as a complete surprise to us. We were told that Dadgar was favourably disposed toward you. . . . The Embassy is filing a very serious protest.'

'But what are you doing to get us *out*?'

'You must work through the Iranian legal system. Your attorneys –'

'Jesus Christ,' Paul said disgustedly.

Jordan said: 'We have asked them to move you to a better part of the jail.'

'Gee, thanks.'

Sorenson asked: 'Uh, is there anything else you need?'

'There's nothing I need,' Paul said. 'I'm not planning to be here very long.'

Bill said: 'I'd like to get some eye drops.'

'I'll see that you do,' Sorenson promised.

Jordan said: 'I think that's all for now . . .' He looked at the guard.

Bill stood up.

Jordan spoke in Farsi to the guard, who motioned Paul and Bill to the door.

They followed the guard back across the courtyard. Jordan and Sorenson were low-ranking Embassy staff, Bill reflected. Why hadn't Goelz come? It seemed that the Embassy thought it was EDS's job to get them out: sending Jordan and Sorenson was a way of notifying the Iranians that the Embassy was concerned but at the same time letting Paul and Bill know that they could not expect much help from the US Government. We're a problem the Embassy wants to ignore, Bill thought angrily.

Inside the main building, the guard opened a door they had not been through before, and they went from the reception area into a corridor. On their right were three offices. On their left were windows looking out into the courtyard. They came to another door, this one made of thick steel. The guard unlocked it and ushered them through.

The first thing Bill saw was a TV set.

As he looked around he started to feel a little better. This part of the jail was ~~a lot~~ more civilised than the basement. It was relatively clean and light, with grey walls and grey carpeting. The cell doors were open and the prisoners were walking around freely. Daylight came in through the windows.

They continued along a hall with two cells on the right and, on the left, what appeared to be a bathroom: Bill looked forward to a chance to get clean again after his night downstairs. Glancing through the last door on the right, he saw shelves of books. Then the guard turned left and led them down a long narrow corridor and into the last cell.

There they saw someone they knew.

It was Reza Neghabat, the Deputy Minister in charge of the Social Security Organisation at the Ministry of Health. Both Paul and Bill knew him well and had worked closely with him before his arrest last September. They shook hands enthusiastically. Bill was relieved to see a familiar face, and someone who spoke English.

Neghabat was astonished. 'Why are you in here?'

Paul shrugged. 'I kind of hoped you might be able to tell us that.'

'But what are you accused of?'

'Nothing,' said Paul. 'We were interrogated yesterday by Mister Dadgar, the magistrate who's investigating your former Minister, Dr Sheik. He arrested us. No charges, no accusations. We're supposed to be "material witnesses", we understand.'

Bill looked around. On either side of the cell were paired stacks of bunks, three high, with another pair beside the window, making eighteen altogether. As in the cell downstairs, the bunks were furnished with thin foam rubber mattresses, the bottom bunk of the three being no more than a mattress on the floor, and grey wool blankets. However, here some of the prisoners seemed to have sheets as well. The window, opposite the door, looked out into the courtyard. Bill could see grass, flowers and trees, as well as parked cars belonging, he presumed, to guards. He could also see the low building where they had just talked with Jordan and Sorenson.

Neghabat introduced Paul and Bill to their cellmates, who seemed friendly and a good deal less villainous than the inmates in the basement. There were ~~plenty~~ several of free bunks – the cell was not as crowded as the one downstairs – and Paul and

1 in his office

in his office

Perot preferred American art: Norman Rockwell originals and the Wild West bronzes of Federic Remington. Through the window he could see the slopes of the old golf course.

Perot did not know where Henry Kissinger might be spending the holidays: it could take Sally a while to find him. There was time to think about what to say. Kissinger was not a close friend. It would need all his salesmanship to grab Kissinger's attention and, in the space of a short phone call, win his sympathy.

The phone on his desk buzzed, and Sally called: 'Henry Kissinger for you.'

Perot picked it up. 'Ross Perot.'

'I have Henry Kissinger for you.'

Perot waited.

Kissinger had once been called the most powerful man in the world. He knew the Shah personally. But how well would he remember Ross Perot? The prisoners-of-war campaign had been big, but Kissinger's projects had been bigger: peace in the Middle East, rapprochement between the US and China, the ending of the Vietnam war . . .

'Kissinger here.' It was the familiar deep voice, its accent a curious mixture of American vowels and German consonants.

'Dr Kissinger, this is Ross Perot. I'm a businessman in Dallas, Texas, and –'

'Hell, Ross, I know who you are,' said Kissinger.

Perot's heart leaped. Kissinger's voice was warm, friendly and informal. This was great! Perot began to tell him about Paul and Bill: how they had gone voluntarily to see Dadgar, how the State Department had let them down. He assured Kissinger they were innocent, and pointed out that they had not been charged with any crime, nor had the Iranians produced an atom of evidence against them. 'These are my men, I sent them there, and I have to get them back,' he finished.

'I'll see what I can do,' Kissinger said.

Perot was exultant. 'I sure appreciate it!'

'Send me a short briefing paper with all the details.'

'We'll get it to you today.'

'I'll get back to you, Ross.'

'Thank you, sir.'

The line went dead.

Perot felt terrific. Kissinger had remembered him, h been friendly and willing to help. He wanted a briefing pap EDS could send it today –

Perot was struck by a thought. He had no idea whe Kissinger had been speaking from – it might have be London, Monte Carlo, Mexico . . .

'Sally?'

'Yes, sir?'

'Did you find out *where* Kissinger is?'

'Yes, sir.'

*

Kissinger was in New York, in his duplex at the exclusive Riv House apartment complex on East 52nd Street. From t window he could see the East River.

He remembered Ross Perot clearly. Perot was a roug diamond. He helped causes with which Kissinger was syn pathetic, usually causes having to do with prisoners. In th Vietnam war Perot's campaign had been courageous, eve though he had sometimes harassed Kissinger beyond the poi of what was do-able. Now some of Perot's own people we prisoners.

Kissinger could readily believe that they were innocen Iran was on the brink of civil war: justice and due proce meant little over there now. He wondered whether he coul help. He wanted to: it was a good cause. He was no longer i office, but he still had friends. He would call Ardeshir Zahed he decided, as soon as the briefing paper arrived from Dallas

*

Perot felt good about the conversation with Kissinger. *Hel Ross, I know who you are.* That was worth more than money. Th only advantage of being famous was that it sometimes helpe get important things done.

T.J. came in. 'I have your passport,' he said. 'It alread had a visa for Iran, but Ross, I don't think you should go. All o us here can work on the problem, but you're the key man. Th last thing we need is for you to be out of contact – in Tehran o just up in a plane somewhere – at the moment when we have t make a crucial decision.'

'He's here too.'

Walter, a tall Alabaman with a voice like molasses, was EDS's chief financial officer and probably the smartest man, in terms of sheer brains, in the company. Perot said: 'I want Walter to go to work on the bail. I don't want to pay it, but I will if we have to. Walter should figure out how we go about paying it. You can bet they won't take American Express.'

'Okay,' Gayden said.

A voice from behind said: 'Hi, Ross!'

Perot looked around and saw T. J. Marquez. 'Hi, Tom.' T.J. was a tall, slim man of forty with Spanish good looks: olive skin, short, curly black hair, and a big smile which showed lots of white teeth. The first employee Perot ever hired, he was living evidence that Perot had an uncanny knack of picking good men. T.J. was now a vice-president of EDS, and his personal shareholding in the company was worth millions of dollars. 'The Lord has been good to us,' T.J. would say. Perot knew that T.J.'s parents had really struggled to send him to college. Their sacrifices had been well rewarded. One of the best things about the meteoric success of EDS, for Perot, had been sharing the triumph with people like T.J.

T.J. sat down and talked fast. 'I called Claude.'

Perot nodded. Claude Chappelear was the company's in-house lawyer.

'Claude's friendly with Matthew Nimetz, Counselor to Secretary of State Vance. I thought Claude might get Nimetz to talk to Vance himself. Nimetz called personally a little later. He wants to help us. He's going to send a cable under Vance's name to the US Embassy in Tehran, telling them to get off their butts. And he's going to write a personal note to Vance about Paul and Bill.'

'Good.'

'We also called Admiral Moorer. He's up to speed on this whole thing because we consulted him about the passport problem. Moorer's going to talk to Ardeshir Zahedi. Now, Zahedi is not just the Iranian Ambassador in Washington but also the Shah's brother-in-law, and he's now back in Iran – running the country, some say. Moorer will ask Zahedi to

vouch for Paul and Bill. Right now we're drafting a cable for Zehedi to send to the Ministry of Justice.'

'Who's drafting it?'

'Tom Luce.'

'Good.' Perot summed up. 'We've got the Secretary of State, the Head of the Iran Desk, the Embassy, and the Iranian Ambassador all working on the case. That's good. Now let's talk about what else we can do.'

T.J. said: 'Tom Luce and Tom Walter have an appointment with Admiral Moorer in Washington tomorrow. Moorer also suggested we call Richard Helms – he used to be Ambassador to Iran after he quit the CIA.'

'I'll call Helms,' Perot said. 'And I'll call Al Haig and Henry Kissinger. I want you two to concentrate on getting all our people out of Iran.'

Gayden said: 'Ross, I'm not sure that's necessary –'

'I don't want a discussion, Bill,' said Perot. 'Let's get it done. Now, Lloyd Briggs has to stay there and deal with the problem – he's the boss, with Paul and Bill in jail. Everyone else comes home.'

'You can't make them come home if they don't want to,' Gayden said.

'Who'll want to stay?'

'Rich Gallagher. His wife –'

'I know. Okay, Briggs and Gallagher stay. Nobody else.' Perots stood up. 'I'll get started on those calls.'

He took the elevator to the seventh floor and walked through his secretary's office. Sally Walther was at her desk. She had been with him for years, and had been involved in the prisoners-of-war campaign and the San Francisco party. (She had come back from that weekend with a Son Tay Raider in tow, and Captain Udo Walther was now her husband.) Perot said to her: 'Call Henry Kissinger, Alexander Haig, and Richard Helms.'

He went through to his own office and sat at his desk. The office, with its panelled walls, costly carpet, and shelves of antiquarian books, looked more like a Victorian library in an English country house. He was surrounded by souvenirs and his favourite art. Margot bought Impressionist paintings, but

for the house

Paul realised with bitter disappointment that they were not about to be released; he *did* have to spend a night in the cell. He thought with anger of the Embassy staff: they had arranged the meeting with Dadgar, they had advised Paul against taking lawyers, they had said Dadgar was 'favourably disposed'. Ross Perot would say: 'Some people can't organise a two-car funeral.' That applied to the US Embassy staff. They were simply incompetent. Surely, Paul thought, after all the mistakes they have made, they ought to come here *tonight* and try to get us out?

They put on the plastic slippers and followed the guard back downstairs.

The other prisoners were getting ready for sleep, lying on the bunks and wrapping themselves in thin wool blankets. The cell boss, using sign language, showed Paul and Bill where to lie down. Bill was on the middle bunk of a stack, Paul below him with just a thin mattress between his body and the floor.

They lay down. The light stayed on, but it was so dim it hardly mattered. After a while Paul no longer noticed the smell, but he did not get used to the cold. With the concrete floor, the open vent, and no heating, it was almost like sleeping out of doors. What a terrible life criminals lead, Paul thought, having to endure conditions such as these; I'm glad I'm not a criminal. One night of this will be more than enough.

3

Ross Perot took a taxi from the Dallas/Fort Worth regional airport to EDS corporate headquarters at 7171 Forest Lane. At the EDS gate he rolled down the window to let the security guards see his face, then sat back again as the car wound along the quarter-mile driveway through the park. The site had once been a country club, and these grounds a golf course. EDS headquarters loomed ahead, a seven-storey office building, and next to it a tornado-proof blockhouse containing the vast computers with their thousands of miles of magnetic tape.

Perot paid the driver, walked into the office building, and

took the elevator to the fifth floor, where he went to Gayden's corner office.

Gayden was at his desk. Gayden always managed to look untidy, despite the EDS dress code. He had taken his jacket off. His tie was loosened, the collar of his button-down shirt was open, his hair was mussed, and a cigarette dangled from the corner of his mouth. He stood up when Perot walked in.

'Ross, how's your mother?'

'She's in good spirits, thankyou.'

'That's good.'

Perot sat down. 'Now, where are we on Paul and Bill?'

Gayden picked up the phone, saying: 'Lemme get T.J. in here.' He punched T.J. Marquez's number and said: 'Ross is here . . . Yeah. My office.' He hung up and said: 'He'll be right down. Uh . . . I called the State Department. The head of the Iran Desk is a man called Henry Precht. At first he wouldn't return my call. In the end I told his secretary, I said: "If he doesn't call me within twenty minutes, I'm going to call CBS and ABC and NBC and in one hour's time Ross Perot is going to give a press conference to say that we have two Americans in trouble in Iran and our country won't help them." He called back five minutes later.'

'What did he say?'

Gayden sighed. 'Ross, their basic attitude up there is that if Paul and Bill are in jail they must have done something wrong.'

'But what are they going to *do*?'

'Contact the Embassy, look into it, blah blah blah.'

'Well, we're going to have to put a firecracker under Precht's tail,' Perot said angrily. 'Now, Tom Luce is the man to do that.' Luce, an aggressive young lawyer, was the founder of the Dallas firm of Hughes ~~and~~ Hill, which handled most of EDS's legal business. Perot had retained him as EDS's counsel years ago, mainly because Perot could relate to a young man who, like himself, had left a big company to start his own business and was struggling to pay the bills. Hughes~~and~~ Hill, like EDS, had grown rapidly. Perot had never regretted hiring Luce.

Gayden said: 'Luce is right here in the office somewhere.'

'How about Tom Walter?'

and offered him the job, only to find that, on talking over with his family, the man had decided that EDS was just too small, too new, too risky.

Paul and Bill had not only taken the chance – they had worked their butts off to make sure their gamble paid off. Bill had designed the basic computer system for the administration of Medicare and Medicaid programmes which, used now in many American States, formed the foundation of EDS's business. He had worked long hours, spent weeks away from home, and moved his family all over the country in those days. Paul had been no less dedicated: when the company had too few men and very little cash, Paul had done the work of three systems engineers. Perot could remember the company's first contract in New York, with Pepsico; and Paul walking from Manhattan across the Brooklyn Bridge in the snow, to sneak past a picket line – the plant was on strike – and go to work.

Perot owed it Paul and Bill to get them *out*.

He owed it to them to get the Government of the United States to bring the whole weight of its influence to bear on the Iranians.

America had asked for Perot's help, once; and he had given three years of his life – and a *bunch* of money – to the prisoners-of-war campaign. Now he was going to ask for America's help.

His mind went back to 1969, when the Vietnam war was at its height. Some of his friends from the Naval Academy had been killed or captured: Bill Leftwich, a wonderfully warm, strong, kind man, had been killed in battle at the age of thirty-nine; Bill Lawrence was a prisoner of the North Vietnamese. Perot found it hard to watch his country, the greatest country in the world, losing a war because of lack of will; and even harder to see millions of Americans protesting, not without justification, that the war was wrong and *should* not be won. Then, one day in 1969, he had met little Billy Singleton, a boy who did not know whether he had a father or not. Billy's father had gone missing in Vietnam before ever seeing his son: there was no way of knowing whether he was a prisoner, or dead. It was heartbreaking.

For Perot, sentiment was not a mournful emotion but a clarion call to action.

He learned that Bill's mother was not unique. Although the Government was not admitting it, there were many, perhaps hundreds, of wives and children who did not know whether their husbands and fathers had been killed or just captured. The Vietnamese, arguing that they were not bound by the rules of the Geneva Convention because the United States had never declared war, refused to release the names of their prisoners.

Worse still, many of the prisoners were dying of brutality and neglect. President Nixon was planning to 'Vietnamize' the war and disengage in three years' time, but by then, according to CIA reports, half the prisoners would have died. Even if Billy Singleton's father were alive, he might not survive to come home.

Perot wanted to do something.

EDS had good connections with the Nixon White House. Perot went to Washington and talked to Chief Foreign Policy Advisor Henry Kissinger. And Kissinger had a plan.

The Vietnamese were maintaining, at least for the purposes of propaganda, that they had no quarrel with the American people – only with the US Government. Furthermore, they were presenting themselves to the world as the little guy in a David-and-Goliath conflict. It seemed that they valued their public image. It might be possible, Kissinger thought, to embarrass them into improving their treatment of prisoners, and releasing their names, by an international campaign to publicise the sufferings of the prisoners and their families.

The campaign must be privately financed, and must *seem* to be quite unconnected with the Government, even though in reality it would be closely monitored by a team of White House and State Department people.

Perot accepted the challenge. (Perot could resist anything but a challenge. His eleventh-grade teacher, one Mrs Duck, had realised this. 'It's a shame,' Mrs Duck had said, 'that you're not as smart as your friends.' Young Perot insisted he *was* as smart as his friends. 'Well, why do they make better grades than you?' It was just that they were interested in school and he was not, said Perot. 'Anybody can stand there and tell

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

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

Abolhansan said: 'He asks whether you are ready to post the bail.'

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

Abolhasan said nothing.

'He can't be serious,' Paul said.

'He's serious,' said Abolhasan.

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

Abolhasan said: 'You are allowed one phone call each.'

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

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

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

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

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

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

'Oh, dear, I –'

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

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

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

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

Bill hung up.

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

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

Paul said: 'Gee, thanks.'

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

Abolhasan said: 'Do you want to give me your briefcases and wallets?'

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

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

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

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

'Sure.'

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

They went out.

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

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

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

the whole thing was about. He could happily tell the investigators the truth: EDS had paid no bribes. He doubted whether anyone had bribed the Minister. Iranian bureaucrats were notoriously corrupt, but Dr Sheikh – as Paul called him for short – seemed to come from a different mould. An orthopaedic surgeon by training, he had a perceptive mind and an impressive ability to master detail. In the Ministry of Health he had surrounded himself with a group of progressive young technocrats who found ways to cut through red tape and get things done. The EDS project was only part of his ambitious plan to bring Iranian health and welfare services up to American standards. Paul did not think Dr Sheik was lining his own pockets at the same time.

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

when/

after/

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

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

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

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

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

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

When the news that Paul and Bill were well and truly stuck in Iran reached Dallas, EDS and its lawyers went into high gear. Their Washington contacts were not as good as they would have been under a Republican administration, but they still had some friends. They talked to Bob Strauss, a high-powered White House troubleshooter who happened to be a Texan; Admiral Tom Moorer, a former Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, who knew many of the generals now running Iran's military government; and Richard Helms, sometime Director of the CIA and a former US Ambassador to Iran. As a result of the pressure they put on the State Department, the US Ambassador in Tehran, William Sullivan, raised the case of Paul and Bill in a meeting with the Iranian Prime Minister, General Azhari.

None of this brought any results.

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

Neither the Embassy nor EDS's lawyers in Tehran had been able to find out *who* had ordered Paul and Bill detained. It

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

'Say, senior executives don't have to keep their passports in the office.'

'That might work.'

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

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

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

'You could do the same.'

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

'Are we going?' Coburn asked.

'I don't know.' Every day for weeks they had asked each other that question. Coburn had developed an evacuation plan which could be put into effect instantly. Paul had been hesitating, with his finger on the button. He knew that his ultimate boss, back in Dallas, wanted him to evacuate – but it meant abandoning the project on which he had worked so hard for the last sixteen months. 'I don't know,' he repeated. 'I'll call Dallas.'

*

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

He picked it up in the dark. 'Yeah?'

'This is Paul.'

Hello.' Coburn turned on the light and looked at his wristwatch. It was two a.m.

'We're going to evacuate,' Paul said.

'You got it.'

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

He ran over in his mind the plans he had made for just this

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

'Oh, shit,' Coburn said.

One of the soldiers was still loading his gun. He was trying to put the clip in backwards, and it would not fit. He dropped it, and went down on one knee, scrabbling around on the ground looking for it. Coburn would have laughed if he had not been ~~so~~ scared.

An officer yelled at Coburn in Farsi. Coburn lowered the

Bill took beds on either side of the doorway. Bill's was the middle bunk of three, but Paul was on the floor again.

Neghabat showed them around. Next to their cell was a little kitchen, with tables and chairs, where the prisoners could make tea and coffee or just sit and talk. For some reason it was called the Chatanooga Room. Beside it was a hatch in the wall at the end of the corridor: this was a little commissary, Neghabat explained, where from time to time you could buy soap, towels and cigarettes.

Walking back down the long corridor, they passed their own cell – No. 5 – and two more cells before emerging into the hall, which stretched away to their right. The room Bill had glanced into earlier turned out to be a combination guard's office and library, with books in English as well as Farsi. Next to it were two more cells. Opposite these cells was the bathroom, with sinks, showers and toilets. The toilets were Persian style – like a shower tray with a drain hole in the middle. Bill learned that he was not likely to get the shower he longed for: normally there was no hot water.

Beyond the steel door, Neghabat said, was a little office used by a visiting doctor and dentist. The library was always open and the TV was on all evening, although of course programmes were in Farsi. Twice a week the prisoners in this section were taken out into the courtyard to exercise by walking in a circle for half an hour. Shaving was compulsory: the guards would allow moustaches, but not beards.

During the tour they met two more people they knew. One was Dr Towliati, the Ministry data processing consultant about whom Dadgar had questioned them. The other was Hussein Pasha, who had been Neghabat's financial man at the Social Security Organisation.

Paul and Bill shaved with the electric razor brought in by Sorenson and Jordan. Then it was noon, and time for lunch. In the corridor wall was an alcove screened by a curtain. From there the prisoners took a linoleum mat, which they spread on the cell floor, and some cheap tableware. The meal was steamed rice with a little lamb, plus bread and yoghurt, and tea or Pepsi-Cola to drink. They sat cross-legged on the floor to eat. For Paul and Bill, both gourmets, it was a poor lunch.

However, Bill found he had an appetite: perhaps it was th cleaner surroundings.

After lunch they had more visitors: their Iranian attorneys The lawyers did not know why they had been arrested, did no know what would happen next, and did not know what the could do to help. It was a desultory, depressing conversation Paul and Bill had no faith in them anyway, for it was thes lawyers who had advised Lloyd Briggs that the bail would no exceed twenty thousand dollars. They returned no wiser an no happier.

They spent the rest of the afternoon in the Chatanooga Room, talking to Neghabat, Towliati and Pasha. Paul described his interrogation by Dadgar in detail. Each of the Iranians was highly interested in any mention of his own name during the interrogation. Paul told Dr Towliati how his name had come up, in connection with a suggested conflict o interest. Towliati described how he, too, had been questioned by Dadgar in the same way before being thrown in jail. Paul recollected that Dadgar had asked about a memorandum written by Pasha. It had been a completely routine request for statistics, and nobody could figure out what was supposed to be special about it.

Neghabat had a theory as to why they were all in jail. 'The Shah is making a scapegoat of us, to show the masses that he really is cracking down on corruption – but he picked a project where there was no corruption. There is nothing to crack down on – but if he releases us, he will look weak. If he had looked instead at the construction business he would have found an unbelievable amount of corruption . . .'

It was all very vague. Neghabat was just rationalising. Paul and Bill wanted specifics: *who* ordered the crackdown, *why* pick on the Ministry of Health, *what* kind of corruption was supposed to have taken place, and *where* were the informants who had put the finger on the individuals who were now in jail? Neghabat was not being evasive – he simply had no answers. His vagueness was characteristically Iranian: ask a Persian what he had for breakfast and ten seconds later he would be explaining his philosophy of life.

At six o'clock they returned to their cell for supper. It was