

# *True Identity*

## Chapter 1

The sound was deafening as Iranian artillery rained down around them. Informants had warned them of the impending attack by the Iranian Revolutionary Guards Corps, and most of the local villagers and guerrilla fighters of the Party for a Free Life in Kurdistan (Partiya Jiyana Azad a Kurdistane- PJAK) had already fled. Rihanna Keren, herself a fighter for the PJAK, was one of those who remained behind to help the last evacuees and to fight the Iranian advance.

But she was not alone. Though few in numbers, those who fought with the PJAK were bold and daring. They followed in the tradition of all Kurdish peshmerga, or “those who face death.”

Before her stood a living example of the rugged peshmerga fighter. Directly in the path of gunfire with artillery shells blasting all around him, the man purposefully helped the injured and those left behind. He was calm in a storm of chaos.

His features were typically Kurdish—dark hair; a long, straight nose; and blue eyes. His muscular build and six-foot frame stirred feelings that made her heart beat a little faster.

Mesmerized, she watched what seemed like a slow-motion film, as he reached into gunfire and randomly exploding shells to save anyone that he could. Who was he, this Kurdish lion? She thought she knew. If her suspicions were correct, he could be none other than the legendary Azad Khebat.

Azad Khebat was actually not his real name, but an alias meaning “free struggle.” No one knew his real name or identity. It was rumored that he was an Israeli Mossad agent, with ancestral origins in Kurdistan, who was helping the PJAK with training, supplies, and covert operations into Iran.

Then she saw her—a young girl of only three to four years of age in the center of the street. She was terrified and screaming for her mother.

The man saw her too. Without hesitation, he ran toward her. Just as he reached the young girl, an artillery shell exploded nearby. Instinctively, he covered the child with his own body as he dropped to the ground unconscious.

“No!” screamed Rihanna, as she raced to the man and girl who were still lying in the street.

She arrived to find the girl uninjured, but frightened. The man lay unconscious, having taken the full impact of the blast himself to save the child.

Her friend Tarkon arrived a moment later.

“Let me help you,” he said. “You take the girl, and I’ll carry him.”

Surrounded by explosions and bullets, they quickly carried the girl and her hero to safety behind a nearby wall.

“We can’t leave them here,” Rihanna said.

“I agree. I know the girl’s family and will get her to them.”

“I mean him,” Rihanna explained, pointing to the mysterious stranger. “We’ve got to get him out of here.”

“No problem,” Tarkon said reassuringly. “We will. But why the urgency?”

“If I’m right, this is Azad Khebat. We can’t let him be captured.”

“You mean...”

“Yes! I mean Azad Khebat.”

Tarkon looked over at the stranger and then back at Rihanna.

“Wait here,” he said. “I’ll be back soon.”

Without another word, Tarkon picked up the girl and raced off. He darted from building to building seeking shelter from the blasts and gunfire. Rihanna watched him for a moment, until he ran out of her sight, and then looked back at the unconscious stranger. She knew what his capture would mean, not only for him, but for their overall fight for freedom and democracy in Iran. It would be a huge setback, if not the end of their cause.

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As promised, Tarkon returned a short time later. This time, he was alone.

“I found her aunt and uncle. She’s safe now,” he said.

“Good.”

They both looked down at the still unconscious man.

“So, what about him?” she asked.

“I’ve got a pack mule waiting. Night is coming, and the Iranians should halt their attack until daybreak. We’ll take him down the mountain under the cover of darkness to a car that I’ve arranged to meet us.”

Rihanna reached over to take his hand.

“Thank you. If I’m right, we’ve just saved our people a terrible loss.”

“I know,” he said.

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