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Menendez Declared His ‘Resurrection.’ Then He Fell in Love.

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After his first public corruption case [ended in a mistrial](#) in 2017, Sen. Bob Menendez had a message for his supporters from the steps of the Newark, N.J., courthouse: “Today is resurrection day.”

Instead, just weeks later, the powerful Senate Democrat started dating a glamorous woman born in Lebanon who had friends who sought the lawmaker’s influence, planting the seeds for his downfall.

Now, Menendez, 70 years old, is back in a courthouse facing corruption charges tied to those new friends, with few supporters and little hope of restoring his political career.

The jury is expected to begin deliberations this week. Prosecutors accused Menendez and his girlfriend-turned-wife, Nadine Arslanian, of engaging in a [sprawling web of bribery](#). He has seen his influence dwindle both in Washington and his home state and has been forced to canvass personally for signatures to help him

get a [spot on the November ballot](#) as an independent candidate.

During the nearly two-month trial, prosecutors painted a portrait of a longtime power broker who, with Arslanian's help, traded the influence of his office for gold, cash and a new Mercedes-Benz convertible.

Menendez's team argued that the senator regularly helps constituents and that Arslanian kept him in the dark about the alleged bribes. "I submit the real question for you is, 'What did Bob know?'" a lawyer for the senator told jurors. Two New Jersey businessmen, Wael Hana and Fred Daibes, are on trial alongside Menendez and have also denied wrongdoing. Arslanian, who has pleaded not guilty, is expected to be tried separately.

Although long considered a largely solo operator in the Senate, Menendez has grown increasingly isolated, according to lawmakers and current and former Senate aides. Some Democrats—including Cory Booker, the junior U.S. senator from New Jersey who testified on Menendez's behalf during the first trial—have called for him to resign, a chorus that is likely to grow louder if he is convicted.

Another colleague, Sen. Tim Kaine (D., Va.), said: "The charges are of a magnitude that if true, I don't think he could continue to serve in the Senate."

Nadine and her friends

In early 2018, with charges behind him, Menendez was flying high. In Washington, he resumed his political ascent, promising vengeance for his doubters. "To those who were digging my political grave so they could jump into my seat, I know who you

are, and I won't forget you," he warned them. The remark stuck with lawmakers and aides on Capitol Hill, where he was known as a forceful politician focused on foreign policy and immigration who appreciated a good cigar.

In February of that year, the senator began dating Arslanian, who like him was divorced. She was dazzling, the senator's lawyer said: tall, beautiful, highly educated and worldly.

Alongside his new girlfriend came her old friends. One of them, Hana, who was in regular contact with Egyptian officials, saw an opportunity, according to prosecutors.

In March 2018, Arslanian and Hana arranged a meeting between Menendez and Egyptian officials in Menendez's Senate office to discuss U.S. military financing to Egypt. Menendez had just reclaimed the post as the top Democrat on the Foreign Relations Committee.

Dozens of more meetings like it followed, most coordinated by Arslanian. After a meeting that May, Menendez sought and then passed along State Department information about staffing at the U.S. Embassy in Cairo. (Menendez's lawyers have argued that the information is released publicly.)

That July, Arslanian arranged a meeting in which Menendez met with Egyptian military officials who wanted Congress to greenlight a nearly \$100 million sale of tank ammunition.

Menendez texted Arslanian the following day. "Tell Will I am going to sign off this sale to Egypt today," Menendez wrote, referring to Hana. Arslanian sent the text to Hana, who forwarded it to two Egyptian officials. One responded with a thumbs-up emoji.

Even as their relationship with the Egyptians grew closer, the couple's romance was at times rocky. The senator temporarily broke up with Arslanian at one point, his lawyer said, because she was "causing too much drama."

The couple kept close track of each other, using the Find My Friends location-tracking application on their iPhones. "I lost you!" Menendez texted Arslanian, when he couldn't view her location.

Menendez's lawyers argued that the senator kept close watch on Arslanian because of his concern about her allegedly abusive ex-boyfriend, while prosecutors portrayed his surveillance as supervision over her go-between role in nearly every alleged quid pro quo in the trial.

The car crash

In December 2018, Arslanian struck and killed a pedestrian while driving at night. "I was worried about you," Menendez texted Arslanian.

The incident left her shaken and carless. She told a friend she wanted a Mercedes C 300, although the couple lacked the cash to buy one. "Bob and I went and test drove on Saturday but the prices are too high monthly to finance," she wrote.

Prosecutors said Hana and another friend, Jose Uribe, stepped up.

"I remember saying to her, if your problem is a car, my problem is saving my family," Uribe told the jury. Uribe handed her 150 hundred-dollar bills in a restaurant parking lot, then funded car payments on a new C 300 for several years.

“Congratulations mon amour de la vie, we are the proud owners of a 2019 Mercedes ❤️,” Arslanian texted Menendez.

Uribe had an ask of his own: Could Menendez help influence a criminal case involving an associate and an investigation of a family friend?

In September 2019, Uribe sat in the couple’s backyard when Menendez rang a bell to summon Arslanian to bring him some paper, Uribe testified. Menendez wrote down the relevant names, folded the paper and slipped it into his pants pocket, Uribe said.

Menendez met in his office with Gurbir Grewal, who was then New Jersey’s attorney general, the next day. When Menendez raised the case that Uribe had requested, Grewal told him he couldn’t talk about the issue, Grewal later testified.

Grewal and his deputy left Menendez’s office less than 15 minutes later. Grewal said his deputy told him: “Whoa, that was gross.”

The steakhouse and the FBI

Also in 2019, the couple and Hana met Egyptian officials for dinner at Morton’s The Steakhouse. The restaurant was one of Menendez’s regular haunts, with the senator dining there at the same table roughly 250 times a year, his lawyer said. Since 2017, Menendez’s campaign reported spending more than \$64,000 at the restaurant.

The group smoked cigars on the restaurant’s patio, and Menendez poured red wine for his companions. Toward the end of the dinner, the conversation, fueled by alcohol, grew louder: “What else can the love of my life do for you?” Arslanian said, according to a nearby diner.

That diner, part of a couple who appeared to be on a date, was actually from the Federal Bureau of Investigation. The pair were there to surveil one of the senator's dining companions and didn't expect Menendez to appear, the investigator testified.

Two days later, Menendez came through on a favor. Hana had been seeking a lucrative export contract from Egypt for his halal business—despite having no experience in the field. Menendez called a U.S. agriculture official whose agency had raised concerns about the monopoly the contract would create.

“Stop interfering with my constituent,” Ted McKinney, the agriculture official, recalled Menendez saying on the call.

That June, Arslanian and Menendez set up Strategic International Business Consultants LLC. “Every time I'm in a middle person for a deal I am asking to get paid and this is my consulting company,” she texted her daughter.

‘Never Enough’

By 2019, the couple's on-again-off-again relationship turned serious. He called her “the most gorgeous woman” in a message. She later replied, “I have the handsomest sexiest man on the planet for a boyfriend.”

During a trip to India, Menendez proposed to Arslanian on a bench in front of the Taj Mahal. He crooned the song “Never Enough,” from the movie “The Greatest Showman,” before offering her a ring.

The next year, the couple married in New Jersey. One wedding guest: the businessman Daibes, who wanted help resolving criminal charges he faced. Daibes gave the senator a recliner and

gold bars in exchange, prosecutors said.

Another wedding guest was a lawyer named Philip Sellinger, who later became the U.S. attorney in New Jersey. He met with Menendez to explain his vision for the post, and Menendez raised the Daibes case, Sellinger later testified. Daibes was being unfairly treated, Menendez told him, and the next U.S. attorney should look into it.

41 Jane Drive

In June 2022, federal agents arrived in unmarked vehicles at the couple's split-level home on 41 Jane Drive in Englewood Cliffs, N.J. Armed with a search warrant, the agents seized what prosecutors would later say were the fruits of the couple's crimes.

Photos show cash stuffed in the midst of suburban clutter. There was \$100,000 in a Burberry bag inside a duffel bag in an office. A pair of brown boots held \$14,500, with tens of thousands more in envelopes, some of which carried Daibes's fingerprints and DNA, prosecutors said.

Then, in September 2023, the U.S. attorney's office in Manhattan announced that the couple had been indicted.

After his first trial, lawmakers had accepted Menendez's return. But this time, his colleagues distanced themselves, shocked by the specificity and seriousness of the charges. The day of the indictment, Menendez temporarily stepped down from his post as chairman of the Foreign Relations Committee.

Menendez and his wife initially put up a united front, holding hands as they walked to and from the federal courthouse. Later, the pair floated separate defenses, with Menendez arguing he was

oblivious to the source of the gold in his wife's closet. After Arslanian said she was diagnosed with breast cancer earlier this year, the judge granted her a separate trial to give her time to undergo treatment.

For Menendez, the trial was a solitary affair. This time, no lawmakers testified on his behalf. Even Arslanian never showed up in court.

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