

Danger of Love

Chapter 1

Bad Dream

England, December 1943

Russ Wesley was buried up to his shoulders. The cold sand pressed hard against his chest and squeezed him tightly. He gasped for breath, afraid his lungs might collapse. Around him, the angry mob flowed, screaming, their faces distorted by hate. Arms lifted up rocks then a sharp thumping began as the stones hit his neck and face and head. He tried to run his way out of the ground, but his legs couldn't move. *Why are they attacking me?* He heard someone scream. A woman's voice cut through his chest like a knife.

His eyes snapped open. The ceiling fan was a dark, slow whirl thumping in the ceiling. *Another bad dream.* The same bad dream that visited him every night, the same dream that robbed him of joy. A darkness pressed

him when the mob had tried to kill him.

Russ rose from his bed and looked out the window at the central London street. A heavy fog made it hard to see anything. Cars and trucks rumbled into sight only to be swallowed by the mist again. He was back in the country where he had lived most of his life. Again he was speaking the language he had spoken since childhood, yet he felt strange. *Why am I feeling this way?* he wondered. *Is it my depression?*

Looking at the fog-covered road, he remembered the sunshine and the colorful roses in his Shiraz home. The mountain there held snow on top and red wild anemone spread over the foothills. The sky was sharply blue, and at night, the stars were like thousands of brilliant rubies. He had first seen her in the square where a circle of women, young and old, danced around a fire. Their colorful clothes, streaks of red and yellow and green, danced around it too. Just outside the dance circle, young men were doing the *tarkeh bazi* and swinging wooden sticks as if they were swords.

When the gaze of one beautiful woman had fallen on his face, Russ had shivered. Her smile had been as beautiful as the stars.

He stepped back from the window in his flat, shrugged, and tried to brush the memory from his mind. *I need to forget. I need to erase the good and bad memories of that land from my mind.* Could he? He wasn't sure. How could he erase the past ten years of his life? The deep feelings, the good and bad memories tangled together day and night.

He snapped on the transistor radio that perched on the nightstand. The thin, reedy voice of the

president of the United States filled his dark room. Joseph Stalin, Franklin D. Roosevelt, and Winston Churchill had completed a four-day meeting in the capital of Iran to shape a common policy announced on December 1, 1943.

Russ's mind was numb. *We invaded Iran and deposed her ruler, and now she is our ally?* Immediately he thought, *Let's face it. If not for the Iranian invasion, there might not be any victory for the allies.* After all, someone—he couldn't remember who—had said, "Iran is the victory bridge for allies if they win the war."

Russ told himself to forget the past. He needed to enjoy the present and set goals for the future. To achieve any goals, he needed to put aside the past and act. After so many years away, he had to adjust to London's lifestyle, he had to overcome his numbness, and he had to find a job in one of the hospitals. His missionary work, his background, and his experience should make finding another job seem easy, but first he had to apply. He wasn't able to do that on this day. He was too depressed to do anything.

He had to forget about her. He wanted a cup of tea. He looked around the clothes-strewn flat, unconsciously searching for Hussein to bring him a cup of tea. But Hussein was thousands of miles away. Russ had to make his own cup of tea. Until he found another butler, perhaps? He laughed. He set the kettle on the stove, grabbed his *tar*, and started playing. The music took him back to Shiraz, the land of wine and poetry.

Chapter 2

From England to Persia

Russ Wesley was finally going to Persia. The land he always dreamed of going to. He was going to guide the Persians to see the light, to introduce them to Jesus the savior.

His curiosity for the unknown made him pursue the life of a missionary who traveled to exotic lands. Since Persia was the most exotic place he could go, he chose to go there. Several months after his father died of a heart attack in the spring of 1933, he left for Persia. By then, Russ had become quite a handsome, tall man. His blond hair had been ruthlessly cropped to reveal a flawlessly symmetrical bone structure with winged brows and hooded eyes a curious shade of green.

Russ had studied Persian language and history for two years to prepare for his missionary work. His dream was to discover its exotic culture while spreading the word of God. There was a great need for doctors, and he hoped to achieve his dreams by working in a hospital in Shiraz called Morsalin.

He travelled on the *SS Gairsoppa*, a 412-foot, steel-hulled British cargo steamship to India. The voyage was long, but the North Sea was calm and beautiful. He spent his time looking at the water, studying the Persian language, and talking with an Indian man who knew the language. With him, Russ practiced his long hours of study.

The first day he met Amitava Goush, an Indian man who knew Persian language. Russ was sitting in the chair on the ship's deck reading a book when a deep voice drew his attention.

"Good morning, sir, it is a beautiful day."

Russ looked up and saw a man, average height and, a little bit over weight, dark skin with big stomach trying to sit in the chair next to him. His face was round and his voice high. He definitely was one of the Indians traveling back home.

Russ smiled and said, "Good morning, yes, it is magnificent day."

The man sat comfortably in the chair hold his hand toward him and said, "I am Ami Goush."

Russ shook his hand and said, "I am Dr. Russ Wesley."

"Doctor! We need a good doctor in India."

Russ chuckled, "I am sorry to disappoint you. I am not going to India though. I am going to Persia (Iran)."

"I see! What made you going to Persia (Iran)?"

"I love travel, and I love to know of exotic cultures. I took Persian as a foreign language in the college and fell in love with it."

Ami smiled in approval and said, "I agree it is the most poetic language I know of."

Russ asked hopefully, "Do you know Persian?" He needed to practice the language, and if this friendly Indian eager to speak, could talk in Persian his long trip would change to fun-filled days.

"Oh, yes, I am from Punjab and learned the Persian language when going to school."

Russ changed to Persian and said, "Oh I did not know that they teach children Persian in school."

"Actually, Persian language was dominant language in Indian schools before the arrival of British to India in 1832. After that time, English became the prestigious language. However, there are still some schools which teach Persian language to the students who are eager to read their historical and literature text." Ami paused and said, "You mentioned that you took Persian in the college?"

"Yes I took several courses and then I studied the language for almost a year to prepare myself to become a missionary there."

"I see so you are a holy man too. What made a doctor to become a priest?"

"My father was a minister of the Church of England. As many families did at the time, my parents provided their children's early education. Each one of us was taught to read as soon as we could walk and talk. At the age of five, I was rescued from the burning rectory. The narrow escape made a deep impression, and they regarded me as providentially set apart, as a "brand plucked from the burning" as quoted in Zechariah 3:2..

In 1913, at age eleven, I was sent to the Charterhouse School in London under the mastership of John King. I lived the studious, methodical and religious life in which I'd been trained at home."

Ami asked with amusement, "So you became a priest because of your family expectaion?"

Russ shook his head from side to side. "No I cannot say it was all for my family, although their wish was part of my decision. During the year of my ordination, I began to seek religious truths in *William Law's A Treatise upon Christian Perfection* and *A Serious Call to a Devout and Holy Life*. The works gave me a more sublime view of the law of God, and I resolved to keep it, inwardly and outwardly, as sacredly as possible. During my Oxford days, I discovered my love for medicine. In 1925, shortly after I took up my residence in London, I began the study of medicine and soon obtained a reputation as a physician."

The call for dinner interrupted their conversation; however, they talked in length about his curiosity that perpetually drove him to ask why and how. Ami was eager to talk probably to kill time in the ship, and Russ was happy to have someone to practice his new learned language.

After several months, the ship finally arrived in Bas Rah. He rented a car to take him to Khanaqin and Ghasre-Shirin in Iran. The road all along the thirty-mile journey was beautiful. Russ couldn't take his eyes off the tall mountains covered with white snow and the valleys. The golden rays of sun reflecting the snowy mountains were magnificent. His next stop was Tehran,

and from there he journeyed on to Shiraz. Along that leg of his path, he saw no signs of winter. Instead, he was surprised to see desert flowers and anemones beside the road. *It's like we're traveling across different planets*, he thought.

The driver announced, "*Darvazeh ghoran*. We are arriving to Shiraz."

Shiraz was known as the city of poets, literature, wine, and flowers. The word *shir* meant *lion*, but it could also mean *milk*. It was considered by many Iranians to be a city of gardens due to the many gardens and fruit trees. At the time, it was a diversified city with major Jewish and Christian communities. Still, the population was mostly Muslim.

Russ spotted a large gate decorated with words. "Do you know when that gate was built?" he asked.

"Oh, yes. The gate was first built during the reign of 'Adud ad-Dawla Dilami. When Krim Khan Zand became the king the gate was pretty much damaged, but he ordered it to get repaired and made that small room on the top to store a handwritten Qur'āns, which are known to be 17 man (51 kilogram).

Russ was a bit confused. "You named some people and dynasties that I haven't heard of. When did they live?"

"Of course you haven't heard of them all! We've had so many dynasties it's hard to remember ourselves. I think Dilamians reigned the west of Iran and Iraq in the tenth century. The Zand Dynasty was good but short-lived. Karim Khan reigned Iran in the seventeenth century. He never claimed himself shah but as *Vakil e-Ra'aayaa*, a representative of the people. You will see

his name everywhere in Shiraz since he practically built the city that was his capital."

As they passed through the gate, Russ saw ten- to twenty-meter walls with small wooden doors beside the road. Tall trees were heavy with pink and white blossoms. "Are these the houses?" Russ asked.

"No. They are orchards of apple, almond, and cherry trees. They are so beautiful this time of the year."

"They bloom in the winter?"

"Yes. The weather is very mild here, and they bloom in *Bahman*, in February." The driver turned right onto a different road. "This is Zand Street, which was built during Karim Khan's time. That old castle is Arg-Karim Khan, his palace."

They passed the majestic citadel, with its tall walls and beautiful handmade designs. As they passed the Arg-Karim Khan, the walls of the houses seemed to become taller and their lengths grew shorter. Russ could still see the top branches of the blooming trees reaching up from behind the tall walls. The wooden doors were closed, but the walls and doors were decorated with pansies and daffodils. Some walls were covered with the green branches of honeysuckles, and their aroma caressed his nostrils. The car turned onto a beautiful street with tall trees on either side. They stopped in front of a wide wooden door that stood open.

"We are in Khayam Street," the driver said, "and this is the hospital. "

The exterior was like the other houses he'd seen so far, with tall walls and a wooden door. The one exception

was a cross at the top of the door decorated with Persian symbols, most notably cypress trees. Russ took his suitcases, then reached for the door knocker. The gatekeeper spotted him and ran through the courtyard with a wide smile.

“Hello, sir. You must be the doctor we were waiting for. How are you doing? How was your trip?”

The man was asking questions one after the other while taking one of the suitcases.

Russ bent down and took the other one and said, “Hello to you too. Yes, I am doctor Russ Wesley. Nice meeting you.”

The man’s smile widened when he heard him talking in Persian and said, “Oh nice meeting you and welcome to our city. I am Orooj the gatekeeper. I did not know if you could speak our tongue!”

Russ replied, “Of course, I can. Without the language, how can I communicate with my patients?”

Orooj shook his head in agreement and guided Russ inside.

The square courtyard was surrounded by trees, and gardens had been planted in the middle. The hospital building was laid out like a big L. Each room opened onto an uncovered patio that stretched around the building and provided access to the courtyard.

Inside the hospital office, Russ was welcomed by Sister Tina. She was an older woman of about seventy. She was tall and skinny, and her wrinkled face still showed traces of the beauty of her younger years. She seemed cheerful, charitable, and full of vigor. She also was quite serious and determined to do her duties. Not only was she the head nurse, but she also oversaw the

administration of the hospital. She introduced him to Dr. Azali.

Azali was a young man with dark skin. He stood about medium height and had thick eyebrows and long lashes. He was clearly well-educated and easygoing. He was from Shiraz and was married. He seemed very friendly and warm. He took Russ on a tour of the hospital.

“This hospital was built in 1917,” he said, “as a women’s hospital. It originally had twenty-five private rooms, a kitchen, and a laundry. Later they added a separate building for men with thirty rooms, a kitchen and a laundry. They also added the church.”

“Why was it first built for women?” Russ asked.

“A Persian philanthropist called Namazi first built it for women who were in labor. Later it was converted to a Christian hospital and run by the Church of England.”

“Are all the rooms occupied by patients? Is there any problem with overcrowding?”

“Not really. The general opinion of the Muslim population isn’t to our favor. They look at our activities with suspicion. There were so many oppositions to Christian schools and even to the hospitals, although to a lesser extent. The patients who come here are mostly upper and middle class and tend to be more educated. We don’t see too many poor patients since they tend to be more superstitious and more influenced by their religious leaders.”

The building had been set up in the Persian style. Colorful tiles decorated the walls, and the windows

had red, yellow and pink glass. The doors had been beautifully decorated with the Persian art called *mosh-aback karri*. In general, Russ didn't feel he was entering a Western hospital. This was a true Persian building with all its intriguing beauties.

The rooms were spacious, and the windows to the courtyard were open. Decorative colored glass had been built into their arches. Each room had two beds, which were occupied by a patient and at least one family member.

He saw Shiraz as a beautiful and clean city. Since all the houses were surrounded with tall walls, he couldn't see into any of the houses unless he went inside. But even the walls were covered with climbing roses or honeysuckles that gave off heavenly aromas. Wherever the street was bare of trees, red, pink, and yellow roses had been planted. The golden sun shone every day, and the blue sky was the opposite of London's endless fog. Shiraz looked like a dark emerald in a great desert of grays and browns.

Even though the environment was beautiful, Russ still needed to adjust to the culture. The city was ancient, and its look came from a few centuries before. Zand Street ran east to west. It had been built late in the seventeenth century when the city was the capital of Iran. Zand was still Shiraz's main street, and the bazar and Masjed Vakil were its main attractions. The narrow alleys around the bazar were densely populated.

Russ asked Azali about a place he might rent. Although he could stay in the hospital, he would rather have his own place.

"Oh," the doctor said. "Actually there is one for rent in our neighborhood. The owner is stationed in Tehran and likes to rent his house if he can. I can show it to you this afternoon if you like. My friend is in town, and we can stop by."

That evening, they looked at the house, which was in an old Shiraz neighborhood and boasted a beautiful courtyard. The small pool in front of the building poured water down the steps along the length of the yard. The fountain and the steps were surrounded by geranium and roses, which made for a magnificent scene.

The house was modern compared to other Persian houses. When compared to his small apartment at Oxford, the home seemed spacious. Downstairs lay a big basement with two rooms and the kitchen. The owner explained that the front room became their living room in summer. Since it was underground and away from the sun, it was much cooler than other rooms. The second room was the storage area for grain, rice, and other nonperishable supplies. Situated upstairs was a bigger room, which served as a living room, and three bedrooms. The outhouse was located at the far right corner of the yard.

The house was already furnished. The owner agreed to leave the carpets and other furniture like the desk, the office chairs, and the beds. Since Russ was single, the chances of messing up the rugs and furniture were minimal. Russ liked the house and right then made an agreement with the owner. He was able to move in by the end of the week. When they went back outside, Dr. Azali pointed to another alley.

“My house is in this alley,” he said. “Would you like to meet my family? I think we can offer you a Persian dinner if you care to mingle with locals.”

“It would be my pleasure,” Russ said. “But will it impose on your wife to welcome a dinner guest this late?”

Dr. Azali laughed. “You must get used to the Persian lifestyle. We get unexpected guests all the times and the lady of the house is always prepared. There is an old saying in Persian that a guest is a gift from God. We have to do our best to entertain them.”

They walked down a narrow lane with tall walls and climbing honeysuckles. They didn’t encounter anyone at that time of the day, but the cleanness of the path and the size of the doors told him it was a good neighborhood. Then he spotted a large door with a lion’s head on each side. The lion was the symbol on the Persian flag. Inside he found the same square courtyard with a pool at the middle and flowers all around. The tall orange tree was the focal point, and its perfumed blossoms were magnificent. Inside, colorful windows and decorated doors added quite a bit of visual interest.

Dr. Azali’s wife, Fariba, was a distinguished woman with a pretty, oval face. Their children were very young and all quite handsome. They started the conversation talking about the weather and ended up discussing the culture.

“It must be a culture shock for you, Doctor,” she said.

Russ smiled. “Well, yes, in some ways. Although, I studied books written about Persia before I came so it wasn’t that much of a shock to see women with the

hejab.” Then he looked at her. “Is it common for women not to wear the hejab at home?”

Dr. Azali and Fariba laughed. “Actually,” the doctor said, “no. If a male guest arrives in a devoted Muslim house, then the women will hide. However, you are in the land of wonders. The so-called hejab is what the clergies want. There are many intellectuals including us who are against it. We are pushing to abandon this custom, which is forced only on the urban female population.”

“This is not an essential Islamic law?”

“Nowhere in the Islamic holy book will you see the order to cover the faces or hands. In fact, when the Muslims pilgrim in Mecca, they should not cover their faces. Most Persian populations live in remote villages where agriculture is the way of life. The women work side-by-side with men and cannot afford to cover their faces or hide inside. This land also has religious diversity. There are Zoroastrians, Jews, Baha’i, and Christians who do not obey Islamic law. Persia’s more liberal population does not believe the hejab is necessary.”

The conversation moved on to other details. They discussed the differences between England and Persia at length. A particular peculiarity was that people in the West looked into other’s eyes, while in the East, that same behavior was impolite.

Although Russ could speak Persian easily, he didn’t know the Persian culture in depth. Dr. Azali, also an Oxford graduate, had lived in England and knew much about that country. Since he was Persian and had lived most of his life in Iran, he had the upper hand.

During their discussion, the servants brought basket of fruit, tea, and cookies. Russ took a cup of tea and some cookies. The cookie was unlike anything he had ever tasted before.

"These are Persian cookies," Fariba said. "They are made of almond and sugar plus fennel seeds for the aroma."

"It's really good," Russ said. "I will love it here in Persia!"

When dinner was ready, a beautifully embroidered cloth was spread across the carpet. A tray of colorful rice cooked with slices of carrots in lemon juice, sugar, and orange peel slices stood in the middle. Beside that was a tray holding a leg of lamb, and almonds and pistachios were served with the meat. Beside each plate stood small bowls of pickled vegetables. Each setting included a dessert plate with sugar, milk, rice flour, and cardamom seeds shaped like a big flower with green pistachio spread.

Russ took a small bit of lamb and rice, not knowing if he could tolerate the unusual flavors. He liked it so much, he helped himself to a second serving. While they ate, a man named Hussein arrived. He was short and well rounded. His skin was tanned and his eyes sharp. Housein bowed when he arrived. He stood politely with his hand across his chest ready to do whatever he was ordered to do, which reminded Russ of English butlers. Dr. Azali said, "Please join us for dinner."

He bowed again and said, "If you excuse me, I'd rather go talk to Sakineh in the kitchen."

Dr. Azali said, "Sure. Please get what you like first. "

He said, "Thank you, sir." Housein took some food and disappeared to the kitchen.

After the visitor went downstairs, Dr. Azali said, "Hussein was my brother's butler. He is a very good cook. Unfortunately, since my brother passed away, he is jobless. I would hire him if my wife was not so used to Sakineh's cooking. Maybe you would like to hire him. But he can only cook Persian food."

"Actually," Russell said, "that isn't so bad if the food he prepares is as good as dinner was tonight."

"Well, you might like some meals but hate others. That is natural. It took me months to get used to the food in Oxford. You are brave even to have tried our food!"

"I love different food, different environments, and the differences in people. That's why I became a missionary, so I can travel around the globe and get to know different people." He paused for a moment before continuing. "Since you are so kind, I don't mind asking another favor. I would like to learn as much as I can about your culture and history and your people. Can you recommend any books I might read?"

"Can you read and write Persian as well as you speak the language?"

Russ nodded. "I think so."

"Well then, I can lend you a few books. Let's go and see." They went into another room that was lined with shelves filled with books. The shelves had been built all around the room with brick and had been decorated with chalk. Dr. Azali grabbed a thick book. "If you like history and want to know about our culture, read this

one first. This epic contains the stories of the Persian kingdom from its beginning to the arrival of Islam. The first part is all the mythical stories, just like Greek myths. The second part is pure history written in poetic style. People claim that Ferdowsi was the major reason we kept our language after the Arab invasion twelve hundred years ago. This is Hafez, who is also known for his mystical poems.

Russ returned to the hospital with several books. He was surprised to think that he had rented a house, hired a butler, and found a new friend who lent him so many Persian treasures in the same evening. He didn't know how close he would grow to that same man in the years to come.



Russ fell in love with the Persian language. He eagerly read all the Persian books he could find. At first, it was necessary to his job as a physician, but then he fell in love with Persian literature. He read all the poems from different decades of Persian history. He spent his spare time reading and thinking about Iran's current affairs.

He started reading *Shahnameh* of Ferdowsi, a highly revered Persian poet who lived from 940 to 1020 CE. He was the author of the *Shahnameh*, the national epic of Iran and related societies. The *Shahnameh* chronicled the legendary history of the pre-Islamic kings from Keyumars, the original king who ruled after the creation of earth, to Yazdegerd III, the last king before Iran was conquered by Arab invaders in the seventh century.

He also enjoyed Hafez's poems. Hafez_e Shirazi was a lyric poet. People learned his poems by heart and used them as proverbs and sayings. His life and poems had been the subject of much analysis, commentary, and interpretation. He'd influenced post-fourteenth-century Persian writing more than any other author. Themes included the beloved, faith, and exposing hypocrisy.



Russ was happy with his life caring for the ill and curing patients as there was no other hospital in the city. He could do his missionary work and convert people to Christianity at the same time. However, he had never suspected it would be so hard to convert anyone from Islam to Christianity. Most of the population was deeply religious and suspicious of foreigners. A small church stood inside the hospital, and every Sunday patients and their families were invited to the church.

The chapel was like any Christian chapel with a few exceptions. The tile work and the decorations on the windows and doors were Persian and mimicked the mosques in Shiraz and other cities. The walls were covered with beautiful handwritten poems in praise of the Lord our savior. The decorations and the church's construction had been undertaken by Father Sharp, who'd wanted to show the Persians that the church belonged to them.

There Russ preached about Christ and Christianity. His audiences consisted of the Christians living in Shiraz and guests from the hospital. The guests mostly

seemed annoyed or disinterested. The children were curious about the church and looked around; many seemed to enjoy the experiment. Most people went home without ever looking back. The exception was one young girl from Zargan who'd been abused by her husband.

