CHAPTER 1

Good Evening, Mr. Roosevelt

Most of Tehran was asleep when an odd caravan set out through the darkness shortly before midnight on August 15, 1953. At its head was an armored car with military markings. Behind came two jeeps and several army trucks full of soldiers. The day had been exceptionally hot, but nightfall brought some relief. A crescent moon shone above. It was a fine night to overthrow a government.

Sitting in the lead car, Colonel Nematollah Nasiri, the commander of the Imperial Guard, had reason to be confident. In his pocket he carried a decree from the Shah of Iran dismissing Prime Minister Mohammad Mossadegh from office. Nasiri was on his way to present this decree to Mossadegh and arrest him if he resisted.

The American and British intelligence agents who plotted this rebellion assumed that Mossadegh would immediately call out the army to suppress it. They had arranged for no one to be on the other end of the phone when he called. Colonel Nasiri was to stop first at the home of the military chief of staff and arrest him, then move on to deliver the fateful decree.

The colonel did as he was told. When he arrived at his first stop, however, he found something most unusual. Despite the late hour,

the chief of staff, General Taqi Riahi, was not at home. Neither was anyone else. Not even a servant or a doorkeeper could be found.

This might have alerted Colonel Nasiri that something was amiss, but it did not. He simply climbed back into his armored car and ordered the driver to proceed toward his main objective, Prime Minister Mossadegh's home. With him rode the hopes of two elite intelligence agencies.

Colonel Nasiri would not have been foolhardy enough to attempt such a bold mission on his own. The decree he carried was of dubious legality, since in democratic Iran prime ministers could be installed or removed only with the permission of parliament. But this night's work was the culmination of months of planning by the Central Intelligence Agency and Britain's Secret Intelligence Service. The coup they were staging had been ordered by President Dwight Eisenhower and Prime Minister Winston Churchill.

In 1953 the United States was still new to Iran. Many Iranians thought of Americans as friends, supporters of the fragile democracy they had spent half a century trying to build. It was Britain, not the United States, that they demonized as the colonialist oppressor that exploited them.

Since the early years of the twentieth century a British company, owned mainly by the British government, had enjoyed a fantastically lucrative monopoly on the production and sale of Iranian oil. The wealth that flowed from beneath Iran's soil played a decisive role in maintaining Britain at the pinnacle of world power while most Iranians lived in poverty. Iranians chafed bitterly under this injustice. Finally, in 1951, they turned to Mossadegh, who more than any other political leader personified their anger at the Anglo-Iranian Oil Company (AIOC). He pledged to throw the company out of Iran, reclaim the country's vast petroleum reserves, and free Iran from subjection to foreign power.

Prime Minister Mossadegh carried out his pledges with single-minded zeal. To the ecstatic cheers of his people, he nationalized Anglo-Iranian, the most profitable British business in the world. Soon afterward, Iranians took control of the company's giant refinery at Abadan on the Persian Gulf.

That sent Iran into patriotic ecstasy and made Mossadegh a national hero. It also outraged the British, who indignantly accused Mossadegh of stealing their property. They first demanded that the

World Court and the United Nations punish him, then sent warships to the Persian Gulf, and finally imposed a crushing embargo that devastated Iran's economy. Despite this campaign, many Iranians were thrilled with Mossadegh's boldness. So were anticolonial leaders across Asia and Africa.

Mossadegh was utterly unmoved by Britain's campaign against him. One European newspaper reported that Mossadegh "would rather be fried in Persian oil than make the slightest concession to the British." For a time the British considered launching an armed invasion to retake the oil fields and refinery, but they dropped the idea after President Harry Truman refused his support. Only two options remained: leave Mossadegh in power or organize a coup to depose him. Prime Minister Churchill, a proud product of the imperial tradition, had no trouble deciding for the coup.

British agents began conspiring to overthrow Mossadegh soon after he nationalized the oil company. They were too eager and aggressive for their own good. Mossadegh learned of their plotting, and in October 1952 he ordered the British embassy shut. All British diplomats in Iran, including clandestine agents working under diplomatic cover, had to leave the country. No one was left to stage the coup.

Immediately, the British asked President Truman for help. Truman, however, sympathized viscerally with nationalist movements like the one Mossadegh led. He had nothing but contempt for old-style imperialists like those who ran Anglo-Iranian. Besides, the CIA had never overthrown a government, and Truman did not wish to set the precedent.

The American attitude toward a possible coup in Iran changed radically after Dwight Eisenhower was elected president in November 1952. Within days of the election, a senior agent of the Secret Intelligence Service, Christopher Montague Woodhouse, came to Washington for meetings with top CIA and State Department officials. Woodhouse shrewdly decided not to make the traditional British argument, which was that Mossadegh must go because he had nationalized British property. That argument did not arouse much passion in Washington. Woodhouse knew what would.

"Not wishing to be accused of trying to use the Americans to pull British chestnuts out of the fire," he wrote later, "I decided to

emphasize the Communist threat to Iran rather than the need to recover control of the oil industry."

This appeal was calculated to stir the two brothers who would direct American foreign policy after Eisenhower's inauguration. John Foster Dulles, the incoming secretary of state, and Allen Dulles, the incoming CIA director, were among the fiercest of Cold Warriors. They viewed the world as an ideological battleground and saw every local conflict through the prism of the great East-West confrontation. In their eyes, any country not decisively allied with the United States was a potential enemy. They considered Iran especially dangerous.

Iran had immense oil wealth, a long border with the Soviet Union, an active Communist party, and a nationalist prime minister. The Dulles brothers believed there was a serious danger that it would soon fall to communism. The prospect of such a "second China" terrified them. When the British presented their proposal to overthrow Mossadegh and replace him with a reliably pro-Western prime minister, they were immediately interested.

Soon after President Eisenhower took office on January 20, 1953, John Foster Dulles and Allen Dulles told their British counterparts that they were ready to move against Mossadegh. Their coup would be code-named Operation Ajax, or, in CIA jargon, TPAJAX. To direct it, they chose a CIA officer with considerable experience in the Middle East, Kermit Roosevelt, a grandson of President Theodore Roosevelt.

Like other members of his famous family, Kermit Roosevelt had a penchant for direct action and was known to be decisive in times of crisis. He was thirty-seven years old, chief of the CIA's Near East and Asia Division, and an acknowledged master of his clandestine trade. The Soviet agent Kim Philby described him as the quintessential quiet American, "a courteous, soft-spoken Easterner with impeccable social connections, well-educated rather than intellectual, pleasant and unassuming as host and guest. An especially nice wife. In fact, the last person you would expect to be up to the neck in dirty tricks."

CIA agents in those days shared a profound idealism, a conviction that they were doing the vital dirty work of freedom. Many combined the best qualities of the thinker and the adventurer. None epitomized that combination more fully than did Kermit Roosevelt.

At the beginning of July, ignoring a CIA doctor's order that he first submit to urgent kidney surgery, he flew off on his secret mission. He landed in Beirut and from there set out by car across the deserts of Syria and Iraq. As he entered Iran at a remote crossing, he could barely contain his excitement:

> I remembered what my father wrote of his arrival in Africa with *his* father, T. R., in 1909 on the *African Game Trails* trip. "It was a great adventure, and all the world was young!" I felt as he must have felt then. My nerves tingled, my spirits soared as we moved up the mountain road. . . . As it turned out, on July 19, 1953, we encountered an unusually listless, stupid and semi-literate immigration/customs fellow at Khanequin. In those days US passports carried, as they do not now, some brief description of any notable features of the holder. With encouragement and help from me, the guard laboriously transcribed my name as "Mr. Scar on Right Forehead." This I found a good omen.

Roosevelt spent his first two weeks in Tehran conducting business from a villa rented by one of his American agents. Decades of British intrigue in Iran, coupled with more recent work by the CIA, gave him excellent assets on the ground. Among them were a handful of experienced and highly resourceful Iranian operatives who had spent years assembling a clandestine network of sympathetic politicians, military officers, clergymen, newspaper editors, and street gang leaders. The CIA was paying these operatives tens of thousands of dollars per month, and they earned every cent. During the spring and summer of 1953, not a day passed without at least one CIA-subsidized mullah, news commentator, or politician denouncing Prime Minister Mossadegh. The prime minister, who had great respect for the sanctity of free press, refused to suppress this campaign.

Iranian agents who came in and out of Roosevelt's villa knew him only by his pseudonym, James Lockridge. As time passed, they naturally developed a sense of comradeship, and some of the Iranians, much to Roosevelt's amusement, began calling him "Jim." The only times he came close to blowing his cover were during tennis games that he played regularly at the Turkish embassy and on the campus of the French Institute. When he missed a shot, he would curse himself, shouting, "Oh, *Roosevelt!*" Several times he was asked

why someone named Lockridge would have developed such a habit. He replied that he was a passionate Republican and considered Franklin D. Roosevelt to have been so evil that he used Roosevelt's name as a curse.

The plan for Operation Ajax envisioned an intense psychological campaign against Prime Minister Mossadegh, which the CIA had already launched, followed by an announcement that the Shah had dismissed him from office. Mobs and military units whose leaders were on the CIA payroll would crush any attempt by Mossadegh to resist. Then it would be announced that the Shah had chosen General Fazlollah Zahedi, a retired military officer who had received more than $100,000 from the CIA, as Iran's new prime minister.

By the beginning of August, Tehran was afire. Mobs working for the CIA staged anti-Mossadegh protests, marching through the streets carrying portraits of the Shah and chanting royalist slogans. Foreign agents bribed members of parliament and anyone else who might be helpful in the forthcoming coup attempt.

Press attacks on Mossadegh reached new levels of virulence. Articles accused him not just of communist leanings and designs on the throne, but also of Jewish parentage and even secret sympathy for the British. Although Mossadegh did not know it, most of these tirades were either inspired by the CIA or written by CIA propagandists in Washington. One of the propagandists, Richard Cottam, estimated that four-fifths of the newspapers in Tehran were under CIA influence.

"Any article that I would write—it gave you something of a sense of power—would appear almost instantly, the next day, in the Iranian press," Cottam recalled years later. "They were designed to show Mossadegh as a Communist collaborator and as a fanatic."

As the plot gathered momentum, Roosevelt faced his most serious obstacle, Mohammad Reza Shah. The thirty-two-year-old monarch, only the second shah in the Pahlavi line, was timid and indecisive by nature, and he doggedly refused to be drawn into such an audacious plot. "He hates taking decisions and cannot be relied on to stick to them when taken," one British diplomat reported. "He has no moral courage and succumbs easily to fear."

More than personality traits held the Shah back. Mossadegh had been the most popular figure in modern Iranian history, and although Britain's campaign of subversion and economic sabotage had weakened him, he was still widely admired and beloved. It was not even clear that the Shah had the legal authority to remove him. The plot could easily backfire and endanger not only the Shah's life but the monarchy itself.

None of this daunted Roosevelt. To carry out his coup, he needed signed decrees from the Shah dismissing Mossadegh and naming General Zahedi in his place. Roosevelt never doubted that he would ultimately obtain them. His battle of wits with the Shah was unequal from the start. Roosevelt was clever and well trained, and behind him lay immense international power. The Shah was weak, immature, and alone.

Roosevelt's first gambit was to send emissaries who might have special influence over the Shah. First he arranged for the Shah's twin sister, Princess Ashraf, who was as sharp and combative as the Shah was dull, to visit her brother and try to stiffen his backbone. Ashraf's tongue-lashings of her brother were legendary, including one in the presence of foreign diplomats when she demanded that he prove he was a man or else be revealed to all as a mouse. She detested Mossadegh because he was an enemy of royal power. Her attacks on his government became so bitter that the Shah had felt it best to send her out of the country. From her golden exile in Europe, she watched events in her homeland with undiminished passion.

Ashraf was enjoying life in French casinos and nightclubs when one of Roosevelt's best Iranian agents, Asadollah Rashidian, paid her a call. He found her reluctant, so the next day a delegation of American and British agents came to pose the invitation in stronger terms. The leader of the delegation, a senior British operative named Norman Darbyshire, had the foresight to bring a mink coat and a packet of cash. When Ashraf saw these emoluments, Darbyshire later recalled, "her eyes lit up" and her resistance crumbled. She agreed to fly to Tehran and landed without incident under her married name, Madame Chafik. At first her brother refused to receive her, but after being not so subtly urged to change his mind by associates who were in touch with the CIA, he relented. Brother and sister met late on the evening of July 29. Their meeting was

tense. She failed to persuade him to issue the crucial decrees, and to make matters worse, news of her presence leaked out and set off a storm of protest. To everyone's relief, she quickly returned to Europe.

Next Roosevelt turned to General H. Norman Schwarzkopf, who had spent most of the 1940s in Iran leading an elite military regiment and to whom the Shah felt deeply indebted. The CIA gave Schwarzkopf a "cover mission" of meetings and inspections in Lebanon, Pakistan, and Egypt so that his visit to Iran could be explained as a simple stopover. According to one account, he arrived there carrying "a couple of large bags" into which were stuffed several million dollars in cash. He met first with Roosevelt and then with Iranian principals in the operation, to whom he distributed much money. On the first day of August he called on the Shah at Saad Abad Palace.

It was a bizarre encounter. At first the Shah refused to say a word to his guest, indicating with gestures that he suspected hidden microphones. Then he led Schwarzkopf into a large ballroom, pulled a table into the center of the room, sat down on top of it, and invited the general to join him. There he whispered that he had still not decided whether to sign the decrees Roosevelt wanted. He doubted that the army would obey any order he signed, and he did not want to be on the losing side in such a risky operation.

Even as Schwarzkopf listened, he sensed the Shah's resistance weakening. One more visitor might be enough to bring the desired result, but it would have to be Roosevelt himself. This was a dangerous proposition. If Roosevelt was seen at the palace, news of his presence in Iran might leak out and compromise the entire operation. Schwarzkopf, however, told him there was no alternative.

Roosevelt expected this advice. "I had been sure from the beginning that a personal meeting would be necessary," he wrote afterward. "Securely and alone, the Shah and I could resolve the many difficult problems confronting us. This could only be done on a person-to-person basis. In all likelihood we would have to meet not once but several times. So the sooner we got to it, the better."

To prepare the way for his visit, Roosevelt sent his trusted agent Assadollah Rashidian to see the Shah on August 2. Rashidian's message was simple: the British and the Americans were planning a coup and would not be deterred. Under these circumstances,

Rashidian observed tartly, the Shah had little choice but to cooperate. The Shah nodded in silent agreement.

Only Roosevelt, however, could close the deal. He asked an agent in the royal court who was known by the code name Rosenkrantz to approach the Shah and say that "an American authorized to speak for Eisenhower *and* Churchill desired a secret audience." In a matter of hours the overture was made, and the Shah accepted it. He would send a car to Roosevelt's villa that night at midnight.

"Two hours to wait!" Roosevelt thought to himself after receiving the message. "I considered my costume. If not appropriate for a royal audience, it did seem good for these rather peculiar circumstances. I had on a dark turtleneck shirt, Oxford-gray slacks, and a pair of black-topped *givehs,* rope-soled cloth-covered Persian footwear somewhere between shoes and bedroom slippers. Not exactly smart but suitably unobtrusive."

Roosevelt, who had interviewed the Shah six years earlier while researching a book called *Arabs, Oil and History* and had met him again during subsequent visits to Iran, waited for the appointed hour with a handful of his agents. He thought it best not to drink, though his comrades had no such scruples. When midnight finally came, he walked through the front gate and out onto the street. A car was waiting. He climbed into the back seat.

Nothing stirred on the streets as Roosevelt was driven toward the stately palace. As his car began to climb the hill on which the palace sits, he decided that he should duck out of sight. His hosts had thoughtfully left a folded blanket on the car seat, and he put it to good use, lying down on the floor and pulling it over him.

There was no trouble at the sentry's gate, just a perfunctory wave. The car continued on for a few moments and then pulled to a stop well short of the palace's broad limestone steps. Roosevelt pulled off his blanket and sat up. A slim figure was walking down the steps toward him. The man, whom he recognized immediately as the Shah, approached his car, opened the door, and slid in beside him. Discreetly, the driver withdrew into the shadows.

"Good evening, Mr. Roosevelt," the monarch said, extending his hand. "I cannot say that I expected to see you, but this is a pleasure."

Roosevelt told the Shah that he was in Iran on behalf of the American and British secret services, and that this would be confirmed by a code word the Shah would be able to hear on the BBC

the next night. Churchill had arranged that the BBC would end its broadcast day by saying not "It is now midnight," as usual, but "It is now *exactly* midnight." Such assurances were hardly necessary, the Shah replied. The two men understood each other.

Still, however, the Shah was hesitant to join the plot. He was no adventurer, he told Roosevelt, and could not take the chances of one. Roosevelt's tone sharpened. He told the Shah that leaving Mossadegh in power would "lead only to a Communist Iran or to a second Korea," which Western leaders were not prepared to accept. To avoid it, they had approved a plot to overthrow Mossadegh—and, incidentally, to increase the power of the Shah. He must embrace it within a few days; if he refused, Roosevelt would leave the country and devise "some other plan."

The Shah made no direct reply. Let them meet again the following night, he suggested. Then he turned to open the car door. Before stepping out into the darkness, he looked back at Roosevelt and said, "I am glad to welcome you once again to my country."

From then on, Roosevelt met with the Shah almost every midnight, entering the palace compound under the same blanket in the back seat of the same car. Before and after each session, he conferred with his Iranian operatives. When local police became suspicious of the villa he was using, he stopped conducting business there and devised another way to hold his conferences. He obtained a Tehran taxi, and at appointed times he would drive it to a quiet corner, always with the "On Call" sign showing. There he would park and begin walking until one or another of his agents, usually hyperactive and pumped on the adrenaline of the operation, picked him up in a Chrysler or a Buick. They planned their day-to-day tactics while careening through the hilly outskirts of town.

In his conversations with the Shah, Roosevelt said he had at his disposal "the equivalent of about $1 million" and several "extremely competent, professional organizers" who could "distribute pamphlets, organize mobs, keep track of the opposition—you name it, they'll do it." He described Operation Ajax as based on "four lines of attack." First, a campaign in mosques, the press, and the streets would undermine Mossadegh's popularity. Second, royalist military officers would deliver the decree dismissing him. Third, mobs would take control of the streets. Fourth, General Zahedi would emerge triumphantly and accept the Shah's nomination as prime minister.

It was an appealing but not entirely convincing plan, and the Shah continued to agonize. His mood turned to what Roosevelt called "stubborn irresolution." But it was "hopeless to proceed without the Shah," Roosevelt cabled to his CIA superiors, so he continued turning up the pressure. Finally, inevitably, the Shah's resistance broke. He agreed to sign the *firmans,* as the royal decrees were called, but only on condition that he be allowed to leave Tehran for some safer place immediately afterward.

Mohammad Reza Shah had never been known as a courageous man, so this latest show of prudence did not surprise Roosevelt. The two men decided that the safest place for the Shah to hide was a hunting lodge that the royal family maintained near Ramsar on the Caspian coast. There was an airstrip nearby, which the Shah found reassuring.

"If by any horrible chance things go wrong," he indelicately told Roosevelt, "the Empress and I will take our plane straight to Baghdad."

The two men met for the last time in the predawn of August 9. Before bidding the Shah farewell, Roosevelt felt it correct to thank him for his decision to cooperate, reluctant though it had been. This was a historic moment, and something beyond the ordinary was appropriate. Roosevelt came up with a wonderful way to embellish his message.

"Your Majesty, I received earlier this evening a cable from Washington," he prevaricated. "President Eisenhower had asked that I convey to you this word: 'I wish Your Imperial Majesty godspeed. If the Pahlavis and the Roosevelts working together cannot solve this little problem, then there is no hope anywhere. I have complete faith that you will get this done.'"

It was agreed that a CIA courier would bring the vital *firmans* to the palace early the next morning. The Shah would sign them and then fly immediately to his refuge at Ramsar. All seemed perfectly arranged.

When Roosevelt returned to his villa with the good news, he and his agents celebrated with an exuberant drinking binge. He finally made it to bed at five o'clock. A few hours later he was awakened by the cursing of an aide. There had been a last-minute failure. The courier who was to obtain the Shah's signature had turned up late at the palace. When he arrived, the royal couple was gone.

Whether this was a simple missed connection or a last-minute attempt by the Shah to run from signing the *firmans,* Roosevelt was determined that it not be allowed to upset his plan. These *firmans* played an indispensable role in the coup he had designed. They provided not just a fig leaf of legality but the operation's central organizing principle. If the Shah was not in Tehran to sign them, they would have to be brought to wherever he was.

The man best equipped to help at this moment, Roosevelt quickly realized, was Colonel Nasiri of the Imperial Guard. He was a strong royalist, could find and fly a plane, and was on intimate terms with the Shah. The arrangements were quickly made, and this time the connection worked. Nasiri flew to Ramsar, obtained the Shah's scribbled signature on both *firmans,* and then, because bad weather prevented him from taking off, sent them to Tehran by car.

Roosevelt and his comrades spent the day waiting impatiently around their pool, with no idea of what was taking Nasiri so long. When night fell, they took to smoking, playing cards, and drinking vodka with lime. Tehran was under a nine o'clock curfew, but after that hour passed, they still hoped someone would turn up. It was almost midnight when they heard shouts at the gate. They ran to open it. Outside was a small throng of unshaven and very excited Iranians, most of whom they did not recognize. They pushed a packet to Roosevelt, who opened it gingerly. Inside were the two *firmans,* duly signed by His Imperial Majesty.

After jubilantly embracing his new friends, Roosevelt considered how quickly he could now move. He was much dismayed when his agents told him there would have to be one more delay. The weekend, which Iranians observe on Thursday and Friday, was about to begin, and Iranians do not like to conduct business, much less overthrow governments, on weekends. Roosevelt reluctantly agreed to postpone the coup until Saturday night, August 15.

Confident of their plan but acutely aware that each passing hour increased the chance of betrayal, Roosevelt and his comrades spent three excruciating days at poolside. Saturday was the hardest to bear because the moment of truth was so near. Roosevelt later wrote that on that day, time moved "more slowly than anything we had ever before lived through."

By now Roosevelt had moved his command post to a basement

in the American embassy compound. His Iranian agents visited him less frequently, but they were busier than ever at their subversive work, as a CIA report on the coup makes clear:

> At this same time the psychological campaign against Mossadegh was reaching its climax. The controllable press was going all out against Mossadegh, while [DELETED] under station direction was printing material which the station considered to be helpful. CIA agents gave serious attention to alarming the religious leaders at Tehran by issuing black propaganda in the name of the [Communist] Tudeh party, threatening these leaders with savage punishment if they opposed Mossadegh. Threatening phone calls were also made to them, in the name of the Tudeh, and one of several sham bombings of the houses of these leaders was carried out.
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> The word that the Shah would support direct action in his behalf spread rapidly through the "colonel's conspiracy" fostered by the station. Zahedi saw station principal agent, Colonel [DELETED], and named him as liaison officer with the Americans and as his choice to supervise the staff planning for the action. . . .
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> On 14 August the station cabled that upon the conclusion of TPAJAX the Zahedi government, in view of the empty treasury of the country, would be in urgent need of funds. The sum of $5,000,000 was suggested, and CIA was asked to produce this sum almost within hours after the conclusion of the operation.

Now, in the words of that CIA report, "there was nothing that either the station or Headquarters could do except wait for action to begin." When dusk finally began falling over Tehran on August 15, Roosevelt climbed into his Hillman-Minx taxi, flipped down the "On Call" sign, and drove to a nearby safe house where his agents had gathered to await the news of victory. As vodka flowed, they sang along with records of Broadway show tunes. Their favorite was "Luck Be a Lady Tonight" from the musical *Guys and Dolls.* By acclimation, they adopted it as the official Operation Ajax theme song:

> They call you lady luck, but there is room for doubt;
> At times you have a very un-ladylike way of running out.
> You're on this date with me, the pickings have been lush,
> And yet before the evening is over you might give me the brush.

You might forget your manners, you might refuse to stay
And so the best that I can do is pray:
Luck, be a lady tonight.

As Roosevelt drove back to the American embassy later that evening, his route took him past the residence of General Riahi, the military chief of staff. He enjoyed the coincidence. If his plan worked, General Riahi would be behind bars in a few hours.

The officer Roosevelt had chosen to arrest the chief of staff and the prime minister that night, Colonel Nasiri, seemed ideal for the operation. He believed in the primacy of royal power and loathed Mossadegh. His command of the seven-hundred-man Imperial Guard gave him control of considerable resources. By successfully obtaining the vital *firmans* at a crucial moment, he seemed to have proven his reliability.

On the night of August 15, however, Nasiri was not thinking clearly enough. It was well after eleven o'clock when he arrived at General Riahi's home and found it abandoned. He was untroubled and simply ordered his men to proceed toward Mossadegh's residence. Unbeknownst to him, another military column was also on its way there. General Riahi had learned of the coup and sent troops to foil it.

The precise identity of the informant has never been established. Most guesses center on a military officer who belonged to a secret communist cell. There may have been more than one informant. In the end, what happened was precisely what Roosevelt feared. Too many people knew about the plot for too long. A leak was all but inevitable.

In the confusing hours around midnight, Tehran was bursting with plots and counterplots. Some rebellious officers learned of the betrayal in time to abort their missions. Others, not realizing that they were compromised, went ahead. One seized the telephone office at the bazaar. Another roused Foreign Minister Hussein Fatemi from bed and dragged him away barefoot and shouting.

The future of constitutional rule in Iran depended on which column of soldiers reached Mossadegh's house first. Shortly before one o'clock in the morning, the rebel column drove up Kakh Street, passed the corner of Heshmatdowleh, and stopped. Here Mossadegh lived with his wife in a small apartment, part of a larger

complex that his family had owned for many years. The gate was closed. Colonel Nasiri stepped out to demand entry. In his hand he held the *firman* dismissing Mossadegh from office. Behind him stood several files of soldiers.

Colonel Nasiri had arrived too late. Moments after he appeared at the gate, several loyal commanders stepped from the shadows. They escorted him into a jeep and drove him to general staff headquarters. There General Riahi denounced him as a traitor, ordered him stripped of his uniform, and sent him to a cell. The man who was to have arrested Mossadegh was now himself a prisoner.

Roosevelt, who had no way of knowing that any of this was happening, was at his embassy command post, waiting for Colonel Nasiri to call. Tanks clattered by several times, but the telephone never rang. Roosevelt's apprehensions deepened as dawn broke. Radio Tehran did not begin its transmissions at six o'clock as normal. Then, an hour later, it crackled to life with a burst of military music, followed by the reading of an official communiqué. Roosevelt did not speak Persian but feared the worst when he heard the announcer use the word *Mossadegh*. Then Mossadegh himself came on the air, announcing victory over a coup attempt organized by the Shah and "foreign elements."

The Shah, cowering at his seaside villa, was also listening. As soon as he grasped what had happened, he roused his wife and told her it was time to run. They quickly packed two small briefcases, grabbed what clothes they could carry in their arms, and walked briskly out toward their twin-engine Beechcraft. The Shah, a trained pilot, took the controls and set a course for Baghdad. After arriving there, he told the American ambassador that he "would be looking for work shortly as he has a large family and very small means outside of Iran."

While the Shah was fleeing, military units loyal to the government were fanning out through Tehran. City life quickly returned to normal. Several conspirators were arrested and others went into hiding. A reward was offered for the capture of General Zahedi. CIA operatives made mad dashes back to the security of the American embassy or safe houses. Jubilant crowds took to the streets chanting, "Victory to the Nation!" and "Mossadegh Has Won!"

Inside his embassy compound, Roosevelt felt himself "close to despair." He had no choice but to send a cable to Washington saying

that things had gone terribly wrong. John Waller, the head of the CIA's Iran desk, read it with great disappointment. Waller feared for the lives of his agents, and he sent Roosevelt an urgent reply. No copy of it is known to exist. According to CIA lore, it was an order that Roosevelt leave Iran immediately. Many years later, though, Waller said that it was not so categorical. Its message, he recalled, was: "If you're in a jam, get out so you don't get killed. But if you're not in a jam, go ahead and do what you have to do."

Things looked bleak for the plotters. They had lost the advantage of surprise. Several of their key agents were out of action. Their anointed prime minister, General Zahedi, was in hiding. The Shah had fled. Foreign Minister Fatemi, free after several hours in rebel custody, was making fiery speeches denouncing the Shah for his collaboration with foreign agents.

"O Traitor!" Fatemi railed before one crowd. "The moment you heard by Tehran Radio that your foreign plot had been defeated, you fled to the nearest country where Britain has an embassy!"

Operation Ajax had failed. Radio Tehran reported that the situation was "well under control," and so it seemed. Shock waves reverberated through CIA headquarters in Washington.

Then suddenly, around midevening, Roosevelt cabled a most unexpected message. He had decided to stay in Tehran and improvise another stab at Mossadegh. The CIA had sent him to overthrow the government of Iran, and he was determined not to leave until he had done it.