

Letter from the Author

When I began writing *A TIME TO LOVE IN TEHRAN*, it had many names and many versions. The first time I became inspired by the idea that ultimately took the shape of this novel was in February 2011. I had just enrolled in a distance course at the University of North Carolina at Greensboro called Current Problems in the Middle East: An Historical Perspective with Dr. Ann P. Saab as the principle professor. I spent the next year of my free time studying as much as I could about ancient Persia, modern Iran, and the history of the Middle and Near East. But all that research began with a dream.

I was living in Ho Chi Minh City, Vietnam when one night in February, I had a vivid dream of a beautiful Iranian woman. I opened my eyes and on my lips was the name “Leila.” After months of research, probably sometime in June, I uncovered who that woman was. I was sitting at my desk and clicked on a link to the funeral of the Shah’s daughter that took place in London in June 2001. And there was this same woman from my dream. Her name was Princess Leila Pahlavi, and when she passed away, she was 31 years old, the same age as I was when I started writing this novel. I have often felt her guiding-hand over this story.

I then had a second dream a few nights later. This time it was of an old man, a retired CIA officer, who was sitting in his garden when September 11, 2001 happened. I woke up and began listening to this old man’s story about his life and work in the Middle East, and these stories will likely find their way to

readers one day. But for now, *A TIME TO LOVE IN TEHRAN* tells of the CIA officer John Lockwood and his great love Leila Bakr in Iran during the years before the revolution and takeover in 1979, the year I was born.

Over the next three years, while writing this story, I was teaching university full-time, studying full-time to learn as much as I could about the Middle East, I was accepted into the MFA program at Southern New Hampshire University, and I was also going through a toxic marriage which led to a much-needed divorce. If the Universe does in fact conspire to help us, I must admit that I felt like it was doing very little to help me at the time.

But I pushed through all the battles, kept true to the story and continued to believe in myself and knew that this book would one day be published. I continued to write day in and day out and knew there was something special about this story set in a very memorable time in Iran's history. Perhaps it has something to do with Leila Pahlavi. Or perhaps not. But I'd like to think so.

Certainly, Iran has had its difficulties and so do I, but what matters is that we do not turn into monsters along the way. That we do everything we can to hold on to the best parts of our soul and to love as much as we can. That, as I found out, was much harder for me to do.

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Hong Kong
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