

## BOOK TWO: Old Loves, New Loves and Obligations

## 25

After his bout with Francesco, Radouan felt depressed and disappeared into his house in the *Mellah*, where the youth Mokhtar cooked supper for him and he slept soundly for many hours. Awakening about two the following afternoon he promised Mokhtar he would return later with a sheep for The Feast, drove to Bab Dukala, parked his car and phoned Delphine that he would pick her up around seven that evening.

Everywhere preparations were underway for *Aid Kabir*. People hurrying to buy sheep were selling their jewelry, watches, TV's, stereos, old clothes, and even their underwear - bad luck not to have a sheep! Outside the city walls: great mounds of charcoal, clay pots, tajine cookers, bunches of mint and herbs for tea, oranges, and sharp knives to slit the throats of the sheep.

Arriving at his house, Radouan wheeled his motorcycle out the front door and went off. Everywhere sheep, oblivious of the fate that would soon befall them, were being carted about and in every *derb* and courtyard tethered sheep bleated mournfully.

Finally, outside the walls, he found a countryman with a small herd and began negotiating with him. He would need two sheep for his father's house, one for Nick at the *Riad* and yes, one for the orphan in the *Mellah*; four white rams, which were then shackled and lifted gently into two carts on beds of fresh green fodder. The first he delivered to the orphan who tied it to the old lemon tree. Then on to the *Riad* where he released another one in the garden and had a drink with Nick who was crazier than usual and ranted on about the coming sacrifice.

Arriving at his father's house with the last two sheep, he left them in the courtyard, and after a bath, prayers and a change of clothes, toiled around on his bike to Delphine's hotel where he picked her up and they sped off toward *Jamaa el F'na*. The big square was a mob scene of jugglers, acrobats, competing musical groups, actors, story tellers, drummers, dancers, herb sellers, snake charmers, tourists, false guides, and hopeful gigolos.

Cutting through the crowd to the Cafe France, scene of so many important turning points in his life, he parked his bike and steered Delphine inside where they ordered tea and had ice cream. And there in a far corner Radouan noticed his friend J. W. peering around his *journal* and nodding with approval, but too shy to come over and be introduced

As the sun set they mounted the stairs to the roof and sat watching as dusk turned to evening and the sounds of drumming and music mingling with the smoke of cooking fires soared into the night sky. Delphine was enthralled and thought it romantic although the strong undercurrent of chaos frightened her and made her suspicious. For Radouan it brought back countless other evenings before the feast: homecoming relatives, the relentless problem of feeding them all. Scenes of his childhood and lost youth spent on this Square added to the sadness he already felt. Far away the whistle of the night train to Tangier sounded. It had always made him want to escape, but to where? And now here was Delphine sitting across from him - another year, and another girl.

After the sun set and it had grown dark, they bought food at one of the stalls in the Square took it back to Delphine's hotel and spent the night in bed eating, watching TV, and making love.

## 26

By dawn the next morning, the two of them were on the roof of her hotel, looking down into the surrounding courtyards where, alone or in small groups, sheep waited nervously. As though they knew something bad was going to happen to them Radouan thought. How he hated this day, yes he had to admit it, all his life since childhood, hardening his heart against its sadness. But he could not, must not, show his sorrow for it was not permitted, must totally suppress those feelings and sublimate them in the worship of God; the remembrance of his prophet Ibrahim, and Isaac his son.

Sensing Delphine's hesitation if not her remorse, he put his arm gently around her shoulder and said: 'after having something to eat... some bean soup and bread... I will take you to meet my oldest sister Fouzia, and one American friend of ours she is looking after. He's a

little crazy. There, on TV, we will watch our King sacrifice the first sheep and then I will sacrifice one and after that we will walk quickly to my family's house where I must perform a second sacrifice of two more. These days my father is not strong enough to do it. In the next few hours at least six million sheep will be sacrificed in Morocco. After sacrificing for my family we will return to the *Riad* and eat *brochette...*'

'You must know by now I don't eat meat,' Delphine whispered firmly and looked away. 'I don't eat it at all!'

'Vegetables are for camels and horses,' Radouan laughed, 'you must eat meat. Human beings are carnivores not herbivores.'

'Before perhaps, but not now,' she replied. 'Today meat is contaminated with antibiotics, hormones, steroids and resistant diseases. You can't tell what you're eating.'

'Not with us! Here we don't have money for these things and it is forbidden for us, as with the Jews, to feed offal back to our animals - our meat is pure.'

'I can't stand these poor animals bleating,' she said at last, 'can we go down?'

'Don't think about it,' he replied firmly, 'they are only sheep.'

After bean soup and fresh bread in a nearby food shop they walked together through the deserted lanes of the Medina to the *Riad* where Radouan's friend, Prospero met them at the door, a pair of black Labrador puppies walking shakily beside him. Radouan introduced Delphine.

'A friend of mine,' Pero explained, 'his bitch had these pups and offered me these two. We need watch dogs here so I took them; also I thought it would be good for Nicholas to have something to look after.'

They went inside. All the trees in the courtyard had been pruned and new plants set out underneath them. They found Nick reclining on the second hand gilt throne Pero had bought him, wrapped in his white blanket, watching the king, Hassan II, attended by Moroccan notables dressed in fine white *jalabas*, praying in a Mosque at the royal palace in Rabat.

'Our king is a descendant of the Prophet Mohammed,' Radouan proudly explained, 'no other Muslim ruler can match his lineage or challenge his word on religious matters. He ranks above

all other *Muftis, Imams* and *Shayks* in Islam and is known as The Prince of Islam.'

Behind the TV set, a large ram was tethered to a pillar, standing so still Delphine at first mistook it for a wooden statue or something stuffed; until it bleated mournfully, gazed at her and bleated again as if asking to be rescued. She winced and felt as though she'd been stabbed in the stomach. This was the animal Radouan was going to kill and it was staring at her.

On television, the King had finished praying and was walking with his two sons, followed by Palace Dignitaries and Notables into a courtyard. Attendants stepped forward holding up a large white cloth, waist high, in front of the king while two more attendants stretched the sacrificial animal, a beautiful snow white ram, before him. Wielding a razor sharp scimitar, the King leaned over and in one stroke, deftly separated the animal's head from its body. Blood spattered the sheet and gushed out on the blue, white and green tiles of the mosaic floor.

Delphine felt sick and tried desperately to suppress an urge to throw up.

Then Radouan and Prospero began untethering the ram.

Intoxicated by the bloodletting on TV, Nick jumped up off his throne, began beating a big drum and cried out: 'And it came to pass that God, he tempted Ibrahim and called to him.... an Ibrahim he say, 'Behold here am I Oh Lord..,' BOOM BOOM BOOM !

'An' God, he say, Ibrahim listen to me: you take that son of yours, your beloved only son Isaac, and get you over to the Land of Moriah and offer him up there for a burnt offering on one of the mountains which I will show you...' WHOA WHOA... BOOM KA BOOM... EEWHA !

Prospero and Fouzia struggled to position the ram for the sacrifice.

KA BOOM KA BOOM ! 'So Ibrahim he gets up early in the morning saddles his ass and takes two of his young men with him and Isaac his son. While cutting the wood for the burnt offering he lifts up his eyes and sees the place far off - the place of sacrifice!'

WHOA WHOA KA... BOOM BOOM BOOM !

'An' he tell his young men to stay with the ass while he and Isaac go an worship there... An takes the wood for the burnt offering and lays it upon Isaac's back, an' takes fire in his hand and a knife to slay Isaac wiff.'

'Then Isaac he speak to his father and say, O father, here is the wood and there the fire, but where is the lamb for the sacrifice?'

WHA WHA WHA!

'An' Ibrahim he say: 'Don' worry, son, God will provide an' 'Brahim he builds an altar an stacks up the wood, an' ties Isaac, an' lays him upon it.'

KA ! KA ! KA !

'Then jus' as Ibrahim reaches for his knife to kill his son and sacrifice him, God thunders down from heaven: Ibrahim, Oh Ibrahim.'

'And Ibrahim he say: Lord here I am. An' God say: Lay not your hand upon your son! Now that I have seen you would not withhold from me your only son, I know you love and fearest me. An Ibrahim lifts up his eyes and sees a snow-white ram caught in a thicket of thorns an' releases his son Isaac and takes the ram and offers him up for a burnt offering.

EEYWHA !

Radouan decapitated the ram. Nick jumped up and down like an excited child, dipped his hands in the blood and made marks on everyone's foreheads.

'An God say: because you have not withheld your only son, I will bless you, an' multiply your seed as the stars of heaven and as the sand which is upon the sea shore and thy seed shall possess the gates of your enemies and all the nations of the earth shall be blessed because you have obeyed my voice.'

BOOM ! BOOM ! BOOM !

Delphine choked and threw up.

'At least we are honest and do it as a sacrifice to God,' Radouan cried hoarsely over Nick's ranting. 'In your country, animals are herded into huge factories where they are badly treated and killed. Every year we confront ourselves with who we really are by killin' these animals.'

'I have confronted these things for many years now,' Delphine responded shakily, 'it's why I'm a vegetarian... sacrificing animals like this... it's barbaric!'

'We Arabs are not barbarians,' said Fouzia suddenly, looking very angry.

'Who's she?' Delphine said condescendingly.

'My sister,' Radouan replied.

'I don't care what she says, what I've just seen is barbarous.'

'You Europeans are afraid of death but we are not,' said Prospero. 'We are practical about it. For us death is nothing... an unavoidable consequence of being born which we must accept... and a release from the bondage of this world... Gods will... the good die young.'

'But does that give us the right to kill these poor creatures?'

Radouan studied her for a long time, bewildered. 'For thousands of years this sacrifice has been goin' on,' he said, 'you think anyone can stop it? COME... my father's house... they'll be waitin' for me. Wash up and let's go!'

Delphine retired to a makeshift bathroom. If it weren't for the presence of his friend Prospero whom she rather liked, she thought, she would walk out on this crazy man.

Fouzia had cut up the sheep's heart, still warm and throbbing, and was roasting the pieces on spits over a charcoal fire.

Delphine stared down at her. Would Radouan expect her to be like that? Impossible! And who was this crazy American who kept smiling at her and ranting on in such a strange way?

Radouan took her hand, walked her quickly to the door and out onto the street. 'Listen,' he said urgently, his eyes flashing, 'you can't imagine how I hate this day, but it's something I absolutely must do... I can't... I can not avoid it... If you want to go, GO! I'll meet you back at the hotel.'

'I'll stay,' she said observing the look on his face. 'But why... why must you?'

'Because I am a fly caught in the web of a spider called tradition.' (Pop-Up) (4) 'You must help me to break out.'

They were on a short cut to his father's house where they found the two sheep Radouan had delivered, nibbling placidly at a mound of greens. Radouan's four brothers greeted them with narrowed eyes and serious expressions. From the second floor his father and mother flanked by his two sisters stared silently down. A butcher stood by ready to perform his task. Delphine thought she might be sick again.

Radouan knelt down facing Mecca and began chanting. As soon as he was finished his brothers brought the white cloth, stretched the two sheep in front of it, and in two strokes they were decapitated. Radouan dipped his forefinger into the sheep's neck and placed dots of warm blood between the eyebrows of his four

brothers, then rushed to the second floor to do the same for his parents and his sisters, and returned and pressed his bloody thumb on Delphine's forehead.

Though seized by a strong desire to slap his face, she found herself paralyzed by his tortured eyes.

His jaws set; he led her upstairs where condescending smiles of suspicion greeted her. Down below, the butcher went to work. Soon choice pieces of heart, liver and kidneys were roasting over a charcoal fire.

Delphine whispered to Radouan in English: 'I cannot eat the organs of these animals which were functioning just moments ago.'

'Forgive me for getting you into this, please, but do not now embarrass me. You will find them delicious!'

'I will not find them delicious and I will not eat them!'

Just then Radouan's mother brought a plate of the choicest pieces for Radouan and Delphine and from the corners of their eyes the whole family watched to see if she would eat.

'Please eat,' Radouan said softly, 'it is considered very unlucky if you do not eat part of the sacrifice.'

After finally managing to swallow a few pieces of liver they escaped and on the walk back to her hotel she scolded Radouan. 'How can you... how can you kill those innocent...'

'It's a ritual we must perform. It marks the end of human sacrifice... the sheep will be killed anyway... we are not barbarians, as Muslims we are even prohibited from killing ants and bees.'

'Why?'

'I don't know; In the *Qur'an* God says it, or maybe it's in the *Hadith*... it's an old teaching. You know I hate doing it, this sheep thing, but if the father cannot perform the sacrifice then the eldest son must... if the eldest son is too young, then an uncle...'

'I wish I knew why I'm so attracted to you,' Delphine blurted out suddenly, 'As a French woman your customs make me very nervous, it's very difficult... sometimes...'

'Sometimes what?' he asked.

'You forget, I didn't come here on my own, I was brought by a magazine... me,' she shrugged, 'I would never have come to a place like this on my own.'

Ah, he thought, so Moroccans were a backward race, stranded forever on the sidelines of history. 'But you like it here a little... No?' he asked gently.

'I like and I don't like. Sexually I find you...' she sighed, 'I'm very attracted to you... but psychologically I find my attraction sick because I know how really crazy you are. I've seen a lot of men, you know. But there is also something else...'

'What?'

'I feel your pain too much...'

'I thought you enjoyed pain...' Radouan smiled at her, 'I think you're afraid of me ...why?'

'By letting me have my way with you, you've trapped me. Sometimes I look at you and see the Devil... lose my self... lose everything.'

'No no, you're just imagining these things, you won't lose; you are going to win big! You will feel happy and peaceful because I will always be there for you to torture...for whatever you need I will be here... You are too beautiful. The effect of your beauty on others will cause you many problems... you need an expert like me to protect you.'

'You sound like you're applying for a job...'

'*Habibti*, why are you speakin' like this to me?'

At the hotel she smoked some hashish and felt her anxiety ebb away; imagined herself as one of the sheep Radouan had slaughtered and was surprised to find herself strangely aroused - that she might enjoy being a victim sharpened her pleasure with him and goaded him on.

'I come from a very crazy tribe.' he whispered hoarsely. 'We claimed all animals belonged to us so we never branded them; had many beautiful women and handsome men as well... successful warriors, fearless and peerless, who took what they wanted when they wanted and no one told them what to do...'

'So?' she replied.

'So I have those feelings deep inside me and I try to control them but really sometimes it's very hard... many times I feel overcome by something stronger than me ... that I'm livin' in the wrong time...' Delphine gazed at him. 'You think you're coming from the past to confront the present?'

‘Yes, that’s what scares me... in this modern world which is not really mine, I become nervous, lose my temper and have done terrible things... taken what I wanted, rejected what annoyed me.’

Delphine pushed him away gently. ‘You, you are SAUVAGE and I’m sure you are infidel too.’

Radouan raised himself on one elbow and stared into her eyes ‘Of course I am savage... What do you think? But I am not Infidel. I’m faithful to those who love me.’ He kissed her eyes and nibbled at her ears. ‘But if you mean am I loyal in love to only one person, the answer is yes and no... My heart is big... I can love more than one person, *makayn mouchkil*... no problem, especially women... it’s me... it’s my nature.’ He grinned at her... ‘I enjoy because they enjoy, but I don’t love all. No. Now I see this thing you call love is much more than I thought ... Yes, because of you, I am feeling something new. Here, people really don’t know about it. We have friendship, we have the passion, but I think your love is different, maybe better.’

Delphine smiled thinly. She couldn’t believe he was really serious. ‘Look,’ she said, ‘the problem is we are both professionals. Our lovemaking is fabulous because we’ve had lots of experience... anticipate and lead each other on... but I think it might be dangerous. We might go too far with each other and spoil it all... still; we have not really opened up to each other, if that’s what you mean by love.’

## 27

A few days after the big feast, Francesco hired a helicopter and they had flown over the Atlas Mountains to Ouarzazate. As they were landing, Radouan explained that although the city was once a destination for caravans from Tombouctou, it fell into ruin and only recently had been revived by the film industry. When they landed and rented a car, the temperature was hovering at 40 degrees Celsius. On the drive to their hotel, Radouan explained that foreigners had been buying up many old *Kasbahs* in the area and restoring them. ‘It’s like the sea shore,’ he said expansively, ‘except the sea is the Sahara... I have an old friend here who has invited us to his house for dinner tonight... we call him Lord Jim.’

Peering out the tinted windows of the car Delphine was not impressed. To her it looked like all the small towns she had seen in Hollywood cowboy films... clean and new with very wide empty streets.

Francesco had booked two suites in the Berber Palace Hotel; one for Delphine, the other for himself and Radouan. Delphine retired to her suite to unpack and change, and while Francesco made calls on his world cell phone, Radouan settled down in a corner with his daily crossword puzzle. For the first time in his life, he suspected, he might be a victim of *Assababa*, obsessive love, also known as *El jawa*. Maybe she was right, maybe they might be going too far, but he cursed himself for his own weakness in allowing this female to upset him so. .

After lunch Delphine decided to rest and they agreed to meet for coffee around six. Pretending exhaustion in order to avoid having to deal with Francesco, Radouan retired to his room but could still hear him talking on the phone, laughing and gossiping. Then silence and after some time he heard a door open and close. Immediately suspicious, he got up, checked out the salon and Francesco's room and found them empty. Gone... GONE! Where had the shark gone? He called Delphine's room and was told the line was engaged. Who was she talking to? Why wasn't she asleep? A thick atmosphere descended upon him and he paced back and forth through the suite snapping his arm muscles, wanting to punch someone. Then he opened the door, went out into the hallway and listened, walked down to Delphine's door and listened again half expecting to hear muffled sounds of someone making out with her.

'How could he have just called her and been told her line was busy and now she was gone?' He knocked on the door and then pounded, which attracted a room boy he was in no mood to see. Struggling to control his temper, he explained that he was the bodyguard of the occupant of the room and insisted that the door should be opened or he would have to break it down. Understanding immediately that resistance would be dangerous, the room boy opened the door only to find the telephone receiver had been improperly replaced; which explained the busy signal; but then why was Delphine not there, where had she gone?

Moving to the window, Radouan parted the heavy curtains and looked out. Near a swimming pool below, there she was stretched out seductively on a chaise wearing the briefest of bikinis. And who was

hanging over her, his pectoral muscles drooping like the breasts of a middle-aged woman, but Francesco! Across the pool two waiters were making certain obscene hand signs which any Moroccan would understand. He wondered if he should go down and make a scene, which would end in a fight and finish off any chance of her becoming a star? Seeing her in that bikini was arousing him too much. She belonged to him! He cracked his knuckles, handed the room boy a wad of dirhams and told him to shove off. Then he locked the door, flopped down on Delphine's bed and fell asleep.

'What are you doing here? How did you get into my room?' Her voice broke into his dreams, and he came awake.

'Where have you been?' he yawned.

'Down at the pool. I couldn't sleep. How did you get in here?'

'Through the keyhole - made myself very small and squeezed through. Come here...' He extended his hand.

'I'm still wet,' she laughed carelessly. 'My hair is all wet, too much chlorine in the water, I must shampoo it immediately.'

'Why did you go down there?'

'It's nice down there, it's good to swim, and you should have come down.'

'Nobody asked me... moreover I dislike pools, I only swim in the sea. Where is Francesco?'

'How should I know ... I haven't seen him?'

'Oh, I see.'

'See what?'

'That you haven't seen Francesco... Come here!' He jumped up and grabbed her.

'Stop you're hurting me,' she cried and struggled in his arms.

'Why are you lying at me? Jus' a few minutes ago I saw you down there with him.' He dragged her to the window and opened the curtain. 'See, he's still there... fuckin' Francesco... you've invited him up here, haven't you... You... you need a good thrashing.'

'Stop! Stop right now. I must shampoo my hair... I must... Stop you'll leave marks.'

'I will leave marks ... I want to leave marks! You lied to me, why?' He dragged her into the bathroom.

'Radouan NO! You must come to your senses... please...'

He lifted her into the shower and got in with her fully dressed. 'PLEASE WHAT? You don't want me any more?'

'Not now. Have you been drinking?'

He began scrubbing her with a loofa. 'First I'm seein' you down there with Francesco, and then you lie to me. I saw him leanin' over you.'

Delphine stared at him and said matter of factly: 'He wants to watch us do things together... you and me... he was explicit and very determined.'

Radouan stopped scrubbing her. 'See...What did I tell you?'

'It's your fault...you introduced me to him.'

Radouan thrust out his chin defiantly. 'You want to be a big star, don't you?'

'He just offered me a lot of money if I could persuade you... fifty thousand francs just to watch us for one hour.'

'Are you kidding... five thousand dollars is nothing to him... he's jokin' you! And if he wants to watch us he would have to pay me too, but I would never do it! I won't allow it. I forbid...'

'Look,' Delphine said angrily, 'who is the subject of all this drama? It's me! And I have bills coming due when I get back to Paris... I have to pay them and I'm broke... the money from this shoot won't come for weeks.'

Radouan melted. 'I will help you, *'bibti*, don't worry. You think I'm a beggar? I have money. Believe me, I love you, I swear it... *ahtajouka* I need you... *oridouka* I want you... By God, I will get money for you before we leave this place.'

'Here in Whazzawhaterver? You must be joking!'

'Here or anywhere, *habibiti*. I can always get money, no problem. But if we give in to Francesco now, believe me; we will have to give in to him on many other points.'

Delphine began shampooing her hair. 'He plans to get you drunk,' she gurgled, 'said you'll do anything when you're drunk.'

'Francesco and me we have shared many women together but they were all prostitutes. You are not a prostitute.'

'I'm not?'

'Of course you're not!'

'What's a prostitute then?' she laughed

'One who takes money for sex...'

'Then I'm a prostitute. I have taken money for sex... lots of it... paid all my college fees that way. And you, I'm sure you've taken money for it too.'

'A man cannot be a prostitute... it's different with us.'

She gave him a sour look and turned off the shower. 'How can it be different? If you sell your body you sell it, you can't say you're not selling it.'

'I never sell my body, I give pleasure... believe me I enjoy giving pleasure but I give it to whom I choose... I'm a selective guy. Only a few people have ever interested me. If they want to help me out later that's their business.'

'I never had the chance to be selective,' Delphine smiled sadly. 'When I was about to begin college, my father lost his teaching position and we had no money. I had to help support my mother and pay tuition fees... mostly I've had to make it with older men like the one you saw me with at lunch that day. You're the first one who hasn't been over fifty...'

'Don't worry,' he smiled and rubbed her back with a towel, 'those days are over. But if we give in to Francesco now, I know him... I've watched him operate for years... He'll be satisfied and just go to sleep on us. When he wins Best Actress for you at Cannes, we'll make a ten minute video he can watch!'

'You really believe he can do that for me... Cannes?'

'Yes, why not? He's a genius. Whatever he proposes people are ready to give him money for. But he is like the devil - *Shaitan!* Really, I think I must come back to Paris with you. If I am not there I'm sure you will make some crazy mistake. How big is your apartment?'

'Can you get a visa for France?'

'I already have one. But Paris is an expensive place, especially for laundry. That's why I'm asking you about the size of your apartment. I change my clothes a lot. Do you have a washing machine?'

Delphine giggled: 'my place is small... really only a studio apartment but, yes, I have a washing machine.'

'Don't worry then. I'm a very quiet guy. When we will be together in Paris we will be very relaxed, very tranquil... I will wait on you. I want to be with you. I don't want anyone else to touch you, I want to marry you. You will see, things are gonna change fast for us. By this time next year you will have a huge apartment. But we must be careful with Francesco, that's the most important thing. And now you must lie down and sleep. I will come by for you around nine. I want to take you to my friend's place... you will be impressed.' He knelt down and kissed her feet.

'I don't want to have babies!'

Radouan gazed up at her in astonishment. 'What are you talkin' about?'

'Children.' Delphine said firmly, 'I don't want any... why get married if one doesn't want children?'

'You don't want to have babies we won't, but believe me some day you will regret it. I promise you... *Inch Allah*... to have children with me would be very lucky for you!'

## 28

After drawing the curtains and putting Delphine to bed Radouan pads back down the hall to the suite he shares with Francesco, slips into his room and has just managed to get out of his wet clothes when Francesco appears at the door.

'Ah amico' he says, 'I thought I heard you come in... where have you been?'

'Couldn't sleep, went for a walk. Where were you?'

'At the pool with Delphine, nice pool there in the courtyard very relaxing. Not only is your discovery beautiful in the tradition of all great movie queens... that relaxed languorous quality is really adorable, but she's intelligent as well... which might cause problems later on I suppose.'

'You think I would introduce you to some bimbo you can find anytime of the day or night?'

'Of course not. What I want really is to watch you fuck her.'

'That's not part of our agreement, remember? But I'll think about it...'

'Come let's have a drink. We need a drink to celebrate...'

'Celebrate what?'

'Getting here, that helicopter ride was scary!'

They move to the bar where Francesco pours out two whiskeys on ice. Radouan downs his in one go and points to a bulge under his towel

'Look... see how big my *zap* gets just thinkin' about her.'

'Call her up then... tell her you want her to come in here right now!'

'You don't want it then, my *zap*? You said you wanted it like a woman, (shrugs) anyway she's gone to sleep. Come here. Jus' put your hand down there and feel it juss feel it...'

Francesco reaches out and takes hold of the bulge. The towel falls to the floor.

'Yaaz... like dat. Now I wan you' to get down and suck it! But firs'pour us two more drinks. OK? Then show me what y'can do'.

Radouan sprawls naked on a sofa. Francesco fills their glasses and returns. Francesco paces the room glancing at Radouan from time to time. They drink in silence.

'Now down you, get you down on the floor habibi. DOWN! An' lick it, yass... an kiss it!

Francesco obeys. '

'YAZ... tha's very nice... you're suprisin' me habibi yes very I can see you really your tongue is really educated. You been thinkin' about this for a long time haven't you? Before there was no time, but now we got plenty. Mmm yes. SUCK IT SLUT. I wanna see you get it real hard and wet and then you're gonna take it up yo ass. Work! And the *bidat* too please... yeah like dat very good! Ugh... I think you had a lot of practice (holds Francesco by the hair) YEAH IWANNA?...you been holdin' back on me?

Francesco comes up for air. 'Don' stop man, DO NOT STOP! You're a... you really are a great cocksucker. Great! You're doin' great now turn aroun' an take off your shorts an' get down an' show me that *ZOUK* of yours.

Still kneeling, Francesco turns around, his head and shoulders on the floor. Radouan gets up. 'Spread it so I can see your Tina yass, like daht babe! Mmm pull it apart so I can see inside so I can penetrate it. (slaps Francesco's ass lubricates his cock with spit)

Francesco: 'EASY!... PIANO RAGGAZZO MIO, YOU'RE WAY TOO BIG!'

Radouan getting excited now: 'You know THAT, Iwanna. You seen it many times before... thinkin'about it wishin'to have it, yeah? RIGHT? UGH...Mmm I hope you're clean if you're not clean you'll be sorry...'

'EASY man mama mia mon dieu'

'Juss relax m' amico RELAX an let it slide in and out. Like DAT yeah good... Mmm!

Radouan closes his eyes and rides Francesco. Your pussy is HOT man... mmm tres chaud great fuck first class and tight ...TIGHT!'

'Go easy...PIANO! PIANO!'

'You wan me to fuck you or not? You tell me you wanna get fucked like THAT... like a woman...well you muss know that woman she like to be fucked long and HARD... iss very important... tha's what you said... mmmm... to be... UGH!.. for you to experience this feeling...YAZ?'

'I'm cuming... I'm going shoot.'

Radouan slaps Francesco's ass hard. Take your fuckin' hand away Iwanna stop jerkin' off if you do... if you come before I do you'll be sorry I'll punch you. When I get excited I have to punch. UGHA! Now hold still...'

'YOU'RE HURTING ME... MI FAI'MALE... REALLY!'

'Iss your own fault Iwanna this is your idea isn't it?...ISN'T IT? Now you're beginning to understand how the woman feels when she get fucked by Radouan!..YAZ?'

'Santo cielo! Dio mio!'

'Shut you up. I'm not GOD ALMIGHTY, I'm PARADISE... you're gettin' a taste of the HEREAFTER m'amico. Now turn over on your back... yazz TURN!

Without withdrawing Radouan flips Francesco on his back, throws a towel over his face and tries to think of his orphan in the Mellah.

Francesco's voice, muffled. 'What the fuck you think you're doing? You trying to smother me?'

'NO IWANNA, ah tryin' to FUCK you... If I have to look at that face of yours I won't be able too. STOP STRUGGLIN' AN' RELAX!' (punches Francesco in the stomach)

'OUCH! God damnit it's really you're really killing me...its worse this way...'(throws the towel off)

'NO HABIBI. NO!' (grabs Francesco's hands pins him down and replaces the towel) If I have to look at those terrible eyes of yours I'll never cum... you're the only Italian I ever saw with eyes that blue... terrible... like shootin'out rays of destruction at me!...'

'MY EYES ARE THE EYES OF GENIUS. Oh my God... SLOW DOWN PLEASE... MIN FADLEK!'

'Say please again...(whispering)...I wanna hear you say it cause I LIKE IT. YEAH!

'Please please PLEASE! I want you to come.'

'I don'wanna cum Iwanna I'm not finished with you... jus' relax and SPREAD... yeah easy like dat... um YEAH..! Don'worry. YEAH

now you're relaxin' OPEN WIDE you want me to fix you you want another drink, mi amico? We got all afternoon. I DON' THINK THIS IS THE FIRST TIME YOU BEEN FUCKED LIKE THIS HABIBI but maybe iss the lass!

## 29

After dealing with Francesco, Radouan had a long bath and donning a new cream colored linen suit, arrived at Delphine's door at nine sharp, only to find her still asleep!

'It's time for you to wake up, *'bibti.'* He slapped her playfully, 'Wake up, we gonna PARTY.'

Delphine stretched and rubbed her eyes. 'Hey, STOP! I'm not... let me... Did I fall asleep? I didn't think I could.'

'*Waha*, yes, you did... Now it's time to go out... we're invited for dinner, remember?'

'Are you drunk?' Delphine observed him critically, 'You're talking like... and Francesco, where is he?'

'We had some drinks together. He's tired so I put him to bed... sends his regrets - maybe the heat, huh? Don't worry about him he's okay... maybe he had too many women in Marrakech. Tomorrow he'll be fine. Now get up!'

'You're sounding like an army sergeant... I'm not a recruit'

'Really, I'm sorry'

Delphine began to pull herself together 'You're not sorry,' she pouted, 'you're talking like a character in one of those American movies you watch...'

'Al Pacino is my brother, I LUV him...he's tough!'

'It's been tough growing up poor in Marrakech, I suppose.'

'Of course, what do you think? People promote all these fantasies about Maroc but underneath it's a very tough place... tough and dark...'

'Looks like you've done all right...'

Radouan's upper lip curled, 'Yeah, well... I would make an excellent gangster.'

Delphine put the finishing touches on her make up. 'You must have learned very soon you had something others didn't have: good looks and maybe a brain...'

Radouan laughed and sighed, 'We use what God gives us... here in Maroc my brain is useless but my *zahp* is famous... too many brains here and no jobs...'

'What I mean is, you're more sensitive than you let on - all this tough guy shit you should stop it. Inside you're something different... with no way of expressing it...'

'Yeah but I do, I write,' Radouan said earnestly, 'keep a diary but I'm always too busy to read what I've written. Anyway, there's no money in it 'cause nobody reads here. Marrakchis are famous as poets, musicians, singers, sportsmen, fighters and lovers'. We're supposed to be heroes and winners, not intellectuals. Tha's for people in Fez.'

Delphine slipped into a pair of panty hose 'You shouldn't be afraid,' she smiled, 'I mean, you shouldn't be afraid to let your real feelings come through from time to time.'

'Oh yeah,' Radouan laughed, 'that can be dangerous... people here are jus' waitin' for you to be sincere, to reveal your secrets and your desires. If they know what you want or what you're really like they can get control of you. But with you, believe me, I'm trying to open up... for the first time with anybody I'm trying because we are the same, *habibti*, we've had the same experiences so I can trust you. Tha's why I worship you.'

In the car they had rented at the airport, with the top down, Radouan and Delphine drove through the warm southern night toward the Dra valley. The rising moon hung in the eastern sky and Radouan was still a little drunk. After some time they left the paved roads for the palm lined lanes of the oasis. From time to time the car skidded and swerved in the sand and Delphine worried that perhaps Radouan didn't really know the way.

'Maybe we're lost' she said. 'How long has it been since you were last here?'

'A few years, but don' worry we'll find it.' He stopped the car, got out, sniffed the air and listened, 'Hear that... jus' listen...'

Delphine could just hear a major sound system throbbing in the distance. 'I hear it but how do we get there? Every road looks like

every other, all these walls, we could pass the same spot twice and never know.'

After a few wrong turns, however, and advice from stray passers-by they arrived at a pair of massive wooden doors set in a long blank wall and Radouan sounded the horn. The gate opened and they entered a large parking lot crowded with expensive looking cars. Veiled men in blue, mouths covered, whites of their eyes glittering, led them to a path which passed through a lamp lit jungle of fragrant night blooming shrubs to a second doorway beneath a high tower guarded by two tall Senegalese youths in white livery.

Entering, they found themselves in a large tiled foyer lined with lighted cases displaying a large collection of antique weapons. Servants posted on balconies above ululated and showered them with rose petals. Through another open door they entered a huge reception room from whose lofty carved cedar wood ceilings, casting geometric patterns on the guests below, hung massive antique lustres of bronze and colored glass. Still further on, through a loggia furnished with comfortable chairs and luxurious divans, a spacious courtyard opened on to a large pool. Walkways of pink marble spanned it, white swans glided upon it and beyond a colonnade of arches, yet another water course led to more pavilions and ultimately a small lake.

The *Kasbah* was the work of an eccentric American designer who helped the owner transform a four hundred-year-old ruin into a fantasy of royal proportions. Exotic birds aroused by the night music screamed in the gardens and frogs croaked loudly as the partygoers, gaped with veiled astonishment at the Arabian night's dream in which they suddenly found themselves. The air was redolent with the scent of hashish and expensive French perfume, champagne flowed and servers passed trays of delicate appetizers.

A tall broad shouldered man in a white silk *Gandoura*, mahogany locks to his shoulders left a group of guests and came to greet them. '*Akhouya*, my brother... *sadiqi*, my friend... ah... *Salaam alikoum*,' he sighed, and smiling at Delphine, embraced Radouan warmly. 'It's been a long time... too long.'

'I'd like to present my friend Delphine,' Radouan smiled, and to Delphine: '*'bibti*... this is my old friend Lord Jim from Jamaica and London... our host.'

'Welcome...' Lord Jim replied and kissed Delphine's hand.

‘Delphine was in Marrakech on a shoot for Vogue... I persuaded her to come down here on her way back to Paris.’

‘Our pleasure.’ Lord Jim gazed steadily at Delphine, ‘It’s not every day we get to feast on such beauty. But where is Francesco, didn’t you say you were bringing him?’

‘The sudden heat,’ Radouan replied, ‘he felt feverish... had to catch up on his sleep... sends his regrets and hopes maybe we can all get together tomorrow afternoon.’

‘Ah, too bad... Yeah... unfortunately I must go back to Paris tomorrow... hate leaving... more and more chums migrating out here under the palms... come, you must meet people.’

Radouan and Delphine circulated with Jim and were introduced around. Radouan, who disliked large gatherings, felt uncomfortable and marveled at Delphine’s poise. After his session with Francesco he was now very hungry and wondered when some food would appear. When he was hungry he knew he could become edgy, combative and unable to control himself. While Delphine circulated with Jim, he found some hors d’oeuvres and almonds, which he downed with a stiff drink and though still nervous, began to feel better. At least the voices inside his head which sometimes talked inside him had stopped.

The guests were a motley assortment of musicians, producers, toffs, posh types from London and assorted jeunesse d’or from New York, Paris, Tokyo, Goa and Singapore. Radouan had a second, third and fourth Jack Daniel’s, felt much better, and began to focus on the incredible number of beautiful women Jim had collected.

One of them sidled up to him. ‘Radouan darling, is it really you? You haven’t changed at all but I can see you don’t quite remember me. James told me you’d be here. I’m renting a place nearby for the winter. I...’

He searched his memory. Yes... Ah... Aicha from Beirut! Never would he forget that week with her! ‘It’s been almost five years since we were together in Taroudant,’ he said, ‘can you imagine. But you look more beautiful than ever...’

‘Are you here alone? I can’t imagine...’

‘I’m with that girl over there.’ Radouan said motioning toward Delphine who came over, ‘Aicha, this is Delphine, Delphine, Aicha. Delphine has just finished a shoot for Vogue in Marrakech and we’ve come down here with Francesco to do some screen tests for his next film.’

‘But how fantastique,’ Aicha exclaimed and eyed Delphine, ‘you must be very excited... I would be. But where is he, that darling man?’

‘Francesco? He’s back at the hotel resting... the sudden heat...’

‘I know, it’s a shock, but I’d love to see him... such a pet... and a genius too. Perhaps you could all come for lunch tomorrow... you must!’

Watching the dancers around the pool...Radouan gazed out past Aicha at the disc jockeys laboring over their turntables. It was a big party. London’s own Andy B. was playing, as well as DJ Jerome from New York, working the crowd, transporting them into the BEYOND. Across the dance floor, balancing candle lit brass trays on their heads, young belly dancers danced with the guests. Yet the guests looked bored and couldn’t really move.

Aroused by the scene, Radouan had another drink and asked Delphine to hang out with Aicha while he went over and spoke to his friend Jerome, about remedying the situation.

‘Remember The Seventh Sky?’ he asked Jerome.

Jerome smiled, rummaged in his record case, found what he wanted and slowly fed it in, picking up the beat, bass pounding as Radouan stripped off his jacket and shirt and moved out among the dancers.

Across the water, Lord Jim grinned as the first bars of a track he and Radouan had put together years before resonated through the perfumed night. A heavy bass introduction imploded into an old Shirelles track, over a track of some preacher ranting about the end of the world, mixed with a Hindu yogi chanting *Kali Yug, Kali Yug, Kali Yug*. Then Jim’s voice, somewhere between Otis Redding and Stevie Wonder: ‘IN THE SEVENTH SKY... IN THE SEVENTH SKY.’

Wondering if he wasn’t too drunk, Radouan followed two of the belly dancers out across the pool on one of the pink marble runways. Could he still dance like he had five years ago in Taroudant?

‘IN THE SEVENTH SKY... PLEASE DON’ SAY GOOD BYE... PLEASE DON’ LEAVE ME... NO NO NO.’

Kicking off his *babouches*, he somersaulted to the other side, and unbuckled his belt, his hips swaying and pumping in front of two girls; challenging them, strutting before them. Across the room Lord Jim clapped his hands and pointed at Radouan. Slowly people turned and stared. Aicha and her friends applauded.

'IN THE SEVENTH SKY... WE WILL GET SO HIGH... DO NOT LEAVE ME... NO DON' MAKE ME CRY.'

Muffled voices: 'Who's the crazy Arab? Is he part of the entertainment? Is he stoned? My God is he going to take off his...?' European eyes narrowed, mouths tightened while behind the guests, on the fringes of the party, the servers grinned and clapped their hands.

'DON' LEAVE ME WHY OH WHY'

His shoulders straight now, hips grinding, his mind slowly slipping away, Radouan moved gravely over the polished stone, his head turning from side to side, angry at the inertia of the crowd.

'IN THE SEVENTH SKY... PLEASE DON' MAKE ME CRY... DON' DENY ME... NAW NAW NAW.'

Across the pool now, he stopped in front of a beautiful blonde and unzipped his pants; then vaulted away, walking on his hands, leaving her open mouthed.

'WE'LL GET BY YES WE'LL GET BY.' - and danced on out of his pants around the pool in his black Versace briefs.

'IN THE SEVENTH SKY... OUT BEYOND THE STARS... YOU MUST FOLLOW.'

Delphine grew frightened. Was this his manic underbelly, coiled like a serpent ready to strike at the slightest provocation - had the two of them planned this; Radouan and his friend Lord Jim? Or was it...?

But glancing around her she realized most of the guests thought Radouan was a hired act. Aicha smiled coolly and passed her a pipe. Delphine inhaled deeply and felt better. Radouan was circulating now among the guests tempting them to dance with him, moving from group to group, flipping over, walking on his hands again, skittishly seductive, hyper-masculine as he touched people and teased them.

'IN THE SEVENTH SKY...' And let them touch him.

Then a young woman in high heels a close fitting tuxedo and black tie sidled out and stuffed a wad of hundred pound notes into his briefs as he danced by, twirling like a dervish round and round, letting the crowd tuck in more notes until they formed a fringe around his waist – the hunger in their eyes resonating inside him so that he could have danced forever.

'IN THE SEVENTH SKY... DON'T TRY TO BUY ME...

NO NO NO'

But as the track ended amid applause and cries for more, more, and MORE, he hurriedly collected his clothes, and managed to escape with Delphine to the parking lot and their car.

'Shouldn't we have said goodbye?' Delphine said breathlessly. 'Put on your clothes, you'll catch cold.'

'We had to get out of there before somethin' happened,' Radouan panted, 'quick, get in, I'll put them on later. Some people they get upset when I dance. Five years ago in Taroudant people took off their clothes and there was a riot. Jim was there so I had to dance tonight in memory of that evening and because I was hungry and got drunk. When I realised those people thought I was a hired act, I thought maybe I could make some money for you. How much do you think we made? Here, take it out and count it.'

'Calm down,' Delphine said, 'No one was upset, they loved you, don't be so paranoid... Be careful! You're going to skid in this sand and hit a tree... Please... CHILL OUT!'

'Count it!' Radouan roared.

'I'm counting, I'm counting!'

'You're too slow.'

'You're too fast... it comes to... £4,850 pounds. I can't believe it!'

Radouan smiled, slowed down, stopped the car, and slipped his clothes on. 'That should pay some of those debts you were speakin' about.'

'But I can't, it's yours.'

'I danced for you, not for them,' he smiled proudly. 'Better than lettin' Francesco have his way, no? Marrakchis are gamblers and I'm a Marrakchi... remind me to teach you how to win at Backgammon or cards... we could make a lot of money together... go to Las Vegas and WIN.'

'And you could be Al Pacino!'

'Yeah, I'm better lookin' than him but you must keep me from drinkin' too much.'

'How?'

'By keepin' me well fed... I must not become hungry or I can have fits... you're smart... jus' remember to feed me, maybe carry some snacks.'

'Why can't you carry your own snacks if you think you need them so much?'

'I never carry anything.'

'I've noticed.'

'It brings bad luck.'

'Tell me.'

'It's *maji*. Some day I'll tell you all about it.' Radouan heaved a sigh and looked around. 'We escaped that place jus' in time. If we'd stayed there another ten minutes we'd have had problems.'

### 30

Back at the hotel Radouan was so keyed up he couldn't sleep and spent the better part of the night in Delphine's arms trying to explain him self.

'You can't imagine what it is like being an Arab guy these days...' he said soberly after a long silence.

'I can imagine but I probably wouldn't get it straight.' Delphine sighed.

'From our fathers, our teachers, our Imams, our Muftis and their books we are taught we are worth thirty percent more than woman. Thirty percent! Yet we feel helpless, cornered, surrounded, hounded and under attack from all sides.'

'You have to do something about your paranoia,' Delphine said, 'there are certain things you can take... Surrounded and hounded by whom?'

'By these beards, who want to take us back to the dark ages,' he replied with a kind of stubborn sincerity, 'by powerful rulers whom we never choose and by their deputies who try to cheat us at every turn. By selfish shopkeepers and businessmen... all these people harassin' us. Yes... and now by our women, from every side, attacking us... even in the house!'

'Attacking you in the house...' Delphine sneered, 'attacking YOU? Impossible!'

He kissed her hands and laid his head on her breast, his voice barely audible. 'Maybe harasser, harass, would be a better word. Here in Morocco we know all about the toughness of women... that beneath their smiles and their laughter our women are aggressive and powerful...like crocodiles. We think we know how to handle them

but now something new is happening: Television. TV is replacing the Muezzins.'

She stroked his forehead. 'You must give us women more freedom, more choices... then we'll stop being so aggressive... whoever says woman is worth only thirty percent of man is not very observant.'

He smiled up at her. 'I'm not talking about you and me; I'm talkin' about Moroccan Life. Not long ago, our houses were like oases in the desert. Twenty years ago we men, we had our own spaces where we could meet and talk, where we could be peaceful together, discuss and joke without women constantly invading. Now everywhere on the streets, in the cafes, these women are passing by and even sitting in offices staring at us like we are nothing - upsetting our tranquility and tempting us at the same time.'

'When you finally stop separating girls from boys at the age of six, later in life they will feel more comfortable with women.'

'But we have no money to attract them! This is the big problem for us: women are not... you must know one thing... most women are NOT interested in sex for pleasure, but for money, security and for having children, as many as possible, to keep the man down.'

Delphine laughed and cuffed him lightly. 'You like being my slave, admit it.'

'Thas' different... you are my Goddess. What can I do but worship you... What I'm talking about is something different. Except for men of the cities whose families have lived there for centuries, many of us have grandfathers who were mounted warriors. Now what are we supposed to do? Our minds are sharp; as children we must memorize *Qur'an*, and hope to recite the whole of it. But our resources are limited because exclusive networks that don't care about us anymore control everything. Before, we protected these people. Now they don't need us, they have robots, rockets and helicopter warships so they reject us and don't want to see our faces...'

'Somebody has to run those warships and fire those rockets, why not you guys.'

'Any moron can be taught to push buttons, anyone who can play these video games, but to fight, to be a fighter is another thing. Mounted warriors have been replaced by men in tanks and planes, by missiles...by computers. In the past our cry was, WITH THE PLOUGH COMES DISHONOUR... we rejected settled life and

boundaries... Believe me; our traditions are very antique, older than all the religions. But now because of this past we are left, most of us, with nothin' but history and a big bag of tricks. Believe me; nowadays the most educated among us are often the worse off and under attack by the world media who portray us as potential terrorists...which is a very wrong idea because the terrorists are animals. And they exist in every country, not only in Arab countries. Really, it's a very difficult thing to make people understand that more than anything we want peace and happiness.'

Delphine massaged his forehead: 'what turns the world against you is your attitude toward us. In the foreign media, women hold many important positions. They decide what gets on the radio and TV and what doesn't. They don't like your treatment of women; your ideas that we are less than men, that we are semi-human beings fit only for pleasure or slaves called wives, who must spend their lives bearing children and working hard in the house.'

'In Morocco our treatment of women is not so bad as you make out, but what you say is true, we are kept separate from them from childhood so we don't understand them and often we are afraid of them.'

'That's so ridiculous!' Delphine laughed and thumped his head playfully.

'You think so?' Radouan sat up. 'I am afraid of my own mother. Jus' you don't know, tha's all... and our lives are changing too fast... it should happen slowly else the men become frightened and grow beards and the women cover their faces because they are frightened too. My father for example, nowadays he's afraid to go out on the street. Of course he's sick so he can't, but part of his illness is that he's afraid to go out because things have changed so much. When he was eighteen there were not more than fifty cars in all of Marrakech. Now look... thousands of cars and taxis and suddenly our Medina is filled with foreigners taking pictures of us because they think we are quaint. What we are is very POOR ... and because of that our world is dangerous... maybe not for you, but for our own women believe me, the streets here are dangerous. We don't want them out there at all. We must protect them and believe me we do!'

Delphine starred grimly at him: 'Mmm... By beating them when they talk back to you, I suppose. By not speaking to them for months... locking them up when you go out...'

'It's important they remain pure. They are the foundation. We must have them, but their power must be expressed in a private way... not on the streets and in offices. It's a shame for us to see them in these offices because it means we men are unable to provide for them and they must go outside to make money.'

'That's ridiculous!' Delphine gazed at him in disbelief. 'I go outside. I make money. As the world has changed, don't you think you should give up these traditions?'

Radouan sighed. 'Listen to me. You come from Europe, which is a very new culture... our traditions come from thousands of years' experience. These new attitudes of yours toward women are less than three hundred years old - only a moment in history. Maybe we're waitin' to see what will happen next. Our culture is very conservative; we don't accept new things easily. And believe me WE KNOW WOMEN. In times past our women have fought alongside us in battle... the wives of the Prophet himself, for example. We know the woman inside and out. If left to her self, we know she is far more ruthless and unforgiving than the man. These traditions and beliefs are imbedded in the structure of our Arabi language. You can't change them by making' laws, but television is! You don't have to be literate to watch TV and the women are watching. Not the stories or the news, but the clothes, the cars, the jewelry, the villas and they want it all... this luxe life... they want it and are furious with us when we can't give it to them - which makes us very angry and leads to violence. It is the Arab women watching TV and harassing their men that causes the men, since they can't progress, to regress into Fundamentalism... It's like THAT.' He kissed her hands, 'What do you think?'

'Maybe you should have been a professor,' she said, 'my father was a school master.'

'Yeah. I was supposed to... but after graduating university with honors I found I had to pay *reshwa*, a bribe equal to five years salary... just to get a posting as an Instructor in one of our universities! My family is naive, we had never heard of these things... suddenly I was blocked because I hadn't the money to pay.'

'It's a shame you couldn't teach... '

'Thas' life... *Macha'allah!* At certain coffee shops here they still call me The Teacher.'

'Have they seen you dance?' she asked mischievously.

'Who?' Radouan asked irritably.

‘These guys who call you Teacher, dancing is a great art.’  
 Radouan laughed. ‘Sometimes we go out in the woods together and get drunk, someone plays a flute or a drum and I dance... and sing too. Before I went to university I had my own small orchestra and sang. We made good money singing for parties, but my mother and father insisted I go on to University. Huge mistake! Still I love them - when I was young my father was one of the strongest men in the Medina. Tha's why I feel bad about him now. When I reach forty, maybe I'll begin to sing again; *Inch Allah*.’ After that you will find me with my friends who now sit in the cafes.... We'll be old men then and you will find us in the mosque prayin'. Tha's the way life ends here... for a thousand years or more. Our lives - only moments in history.’

## 31

Late the following afternoon Francesco had recovered sufficiently to speak with Radouan about what had happened the afternoon before and described his feelings in excruciating detail - which Radouan found embarrassing. ‘You've been thinkin' about this too much, he frowned’

‘I guess I had it coming,’ Francesco replied.

‘You came a lot... like to fill up a coffee cup.’

‘I'm not talking about that, stupid! I'm saying I don't blame you.’

‘Don't blame me for what?’ Radouan's eyebrows knitted in surprise. ‘It was an ordinary fuck... what do you think? Maybe for you it was something special... for me it was jus' WORK!’

‘You were very harsh; it was like revenge... like retribution.’

‘No no. You've seen me with many women. It was no different than that. But a *zouk* is not a *tina*.’

Francesco shrugged his shoulders: ‘In any case I want you to know, although you almost killed me, still I think your girl iss fantastic and I want to go ahead with the test... tomorrow morning early. Will you see she's ready by seven? The early morning light here is exceptional and it will be cool. No special dress... sports clothes, whatever. Maybe you should wear a jacket and an open shirt.’

The following morning Radouan and Delphine met Francesco and after a quick breakfast they drove out to a ruined *Kasbah* where they found a make up team, lighting crew, and cameramen waiting.

Francesco explained what was going to happen: 'Delphine is going to walk down that dusty path towards the gate of the *Kasbah* where Radouan will be standing... just standing casually leaning against a wall smoking a cigarette watching her approach. As she walks in through the gate, she glances at him... not once, but twice. A few moments later he stomps out his cigarette and follows her. Delphine knows you're following her and becomes frightened, looks back over her shoulder nervously then tries to lose you, because she knows what you want, or maybe she doesn't know... maybe is a mystery... maybe you want to make love to her... maybe you're a rapist or some undercover agent. We don't know and neither does she - very simple. Delphine becomes hysterical, tries to run, to hide... Radouan stalks her like a cat. You just play this little game and don't worry about us. The cameras will be following you, and there are cameras positioned in certain places too... you just concentrate on this game of pursuit and evasion.'

So clever was Delphine at evading Radouan, it took him almost twenty minutes to find her. And when they finally met coming around a corner, Radouan grabbed her angrily, shook her and they embraced.

Immediately afterwards they watched the video footage, which confirmed that Delphine was indeed very special, in fact, she was spectacular - unfortunately Radouan had gained weight and photographed on the heavy side; a Moroccan Heathcliff.

'If you could lose ten kilos and stop being so self-conscious, you could be a big star too,' Francesco laughed.

The next day as they examined the film rushes he was increasingly enthusiastic. 'Amazing, Juss look at this... from any angle she's great, you can't take a bad picture of her. Remarkable! I've tried things here that would make most women look terrible but not her.' He smiled at Delphine and bowed, 'My dear, you are in a class by yourself. Sometimes you are very funny... look here... without even knowing it. This is because...'

He turned slowly to Radouan. 'You'd better be careful of her, she's very smart, even when she seems not to be... and this crazy duel with the cameras, she enjoys it... which is why she's so good.'

He took Delphine's hands. 'I will create the ultimate Romantic Comedy for you, my dear, which no one will be able to imitate... a totally new oeuvre. Audiences, they will leave the theater bent over from laughing, and once we make them laugh we can make them cry, and when they cry they will fall madly in love with you.' He paused. 'Then, of course, there's the sexual level. No one expects someone who is naturally funny to be so arousing but you are... a rare combination. Radouan, bambino mio, you have very good taste, the sixth sense...'

'I have experience...' Radouan replied gravely.

'Ah yes, of course,' Francesco rolled his eyes, 'with women indeed you have. And to think there she was in Marrakech and I might never have met her... but for you, Radouan *habibi*, she would have slipped through my hands... my life... And when those pages in Vogue appear... When do they appear?'

'Next month,' Delphine said evenly.

'So...' Francesco eyed her cautiously, 'will you do a film with me? Do we have a deal?'

'I'd be honored.'

Suddenly, Radouan was serious: 'A deal, yes, but first you have to put her under contract ... we have to talk about money.'

'Of course, of course we will,' Francesco declared expansively... *makayn mouchkil*, no problem.'

Radouan stared at him menacingly. 'No, *makayn mouchkil*...we have to come to an understanding about money before we leave this place... a written agreement...'

'Written in blood, I suppose!' Francesco smirked.

Radouan laughed. 'Yes, of course, in BLOOD - maybe sperm.'

'Why can't we go to Paris together and do it there... my attorneys will work things out.'

'No no, *habibi* Francesco! It will be done here. That's the very first condition. We will come to an agreement here... a written agreement. Then our Avocats can work out the details but the MONEY MUST CHANGE HANDS HERE! *Safi?*

'*Safi, Safi, Safi...*' Francesco crooned impatiently, 'Okay, Okay! When? This Ouarzazate, I detest it... I want to get out of here!'

'Tomorrow at four?' Radouan replied, 'That gives us time to think. Tomorrow afternoon we'll get drunk and make a deal.'

## 32

As Francesco was still feeling shaky, Radouan and Delphine took the car and set out for the Dades Gorge, to the east through the Valley of a Thousand *Kasbahs*, along the river Draa. Many of the *Kasbahs* were in ruins and they fantasized about how they would buy one and restore it with the money from Delphine's first picture. By afternoon they were having tea at the entrance to the spectacular Gorge and that evening stayed in Roses a funny looking 1960's hotel which crowned a rocky hill above a small town, but was comfortable enough and had magnificent views.

After watching the sun set from one of the terraces, Radouan announced he had some calls to make; that Delphine should have a bath and he would arrange for some woman to come and give her a massage.

'Why can't you make your calls here with your portable?' Delphine asked slyly.

'Because my phone card is used up and I need a few drinks before I can talk,' Radouan replied. I have to think about our deal with Francesco... I need advice, need to speak to Jim and some other people too; have your bath and I'll be back soon, we'll have supper in bed and watch football.'

Down in the hotel bar Radouan fortified him self with a few whiskies and called Lord Jim, who had already left for Paris. What to do? He tried Jim's international cell phone number but there was no reply. He wanted some guidelines about negotiating with Francesco, about contracts and the film industry of which he knew next to nothing - If not Jim, then who?

Of course, there was Toni who knew everyone. Suddenly he remembered he hadn't spoken to her since their fight the night before *Aid Kebir*. She was going to be really angry but there was no other way. Dialing her number he got her answering machine, but when he started to leave a message she picked up. 'Screenin' your calls eh...' Radouan chuckled, 'Why are you screenin' your calls?'

'Because of you. You're driving me crazy,' Toni said icily. ' Five nights ago, or was it six, you left here saying you'd wake me up at nine thirty in the morning now... DAYS later...'

'*Aid Kebir*, '*bibti* ... too many things to do... sheep killin', sheep eatin'... my family... the usual.'

'I hate this wretched feast... how I hate it. But you... you certainly could have called me from wherever you were... Where are you now?'

'In a small town east of Ouarzazate scoutin' locations and doing' this deal; part of the business I was tellin' you about. I told you I would probably have to come down here.'

'You didn't tell me anything of the sort. You're just saying that because you know how I forget things. You think you can make up anything you want, but you definitely...' she was at a loss for words, 'you have no idea how many things I have on my mind... and you did NOT tell me anything about going to Ouarzazate!'

Radouan was amused. He'd forgotten how much he enjoyed playing these games with her, how he'd always been touched by her vagueness; so opposite to the irritating certitude of most women. 'You're just makin' that up, *zweenti*, that I didn't tell you - you don't really remember it at all. What have you been doin' that you have forgotten all about me? You've been shaggin' that young architect? I'm sure he mus' be cute or you wouldn't have hired him.'

'Of course he's cute, very cute but far too young for me...'

Radouan laughed, 'No one is ever too young, my darlin'. If it's not him it must be Lahcen. Believe me, if I ever find out you've been together... Why didn't you call me?'

'Why should I!'

'You have my number. If you missed me so much...'

Toni sighed, 'Darling, really... the truth is, I simply do not think it's terribly smart for a woman my age to be tracking down her young lover.... What have I been doing? Smoking one cigarette after another, worrying about you night and day... worrying and wanting... which I loathe... smoking too much. It's entirely your fault! Your nervousness rubs off on me. Finally I went to the *hamam* at the Tichka and steamed out all the nicotine, but I couldn't steam you out, so now I've started up again.'

'STOP!'

'I know, my darling, that is what I am trying to do,' she whispered breathlessly, 'but it is very hard without you here to remind me. When will you be back?'

'I need your help...'

'I knew it. You're in trouble; I knew it the moment I heard your voice... I've been feeling it... Are you in trouble?'

'Me in trouble? I'm never in trouble...'

'Humph, since when? Are you drunk?'

'Listen to me, jus' the opposite but I need your advice... right now, this evening if possible... I want to speak with an Avocat who specializes in film contracts. Do you know anyone who will speak with me without wanting money up front? I have a meeting tomorrow at four in the afternoon. I have to sound intelligent.'

'How large is this deal?'

'*Kabir*, very large. One of the biggest directors on the planet.'

'Who?'

'Francesco Monte, you know him?'

'Francesco?' Toni laughed her heavy metal laugh 'Of course I know him, known him for years but how do you know him? Is he with you? You never fail to surprise me.'

'I hope so, *habibti*... I hope so.'

'I know an agent in London...'

'No agents, please ... I am the agent...'

'Well, in that case, let me think. Ah... there's my old friend Marty Segal in New York. He lives in New York because he hates California, but his office is out there in Hollywood... he's what's called a film industry attorney I do believe... the tops.'

'It's still early out there.'

'Yes. Let me try and find him. I'll get right back to you.'

Radouan clicked off and ordered another drink. The night was warm, too warm for that time of year in the *Souss* where the night wind should have been blowing cool from the Sahara. In a banquette in a dark corner of the nearly empty bar, he noticed two girls gazing at him. When Moroccan women looked at him that way he wanted to satisfy them immediately. A year ago he would have taken them somewhere, anywhere, and had them both, but now? Suddenly, he realized they didn't seem that important to him. Had Delphine disabled him? A terrifying thought, but one soon dispelled by a stirring in his loin as he studied their pouting mouths and imagined the parting lips of their *tinas* inside those tight pants they were wearing. Yes, it was Delphine who had cast a spell on him. To be always thinking of her even now, even though she was too thin and her *zouk* was not as *zween* as those two right there in front of him, what else

could it mean? He was about to go over and introduce himself when his phone beeped. He continued staring at them as he spoke:

‘Hallo...’

‘Martin Segal here,’ a voice answered, ‘what can I do for you?’

### 33

The following afternoon at four, over mint tea and sandwiches, Francesco had been surprised, not by Radouan’s cleverness at negotiating but by his masterly command of the film business. Surprised and dismayed, but he reminded himself that anyone who played chess and backgammon as Radouan did, where the end game was thought out well in advance, should never be underestimated. Knowing he’d made a big mistake telling Delphine how great she was, he sighed inwardly – a big mistake!

‘Look iss me who’s doing you a favor,’ he said trying to cut his losses, ‘you and Delphine... so many imponderables in this business and you want all this money... iss not practical... not even friendly, my darlings.... the risk... in film making there is no way you can predict what will happen. Delphine could fall ill - have an accident...’

‘Which would be covered by the insurance policy you will take out,’ Radouan replied calmly.

‘Really...’ Francesco drawled and rolled his eyes, ‘Say I do agree then, the length of the contract you propose iss too short. The time frame must be longer... if I’m to pay out all this money before even deciding what her first film will be like...’ he waved his arms in the air, ‘I mean iss a huge investment... the contractual period muss be longer... muss include a minimum of three pictures. I won’t build her up juss to see her leave me...’

‘But what if the film’s a dud?’ Radouan snickered, ‘You want to be committed to her? Do we want to be committed to you?’

‘I do not make DUDS,’ Francesco hissed dismissively, ‘but that’s the whole point of a longer contract... the first film might go

nowhere but a second or third film will make her a star... it often happens that way.'

'Believe me, *habibi* Francesco,' Radouan urged, 'a one-film contract is to your advantage. One film with an option to renew at a discount... first refusal, whatever you like...'

'But thirty million francs, that's five million dollars!' Francesco gazed at the ceiling.

Radouan's eyes flashed ominously 'That's NOTHIN'. You said yourself the rushes were spectacular - tha's the word you used - and when her pictures appear in all the Vogues worldwide, then it will be too late for you, *habibi*... you will have to pay much, much more. Thirty million francs? Really it's too cheap.'

'Iss not cheap at all, Francesco said truculently, 'e troppo, malto troppo.'

'These days it's nothin' and you know it.' Radouan stared hard at him, 'when you think what you're getting it's a bargain!'

Francesco put on his glasses and examined the provisional contract Radouan had drawn up: 'And this business about points... gross points. Nobody gets them anymore...'

'You get gross points, you always get them...'

Francesco puffed himself up and smiled benignly, 'But I am an icon, my dear, I am Francesco Monte...'

'Right, *habibi!* So you give some of your iconic points to Delphine here who is a world class model...'

'And final cut...' Francesco grimaced, 'do you know what you're asking? Distributors would never agree, NEVER, even I do not get a final cut without a fight...'

'Then you have to fight. We have to be sure she isn't trashed in the final cut. But if you agree to three percent of gross box office....'

'You are crazy, mi amico ... absolutely mad! Superstars, some times they get half a percent... half of one percent! And you are asking for script approval too...'

'Of course, what do you think? If she can't approve, how will she know she can do it?'

'Scripts are for the money men, I never follow a script I have a concept.'

'Call it what you want. Concept then... she has to have concept approval at least...'

'Ideas... my ideas come together as I get to know someone and use their personality to give voice to my feelings... SENTIMENTI –

which is why I'm a great director, I don't work from scripts I work from feelings... so forget scripts and concepts, they're not important...'

Delphine, amazed by this performance, sat by demurely sipping her tea, trying to look serious and intellectual; trying to remain calm... trying not to laugh at them.

'I can see you're not in the mood to negotiate,' Radouan said finally and got up to leave. 'Com'on Delphine, we're wasting our time here, we're due out at Aicha's place for drinks.'

Francesco jumped up and waved his hands. 'ASPETA, wait *safi safi* sit down... SIT DOWN! Again you are leaving my shop... I can't believe it... after all these years... treating me like I'm some carpet dealer in the fucking souks...'

'We've been through this before,' Radouan smiled, unmoved, 'you know Marrakchis are famous negotiators...'

'Let's get to the point then: you give in on the final cut and the gross points and I'll agree to your price.'

'Sorry we have to have gross points and we can't go lower than two percent.'

'One half of a percent...'

'One percent...'

'OK OK... one percent but only if the gross is over fifty million dollars in the first week...'

'No no *habibi*...NO!' Radouan bared his teeth. 'We have to have one percent from the first ticket sold. We'll drop the script approvals but we want a salary for Delphine while the film is in production, twenty-five thousand a week; separate dressing room, separate hair dresser and makeup teams, approval of publicity, a sky blue Lexus convertible and all her personal expenses until the film debuts. Further details to be drawn up by our attorneys...'

'Who's your attorney?'

'Martin Segal.'

Francesco groaned. 'I might have known! But HOW... how do you know this person? Or shouldn't I ask?'

'Don't ask!' Radouan got out a pen, 'So we cross out these and initial the rest. Then you sign and Delphine will sign and I will be the witness. And in the morning you will telephone your bankers to transfer five million dollars into her account at Paribas.'

Francesco looked skeptical, 'Tomorrow?'

'Yes.'

‘I’m not sure I have that much cash, I may need to sell some shares.’

Cracking his knuckles, his eyes rolling in their sockets, Radouan stormed around the room. ‘Until the money is in her account there is no deal. Really! I’m ready to tear up this agreement right now. On the head of my mother, I swear, just in the last hour Martin Segal has called me from New York. He’s been to Conde Nast, seen Delphine’s pictures and has a much more profitable deal for us elsewhere... He says she’s dynamite... what does it mean, dynamite?’

Francesco smiled condescendingly. ‘I will do my best to make it happen by tomorrow, but please...’

‘What does it mean this dynamite...?’

‘It means he thinks she is going to be FAMOSISSIMA! HUGE! Explosive! Unstoppable! Dynamite is an explosive...’

‘You see, I told you.’

‘Please *akhouya*, my brother, I cannot stand talking like this with you a moment longer... it will wreck all my feelings for her... my ideas they’ll just stop coming... You’ve won big. Be happy and relax.

### 34

Promising to return for a late supper, with no intention of doing so, Radouan and Delphine retired to her suite where he downed a half bottle of Jack Daniel’s in one go. And was only distracted from finishing off the rest by Delphine slowly unbuttoning his shirt and trousers and leading him to bed where she stroked his forehead and massaged his shoulders as the whisky went from his stomach to his loins and they made love and passed out.

After some time, he stumbled off to the shower and returning a few moments later, lay stretched out on the bed at her feet.

‘You, you’re a rich woman now.’ he whispered worshipfully and kissed her knees.

‘The money isn’t in my account yet,’ her dark eyes bored into him.

Radouan chuckled ‘Now you’re learnin, *mahboubati*, or maybe you already know. But don't worry, it will happen... remember what I

told you, Francesco can't tolerate waitin' and he hates Ouazazarte. *Oridouka*.... I need your...'

'That money; it's not just mine, it's yours too, you know.'

'No no. It's yours, all yours. You will see, by the time you finish this first film it will seem like nothin'... I wonder... will you still need me then?'

'Can't you tell?'

'I hope you will but I have to have constant reinsurance.'

'Reassurance... Reconfort...' Delphine corrected him.

'I need it all the time.'

'Why?'

'I don't know... Why do I need it? Because inside when I look into myself I see a huge zero - Nothing! The constant possibility of failure is always lurking there - which makes me, you know... very nervous.'

Delphine smiled reassuringly. 'You're not a failure but you drink too much.'

'My nervousness goes away when I'm drunk. Shall I come to Paris with you?'

'I'd be very unhappy if you did not... tres desole. We'll get a bigger place...'

'No, not yet. We must wait and see what happens. Probably we'll have to spend most of our time in Rome... there or wherever the great artiste decides to shoot his film... You mus' know, Francesco, he's very crazy.'

Delphine gazed at him thoughtfully: 'In Rome or Paris, wherever... I know I'll have to watch you... when you see all those European women with their... the way they... I know you're going to make me very jealous.'

'No, *'bibti*, let me tell you something'. Me, I've been to Paris several times, but you're right... the first time I did go crazy... all those women exposin' themselves... their elegant thighs, those tight skirts clingin' to their *zouks*. I was shocked and aroused and I became crazy. So did they.'

Remembering it all, he laughed, 'Now I'm older and I have you... believe me, I won't make you jealous and I will be very good... you will see.'

'*Ahtajouka*,' she whispered.

'*Ouridouka*,' he replied.

## 35

As the next day passed, out of character and out of sorts with a hangover, Radouan retreated into a cocoon of tangled sheets and blankets and refused to come out. Delphine, on the other hand, rose early and spent the day by the pool observing Francesco as he ordered his broker in New York to sell so many shares of this and that and deposit the proceeds in her account.

As for Francesco, he was busy having an interior dialogue with himself about the many different levels of Delphine's personality - which was more complicated than he'd imagined: the educated student, the infantile egoist, the combative shrewd Parisian woman and, of course, the sensuality which seemed to vaporize around her body like the fragrance of gardenias on a warm tropical night. Transferring this money into her account, he mused, was a prelude, to the real encounter which he hoped would take place as soon as Radouan was out of the way.

As the day passed and money began to flow into her bank account, Francesco noticed her body, became soft and receptive, even penetrable. And later that afternoon when his cell phone beeped and her bank in Paris confirmed the transfer had been completed, it was as though she had reached a climax and floated away in a haze of satisfaction.

'This was the moment I could have had her,' he thought. 'At this moment if I hadn't been so stupido... Ha avouto I non stata cosi stupido! Had I arranged for us to be alone I could have...'

Just then Radouan arrived, looking like a Fra Angelico angel in a pale blue *gandoura* and white *babouches*. His bright eyes wandered furtively from Delphine to Francesco and he knew something had happened between them, something new.

'The money is in her account, just confirmed from Paris,' Francesco said cheerfully.

Radouan took Francesco's hands and kissed them affectionately, murmuring various blessings in Arabic. Francesco was touched but not taken in.

Delphine was put off. Was he mocking Francesco, or was there some special relationship between them she didn't understand? If Radouan was having an affair with Francesco, why couldn't she? Generally she was not attracted to Italians, but compared to other older men she'd slept with this one was an Adonis. Yes, a fifty-year Italian male with a good body and steel grey hair had just given her five million dollars. A new experience she had to think hard about - five million dollars. Somehow she had to look for his weak points and dominate him. Yes, she must begin preparing herself for a new life. For the first time she would not be a powerless student trying to pay her bills or a mannequin bossed around by photographers, stylists and difficult couturiers. Yes, this somewhat sexy middle aged Italian was going to work for her! Soon people would be worshipping at her feet and groveling! She smiled with satisfaction. For the time being, though, as he was obviously a magician - and a genius, it would be wise to do exactly as he said.

'Give me your phone.' Radouan held out his hand to Francesco, 'I'll book three seats on the morning flight to Paris. I know you hate this place.'

'Vieni anche te?'

'Of course, what do you think? That I would allow her to travel without me? Are you crazy?' He kissed Francesco's hands and held them in his. 'And remember, you have to pay for her ticket plus expenses... me, I'll pay for my own ticket.'

'Then you had better call your friend Mr. Segal and have him work out the details of our deal with my attorney in Paris,' Francesco replied, 'and FAX copies of our agreement to both of them.'

While Radouan made reservations and called Martin Segal in New York, Delphine slipped into the pool and soon Francesco was there beside her and they were splashing each other. Observing them, Radouan sensed that now Francesco had filled her up with his money she was like a fish trying to fly. Where would she fly to, he mused, and how would he finally clip her wings? As long as he was with her, Francesco wouldn't have a chance, but left alone together? Ah, for sure, something would happen.

And that evening over dinner, impossible for them to avoid, Radouan found Delphine's manner even more disturbing! No longer the flying fish, now she was a young female butterfly, trying her wings, trembling expectantly, hanging on every word that issued from the great director's lips as he spoke on and on about film making,

directing, and the importance of casting. Of stars he'd created, intimate details of their lives and the mistakes they'd made which ended their careers - All the time flattering Delphine, exciting her so that, beneath the clinging material of her blouse, the erect nipples on her breasts were clearly visible.

Later in bed she was moody and distracted - still aroused by him, but not really responding; in fact was fluttering away, far far away. Even when they finally made love, she was not really there for him, not like before.

'*Macha'allah,*' he thought to himself, '*Macha'allah!* She was experiencing temporary insanity due to the sudden ejaculation of so much money. Considering that she had always been poor, was it not to be expected?'

Early the next morning at the time of prayer just before dawn, he awakened with a jolt from a bad dream with the realization that his passport and papers for entry into France were in his briefcase at Toni's place in Marrakech. There was no way he could leave with her on that morning flight, no way for him to prevent what he was sure would happen between her and Francesco! Pacing around the suite, he resisted the temptation to have a drink, and paused every so often to look down upon Delphine, her beautiful hair spread across the pillow, her perfect nose - a faint smile on her lips. Was she dreaming of him, or of Francesco and his money? He longed to wake her and find out, tell her he would not be going to Paris with her and make love to her one last time. Instead he crawled in bed beside her, took her in his arms and, wondering what to do next, lay awake listening to the call of the Muzziem.

It would be wiser not to mention the passport business at all he finally decided. Yes. And to say there were people he had to see in Marrakech, and business matters to be taken care of before he could leave; and that he would join them in Paris as soon as possible... *Inch Allah?* Perhaps she would feel her slave was escaping and wonder why. Maybe she would imagine that he really didn't need her and become jealous and come to her senses. Yes, let her be alone with Francesco for a while, she will be disappointed and out foxed!

Delphine yawned and opened her eyes.

'*Sabah el kheir,*' Radouan smiled down at her as she awakened.

'*Bon jour Al zeen,*' she whispered, throwing her arms and legs around him, kissing him passionately.

He resisted the temptation to go on, and the more he held back the more eager she became. 'You have to get up,' he said, 'its later than you think, you're gonna miss your plane.'

'Our plane.'

'No, *azizati*, your plane. I'm not comin' jus' yet, I have some unfinished business in Marrakech.'

'But you've already bought three tickets.' Delphine sat up and rubbed her eyes 'So I'll drive back with you and wait 'till you've finished your business...'

'No, *'bibti*, you absolutely must not disappoint Francesco. I'll be there in a few days... believe me, he will be very disappointed and angry... might call the whole thing off. You don't know him. Until everything's settled you must not let him out of your sight... But don't sleep with him! That would spoil everything. Jus' go with him and suck up, especially as he has just thrown all this money at you. I'll call Martin Segal to postpone things until I get there... I shouldn't be long.'

'But it's you who has given me this money,' she said sleepily... 'Come, *habibi, ahtajouka*.'

'Not now!' Radouan smiled. 'Get up! You must...'

'You're trying to escape me, why?' she headed for the shower, 'I think you are...'

'Not at all, 'Radouan shouted after her, 'you know I worship you... but now you have a grand career ahead of you... a LIFE... and this is jus' the beginning, this very morning!' He stripped down and followed her into the shower, 'Don't worry, I'll be with you in Paris very soon. We'll keep in touch by phone and talk tenderly to each other... so you better answer or I'll think you're doing something BAD!' Radouan chuckled, 'Francesco, he enjoys makin' sex too much. You will see he can't get enough. He may even tempt you with some young gigolos. He's a Vampire. Keep your phone with you and if he starts givin' you a hard time jus'call me...'

A few hours later, saying good bye and watching their plane fly away into the fresh morning sky, Radouan kicked a stone out of the earth and made a run with it across the parking lot. He'd lost her. He knew it. Like a rocket, he'd launched her and now it would never be the same between them. Suddenly he was very lonely and angry with himself for leaving Marrakech without his briefcase; not even thinking about it until it was too late. And for sending her away! Why? How could he have done it?

Back at the hotel, he went up to the suite he had shared with Francesco, packed his bag, and took the elevator back down to the lobby. With luck he would be in Marrakech by early that afternoon.

As he was checking out of the hotel, however, he noticed the same two girls he'd seen at the Dades Valley the night before. Following them into the bar, soon he was buying them drinks and learned that they had missed their bus to Agadir, a resort town on the coast and would have to wait until afternoon for the next bus. Perhaps he should offer to drive them to Agadir, or maybe take a room for a few hours in a private villa there in Ouazazarte. Anything to stop thinking of Delphine, his golden haired Goddess, to obliterate her memory, destroy the fantasy he'd made of her, so at odds with what he really believed. Ordering more drinks, he listened to the chatter of the two girls, bought them lunch in a corner of the bar and finally drove them to the bus station.

After dropping them off, still drunk and feeling more destructive than ever, he decided, against his better judgment, to drive on to Marrakech. With luck he would be there by dawn. But near Aqouim, at the summit of the pass, a torrential rainstorm had overtaken him and on a particularly sharp turn his front wheels had skidded off the road out over a deep gorge, the car hung on the edge of the precipice and he had passed out.

Later he was awakened by a tapping noise and opening his eyes he was blinded by the light of a torch. Then the voice of a youngster yelling at him in *Chleuh*, the Berber language, to wake up and not to move because the front end of his car was poised over fifty meters of air and could easily fall off.

'You must get into the back seat,' the voice said gently, 'very very carefully, and I will try to open the door because only Allah the Almighty, is keeping you from falling into the abyss.'

Radouan, now suddenly sober, managed to slip into the back seat and out the door tumbling on to the muddy shoulder at the feet of a youngster who laughed and helped him up.

As they stood there wondering what to do next, an ominous creaking sound came from the chassis of the car. Trying without success to open the boot, he gave it a swift kick. The boot popped open, he grabbed his suitcase, and the boy pulled him back just as the car slid slowly over the edge and crashed far below.

'There is no power and no strength, save in God the Almighty, the Merciful,' Radouan whispered; and studying the boy for the first time, beheld an angel! So beautiful was the face that beamed up at him, he thought it must be *Jibril* who had come to save him. Certainly it was not a face of this world. Long russet hair tumbled down over a white blanket above sturdy legs and bare feet.

'Come,' the boy said, smiling up at him 'you are wet and hungry. All the coffee shops in Aqouim are closed. I work in one and was on my way to my patron's house when I found you. Come, we will go back to Aqouim and I will prepare some meat and coffee for you - come.'

Doggedly, Radouan followed him up the road through heavy rain, arriving after a long walk at a food shop. The boy lit a fire, had Radouan strip down to his shorts, hung his clothes to dry and toweled him down. Then, finding an old mattress for him to lie on, he excused himself and, leaving Radouan alone with his thoughts in front of the fire, went to prepare some food in the kitchen below.

Staring at the fire Radouan drifted into the past and saw himself as the boy who had just saved him - remembered sitting in *Jamaa el-Fna*, the big Square in Marrakech, in front of the cooking fires waiting for food after hard nights selling cigarettes in the cafes and *souks* around the square. So why hadn't he told Delphine he wanted part of that five million? She'd even offered him some! With ten percent he could have done all the necessary repairs on Prospero's *Riad*. What did it mean? Was it his pride? Yes and that he loses control when he's around her, that he's in love with her, yes, and now he's afraid of her! Why? Because he showed her that he enjoyed obeying her and now he could never control her... allowed her into his private world where maybe she could even have stolen his *Baraka* - then leave him as he had left so many others!

The angel returned with coffee, brochettes of beef and some bread, squatted on his haunches inside his white woolen blanket, and

watched Radouan eat. The storm had passed and a crescent moon shone in through a window. The boy gazed at him in a strange unsettling way.

'You want to leave this place and come with me, don't you?' Radouan said.

'Yes,' replied the boy, 'how did you know?'

'I was a boy once myself, not so long ago. How old are you?'

'Fifteen.'

'And what is your name?'

'Ali.'

'And why do you want to run away?'

'My father died of heart failure last year and left us very poor. So my mother married a retired army man who owns this shop and I must work for him. But he mistreats me, knocks me around, and wants to rape me all the time.'

'And how do we get out of here now that my car has gone down the gorge... tell me?'

'We must leave very soon and we must walk.' Ali said eagerly, 'My stepfather will wonder what has happened to me and will come looking.'

'And which way will we walk?'

'Up the mountain and down the other side toward Marrakech, of course.'

'Your stepfather, does he have a car? Won't he drive up the mountain lookin' for you?'

'He has a motor bike. He will come up the road looking but most likely he will think I took cover during the storm and am asleep in my friend's house.'

'Then we'd better leave right now,' Radouan said, finished his food quickly, got up and stretched and put on his clothes. 'Is there anything you want to take with you?'

'I have some clothes downstairs and I will take this blanket.'

'Have you an identity card?'

'No, I'm not eighteen. But I have a certificate of birth.'

'Good, then hurry, let's go!'

Out on the road, the air had turned cool and they walked briskly in the half moon light, turning around every so often to see whether Ali's stepfather was coming. About a mile above the shop Ali took Radouan's arm and pointed. 'Look there he is on his motor bike. He's come to the shop to check up, now let's see what he'll do.'

They watched as the bike remained in front of the shop for a few minutes, then moved slowly back toward the highway and went down the mountain again.

'Well that's that,' Radouan said, 'now what?'

Ali hung on to Radouan; 'Let's keep on walking if you don't mind... the farther away from him I get, the better I will feel.'

'Why have you never done this before - walking away?'

'Because I never had money; he would never give me any money.'

'And now you have money?'

'No, but I have you and I am sure you will give me some because I just saved your life.'

'You're right,' Radouan grinned, 'I will, but where will you be headed for?'

'Casablanca, of course; in Casa I can make money easily, I know it. I would like to stay in Marrakech but my stepfather would surely find me there and make me return to his shop.'

Just then they saw a pair of lights below and soon heard the roar of a truck grinding up the grade.

'Here comes our ride,' Ali cried hopefully, 'we must hurry up to a flat stretch where he can stop.'

A few minutes later the truck stopped, the driver leaned out and shouted that if they needed a lift they should jump in the back; which they soon discovered, was filled with red onions for the morning market in Marrakech.

'If we ride back here our clothes will smell awful, don't you have room up there?' Radouan yelled.

'You think you're some kind of Pasha?' the driver yelled back, 'I don't let people ride up here with me, take it or leave it.'

'We'll take it,' yelled Ali, and to Radouan whispered, 'don't worry I will spread out my blanket and we can lie on that. When we get to Marrakech I will wash it, come on let's go.'

They climbed aboard. The driver revved up the engine and started up the road again. Ali spread his blanket over the onions and they lay down. Soon he had managed to snuggle up against Radouan. 'Really, I think I would like to stay with you,' he said, 'where are you going? You look like you might need a good boy like me to take care of you... cook for you... run errands... are you married?'

'Not yet but I am engaged and very soon I will be married; I live in Marrakech but I have to stop at the bottom of the mountain where I have some business to take care of.'

'Let me come with you then... in a few days I'll be off to Casa to make my fortune,' Ali smiled up at him.

'I'm sure you will.'

'What?'

'Make your fortune... all you need is the will to do it, and you seem to have plenty of that. Before I go I'm gonna give you a thousand dirhams... which should be more than enough for you to live on 'til you find something in Casa.'

'Make it three,' Ali replied, 'after all I just saved your life.'

'Three is too much,' Radouan grinned, 'what makes you think I carry that much money around with me?'

'Because your bag, it's very expensive.'

'How would you know it's expensive?'

'My father, before he died he worked at the airport in Ouarzazate. Some times I would help him carry bags. I know what they look like, the expensive ones.'

'You're very smart. I'm sure you'll be a rich man some day, maybe by the time you grow up I will be a beggar and you will come along and give me some money.'

Impulsively Ali threw his arms around Radouan and kissed him. 'Believe me, I would,' he said.

Radouan reached in his pocket, brought out a wad of bills, and counted out two thousand dirhams.

'You have more there, give me my three thousand dirhams.' Ali grinned. 'I will need them.'

'You won't need them,' Radouan laughed, 'a boy with your looks can make money anywhere. You know it!'

'One thousand more, please,' Ali pleaded, holding out his hand, 'you promised.'

'I didn't promise. You asked but I didn't promise. If I gave you another thousand what would you do for it?'

'Any thing you want. With you, I would do it without money, but I need the money.'

'I don't want you to do THAT,' Radouan laughed and reached in his pocket again. 'Here. Here is one thousand more. I don't need you to do anything. I have a boy who takes care of me and I'm gettin' out at the bottom of the mountain.'

By the time they reached the top of the pass Ali was fast asleep in his arms. The feel of the boy against his chest dispelled his feelings of loneliness. He thought of Delphine again, wondered what she was doing at that moment, and wished he could call her but his cell phone had gone over the cliff with the car. As they began their descent, the rising sun illuminated the plain below and in the distance, Marrakech. At the foot of the mountain the road straightened out and the driver sped up. A few kilometers further on Radouan tapped on the window and requested him to stop. Then he woke Ali, told him to hide the money he had given him and buy a money belt as soon as he reached Marrakech. After that he gave him a long tender kiss and jumped out of the truck with his bag.

'If you ever need me you will probably find me mornings sitting in one of the cafes in Gueliz.'

'Which one?' yelled Ali as the truck pulled away?

'Any one...jus' look around.'

### 37

As the truck sped away, Radouan waved farewell, brushed himself off, and walked down the long drive to The Baroness's place. It was still barely six in the morning. He knew she always rose early and when one of the gate keepers let him in, and old A'hmed whom he hated led him up to her suite, sure enough, as they entered, her voice sounded from inside the heavy silk curtains of her canopied bed.

'Wer ist da?' she asked sleepily.

'It's me,' Radouan replied, 'sorry I'm so early but...'

The Baroness peered through an opening. 'Don't look at me, please, I look awful, bad night... and look at you... you look awful too... my God, *habibi*, what has happened to you?'

Radouan looked away, 'I've been in Ouarzazate... coming up the pass I almost killed myself... totaled a rented car...caught a lift in a passing truck.'

‘But mein Gott, *habibi*, was ist dieser ... what is that awful smell? Have you been drinking? Were you sick?’

‘I was drinking but the smell is onions... I had to sit in the back of a truckload of red onions.’

‘Take off your clothes immediately, give them to A’hmed and go in and bathe yourself... Have someone scrub you... quickly... GO! You have many changes of clothes here in the closet... Allez! Schnell, Schnell!’

While he was gone, she ordered coffee and bread and the bean soup, of which he was so inordinately fond. Then she retired to her dressing room and tried to do something about her face. After bathing, Radouan slipped into a *gandoura* and found her seated at a table near the big bay window overlooking the garden.

‘It’s very interesting you came this morning.’ she smiled tentatively, ‘We’ve known each other for such a very long time I think I’ve developed a telepathic relationship with you, but... Warum... Musst dar dich immer zerstorende. Why? Why must you continue to be so self-destructive? All night... yes, all night long I was feeling your presence,’ she shrugged her shoulders nervously, ‘you were upset about something... behaving dangerously and I became frightened, yes, because there are certain things I’ve put off telling you... certain arrangements. Things you must know that will explain my merkwürdiger verhalten... strange behavior over the years.’

‘You don’t look like you spent a sleepless night, you look good!’

‘You always say that! I think you’ve just memorized that sentence. Really, I could be dying, which I am, and you would say the same thing.’

Radouan lowered his eyes and remained silent. How else could he cheer her up, he asked himself?

‘Things are happening faster than I expected... I mean this disease I... I’m beginning to lose weight... sometimes I feel I’m already a ghost...’

‘A *GHOUL*...’

‘In Arabic yes... *ghoul*... In the mirror I no longer recognize myself.’

‘You’re crazy...’

‘That makes two of us,’ she chuckled, ‘but let me go on... Do you have to be somewhere?’

'No, no of course not,' he replied absently, thinking that he should be in Paris with Delphine, 'Why else would I have stopped to see you?'

'It's a rather longish story I have to tell you, but it's very important... do you have the patience to hear it?'

'Of course.'

The baroness settled back in her chair and focused on the old cypress trees outside the window waving like one of Van Gogh's paintings in the morning breeze. 'As you know, when I arrived here with my father, I was very young, twelve years old exactly. We celebrated my twelfth birthday in a palm grove near the Mamounia where the Casino now stands... spring of 1940... I've told you all this before...'

'Shahrazad,' Radouan replied sleepily, 'you are Shahrazad...'

The Baroness laughed: 'And you are Malik Shahrayar, I suppose? Let me see, where was I? Yes... well, six years later in 1946 when I was presented to society here in Marrakech, Pasha Glaoui gave a big party for me... more than half a century ago! All our friends from Europe who had survived the war came down: Winston with his son Randolph and Randolph's wife Pamela... and there was David Herbert, a life long friend, and Barbara Hutton with her prankster cousin Jimmy, David Windsor and his American wife, and so many others including a young Moroccan with whom I began to have a light hearted romance... which was very difficult because my father always had me watched...'

She took off her glasses, 'The more barriers he put up to keep us apart the more passionate our affair became... went on secretly for years... I thought he was the great love of my life... but as one of your poets once observed, love can be a snake disguised as a necklace or a nightingale which refuses to stop singing.'

Radouan looked grim.

'Please don't look sad, *habibi*... you know very well that you are the great love of my life. You know that. This man I was in love with, he was a handsome young man from Fez... from a *Chorfa* family. His father was one of the few *Fassis* who were invited to Glaoui's court because of course Glaoui was a Berber and *Fassis* are mostly Arabs... where was I, yes... well, for sixteen years this affair went on, and on and I became terribly frustrated. Then he married a girl from Meknes, he had to, and I hoped our romance would end but of course it didn't and in 1962 when I was thirty-four, I became pregnant with

his child. Yes, and don't look so surprised because I know you aren't! He pleaded with me to marry him... by then he had taken a second wife so I would have been number three. Then he went to my father and asked... Father was sixty-eight at the time, hated the idea that he was losing his famous good looks, and more arrogant than ever because by then he'd become very rich. So he turned down my lover... ordered him out of the house... this house... my lover, a *Cherif* of Fez, the father of the child I was carrying.'

Radouan could see she was still very angry at what had happened. 'I know it's very early,' he said plaintively, 'but do you think it's too early for a drink?'

The Baroness smiled indulgently, it had been some time since she had had Champagne in the morning, but why not, it was a special occasion.

'There should be a bottle in the fridge under the bar,' she said, 'we've both had a hard night...'

She toasted him and they touched glasses. 'Of course, I was ready to marry him instantly... no matter how many wives he had, but my father said if I did that he would never see me again and would cut me off financially forever. God only knows whom he would have made his heir. All his family members had been killed or disappeared during the war and most of my mother's family too. But our life together until then had been so wonderful it was hard for me to understand why he was being so difficult. Now I realize he thought he was protecting his fortune because, according to Moroccan legal custom, if I had inherited anything from him, it could have become my husband's property. That's what he was afraid of...' She smiled mischievously, 'and he was jealous too because he had never remarried and I was his hostess.'

She sipped champagne and narrowed her eyes. 'I told my father I would not have an abortion... he wanted me to go to Switzerland and have an abortion but I refused... and I insisted if I couldn't marry my lover, at least I should be allowed to have his child and raise it up. Finally he agreed, but on the condition that I should never see my lover again. Can you imagine? But I said okay and prayed for a little girl. Yes... knowing that a girl would create fewer problems, I prayed... *Mach Allah*... and had a boy!'

'There is no power and no strength save in God, the Almighty, the Magnificent,' Radouan intoned in Arabic.

‘Yes, that is true,’ she nodded thoughtfully, ‘one absolutely cannot avoid one’s destiny... I had a boy! His face was like the sun and moon combined... masses of thick curly brown hair... large eyes like yours... I’m afraid the whole affair was a terrible embarrassment for my father and a few weeks later my child disappeared! YES. And I’m sure my father had him spirited him away but I’ve never been able to prove it.’

‘Spirited away? What does it mean?’ Radouan asked.

She looked surprised. ‘Spirited? Well, it means... in English yes, secretly taken away... in Arabi, *makhtoufa*. No?’

‘Yes, *makhtoufa*.’

‘One night my little boy simply vanished. I never saw him again! The story was given out that one of the nurses had run off with him. My father claimed he’d initiated a search and although the police had followed every lead they could not find the nurse... or my baby. That’s what I was told at the time. She dabbed at her eyes with her scarf. ‘I wanted to kill myself. I’d always idolized my father but after that, ach... I began to avoid him. And a few years later he died... poor guy... thrown by one of his favorite ponies...on the playing field. At his age he should have had more sense.. Broken neck... died instantly... I was there. I saw it happen.’

‘After that, I employed my own investigators to search for my son but nothing came of it. Since then I’ve had to live with the thought that he might have been destroyed by my father, or worse, that he may be alive somewhere living in poverty with that nurse... unlikely, as he was so beautiful, but still possible. If he had lived, he would be exactly your age.’ she beamed at him through watery eyes, ‘That is why I’ve always had a very special place in my heart for you, *habibi*... very special.’

Radouan gazed at her thoughtfully and said: ‘I’m sure the servant who carried him off received a large sum of money and a ticket to some far away place. Or maybe it was your lover himself, who arranged for his son to be brought to Fez and raised up there in his household as an orphan he had taken in -it happens... And your father... maybe he cooperated with your lover to spirit your little boy away... As you say, it was God’s will.’

‘But my lover was devastated. I received letters from him. I can’t believe he would have lied to me...’

Radouan sighed and shook his head. 'How can you not believe... of course, he would have lied to you? Is he still alive, this old lover?'

'Died a few years ago,' she gestured helplessly.

'Tell me,' Radouan said, 'in all these years... why have you never told me about this? I could have helped you find him...'

Minna fidgeted with the edges of her old Pashmina shawl. 'Well, because my lover was still alive, of course... and because I was afraid you might tell someone. All these years I have kept this to myself. Now I've told you because I am dying.' She sighed and nodded her head, 'and because everyone else concerned is dead or too old to care. The only person on earth who knows this story is you, *habibi*, unless of course that maid is still alive, or unless my lover told someone.'

'In the Medina we have a saying: *Nass el mouta fi rouda matou bi'alayn*... half the people in the graveyard died from gossip... You know I never gossip. I could have helped you find him. I know how to talk with people.'

'Yes...' the Baroness raised her voice, 'I was afraid you would undertake to do that very thing... and that it might get you in deep trouble... killed for example.'

He gazed at her inquisitively, 'What are you sayin'? I can see you're holding something back...'

She sighed, 'Well, actually there is someone claiming to be my son. I have seen him. He is not my son but somehow he knows the whole story of my son's abduction... rattles it off like he'd memorized it...'

'Tell me his name...'

'I can't and I won't! You don't need to know and I'm not going to say anything more about him. He is not my son! My son was fair, his father was fair, and this person is dark. But I've told you all this, *habibi*, because I wanted you to understand why I've always thought of **YOU** as my son. You are exactly the same age. Did it never seem strange to you that we could be lovers?' she laughed, 'I know it has to me... I've always felt a twinge of guilt about our relationship... one does not usually go to bed with one's son... although it happens.'

'Yes, it does,' Radouan replied thoughtfully, more often than you think.

'My only real friend.'

'No no, you have many friends... many.'

'But not like you, *habibi*, never like you.' She sipped her champagne and gazed at him steadily. For a long time now she had wanted to tell him how fortunate she had always felt, how lucky, really, to have known and loved him - that in her old age she should have been blessed with the companionship of such a great soul, - and it made her sorry for those people who find love early in life and lose it, as she had, or see it wither away slowly.

'Have I told you I must get married soon?' Radouan said finally.

'I see I am embarrassing you now, I'm sorry...' the Baroness smiled, 'you always change the subject when you're embarrassed...'

'It's my mother,' Radouan replied, 'she says it is time for me to settle down and start having children.'

'Your mother is a very wise woman. I agree thoroughly. I only wish I could transform myself into a beautiful young girl again...alas I am not *Aala-al'Din!*

'The girl's name is Hafida. At fifteen she is already plump... like a young cow... simple and happy, but not presentable...'

'Fat in young women is often a sign of sexual frustration.' The Baroness sighed. 'I'm sure though with you in her bed she will become beautiful. Remember Prince Charming, the story you loved where the prince wakes up the sleeping beauty?'

'Yes of course.'

Minna's eyes glittered, 'When you were sixteen you used to beg me to read it to you. Your Hafida, I'm sure, she is a sleeping beauty... her beauty is asleep and now you must awaken it.'

'I will have to think of someone else when I go to bed with her...'

'She laughed raucously and coughed. 'I shouldn't think that would be too difficult! But finally, I think you will come to love her. When will the wedding take place? I must try to stay alive for that...'

'Don't speak like that,' he scolded her gently, 'of course you will be alive. The date hasn't been fixed yet... that's for me to decide, but we are engaged so it's sure to happen.'

He filled up their glasses again and began to feel more awake. 'I have to tell you, though, there is a further problem: the day before I met Hafida and her family, can you imagine, only one day before... I met an unforgettable girl and we... jus' now in Ouarzazate I was with her... we were due to leave for Paris together yesterday but my passport and papers were here in Marrakech so I had to let her go back to Paris by herself... *Mach Allah*... but I worship her; really... for

the first time in my life I'm experiencing something more than just passion. In a few days I will go up to Paris and marry her...'

'Mein Gott, *habibi*, who is she? What does she do?'

'She's French, a psychology student from Toulouse University... but she's beautiful... been supporting herself by modeling... here in Marrakech on a shoot for Vogue. I introduced her to Francesco - you know him I'm sure: Francesco Monte. We've been in Ouarzazate negotiating a five million dollar contract for her first picture.'

Astonished, Minna stared at him: 'But fantastic, *al zeen*, how brilliant!'

'I didn't keep one centime,' He laughed self-consciously and looked worried. 'Believe me, on the head of my mother, it's the first time I never took a commission and I've been regretting it all the way back from Ouarzazate - Which is why I got drunk after they left, I guess, and almost killed myself on that mountain. But she's very beautiful, very intelligent and we've led similar lives... she's the woman I've been waitin' for. Don't worry, you will meet her...'

'But you,' The Baroness said thoughtfully, 'you are also beautiful. In the fullness of manhood... a Chevalier always ready to ride forth against injustice... maybe in another life you were a knight like Don Quixote.'

Radouan's lips curled slightly, revealing perfect white teeth. 'I'm not like Don Quixote... my search is the same but I'm not so old and I don't ride forth... there are other ways... you will see.' He gazed at her affectionately. 'My Mom... *ma chere 'zizati*... you know how I love your *moujamala*, your flattery... It has helped me through many depressing moments, given me ideas about myself I would never have thought about... made me like myself and given me courage...'

'When you curl your lips like that,' she replied wryly, 'you look exactly like a young camel... do you think, perhaps in our long relationship with animals certain traits and features have rubbed off on us.'

'If that is true, then many Europeans and Chinese should look like pigs...'

They laughed together and she nodded her head, 'But honestly, I've never really flattered you... only told you the truth. If it's been able to lift your sense of self esteem then I'm happy for that.'

'I was depressed but now I'm feelin' better...' Radouan smiled.

‘So am I...’ she sipped her champagne. ‘Well well, Francesco Monte... better be careful he doesn’t take this girl away from you... he has a certain reputation you know... What’s her name?’

‘Delphine... But Francesco knows if he did that I would kill him...’

‘He knows you that well?’

‘What do you think?’

Minna averted her gaze ‘And what will you do about this girl your mother has chosen for you?’

‘Really, I don’t have to marry her. Parents are held responsible for the outcome of marriages forced on sons. If I bring up that point, my mother will back down, but I think probably I will marry her... and Delphine as well. What do you think?’

‘And what about Toni?’

‘What about her?’

‘The Baroness wagged her finger at him, ‘She’s divorced her husband and come down here expecting you to marry her... or did Rupert divorce her?’

‘How do you know all this?’

‘Oh come, *habibi*, how could I not know! You met her for the first time here in this house, years ago! I talk with her constantly on the telephone.’

‘Their divorce was not my idea, believe me... I’ve always liked Rupert.... I still do, we’re Polo buddies. They shouldn’t have done such a useless thing!’

‘But the fact is they did, mon ami... she has left England and come down here all because of you.’

‘Of course, I will marry her... I love her deeply... Probably I should marry her first.’ He stared proudly at Minna and raised his glass, ‘I’m an Arab and a Musulman and can have four wives if I want, and many concubines. You think I couldn’t keep them happy?’ he grinned. ‘You know me.’

‘Yes I do know you,’ she replied gruffly, ‘and I adore you, but I don’t think three or four wives will make you happy...’

She topped their glasses and gazed at him hopefully: ‘Have you thought any more about what we discussed last time you were here... I mean about helping me out?’

‘Out of what...are you in trouble?’

‘Out of my body, *habibi*... out of this damn thing that is falling apart around me like a package coming undone!’

'Yes, I have. But I told you I don't like you to speak of these sad things. We must go together to Sidi Zween... they will cure you I'm sure...'

'When?'

'Soon, *habibti*, I jus' have to make the arrangements.'

'But I don't want to suffer... to become helpless. I hate pain... have you...?'

'Yes,' Radouan sighed, 'don't worry, I haven't forgotten. I have a friend whose sister has a pharmacy. I also have the method: how many sleepin' pills to take, of what kind, and how much whisky... also your opium.'

'When can you get them?'

'Soon, I already have the opium...'

The Baroness beamed and sank back in her chair. 'Ah the Poppy... what a relief... Thank you, *habibi... chokran!* Then we can wait until you return from France and marry Hafida. You aren't going to be there long are you?'

'A few days, two weeks at the most - as long as it takes to get Delphine to marry me. I mustn't lose her... I don't want to share her with anybody!'

'When you return I'll make myself ready.'

Radouan jumped up and started pacing around the room.

'Please don't speak of it, *habibti...* Before I go to France I will arrange for my sister Fouzia to take you to Sidi Zween. She knows everyone there.' He got up to leave.

'You're not leaving are you?' The Baroness looked surprised, 'Sit down... I have something further to tell you... the most important part'

Radouan sat down on a footstool facing her and began to massage her foot.

She sighed with pleasure. 'What I've told you so far was to prepare you for what I'm going to tell you now. It's really very simple and I hope it's been done in a way that you will have no problems.' She reached down and took both his hands. 'You see... I have made a Testament, which names you as the sole heir to all my assets: cash, shares and properties here in Morocco and abroad... I'm leaving everything to you because for some reason I think you will know what to do with it... If one gives money to those who have experienced poverty I think sometimes they know how to use it better than all the experts in the world. When I die it will all be yours...'

Radouan was devastated, kept his eyes lowered and continued to massage her feet.

'Although she does not know the value of my estate, the Baroness continued, 'the Notaire Madame Saadi has all the documents and I am going to give you copies that were registered here in Marrakech yesterday... there are also copies with my Avocat in Geneva. But you will have to engage a Moroccan Avocat of your own, preferably someone from outside Marrakech because you may have a battle on your hands here. This place... this property, Dar Chems... actually I am giving it to you next month to be sure you get it. Next month you will become the owner and I will be the tenant... I will pay you rent which you will use to keep the place going, pay all the people who work here, etc.'

Astonished, Radouan looked up at her and shook his head. 'But your family members... surely they will oppose this.'

'*Habibi*, I have no family... Remember? I can see you're very tired... we've gone over all this before... all lost in the war... and I am the last one. If anyone comes forth with a claim on my estate they are lying. If the authorities here in Maroc try to take this house or any other of my properties here... which they might... there is enough cash with Credit Suisse to buy them back many times over... especially this place... our house, yours and mine... these gardens, years of work and care... I couldn't bear that...'

Patting her eyes again with a tissue, she continued. 'I've left written instructions in my Testament that I'm to be interred here in a mausoleum that has just been finished. I don't think you've seen it but there is room for you there too. I want you to live here in this house and find some peace of mind... in your old age perhaps you will sit in this room and think of me.'

Tears streamed down Radouan's cheeks: 'I don't like you talkin' this way, you mustn't think about it.... You can't... you absolutely must not leave me. Who will I come to when I feel bad, for advice, for flattery and tenderness?' He knelt down beside her, put his head in her lap. 'My mom... Thank you for what you've done... and be sure, I will always fight for this place to keep it... to protect it....'

He stood up, lifted her frail body into his arms and they embraced.

'You must go now, I suppose,' she whispered. 'You didn't mention Nicholas, how is he?'

'One day okay, the next not okay.... It's like that. But actually, for the first time in years he's a little better, *chouiya, chouiya*. We've cut down on his drinking' and he's actually doing some light work... trimming up the garden...'

'Give him my love, will you? I've always enjoyed his madness.' She laughed. 'Tell him I'm going to come and visit him while you're in Paris, but don't tell him I'm sick. Ask Prospero to call me and let me know when would be a good time.'

'You aren't sick. You must keep that thought in your mind.'

She shook her head and said, 'When I'm gone, I mean dead and gone, you must bring Nicholas out here to live. You, Nicholas, your wife Hafida, Antonia down the road in her own place and your Delphine in Prospero's *Riad*, which you will soon be able to restore to its original splendor. I would like to think that's what might happen...'

Radouan opened the door to go then turned back: 'I... I don't like to leave you like this but hang on. I'll come out before I leave for Paris'

'*Inch Allah, Inch Allah.*' The Baroness said wistfully, 'Here... I almost forgot to give you this, a copy of my Testament and other papers you should have... Keep them well hidden, *habibi*; No one knows I've given you these, not even my Notaire, Saadi.'

'I will, *'bibti*... I will. May God grant you tranquility.'

### 38

An hour later Radouan had changed clothes at his father's house, looked in on Nicholas, checked out the orphan Mokhtar and by 1:30, in white linen pants and a LaCoste polo shirt, was sitting opposite Toni over lunch on the terrace of her apartment.

'You look angry,' she said, from behind large sunglasses, 'are you?'

'About what?'

'How should I know? About something... you look...'

'I called you many times over the past few days... you never answered... never called back.'

'Sometimes I don't answer,' Toni drawled, 'sometimes I forget and leave the bloody thing somewhere and can't find it. Was Martin Segal able to help you?'

'You're changin' the subject. You were with Lahcen, admit it. Tha's why you didn't answer...'

Trying to remain cool had left Toni a wreck, 'Will you please shut up? I'm trying to prepare myself to forgive you... now please stop it! You know very well that you do talk this nonsense just so you won't have to explain what you've been up to. Really, sometimes your penchant for secrecy drives me...'

'Drives you mad,' Radouan grinned. 'You've always been mad... it runs in your family.'

'We were talking about secrecy.' she muttered, 'the way you compartmentalize your life...'

'Your friend Monsieur Segal was very helpful. Francesco and I signed a preliminary agreement. I must go up to Paris soon to consummate the deal.'

'Consummate!' she laughed bitterly, 'sounds like a marriage...'

'YEAH...' Radouan snickered, 'Francesco and me, we're gettin' married...'

'Well, I'm going to be very busy with my architect,' Toni sighed, 'but Paris! You, alone there with Francesco! I'll miss you, I always miss you,' she smiled thinly, 'but I've come to realize I'm not really jealous of you any more...'

She was faking and he knew it. 'Now you're talkin' crazy again,' he said, 'blub blub blub... and don't light that cigarette...'

'Let me finish, damn it!' she pouted. 'You... you always say that I'm crazy when you don't want to think about something I've said...'

'We must get married soon,' Radouan muttered, 'that's the only solution.'

'I'm sorry, you're mumbling. What did you say?'

Radouan scraped his throat and finished off his glass of beer. 'I said we should get married very soon - IMMEDIATELY. Isn't that why you're here... why I'm here... why you got divorced... so we can get married?'

She took off her sunglasses, and squinted at him suspiciously. 'You're not really serious, are you... just being mean again? I'm never quite sure when you're serious and when you're trying to torture me.'

'I'm serious. Your plane is parked at the airport. Let's just go somewhere and do it!'

'And just where would that be, Rabat...the British Embassy?'

'If we do it here in Maroc it could be delayed for weeks or months while they investigate me. Maybe we have to fly to London and do it there...'

'You agree to a civil marriage under British law then?' she asked looking surprised.

'Of course, why not? But if I agree to that then you must promise me you'll marry me here in Marrakech according to Islam... not immediately, but soon.'

'Yes I will, if you will agree to move in here and live with me,' she replied.

Radouan sighed. 'We've gone through this before... it would cause too much gossip and jealousy, too many problems... dangerous for both of us, even if we were married. After you build your place in the country I will live out there with you, *makayn mouchkil*, but I will need a helicopter.'

'Helicopter! What on earth for?'

'To go between here and there. I have many responsibilities here... every day people to look after... drivin' takes too much time...'

'What color?' Toni asked sarcastically.

'Dark red the color of blood not fresh but dried...'

'Dried?'

'Blood, blood ...'

'You mean maroon...'

'More red than maroon...'

She glanced at him and looked away, stifling a smile. 'I can see you've been thinking about this for some time. Let me get this straight... you want me to call up and order you a helicopter the color of dried blood.'

'Absolutely, why not? Let them mix the paint and send us some samples...maybe with gold and silver flecks.

'But can you learn to fly one? I don't want you crashing, my darling, you're so impulsive, such an awful driver...'

'I don't like cars, I like bikes. On my Harley I'm an expert. In the sky, I'll be even better, jus' buy one and you'll see. I'll learn fast. You must learn too... we'll go cruisin' around together.'

She sighed. 'Somehow I'd always thought our wedding would be something more than just signing papers in some dreary registry office.'

'Ah, but we were married long ago, my *zweenti*... from the first night we slept together.'

'I'm sorry but it was the second night...' Toni giggled. 'Now it's you who don't remember. The first night we were both too nervous and drunk to do anything.'

'Are you crazy? You think I didn't make love to you that first night? You must be thinkin' of someone else not me.'

'My darling, you are... as they say in America these days, "in denial; perhaps because you were only twenty at the time. You'd polished off at least thirty beers and a bottle of wine...'

'That's nothin' for me...you know in those days I could easily drink twice that much...'

'We did have sex but it wasn't that good...you were extremely drunk and I was terrified...'

'Of what?'

'Of you! Of being discovered. The second night was a different story...'

Radouan smiled sympathetically. 'Don't worry, *'bibti*, when we get married here we'll have a HUGE party... wedding parties in Marrakech... well you'll see... you'll enjoy.'

'I have to tell you, honestly I do not know much about Islam... about as much as I know about Christianity or any other religion I suppose... Will I have to read the *Qur'an* or something before we get married?'

'You don't have to read *Qur'an* or study anything, jus' you have to obey me at all times.'

'OBEY YOU! Really, darling, please... she suppressed the desire to laugh; we're living in the twentieth century!'

Radouan glanced at her, wide-eyed, incredulous. 'You don't want to obey me? After all these years you don't trus' my judgement?'

'Of course I TRUS' you, but obey? That's a harsh word, darling... sounds awfully primitive.'

'Love, honor and OBEY...you have it in your own English wedding vows...'

'I think OBEY has been thrown out...'

Radouan clicked his tongue, 'Thrown out! That's ridiculous... how can it be? What is written cannot be changed. I swear on the earth that covers my grandfather's grave, you are really *mahboul!* Sometimes I don't know what to think of you!'

'And what am I to think of you my love... your saturnine ways, oh Prince of Deceivers... That's why we understand each other so well... She thought of how debauched her own life had been, so different from his and how despite his libertinism, he had somehow managed to preserve a strange sort of innocence and purity.

'So you won't obey me, you don't want?' he ventured.

'You're right, I DON'T WANT...'

'But you know you enjoy obeying.'

'I do?' she looked startled.

'Yes, of course...' Radouan's lip curled up over his teeth in a sardonic grin.

'How do you know I don't hate myself for it?' she said.

'Because when you obey you don't smoke as much. Which means that obeyin' me, it makes you feel safe and calm... you relax and don't have to think of what to do next... jus' obey.'

'Is that why you're so nervous all the time?'

Radouan looked surprised, 'Me nervous... I'm not nervous... Maybe.'

Toni was amused, 'You are... you know you are... and by your own logic it must be because you refuse to obey any one, to bend, to surrender to anyone or anything even in Love... that's what makes you so nervous..!'

'I obey the Holy *Qur'an*; I surrender to God at every moment, to his Grace, to his omens, to his wrath, to his mystery.'

'Hypocrite! - Darling, please... you break the rules all the time, your own rules, and you don't obey anyone ... usually you hide your nervousness but it comes out when you have one of your fits... Sometimes you should obey ME, and perhaps that might calm you down.'

Radouan gazed at her. The way he had behaved with Delphine, he thought to himself; didn't he bend, didn't he surrender to her? Or had he just been acting? As it was clearly God's will that they met, was it not fit that he should have used all the bows in his quiver to keep her? 'It's against my culture and my religion to surrender to a woman,' he said firmly, 'the only being I can bend to is God.'

'God is not a person... God is a force...' Toni replied.

‘In *Qur’an* and *Hadith* everything is there; all that God has advised us to do...’

‘But to surrender to a woman can be very fulfilling... that’s what love is all about...’ Toni ventured.

‘That’s what temptation is about,’ Radouan said. ‘The serpent, the apple and Eve... we are tempted all the time but it is against our teachings. We have an important saying: a man should always listen to his wife’s advice but never follow it. That’s why I could never surrender to you.’

Toni closed her eyes. ‘You obey your mother...’

‘She’s not my wife, she’s my mother. I came out of her womb and... she’s the only woman I must really obey. And what about you, have you never obeyed anyone?’

How could she ever explain to him the tyranny of her father, that captain of industry who had destroyed her will; left her a nervous wreck, victimized and suspicious? She opened her eyes. ‘My father... I always obeyed him because he terrified me, but it was mostly servants I had to obey... jolly well had to or they would beat me,’ she shrugged. ‘Really I never saw much of my father or my mother... they were always off somewhere having fun; going to parties and shooting things... dragging home dead animals to be stuffed.’

She folded her hands under her chin. ‘My first nanny was very sweet, very tender, but she died on me. The second was a first class psychopath. It was she who made me rebellious... beat me... locked me in closets... that sort of thing. I should probably have never smoked if it wasn’t for her.’

‘You never obeyed Rupert?’

Toni covered her mouth: ‘Sweetie,’ she whispered, ‘Rupert was Daddy’s choice - he was fascinated by titles. The reason he married my mother, for example. Knowing me as you do... better than anyone else on this earth... can you seriously imagine me obeying Rupert? You... you’re neurotic; that is why we understand each other so well, but you aren’t mad. Rupert IS mad, certifiably so... his whole family for generations.’

‘No no ... you’re wrong. Rupert is a great soul and a great horseman, his horses speak to him, he understand their language... tha’s his life. Jus’ because he can’t handle the rest of the world, you can’t say he’s crazy... you... you should be ashamed the way you have disregarded him... *Hasab*, ancestral renown, is an inheritance from doers of noble deeds... one shouldn’t squander it.’

Toni arched her eyebrows. 'Well! I'm not quite sure what noble deeds Rupert's ancestors are supposed to have done.... I believe the first Earl was the lover of a king, perhaps Richard the Lion-hearted, but I do know Rupert was born in the wrong century... like you really, but in his case more extreme. If you've lived all your life in eighteenth century houses surrounded by people and servants with eighteenth century attitudes well, naturally, it's hard to grow up and cope with modern life.' She shrugged her shoulders, 'but with Rupert I'm afraid it's more than that... some hereditary defect I reckon.'

'You're right! Maybe that's why I like him, but don't forget; I've grown up in a twelfth century city... in a family with ninth century attitudes. In another time, other ages, I would have been a warrior poet. In Arabi we have had many such poets... right now I'm a poet of the streets... of the night... yeah... high heels and red evenings!'

'Someday, perhaps, you'll write about it...'

'I do. I keep a diary. I write about my life but who would ever believe it? Really I'm too busy livin' it to write much these days. He stopped and gazed across the table at her. 'Why are we always talkin' like this... asking' all these stupid questions? Go into the bedroom and take off your clothes... I want to make love to you...'

'Don't you think we should digest our lunch first?'

'You know eatin' makes me want more...'

'I know. Most men want it when they're hungry.'

'I'm always hungry and I'm always ready.' He stood up, stretched and yawned. 'Now go... go get undressed and we'll celebrate our comin' marriage.'

### 39

That evening Toni had telephoned John Whittle, her late father's ADC, and asked him to make the necessary arrangements. After a hurried late night departure from Marrakech, by dawn on April 29, 1998, they were landing at London's Docklands airport. Sir John Whittle, her father's former ADC eased their way through Immigration and Passport control and led them to a limousine where Lady Whittle was waiting to drive with them to Toni's house in Eaton Square. A few hours later they emerged, Toni in a Hardy Amis frock and Radouan

cautiously conservative in grey flannel pants and blazer - emerged and were driven to the Chelsea Registry Office in Kings Road where, after various formalities endured and papers signed, they were duly married- Sir John and his wife as the witnesses.

A drunken champagne lunch with the Whittles followed at San Lorenzo. Then carefully avoiding press photographers, the happy couple returned to the airport and in no time at all were taking off though a Turneresque London smog for Marrakech.

Relaxing at thirty thousand feet, Toni went on about the day: 'Don't you think it was sweet? Lady Whittle is so eccentric and shy, they're such dears, they've been so good to me since father died and she... really she was very taken with you, *habibi*, very impressed... which is rather important because she is the one who tells John what to do. I loved it all... so different from my wedding to Rupert... awful affair... everyone sick with food poisoning... But this, *habibi*... it was...' she sighed and smiled mysteriously, 'Oh darling, WE'RE REALLY MARRIED! I can hardly believe it! It was all such a whirlwind aren't you excited? Don't you feel different?'

Radouan yawned and closed his eyes, 'Different?'

'I mean not like before...' she smiled tentatively.

'Like before what...?'

'Before our marriage, silly, are you still drunk? So am I... I mean we did just get married, didn't we?'

'These ceremonies... they're nothing... In the eyes of God we've been married for many moons.'

'From a romantic point of view I agree, but from the practical side I don't ... You are now entitled to a British passport and Sir John will see that you get one soon...'

'What's so great about a British passport... the English are hated around the world...'

Toni's neck stiffened. 'Why, that's absolutely not... I've never heard anything so absurd...'

'Or laughed at...' Radouan smiled sympathetically.

'We are NOT hated we are LOVED and RESPECTED. We are certainly not laughed at... we give and give and do all sorts of good things around the world. Our passports are certainly not worthless!'

'Go to any Black Market then, the true value market, and see the prices. The American and British passports are cheap...very cheap. The most valuable one is Canadian...'

'I don't believe it.'

‘Believe it or not it’s true...’

‘Anyway, you’ll be able to come to England whenever you like and live there or travel on your British passport with far fewer problems than you have with your Moroccan one.’

‘I’ve told you this many times before, *‘bibti*, I’m not interested in going to England or ever living there even for a short time. The climate is too harsh. It makes the people harsh and mean spirited... to us they are all barbarians and racist hooligans...’

Toni glared, trying to get him in focus. ‘Am I so mean spirited then? Are you calling me a barbarian?’

He gazed at her for a long time without speaking, ‘I SAID THE PEOPLE. You, you can afford not to be mean spirited because you have people workin’ for you who are: your Barristers, for example, your Prime Minister, your government officials. Their policy towards us Arabs has always been very arrogant, and condescending. Divide and conquer or conquer and divide. You cut Islam up into meaningless little states that never existed before... and took land from us and gave it to others... you have to face up to these things and not delude yourself.’

‘But we have a very large Islamic community in England. How can you say we’re intolerant?’

‘You have mainly Pakistanis, and Saudis – recent converts and tribal arrivistes. We say they are not the real Islam at all!’

‘How can you say that when Mecca... isn’t Mecca somewhere in Saudi Arabia, if they aren’t the real Islam, then who is?’

‘Yemen, Egypt, the Hijaz, Palestine, Lebanon, Syria, Iraq, Tunisia, Morocco. In these places you will find the real Islam.’

‘What about Iran?’

‘We say Iran is stranded in the tenth century. It is their version of Islam and their denial of Philosophy, which has strangled Arabs for the last thousand years.’

The sun was setting on the clouds below them. ‘You don’t feel changed then?’ she said.

Radouan sighed deeply and took her hands. ‘I’m happy that you are happy, my darling... May God make Paradise your abode... Believe me, your happiness is my happiness. If havin’ this ceremony makes you feel more comfortable then I’m happy for that because I love you. I really do. Moreover, what is even more important is

*oheepouka*, I like you and will always stand by you because you have always stood by me...'

'Stood...'

'Stood?'

'Stood by me, not standed... you're thinking of that Otis Redding, song "Stand by me" ...'

Radouan scrutinized her quizzically and after some hesitation he replied. 'You have always stood by me, but I'm still hopin' you will marry me again in Marrakech.'

Toni smiled: 'More ceremony blah blah blah...'

'We don't have a ceremony...we have a meeting to draw up the marriage contract in which we write down exactly what we expect of each other regarding money, property and rights - whether I allow you to travel alone, for example. And after that we party... the wedding party isn't blah blah it's excitin'music, wild dancin', feastin' and serious drinkin'. Finally I go up to the bridal chamber where you are waiting and take your virginity. You will see after that, you will really feel married...'

'I'm hardly a virgin darling!'

Radouan clicked his tongue, '*Mahkayn Muchkill*. Widows are not usually virgins either but we marry them... the Prophet's first wife was a widow. Near the end of the party we are supposed to leave the guests and go up and make love. Then afterwards, more party. At a wedding party everyone relaxes... people do things they would not normally do, you will see, *habibti*, this English ceremony we jus' had was boring. I know you wanted it so people will stop talkin' behind your back but now you've done it I think it might be worse for you... tha's my opinion... Rupert is going to be pissed off.'

She smiled icily. 'Why don't you just go and visit Rupert if you think so much of him. Take this plane and go visit him wherever he is...'

'He's at *Larache*... jus' bought a large piece of pasture land there for his horses.'

'How do you know that?'

'He called me last week. He's comin' to Marrakech very soon to buy ponies, I'll see him then. He likes me. I like him too.' Radouan stared at her impishly.

'You mean he's pissed off because I got you and he didn't...'

'You're so crazy!' Radouan exhaled. 'You really think there was ever anything between Rupert and me...'

‘Sometimes it has occurred to me,’ she said. ‘Why didn’t you tell me you’d spoken to him?’

‘I forgot... he reached me in Ouarzazate when I was negotiating with Francesco. He’s comin’ down soon wants me to help him.’

‘And you intend to see him?’

‘Of course, why not? Unless I’m in Paris...’

Toni’s eyes opened wide, ‘PARIS! For God’s sake, what are you talking about?’

‘Paris, France, mon cher *azizati*. I have to go to Paris in a few days. We discussed this just yesterday. This film deal. Your friend Marty... he’s flyin’ over tomorrow. I’ll probably have to leave the day after...’

‘Then I’m coming with you and after your business in Paris is finished we’ll fly somewhere and have a proper wedding trip...’

‘No, No!’ He gazed at her sternly. ‘You must stay in Marrakech and supervise your architect, tend to business and get our house built. He’s drawn up the plans. Now you must look that he doesn’t cheat you, be very strict with him. Moreover, I’ll be workin’ very hard and won’t have time to be romantic... don’t worry I’ll be back very soon and we’ll have a real vacation wherever you want...’

‘I don’t trust you alone in Paris!’ she grumbled, her face bathed in doubt. ‘

‘Paris, Marrakech, what’s the difference.’ Radouan replied, ‘if you don’t trust me there, how can you trust me in Marrakech, the Paris of Africa, after all.’

She gazed out a window at the first stars. ‘I’m still hopelessly jealous of you, I guess.’

‘I hope so!’ he grinned.

‘How can you say that?’

‘It means you still want me, *oridouka*, *ahtajouka*, still need me...’

‘But it drives me crazy when we’re not together... I begin... well, I start...’

‘You know you can’t own me, darlin’, I’m a flyin’ horse, not a share on the Bourse...’

‘You know very well what I mean... over the years, I’ve been observing you. You have this unnatural ability, this psychotic talent, for manipulating people; finding their weak spots... it’s uncanny. You sense my nervousness, then exacerbate it... it’s very cruel, but I don’t think you’re aware of doing it. Are you?’

Radouan's face drained of color and became a mask, 'You have a cruel side too, you know. I've been waitin' for you to soften... sometimes I think you enjoy seein' me suffer.'

'Ecoute moi, darling...' Toni whispered, 'We just got married, yes? I want to come to Paris with you, is that so awful? Alone in Marrakech, I'll be miserable...'

Beneath the mask his eyes flashed implacably; 'You'll have Lahcen... I'm sure you see him when I'm not around.'

'See... now you're doing it again, right now... changing your face... trying to scare me... why? You feel guilty about leaving me behind... you know very well Lahcen means nothing to me.'

'I don't know...'

'But you forbade me to see him... I only think of him when you suddenly desert me... Really!'

He gazed at her for a long time and then embraced her. 'Listen. Please... This is something I need to do on my own... understand? If you come along... if the people involved, if they see you or even think you have anything to do with this, every one will think it is you who is doing it... that I'm just your pantin... what you say... your puppet. Prices will go up and my leverage will be gone. Trus' me, I know what I'm doing but I have to do it myself.'

'Look, we don't have to go back to Marrakech at all.' She kissed his neck and murmured, 'I'll just tell the pilot to turn around and go back to Paris. In three hours we can be in my suite at the Ritz. Really, darling, don't be so insensitive.'

He kissed her forehead. 'You're not listenin' to me, *habibti!* It's very important for me to do this on my own!'

'Well, you're not doing it entirely on your own,' she said testily, 'Martin Segal is my friend after all...'

'Don' worry I could have got someone else... he's jus' advisin' me. Jus' try... TRY to understand... Be happy that this thing is happening that I'm really doing something on my own. We never know when fate will come and snatch away our happiness... Don't ride me.'

Toni smiled grimly and after a long silence replied, 'You're right, I suppose... I try to hide it, but if I'm honest I have to admit that I would like to possess you... totally... lock you up in a castle some where. Locked in the tower of love... ah yes, I would like that,' she smiled, 'better watch out! I have just the right place.'

'You have a castle somewhere with a tower?' he said, pretending to be amazed.

'Several.'

'We mus' make love in one of those towers sometime,' he murmured huskily, 'I would like that... on the cold stone floor... maybe when I'm finished in Paris we could...'

Toni closed her eyes. 'Darling, be serious. We have a lot of time invested in this relationship of ours, nearly twenty years... We must nurture it carefully, guard it ... that's why I'm possessive, I guess. If you ever deserted me I'd feel all our time together had been wasted, it would be like death!'

'A friendship is not a commodity or the product of some company,' he replied quietly, 'time can't be wasted. Our life together; our passions, our jealousies, our fights, our reconciliation's, these things, believe me, they are outside of time.' He ran his hands through her hair and kissed her, 'If from tomorrow, for some reason, we never saw each other again, do you think it would all have been for nothing? Believe me, THE SECRET MARRIAGE VOW IS NEVER SPOKEN, NEVER CAN BE BROKEN! Great moments live on'j

She rested her head on his chest, 'I don't think I could go on living without you...'

'Don't worry, you won't have to. I'm here... I will always be here for you and we will keep building our life together... not tear it apart or destroy it.'

## 40

The next afternoon Radouan drove to the Medina, parked his car in the parking lot near the Prefecture and walked to his house where he found the orphan, *Mokhtar* lying in a cool corner playing with the cat.

'*Ahlan, kayf el hal*, Hello, how are things?' Radouan grinned indulgently as Mokhtar stood up and embraced him.

'*Hamdou Allah*,' Mokhtar lowered his head and stared at the floor, 'I was wondering if you would ever return,' he said. 'My food is

running out and I've been thinking, what I would do if you never came back? I'm glad to see you.'

'Me too,' Radouan laughed nervously. 'Don't worry, I will always come back... but listen... I want you to get your things together right now. I have a job for you... will you do it?'

'Of course, whatever you say.'

'The foreign woman I told you about who lives out off the Route d'Ouarzazate... you remember... friend to me for many years... old and sick... I spoke to you before about her.'

'I remember about her, yes.'

'I have learned that certain people could be givin' her some trouble... I want you to go out there and watch. Will you be my eyes and ears?'

Mokhtar nodded.

'In a few days I must go to Paris. I will be gone for two or three weeks. This afternoon we will drive out there and I will introduce you to A'hmed, the head servant. A'hmed is a bowl of shit and a swindler but he won't try to rape you. He will have to follow the old lady's orders. I have spoken to her about you. She will take you on as a gardener... can you pull weeds?' Radouan pinched Mokhtar's cheek. 'Would you know a weed from a flower? Anyway, you can learn. This will be a good opportunity for you to get some exercise. I hope you won't run away on me though. But just in case something happened and you had to get outta there, I will give you some money which you must hide well... and also the key to this place in case you have to come back here... we never know. But believe me, if you try pullin' anything on me... any tricks... On the head of my mother, I will kill you!'

Mokhtar threw his arms around Radouan and kissed him passionately.

'Quickly now,' Radouan whispered, 'put on some proper clothes, make a bundle of your belongings and walk to the bus stop in front of Club Med. I will be driving a dark red sports car. When I see you I will stop and you will quickly get in the back seat...understand? You know the place...?'

Mokhtar nodded, disappeared upstairs for a few minutes and returned wearing a pair of blue jeans and a white kurta. 'You look fine,' Radouan said approvingly, and kissed him on both cheeks, 'now GO!'

Half an hour later they were on the road to the Baroness' estate.

'Someday maybe you'll take me to Paris instead of sending me off to work like this,' Mokhtar said after a long silence.

'Some day I would like to,' Radouan replied, 'but right now you are too young and inexperienced, and I have many things to do. You, you should be happy. You wanted to get out of the house and now you are out. Don't worry... I will return soon and you will come back to Marrakech.'

'*Inch Allah*... How do I know you're not dumping me... bringing me out here so you can put someone else in your house?'

'Do you think I would do that?'

Mokhtar laughed nervously, 'You might; you are one crazy guy. We forgot about the cat... what will he do?'

'Don't worry; cats know how to take care of themselves. He will know that you are gone and find his food in the streets.'

It was dusk when they arrived at the Baroness' place. Radouan told Mokhtar to wait, went up to Minna's suite and knocked softly at the door.

'Who is it?' her voice sounded from inside.

'It's me,' Radouan replied, 'shall I come in?'

'Yes, of course, I'm just reading...'

He walked across the room, sat down on the side of her bed and held her hand. 'I'm going to Paris soon,' he sighed. 'I will come out and see you again before I leave... a few days... but right now I have a favor to ask.'

The Baroness looked over her reading glasses and nodded.

'Some months ago I found an orphan on the street nearly dead from starvation. His name is Mokhtar. My sister Fouzia and I have been sheltering and feeding him, but now he's better he wants to get out and do something useful, so I thought maybe you could take him on for awhile... until I get back.'

'Of course, *mahkayn mouchkill*, I'll call A'hmed. I think we're short of gardeners... we're always short of them. I'm sure he doesn't know a thing about gardens but he can help out the others, some of them are quite old now.'

A'hmed appeared at the door, a grizzled man in a thin white *jalaba*. Minna explained the situation and instructed him to take Mokhtar on as an extra hand around the garden and make a place for

him to sleep. A'hmed who disliked Radouan agreed, wondered what he was up to, and glanced sharply at him several times as they went down to Radouan's car where they found Mokhtar and got him settled in a small room attached to the head gardener's cottage.

## 41

Driving back to town, Radouan brooded over the mystery of the person who was claiming to be the Baroness' long lost son. If he wasn't her son, how could he have known so much? Or maybe he really was her son; if so what did he want, money of course, but what money? Maybe she had some money and maybe she didn't; there was nothing in her Testament which she had given him that stated how much money there was, just the names and numbers of certain bank accounts, shares and properties. What he did know was that he had to follow her instructions and protect Dar Chems. She was his oldest friend, the origin of all his good luck and he must carry out her wishes faithfully.

Following the Route de Ramparts, along the river, he entered the Medina through Bab Ailen and soon arrived outside the *hamam* owned by J.W.'s family.

The *hamam* was nearly empty, but he found J.W. lounging in the hottest of the three rooms and joined him.

'I'm recovering from a big night,' J.W. groaned, dousing him self with hot water. 'Suppose you've come to ask about that guy you wanted me to find out about... well, I haven't much... he doesn't move in our circles so it's difficult ... the only thing I have is from your friend Omar's brother, the spy Mahjoub. You know him...'

'Yes, of course,' Radouan replied, 'I try to avoid him.'

'Me too, but sometimes he's useful. He came to the *Hamam* two days ago and we talked... the guy you mentioned from Fez appeared in Marrakech a few months ago and began questioning people about the Baroness saying that he was her son. As she is a friend of the King, the authorities began to wonder what he was up to and put Mahjoub on his trail... One thing he learned was that this guy, whoever he is, has made it his business to find out a lot about you and doesn't like you. He was overheard putting you down at the Mamounia Bar. Then in a cafe in Gueliz, he was seen talking with a notorious guy from Benguerir who specializes in getting rid of

people... The Fassi seems to see you as an obstacle on his way to inheriting the Baroness' estate. He's an Avocat and speaks English as well as French. If I were you I'd be careful. Has the Baroness ever mentioned leaving you any money?'

Radouan dissembled. 'From time to time, but never anything serious. If he wants me out of the way I'd better watch out. What does he look like?'

'Mahjoub said he was good looking, well dressed and a little rugged... like he trains or runs or something... my advice is that you should leave town for a while...'

Radouan doused himself with hot water. 'Right now, I'm supposed to be in Paris but I can't seem to get outta here. My Polo buddy Rupert, has jus' arrived to buy some ponies so I'll have to be with him day and night. Toni's pissed because she thinks he's come here on purpose to screw up our marriage... thinks we're...'

'You married her!'

'Yes, of course... didn't I tell you? Or maybe I haven't seen you since then.'

'You haven't... Isn't he mad at you?'

'Rupert? No, he's a very good friend to me... and he didn't know we got married. Toni never told him. I had to tell him, can you imagine! Really, I have compassion for him. So for the next few days I have to be here and look after him, take him shopping, look for ponies, go to the Casino at night and find women for him... the usual, I guess... and on top of that, Hafida the girl I'm supposed to marry...'

'The Keeper!'

'Yes, her... Now her parents are harassin' my mother about when I will meet with the *L'adoul* and finalize things. I agreed to see them day after tomorrow,' he sighed, 'really her people are already bringin' me down. And right now I'm supposed to be in Paris on this business deal with Delphine and my Avocat from Los Angeles is waitin' there for me... It's a big mess.'

'Is the Baroness sick?' J. W. asked, 'there's some rumor...'

'She thinks she is... tha's why I don't mind stickin' around a little longer... if I can do something about this Hollywood Avocat sittin' there in Paris... he's very expensive.'

'If it looks like she's dying, what will this Fassi do?'

'I don't know... tha's why a voice inside me says I should stick around...'

J. W. looked at Radouan thoughtfully and said: 'He might try to set you up in some way, be careful.'

## 42

A few days later, after Rupert had come and gone, as he was on his way to lunch at Toni's flat, he received a call from his sister Fouzia saying he should come straight to his father's house and help take him to the Clinique du Sud for dialysis.

He phoned Toni and told her the problem but she didn't believe him and hung up. If this were not enough, when he arrived at his father's house, his mother informed him his youngest brother had been put in jail for knocking some guy in an argument and he had to get him out. All of which made him more anxious than ever to speak with Delphine. Two weeks had passed since he had waved good bye to her at the Ouarzazate airport, but though he kept trying to reach her, even when he called early in the morning, he got a busy signal. Did he have the wrong number? It was making him crazy.

As soon as he settled his family's affairs, he drove out to Dar Chems to look in on the Baroness and inform her that he was booked to leave for Paris the following morning. When he arrived there about five that afternoon, however, Mokhtar intercepted him on the drive and told him he'd overheard the new server, Zouheir, speaking to a young gentleman with a Fassi accent who had been to see the Baroness several times. 'I was with the two other gardeners trimming bushes ... they were walking nearby but we could see and hear them. The Fassi was giving the server money, at least a brick (10,000 Dirhams) and telling him the next time you came out here to see the Baroness he should kill her right after you leave.'

'How long ago was this?' Radouan asked.

'This morning about eleven.'

Radouan thought hard. Something clicked in his brain and he thought he remembered Zouheir from years ago... the guy from Benguerir. J. W. had mentioned him! 'You're a good boy,' he said. 'As I suspected, these people are getting ready to do something very

bad.' He scrutinized Mokhtar thoughtfully. 'You must promise never to tell anyone what you have just told me... Understand?'

Mokhtar nodded. 'I promise.'

'I want you to find the Baroness' maid and keep her busy. I've come to say good bye and don't want to be disturbed. There is a large walk-in closet in the hall just outside the Baroness' suite. I want you to hide in there and watch her door. I will be leaving between eleven and midnight. You be in the closet by eleven and stay there through the night. Do you think you can do that without arousing suspicion?'

Mokhtar smiled, 'It won't be hard. The maid, Fatima, has been having an affair with this new server Zouheir. But now he's seeing another girl so Fatima is very angry with him and I've been making out with her in that same closet... she will be happy to go there again with me and spy on Zouheir.'

'You must avoid A'hmed. Do you think you can do that?'

'I will try... *Inch Allah*... don't worry, I will make myself invisible

'And if you need to leave this place... and you may have to... you have the money I gave you and here is the key to my house... you might have to escape this place... if you do, take the maid with you but do not let her out of your sight and lay low until I get in touch... it could be several weeks. Tomorrow morning I'll be on the first plane to Paris... be good, *habibi*, and do exactly as I have said.'

Mokhtar nodded dutifully, and Radouan headed for the house.

The sun was just setting. He went up and found the Baroness in a confused state, furious because she'd lost the opium he'd brought her and thought someone had stolen it. 'See, what I mean,' she pleaded desperately, 'I can't keep track of anything any more... even I forget what I'm looking for!'

Radouan scoured the room, found the opium and they shared a pipe together. Hoping to distract her, he turned on the sound system and played an old song by Umm Kalthoum. They listened in silence, soothed by the Diva's voice, savoring all the memories it evoked.

'A different age,' the Baroness said with a shrug. 'I remember sitting in this very room with Jimi Hendrix listening to that same song... he was stunned... later he went to Cairo and visited her.'

Radouan got out the Backgammon board and they played until Zouheir, who seemed startled to see Radouan, arrived with supper. Later Radouan crawled in the big bed with her, closed the curtains and read from a new French translation of *The Thousand and One Nights*.

She was fretful, inconsolable, and it was almost midnight before he was able to leave.

### 43

The following morning during the flight to Paris, an attractive young American woman returning from a visit to Marrakech struck up a conversation, pressed her leg against his and when breakfast was served, while questioning him about Morocco which she said she had found 'fascinating', let her hand wander down under their trays and started pinching his thigh. Later, as she excused her self to visit the rest room and crawled over him, the feel of her body squeezing past his knees set off a familiar reaction. And when she returned she made it clear she would be staying at the Hotel George Cinq and would like to get together with him.

Radouan was non-committal. Only Nick could have really appreciated all this,' he thought, the temptations which constantly plagued him, temptations which would have demoralized a Saint.

Closing his eyes, he tried to sleep but was hounded by a bout of self-loathing. Had he really used Toni as badly as she claimed? To him it had always seemed like a fair exchange; and what about poor Minna and Nick? To each of them he'd tried to be a good friend: loyal, correct, always ready to protect them. And yet he'd never been able to surrender to them. Maybe Toni was right and he was really cruel or had a *djinn* inside him as Nick and Francesco claimed; especially with people who desired him because it was so easy to wind them up and watch them dance. But in the past year, with the coming of his thirty-sixth birthday and still unmarried, an uneasiness born of loneliness had crept into his life - even when surrounded by friends or making love.

What did it mean? Did it mean what his mother was constantly telling him; that he had wasted his life? Sometimes she would point to the Crown Prince on TV and say, 'Look. He's the same age as you!' She was the one who, even more than his father, had insisted he give up his singing career and become an academic. Only to find when he finally received his University degree with high honors that there were no jobs for the likes of him, no place in the Morocco of 1985 for his intellectual skills and NO ESCAPE!

That was the beginning of his real whoring around; when he realized he had physical skills, which equaled if not exceeded those of his brain. All of which had led to a kind of heartlessness, he supposed, especially in the way he'd treated Nick. Was time running out for him? In some weird way he could feel it happening and for the first time in his life, even though his relationship with Toni was now "legal" he found himself seriously frightened. When you are *zween* life is easy. People had thrown money at him, groveled and shamelessly abased themselves and he had become cynical and unforgiving. What would happen when he was old and wrinkled like his father... like Minna? Who would be there for him? Maybe Toni was right and their marriage had affected him more than he cared to admit; or was it Minna's downward spiral? How else could he explain the waves of guilt which were preventing him from doing anything about the provocative young woman who sat beside him?

Above Paris the sky was thick with fog and as the plane circled for some time, Radouan found himself wishing it would crash. Then when they finally pulled in at the arrival gate he ignored the American and after Passport Control and Immigration, while waiting for a taxi, became furious with himself. Why was he standing there in the rain in a taxi queue, when at that very moment he could have been enjoying himself with her in the warm privacy of the limousine that had picked her up?

The city was grey and unseasonably cool and it seemed a lifetime before he finally reached the address Delphine had given him on the Left Bank in Rue Cherche Midi. He knew he should have tried to call her from the airport but as her phone was obviously out of order he had decided to take his chances. Maybe he would find her there with someone; in which case he would return to the airport and take the first plane back to Marrakech. Maybe he would surprise her with Francesco; a big problem, or maybe she wouldn't be there at all!

Arriving at her flat he pressed the button opposite her name and waited impatiently, Then, just as he was about to give up and go find a cafe where he could have some coffee, a sleepy voice answered, 'Hallo?'

'Hey, *habibti*,' he shouted into the intercom, 'it's me Radouan, let me in...'

'Mon Dieu, Mon Dieu, where have you been? I've...' her voice was stressed. 'Take the ascenseur to the fifth floor,' she shouted and buzzed him in.

On his way up he checked himself out in a mirror and smoothed his tousled hair. At her door, Delphine was waiting for him in a pair of rumpled pajamas.

'I've been so worried about you,' she cried and gazed steadily at him, 'a horrible dream, a premonition that you were hurt... some kind of accident and I thought, well, what can I do? How would I ever know? Who would ever tell poor Delphine? Who would take care of the business with Francesco? I called you many times but your phone was dead.'

He held her hands and kissed them and cradled them in his '... And I called you many times as well, but your phone was always busy.'

'Maybe you were dialing the wrong number... did you remember to dial the two zeros?'

She led him into her apartment.

He heaved a sigh of relief and slumped down in a chair. 'Well, I'm here now... The flight was late... Spent an hour cruising around over the city... but your dream was right... Driving back from Ouarzazate I got caught in a big storm... went off the road and nearly killed myself... my phone went over with the car, so did your phone number. I thought I remembered it but I guess I didn't.'

'You see...' she shook her head, 'I knew something had happened...'

'Then things got complicated. I had to take my father to the hospital, and get my youngest brother out of jail... my mother was very upset.' He slid off his chair, knelt down beside her and kissed her knees. 'Ah, *bibt!* All the way in from the airport I was worrying... afraid I would find you here with someone.'

'If you were so concerned you could have called information for my number,' she laughed and smiled down at him, 'that way if

someone had been here I could have got rid of him or her before you arrived.'

He rose up and pretended to punch her. 'Now you're tryin' to provoke me... have you been seein' Francesco?'

'Of course, I see him every day. But I haven't been... *seeing him...* if that's what you mean.'

He drew her into his arms and kissed her many times. She led him into the bedroom where, still wearing his raincoat, he undressed her and worshipping her body with his tongue, made love until they were both exhausted.

A few hours later, coming awake, Delphine asleep beside him, Radouan had thrown on a robe and explored her flat which, although small, was filled with antiques and expensive objets de valeur. Someone, he reflected, or maybe many ones, had been very kind to her. Was she still seeing these people? Had she slept with Francesco? In his heart he really couldn't condemn her, but he could see now that he needed her far more than she needed him - and that this was going to make him CRAZY! With money from the film deal, couldn't she stop seeing all these gift-givers whose grinning faces peered hopefully from expensive gold and silver frames on marquetry tables of the small thickly carpeted salon? Or maybe it wasn't the gifts that interested her at all, but the look of adoration on their faces - the same thing that excited him! Yes, of course... that was it.

The next few days, between meetings with Francesco, Martin Segal and their advisors, Radouan began to help out around the apartment: went shopping at the local super market, washed dishes, learned to use the clothes washing machine and even tried his hand at cooking. Domestic tasks he could never have performed in Marrakech, where he would have been laughed at for doing women's work.

How different from the last time he was in Paris with Toni at the Ritz, where being an Arab was perfectly normal and okay; waited upon and shielded from the indignities of daily life suffered by ordinary Arabs on the streets and in the Metro.

Now, while going and coming from Delphine's apartment or out of curiosity exploring other districts of the city, he had been threatened, insulted, even jostled by a gendarme for no good reason! How had these people, whose ancestors were living like beasts when

the University at Fez was founded; how had they come to believe they had the right to behave in this way? Indignant and nervous he worried that he would lose control of himself, suddenly become violent and send someone to the hospital. A big mistake that would fuck up everything! So finally he began to spend hours closeted in her apartment, drinking beer, watching the sports channels and reading the Arab newspapers.

As the days passed, however, although Delphine was charmed by his attempts at domesticity, Radouan sensed she was not impressed and he should not give up too many of his masculine prerogatives or she might become bored with him. Most importantly with her, he reasoned, he must remain unpredictable, and set limits on how far he would allow his fascination with her to dominate him. Often, however, by the time Delphine returned from wherever she'd gone he would be drunk and out of his mind with jealousy. Never having waited more than five minutes for anyone in his entire life, it was a new experience sitting there alone, wondering where she was: whether she'd really gone to the dentist, was really at the gym, the hair dresser, or wherever else she was supposed to be. Or was she lying naked somewhere selling her self for a very large sum of money.

'I've told you I'm not seeing any one else,' she would say adamantly when he started questioning her, 'but I have a busy life now... Francesco has already started the publicity on me... I spend half my time with photographers, the other half keeping myself fit and looking good for them... which is why I have to go to the masseur everyday... which takes another hour out of my life... it's all your fault!'

'Did you say masseur?'

'Yes, a nice OLD Indian masseur I've discovered. His touch is so fantastic; you'd find it very relaxing.'

'I don't want you bein' massaged by this cannibal,' Radouan burst out passionately, 'I absolutely forbid it! If I find you've gone to him again I'll make a huge scandal. I don't want other people touchin' you... And I'm sure you're not just seein' Francesco, you're fuckin' him... I can feel it. Attention! If I catch you with him I'll kill him. I might wait, believe me on the head of my mother, but I would do it!'

'You're drunk again,' she said coolly, 'I wish you'd stop drinking all this beer, you're getting fat and puffy.'

'I'm not gettin' enough exercise,' he grumbled, 'I'm used to an active life.'

'Go to the gym then.'

'I don't like to go out. You can't imagine the things that happen to me.'

'Yes I can, I can imagine... but you mustn't worry so much... a little fat is sexy.'

'I sit here waitin' for you all day, it's not normal... I want to marry you soon... you promised! Why else would I be here?'

'I didn't promise,' she responded sharply, 'and what is the reason without children? You know I can't have children now, it would ruin my career.'

'You don't think I'm good enough to be your husband,' he narrowed his eyes. 'I know it. Underneath you're racist like everyone else here... fascinated by the Arab; he's so exotic, so handsome, you like him for sex, some of you even fall in love with him... but underneath you don't respect him. It's true or not?'

She smiled and raised her eyebrows. 'Look, I'm too tired to fight with you tonight. If you want to come with me tomorrow, come... come to the dentist... to the gym... to the old Indian masseur...'

'I don't want you to go to any of these places unless you check them out with me first... okay!'

'You want to run my life...'

'Absolutely... I worship you. And I've been helping you out, haven't I? Now tell me, when we're going to get married?'

'I have to have time to think.'

'About WHAT?' he roared. 'We need each other... what else is there?'

'Look, I want you... I need you. You know that... I can't think of my life without you, but why do we have to go through this meaningless ceremony?'

Radouan chuckled at the irony of it all. Wasn't this exactly what he'd been saying to Toni two weeks ago?

'What are you laughing about?' she said angrily.

'I'm not laughing, *bibtî*, I'm thinkin' how much alike we are.'

'You're afraid of something,' she said. 'Are you afraid I'm going to run out on you?'

'Probably. Probably you're gonna be very famous... so famous that at some moment in the future you will leave Radouan behind in the dust bin... To you... for the first time in my life I have opened up...

it worries me... it's like a wound that won't heal... an itch that won't stop.'

'You mustn't feel so...' She stroked his head. 'I don't want you to feel insecure. I would never do anything like that; believe me, just so you know I mean it... OK, we'll get married in a civil ceremony. I hate the church... we just have to find out how to do it...'

'You must promise you will marry me later on in Marrakech according to our customs.'

'Why? Is Islam so different? All these religions are the same. I hate them!'

'You're atheist?'

'Yes and you are a Libertine!'

'You would be happier if you accepted Islam. You will see... you will be happy all the time... I will make sure you are happy.'

'You think we can really make each other happy?' she sighed, 'We've both been professional lovers... I'm not so sure...'

'That's why it will work... because now for the first time we've discovered who we really are... I'm not interested in anyone else.'

'The problem is our lives have been too easy,' Delphine said thoughtfully, 'you... you're a beautiful guy. Me, I'm a beautiful woman... but we've become cynical and have this really low opinion of ourselves. When people say they love us we think they're weak because we can't imagine anyone really could; we don't respect them, find them boring and depressing. The question is, ARE WE GOING TO DO THIS TO EACH OTHER?'

'Do what?'

'What I just said! Use each other... become dishonest... fuck each other up... not respect each other... You're a hustler; I'm a hustler... its habit forming! I don't want us to fall into that trap...'

'What trap?'

'Using each other, not respecting each other...'

'Then we should try to understand each other, no?'

'But you're not; you're constantly accusing me of seeing other men, of fucking Francesco. You want to invent something I'm not doing. Why, because it excites you? Or do you feel guilty about something you're doing? I don't know what... What are you doing that you feel so guilty about?'

'Why should I feel guilty about anything?' Radouan replied indignantly, 'I jus' made you five million dollars and yesterday I got him to give you a million more!'

Delphine's eyes narrowed. 'How did you manage that?' she asked. 'What sort of hold do you have over him?'

'I have a great avocat, one Martin Segal.'

'Oh come on, please I'm not stupid.'

'Then don't ask...and I won't ask you what you do when you go to the hairdresser...'

'How about the masseur?'

'Get a masseuse. I don't want any guy touchin' your body... bad enough havin' cameras pointin' at it day and night... like so many *zahps*...'

'That's my business, my work... getting fucked by cameras... that's why I'm good at it because I do feel like I'm having sex with them...'

'Where do I fit in then...?'

'*Habibi, habibi,*' she laughed tenderly, 'you're the real thing! All my lovers, they have bored me, cameras they excited me... now you've changed all that.'

Radouan gazed around the room, 'As soon as we are married we mus' get a new apartment this one, is drivin' me crazy... way too small. Tha's why I negotiated an extra million from Francesco... an Arab must pay the bride price... consider it your bride price. We can use it to pay for a really nice apartment. Or we could live at a hotel like the Crillon for example or the Meurice where the great Spanish artist Dali once lived... the Meurice has the best mirrors.'

'The Crillon... how would you know about the Crillon or the Meurice?'

'You see what I mean... Arabs like me from a place like Marrakech shouldn't know about those things...'

Delphine made a face, 'I'm just asking... really!'

'No, no, you were not jus' askin', you were puttin' me down. I told you I've been in Paris before... I know this city well... Places you could only dream of going to I've already been to, especially around Place Vendome and Place Concorde... Right now it would be too expensive for us to keep an apartment at the Ritz, but the Meurice is nice... it would be good for your career to be seen there... I'm sure I could work out a deal with them.'

The following day Delphine made some inquiries and discovered that, even when they got all the proper documents

together, in France there was a forty-day waiting period; quite logical, she thought, but it certainly wouldn't suit Radouan.

They were having lunch with Francesco at the Ritz to celebrate their engagement when she broke the news. Radouan was furious, but Francesco distracted him by suggesting that they could get married in Italy where there was no waiting period. Told them he'd just finished a rough outline of the film, wanted to fly to Rome the next day to scout locations, and suggested they come along.

'I will take you to the village where I was born,' he waved his hands expansively, 'a la Campagnia east of Rome... I know everyone there... you can be married with no problem by the Communist mayor. A wedding in the country with a local band and great food would be fun.' Delphine and Radouan agreed it was a splendid idea, toasted each other many times and in a drunken haze spent the afternoon looking at apartments - the Crillon and Meurice were fully booked - and finally settled on a large opulently furnished place opposite the Isle de St Louis with spectacular views.

#### 44

The next day they flew to Rome with Francesco, replenished their wardrobes and the following afternoon, while a tattered military band played the Isle of Capri, they were married at Francesco's village by the Communist Mayor. For years Radouan would wonder whether they were actually married.

Back in Paris, a few days later while Delphine was at the hairdresser and Radouan went out to buy his morning paper at the local newsstand, he came upon three film magazines – one Italian, two French – with covers devoted to half naked shots of Delphine. A mindless rage seized him and when Delphine returned he pinned her against the wall, told her how stupid she was, how furious Vogue would be, flailed his arms angrily, cracked his knuckles, threatened to punch her and finally threw a valuable Louis XVI clock to the floor, where he pounded it with his fists and finally stomped the fragile porcelain to dust.

Delphine slumped stoically on the floor her head in her hands, trying to understand what was going on, quietly repeating over and over to him in a steady drone, 'Chill out... Chill out... Chill out.' At some point he had become very unhappy about the direction his life had taken and wanted to revenge him self against the world, but why?

After destroying the clock, Radouan gathered up the film magazines, retreated to the bathroom and began burning them in the tub, page by page -his hands still bleeding from his encounter with the clock. Finally he sat down on the tile floor, buried his head in his lap and began to cry.

About an hour later, Delphine went in and began carefully dressing his wounds. 'Don't take this thing so seriously,' she said picking bits of porcelain from his skin with a pair of tweezers. 'Everyone poses like that when they begin. You have to capture the attention of the public.'

'I'm sorry but I had to take it out on something... how can I punch you when I worship you? Any other woman I would have... but jus' think what those pictures make ME! Your maquereau, your Moroccan pimp! Now when we go out together everyone is gonna know what you look like underneath your clothes... It's a Sin! Look how nervous it's makin' me... underneath your clothes yes... when I get nervous I can lose it,' he breathed deeply, '... I don't like to see your beautiful *zouk* -MY ZOUK - stickin' out like that in public places. When I first saw those magazines I thought; what a *zouk* ... I'd like to fuck that. Then I saw it was you. Your *zouk*...!'

She stared at him and smiled. 'So you admit you desired the girl on the cover before you knew it was me?'

'Of course, that's what I jus' said.'

'Don't you see? It means you would fuck any fantastic piece of ass that comes your way!'

'I said it excited me. What was it supposed to do? Every man in France will be wantin' to fuck you.'

'That's what Francesco hopes.'

'He's pimpin' you to the world! Fuck Francesco!' he pounded the floor with his fist, 'Fuck him, he's *kharia*. I'll kill him. I swear it. Go get the phone.'

'Who are you going to call?'

'I'm gonna call him, Francesco and Martin Segal too... it's in the contract you have publicity approval... Vogue will probably cancel

your spread... which is just what Francesco wants... those film magazines... they must organize a team of guys to go out and buy up every copy in Paris.'

'I think Vogue will love it... and Francesco is in Sicily, remember?'

'I have his world phone number... I can reach him anywhere. Go get the phone! Believe me you'll never pose for another fashion shoot if they see these pictures.'

'I won't have to...'

'You might have to. What if the film is bad? What if the critics pan it?'

'It won't be.' She brought the phone and handed it to him '... he's going to make me a star... I know it... you should trust him... he's going to make us a lot of money. You seem to be forgetting...'

'I can't believe that you would want your ass exhibited like that all over the world. Either they buy up those magazines or we cancel the contract with Francesco.'

'Those magazines have been out for a week. You just haven't noticed them before... and selling out everywhere. It won't do any good to call Francesco. I signed a release when I posed for them.'

'Believe me I don't forget... that's me... I don't forget, OK? Really I think as soon as I get you moved into that apartment I'll go back to Marrakech for awhile ... here, I'm going to get in trouble... for the moment its better if I go back... I've been away ten days already; my family will be needing me. You're right, I won't call Francesco. Now that we're married I feel a lot better... still I don't want to cause any trouble for you so while you're getting started I think I'll jus'...'

'You're not going anywhere,' she said steadily, 'you're going to stay here in Paris with me. I won't let you go... you just HAVE TO LEARN HOW TO CONTROL YOURSELF...and you're doing it. I see improvement everyday. You have the phone in your hand, call your family right now and see how they're getting along.'

He smiled at her helplessly. '*Habibti* Delphine... By God I wish I had the money jus' to take you out of all this and make you a real queen somewhere. Yes, I would do it... for you I would buy a small country.'

'You mean lock me up somewhere!'

Recalling his recent conversation with Toni, Radouan grinned, 'Yahzz... I would like that. I would visit you from time to time. Not every day but every few days...' he caressed her '... give you time to

miss me until you want it so bad your *tina* would be *FAZGA*...yes... then I would come and satisfy you...'

'Why lock me up?'

'So no one else could get at you, of course - so you would be hotter for me when I come to you and because a beautiful woman is *FITNA* chaos and *QAID N'SSA* the power to deceive and defeat... not by force but by deception and intrigue. You, you have it... that *QAID N'SSA* - That's why you're gonna be a huge star.'

'And a beautiful man is he not this *Fitna*? You are. You know you are! Wherever you go you cause chaos!'

Still on the bathroom floor, Radouan kissed her knee slowly up her leg, lifting her skirt until he was kissing her inner thigh; then suddenly bit her.

Delphine screamed and pounded him with her fists, 'Cannibal... CANNIBAL... Help... Some one help please...' But he only locked his jaws, hung on and inserted his forefinger in her vagina.

After some time, he let go and gazed up at her. 'Now you have a secret wound,' he whispered hoarsely, 'now I've marked you... you won't go showin' yourself so willingly again... you'll have to explain it if you take off your clothes for anyone... you'll have to ex...'

'I can't believe you just did this,' she breathed, examining her self.

He spat out some skin. Blood trickled down his chin. 'Yes I did,' he panted, 'I jus' did it!'

'But this is not going to go away... you...' she stared at her thigh in disbelief, 'you've bitten a piece out of it... look, you just spat it out! My God you're bad... Have you ever thought about that... about your temper, your recklessness, yes, and even joy when you're inflicting pain? You're not human... '

'You're right! Yazz! Radouan is not human, not a domestic individual like the rest of you, he is *SAUVAGE*... une sauvage moderne, carries a sharp dagger in his pant leg, lives for the moment - no future, no past... *YOU LIKE PAIN... ADMIT IT!*'

'You're wrong I hate it... and you! One moment you're submissive, the next *PHOOM* you're a treacherous beast... I need a whip...' She examined her self again, 'look at this mess...what will Francesco say?'

Radouan shrugged 'I hope he never sees it. But if he does jus' tell him the truth! He's Italian, he'll understand...'

'Where's the antiseptic? Get up and find it, the human bite is very dangerous.'

'But I'm not human,' he roared... 'I come from a crazy tribe of camel racin' *qat* chewin' warriors, and *marabouts*... the Banu Hilal, I come from... For at least two thousand years now by *ZAHP* and *SWORD* we have conquered and survived... Because we were not afraid to be cruel the world it backed off from us and left us alone. Only in the last hundred years have some of us consorted with the likes of you, yes, and not by choice! So don' worry, by the time you wake up in the morning I'll be gone back to *Hamra*... My *Hamra* not like here where everything is exhibited out on the streets like a boucherie and people have no shame...'

'It's called LIBERTE!' Delphine screamed. 'We killed our king and Queen to get it!'

'Yazz! Tha's the whole problem... all of you; you're sufferin' from the curse of those murders. Your Liberte is not freedom... jus' fake like the people here and the food... all presentation and inside... less than ZERO.'

## 45

The day was May 28, 1998 - a day Radouan would never forget. On the plane back to Marrakech he had tried to work on the crossword puzzle in the morning edition of *Le Monde*. Crosswords usually calmed him down, and cleared his brain - so overloaded he could often feel the pressure inside his skull of voices speaking to him in five different languages. Foreign Women! Ah..! Really he should have nothing more to do with them, never would he understand them, never had – not even Toni. Suddenly he remembered he hadn't called her since he'd left Marrakech. Stupido! How could he have...?

Folding his newspaper, he signed and looked out the window at the clouds over Spain. Really, he had to stop procrastinating and tell his mother to set the date for the *L'adoul*. Only this girl Hafida would ever really understand him and treat him with the esteem an Arab

man expects. How fine it would be to be back in Marrakech, he thought and smiled inwardly - his 'home – town', as Nick used to say. The Atlas Bar and Coffee where he sat most mornings exchanging gossip and information... The Big Square *Jemaa el Fna*; the Cafe France at sunset... Le Cafe des Reves Brises on Avenue Mohammed V... the closeness of people sheltered within the old city walls... even the old French section of Gueliz was still tranquil.

The plane landed. Hopefully no one who knew Toni would see him for now he had many things to do if he was going to marry Hafida. First he must go straight to his father's house and give his mother some money to organize the wedding party. She would be pleased. Maybe it should be in R'hamna at the house of his grandmother. After that he would walk over and see Nick and make arrangements with Prospero for reconstructing the *Douirya* attached to the *Riad*, which he and Hafida would occupy after their marriage. Then he would drive out to Minna's *Ksar* and find the orphan Mokhtar who would tell him what had been happening out there. And after that he would show up at Toni's... *Inch Allah!*

At passport control, however, the fellow in the booth kept him waiting and Radouan was about to signal a friend of his, the Chief Customs Inspector, when he suddenly realized two men in sports jackets and dark pants were standing on either side of him. Police, he thought instantly, their manner all too familiar; Plainclothes Police at that, so it had to be something serious!