

A.N. OVEISSI



**THE**

**IBANKER**

**AND THE  
GOLDEN  
CAGE**



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By A.N. Oveissi

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## Prologue

Only a short moment had passed since the silver Bentley pulled up to the security barrier. A guard ran up to the car, and our sexagenarian driver, Charlie, handed him our passports. The stern-looking official offered a cursory smile and peered inside towards the back seats. Once he'd made eye contact with us he ran off and opened the gate to let us through. The car moved, and less than a minute later we arrived at the entrance of the small terminal where a strikingly attractive receptionist awaited our arrival.

“Welcome. Please follow me when you're ready,” she said with a warm smile.

*French.* I knew it the moment I set eyes on her. She carried herself like a Frenchwoman. A seductive nonchalance, the genes for which only they seemed to carry. Her accent simply served as confirmation. Where she was from wasn't of great interest at the moment, though. More intriguing was her conflicting attire. At her waistline, a classic white shirt met a dark red skirt, which came down to her knees. By most standards, except perhaps those of the Saudis, she was dressed conservatively. But the excitement took place below knee level. Our poised guide wore a pair of stiletto-heel, shiny black lace-up boots that were befitting a dominatrix. One particular thought held my mind hostage, and I'm sure it did all the men who set eyes on her that day: her wearing nothing but those boots.

She effortlessly led us to a nearby sitting area, which looked more like a luxury hotel lounge than an airport departure area. Then again, we were in Farnborough Airport, where all kinds of VIPs parked their planes. I grabbed a bottle of fancy water from a refreshments table, walked over to one of the stylish red sofas and sat down. A table beside me displayed newspapers in various languages. A

headline caught my attention: “A New Offshore Tax Haven for the Global Rich”.

*Interesting.* I reached for the newspaper.

Before I could finish the *Financial Times* article the pair of stilettos reappeared. *Welcome back, mademoiselle.*

“You can go now,” she said.

The aircraft was ready. We got on our feet and made our way to the tarmac.

“Must be a hassle to put on and take off?” I asked the Frenchwoman, pointing to her glossy boots.

“Oh, I like to keep them on. All the time,” she winked. “Have a nice flight, Mr. Shiraz.”

*You naughty little minx.* I looked into her eyes long enough to make my interest known and considered inviting her to dinner, but I remembered a little promise I’d made myself some time ago. I don’t mix business with pleasure. At least I try not to. *Besides, have you forgotten already? The last time you had dinner with a Frenchwoman you ended up spending the night in a Nairobi jail.* I smiled and walked on. *Promises can be so inconvenient. I’ll definitely regret it.*

The private jet was less than a lovely two hundred-yard stroll away. Charlie had parked the car right next to the aircraft and already transferred all our baggage to the plane. My briefcase, however, he held on to and handed to me when I arrived. *Good man.* Just before we mounted the steps to the plane, airport personnel appeared and returned our passports to us.

Once inside the cabin, the crew greeted us and began preparing for take-off. I quickly stepped into the bathroom to freshen up. I could have been in a Four Seasons Hotel presidential suite. When I’d finished, I looked in the mirror and smiled. Despite

regularly flying in private jets these days, I couldn't help noticing the contrast with commercial jet travel. There was no standing in never-ending lines at ticket counters sandwiched between families laden down with suitcases. No unpleasant customs officer or intrusive security checks. Sitting next to a crying baby? Thank heavens, no longer a worry. But best of all, and I mean by far the best thing about travelling by private jet, was that you saved so much time. The most valuable commodity of all.

Minutes later we are in the air.

The private jet I'm flying on belongs to my client, who is the head of one of England's wealthiest families. The person I'm travelling with is one of the children in the family. They're worth billions of pounds. That's double digit billions and pounds sterling. However, only an Indiana Jones of finance could put a remotely accurate value on their total holdings. In fact, it would be difficult to prove they have more than a few hundred million in assets to their name. It's practically impossible to trace their possessions. Take the jet we're now flying in – one of three owned by this family. It belongs to some obscure offshore company with no direct link to any members of the family. And just as their true wealth is a secret, so is my relationship with them. That brings us to my role.

In essence, I am a dealmaker. I introduce money and opportunity to one another, and I inspire carnal chemistry between them. By money I refer to what's called a "family office", an organization tasked with managing, preserving and growing the wealth of a very rich family. I really only have one client: a consortium comprised of a handful of families whose combined assets total upwards of \$150 billion. They're from completely different parts of the world. They pool their

resources together and are united in their search for unrivalled investment opportunities. I am their treasure hunter, if you will.

As for the opportunities I help introduce to my families, let's just say that they are as diverse, colourful and varied as the tenants of Amsterdam's red light district. Though each family has an army of people managing their wealth, the deals I look after are what we call, amongst us, Special Situations opportunities. They're the more sensitive transactions, and nearly always have an unusual angle to them that makes them difficult to fit into a simple category. One day it can be hundreds of acres of breathtaking beachfront property in the Caribbean that's offered at a highly attractive discount because the owner has just gotten into serious trouble with the Russian government; the next, the quiet sale of a significant stake in one of the largest alternative energy companies in the world by a sovereign wealth fund; a Mongolian gold mining license of national importance being offered by the mistress of a leading politician; a Premier League English football club; a five-star New York hotel; a luxury super yacht previously owned by a former Icelandic billionaire; a London-based kids' gaming website on the verge of becoming the darling of the Internet; \$350 million of shares in the world's largest social media company being sold by one of the founders; the most expensive residential real estate asset in India; a priceless painting that's been in a series of private residences for the last 300 years and which may be for sale; and so on and so forth.

The flight I'm on now is headed to Monaco, where the English scion and I will meet with a 27-year-old Kazakh business tycoon who is about to buy a £50 million house owned by the family. The property is situated in one of London's most expensive addresses, Eaton Square. My arrangement, should the purchase go through,

and it very much looks like it will, will pay me a handsome fee. Enough to buy a two-bedroom flat in a trendy part of London. Cash. Best of all, it took but one phone call to the Kazakh, whom I'd met only two weeks previously at a spa in Gstaad.

Five years ago, I would have found it a bit of a stretch if you told me I'd be travelling the world in a private jet in search of exceptional deals. It's quite a change from my days roaming the halls of the London School of Economics (LSE). How very little I knew about the world of money and high finance. Only after I'd finished my studies and joined Paris Berkeley Capital, the global investment bank I worked for for three years before establishing my family office business, did it dawn on me that there is a world out there that is in fact beyond most people's realm of knowledge. The everyday man or woman has no idea. It's no exaggeration; the movies don't even come close to depicting what's it's really like. A Hollywood scriptwriter doesn't have access to the necessary raw material. It's much, much more than just owning expensive cars and homes. Those are things everyone sees. And what you see is but the tip of the iceberg. What I can tell you is that it is a world propped up by powerful pillars and fenced around by impenetrable gates. Three imperatives rule this domain: to protect vast riches; to allow few people into the club; and to fly below the radar. The lingua franca of this world is finance. The gladiators that protect the system are investment bankers and dealmakers.

I am going to show you that world.

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