

Chapter 1: The Refugee
Cornell Medical Center, New York City
November 9, 1979

Josephine walked into the elevator, as she studied the doctor's hand-written notes. She pressed the button for the 17th floor, reserved exclusively for VIPs. "David Newsome, the diplomat? He's an American," she thought. Her eyes caught on the word "malignant". She exited the elevator and was immediately greeted by the floor supervisor.

"Meeting is in the conference room," said the stocky older woman with a curt nod.

A long shift was ahead of her with the usual unexpected challenges. Josephine glanced at her blurred reflection in a window as she passed, making sure her cap was not crooked and that the crisp white uniform that covered her slender form was neatly arranged.

From the increased security of the ward, Josephine surmised it was going to be an interesting night. Frequently she was assigned to foreign VIP patients with her multilingual capabilities. In the past, the hospital had used false names to protect the identity of a foreign patient. Could that be the case this time? Passing the reception desk, she quickened her steps down the hall, the doctors' muffled voices in discussion indicated they had commenced their meeting. Josephine slipped into the conference room and sensed the tense atmosphere. Dr. Blanding paced the floor.

"This is an impossible situation," sighed the gray-haired man. "He obviously needs to undergo radiation, but we can't force him. He's

uncooperative with the nursing staff, medication and treatment. I'm at my wit's end. How can we proceed without cooperation from the patient?"

"Your answer may have just walked in through the door," announced the younger Dr. Herlihy, as he slid his spectacles up the narrow bridge of his nose and smiled at Josephine.

She blushed and pushed a strand of her honey-blond hair back under her nurse's cap. "I'm a bit confused. Why do you need a translator for David Newsome?"

"This time it's not a language barrier issue – 'His Majesty' speaks perfect English," stated Dr. Blanding.

"Prince Rainier? King Hussein?" Josephine questioned with a knitted brow.

"No, but close enough. It's the deposed Shah of Iran," explained Dr. Herlihy, with the slightest twinkle in his eyes as he watched for her reaction.

"Mohammed Reza Shah Pahlavi²?" Josephine spoke calmly, according to her training as a nurse, which had encouraged her to always have a placid demeanor.

"Jo, the Shah has advanced lymphoma and the decision to treat him here is top secret," explained Dr. Herlihy. "He was reluctant to come here from the beginning and now it's been two weeks since he's been admitted. He's become completely uncooperative and rude to the staff. He doesn't want to stay in the country that he says has 'undone him.' We believe that with your background you might be able to connect with him and get him to cooperate with us."

"And what about David Newsome?" Josephine asked.

"I'm sure the Under Secretary of State for Political Affairs will not be happy when word gets out."

Josephine tried to relax. A tingle passed down her spine as she walked past a dozen armed security staff personnel. She felt as if she were walking through a fog as memories of her exile came flooding back. Dizzily, she steadied herself against the door frame of her patient's room. Her fingers ran across the name card.

"David Newsome," she whispered, as she sighed deeply and turned the doorknob. The room was dark; a narrow slit of light fell upon her new patient. The Shah lay in the bed intently staring at a TV screen. His emaciated face and wasted form forced a look much older than his sixty years, but his facial features were still strong and proud. Despite his illness, he had not lost the air of nobility. The television blared with the news of the Iranian hostage crisis³. The Shah's face became grim.

"Bandits! Terrorists! Where are the defenders of human rights now?" he yelled.

"I am looking at him," commented Josephine briskly, as she turned off the television.

The Shah frowned. "Did they tell you to say that? I will not be patronized!" he snapped, fighting to control his anger.

"No, Your Majesty. I know because I have personally benefited from your kindness and generosity."

The Shah propped himself up in bed and studied her face. "Go on," he uttered, sternly.

Josephine lowered her eyes as she straightened the rumpled sheet and blanket of the Shah's bed. "As a young Polish child I lived through the horrors of Soviet communism." She closed her eyes and swallowed hard. "In 1942 I was one of the many thousands who, because of your benevolence, found a most welcome sojourn in Mashhad, on our way to India. Today, by some strange fate, I am graced to be your nurse."

The Shah looked up at her in disbelief. A heavy silence filled the air. Josephine's heart raced and she searched the corners of her mind for a formal Persian greeting.

"Salaam Ala-Hazrat. Hale-Shama Chetoreh?" She bowed gracefully before him.

"How am I?" said the Shah with a sudden flash of contempt. "How am I?" he repeated, more softly. His face fell, and he mumbled, his voice rather broken. "I have been reduced to an unwanted vagabond, a dying man adrift a sea of betrayal. I am a king without a country."

"I, too, am a woman without a country and know what it is like to be a vagabond shuttled from country to country." She spoke the rushing words as if embarrassed at her boldness to be so informal with the Shah.

The Shah's marble pride seemed to instantly melt. His face softened and he squinted as if searching the past. "I have never been able to erase from my memory the sight of the thousands upon thousands of Polish refugees pouring in daily onto our shores, escaping those blood-thirsty Soviet terrorists. Children, mothers, soldiers with their skin hanging off their bones. They were barely recognizable as human beings." His expression was almost reverent. "Yours was an exodus of biblical proportions. The Polish cemeteries⁴ which remain in my kingdom are the footprints of a silenced journey."

His brows lowered into an ominous fold across his enquiring eyes. The Shah shook his head, "And yet, here we both are today. Tell me. Does my nurse who comes on the wings of fate have a name?"

"*Es me man Josephine hast,*" she replied and then added, hesitantly, "You may call me Ziu-ta." She meticulously smoothed out each crease in the bedsheet.

The Shah reached abruptly for her hand. With fingers as dry as leather, he gave it a gentle squeeze. "Thank you, Ziuta." His voice lingered on the syllables of her name. "You've shaken out enough wrinkles in my linen. Now tell me, have you any permanent wrinkles left etched on your soul?"

Ziuta slowly lifted her head to look at him and squinted against his intense gaze. Her mind wandered. She realized she could no longer keep her painful past hidden, a past her tortured mind had buried in a country which failed to recognize her pain.

She suddenly felt as if she were encased in a dense fog. A loud hammering reverberated inside her head. As She saw figures moving in the distance. With every breath the banging became louder, like an echo of a distant past. She closed her eyes wishing to escape but visions of hammers striking iron nails into wood forced her eyes open. Her anxiety, panic and overwhelming grief could no longer be concealed. Ziuta felt dizzy as the room began to spin.

“Sit down, my dear,” the Shah whispered. “You look quite pale.” Ziuta sighed and sat down on the edge of her patient’s bed.

