Desperate to leave Venezuela, Ardeshir conceives a plan wherein they turn themselves into the Iranian Embassy, say they were stupid kids and now they want to come home. Without money, this is the only way they will get a plane ticket and paperwork to leave Venezuela. Knowing there is no direct flight from Venezuela to Iran, they plan to escape in the international airport of

Madrid before boarding the second plane. Reza hides a sharpened can opener in his pocket; if they are caught in Madrid, he plans to slit his wrists.

The plane has an unexpected delay in the Canary Islands which throws off the Revolutionary Guards waiting for them in Madrid. The four are able to elude capture by hiding in a bathroom and finding an Iranian Mujahideen who is selling newspapers in Farsi. In exchange for doing an international press conference exposing the terrors of Ayatollah Khomeini's regime, the four wrestlers are given food, clothes and a guarded apartment in Madrid. In the next year, Reza and Ardeshir are granted Visas to live in Southern California. Reza and Ardeshir earn wrestling scholarships to attend Cal State Fullerton. Only one phone call could rip Reza away from achieving his dream.

In Iran, Reza's older brother hires smugglers to take his father and four sisters out of Iran to join the older sisters in Belgium. It is late December. While in Turkey, all of their money is stolen and Reza's sister, Soroya places a desperate call to Reza. He secures false paperwork from a Mexican CSUF teammate and flies to Belgium to develop a plan with his sisters. Although he can pass as "Jose Martinez" in the European airports, in Turkey they will recognize him as an Iranian and jail him immediately for having false paperwork. But there is no other way, and Reza boards a plane to Istanbul.

He escapes detection in the Istanbul airport, finds his family and hires new smugglers to take them to Germany. Reza returns to Belgium to await their call from Germany, but instead he receives a call from Vienna, Austria. He drives to Vienna, gathers his family and gets arrested at a checkpoint at the German-Austrian border. Reza is sent to prison and his family is transferred to an Austrian refugee processing camp.

After Reza's false paperwork is processed, he's freed. However, his family is quarantined in the Austrian refugee camp until their identities are processed (at which time they will be sent back to Iran). For five days, Reza searches for a road that will go from Austria to Germany without passing through a checkpoint. He sleeps in his car and steals food to stay alive. At a gas station, he befriends a drug smuggler who provides him with a map of trails that will take his family to Germany. But the trails are covered in ice and snow and the German guards watch the mountain passes from guard towers. If he can get to Germany, he has a chance to drive them through Holland and into Belgium where border crossings are not as strict.

With map in hand, he arrives at the refugee camp in the middle of the night. Through a broken window, he is able to get his family out. The exhausted family stands at the side of the frozen river. A smoker, his father coughs and gasps for breath. One younger sister suffers with a broken foot while another sister shivers with fever. Reza struggles to bring the family along the narrow and frozen mountain trails while staying unseen by the Germans guards.

His sisters forge ahead, while Reza carries his father down the icy path. "I will not let you die here," he says to his father who begs Reza to leave him. Stumbling, Reza continues through the frozen darkness until he reaches his sisters. He lays his father to huddle with them and returns

with the car. Through a snowstorm, he drives his family to safety in Belgium. The next day, he boards a plane back to America. He wants to go back in time to take his course finals.

In 1994, Reza Abedi graduated from CSUF with a teaching credential and currently works as a Spanish teacher and Head Varsity Wrestling Coach at a high school in Southern California. In 2000, his colleagues nominated him for “Teacher of the Year.”

In 2019, Reza was inducted into the National Wrestling Coaches Hall of Fame alongside U.S. Presidents.

The book is available as an [Ebook, print book and Audible](#). We would be honored to share the book in its entirety with you.

Please note that in the published copy, the Farsi terms are cited in a footnote at the bottom of the page. To streamline the formatting, the translation will appear in parenthesis next to the word.

[Return to Complete Book Proposal](#)

First Two Chapters

Prologue

Genesis 32:22-32

So Jacob was left alone, and a man wrestled with him until daybreak. When the man saw that he could not overpower him, he touched the socket of Jacob’s hip so that his hip was wrenched as he wrestled with the man.

Then the man said, “Let me go, for it is daybreak.”

But Jacob replied, “I will not let you go unless you bless me.”

The man asked him, “What is your name?”

“Jacob,” he answered.

Then the man said, “Your name will no longer be Jacob, but Israel, because you have struggled with God and with men and have overcome.”

Reza would not know this story. He would live it.

Part I

Chapter One

Spring 2004 California

The first time I hit a baseball I ran to third base.”

“Third base?” I ask. “Why’d you run to third base?”

Munching sunflower seeds and watching our sons play Little League, Reza and I sit in our lawn chairs on a sunny Saturday afternoon. Since we teach at the same high school, we have been chatting casually about colleagues and other mundane topics.

“No one told me,” he says between spits, “to run to first.” “You must have been little.”

“Not really,” he answers. “I was in college.”

He offers me another helping from the torn corner of his plastic bag. I put out my hand and study his face. With his kind, dark eyes and a model-perfect smile, he pours the silver seeds into my palm.

I raise my eyebrows. “No baseball in Iran?”

“No baseball in Iran,” he says with a laugh. “Soccer, gymnastics and wrestling.” I recall Reza sharing his World Military Wrestling Champion gold medal at a student assembly. Although he is short, his toned body pulses with the strength of an elite athlete.

“Watch me coach,” he says. “Wrestling tournament’s next week. Come see a real man’s game.”

Just as I’m about to defend all American sports, a dad from another team comes to me with a newspaper article in his hand. “Are you Kristin Orloff?” he asks.

“Yes, I am.” I glance at the article. “Is that the article I wrote about ‘fun’ in little league?”

“It is.” He hands it to me. “Could you sign it?”

“Be glad to.”

I hear Reza clear his throat. “You liked it that much?”

The dad nods. “It gave me a completely new perspective.” He walks away and I turn to Reza, planning my defense of America’s favorite pastime. But before I can begin, he looks to his feet and rubs his hands together. Like a little boy.

“Hey, ah, Kristin,” he says, using a soft tone I hadn’t heard before. “Maybe one day you could write my story.”

“Yeah, maybe,” I say.

The following week I enter our high school gym to watch our wrestling team. The bleachers are packed with screaming students and cheering parents. I am grateful to squeeze in next to a colleague.

“What do I need to know?” I ask as I pull open a package of red vines. “I promised Reza I’d come watch him coach.”

He laughs at my ignorance. “A match is three periods of two minutes each. But if you pin a guy, it’s over.”

“That doesn’t sound too bad,” I say, tugging on the stale vine with my teeth. “Most sports take hours.”

“You’re wrong,” he says. “Wrestling demands more strength, speed, discipline and . . .” He searches for a word. “Just guts than any sport.”

“Looks like they’re just rolling around.”

“Don’t let Reza hear you say that,” he says. “He credits wrestling with saving his life.”

I watch Reza pace about the match, his compact build moving with large gestures to match his exploding voice.

“Was Reza’s life in danger?” I ask, trying to remember if Reza had mentioned anything like that during our conversations.

My colleague looks into the faces of those sitting around us. He leans into me. “You know about Reza, right?”

“Know?” I ask, my mind flying back to his words at the Little League game. Maybe someday you can write my story.

“He was an assassin for the Shah during the revolution. He had to escape without paperwork so no one knows his real age.”

“Seriously?” The red vine snaps in mid-bite.

“Had to kill a man with his bare hands.” His fists mimic twisting a rope. “Snapped his neck like a turkey bone.”

“He told you this?”

“I’ve heard things.”

A voice bounces across the gym announcing Reza’s son as the next competitor. The crowd bursts into wild cheers as his son jogs into the center circle.

It is a grueling match. At times, Reza crawls around the perimeter to shout his guttural commands. His son struggles with his opponent. Again and again, their bodies slam to the mat.

“Pin him!” I say, not really knowing any other term to use.

The two wrestlers snarl as their limbs twist in positions that seem to rip them from the sockets. Reza continues his verbal barrage, his flying spit matching the sweat pouring from the young athletes.

As I watch him, I wonder what he endured to come here, to live this moment, to coach his son in an American high school gym.

The referee raises his son’s hand in victory. Reza pumps his fist.

After all the matches are over and the fans begin to clunk down the bleachers, I approach Reza.

“That was pretty exciting,” I say.

With a grin, he embraces me. “Thanks for coming.”

A few parents come to shake his hand, and various wrestlers pepper him with questions about tomorrow's practice or if he knows where they've left their shoes. His humble and patient manner intrigues me.

I remember the words, "snapped his neck like a turkey bone." I look at Reza's hands and wonder.

"Remember when we talked about writing your story?"

"Of course," he says.

"Still up for it?"

He places his hand on my shoulder. "Can you come over tomorrow?"

I walk to the parking lot with a bit of a bounce in my step. This is going to be exciting. An assassin for the Shah. I'm a little nervous about taking on my first book project, but I have published several articles. How hard could a book be?

The next night, I leave Reza's house with my spiral notebook, three hours of videotape and no idea how I am going to write his story. Do I begin with the night he tried to escape? How am I going to keep his ten siblings straight? Should I include the vignettes that might jeopardize our safety?

The cursor at the top of the blank page mocks me. I scan my notes again. Consult my writing books. Watch another section of tape. All right, then, I'll just begin with the first experience he shared with me. I'm sure it will flow from there.

Chapter Two

March 8, 1971 Kermanshah, Iran

“Muhammad Ali’s going to pulverize Frasier tonight,” Reza said. The eight-year-old struck with two lightning left hooks to knock out his imaginary opponent. Across the frayed wrestling tarp in the crowded gym, his calloused feet chopped and danced. “Everyone thinks Muhammad Ali will be our champion,” Reza repeated and then raised his voice to secure his father’s attention. “That’s what all the kids at school are saying.”

“Kids at school don’t always think,” Abbas replied as he rubbed his whiskers and brought his gaze just above his son.

Reza watched his father ponder the puzzle of wrestling mats with struggling athletes sweating through workouts. With a sigh Abbas mumbled, “They just repeat what they’re told.”

Finishing a flurry of uppercuts, Reza rolled his head and shook his arms. “I think Muhammad Ali is going to destroy that Joe Frasier. How can anybody named Joe even be a fighter? Let alone a ghahreman” (Champion).

He rose on his toes and resumed his silhouette match. Streams of sun struggled through the dirty windows that edged the ceiling and painted a matrix of light on Reza’s slender body. He swaggered to the gym’s echo of grunts and thuds. Uppercut, uppercut, jab, jab. *I could beat that Joe. I’d give him some up top, then come down low and—*

“Reza! You think you’re a boxer now?” Abbas said. “You’re not.” His thick index finger pointed to the mat. “Finish your workouts.” He paused, folded his arms and suppressed a smile. “Or you’ll miss the fight.”

“What do you mean miss the fight? How can I watch the fight? Farid’s TV is broken. Did amou (uncle) fix it?”

Abbas pounded his fist into his palm. “Sit-ups!”

“But what about—” he started to ask.

Abbas answered with a stare.

Reza lay flat on his back. “How many?”

“You ask me how many?” Abbas barked. “How can I know?”

On the mats, dotted in puddles of sweat and stained with drops of blood, the young warrior trained. Reza stopped at seventy-seven, when he could no longer lift his head. He flipped onto his stomach and arched his back. Sweat blurred the figure of Abbas walking toward the wrestlers practicing one-on-one drills.

Reza stood, waited for the burn of vomit to leave his throat and jogged after his father. A smile graced his face. He loved live drills.

Reza saw a few wrestlers edge over to climb the ropes that dangled from metal beams. He watched them go and shook his head. *Go climb your ropes. Cowards.*

A ten-year-old wrestler, Kaveh, disengaged himself from his current opponent and began to swing his arms and crack his neck. He glared at Reza and walked toward an empty mat.

“You’ve got three kilos on Reza,” Abbas said as he pointed to Kaveh’s thicker frame.

Reza hustled to catch up to his father. “I can take him, Baba (father)!” He shot a fierce look at Kaveh, who already stood in the center circle.

“Then do it,” Abbas said. He took his place at the side of the mat.

Stepping into the center, Reza brushed back the thick locks of black hair and licked the sweat from his bare upper lip.

Setting his legs diagonally, Kaveh bent his torso at the hip and brushed his hands through the air like a praying mantis. His eyes locked on Reza and Reza returned the stare.

Reza grabbed Kaveh around the waist and tried to drive him into the mat. But Kaveh’s legs stayed anchored. He reached around Reza, pulled up on his torso and then landed on Reza with crushing weight. Takedown for Kaveh.

Staggering to his feet, Reza went to regroup when Abbas pulled him aside. “Your body is weaker, so you’ll lose every time when you try to wrestle on strength alone.”

“What? How am I supposed to—?”

“Instinct is your fiercest weapon,” Abbas said as he held Reza’s shoulders and gave them a tug with each word. “Each movement, each twitch, each flicker must feed into a warrior.”

“Chashm (yes), Baba,” Reza said.

He returned to the mat, eyes darted across Kaveh’s face and body. *Twitches and flickers? Why does Baba always use these riddles?*

Kaveh’s right foot anchored into the mat, but his left couldn’t find a solid place. Reza noticed. He shot his body to that leg, lifted Kaveh a few inches and then slammed him to the mat.

“That’s it. Feel his weakness,” Abbas said. “Find it.” He circled the two wrestlers, his expert eye seeking weakness, possibilities.

Kaveh shot a double leg and drove his head into Reza’s gut, but Reza sprawled and reached for Kaveh’s ankles.

“Grab his shins!” Abbas commanded. “His shins!”

The young limbs bent around each other like vine tendrils slick with fresh rain. The muscles struggled to seize a hold before being ripped into a new position and struggled to grasp again. Reza’s legs seemed to operate separately from his arms as they wrapped around Kaveh’s head and drove it to the burlap surface.

Abbas slapped his hand on the mat to indicate the end of the period.

Reza released his victim.

Two more practice periods yielded similar results.

Kaveh wiped blood from his split lip. “Come on, Reza!” Kaveh said. “It’s just a drill.”

“Exactly,” Reza responded. “That’s why you’re only bleeding. Let’s go. Stand up.” *Coward.*

Reza took a quick lap around the mat, shaking his arms and rolling his head before he returned to the center.

“Step up,” Reza said.

“No way,” Kaveh replied. “You find someone else.” He walked around several entangled wrestlers before leaning against the scuffed wall to pinch close his bloody nose.

Reza looked to Abbas, who waved to let him go.

Then Abbas pointed to the area where the strongest wrestlers worked out. The intense lines sketched into Abbas’s face masked his gentle eyes. A slight man of perfect proportions, he carried every movement with balance and purpose. Thick eyebrows drew attention away from a thinning hairline, and his smile, although rare, could set everything right with the world.

“That was better,” Abbas said. “Work to read your opponent’s thoughts, know his next move.” Abbas placed two hardened hands on the tops of Reza’s shoulders and steered him toward the older wrestlers.

“Chashm,” Reza said. Then he scrunched up his face and looked to the ceiling. “I can do that sometimes, Baba. But today, I keep thinking about the American fighters.”

“Perhaps,” Abbas said, with the slightest catch in his rough tone, “Farid will come to our house to see the fight.”

“Our house? Come to our house to see the fight? Does that mean we have a TV?” Reza raised up on his tiptoes and looked directly at his father. “Really?”

“Yes, a TV,” Abbas said. “But first you have a match. Focus!”

Reza took a huge breath, stepped into the center and faced his next foe, an older and larger boy. In seconds, the boy smashed Reza’s face into the mat, where blood trickled from his nose and formed a tiny puddle directly in front of his eye. He caught me in the reversal.

“Reza!” Abbas said. “You should’ve seen that coming. Get up. Do it again.”

Shaking his arms and hopping from side to side to realign his muscles, Reza glared at the wrestler, who was nearly twice his size. “Let’s go!” Reza said. He did not wipe away the blood.

His opponent rolled his head around his thick neck. “Ready to be pinned again, Abedi? Where do you want to bleed from this time?”

Reza responded by stepping into the center of the mat and glancing at the clock. The next thing he saw up close: a puddle of his own blood.

Abbas yanked Reza up by his arm. "You cannot hesitate." He grabbed Reza's shoulders and pulled Reza toward him. Their faces reflected the mirrored image of the other.

Abbas raised a finger and pointed. "When you stop, you quit, you die."

Reza nodded and walked back to the center. *No one's going to die, Baba. I just want to see the fight. See American warriors. See a—*

"Abedi, let's go!" The opponent called out.

"Focus!" Abbas yelled. "Know him."

Three more live drills produced improved results for Reza.

"Better," Abbas said. "Now, go get your sister."

Reza pulled on his faded jeans and T-shirt, bolted out of the gym and down the bumpy asphalt road. He scurried into the smaller gym and searched for Soraya among the boys and girls doing flips and twists.

Seeing a classmate complete a summersault, he remembered the few weeks he trained there. Like some young boys, Reza had started with gymnastics but spent most of his time tackling his teammates or jumping from the high bars. One afternoon when Abbas came to walk him home, Reza's gymnastics coach engaged Abbas in a serious conversation. Reza was not allowed to hear.

That night, his mother hugged him with tears trickling down her cinnamon cheeks. "My son, my son. You are so young, just barely older than a baby." Reza had never seen his mother cry.

Abbas stood a few feet behind and spoke to her with a voice Reza feared. "Nimtaj, he has the strength, the instinct. You cannot keep him doing summersaults."

"Why not play soccer with Farid?" she asked Reza. Her gentle eyes glistened as she brushed thick curls from his forehead.

"Just kicking a ball and running after it is boring," Reza told her.

Then Abbas stepped forward and took Reza away from his mother. "It is done. He comes with me."

"He's only six, Haj' Abbas. Can't you wait until he is at least—?"

"He begins his training tomorrow."

Training for what? Reza had thought. Now, as he looked at the other boys doing their gymnastics, he smiled. Whatever he was training for, he liked it a lot more than these cartwheels and back flips.

He walked across the mats, looking for his sister. On the far side, he spotted Soraya completing a perfect dismount from the balance beam and jogged toward her. *She better be ready this time.*

"Baba got us a TV and he said it's time to go." Reza called.

Soraya slightly turned her head. Ten months his senior, she had the exquisite markings of a fawn and eyes that spoke before she did. Clipped in a perfect knot on top of her head, her silken black hair seemed to provide ballast as she jumped and spun.

She faced him with pouted lips. "Baba didn't say that. You did. And," she said as she hopped back on the beam, "I'm not finished."

"Do you always have to be impossible? Just this once, can you cooperate?"

Soraya's lean, muscular body completed several back flips before she landed again in a perfect dismount. "No."

"If we miss the fight because of you, I swear, I'll—"

Behind Reza, Soraya could see Abbas walking in their direction. Raising her voice, she continued. "It's not fair that we have to go home just because you want to see some stupid Americans fight. I have a competition next weekend and I have to practice." This time she did not return to the beam. She waited for her father.

Reza turned around, held up his arms and pointed to Soraya. "She's being impossible."

"Soraya," Abbas said. "We're going home now, but Reza'll escort you back here early tomorrow so you can get in the rest of your routine."

She grinned at Reza and pranced off to put on her warm-ups. Reza didn't say a word.

She returned in her loose-fitting pants, long shirt and unclipped hair. It poured down her back like a piece of night, accenting the brilliance of her eyes and sculpted face. She paraded toward the door, when Abbas stopped her. "Soraya, where's your roosari (headscarf)?"

Her shoulders dropped. "I left my headscarf at home, Baba."

"If you are not in hejab, you do not leave the house. Reza, why did you bring your sister here this morning with her hair uncovered?"

"I'm sorry, Baba." He shot his meanest look at his sister, who looked away. *She's impossible.*

"No more, Soraya. You're almost ten and you must cover every time you leave the house. Every time," Abbas said.

"Chashm, Baba."

Abbas brought his hand to his face, the coarse skin making a scratching sound against his uneven beard. He pointed to the door and the three headed into the fading sunlight for their walk home.

Bursting through the thick wooden door, Reza ran into the courtyard. "Salam, Naneh (mom)," he said as he passed his mother lifting the large silver handle to pump water from the fountain-well.

In case Abbas came home with a male friend, Nimtaj swiftly took the chador tied around her waist, covered her hair and continued her task. "Must you run, run, run to that box?"

Reza stopped before he headed into the large hallway that served as the main room. Floor-to-ceiling glass, checkered in small metal panes, created a barrier separating the entry, fountain-well and kitchen from the main hallway, two bedrooms and large closet.

His hand touched the knob. Through the glass, he could see his two younger sisters and his younger brother sitting on the floor staring at the blank screen. *Why isn't it on? Where's the fight?*

Behind him, he heard his father's voice coming up the path to the house. Reza went to his mother and wrapped his hands next to hers on the handle. "Sorry, Naneh," he said. He pumped the handle twice to produce a stream of grey water. "But isn't it exciting? We have a TV!"

She let go and dipped the corner of a cloth into the water. Taking the wet edge, she wiped away a bloodstain from his lip. He held still, but only for a moment.

"There," she said. "Now I can see your whole face."

"It's still my whole face, Naneh," Reza replied, "just with a drop of Kaveh's blood."

"Um-hum," she said as she grabbed both handles of the huge pot and carried it back to her kitchen.

"I promise. It wasn't mine." Reza followed her. "But, the TV! Isn't it exciting?"

She glanced into the main room. "Exciting? No more exciting than bringing in a huge rock to stare at, but it has kept Hassan and your sisters busy today."

"Have they seen anything? Did they see the American boxers?"

Behind them, Abbas and Soraya came into the home.

"Oh, you and your American fighters." Soraya said.

Nimtaj dried her hands on the chador, now tied around her waist. "Why is your hair not covered?"

"I forgot. I'm sorry," Soraya replied.

With his mother's attention on Soraya, Reza followed Abbas and joined his younger siblings in worship of the only furniture in the room. The TV.

Anxiety mounted as time neared for the fight to begin. Nimtaj calmed the brood while Abbas desperately tinkered with wires and knobs. Sitting on the faded Persian rug under the framed portrait of Shah, the chunky TV looked more like a roadside oddity than furniture. This magical box not only looked out of place, it refused to work.

Reza lived the excitement of the much-anticipated Muhammad Ali vs. Joe Frazier boxing match. He heard stories about the two American boxers at school, stories he wanted to see unfold before his eyes. His classmates argued that the legendary wrestler Takhti could have defeated them both, and Reza's heart swelled with impatience to see for himself. But no matter how many times Abbas clicked the two knobs or bent the silver antennas, only grey and white static crackled behind the thick glass.

"It'll work," Abbas said. "The shopkeeper told me it's the best."

Reza's three younger siblings gathered on the rug, standing in an unnatural cluster rather than sitting in the usual circle assembled for family meals.

The two little sisters, four-year old Farah and two-year-old Pari, stood curiously in front of the TV studying their reflection. "We go inside too?" they repeated.

Six-year-old Hassan sat on the floor and moved in a side-to-side symphony with Farah and Pari, trying to catch his reflection, too. Fuzzy lines, diagonal patterns and a lot of static greeted them.

The oldest brother, Amir, came into the room and headed directly for the TV. In his long, lanky stride he stepped on Hassan's hand and paused for only a brief moment. He glared down his pointed nose at Hassan, who stuffed his fingers in his mouth.

"It's the antenna. It has to be," Abbas said as he looked up. "Is it on the roof right? Did you follow the directions?"

"Directions? TVs don't have directions," Amir said. "You plug 'em in and turn 'em on. That's how they work. Ours must be a broken one."

The kids gasped—broken meant forever in a family with little means to support so many.

"It's the antenna wires? I'll go on the roof, Baba. Let me fix it." Reza begged his father.

"How can you know anything about these TVs?" Abbas answered without looking up. "You'll just fall and hurt yourself. Again. Amir, you go."

“No, no, he won’t know what to do!” Deciding his father’s silence implied permission, Reza ran through the kitchen, out the door and scurried up the ladder to the flat, brown roof.

He squinted in the setting sun across the multitude of one-story brick buildings, watching his neighbors bending their antennas and shouting to waiting families below. “Now?” they would ask. “Can you see anything now?”

As he worked to connect the antenna wires, Reza’s mind reeled in fear. We’re going to miss it! No one can get it. These stupid TVs never work like they’re supposed to. How can anyone see what is happening a world away, a world called America? Baba wasted his money.

Voices called up. “Reza, start bending the antenna! Zood bosh! Hurry!”

Reza bent this way and that, twisting the wires and calling down to the faces peering up at him. His younger brother and sisters darted in and out, calling to Baba, calling to Reza.

“More left. More right. Up. No, down. No, back the other way.”

The older brothers, twenty-one year-old Amir and fifteen-year-old Mostafa, climbed the ladder to stand on the roof alongside Reza.

While Mostafa smiled at other families struggling with their antennas, Amir moved in to Reza. “Of course you don’t know what you’re doing, but you came up here anyway! That’s why Baba wanted to send me. Give me the wire and move.” He reached around Reza.

“No, I can do it. I can do it! Don’t push me. Stop it!” Reza’s foot slipped on the loose rocks at the edge of the roof.

Mostafa grabbed his arm and pulled him back. Before Reza could speak, Amir blasted, “You know we can’t take you to the hospital. Ahhg! And I’ve dropped the wire because of you.”

“I’ll get it,” Reza said, stepping back toward the roof’s edge. The black wire dangled from the window. “I can reach it.”

“No, you can’t. You’re too short. Ugh! If we miss Muhammad Ali crushin’ Frazier—” Turning from Amir’s anger, Reza planned his reach for the wire. Glancing at the ground below, he estimated the fall should he come up short.

Desperate calls from below. “It’s not coming in! Nothing! Hichi(nothing)! What happened? There’s nothing now!” The family frantic. The cable dangling from the window. Reza lay on his stomach and hung over the edge. I’ll get it. Stretching to grab the wire, he called to Mostafa, “Just hold my legs, I almost got it.”

Mostafa looked over at his brother. “Reza, you’ll fall,” he replied. “Get up and we’ll . . .”

Reza’s fingertips barely touched the ends. “I almost got it, just one more . . .” As he reached, stretched, pushed himself over the edge, the sound of small rocks crunching beneath his rolling body became a roar.

“Reza! No!”

Tumbling, Reza swung his arms in a desperate circling motion as if trying to take flight. He flipped himself in a brief moment of balance and landed on the hardened clay ground, feet first, with a grunt. In a defeated heap, he held his ankle and tried not to cry.

Amir shook his head while Mostafa hurried toward the ladder.

Hearing the thud, Abbas rushed outside, but Amir cornered his attention. “Naneh will help him,” Amir said. “You have to reach the wire.”

“Go ahead,” Reza said while his large brown eyes blinked back tears. “I’m not hurt.”

Nimtaj leaned out the open window. “Not again! Are you sure you’re not hurt?”

“Baleh,” he nodded. “I’m fine.”

Only Hassan ran out of the house in search of his brother. He followed the brick wall around the perimeter until he found Reza rocking and holding his foot.

“Rezz!” Hassan’s small figure, wearing only a pair of torn shorts, sprinted to his brother.

“I’m okay. I’m fine.” Reza reached to the bony shoulder for balance. “Just help me up.”

“I’ll get Naneh. You’re hurt.” Hassan turned to run back into the house.

Reza grabbed his arm. “No! Get over here! I’m fine. I’m all right.” With strength from Hassan, Reza steadied himself.

Leaning at the end of the alley, Mostafa shook his head at his stubborn younger brother. An impressive few beard sprouts, twisting in the mountain breezes, gave Mostafa’s face the look of a young wizard. Only a few years older than Reza, he stood almost a foot taller and carried the wisdom of a thousand generations. He calmly approached the two and ordered Reza to sit.

Hassan protested. “Pick ’em up! Zood bosh! He’ll miss the big fight.”

Mostafa leaned over Reza’s swelling foot and moved it side to side. “You’ll walk, but I’d give up flying for a while.”

He reached under Reza’s arms. “Here, let’s get you up.”

A man’s shadow crossed the figures. “He should get up alone. He acts before he thinks and he only thinks about himself,” Amir said. His large frame and naturally dark features were emphasized in the shadows.

Hassan ducked behind Mostafa.

Reza looked down in shame, but Mostafa had already hoisted him to his feet. He whispered, “Sometimes you’ll fall,” and brushed dirt from Reza’s back. “But you always get up.”

The three brothers came into the home, hardly noticed by the family engaged in the only piece of furniture in the room.

Nimtaj and Reza’s two oldest sisters, Rasha and Mehri, brought the deeg (large pot) of steaming herbs to Reza. With his sheepish grin, he stood to place his swollen ankle in the brew. Smelling the rising steam, Nimtaj patted Reza’s head and went to her kitchen with Rasha and Mehri to prepare the evening’s meal, showing no interest in this new distraction crackling in their home.

The throbbing pain was soon blotted out by the image of two enormous warriors smashing fists into swollen faces while throngs of Americans cheered. Reza gasped as

Frazier absorbed a blow from Ali that would have killed an elephant and howled in amazement when Frazier got up.

“Look, Baba!” Hassan said. “He’s like an ox. He could lift the whole house!”

Farah’s pudgy face nodded in agreement. “Maybe two houses!” she added.

The commentator fumbled through the translation of boxing terms, his voice crackling in and out with both surreal emotion and poor reception.

Reza watched Muhammad Ali and marveled at how someone so powerful could also be so quick. These are Americans, Reza thought, from a land that might as well have been the moon. He strained to study the American faces in the crowd at Madison Square Garden, people whom he figured just wandered in off the street to take in a good fight. He pulled his swollen red leg from the deeg so he could get closer to the screen and hear the announcer.

Sitting next to his eight-year-old cousin, Farid, who had just scrambled in since his TV couldn’t be fixed, Reza whispered, “Muhammad Ali’s got this guy beat. He’s just waiting for the right moment to knock him out.”

Farid nodded in agreement and continued to write in the notebook he always carried with him.

Reza scooted even closer to the screen and became lost in the moment. Muhammad Ali punished Frazier with endless bloody blows. Now entering the fifteenth and final round, both fighters staggered with exhaustion. Screaming fans melted away leaving two ancient warriors facing one another in their broken bodies.

Reza reached to the screen and pretended to touch them. But he drew his hand back as Frazier lashed out with a punishing left hook to Muhammad Ali’s exposed jaw. Ali dissolved to the mat. His legs flopped in the air while his arms crashed to his side. The referee leaned over the pulverized mass. “1, 2 . . .”

And then, like a burst of black smoke from a smoldering inferno, Muhammad Ali rose.

Mostafa cheered and the others joined in.

Reza hopped on his good leg and yelled, "Baba! Did you see that? He won't stay down! He won't stay down!"

"Ahh, Reza, it's what I always tell you: getting up is what it takes to be Champion." Abbas paused and shook his head. "But that one moment of hesitation cost him this victory."

"Baba's right. One mistake and he won't be the ghahreman. It's over," Amir confirmed.

Reza looked up at Abbas and he nodded in agreement.

"But he got up," Mostafa said. "He got up."

At the sound of the bell, the warriors staggered to their corners. The referee took the card from the judges. The crowd took a collective breath as the referee's voice echoed through the arena. "Joe Frazier is the new Heavyweight Champion of the world."

Reza looked down and rubbed his swollen ankle.

A few hours later, the chilly spring evening found Reza, Farid and Hassan lying on the rooftop under the sparkling, ancient sky. Without the summer heat, the boys brought wool blankets to keep them warm.

Hassan ensured his blanket touched Reza's before he adjusted his pillow and settled in.

Reza was absorbed in the vast wonderment of the decorated darkness above them.

Farid, born only a few months after Reza, had an insatiable curiosity and sharp mind for details. He reviewed the notes he took during the fight and concluded that Muhammad Ali really should have been the ghahreman.

"What do you know about boxing?" Reza asked. "It's nothing like soccer."

"What's there to know? You land a punch, you get a point." Farid pointed to a page in his notebook. "And Muhammad Ali had more."

“Maybe it’s different in America,” Reza answered. “I mean, can you believe they were so huge? And fearless. I wonder if all Americans are like that.”

Farid and Reza first reasoned all Americans must be fearless, huge and strong like oxen. But, after a few minutes of silent pondering, Hassan shook his head and declared, “I saw skinny ones in the crowd.”

Reza agreed. “Lots of skinny ones.” Images of the mighty warriors were still crisp in his mind. Reza felt their desire, their sweat and their force. “So, it must be that the big Americans are bred to fight. They’re strong, like Takhti, but can a boxer be a true pahlavan?” He gazed off into the night sky.

Farid pulled the woven blanket closer to his chin to offset the evening’s chill. “Maybe, if you want to be a champion in America, you get all the best foods and all the best training ’till you’re huge.” Farid laughed a little. “And then all the skinny ones stand around and cheer while you get beat like a goat with a club.”

Reza pounded his fist into his hand, mimicking the action he had seen Abbas use many times when making a point. “But a goat can’t fight back. It has no chance. It’s just always a goat.”

“I’ve seen goats run really fast,” Hassan said. “And then they can’t get beat.”

“Cowards run,” Reza said. “Warriors fight.”

“But pahlavan fight with honor,” Farid said. “Like Takhti.”

Reza stood and walked to the edge of the roof. For several minutes, his small figure blended into the night. “I think I’d like to go to America,” Reza said. “I’ll find Muhammad Ali and tell him he really won and not to be disappointed. At least, he should be proud he got up.”

Silence followed Reza’s statement, so he figured they had fallen asleep. He returned to his bedding, adjusted his pillow and closed his eyes to remember his warriors exchanging blow after blow.

In the darkness, Farid’s voice cut into Reza’s dreams. “But it’s too much money to get to America and we don’t know how to get there.” He paused as if waiting for a response from Reza. “And your family is here and you’re Iranian. Iranians live in Iran.”

Reza stared into the brilliant path of the Milky Way. “Iran is just one part of the whole world.”

A world that for now lay buried somewhere behind a thick wall of black and white glass.

This marks the end of the second chapter.

Thank you for your time and attention and we look forward to changing the world with you.

Sincerely,

Kristin and Reza

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