

118 Days, 12 Hours, 54 Minutes

On June 21, reporter Maziar Bahari was rousted out of bed and taken to Tehran's notorious Evin prison—accused of being a spy for the CIA, MI6, Mossad...and NEWSWEEK. This is the story of his captivity—and of an Iran whose rampant paranoia underpins an ever more fractured regime.

By **Maziar Bahari** | NEWSWEEK

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Evin Prison, June 21, 2009 (around 10 a.m.)

The interrogator sat me in a wooden chair. It had a writing arm, like the chair I'd had in primary school. He ordered me to look down, even though I was already blindfolded: "Never look up, Mr. Bahari. While you are here—and we don't know how long you're going to be here—never look up." All I could see from under the blindfold was the interrogator's black leather slippers. They worried me. He had settled in for a long session.

(Article continued below...)

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"Mr. Bahari, you're an agent of foreign intelligence organizations," he began. I had gotten a look at him when he and his men had dragged me out of bed and arrested me a few hours earlier. He was heavysset—I later learned that the guards called him "the big guy"—taller and wider than me, with a massive head. His skin was dark, like someone from southern Iran. He wore thick glasses. But I would know him now only by his voice, his breath, and the rosewater perfume used by men who piously do their ablutions several times a day before prayers, but rarely shower.

I could see Mr. Rosewater's slippers right in front of my foot. He was towering over me.

"Could you let me know which ones?" I mumbled.

"Speak louder!" he shouted. He bent toward me, his face an inch away from mine. I could feel his breath on my skin. "What did you say?"

"I was wondering if you could be kind enough to let me know which organizations," I repeated.

"CIA, MI6, Mossad, and NEWSWEEK." He listed the names one by one, in a low but assured voice.

I was struck by Mr. Rosewater's confidence. I did not know then exactly which branch of the fractured Iranian government he worked for. When I was arrested, hundreds of thousands of protesters had been filling the streets of Tehran for a week, outraged over the disputed reelection of Iranian President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad. There had been violence. The club-wielding militias known as Basij had inflicted much of it on the marchers, women as well as men. But some of the protesters had fought back too. Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, Iran's Supreme Leader, had decreed that the protests stop, but nobody at that point was sure they would. At least, nobody outside Evin Prison was sure. Mr. Rosewater was another matter.

I would later discover that I had been picked up by the intelligence division of the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps, or IRGC. Before the June election, this unit of the Guards was little known; whenever journalists and intellectuals ran afoul of the authorities they were usually questioned by the official Ministry of Intelligence. But the IRGC, which reports directly to Khamenei, had been growing dramatically more powerful. Many suspect that the Guards rigged the election. Certainly they led the crackdown that followed.

IRGC intel is now responsible for Iran's internal security, which means that its rampaging paranoias have suffused the regime. There remain players within the system who can make rational decisions about Iran's international interests; if there weren't, I would still be in jail. But the Guards are exacerbating the Islamic Republic's worst instincts, its insecurity and deep suspiciousness. As world powers try to engage Tehran to mitigate the threat of its nuclear program, it's critical that they understand this mindset and the role the IRGC now plays within the Iranian system. I learned all too much about both while in the Guards' hands.

Everything was an education inside Evin—from the questions Mr. Rosewater asked, to what answers made him beat me, to physical details. Now, for instance, I studied his slippers and light-gray socks. In Iran, low-ranking functionaries often wear shabby plastic sandals, and they have holes in their socks. That first day I was hoping Mr. Rosewater was only a junior agent, a flunky trying to make himself sound important. I was hoping to find a hole in his socks. But there wasn't one. His slippers looked as if they had been polished.

Mr. Rosewater was to be my nemesis for 118 days, 12 hours, and 54 minutes. He never told me his name. I saw his face only twice. The first time was when he led the team that arrested me. "This prison can be the end of the line for you if you don't cooperate" were his welcoming words. The second and last time was after I was freed—and warned by him never to speak of what had happened to me in jail. If I disobeyed, he said, I would be hunted down. "We can put people in a bag no matter where in the world they are," he said menacingly. "No one can escape from us."

I did not believe him. I do not believe him. But the doubt lingers, which is what he wanted—what the regime he serves wants from all of us, in fact. They are masters of uncertainty, instilling it among their enemies, their subjects, their friends, perhaps even themselves.

If he could, Mr. Rosewater would threaten me for the rest of my life. But 118 days was enough. I do not want to be his captive any longer.

Vali Asr Avenue, June 21, 2009 (a few minutes before 8 a.m.)

Four of them came for me. They told my mother they had a letter for me, then showed her something

resembling a warrant and followed her inside. She woke me gently. "Dear, there are four gentlemen here from...the prosecutor's office? I don't know. They say they want to take you away." Her tone was even. My father had been jailed repeatedly in the 1950s for fighting against the shah's regime. She knew what to say.

The men adhered to a strange code of etiquette. They took off their shoes when they entered the apartment, and later, while searching my room, they declined my mother's offer of tea. They told me later that they did not like to impose on the families of those they arrested. One even apologized to my mother for using a Kleenex to wipe away his sweat while going through my personal belongings. The possibility that they might be arresting an innocent man, however, did not seem to trouble them. Early in the revolution Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini had issued a decree: "Keeping the [Islamic] system alive is the most important task of a Muslim." In their minds they were simply carrying out their religious duty.

Three of the men had bland looks, like accountants. Mr. Rosewater was clearly the boss. He wore a brown suit and a white shirt. When he entered my room he sized me up like prey. I could see a revolver under his jacket, but the way he stared at me made it clear he preferred to use his gaze as his weapon, to pin me down with it. I was going to be watched like that until I broke. "Don't worry," he told my mother with a smile as they led me away. "He's going to be our guest."

There were five cars waiting outside, all unmarked. No one wore uniforms or showed badges. As we drove off I asked one of my captors if we were heading to Evin Prison. "Maybe we are. Maybe we are not," he said. Then I was ordered to take off my glasses and don my blindfold. I took a last look around. We were on Kurdistan Highway driving north. We were definitely going to Evin.

Built in the late 1960s, during the reign of the shah, as a high-security jail for political prisoners, Evin Prison soon became synonymous with pulled fingernails and broken bones. Its early residents were mostly communists and Islamists. After the 1979 revolution, the Islamists put their captors as well as many of their former leftist cellmates behind bars. They used some of the same techniques as their predecessors, but more efficiently. Many of those who had withstood the shah's torturers broke within days under the new management.

"Welcome to Abu Ghraib, Guantánamo, or whatever it is you Americans build," a guard said to me after we arrived. He spoke with an Azerbaijani accent, and sounded older. "I'm not American, my brother," I said with a smile. "You work for them, so you're one of them," he said. "But don't worry. It's not a bad place here." The old man handed me off to a guard in another building. I was taken to my cell.

I once interviewed a former Islamic guerrilla who had become a government minister. The problem with the shah's secret police, he said, was that they thought they could break a prisoner's will through physical pressure, but often that just hardened the victim's resolve. "What our brothers after the revolution have masterminded is how to break a man's soul without using much violence against his body." As I stepped into my cell I wondered how violent was "without much violence."

I took off the blindfold.



Tom Stoddart / Getty Images for Newsweek

Bahari with his newborn daughter

The Quran says that one of the worst punishments Allah inflicts upon sinners is to make their graves smaller. My 20-square-foot cell was like a tomb. The walls were made of faux marble. They were off-white, and the texture of the stone reminded me of an old man's pale, transparent skin. You could see grayish-blue veins. The walls were clean, even spotless, except for some defiant aphorisms and Persian poetry in small, crabbed handwriting. Three sentences were written larger than others: "My God, have mercy on me," "My God, I repent," and "Please help me, God."

London , November 2009

My wife, Paola, is breast-feeding our 2-week-old daughter, Marianna, on the couch. The little girl is enjoying every drop of milk. No Madonna and child were ever more beautiful. We are listening to one of the songs that kept playing in my head in Evin, that helped me tune out what was happening and find some peace inside myself—"Hey, That's No Way to Say Goodbye," by Leonard Cohen:

I loved you in the morning,

Our kisses deep and warm,

Your hair upon the pillow

Like a sleepy golden storm.

Those lines became Paola for me, part of a whole musical refuge of lyrics and melodies. Of such stuff is survival made. Thank you, Mr. Cohen.

Evin Prison, June 22, 2009 (around 4 a.m.)

A guard woke me and told me that after morning prayers I would meet again with my "specialist," which is what the prison guards were told to call the interrogators. This would be my third session in 24 hours.

When Mr. Rosewater came into the interrogation room I could hear him yawning. He asked if I wanted half of the peeled-and-salted cucumber he was eating. When I declined, he was insulted. "What? Do you think that interrogators don't wash their hands?" I said OK, and I ate.

Mr. Rosewater wanted me to tell him about a dinner I'd attended with eight other journalists and photographers at a friend's house in Tehran in April, several weeks before the election. "You are part of a very American network, Mr. Bahari," he said, as if summing up his case in a courtroom. "Let me correct myself: you are in charge of a secret American network, a group that includes those who came to that dinner party."

"It was just a dinner," I murmured.

"Yes. A very American dinner. It could have happened in...New Jersey, or someplace like that." He paused. "Your own New Jersey in Tehran."

The strangeness of the accusation was unsettling. New Jersey?

"You've been to New Jersey, haven't you, Mr. Bahari?" The thought seemed to infuriate him, and I was struck by the feeling that for some reason he might have wanted, secretly, to go to New Jersey himself. The worst thing that can happen in any encounter with Islamic Republic officials is for them to think that you're looking down on them.

"It's not a particularly nice place," I said, trying to sound conversational.

"I don't care. But it is as godless as what you wanted to create in this country."

"I'm sorry. I don't understand."

"You were planning to eradicate the pure religion of Muhammad in this country and replace it with 'American' Islam. A New Jersey Islam." He was building his case, and my responses were irrelevant. "Tell me," he said, "did any of the women at the dinner party have their veils on?"

"No."

"Then don't tell me that you didn't have a secret American network. A New Jersey network."

studies and to begin my career as a journalist and documentary filmmaker. I returned in 1998, making movies and reporting for NEWSWEEK. But until my imprisonment I had never fully appreciated the corrosive suspicion that is rotting the Islamic Republic from within. The Guards see real enemies all around them—reformists within the country, hundreds of thousands of U.S. troops outside. Even worse are the shadows—supposed agents of Britain, the United States, and Israel—upon whom they impose their own fearful logic and their reinvented history. Only Muslims, only they, are victims.

As it happens, I may be the only Iranian or even Muslim filmmaker who has ever made a film about the Holocaust (*The Voyage of the Saint Louis*, in 1994). Mr. Rosewater was offended by the very idea and worked hard to connect me to what he called Jewish and Zionist "elements." In his lexicon, Jewish persons were rare. There were only "elements."

I don't know if Mr. Rosewater had ever seen a Jewish person in his life. I think not. He had never been to New Jersey either. But he believed that he knew everything there was to know about such people and such places, and his faith in his facts was unshakable.

Evin Prison, June 26, 2009 (after evening prayers)

Mr. Rosewater was not alone. I could hear someone else in the room, another interrogator. He was complaining about my written answers to questions about different individuals. When he came closer I saw he had shiny, polished black shoes on. His trousers were neatly ironed and creased. "Mr. Bahari, your answers are very general. We hope that you can give us more detailed answers," he said. He sounded more mild-mannered than my normal tormentor. He was the good cop today, the voice of reason.

"I just write what I know, sir. And if I give you more details, that means I'm lying."

"Well," said Mr. Rosewater, who had been fairly quiet up to this point, "we have interesting video footage of you. That may persuade you to be more cooperative." I could not imagine what that might be. Something personal? Something that might compromise my friends? But...I reminded myself I had done nothing wrong.

I saw the flicker of a laptop monitor under my blindfold. Then I heard someone speaking. It was a recording of another prisoner's confession. "It's not that one," said the second interrogator. "It's the one marked 'Spy in coffee shop.'" Mr. Rosewater fumbled with the computer. The other man stepped in to change the DVD. And then I heard the voice of Jon Stewart on *The Daily Show*.

Only a few weeks earlier, hundreds of foreign reporters had been allowed into the country in the run-up to the election. Among them was Jason Jones, a "correspondent" for Stewart's satirical news program. Jason interviewed me in a Tehran coffee shop, pretending to be a thick-skulled American. He dressed like some character out of a B movie about mercenaries in the Middle East—with a checkered Palestinian kaffiyeh around his neck and dark sunglasses. The "interview" was very short. Jason asked me why Iran was evil. I answered that Iran was not evil. I added that, as a matter of fact, Iran and America shared many enemies and interests in common. But the interrogators weren't interested in what I was saying. They were fixated on Jason.

"Why is this American dressed like a spy, Mr. Bahari?" asked the new man.

"He is pretending to be a spy. It's part of a comedy show," I answered.

"Tell the truth!" Mr. Rosewater shouted. "What is so funny about sitting in a coffee shop with a kaffiyeh and sunglasses?"

"It's just a joke. Nothing serious. It's stupid." I was getting worried. "I hope you are not suggesting that he is a real spy."

"Can you tell us why an American journalist pretending to be a spy has chosen you to interview?" asked the man with the creases. "We know from your contacts and background that you told them who to interview for their program." The other Iranians interviewed in Jason's report—a former vice president and a former foreign minister—had been arrested a week before me as part of the IRGC's sweeping crackdown. "It's just comedy," I said, feeling weak.

"Do you think it's also funny that you say Iran and America have a lot in common?" Mr. Rosewater asked, declaring that he was losing patience with me. He took my left ear in his hand and started to squeeze it as if he were wringing out a lemon. Then he whispered into it. "This kind of behavior will not help you. Many people have rotted in this prison. You can be one of them."

London , November 2009

The morning of my "confession," I woke up humming "The Partisan," a Leonard Cohen tune about World War II resistance fighters:

When they poured across the border

I was cautioned to surrender,

This I could not do;

I took my gun and vanished.

The thought of resisting had crossed my mind, too. But why? I was a journalist, not a freedom fighter. Political prisoners in Iran were forced to make false confessions all the time. I'd always known they had been coerced, and had sympathized with the victims. Surely others would feel similarly about me. But even now, months later, the experience gnaws at me. My father spent four years in prison under the shah without asking for mercy. What would he think of his son apologizing to the Supreme Leader after eight days?

Evin Prison, June 29, 2009 (after midnight)

I was deep asleep when a guard opened the door to my cell. "Get up! Specialist time!" Mr. Rosewater did not say hello as usual. He dragged me away from the prison guard. "The fun is over!" he said. He pushed me several times so hard that I almost fell on the ground. He then grabbed my arm and started to drag me along rapidly. He was breathing heavily and kept on repeating, "Islamic kindness is over. You little spy, we will show you what we can do with you. You're going to see what we are capable of." He shoved me into a room. There seemed to be several people in it, whispering among themselves. The smell of sweat and

rosewater was strong.

All of a sudden the room erupted in a cacophony of greetings. Everyone wanted to say hello to someone they called "Haj Agha." The nickname literally means someone who has been to Mecca for pilgrimage, but among Iranian officials it signifies seniority. Someone took my hand and put it in Haj Agha's hand.

"Salaam, Mr. Bahari," he said. "Do you know why you are here?" His voice sounded familiar, like that of a well-known regime propagandist who has a show on Iranian TV. He definitely did not want to be recognized, and told me to keep my eyes completely covered.

He turned aside and asked someone, "Is the car here yet?" Then he addressed me again. "Mr. Bahari, you're suspected of espionage. You have been in contact with a number of known spies." He named a few of my friends, mostly Iranian artists and intellectuals in exile. A car was coming to take me to a counterespionage unit, he said. There I would be interrogated more than 15 hours a day and subjected to "every tactic" until I talked. The investigation would take "between four and six years." I could be sentenced to death.

Haj Agha made sure to say the word "death" as if he were talking about a cup of tea. In fact, he immediately said, "Would you like a cup of tea?"

"Thank you," I said. I could barely get out the words. I was lost in thoughts about my mother, about Paola, about our unborn child. How could I have put them in this situation? I was a bad son, I thought, a bad husband, a bad father.

"Unless," said Haj Agha, pausing one more time. "Unless you would be interested in a deal, Mr. Bahari."

Soon after my arrest, in addition to accusing me of working for various spy agencies, Mr. Rosewater had insisted that I'd "masterminded the coverage of the election by the agents of the Western media in Iran." This played to a familiar fear. Ayatollah Khamenei liked to warn Iranians about a "cultural NATO" as threatening as the military one—a network of journalists, activists, scholars, and lawyers who supposedly sought to undermine the Islamic Republic from within. Anyone on the streets of Tehran in June would have known just how spontaneous—even leaderless—the post-election protests had been. But Khamenei and the Guards clearly believed, or at least wanted Iranians to believe, that they had been orchestrated by foreigners. They called the plot a "velvet revolution" or a "soft overthrow." "You are worse than any saboteur or killer," Mr. Rosewater had raged on that first day. "Those criminals destroy an object or a person. You destroy minds and provoke people against the Leader."

In Persian there is a very poetic word, *jafaa*, that refers to all the wrongs you do to those who love you. According to Mr. Rosewater, I was guilty of *jafaa* against Khamenei. Now I was to repent.

The next morning I was brought to Haj Agha's office. Cameras had been set up on tripods. Mr. Rosewater sat behind a curtain and fed questions to reporters from three state-run media outlets. "Give your answers as clearly and articulately as you can—of course, in your own words," Haj Agha instructed me. I was to explain how a velvet revolution was staged—by foreigners and corrupt elites, using the Western media—and how only the wisdom and munificence of the Supreme Leader had thwarted this latest attempt.

I tried to keep my answers as vague as possible, with what I hoped would come across as ironic detachment. (A source in the old Intelligence Ministry told me later that my soliloquy was "a case study in saying nothing.") Inside I seethed as one of the "reporters" joked with Mr. Rosewater and tried to help him devise tougher questions for me.

Evin Prison, July 4, 2009 (a few hours after noon prayers)

After the "confession," Haj Agha had promised, I would be freed soon. But the next time I saw the burly Mr. Rosewater, he closed the door to the interrogation room and for the first time started to beat me.

Some police manuals, even in the West, say that hitting a prisoner with a closed fist constitutes assault, but an open-handed slap does not. Perhaps Mr. Rosewater had read such a guide. His meaty palms slapped me hard across the back of my neck and shoulders. "I thought we had an understanding, sir!" I protested as I tried to protect my body.

"Move your hands, you little spy!" he screamed. "Understanding? What stupid understandings could we have with a spy like you?"

The beatings would continue from that moment until late September. Mr. Rosewater didn't beat me while asking me questions. He beat me before or after, simply to show he was in control. He pretended not to enjoy it. At one point he told me he beat me mainly because he was angry. "What you have done, Mazi, makes my blood boil. I don't want to raise my hand against you, but what do you suggest I do with someone who has insulted the Leader?" He claimed his own father had been a political prisoner before the 1979 revolution, and the shah's torturers had pulled out his toenails so brutally that he still couldn't walk properly. I should feel lucky, Mr. Rosewater implied.

I did not. Once or twice a year I am felled by devastating migraines. Mr. Rosewater knew that, from the medication I'd brought with me to Evin, and he took particular pleasure in pounding the back of my head.

What I hated most, though, was when he called me "Mazi." Only my close friends and family call me Mazi. The nickname is familiar, affectionate. In his voice it sounded obscene. "I'm really sorry, Mazi, that your days are numbered," Mr. Rosewater would tell me. The next time I saw him, he promised, I'd be standing on a chair with a noose around my neck. He would personally kick the chair out from under me. I would not know the date of my execution in advance. But, he assured me, it would take place after morning prayers, around 4 a.m.

Weirdly, after long interrogation sessions Mr. Rosewater would sometimes start to open up. He would appear to grow weary of screaming and hitting me, kicking me, whipping me with his belt, and he would start rambling like a drunk confessing to the bartender after last call. "Many of my friends have had to divorce their wives," he told me one night. "We have to work late shifts. We have to travel without much notice, and the job puts a lot of psychological pressure on us. Not many women accept that. I adore my wife. I kiss her hands and feet for understanding me and putting up with my job."

One night about a week before the holy month of Ramadan began, his cell phone rang. It was Mrs. Rosewater. "Hello, dear," he said. "How are you?" He had his hand on my neck. "How is the honeycomb?"

She must have been preparing food for the holidays. He moved his hand toward my ear and started to squeeze it. "I know, it's lovely, isn't it? It's much better than the one we had last year...I'm glad your mother liked it, too. How is she, by the way...Well, darling, he is a doctor; he knows what he is talking about...Wait a second." He hit the back of my skull as hard as he could and yelled, "Didn't I tell you to write down the damned answers?" He pushed my head down toward the chair's writing tablet. I started to write again. He continued talking with his wife. "I don't know how long I'll be here tonight. I may just sleep here. Don't wait for me for dinner." He came toward me again. With a crack, his belt hit the writing arm of the desk. "Write!" he roared.

London , November 2009

Any bruises had faded by the time I arrived in London, but Paola was shocked by how thin I was. One of the first things Mr. Rosewater had promised me was that he would send my skeleton home. He was right. I lost 25 pounds in prison.

I quickly realized that to cope with the interrogations I needed to be both physically and mentally fit. I probably exercised five hours a day in my tiny cell. I did 500 sit-ups and 60 push-ups. I did yoga. I lay on my back, kicked my legs up in the air, and bicycled.

For a while I was allowed to walk in the prison courtyard for 30 minutes in the morning and 30 minutes in the afternoon. They put six or seven of us next to each other, and we strolled back and forth with our blindfolds on. The guards called it *hava khor*i—literally, getting fresh air. That was the only time I could see the sky, by raising my head and squinting from under my blindfold. At first I didn't know how one could walk blindfolded. But I quickly memorized the number of paces between the walls of the courtyard. I even started to jog.

My true refuge, though, was music. Once, after a particularly brutal beating, I swallowed three migraine pills and passed out. Two women came to me in a dream. They had kind faces; in fact, they reminded me of my sister Maryam, who had died of leukemia in February.

"Who are you?" I asked.

"Sisters of mercy," they answered.

They touched my forehead gently to soothe the pain. In the dream I smiled and heard Leonard Cohen singing his song of the same name:

Oh the sisters of mercy, they are not departed or gone.

They were waiting for me when I thought that I just can't go on.

And they brought me their comfort and later they brought me this song.

I woke humming those words, free of pain. From that moment Leonard Cohen became the guardian of my universe. He was the secret that Mr. Rosewater could never discover.

Revolutionary Courthouse, Aug. 1, 2009 (before noon)

I was blindfolded as we drove. Mr. Rosewater hadn't told me where we were going, but he had told me my role. "Mazi, you can be a great service to yourself and the country today," he'd said at one of the predawn interrogation sessions he had begun to conduct ever since threatening me with the noose. He slapped the back of my head. "You want to be free, don't you?"

"Yes," I said quietly.

"So, all you have to do is repeat what Haj Agha taught you about velvet revolutions, in a press conference." He smacked my legs until they stung. "But this time we need names. We need to know who are the agents of the velvet revolution. We need names, Mazi. No names means the noose. Understood?"

Waiting at the courthouse that morning, I had no idea that in another room more than 100 bedraggled prisoners—many of them leading reformist figures and former government ministers—were sitting in the dock as a prosecutor read out a long, outlandish account of their roles in the supposed velvet revolution. Two of them—former vice president Mohammad Ali Abtahi, and former deputy interior minister Mohammad Atrianfar—were later brought out to "confess" their roles to state-media reporters.

My turn came after lunch. We ate chicken kebabs and drank *dough*, a savory yogurt drink similar to lassi. Mr. Rosewater gave me his drink, saying he had to watch out for his blood pressure. "Names, Mazi, names," he reminded me.

Again I didn't provide any. Of course I knew several reformist politicians—any veteran Iranian journalist would have. Many of them, in fact, had also been leading revolutionaries; over time they had decided that the system they'd helped put into place could survive only if it was modernized. That was heresy to the new generation of Guard commanders. These hardliners emerged after the Iran-Iraq War convinced that Iran had no friends abroad, only enemies—and was saddled with a corrupt, impious leadership. In their view the old guard needed to be purged from the system as thoroughly as the shah's cronies had been.

It was clear that Mr. Rosewater wanted me to implicate these reformists, to link them to my media bosses in the West. Next to me on a dais sat another prisoner: Kian Tajbaksh, an Iranian-American scholar who worked for the Open Society Institute, run by George Soros, a particular bogeyman of the Guards. The fact that the government had licensed both of us to do our jobs only confirmed the Guards' suspicions about the Iranian establishment. "Those who gave you permission are even guiltier than you are," Mr. Rosewater said to me once.

When we finished, I knew what awaited me back at Evin. In the interrogation room Mr. Rosewater beat me without saying a word. He didn't have to explain.

Evin Prison, August 2009

Day after day, hour after endless hour, the interrogations went on, growing surreal in their outlines of nefarious conspiracy, then circling back to more concrete matters, like the names and professions and opinions and connections of anyone I knew or might know. Early on, Mr. Rosewater had demanded my e-mail and Facebook passwords, so he had a very long list of contacts to grill me about, one by one. What did I know about this journalist's links to foreign organizations or governments? What was that one's take on

events in Iran? And, if they were women, had I had sex with them?

This last subject occupied Mr. Rosewater for several weeks. He was a young man, perhaps in his mid-30s. Sometimes, I think, he used sex as a way to humiliate me. But he also seemed genuinely curious about someone who had spent so much time in the West. Once he asked me how I knew one lady friend:

"We met at a party," I said.

"A sex party?"

I was taken aback. "I don't know what a sex party is," I said hesitantly. "I've never been to one."

"Yeah, right," he said sarcastically. He was convinced that any party where women went unveiled had to be depraved. His professors, he said, had taught him about free love in the West. "You can't tell me that you can't just take any woman's hand in the Champs-Élysées and have sex with her." He drew out the syllables in "Champs-Élysées," the way he had with "New Jersey."

Such nonsense was draining. But at least the questions represented human contact. Other times Mr. Rosewater would order the guards to lock me in my cell for days. By the time they dragged me out, hollow-eyed, I looked forward to his questions. Twice I seriously considered suicide by breaking my glasses and slitting my wrists with the shards. I wondered how long it would take to bleed to death.

Evin Prison, Sept. 17, 2009 (around 9 a.m.)

"It's very strange that no one has said anything about you yet," Mr. Rosewater told me one day. "Don't you have any friends or relatives?" I thought he was bluffing but couldn't know for sure. The prisoner's worst nightmare is the thought of being forgotten. Then, one morning in September, the friendliest of the prison guards—a man with whom I exchanged obscene jokes—opened my cell door and said, "Mr. Hillary Clinton, you can go have *hava khori* now."

I was mystified. "Why 'Hillary Clinton'?" I asked him. "She talked about you last night," he said, referring to comments the U.S. secretary of state had made to her Canadian counterpart. I was ecstatic. This meant there was international pressure to free me. I wanted to hug the guard. Instead I told him one of the funniest and most obscene jokes I knew.

Early on I'd had conversations in my head with friends and colleagues, in which I made suggestions about how to go about getting me released. As time went on these seemed ever more futile. But in September, I began to see signs that the Guards were under pressure to free me. First they allowed me to call my mother, then to share an *iftar* dinner with her during Ramadan. Then they let me call Paola—to warn her to stop giving interviews. (Bless her, she knew that the message meant she should do more.) Mr. Rosewater began claiming he wanted to free me before our baby was born at the end of October, a key part of the publicity campaign on my behalf. Eleven days before my release, I was moved out of solitary confinement and into a cell with four leading reformists, including Atrianfar. We had TV.

One disenchanted Iranian official told me recently that the Guards blocked my release for weeks; Mr. Rosewater was among the loudest calling for me to be tried swiftly and harshly. I doubt he ever cared about

the multilayered pressure campaign that NEWSWEEK and others had put together on my behalf—the editorials and petitions, the diplomatic démarches, the quiet personal efforts of world leaders. But there were Iranian officials who also disagreed with my detention. Soon after the election they might have been too hesitant or too powerless to do much. But by September, with Iran on the verge of nuclear talks, they could make the case that I had become a distraction. "You were more of a liability than an asset in jail," the disenchanted official told me.

I still don't know what finally broke the deadlock. A few years from now, after the Guards have consolidated their position, I'm not sure anything would.

London , November 2009

I am nervous but exhilarated as I type out the words on my laptop:

Don't contact me anymore. I have never spied for anyone. I am not going to start by spying for you.

I send the e-mail to the address Mr. Rosewater gave me. In the days leading up to my release from Evin he had forced me to sign documents saying I would "cooperate with the brothers in the Revolutionary Guards" once outside the country. He'd given me a list of names to report on, including most of my Iranian friends in London and other Western cities. He'd given me the e-mail address to use.

The night before I left the country, he asked to meet me at a hotel in downtown Tehran. His glare was just as menacing as on the day he arrested me. When the waiter told him our tea would be delayed, that the water needed time to boil, Mr. Rosewater shot him a spine-chilling look. The tea was ready within minutes.

We made awkward small talk. He had brought a colleague with him, an older man whose voice I had heard occasionally during interrogations. "We hope to have constructive cooperation with you in the future," the man said soothingly. I smiled and nodded politely. Mr. Rosewater was more blunt as he reminded me that the Guards could find me anywhere in the world. "Remember the bag, Mr. Bahari. Remember the bag" were his last words.

I'm remembering something else instead. In my dream, when the two sisters of mercy came to my aid, it was comforting to think that one of them was Maryam, my own beloved sister. At the time I wondered who the other could be. Now, holding my newborn daughter in my arms, I know. Her name is Marianna Maryam Bahari.

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