

Part 1:

Panopticon

After he was banned from leaving the country and from his profession, after his wife was executed, after the attempt on his life, after his comrades disappeared and his friends left the country without saying goodbye, after the mass arrests, the raids on people's homes and the Party warnings, after tracking down smugglers and counterfeiters, nothing could have been more improbable than getting picked up, only for them to hand over his counterfeit passport. Yet that was exactly what had happened.

He pressed his hand to his jacket pocket. The passport was there. He had it. A dopey lad was sat in front of the phone booths on the other side of the street, changing notes for coins and keeping one toman from each transaction for himself. Jamshid gave him a ten and got nine coins back. He called the only neighbours who had a phone and got through to the lady of the house who sent her son over to his parents to give them the all-clear. Then he decided to walk a few blocks and set off at a hobble.

The small streams running along the streets came from the Alborz mountains to the north of Tehran. Meltwater, clear, cold and full of power, trickled down from the rich north to the south below, where it fizzled out. Fattened up with filth for mile after mile, the streams eventually emptied their guts at the feet of the residents down in Javadiyeh, Amiriyeh, Simetri and Gomrok, where they languished, as if to make a point.

By the side of the road was a woman who kept shouting that she wasn't afraid. Of what, she kept to herself. A few streets over, a toothless pensioner had set up a stall where he sold books by the kilo. Jamshid came to a stop, propping himself up on his crutches, and lit a cigarette. A kilo cost one of two prices. You could pick the books out yourself or, for a lower price, you could let the stall owner blindly grab a few titles for you. Like buying fruit. Like apples or oranges. Jamshid had spent the past few nights incinerating large chunks of his book collection and he would be leaving Iran in a matter of weeks, maybe even days. And yet he found himself searching for his wallet anyway. Nothing summed up the state of his country better than this image, he thought. He counted out his money, walked up to the stall and bought two kilos of books. 'I'll take two,' he said. The man placed a small stack on the scales. Two kilos and three-hundred grams. He waved off the extras and called it an even two.

He was still a ways away from home but Jamshid knew that soon enough he wouldn't be seeing these streets ever again and decided to say

his goodbyes on foot. Everything he would do in the coming weeks, it would likely be for the last, second-to-last, third-to-last time. He would never see the dopey lad again, or the woman shouting at her fear. He would never buy two kilos of books again. Wonder what sort of headcases they've got on the Champs-Élysées?

It was late by the time he reached Javadiyeh. In the gutter at his feet, the sludge was drying in the slant of the evening sun, forming a crust on the cigarette butts, plastic slip-ons, food scraps, shopping bags and a deflated football that a child a few miles upstream must have cried after. The mouths of the passers-by had fewer and fewer teeth. There were more children out in the streets than he could count, even though it was steadily getting later. Hanging from lobes their mothers had pierced with simple sewing needles, the girls wore wire or bits of string in place of earrings. The chador were getting stricter, and the faces too. The people here stressed a different stress, sweated a different sweat. He was in the south now. And drained.

Part 2:

Vitamin C

Dave looked at the picture. He didn't know where to start.

'Nima, baby. This guy's white. You two ain't exactly alike.'

'I'm white.' Now it was Nima's turn to provoke.

Dave, who could tell what Nima was getting at, laughed. 'Know what I love most about you?'

He didn't. All Nima knew was that now it was going to take longer.

'You're an enigma. Like how you'll just hang around on a bridge blowing bubbles and trying to hit the cars below like a little kid.' Dave was one of those types who could say a thing like that in a way that was flattering.

'What you getting at? Man thinks I'm naïve, yeah?'

'No, baby. Not naïve. Zen. You're zen. I still ain't figured out how, but you are, you're zen.'

'Like you, innit? With your yoga and all that kombucha-moonwater shit? That kind of zen?'

Dave placed both hands on Nima's shoulders and looked him in the eyes in the mirror. He wasn't joshing around anymore.

'No. Not kombucha-moonwater zen. More like, I-ain't-exactly-from-these-ends zen. You do what you do, only somehow what you do ain't got

anything to do with you. You just do it. Like this haircut. You're asking for it, but you don't want it!

'I do.'

'You don't.'

'Swear down.'

'Swear up, swear down. No, baby. You don't want the haircut. You don't really want anything at all. You're just wondering if getting the haircut would actually do anything, if it would make a difference somehow or if this really is it.' Dave gestured at the room but meant the universe. 'You don't actually want things to be different. You just wanna know, what if? Deep down, that's your whole mindset, your mantra. What if?'

Nima felt they should get back to talking about hair. 'Listen, I don't wanna look like this G, you feel me? I just want his hairstyle. You're here telling me it's for white people, I'm telling you I am white. I'm Persian. Aryan. Bruv, my surname's Ariapoor. I ain't gotta explain it to *you*.'

'Easy, white boy! Easy. I know. You, me, us, we're all white. Aryan. Our great-great-grand-whatevers invented whiteness. Ain't nobody trying to take that away from you. Thing is, though, we might have invented it, but we were never that good at it. I mean, look at this G. He's Danish, Swedish, English, something like that. White-white.'

And on it dragged. Nima eventually gave in to a 'Trust me!', even if he did respond with a 'Trust that I do not trust you'. And while Dave cut his hair, he scanned the floor for Mel's hair but couldn't find any and it occurred to him that he had never seen any hair on the floor here. Not even the hair Dave was cutting off him right now seemed to find its way down there.

There was some on the cape, on his face and on the back of his neck. But not on the floor. Not a single strand.

'How come there's never no hair on the floor here?'

'There is.'
