
Chapter 12

Hamid's Departure

It was Friday, April 8, 2005. It was the day Hamid would be leaving to go back home to the United States. We had traveled together to Iran and were supposed to go back home together, but it was not working out as we had hoped. So, it was not the greatest day for me. I was grieved and happy at the same time. I was happy because Hamid was going home to his dear wife and children, but sad knowing my wife and children were disappointed by this obstacle in my path; not being able to see each other as expected. I also felt Hamid's dissatisfaction that I was left behind.

I felt certain I would gain my freedom and that it would be delayed for only a short time, but I had to overcome my depression by being calm and patient and rely on God's faithfulness. My soul was disturbed and it was hard to face the reality of Hamid's departure without me. Therefore, instead of going to the airport to see Hamid off, I stayed home with Mom and Dad and prayed for his safety and the rest of my own journey here in Iran. I opened up my Bible to hear what God had to tell me concerning the rest of my journey, for I needed to hear more assurance and comfort from Him. I was hoping that His words would bring peace to my disturbed soul. I came across this passage in the book of Psalms, chapter 43:

“Vindicate me, O God, and plead my cause against an ungodly nation; Oh, deliver me from the deceitful and unjust man! For You are the God of my strength.”

I read this psalm several times and it spoke to my heart. I wanted to hear more and wished to hear Him audibly, telling me what to do next. That night, I tossed and turned, and had a hard time sleeping. All kinds of thoughts were going through my mind. I would grab a pen and paper and jot them down before I forgot, hoping that it was from my Lord.

In Iran, with the situation I was in, you either hire a lawyer to do the running around for you or you do it yourself if you expect anything to be done. So, early in the morning at 6:30am, Nader and Ali came over to pick me up and we headed to the Navy base. We got there at about 9:30am, and called Col. Ansari from outside of the base. Ali spoke with Col. Ansari, but the response was that he needed a couple more days to finish the work that he had already started. Col. Ansari also said that he had been busy working very hard on my behalf and was able to reduce the expenses down to about \$10,000, half of what we had earlier been told.

Ali was happy about the news, but not me. My heart was telling me that something was wrong, but I could not put my finger on it. All I knew was that we had just driven three hours in heavy traffic, inhaling lots of exhaust fumes to get there and for him to tell us to come back in a couple of days was very upsetting. So I decided to call him back. I sensed

that Ali did not agree, although he did not voice his feelings, but I went ahead anyway. I told Col. Ansari that I was not satisfied with his conversation with Ali and that I must see him since we drove such a long way. He agreed, and Nader and I went in while Ali stayed behind in the car.

We went directly to the building where Col. Ansari was. He welcomed us and began with his “fast and charming talk” singing the same song by saying, “I have been working so hard on your file, sending and receiving letters from the education dept. finance dept., the budget and credit dept. etc. and of course everyone has to sign the papers.”

He told us that he had done a lot on my behalf and that he could not tell us everything over the phone. Then he proceeded to tell us that he was actually able to reduce the expenses to almost \$4,000 **plus some expenses in Rial, which amounted to about \$330.00**. So all together the adjusted repayment figure was about \$4,330!

Nader and I looked at each other and could not believe what we were hearing! Nader wanted to trust everything Col. Ansari was saying, but I had mixed feelings about it. I needed to go along with what Nader wanted to do, since he was making every effort to help me.

The news made me happy and eased some of the stress I was under. I thought that perhaps my problems were almost over and the grace of God was falling on me. And again, but for a short while, I felt that these people I was dealing with seemed to be Godly and truly wanted to help resolve my situation.

But later, I realized that something was indeed fishy. I wondered why he did not want to tell me the truth about the

reduction to \$4,330 over the phone! What did he have to hide by telling us \$10,000 and later changing it to \$4,330 in less than half an hour?

I also was suspicious of the fact he was trying to stop us from looking into my file because later on, I was told by Mr. Javadi that many documents from that far back were destroyed.

Someone else suggested that perhaps he wanted some bribe money! Or perhaps he simply was giving me a hard time by trying to intentionally delay me, therefore dodging me. I had been trying to think positive, but it was very difficult!

Col. Ansari told me all that was left to do was to have the commander of the personnel department sign the document, and then I would be done. I thanked God, thanked him and shook his hand acknowledging that I was happy with the results. I left that day with a smile!

I was so excited from our conversation and thought that it should not take any more than a couple of days for the commander to sign the letter. Therefore, with no time to spare, we went straight to the KLM office in Tehran, rescheduled my flight for two weeks later, paid the exit fee of 10,000 Toman (\$12), and my flight was reserved for April 23.

At first the KLM agent told me that there was no seat available for the next month in the seating class that I was in, but after speaking with a supervisor, she was able to change my seating class in order to find me a seat. I thanked God for that too and phoned home to tell my wife the good

news! I also called my supervisor, Terry Kipick, at work and told him about my situation and to let him know that if God was willing, I should be home soon. My wife had been in touch with my co-workers and had kept them up-to-date about my status. I figured that if everything went as planned, I would be late only two weeks. I still had extra paid vacation days left so I could use them as part of my income.

It was great to visit my family and friends in Iran, but I was more than ready to leave and come back to my own family in America, which is where my heart was.

The next step was to collect enough money to pay my debt. So the following day, my mother went to see her sister, Zahra, to ask her for a loan. I only had about \$1,000 with me. Hamid left \$1,000 for me to use if needed, and my Aunt Zahra lent the other \$3,000. Now I had the money necessary to take care of what I needed to pay the Iranian Navy.

Later that week my mom and sisters took me shopping at the central bazaar in Tehran and to some shopping centers in Karaj. They purchased many gifts for all of my family back home. Soon, my suit cases were packed and ready to come home to my loved ones.

After two days I called the Navy to see if the commander had signed the letter, but was told to call back on Saturday which was three days later. I then learned that the commander would not be in his office on Saturday, and Sunday was a holiday, and Monday was Military Day and he would be busy with a parade that day. On Tuesday April 19, the commander was on a mission and out of town.

Finally, on April 20th, I learned that the commander, Col. Mirshekar, and his boss, General Ghots, rejected the letter!

“Why did he do that?” I cried out to my God!

Have you ever felt like you were on a sinking ship? That’s the way I felt upon hearing that news.

The reason they gave was that they wanted the expenses in Rial, which amounted to about 330 US dollars and claimed to be for “special mission expenses” to be converted from Rial to Dollar at the rate of 30 years ago.

In other words, a \$330 conversion would increase the total repayment to \$40,071. This is how it was calculated:

Today \$1=850 Toman, but 30years ago \$1=7 Toman so,

$330 \times 850 = 280,500$ Toman already written in my file

$280,500 / 7 = \$40,071$ conversion at a rate of 30 years ago.

Nader went to see Col. Mirshekar and questioned him about this conversion of the money. Col. Mirshekar showed him a file of someone named Mr. Hossaini whom he claimed had similar circumstances as mine. They intended to use his situation as a legal precedent for the conversion of the money in my case as well.

Col. Mirshekar then said that they had requested more clarification from the courts on this other man’s case, and they were still waiting for the answer, but, in the meantime, they were following the order from the leader of the country. He did not however disclose that they had been waiting for an entire year for that clarification of that request. Nader

then took notes of the file number that he was referring to and left his office.

So, since the letter for my case was rejected, it was sent back to the budget and credit department for a redo. Nader went to the Navy base and spent all day there, carrying the new letter to different departments to speed up the process. While he was there, he also went to the information dept. and complained about the way they were taking their time and sending us back and forth causing extra anguish for us. Over the past few weeks, I had overheard some comments being made about me from some of the officers saying, "He has been in America enjoying life for the last 30 years, let him run around and suffer for a little while in this country."

The budget and credit department sent back the second request to the personnel department without any changes. I asked, "What do we do now? It was exactly the same figures as the first. Why did they not change the amount?" We were not sure what to do next.

We then decided to go to the budget and credit department to meet with Mr. Goodarzi and to ask him why he did not change the numbers as requested. Mr. Goodarzi was a very calm and soft-spoken person. He was working there as a civilian. After a short pause, he tried to choose his words very carefully, saying that he could not do that for a few reasons:

- 1) *He did not have an order to change the numbers even though he had requested it from higher up in his department.*
- 2) *There was a card in my file indicating that the money that was issued thirty years ago was in Rial and not in*

US dollar, therefore he could not change it to the rate they requested.

- 3) *He did not have the exchange rate as it was 30 years ago.*
- 4) *It sounded like too much money from a small amount in Rial, which they had recorded in my file, and he felt that it was not a justifiable request.*
- 5) *It was against the law and he did not want to be part of that. If they wanted to change it, they could do it themselves!*

We went back and forth between the budget department and the personnel department to clarify what to do next. When Col. Ansari kept giving us his assurance by saying that our final days of coming and going were almost over, he gave me enough confidence to re-reschedule my ticket. I was confident about leaving Iran and had banked on his words.

Capt. Hassanvand, the lawyer for the Navy, came over and we discussed our dilemma with him, and these are the exact words he told us, “If you still have your passport in your possession along with the copy of the amnesty letter, then you should be able to leave the country without any problems. Then, Nader can act as your lawyer on your behalf to finish where you left off and settle the financial matters at a later time.”

Now when I think back, I believe they intentionally tricked me, knowing that I would be leaving the country soon and that I would be stopped by the airport security who had the authority to confiscate my passport, and not the Navy. When I had given my passport to Mr. Ahmadi at the Information Department, he gave it back after making a copy

of it, which proved to me that they did not have the authority to confiscate anything, only to file a complaint. They somehow wanted to punish me without being blamed. But first they needed to tempt me to do something wrong or illegal in order to accuse me and keep me there at their mercy indefinitely!

Another thought I had was since other border cities in Iran do not have the sophistication of Tehran's airport, anyone could leave the country through those border cities with their passport in hand and without being detected. This was a clever tactic on their part to obtain my passport!

I had already reserved my flight for the 23rd of April to leave Iran. Capt. Hassanvand had already deceived me by telling me that it was okay to leave the country. Other friends were also encouraging me to get out at whatever cost. I remembered from the Bible the way Peter was able to escape from prison and the angel of God was with him, opening every prison door. I thought to myself, could it be like that God? Would you do that for me? Would you close the eyes of the authorities in order for me to leave Iran? I was doing a lot of praying and asking others to do the same. Prayer chains had already been started in both Iran and the USA as I was getting ready for this departure. I was already delayed for two weeks from my original departure. So, with those thoughts, I mustered enough courage to try to leave Iran, hoping to be free from this "prison!"

“Over the next days and weeks, I was in touch with our local congressman’s office and our state senators’ offices. They were mostly compassionate and were willing to do anything they could, but the reality of it was there wasn’t much any of them could do as long as he was in Iran. Saiid and I both were doing everything we could under the circumstances. Everyday we would wake up with renewed hope that there would be a breakthrough and this nightmare would be over, but the day would come and go and there would be another obstacle. It seemed there was no end.

But in my heart I knew God had a plan and I felt in time He would bring Saiid home, but the waiting and uncertainty was hard. I found myself so many times on my face before the Lord, praying for my husband and for his safe return, and for His strength to get us through. This is one of the verses that gave me comfort:

Psalm 5: 1-3 “Give ear to my words, O LORD, Consider my meditation. Give heed to the voice of my cry, My King and my God, For to You I will pray. My voice You shall hear in the morning, O LORD; In the morning I will direct it to You, And I will look up.”

It was especially hard for Saiid with the run around he constantly got from the navy base, and the fact that he was the

one trapped and separated from his family. I could tell he was discouraged from time to time, and I tried to cheer him up the best I could. I think the thing that helped the most was the encouragement from our family and friends. I always made sure to let him know about the cards, phone calls, visits, and emails that were coming in from all over! I usually forwarded the emails to him so he could read them for himself. We will never forget the love, the concern, the prayers and the generosity that came from so many people during that time.”

Ursa