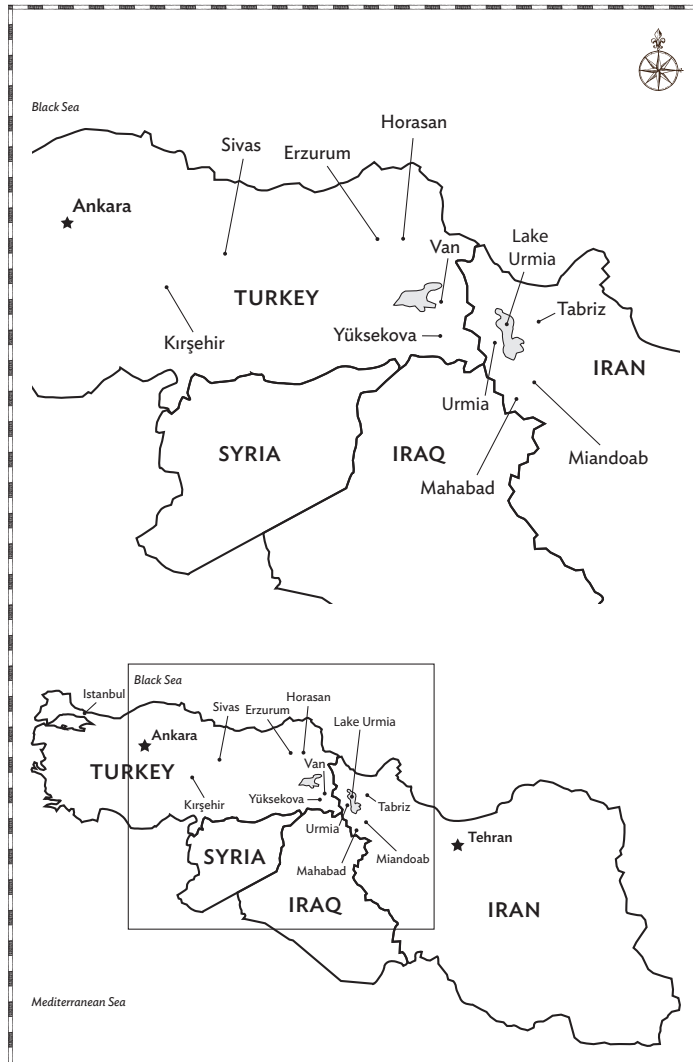




Chapter Twelve

Day One: March 20, 1988



As the sun dipped behind the mountains, a pickup pulled up to the place where Siamak, Tofigh, and I waited. The truck was a patchwork of rusted steel with tires so worn I didn't see how they would get any traction on the snowy mountain passes we needed to cross. My friends and I wedged our bodies into the cab with the driver, a stout man in his thirties who smelled of wood dust and sweat. It was a tight fit. The driver grunted what I took to be "Hello" and steered the truck toward the mountains, carrying us away from the New Year celebrations.

Jaklin's family had traveled by truck and then bus, arriving in Ankara in two days. I found it reassuring that we might be traveling in the same truck her family rode in. Of course, her family had also traveled during more favorable weather, but I wasn't thinking about that at the time. My thoughts were positive: Her family made it out, and so would I.

The truck bounced over dirt and rocks. I couldn't make out a road, yet the driver seemed certain of where he was headed. Today would be the first of many days that required putting blind trust in strangers. I snuck a sideways glance at my friends and saw the same glimmers of hope and apprehension on their faces. I suspected we were each thinking the same thought: "We are really doing this! We are getting out!"