

## BOOK THREE: Crimes, Punishments and Rewards

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'There is no power and no strength, save in God, the Almighty, the Magnificent,' Radouan began intoning under his breath, ready to powder them, who ever they were, ready to fight and kill! But then, to his surprise, inside his head he suddenly heard a voice, 'CHILL OUT, CHILL OUT, CHILL OUT', the voice of Delphine, yes it was her commanding him, restraining him from insulting the policemen in the thousand and one ways he knew he could. Instead, smiling at the thought of her, he found himself asking them politely what they had in mind.

They in turn were equally polite, which unnerved him because most Moroccan police were not. Quietly they identified themselves as officers of the DST, one of the highest security units in the country, and let him know that they were armed and expected him to come with them without making a scene.

In a small office nearby, presided over by the officer in charge of immigration, the Chief of Airport Security entered, asked Radouan to sit down and offered him a cigarette, which he declined. He was resisting the instinct to fight and run; their guns would be useless against the speed at which he could act.

Then 'CHILL OUT' Delphine's voice again like a *muezzin* from the sky and he sat down and crossed his legs like a gentleman revealing a new pair of expensive Armani socks and Gucci shoes he'd picked up in Rome.

After some time, while they all looked at each other and nothing happened, an older man in a tweed jacket and khaki pants who identified himself as an officer of The Criminal Brigade and looked more European than Moroccan, appeared and sat on the edge of a desk facing him. 'We expected you'd put up a fight,' he said quietly in the Arabic of Fez, 'you seem to have a reputation as a fighter.'

'You've been checking up on me why? Tell me why I'm here.'

'The name Baroness Minna Von Schleebruck... does it mean anything to you?'

‘Yes, of course,’ Radouan replied, ‘we’ve been friends for many years... over twenty, since I was sixteen. Why do you ask?’

‘Could I ask you exactly when you last saw her?’

With great effort Radouan mastered his anxiety. ‘Yes, of course. I’ve been abroad for ten days, in Paris and in Rome. So I saw her the night before I left for Paris... had dinner with her... told her stories and put her to bed.’

‘Did you spend the night out there?’

‘No, I drove back to Marrakech.’

‘At what time did you arrive back in Marrakech?’

‘Around midnight...’

‘You have a witness that you returned by that hour.’

‘Yes, of course, my wife.’

The officer looked mildly surprised. ‘Your wife? We didn’t know you were married. When did you get married?’

‘About a month ago...’

‘Here?’

‘Here what?’

‘Here in Maroc...’

‘No, in London. We plan to have a Muslim wedding here very soon.’

‘Your wife is British?’

‘Yes, her name is Lady Antonia Howard, or was before she married me.’

The man studied him for some time. ‘So she can verify that you were here in Marrakech by around twelve o’clock of the night before you went to Paris.’

‘I think so...she was asleep when I got home. I woke her up. She looked at her watch and yelled at me. Then she went right back to sleep again. Ask her, I’m sure she will remember.’

‘And it takes how long to drive from the Baroness’ place to Marrakech?’

‘At that time of night about half an hour; why are you asking me all this?’

‘The Baroness is dead,’ the officer said quietly, ‘In her bed... she was found dead in the early morning hours. There is a servant A’hmed who says he saw you leaving her *Ksar* around five thirty in the morning of the day you flew to Paris. The Baroness left a Testament making you her sole heir. The document is with her Notaire Madame Saadi. Do you know about this Testament?’

'No, I don't,' Radouan dissembled coolly.

The officer cleared his throat. 'We have a Mandat d'Arret to detain you for the murder of Baroness Minna Von Schleebruck signed by the *Wakil al Malik*. Will you come with us peacefully or must we cuff you?'

'Who is the complainant?' Radouan gestured, 'By God, there must be some mistake!'

'We do not know about such things as complainants,' the man sighed, 'we are only here to take you in.'

'Take me in to where?' This is crazy! She was my best friend in this world.'

'First to *Jemaa el-Fna*. You've lived here all your life, you must know the system. You will be held there while the investigation proceeds... at least twenty-four hours maybe more. You are permitted to call your wife and your Avocat if you have one.'

Radouan clenched his fists and closed his eyes. For one who had known only good luck and clear sailing, it was like a terrible storm had suddenly battered him. All his life, the jails of Marrakech had been the great nightmare, constantly held up by everyone as the final solution for bad boys. All Marrakchis they lived in fear of them: the holding tank at *Jemaa el-Fna*, and *Boulmaraz* prison where men were packed together like sardines. After thirty years of narrowly escaping their confines, that he should now be jailed for the murder of his beloved Minna was *soukhrya*, a supreme irony!

He called Toni's number on his new cell phone but got her answering machine. He couldn't blame her for not being there; or not taking his call. If he'd bothered to call her from Paris, she would have known of Minna's death and he could have avoided all this. Or could he? Why had there been no mention of it on TV or in the French papers? He felt like throwing his phone on the floor and grinding it under foot.

'CHILL OUT,' - Delphine's commanding voice again and instead, speaking very quickly in English, he left a message: 'hello it's me I jus' arrived from Paris and was arrested at the airport... they're sayin' I murdered Minna the night before I left for Paris which is crazy because I was back in Marrakech by midnight in bed with you. Remember? I need to see you. Please call Pero.'

Then he called Prospero and got his answering service as well. 'Hello, Pero, it's me,' he said, 'they've just arrested me at the airport for the murder of Baroness Minna... I have to see you...

Congratulations...I guess I'll be your first client...I'll be at *Jemaa el-Fna* for a while, then maybe *Boulmaraz*. Please contact my wife Lady Antonia... *Salaam*.'

His exit from the terminal through a side door to a waiting police van was discreetly managed, and the drive to the temporary lock-up at *Jemaa el-Fna* uneventful. The following morning there was a hearing at which he was told the evidence against him was so strong he would be remanded to *Boulmaraz* - just across the street from the disco where he used to carouse late on Saturday nights. *Boulmaraz* - end of the world.

At the hearing, Pero had turned up. 'Because the charge is murder,' Pero told him quietly, 'that's why they're sending you to *Boulmaraz*. At the end of one week, there will be another hearing at which I will be asked to come forward and refute the evidence against you. If I cannot refute it to the satisfaction of the Public Prosecutor, you will have to wait longer, perhaps a month or so, until you are able to appear before the Judges of the Appeals Court. Of course there is no question of bail. Maybe we can pay some money and have you moved to another facility where it's cleaner and the food is better... but don't worry, I will find your wife and bring her to see you as soon as possible. *Sella maktouaa*, you are being sent in a torn bag, my friend, railroaded... we need all the help she can give us!'

But where was Toni, Radouan asked himself and felt his muscles tighten as though he'd suddenly aged ten years? God's punishment for his sins he supposed... and what if Toni had gone back to England and divorced him, what would he do then?

Arriving at *Boulmaraz* that afternoon, the great prison gates, like the jaws of hell, closed behind him and after he was processed he was escorted to the small foul smelling cell which he would have to share with forty other men. It was like being swallowed alive.

On the second day of his confinement, the cell door had been thrown open and looking dazed as if he had no idea what was happening to him, Nicholas K Brady III had been unceremoniously

shoved through. Radouan waited in the shadows wondering why Nick had not been taken to the Psychiatric Hospital. Or was this the Marrakchi way of telling him the police knew all about their relationship and were throwing it in his face?

After some time, two of the inmates began cracking jokes at Nick's expense, cruel jokes in the local Marrakchi dialect which they assumed he would not understand; which brought Nick out of his stupor and led him to provoke them with equally sarcastic replies. Radouan waited certain he would have to intervene. At first, the other prisoners were impressed that a foreigner should speak their tongue so well. But as Nick became ever more abusive, exposing their hypocrisies and deeply wounding their sensibilities, a few bullies among them surrounded him, taunted him for being a Gay, challenged him to deny it and forced him to his knees.

Unable to restrain himself, Radouan pushed his way through the crowded cell and disposed of the main culprits, knocking three of them unconscious. This invoked respect from the other men and they drew back.

'I've known this man for over twenty years,' he harangued them, 'you sons of donkeys, you bowls of shit. This man is a great intellectual, a professor and a teacher who taught many of us boys to speak French and English. He is a good man. If anyone else touches him, I'll kill him. On the head of my mother, I will pound him to dust.'

Then he helped Nick up, and elbowed their way to a corner where he managed to find enough space for them to sit down together. 'At least here we can rest our backs against the wall,' he sighed.

'Where am I... are we?' Nick blubbered incoherently, rubbing his eyes, '... I suppose its Hell... or what I've always imagined Hell would be like ... over crowded... smells like it too. But why did those men burst into the *Riad* and grab us, Fouzia and me? Fortunately Pero was not there... he'd just left. Must say,' he shrugged, 'though I was longing to get out of there I can't imagine a more bizarre way of leaving. Why are we here? Why are you here? Que se passe-t-il?'

'My old friend, the Baroness Minna, is dead. Murdered they say... someone has filed a complaint against me and I've been charged. When it's murder you know, they often arrest whole families and all the acquaintances of the accused hoping to scare them into

giving the kind of evidence they want... I guess you're part of my family. Do they know about Pero?'

'They didn't ask for him... just grabbed us.'

Radouan chuckled, 'Good! He's my Avocat now... I'm his first case... for sure they would like to throw him in here too; except it's his family who owns the *Riad*... we'll see... *Inch Allah*.'

Sitting knee to knee crammed in their corner; no room to move or even stretch their legs. Radouan stared sullenly down at the floor. Finally the lights went out and they managed to lie down together in the fetal position, Radouan's arms protectively sheltering Nick.

'Strange it would take something like this to get us together again... I mean so physically close,' Nick chuckled.

'Please lower your voice, Radouan whispered, 'These people will think bad things about us.'

'No one speaks English here... I was remembering when your beard first began to grow, the first soft fuzz... now I see it's very heavy and black... grows very fast... when you don't shave you look like a terrorist...'

Radouan snickered, 'That time, I remember it well... it was about then you kicked me out. You said: "Now the time is approaching when we must go our own ways... when a boy's beard begins to grow he's a man and men aren't supposed to be fucking around with each other. Your reputation will suffer." That's what you said.

'You won't let me forget will you?' Nick mumbled.

'Even so, I would have stayed with you if you'd allowed it. When you kicked me out I almost died... started wastin' away.'

'Com'on, you didn't waste away at all, you took revenge... almost killed me... more or less succeeded in neutralizing me – neuterizing, I should say...'

'It wasn't my fault...'

'Yes yes, it was *habibi*.'

Radouan whispered sharply: 'Think where we are and stop speakin' Arabi... go to sleep... we need sleep... it's your fault... everything in my life is your fault. You abandoned me... then you came to regret it and wanted me back but by then it was too late... now sleep, you crazy man, SLEEP!'

'I'm not sleepy,' Nick whispered matter of factly. 'I'm wide-awake. How can one think of sleeping in a place like this? When I realized I was so jealous of you it devastated me. That's why I had to

send you away... and that's why finally I came back... Your glances had wounded me forever oh hunter who shoots arrows with precision... and now I'm HAUNTED... but I guess it was my own fault because I'd allowed myself to become your victim.'

Radouan chuckled softly. 'Now you're jokin' me... I always thought I was the victim!'

'Stop dissembling clever one. I know perfectly well that you make *Maji* on people... have it in your blood!'

'Your jus' now understanding this?'' Radouan whispered sarcastically, 'really, in some ways you're very stupid...now go to sleep, you're tired.'

Nick turned away from him, 'I'm not tired,' he mumbled, 'I'm wide-awake! You don't understand... you do it with your eyes, make them like black holes... traps into which souls fall... I let you go on like that as an experiment, but I got caught.'

'I didn't destroy your mind you destroyed it yourself tryin' to challenge me... always gazin' at me... then took *Ch'dak J'mel.*' He hugged Nick tightly. 'Now you must bury your passion and become a Martyr... *He who hides his love and is chaste, then dies, will be admitted to Paradise as Martyr -Hadith: al'Is'h .* Sleep... Sleep now and I will watch over you...'

Nick turned over and faced him. 'You resort to these pious thoughts when you don't want to take responsibility for your actions...'he whispered.

'That doesn't mean pious thoughts aren't true, 'Radouan grumbled, 'jus' because we can't live up to them... It's time for you to surrender to Fate, to the Absolute Ruler of the Universe. The meaning of Islam is Surrender and when you do it you will stop sufferin'. Absolutely I know you are gonna to do it. Moreover, it will make you happy and me too once we get out of here...'

'You really think we'll ever get out?'

'Of course, absolutely we will. I married Antonia Howard a month ago in London under British Law.'

'Married?'

'I'm sure I told you, maybe I didn't... so much has been happening.'

'Congratulations,' Nick muttered, 'but I thought you were going to marry this girl your mother picked out?'

'Yes, of course, I came back here from Paris planning to do jus' that.'

'Paris!'

'I've been there the last three weeks on business... became engaged there.'

'Wait. When did you get married in London?'

'The week before I went to France...'

'Where you became engaged to another woman...'

'The one in Paris, Delphine,' Radouan replied contemptuously. 'I told you about her the day I met her... you never remember anything.'

'Sometimes it's hard to keep up...'

'The one who was here on a fashion shoot for Vogue. I got her a screen test with a famous director; she's gonna be a big star... I married her in Italy last week...'

'What!'

'Married her in Italy last week. The director, Francesco Monte, he took us to his village outside Rome... we were all drunk. I think we got married but I'm not sure. Very soon she will come here and we will be married according' to Islam...'

'So you've married twice in the past month?'

'Yeah. Two different ones; the English woman and Delphine, the French one... now stop speaking this blah blah and let me sleep...'

Nick held Radouan's hands tightly. 'You're crazy and you drive everyone around you crazy!'

'That's what everybody says... your problem is you are a victim of *El wahm taa al Hawa*...' Radouan whispered.

'*Al Hawa*?'

'Dreamin' love. You're always dreamin' this thing with me that isn't real...'

'Difficult is the love between patron and client, teacher and student, an old man and his young love, between the warrior and his stallion.' Nick intoned and closed his eyes and sighed, 'Oh *al fhal*, tell me who between us was the horse and who the rider? I remember when our relationship changed from teacher-student to lover-beloved, I had this strange vision of you as my nemesis... a sudden illumination... a premonition that you had come into my life to destroy me... You say I gazed at you too much, but that's why... because I couldn't believe what my intuition was telling me... and I still don't! I should have ended it then but I couldn't... *Macha'allah*.'

'How can you say such things to me? We've shared so many unforgettable moments together...tender moments live on.'

'Ssh...Yes, to poison the rest of one's life.'

'Everything passes,' Radouan observed, 'nothing lasts forever.'

'I wanted you to be the best... you had the potential.'

'I'm still the best!' Radouan muttered indignantly.

'But you had this bag of tricks, which I'm sure you learned from some prostitute... the constant teasing... coming on to people 'til you captivated them, then discarded them like used toilet paper.'

'I never discarded you,' Radouan purred softly, 'LOOK; here we are together after twenty-two years... There is no Power and no Strength save in God, the Almighty and Compassionate!'

Nick turned until they were forehead to forehead. 'I want you to admit I gave you a life,' he whispered angrily, 'that you would never have made it without me... you have this real talent for making people unhappy, well what you give, you get back. So here you are in jail at last and you may die here or they may kill you... that's the pay back! Life has two days, mon ami, one peace, the other wariness; and two sides, worry and happiness.'

'What's written is written,' Radouan growled, 'Don't think without you I wouldn't have made it... whether I die here or not is up to the All Mighty...'

Nick tried to fall asleep but was tormented by the thought that soon his body would be crawling with fleas and mites. 'Think of the time I devoted to you back then,' he said at last, 'just think of the way you were living...'

'We've spoken of these things many many times.' Radouan replied wearily 'You wanted to disappear. I should have sent you back to your wife but I didn't because I had compassion for you. With your money you deserved a beautiful young girl...'

Nick stiffened, 'You always say I have money hidden somewhere... Just because you hide your money doesn't mean everyone does.'

'No no no,' Radouan insisted, 'inside you're a very mean man, mechant. I'm sure you have it hidden somewhere.'

'I'm sorry, but the word is frugal... I'm frugal, not mean, there's a difference... You're always projecting your behavior on me. You do that all the time. Anything you don't like about yourself you accuse others of... If I had money do you think I'd have let you sit here in Marrakech all these years fucking your brains away?'

'I haven't fucked away my brain, believe me my brain is very sharp! But I must fuck women... as often as possible.

Nick sighed. 'Either you are a genuine schizophrenic and can be helped or you are a totally selfish man whose beauty has made life so easy he can't imagine making the least effort to please anyone but himself.'

Radouan was exhausted and determined to put an end to their conversation. 'Believe me,' he declared, 'now I'm tellin' you the truth. I KNEW HOW YOU WERE SUFFERIN' AND I ENJOYED IT. Can you understand that? Can you forgive me? '

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Early the next morning as light filtered through the one small window high on their cell wall, Nick calculated each man had less than a third of a square meter to himself. In one corner was a water tap, which seemed to flow intermittently and in the other a hole in the floor, which served as a drain and toilet and was often clogged. The stench was unbearable.

Soon the cell door opened and guards distributed bowls of weak bean soup and pieces of moldy bread.

'If you take that soup you'll be sick and have to shit in front of all these guys,' Radouan said, 'don't eat it... we'll be out of here soon.'

Their conversation continued from the night before. Nick was about to admit that he was not as crazy as he'd been making out and to ask Radouan to forgive him when their conversation was interrupted by a large hand extending down between them attached to someone a few years older than Radouan wearing a Planet Hollywood T-shirt and cut-offs. The man squatted down and embraced Radouan. They kissed many times.

'This is my friend Omar,' Radouan said introducing Nick. 'Omar works in his father's bazaar. I've known him since I was a kid; he's like an older brother to me. You met him years ago. He doesn't

understand English and he can't read but he's a sweet guy and not stupid... everyone calls him Handy Man.'

'What brings you here?' Omar asked sympathetically.

'Jus' havin' a little vacation...' Radouan grinned.

Omar chuckled knowingly.

'They're accusin' me of murderin' that German woman I've known for years,' Radouan explained in Arabic.

'You mean the Baroness.... Of course, everyone in Marrakech knows who she is. Did you do it?'

Radouan's mouth dropped. 'How can you say that? She was my oldest friend.'

'I heard she made a Testament leaving everything to you, all her properties and money in Swiss Banks...'

'Where did you hear this? When?'

'Can't remember... maybe a week ago. She never told you she was going to leave you something?'

'No. I was in Paris...'

'So I heard.'

Radouan was about to ask Omar again where he got his information when he remembered one of Omar's brothers worked for the police. 'Why are you here?' he asked.

'Hashish, of course...' Omar replied.

'But your brother...'

'He couldn't help me this time, but I'm sure he's working on it. A boy I know... country boy... became jealous of me and invented a story... went to the police and told them I had him delivering hashish to foreigners. Police they came and dragged me out of bed,' Omar observed himself with some surprise. '...No time to change.'

Radouan scolded him: 'I've told you many times to be careful of these country boys...'

'Yeah, every one has to watch out now... something about "the human rights," whatever that means! One human right should be not to change, not to progress. They forget all the fights and battles that were fought around here over boys... boy stealing... camel stealing. They forget the days of Chaiir El Hamara of Bal Gamane, the bird seed seller on Derb Debachi who was a great connoisseur in these matters!'

They all laughed together.

'Now they want to call it abuse,' Omar went on earnestly, '... we have our human rights too, our traditions. All these new laws... they just make them up to make money... that's all.'

'But we are Arabs... boy stealin' is a Berber thing...' Radouan said, trying to provoke Omar.

'Bullshit! Arabs are boy stealers too... everyone does it because the boys they want it... they need it... the protection of older fellows. How long are you here for?'

Radouan put on a hopeful face. 'They say I'm here for a week but maybe I'll be out sooner... *Inch Allah*. But I'd like to know who made the Complaint against me. Maybe you can try and speak with your brother about it. What's his name?'

'Mahjoub...'

'Of course... then maybe you could speak with Mahjoub and find out who is accusin' me... who went to the police... who wrote up the Complaint?'

'Mahjoub, he is supposed to be coming here tomorrow to get me out... *Inch Allah*... I will speak to him about you, don't worry...'

'I will make it worth his time and yours too....'

Omar patted Radouan's back. 'Don't be stupid, we're old friends, you don't need to do anything like that... when I get out I'll see what I can do... some detective work for you... but fuck, I hope I do... I mean my oldest brother Moustafa... he's the one who has to make the deal to get me out of this shit hole... our mother will yell at him, I'm sure. I'm the youngest of ten brothers; they have to take care of me...'

'And I am the oldest of six brothers...'

'Being the oldest is the worst... My brother Moustafa is insane... so are you sometimes...' Omar turned toward Nick. 'Who's he... seems to me I know him but I can't...'

'My old English teacher,' Radouan explained, 'American... swims on the other shore... speaks Arabi. You met him once but you don't remember... lived here for years without leavin'... never had a visa. Some friends and me, some of the boys he taught, we've been hidin' him over in *Riad Arous*. Now the police know it... they arrested him and my sister Fouzia who was over there cookin' for him... Maybe they've arrested my whole family by now... *Inch Allah*. But my father has an uncle in Parliament, so I doubt it.'

'Then your father should be able to do something for you...'

'Maybe, but I don't think so. Murder is different than fightin' or hashish...'

'You have to remember one very important thing, *akouya*... and watch out!' Omar grinned and pointed his finger skyward, 'People are gonna be very jealous when they hear of your good luck.'

'What good luck? That I'm accused of murder?'

'No man... that you might get all her property and money. You will see they will try to take it away from you. Remember that Dutch woman who left a very nice house and property in the Palmerie to her Marrakchi lover... yes? Well, they took it away from him.... And now that you've married an English lady with her own jet prive, man, they'll wanna roast you.'

Radouan frowned. 'Her plane belongs to her father's company... how come you know all this about her?'

'I heard it from Lahcen, the trainer at Mamounia... he was in one of our shops the other day with some tourists.'

'I hate him. I would enjoy stranglin' him... *arriviste* bastard.'

'Yeah... he's very jealous of you too... that you got her, and married her in England... hopes you'll stay in here forever.'

Radouan lowered his voice and whispered tenderly in Omar's ear: 'My uncle, when you get out of this place I hope you will do one thing for me... to be sure Lahcen leaves Marrakech and never returns? I don't care how you get it done, but will you do it?'

'Yes, of course, don't worry. I never liked him either... tres dangerous.'

'HEY,' a voice rasped overhead. Radouan jumped up and embraced its owner, a husky young man like himself, 'Houcein, may God protect you... what are you doin' in here?'

'Ah not much... last night I put a policewoman in the hospital... she was bein' stupid. Stopped me for not usin' my turn signal, can you imagine... caused a huge *embouteillage* so I knocked her...'

Radouan kissed him on both shoulders 'Don't worry your Patron will get you out. The guys on the force, they hate these new police women, they'll go easy on you.'

Houcein had been a bodyguard for a prominent foreign diplomat, the only real job he'd ever had. Radouan and Houcein were the same age, had attended the same schools and had been known in the Medina as the two toughest, best looking boys of their time.

'I lost my job with him last year,' Houcein said, 'guess I haven't seen you for a while... we were in Istanbul just before he retired.'

Because I was an official bodyguard I had a permit to carry a gun... got drunk in a bar there in Istanbul one night... didn't kill anybody just destroyed the place...' Houcein turned his gaze on Nick. 'Who's that?' he asked Radouan.

'That's Nick, you knew him years ago.'

Nick pointed grimly at Radouan: 'Because I know him... that's why I'm here...'

Omar laughed.

'They broke into Pero's place lookin' for evidence about me,' Radouan smiled '... and found him and Fouzia. When they caught on he'd been here for seven years without leavin' they charged him. Also they hate him because he caused them big problems years ago when his wife came over here lookin' for him...'

'They're sayin' you killed the Baroness,' Houcein whispered. 'Headlines in all the foreign journals, also the local ones. You're famous!'

Radouan turned to Omar: 'Tell me who could be promotin' all this *ichaa* ... givin' interviews to the press?'

'The Police didn't release any information until they arrested you... but we all knew certain things and were trying to piece them together.'

'You mus' ask Mahjoub to find out about this propaganda,' Radouan said and turned back to Houcein. 'You think I would do that? Kill her?'

Houcein hesitated. 'No... Her you wouldn't kill... maybe that fucking English woman you've been seeing for years... wouldn't surprise me if you killed her some day...'

Radouan grinned broadly, 'I jus' married her...'

'Congratulations, you never invited me...'

'We got married in London. We'll have a weddin' party down here soon. Don't worry, you will meet her... when you get to know her you will like her.'

'I met her already - Long time ago with a bunch of musicians from London.'

'She was pretty crazy then,' Radouan grinned, 'but I've calmed her down.'

'Maybe Houcein can find out who filled the Complaint against you,' Omar said.

'I heard already,' Houcein volunteered, 'they say it's the notaire, Madame Saadi... she's giving out that a servant called her just after

sunrise saying they'd discovered The Baroness' body at dawn when the server brought her bed tea... said he saw you leaving about an hour before that. That's what the journals say.'

'Ecoute moi,' Radouan whispered, 'I have someone out there workin' as a gardener. The Baroness, she hired him jus' before I left for Paris. He will know what really happened if we can find him. His name is Mokhtar. Whoever gets out of here first should go and find him... but be careful. The boss out there is an old bastard called A'hmed who he hates me. Maybe he sent Mokhtar away... or maybe the kid had to escape. If he's not there, he could be stayin' at a certain house in the Medina. I will give you the directions. Mokhtar is very important. You must promise to locate him and send him to Prospero; here, I will give you Pero's mobile number.' Radouan wrote out the information and sighed, '*Tal'bsouk al jarima...*' he said, 'some one wants me to wear another person's clothes. I'm being framed but I can't see any motive for Madame Saadi to do this...'

Houcein rolled his eyes and said: 'I've heard she has a cute new boy friend from Fez half her age.'

Omar laughed: 'She's so ugly who would want her?'

'In the cafes they're sayin' he has her completely under his control and expects to marry her soon... maybe he has something to do with all this.'

As the day passed, conditions in the cell worsened. There was no lunch and everyone became hungry and angry. Someone said the soup they received in the morning was all they'd get until evening. Water was limited to short periods before prayers and there was not even room to pray. Radouan worried that Nick might not make it - all those years lying around in the *Riad* had left him weak - and vowed when they got out he would try harder than ever to rehabilitate him.

Friday was visitors' day. Omar waited impatiently for his brother to show up but instead it was Radouan who was called, and

after leaving Nick in Omar's care and pushing his way through the crowded cell to the door, he was conducted to the visitors' room where Prospero and Toni were waiting.

Not sure how long he would be able to speak with them, Radouan immediately passed on the information he had received from Houcein concerning the notaire, Madame Saadi, and asked Prospero to drive out to the Baroness' place and try to find Mokhtar. 'But you must be careful of A'hmed... try to avoid him if you can, but if you have to speak with him, jus' tell him you're my Avocat now and want to ask a few questions and look around... But do not mention Mokhtar's name to him... find a way to ask one of the gardeners where he is. You must try to find out what really happened... won't get a straight story from A'hmed. The most important thing is to find Mokhtar.'

Prospero confirmed that Fouzia had been arrested and was in the women's section of the jail, but neither Radouan's parents nor his other sisters or brothers had been bothered. Himself, he had just left the *Riad* when the police arrived. Lucky because they would have arrested him too and he would have been unable to take the case or do any investigating.

Having taken care of business, Radouan turned to Toni. Her face was an ashen mask and she was ominously quiet. 'I have no idea why this is happening,' he said, 'somebody's tryin' to frame me but I don't know who, or what's the reason...'

'I've tried...' Toni gritted through clenched teeth. 'I have tried everything to get you out of here but I don't seem to be getting anywhere. It's your own fault...'

'Speak louder, I can't hear you,' Radouan said.

'Your thoughtlessness, your selfishness in never calling me from Paris or wherever you really were! If you'd called I could have warned you not to come back here; they kept the whole thing very quiet until they arrested you, but I knew... I could have picked you up and we could have flown to... wherever,' she shrugged her shoulders, 'Now we have this mess to cope with.'

'It wouldn't have worked,' Pero said calmly, 'they've had Interpol on the case since the morning of the murder.'

'They tell me people being held for murder are restricted in ways other prisoners are not,' Toni shouted, '...Isn't there some other place where we can meet privately? I mean the noise level here is staggering.'

‘For that we must write a letter to the Prison Commander,’ Pero replied, ‘He’s the main link here... I’ll take care of it immediately. For a certain consideration they will allow us to meet in some hallway but Radouan would still be cuffed. For more money we could have the room which is usually used for questioning people. They know Toni’s rich so it would be expensive but believe me, at this point it’s the only way. Now I must do some serious detective work. Whoever’s behind this has a purpose, and is motivated...’

‘If they have money they might outbid us, mightn’t they?’ Toni screeched.

‘I want to get him out of here as soon as possible,’ Pero yelled.

‘Don’t worry about me,’ Radouan roared, ‘You know I’m a hard man...’

‘We know that, darling, but we also know something about the conditions here and what happens... what they do to people... Have they tortured you yet?’

‘Not yet, *Hamdou Allah*.’

The police in Marrakech had been waiting years to get Radouan, Pero reflected, it was going to be expensive to change their minds. He was the type of guy they liked to shackle down and work out their grudges on.

‘I was so angry with you but now I see you like this I can’t...’ Toni cried hysterically, ‘I just can’t bear it... your being here... you didn’t murder her, did you?’

‘How can you possibly say something like that to me?’ Radouan moaned with passion ‘What does it mean? Of course I didn’t! I can’t believe you jus’ said that... moreover, did you know she was dyin’ of an incurable disease?’

‘Why no. How terrible!’

‘She was thinkin’ of takin’ strong sleepin’ pills and whisky. I even managed to get some for her.’

‘Darling, you didn’t... you actually got them?’

‘Where are they now?’ Pero asked.

‘In my luggage which the police have confiscated, but no problem... the prescription is in my name... French doctor. Didn’t you know I have trouble sleepin’? You think I’m stupid?’

‘Sometimes you are, my darling... very stupid.’

‘I want to punch you!’ Radouan growled menacingly

‘Well, this is one place you can’t,’ she smiled defiantly and looked around. ‘Thank God... the crowd is thinning and we can stop shouting... What were you saying?’

‘There is one thing you can do for me which is very important. They brought in an old friend of mine... American... taught English to us boys. When he decided to give up his life in America we hid him in a *Riad* belonging to Pero’s family who live in Casa... His name is Nick Brady... then soon after that there was a huge investigation... his wife came here to find him but they never found him... we hid him... crazy thing to do but we enjoyed it... the adventure. That was seven years ago. Two days back... right after they got me they picked him up at the *Riad* with my sister Fouzia... He’s not well... a little crazy, has no papers or passport but he’s very intelligent... you will like him... and in his case your influence would work. His only crime other than bein’ here without a visa is that he knows me... He has kept one number they call the Social Security... write it down... from this number the Embassy in Rabat can get him all the necessary documents for a passport. You think you can do this? Conditions here are killin’ him... I’m sure he could pay you back for any money you had to spend...’

‘*Makayn mouchkil,*’ Toni beamed. ‘I remember him from somewhere years ago... what a strange story... of course... he can stay at my place while I sort out his life... it won’t be a problem...’

‘Thanks, and Fouzia too if you can manage it.’

‘Yes, of course, don’t worry about her,’ Pero replied impatiently, ‘our big problem right now is to find out who is spreading all these stories and photographs of you... in Paris, par exemple... yes... Who could...?’

‘My friend Houcein says it’s Minna’s notaire Madame Saadi. He says that after they arrested me she started releasin’ all this stuff... now all the journals have the story. Why should she be so interested?’

‘I’m sure Madame Saadi is the source,’ Toni said firmly, ‘she’s my notaire too, but considering the money involved the tabloids will eat it up... You forget Minna was a famous social figure for many years and I’m not exactly unknown... **TYCOON’S DAUGHTER MARRIED TO ACCUSED ARAB MURDERER! GERMAN BARONESS LEAVES FORTUNE TO ARAB CASANOVA!** Those are some of the headlines... You know Minna was much richer than she ever let on? I mean her property here is just the tip of an iceberg... houses and properties in Manhattan, London, Paris, Cap Ferrat,

Geneva and Rome... a controlling interest in one of the world's largest food corporations... huge holdings in other multi-nationals as well. All that is supposed to be yours now, my darling! Worth fighting for don't you think?' She studied him and smiled encouragingly.

Radouan yawned and frowned, 'You think so?'

Toni sighed 'I wonder if Minna really knew how rich she was? I'm sure you understand how much jealousy and hatred this is going to cause... I mean the heads of all those corporations have a real interest in seeing you dead... let's hope they don't reach the authorities here before we do. But your friend Houcein is right: the only person who could know all these details is Madame Saadi. We know she filed the complaint against you so she must be giving out all this information as well...'

Pero turned to her and said. 'The latest Saadi has given out is that this person called Youssef, the guy from Fez that Houcein mentioned, had written the Baroness a letter, filled with details, explaining that he was her long lost son... making his claim seem very real. Saadi has said because Radouan often helped the Baroness with her correspondence, he was in a position to intercept Youssef's letter and destroy it, then murder the Baroness before she could change her Testament in Youssef's favor.'

'Long lost son,' Toni cried, 'What are you talking about? What long lost son?'

Radouan looked surprised. 'She never told you about the child she'd had?'

'No never... I can't believe...'

'Yes, here in Marrakech many years ago,' Pero explained, 'The father was a *Cherif* from Fez... one of the few Fassis who was close to Pasha Glaoui... part of his inner circle like her father, the Baron. She was this Fassi's secret lover from the age of eighteen, until she was thirty-four when she had his child - a boy. But when it was six weeks old, one night it disappeared along with its nurse. Her father the Baron Von Schleebruck pretended to make an investigation, but actually paid the authorities not to investigate. When she found out, Baroness Minna was heartbroken. Then when she met Radouan whose birthday was exactly the same day as her lost son's... that's when their relationship began.'

Radouan held his hand over his heart, 'I swear, not until yesterday when Houcein told me, had I ever heard of this Youssef. Believe me there was no letter from him... or if there was I didn't see

it... even if I had, you know me, would I care whether I got money from her? Yes, of course, now because she has left it to me I'm interested and because she made me promise to take care of *Dar Chems*... but if this guy is real... Don't worry. I wasn't at her house that morning... I left about eleven thirty the night before and was home here in Marrakech an hour later, remember?'

In fact, Toni could not remember and was trying hard to conceal how isolated and helpless she felt. On the one hand, she adored Radouan for his good qualities, on the other there was this depressing dark side, really very dark indeed, infused as it was with so much hypocrisy and a thirst for bloody revenge. Furious with him for getting himself in such a jam, she wondered what could really have happened at Minna's that awful morning - would she ever know? Would anyone? Poor Minna, so well intentioned so divine, what a mess she'd left behind!

As the fateful cries of the Muezzins echoed through the city saluting the dying day and the sun slid past the last small window of the reception hall, Toni and Pero departed and Radouan was returned to his crowded cell.

For the first time in their long relationship he began to understand that perhaps Toni was more together than he'd thought. Most women he knew would have proven hopeless in such a situation, and though she seemed to enjoy the publicity a little too much, he could see now she was going to help him. Thanks God they were married, now he could count on her to pull him through. Or was it because he might soon be very rich that she was in such a forgiving mood?

As Radouan was settling down for another long night with Nick, Francesco Monte, far away in Rome, exultant over the turn of events, was showing Delphine the latest headlines in the London and Paris papers. 'ARAB TERRORIST ACCUSED OF MURDER MAY INHERIT VAST WEALTH' 'TONI HOWARD'S NEW ARAB HUSBAND JAILED FOR MURDER' 'ARAB TOYBOY JAILED IN BARONESS VON SCHLEEBRUCK MURDER.'

Her eyes nervously trying to focus, Delphine avidly perused each journal, which Francesco handed her. There were photos of Toni and her ex-husband Rupert, with Radouan dressed for polo, his arms around them both and the caption, 'HAPPIER DAYS'.

'Alors, and no mention of me!' she cried shaking her head in disbelief as she stared at the photographs. 'Not a word,' and glanced coldly at Francesco her brown eyes boring into him, 'tell me, am I married to him or was that some kind of faux ceremony we went through?'

They were standing together in the vast foyer of Francesco's palatial apartment off the Via Veneto where he had been exploring Delphine's latent but formidable dramatic talents. Long hours before the cameras, in a series of close encounters with some of Europe's most attractive men, had left her feeling drained and close to madness.

'What's the story?' she would shout from the set, frantically waving her arms. 'What am I supposed to be doing?' And would receive no reply from the great director except an occasional grimace or a smile and a few lines thrown at her; or he would tell her that everything would be revealed in due course, that every great film had a life of its own, etc, etc.

Late nights and long days had worn her down and now this sudden news of Radouan was pushing her beyond her limit.

Up and down a circular staircase, deeply carpeted in imperial purple, she swept, reading aloud from the journals, gesticulating, unable to CHILL OUT; while below in the black and white tiled foyer with its ancient Roman sculptures and other objets d'art, Francesco watched.

Was she upset because Radouan was in trouble, he wondered, or because her husband had suddenly become so famous? No matter, the news was having its effect. Gone was the school masters daughter, the intellectual Delphine; gone the psychology student, uptight hooker and skilled Vogue model. Enter the passionate woman, raw with emotion, Delphine, Queen of Hearts, frantically ascending and descending the staircase, her loins quivering with jealousy, her angry buttocks undulating beneath the fabric of her clinging skirt, as she finally collapsed at the foot of the stairs.

'Ora e vulnerabile finalmente', Francesco muttered, 'Now someone, some particularly ugly man, sensual but ugly, perhaps your husband, whom you hate, must approach you and...'

Furious, Delphine pulled herself together and staggered toward him. Throwing the newspapers at his feet, she picked up a heavy gold box from a table and hurled it at a priceless Venetian chandelier which fell to the floor in a thousand pieces. Another gold box penetrated a view of Venice by Canaletto and a large Faberge egg seriously dented a masterpiece by Veronese.

As she collapsed on a nearby sofa, Francesco clapped his hands enthusiastically. By this marvelous anger welling up from beneath the various disguises she had worn, the veils of her psyche had finally been rent - or had she learned all these wrathful gestures from watching too much television - whatever. He was impressed and very pleased. Perhaps he might imagine her as a young dominatrix, the Goddess Amazonia, hiding beneath an haute bourgeois exterior, her husband a handsome saturnine ape. What do they do? Perhaps she pimps him among her girl friends bored by husbands too busy and tired to make love... A wicked young woman, yet very amusing, she thrived on controlling men.

Delphine was weeping now, holding her head in her hands and staring into space. Although she'd been too busy to think much about him since he'd left, this sudden revelation that Radouan was in trouble, and the thought that she might be sharing him with another woman, was causing her acute physical pain. Her beautiful man, her 'Paradise'. He belonged to her! It was too much!

Then the hall came into focus and staring at the shards of the chandelier that littered the floor she sighed and closed her eyes. What was happening to her? Never in her life had she lost it like this - and Francesco there quietly applauding. How she hated him!

'I must fly to Marrakech as soon as possible,' she sobbed, 'hand me the phone please, or you... you call your travel agent and have him get me on a plane tomorrow morning. Tell me... how is it possible for him to be married to this... this English woman and to me also? It's not possible! I...'

'My dear young woman have you forgotten? He's a *Musulman*.' Francesco chuckled. 'I'm afraid you'll juss have to prepare yourself... he may take up to four wives. And, of course, by marrying you he has secured a claim on your earnings, not that he would ever exercise it of course, but I'm afraid you'll just have to live with it unless you want to divorce him. I'm sure Toni Howard will be just as surprised as you!'

'And who is this Baroness Von Schlee...whatever her name is?'

'Minna?' Francesco sighed. Well she's... was... many things: a famous international personality, before your time, like Hutton or Duke, but smarter, more beautiful, and as it turns out far richer... For many years she was the Queen of international chic, undisputed doyenne of Marrakech... the first to befriend Radouan when he was very young, about fourteen I should say, and they've been lovers and friends all these years... absolutely impossible that he could have murdered her!' Francesco's eyes glittered. 'Believe me, he'll be far richer than any of us could ever dream of being, my dear... you might want to think about that before you quarrel with him. Of course, there must be many others who have their eyes set on that hoard and will try to see that he goes to jail for good... dies in prison... something like that!'

Francesco struck his forehead, 'Dio mio! Assolutamente!' and called his secretary to book two seats for Marrakech the next day and have the Mamounia prepare his cottage and arrange a suite in the hotel for Delphine. Then he lifted her into his arms and whispered, 'For the first time, just now, my darling, you really let go. If you can remember how that felt and do it again and again in front of cameras, you'll have the world at your feet. Yes! And don't worry... we'll tell them of your marriage to Radouan, but only at the proper moment. Marvelous publicity! But pas encore, my dear, pas encore.'

'If he doesn't kill you first...'

'Who?'

'Radouan, because of you and me.'

'No problemo,' Francesco murmured grimly, 'he's locked up!'

In Marrakech two days had passed before word came through that Nicholas K. Brady III would be released. By then claustrophobia, induced by close confinement, had weakened his fragile hold on reality and he was incoherent.

Wondering as ever whether he was really getting through to him, and trying to sound optimistic, Radouan had given him a pep talk. Told him Toni had volunteered to take care of him and have him stay at her place until things settled down and he was able to be out and about again. Meanwhile, as soon as he had proper papers, and felt better Radouan had suggested he should hire a crew and resume his project of repairing Prospero's *Riad* and the *Douirya* house.

'Soon I will marry Hafida,' Radouan said brightly, 'really you will like her, I know... not beautiful but her face is sensitive... like the face of Umm Kalthoum before she became famous... You will live with us out at Minna's *Ksar, Dar Chems*; believe me its big enough for all of us. Toni will be in her own place just down the road. But we must fix up the *Riad* to stay in when we are in town.'

Nick had gazed at him solemnly for some time and then whispered with a hoarse voice: 'who's crazy, you or me?'

Late that afternoon a guard had come and taken Nick away. Houcein and Omar had been released earlier and now Radouan found himself alone - with forty guys he'd never seen before, a new experience for him as friends and relatives had always surrounded him. Retiring into a corner he tried to sleep but his mind was restless and kept going over the events of the past few weeks trying to make some sense of them. As he had always avoided thinking too deeply about himself or analyzing his behavior, it was a painful experience.

After all, everything a person needed to know for living this life was supposed to be found in the Qur'an and the Hadith. You hadn't to look inside yourself to find the truth; in fact it might be a sin - or would it? He had read Lacan, Freud, Roland Barthes, Derrida, Foucault and others but thought they missed the point because he'd seen too many hysterical people healed by *Marabouts* - adepts who knew how to exorcise bad *djinns*. Sometimes there were bad *djinns* and sometimes there were lucky ones. Once he met an Egyptian who lost all his money and became crazy; began speaking in the Persian tongue, a language he did not know. Finally his family called a *Marabout* who understood Persian, listened to the voice coming out of the man's throat and told him the *Djinn* was trying to help him and he must learn Persian and follow what the *Djinn* was saying. This they did and soon became very rich.

Radouan believed in *djinns*, not the unconscious, the subconscious, the id, the libido, the ego or the super ego. Life was

more blurred than that, more complicated but also very simple. Maybe it was true as Nick and others had said that he, himself, was harboring a *djinn*. Maybe even two or three of them were there lurking inside his body challenging and provoking him, bursting out violently and getting him into trouble. Since that last scene with Delphine in Paris, he had started thinking of these things more openly.

Several days passed and he was beginning to lose track of time when, one day, they called him to the Court of Appeals before the Public Prosecutor, and a Judge and told him the evidence against him was so strong he would not be released. The Public Prosecutor told the court the Baroness' trusted servant A'hmed had sworn he had seen Radouan leaving the house at dawn and just after that the lifeless body of the Baroness had been discovered by the server Zouheir who had sworn he had served supper to the Baroness and Radouan at eleven o'clock, not eight or nine as Radouan claimed, and that no one at the gate had seen Radouan leave before the first light of day. The Prosecutor went on about Radouan's fingerprints being all over the place. And as for his wife's testimony that he had returned to her flat around eleven thirty that night, this could not be corroborated, for neither the guardian nor the concierge of the apartment building could remember him arriving back that evening. It would have been an easy matter, the Prosecutor claimed, for Radouan to have driven straight to the airport and caught the first flight to Paris. In fact, it was probably part of his plan. After all, his car had been found at the airport parking lot a few days later.

Prospero had not been informed of the hearings until the last moment, and had no time to prepare a rebuttal. His arguments were weak. Yes, the server Zouheir could have served supper to Radouan and the Baroness, but the hour was definitely eight thirty or nine, not eleven. And why should the Prosecutor or the court believe a servant's testimony over Radouan's when every one knew servants could be paid off to say anything. Moreover, Radouan had always driven his car to the airport and left it there when he was traveling out of Marrakech.

The attitude of the men from the Public Prosecutor's Office was arrogant and threatening. Had he not been married to Toni, Prospero was certain they would have soon resorted to "questioning" Radouan until he signed some fake confession - when they started to pull out your toe nails you would sign anything. Even so, there was no

guarantee they would not do it. But where were the witnesses who could refute A'hmed's testimony?

Finally the *Cadi* spoke: 'Since the defense cannot at this time, furnish evidence contrary to that given by the servant A'hmed, and the server Zouheir, this case is to be continued for three more weeks pending further investigation.' Meanwhile, Radouan would remain in *Boulmaraz*.

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Several days later, it seemed months to Radouan, he was taken to a private room where he found Francesco waiting. As there were two guards present they embraced formally and spoke in Italian. 'Mi amico,' Francesco blurted, 'como vie? You can not imagine what I had to go through juss now to get in here... ayee! You would think I murdered her!'

'That's not so funny,' Radouan said severely, 'What are you doing here? I thought you were ready to start shooting... where's Delphine?'

Francesco sighed and waved his hands helplessly. 'She's waiting out in the front office trying to negotiate with them to let her come in here... they are giving her a hard time... don't believe she's married to you. Naturally, she wants to see you... all the headlines in the tabloids you know, and insisted we come down here. Your picture is all over the place... you look great... fantastic... Have you any idea how much that woman left you?'

'Nothing, except what's in the journals...'

'Ah, so you've seen them...'

'Toni was here with my old friend, Prospero who is now my Avocat. They spoke of some properties and shares in big companies - plus cash.'

'Mi amico, let me tell you,' Francesco smiled obsequiously, 'you are going to be un tres riche homme... much richer than your Antonia Howard.'

Radouan smiled sadly, 'If I ever live to see it! This is a place of death... I may be her heir but there are many people who would like to see me... like to see the end of me... including you probably.'

'You know that's nonsense, *habibi*... but is it really true? I mean what the journals are saying... that you married Antonia Howard?'

Radouan looked surprised, 'Of course... what do you think? She's wanted to marry me for many years now. When I came back from bein' in Ouarzazate with you she started up again about why had she divorced Rupert if we weren't gonna get married... etc... So I said okay let's do it and we flew up to London in her Gulf Stream and did it... got married in some government office. I'm hoping that we'll soon be married properly here in Marrakech... *Inch Allah*.'

'But my friend, what about Delphine?' Francesco drawled.

'What about her? Of course I love her too... too much... I'm her slave.' Radouan stared coolly at Francesco, 'I hope you haven't been foolin' around with her. When I look at you something tells me maybe you have.' Then he placed his hand over his heart and said: 'Jus' remember if I ever catch you... if I ever find out you've fucked her I swear I will kill you, or arrange for you to be killed... so watch out! Now they're callin' me a murderer, maybe I'll have to live up to my reputation.'

Francesco laughed and waved his hand, as if warding off the evil eye... 'Drama, drama, drama... always drama, *habibi*... I love it! But seriously, mi amico, what Delphine can't understand is how you could have married her when you are already married to Antonia?'

A furious light flashed behind Radouan's eyes, 'Look, my friend, it's very simple... I am a *Musulman*. I can have four wives if I choose, and as many concubines as I can handle...'

'Thass what I told her, but could you handle four wives?'

'Of course,' Radouan replied solemnly, 'what do you think? Really I would like eight; one for every day of the week and a spare in case one of them is sick or has her period. Before I was arrested I was planning to marry another one my mother has picked out, a R'hamna girl. She, I have to marry because my mother has chosen her... but she can't read or write and she isn't beautiful... maybe she will become beautiful... that's what Minna said... that's one of the reasons I had to leave Paris because I have to marry this girl... very simple. But now, *Inch Allah*... how can I?'

‘Iss not as simple as you think,’ Francesco shrugged, ‘sounds very complex... this girl your mother has chosen... won’t she object to you having two other wives?’

Radouan’s eyebrows shot up, his brow wrinkled. ‘How can she object... why would she? She’s very lucky to get me. Her father is a poor man. She has many unmarried sisters. He’s lucky to find a husband for her... especially someone *zween* and smart like me... And she wants me, I can tell!’

‘Then who will be wife number one...?’

‘The one who has the first male child, of course...’

In the office of the jail, as soon as Francesco had been taken in to see Radouan, Delphine had made her move. Furious that he had been permitted to see Radouan and she had not, she sat behind a magazine discretely observing the scene: crossing and uncrossing her sumptuous legs, revealing to the assembled officers and staff from time to time a glimpse of Paradise. After all she was from Arles and knew how to get what she wanted from guys like these. How to come on to them, excite them by violating their taboos, stare at them mercilessly from their eyes to their belts and back again, look hungry, pout, and wet her lips.

Finally she decided the handsome one they called Le Chef was in charge, focused on him and a few minutes later had sauntered over to his desk and, knowing full well it was beneath his dignity to do so, had asked him politely if he could get her a Coca-Cola.

Slowly taking in her body with his eyes, a twisted smile forming on his lips, Le Chef sent off an underling to get the Coke, opened the gate in a low wooden barrier which surrounded his desk and invited her to sit down. Though he was polite enough and kept his hands firmly planted on his desk, she knew he was aching to reach out and grab her, do something violent, something punishing. Explaining that she was an actress working with the great director Francesco Monte who was just now talking with her husband Radouan, she begged to be allowed to join them.

Masking his confusion Le Chef snickered ‘How can I be expected to keep up with the sex life of Radouan,’ he asked cynically, ‘the Marrakech police know of only one wife of Radouan, the English woman. Anyway, you don’t look like a wife,’ he smirked, observing

her carefully, 'maybe you are just some prostitute this famous director has hired... have I seen you in any film?' Delphine tried to explain her status as a star in the making, but Le Chef's brain had traveled elsewhere and he seemed to be having trouble concentrating.

The moment to strike had arrived. Delphine shook her shoulders and laughed. 'Perhaps it would be possible, for you to accompany me to the room where my husband is being kept. Is it far? It's really important that I be there as they are discussing business matters that concern me.'

He stared at her meaningfully. She returned his gaze and pouted as he looked around the room and calculated who would see him leave with her. The Coke arrived and the assistant was dispatched on an errand. Finally satisfied that any damage would be limited, that in fact, leaving the room with her could actually advance his standing with his staff, Le Chef signaled her to get up and follow him.

And as she had more or less expected, halfway down a long dimly lit hallway he had stopped, opened a door and pushed her into a small hole in the floor toilet, redolent with the odors of underground Marrakech. Moments later he had one of his huge hands up under her skirt. Considering his behavior, she was surprised by the gentleness of his touch. With his free hand he guided hers to his erection which she so skillfully manipulated that within two minutes of entering the place he had ejaculated forcefully against the wall. A moment later, however, the sight of his own sperm seemed to make him ill and he was vomiting; then just as quickly he composed himself and minutes later they were standing before a door at the end of the hall and he was asking her for money.

She restrained herself from slapping him in the face and palmed a wad of dirhams into his waiting hand. He knocked softly at the door and a guard let them in. It was obvious to her she had just stepped into an interrogation chamber. Ominous looking chairs, strange tables, impressive hardware and white tile floors like a *salle de bain* with a drain in the middle - for bodily fluids she supposed. A guard saluted them and gestured toward Radouan and Francesco seated across a table from each other under a bare light bulb.

A few moments went by before they were aware that she and her escort had entered the room.

'*Habibti*, you made it,' Radouan cried, 'come here.'

'I think you're horrible,' Delphine said quietly in English knowing the guards and the Prison Chief would not understand.

Radouan's forehead creased in distress. '*Habibti*, what are you sayin' you're upset... come here.'

'Just now you told Francesco about your wives, the one to have the first male child would be wife number one... just now as we came in, I heard you say it...'

'Yes, of course... why not? It's perfectly normal.'

Delphine stared at him coldly. 'You know I don't want children now...'

'I'm not askin' you to have any...'

'It's you who involved me in this film business, God damn it. Now I'm in it, I'm not going to make any mistakes; like having kids ... OR BY BEING WIFE NUMBER TWO!'

Radouan pounded his head with his fist. 'Ayee! No one is number one or any other number. That's Francesco who has mentioned this, not me. You will always be THE number one to me, *habibti*... number one in love, you know that...'

'Mmmm...' Delphine pouted her brown eyes searching his. 'You say that so easily because you don't mean it. I suppose your Antonia Howard is number one in bank notes! For you women are just, I don't know... really some times I think you'd be better off with one of those life sized rubber sex dolls... You want to keep us down; that's why your whole fucking culture is down!'

'I've explained to you many times we don't keep our women down,' Radouan replied angrily, 'we protect them...'

'Bullshit.' Delphine whispered fiercely, recalling the emotions of Francesco's staircase. 'Listen to me. If it comes out in the columns that I came after your Antonia, what do you think people will say? I will be labeled The Number Two Girl! STARS can never be number two...'

Radouan was amazed... 'So be number one,' he said calmly shrugging his shoulders, 'be any number you want!'

'You said the one who had...'

Radouan raised his cuffed hands and rattled the chains at her. 'You will...you will have children with me some day I swear it. Before we are finished you will have two or three of them, you will see... jus' talkin' to you gets me excited, I would like to make it with you right now on this table, but how can I?' He dropped his head in both hands and looked down at the table. 'Maybe we shouldn't see each other

again 'till I get outta here,' he mumbled, 'it upsets me too much... Listen... You know we have somethin' between us that's very special... absolutely unique. When I get outta here...'

'When do you think that will be?' Delphine asked wryly.

'Within three weeks, a month at most. Either I'll be out, or I'll be in forever and probably they will kill me... but I didn't do it, I didn't murder her so... *inch Allah*, I'll be out. Many persons want my skin because of what the Baroness has left me. They smell a feast... every one wants his portion. Vultures are hoverin'. It's going to be very expensive!'

'You already have some of your Baroness's money then?'

'Not yet but Toni... she will loan me enough until I can repay her...'

'Your Toni, does she know about me?'

'Not yet but she will... I will tell her very soon...'

'Will she care?'

'Care?' Radouan repeated thoughtfully, 'Toni and me... you see we are old friends... we go back almost twenty years, through many scenes and scandals, many tender moments too... so we have a mature friendship which can't be shaken. With you and me, everything is new and exciting... two different kinds of love. Believe me, Toni understands these things... she will understand you and she will like you too, I'm sure...'

'When will you tell her...?'

'Soon...'

Delphine narrowed her eyes and studied him. 'That's not good enough... I know what your "soon" means... It means maybe, some day, or never. You... you're the Sultan of Procrastination...'

'No, *'bibti*,' he laughed, 'KING OF ZAHF. I'm the King of *Zahf*. Jus' look down and see what you're doing to me inside these fuckin' filthy pants...' Suddenly Radouan became aware of her escort standing in the shadows. 'Who is that animal you came in here with?' he growled.

'*Le Chef* of something... this prison I suppose, that's what they seem to call him out there...'

'He's not any *Le Chef*. I know who the *Directeur* is here...it's not him, he's a chauffeur. What did you do for him that he brought you here...'

'Nothing. I gave him some money...'

Radouan sniffed the air, 'You're lyin' at me. I can smell it... that you've just had sex. If I wasn't wearin' these chains and cuffs I'd knock you. YES, but I can't do it so I might as well be happy to see you, *zweenti*, very happy...' he intoned sarcastically, 'So make your lips like you're kissin' me and I'll remember them tonight while I'm jerkin' off.'

Delphine was furious. Was she the only one that knew how really crazy he was? What kind of scary games was he playing with her head that she should suddenly start seeing him as a phantom - there but not there? 'I think I'd better go now,' she said, getting up, 'are you finished talking with Francesco?'

Radouan's eyes glittered angrily. 'No, I'm not. What do you think? Fuck you! GO! I mus' speak more with Francesco. Go wait outside with your chauffeur.'

She spun around and headed for the door Le Chauffeur had already opened for her.

'Sei un attore incredibile... in questo momento... un genio della mimica... molto buffo,' Francesco said after they were gone, and rolled his eyes.

'And the genius of *Zahp*,' Radouan growled angrily, 'but I'm gonna be outta here very soon... maybe escape. So watch it! If I find out you've made it with her jus' remember what I said... it will be very painful for you *habibi*... you will suffer horribly... die very slowly like a boiled langouste.'

'Ammettilo! You did murder Minna Von Schleebruck!'

'Are you crazy? Why? Jus' tell me, please sir, why I would do that?'

'Per la sua fortuna...'

'But I didn't know about her fortune...'

'Non ti credo, Francesco smirked doubtfully, 'I'm sure you knew about it. You forget I knew her very well... and I know you! She would have told you about being her heir... her last great scene. And you killed her because someone else appeared to claim it. In fact I have something like that in one of my films...'

'Catch, Catch All,' Radouan grinned.

'Si...you know it then, where the...'

'Of course I know it. I know all your films, what do you think? I'm one of your greatest fans; not only of your films but also for the quality of your ass... *habibi*, tighter than any *tina*. But if you fuck

Delphine, I swear I will say I've been fuckin' you for years and it will finish you.'

Francesco laughed loudly, 'Al contrario, it would only add to the mystique, which already surrounds me, *habibi*. Let me speak plainly: non mi spaventi. Non ho paura di te - and despite your savagery and thirst for revenge, ti voglio bene 'babe' veramente!'

'You should,' Radouan responded sternly.

Francesco rose. 'I must go before that guy rapes our budding star,' he smiled sadly, 'what can I do for you here?'

Radouan gazed at him thoughtfully, 'What can anyone do? Jus' keep away from HER... there's nothin' else to be done... what will happen will happen; it's in Gods hands now. Take her back to Rome and finish your film. If she speaks about divorcing' me, remind her how rich I'm gonna be. I'll buy her a villa in the Bois de Boulogne. She loves MONEY... all great whores they love money - ME TOO.'

## 53

Radouan was returned to his cell edgy and nervous, aroused by seeing Delphine and profoundly depressed by what was happening to him. As the men in the cell settled down for the night someone provoked him, he jumped on the offender, dragged him to the floor and knocked him unconscious. A free-for-all developed. He pummeled two more men and challenged everyone in the cell. The disturbance roused the guards who soon came to get him. It took six of them to finally restrain him and carry him to an isolation cell, not quite high enough to stand up in, a hole for pissing and shitting, a liter of water a day for drinking and washing, and one piece of bread every twenty four hours. At night a thin mattress would be provided, which would be taken away at dawn, but he would have to pay to have the light turned off.'

He berated himself for losing it. What became of CHILL OUT? Delphine, of course, and how much she had changed. And that fuck Francesco.

Alone now with no witnesses, he realized he could easily be tortured or killed - anything could happen. But would they kill him as long as they believed there was money to be made by keeping him alive? Or would someone be offering more money than he could - some outsider like this Youssef from Fez for example, or the people controlling Madame Saadi, the ones who had persuaded her to file a complaint against him. On the other hand, the police were all Marrakchis and he was a Marrakchi. Would they ever trust outsiders to give them what they wanted? No. He knew exactly how their minds worked: didn't give a fuck whether he had murdered some foreigner or not, only the MONEY!

The days passed slowly and he scratched marks on the wall of his cell as others had done to mark their passage and felt himself going down physically; down, down, down, from lack of exercise and too much time to think. At night as he lay crouched in the foetal position, unable to sleep, only to feel unbearable remorse, he reflected bleakly, that for the past twenty years he'd been on a roll which might now be ending. A year ago he'd felt it coming. Now it was here. Or was it? Even reviewing the great moments of his life, moments of love and triumph, he could not combat the mindless torpor that had descended upon him; invaded him like a painful alien force.

In these desperate straits, however, a new feeling began to shape itself inside him, the only thing that seemed to make sense: considering man's fate, his fragile position in this world, was *RAHMA* compassion. Delphine had been right when she'd said he had the Passion but no Compassion - or was it Nick or Toni who'd said that? And that true love was both of these.

'Concentrate on that and you will come through,' spoke a voice from deep inside him - a new voice, a voice from the world behind the world, a voice of contentment and tranquillity.

Then a day arrived when he was taken out, permitted to shower, given new underwear and a tracksuit and taken to the interrogation room again where he was sure they were going to start "questioning" him.

But no, finally the door opened and there was the Chauffeur politely ushering in Toni - and Pero complaining in English how much the visit was costing them per minute.

'Pay, pay, pay,' chanted Radouan, forcing a smile, speaking rapidly in English. 'You must know one thing... they've put me in solitary confinement and now they have me there alone sans witnesses, they could do anything. If we stop payin', they'll start "questioning" me... I know it...'

Toni smiled wryly, 'Don't worry; we'll spend whatever is necessary. When we leave I will speak to Le Chef about getting you better accommodations. But we have some very interesting news...'

Pero interrupted her: 'There's a chance we may be able to get a psychologist from the University to say you're psychotic and should be transferred to the Psychiatric Facility... I believe it's better than this place.'

'Is that your news?'

'Not at all, my darling,' Toni lowered her voice, 'something else, something really important. Through his friends and through Omar's brother Mahjoub, the police informer, Prospero has learned that there is gossip in Fez that Madame Saadi's boy friend Youssef is not Minna's son after all, but the son of a servant girl. That he was educated by his Patron, Minna's former lover, and perhaps even adopted by him... it's all too confusing but hopeful.'

'Omar's brother has also learned,' Pero continued, 'that well before this Youssef met Madame Saadi, he'd been in Marrakech asking questions about the Baroness, prying into her affairs, perhaps even meeting with her. Of course he's claiming that he's her long lost son. He's been saying this for months to anyone who would listen to him. Saadi must have shown him the Baroness' Testament in your favor...'

This seemed to confirm everything Radouan had thought all along. Hadn't he told Minna her child was probably abducted by its father and passed off as the nurse's son? Could this Youssef really be Minna's son? But Minna had met him and thought he was a fake; she'd said so that morning he landed up at her place smelling of onions.

'Did you know Minna left you everything, my darling? I reckon this Youssef might have timed Minna's murder to make it look like you'd done it; then announce to the world that he had come to claim his inheritance... I mean it's possible...'

‘Yes, I did know she was going to leave everything to me,’ Radouan replied, ‘but only the next to last time I saw her... the morning I came back from Ouarzazate. She was worried people would try to take Dar Chems away from me... made me promise to fight for it... gave me copies of her Testament and other papers. I’ve never looked at them. They’re in a leather case at Toni’s, thanks God they weren’t in my luggage.’

‘How many people other than Saadi might know that Minna had designated you as her heir?’

‘From my side no one. From Minna’s side I don’t know.’

‘Many I fear,’ Toni sighed. ‘With so much at stake... well let’s be realistic... were going to have to buy them off.’

Radouan looked perplexed, ‘But we discussed her family many times... she would speak on and on about how all her relatives were dead.’

‘Well, I think that’s true. That Plot to kill Hitler... her relatives were deeply involved... all of them executed. But the Chairmen and Boards of Directors of some of the companies you are due to inherit must be very angry that control may pass into the hands of a young Arab accused of murdering her. I think they will try to prevent it. And this Youssef, I guess I’ve seen Saadi with him several times... something about him looks wrong.’

‘Why do you think that?’ Radouan asked.

‘Just a feeling... Saadi is very smart and known for being honest; I think this Youssef may have swept her off her feet...’

‘What?’

Toni sighed. ‘Oh dear, another cliché, it means caused her to become carelessly obsessed with him... but, my darling, you must never admit to having known about the papers Minna gave you... and I better hide them somewhere safe in case the police decide to search my place...’

‘Did she sign your copies?’ Pero asked.

‘Yes, they were signed and recorded here in the Municipality... that much I saw when I glanced at them... but there must be other copies... maybe with her solicitor in Geneva. She used to have me sort her mail... never to open it... but there were often letters from Switzerland from a Monsieur... in Geneva... can’t remember his name. Saadi must know there are other copies, otherwise she would have destroyed the one she has.’

‘Toni’s right,’ Pero agreed, ‘You must never admit to knowing about these documents, at least for the moment, it would make our case much more difficult.’

‘You think I’m crazy! The police at the airport already asked me if I knew she was gonna make me her heir. I would never tell that. But you must know one other thing... she promised me she would not try to take her life until I returned. I wanted to take her to see a certain *Marabout* at Sidi Zween... What does it all mean?’

‘It means she may have spoken about it to others,’ Toni replied, ‘as you say, perhaps A’hmed... I’m sure he’d do anything she asked...’

‘In which case Madame Saadi and this Youssef are just taking advantage of a great situation,’ Pero reasoned. ‘Some one takes up her bed tea and smothers her, then old A’hmed calls Madame Saadi and says he saw Radouan leaving the *Ksar* at dawn. As you are the beneficiary of her Testament, common sense would suggest that if you knew Youssef was in town claiming to be her rightful heir you might have murdered her. Someone was waiting for the right time... someone who was paid to murder her... Who is this server who is supposed to have discovered her body when he brought her bed tea?’

Radouan feigned surprise. ‘A’hmed did not discover her body?’

‘No.’

‘There was a new server there; I think his name was Zouheir.’

Toni recalled Radouan claimed he was back in Marrakech by eleven thirty that night... she had even corroborated it with the Public Prosecutor. She gazed at him, at his sphinx-like mask and lowered her voice to a whisper. ‘I covered for you when the police asked me if you were with me that night. Where were you?’

‘I was with you... you jus’ don’t remember.’

‘You were not!’

‘Then don’t ask!’

Pero observed that it should not be hard to find out whether one of the servants was paid a large sum of money... servants were a jealous lot and liked to gossip. ‘And by the way,’ he said, ‘we haven’t been able to locate the orphan you brought out there to work for the Baroness... seems he disappeared when the police arrived.’

Radouan looked worried. 'Mokhtar? You must keep lookin' for him! Go to the place I told you about in the Medina... I'm sure you will find him there. It's very important.'

'I will also send someone to look and ask around in the villages near the Baroness' *Ksar*,' Pero added, 'meanwhile I've decided to drive to Fez and investigate things myself. Lady Antonia would like to go with me but I told her she should stay in Marrakech so she can deal with anything that comes. Also her appearance in Fez would arouse too much suspicion. Me, no one will pay any attention to... I'll be invisible.' He made his excuses and left Toni and Radouan alone with Le Chef and two guards.

Radouan studied her for a long time. 'I have to tell you... it's very important,' he said at last contritely, 'I swear it doesn't change anything between us... really. I mean ...well ...I've married this French girl, Delphine. I met her here the last time you were away in England, remember? You were gettin' your divorce or somethin'....'

Toni narrowed her eyes and felt her jaws locking in anger. She wanted to scream but she couldn't. 'Of course I remember! You... you make me sound like an idiot! I certainly remember my own divorce but... MARRIED? What girl? How could you?'

'Please, *habibti*, be tender, and don't provoke me now ...'I can't sleep here... I feel bad enough already, very bad... sometimes you don't remember things, okay? It's about her, Delphine, I've been doin' all this film business with Francesco. Through me he became interested in her. Right now he's shootin' a film which will make her a huge star. I did the deal for her with Francesco; six million dollars for starters and I didn't take a centime... no commission but I don't trust her to give me anything either so I had to marry her.'

Toni threw her head back and eyed him balefully. '*Habibi*, stop it... just stop! You can't really expect me to believe you married someone for purely financial reasons...'

'Of course not. She's very special... physically attractive and intelligent too but she drives me crazy - we fight a lot but you will like her.'

'Well I'm not sure of that at all! Why should I like her? I find most French women very difficult. Exactly when and where were you married...?'

'Last week at a village near Rome - Francesco's native place. You remember I went to do business in Paris...'

She nodded dismally. 'Now I understand why you didn't want me along.'

'No No, No, *Habibti*. What I said about doin' the deal on my own was completely true. But yes, it's also true that SHE was the business... I had to finish the deal and supervise her. It takes too long to get married in France so we flew to Rome. Francesco will be shootin' his film in Rome and Sicily so it saved time. He arranged the wedding... it was... very... we all got drunk... in fact I'm wonderin' if we really got married at all. Or is this one of his tricks.'

Toni laughed, 'Perhaps you aren't. I thought Italy had a waiting time just like France.'

'I don't think so. Anyway we signed some papers before the Mayor of the town. Then Francesco flew off to Sicily to scout locations and Delphine and I flew back to Paris where I was gonna help her move into her new apartment and then return here. But the next day when I went out to buy my journals I found some film magazines with photos of her. She was half-naked... more than half... I became very angry and lost it. We had a huge fight and I left. Really, Europe is not the place for me; I can never belong to those countries... my place is here in Marrakech and I know it.' He sighed. 'You can leave me here in this jail to die if you want to... maybe I deserve it. Maybe you will. If you don't think you can share me I wouldn't blame you, but it wouldn't make any difference in the way I feel about you.'

For Toni, the expression of remorse that flooded his naturally arrogant face at times like this, had always proved irresistible; eyes rolling upwards like a crazed El Greco saint when he wanted something badly enough or was reaching for the impossible. But this time she was furious. His movie deal would never have been done without her friend Martin Segal. And what must marriage mean to him when literally hours after their own marriage he dashed off to Paris to meet this bitch? Perhaps a few weeks in jail would straighten him out, she thought. But no! As she gazed at him and sighed, to be truthful, even if they had not been married, she would have fought to get him out of this place! Moreover, she was certain she could easily compete with any other woman he became involved with.

'*Habibi*, you'd better watch out,' she said steadily, 'I'm going to do whatever I can to get you out of here... you know that... but I'm going to be a very jealous wife and a tricky one too.'

'There is one thing more I have to tell you...'

‘Yes.’ She glanced at him suspiciously.

‘A young country girl my mother has picked out... I have to marry her too...’

‘Ah!’ Toni groaned, ‘you’re too much! You keep trying to drive me mad by telling me I’m crazy, when it’s you who are... yes, you are! It’s just lucky I spent so much time in India where the Rajas have so many wives... otherwise...’

‘They must not be Muslims then...’ Radouan replied sanctimoniously. ‘We Muslims can have only four wives. India... I feel sorry you wasted so much time in that place. But you will always be wife number one for me, *bibti*, even if you divorce me... You want to divorce me?’ he asked, gently ‘Believe me I would understand it... now I’ve had so much time in here to think, I know sometimes I’ve treated you very badly.’

‘I will never divorce you! NEVER! You can be sure of that. But I’m not sure I’ll marry you here either... all that nonsense about obeying...’

‘You can write whatever you want into a marriage agreement, it’s like a contract.’

‘Would we have a Moroccan wedding party then... you’re always talking about them?’

Feeling he had won the round, Radouan raised his cuffed hands and took hers across the table and kissed them. ‘Yes, of course, what do you think? No marriage is complete without the wedding party. Of course we will have one... orchestras and dancing girls...’

‘And dancing boys, I hope?’

‘Yes, why not... maybe even I will dance for you... you’ve never seen me dance...’ he dropped her hands. ‘And now you must go, this visit must be expensive...’

‘I’m going to arrange for you to be moved to another facility if possible... as you are quite mad anyway it shouldn’t be too difficult.’

‘What else can I say,’ he whispered ignoring her jibe, ‘I love you very much, I want to kiss you for about one hour... to kiss you... but that’s impossible here so you must go now... Go!’

On the walk back to the prison office Toni had invited Le Chef for a drink later that evening to settle accounts. When she had gone he had pondered the meaning of her unprecedented invitation, become excited and dreamt of having a chance with her. As she had married Radouan, he reasoned, it meant she liked Moroccan men and understood how to please them, no? That afternoon he left work early and went to a nearby *hamam* where he had himself scrubbed and bathed, oiled and massaged, doused with expensive French cologne and donning a smart new powder grey uniform, by seven thirty he was knocking at her door.

A young maid in a white cap and pink apron ushered him into a huge salon with European furniture and strange paintings in expensive golden frames. Soon the English woman entered wearing a sheer white *jalaba* that clung to her body. He admired her *zouk* and after she made a drink for him they sat facing each other across a large glass coffee table stacked with provocative looking magazines. Speaking very good French she asked him how much she owed him and he replied that five hundred dirhams (fifty dollars) a minute was the usual rate. As she was there with Radouan for forty-five minutes it worked out to twenty two thousand dirhams - enough to buy his nagging wife a few extra caftans, he reflected.

Expecting her to bargain, he had planned subtly to indicate during the negotiation, that if they could become friends, the price might be much less... certainly she would be able to tell by the cologne he was wearing that he was open to suggestions. Instead she got up and left the room, returning a few minutes later with the money and as he counted it out he realized he could have asked for much more; and thought jealously of Radouan and how much he must have swindled out of her.

When she then asked him if he could arrange to have Radouan moved to the Psychiatric Hospital, however, and that there was a doctor who would certify he was psychotic; although Le Chef was not quite sure what a psychotic meant, he realized she had given him a new opening. Why? -Because she was attracted to him, of course. They stared at each other across the coffee table and it occurred to him that although he might be ten years older than Radouan he was

just as good looking and certainly more experienced. She shifted the conversation to Arabic and he was impressed. They discussed the weather and the various notables received by King Hassan II during the past week. It was important for him to find out if she knew the King personally - which could be a big problem for him!

'You know,' she said, 'I don't even know your name.' Toni said brightly. They call you Le Chef but that's not a name, is it?'

'My name is Larbi; I'm a chauffeur, a driver for my superiors.'

'May I call you Monsieur Larbi then?' Toni smiled. 'Le Chef sounds like you work in a restaurant.'

Running his large bronze hands through his curly steel grey hair, he smiled back at her knowingly. 'Of course, call me Larbi, now that we are friends,' and waited for her response, which did not come.

Instead, she gazed at him for a moment and then said: 'So I guess we'd better get down to business. How much would this move cost?'

'Because Radouan is accused of murder, such a move could cost about two hundred thousand dirhams,' he replied, 'I will have to take care of a number of other guys.'

Toni remarked that his services seemed very expensive. He replied that he was a professional and very good at what he did and also was a married man with children to care for.

Feeling constrained by the table between them, he wanted to reach out and smash it. Instead, he let his hands drop to his thighs, rubbed his knees vigorously and gazed at her. She sipped her drink leisurely, lit a cigarette and seemed to be waiting for him to make the next move. Just then, as he was about to get up with the idea of walking out on her terrace and admiring the view, they were interrupted by her maid who announced that two foreigners had arrived in the lift and refused to leave.

Toni excused herself and found Francesco Monte standing in the foyer with a strikingly beautiful young woman whom she assumed must be Delphine.

'Francesco darling,' she shouted gaily, 'how amazing to see you, it's been ages, you're looking marvelous... and this must be Delphine. Do come in.' then she lowered her voice conspiratorially, 'I have a policeman here collecting money for services rendered. It's good you came along just now I think he was about to make a move on me.'

Delphine was surprised Toni knew her name... what else did she know? 'I'm Radouan's French wife,' she whispered in French.

'Of course you are, darling,' Toni smiled. 'He's said some awfully nice things about you, I'm sure we're going to be great friends... come.'

As they moved into the grand salon Delphine was jolted by the leaden eyes of Monsieur Le Chef as they fastened on her.

'Monsieur Larbi, may I present Monsieur Francesco Monte and Madame Delphine Benne?' Delphine extended her hand for him to kiss and received a gentle nibble, which did not go unnoticed by Toni. 'What will you drink,' she asked, 'I believe we have everything from carrot juice to champagne.'

'Oh, carrot juice,' Delphine replied

Glancing at her new guests and realizing he must postpone his plans, Larbi excused himself and Toni saw him to the lift where they had more conversation about getting Radouan transferred and she allowed him to kiss her hand. When she returned, she found Delphine pacing up and down in front of the doors overlooking the terrace. Something about the way this young beauty moved told her Radouan had been right; Delphine was going to make a big splash.

'And I'll have champagne,' said Francesco, 'but only if you will join me.'

Toni poured out two glasses and toasted him. 'To your new film, Francesco darling... I'm sure with Delphine it will be a fantastic success! Come, it's stifling in here, lets move out to the terrace and get some air.'

On the terrace they made themselves comfortable and Francesco told Toni they'd been to see Radouan.

'And you had to deal with that animal I suppose,' Toni said, referring to Larbi, 'I hope he didn't charge you as much as he did me.'

'It was expensive, but worth it,' Francesco replied, 'Radouan looked fine.'

They sipped their drinks and admired the view. 'I've come here because I think we must have a talk,' Delphine said at last.

'Whatever about?' Toni drawled.

'*Alors*,' Delphine shrugged helplessly, 'About HIM of course... our husband Radouan, and our relationship... yours and mine.'

'What about it?'

'*Donc*... you married him first. You must think of yourself as his first wife... no?'

Toni shrugged her shoulders, 'Well, I suppose so... hadn't really thought about it... unless he's had other wives I don't know about.'

'And I married him after that so I am the second...yes?'

'I suppose one could say that...'

'Well, that's the problem...' Delphine said matter of factly.

Toni's eyebrows arched. 'Really, I don't quite...'

'If Radouan hadn't got me into this film business,' Delphine went on, 'it wouldn't be important to me, but now... well you can imagine what they will say...'

'Who?'

'The problem is I must not be thought of as second... his second wife. Imagine what they would call me: the number two girl, I'm sure! Can a STAR ever be number two? Never! I must always be referred to as wife number one...'

Toni looked slyly at Francesco, 'Oh I see... and if I object?'

Delphine smiled mysteriously, 'Then I suppose I might have to divorce him... but really I don't want too because I suppose I really love him. It's all so impossible! I'm sorry I can't help myself... I need him and I really HATE him too... can you believe that? As I was a psychology student at University I should have known better...'

'I know what you mean...'

Delphine waved her hand. 'Not because he's married to you,' she sniffed tearfully, 'that's not what really bothers me, it's his attitude... such hypocrisy... doesn't know the meaning of sincerity.' Her eyes narrowed, 'not because he loves you or me or someone else, no, because he loves only himself... that's why he's incapable of returning love because he's only interested in people loving HIM!' She sipped her carrot juice thoughtfully and said almost to herself: 'He's such a wonderful lover I thought it would be different, but... If I'm honest I have to admit that even in bed he's not really with me... only with himself and whoever he may be thinking of at the moment!' She burst into tears. 'If you're lucky maybe it's you.' she sobbed, 'really he must break out of this shell he lives in and understand there are other people out here. I'm sorry to become so emotional,' she sniffed, 'but I have to say these things to someone, another woman I suppose, or I'm going to go crazy... I'm so sorry...'

Toni lit a cigarette and gazed at her thoughtfully. 'Why not.' she sighed, 'believe me my dear I'm flattered. For one so beautiful, and

you are very beautiful, to be so observant is very rare. Thank you for being so open, but tell me, why are you not like Radouan?’

‘Like Radouan?’ Delphine sniffed through her tears, ‘I don’t understand...’

‘Narcissist... You... you are also very beautiful, very *zween*.’

‘Oh that... I see what you mean.’ Delphine smiled thoughtfully, ‘Ah well, sometimes things happen to people early in their lives, some shock. They feel isolated and become introvert and if they are also beautiful they fall in love with themselves because they see other people are attracted to them... something like that, I suppose. I come from a provincial family, poor but intellectual... we have a long history of... my father was a schoolmaster and his father and so on. We were a very close family; we read books together... were very loving, very affectionate so I never felt isolated until my father died... perhaps I am narcissist, but not like Radouan.’

Toni nodded. ‘You’re so right... he’s incredibly self absorbed. When you have his attention, it’s like the sun is shining on you, like you’re the only person in the world. Then he leaves... leaves and forgets you, and you feel very cold, and he hasn’t a clue what he’s done to make you feel so miserable. I’ve known him now for over twenty years... loved him and grown up with him. You’re right to speak of shock. If you knew what he’s lived through perhaps you would understand. His father is mad, certifiably so, and drives everyone around him mad; claims to be descended from Sufis, but who knows; a very tough man though, beautiful specimen until he got sick. Everyone in the Medina adored him... and was frightened of him. From the age of six Radouan spent his childhood on his father’s knee in the taverns of Marrakech, terrified because his father really enjoyed pushing people around and beating them up... he beat his wife, he beat Radouan and his brothers and sisters constantly. Radouan’s mother was a beautiful fifteen year old girl from the country, steeped in *maji* but very innocent of the world. Eight children and two miscarriages later she’s a wreck poor thing. Radouan is the eldest son, sensitive and brilliant, but he’s borne the burden of his mothers passion for him and the brunt of his father’s depravity; his drinking, his tantrums and jealousies has left our husband wounded and traumatized, until... really sometimes he becomes almost autistic... you know *autistique*?’

‘Yes, of course...’

‘Well, I’ve tried to help him steady himself and control his temper over the years and perhaps I’ve succeeded up to a point, but really he should see a specialist. Of course, he won’t hear of it; refuses to take any medication even vitamin supplements. No... he’d rather eat brochette of camel or horse by the roadside than spend a few dirhams on something that might help him. If he weren’t so attractive and physically strong, no doubt by now he’d be institutionalized or roaming the streets begging. One of his classmates at University here with a further degree from The University of Paris is doing just that; begging on the streets of Marrakech as we speak, can you imagine?’

Francesco touched his forehead and said: ‘He has too much energy....’

‘That’s why some medication might be good for him,’ Toni said.

Delphine smiled grimly, ‘I’ve known so many people who’ve taken these things. The problem is they begin to feel like vegetables so they stop taking them because to be normal seems so stupid. They enjoy their craziness; the excitement, the drama. Really psychotics enjoy imposing their madness on everyone around them...’

Toni took Delphine’s hands in hers. ‘I’m so glad you understand these things, darling, perhaps together we can help him. Really, though, I think you should hold off divorcing him, you might regret it... and I... I’m perfectly willing to share him with you, as I’m sure I have with many other women for years. But if you want to be known as wife number one you should think about it because when there are two wives it generally means the man got tired of number one and took another...’

‘Ah, these French women,’ Francesco sighed, ‘this iss exactly what I have been trying to tell her.’

Delphine laughed self consciously, ‘I guess I wasn’t listening... I... perhaps it was just an excuse to get here... I was so broken up.... *desole!*’

‘Well it really doesn’t matter,’ Toni said, ‘you’re here and it’s wonderful to meet you... call yourself number one, number two or three... you mustn’t think of it that way.’

‘Three?’

‘You don’t know about number three then,’ Toni laughed mischievously.

‘No, of course not!’

'Oh dear, perhaps I should have kept quiet,' she glanced at Francesco and rolled her eyes. 'It hasn't happened yet, but he's engaged... that's the important part... the two families have agreed to the terms in writing so it will happen... a girl his mother has picked out and of course he must obey his mother. Among Arab men mothers are terribly important because mothers know their sons and what kind of woman will suit them. The girl is very young... fourteen or fifteen, I understand. Of course she knows nothing of us.'

'Fourteen or fifteen!' Delphine moaned.

'And rather plump, I believe, Toni added, 'I think Radouan finds her somewhat embarrassing, but she comes from an old, currently impoverished family within his tribe and his mother is absolutely determined...'

'He told Francesco the wife who has the first male child will be number one,' Delphine exclaimed, 'I heard him say it...'

'Ah yes,' Toni said, her voice tinged with irony, 'I'm sure this one will have many children. Not long ago Radouan's tribe were victims of genocide organized by the wazzier of the sultan Abdul Aziz... less than a hundred years ago. Since then they have regained their numbers, thanks to women like Radouan's mother who turned themselves into breeding machines.'

Delphine stared at Francesco: 'You must promise me the press will never hear of this.'

'Of what?' Francesco asked

'That I'm married to him, of course.'

Francisco shook his head. 'You must stop worrying... as far as the press is concerned you will remain forever available... at least until the proper moment!'

## 55

Summer had descended early over Marrakech - a massive brown cloud, blown in from the Sahara, the dreaded *Ghergui*, which had trapped the heat and turned the city into an oven - the last place on earth Toni had expected to be that time of year. In fact, she had planned to whisk Radouan off to a castle in Ireland's West Country

where they could have spent the long cool evenings picnicking and riding by the sea... *Mach Allah!* Obviously He had other plans.'

And never having thought of spending a summer in Marrakech, she had never bothered to have her flat air-conditioned. But now as fine ochre colored dust blew in under the doors and some days, unbelievably, the furniture was too hot to sit down upon, she decided she must act.

But how could she - how could she be thinking of herself in this way, of her own comforts, when less than two miles away in *Boulmaraz*, Radouan was suffering. On the other hand, she reasoned calmly, hadn't she suffered too? Would he ever guess how many hours, nights and days over the past fifteen years she'd spent worrying about him? Which was why she was here now, wasn't it? Because really she had to be near him SO SHE COULD STOP WORRYING! Did this not make sense? She shuddered, God what a mess! In *Boulmaraz* prison, the air would be rank with the smell of sewage and the body odors of the inmates. Before she did anything else she must ask her GP to find a psychiatrist and arrange a meeting with Le Chef again to see what could be done.

The heat grew worse; the temperature soared to forty-three, then forty- nine, and when the men came to install her air conditioning, she left her maid in charge and fled to a suite at the Mamounia. There, the following morning she met with a psychologist from the University of Marrakech, who agreed to write a letter stating that he'd examined Radouan and found him subject to pathological episodes, especially in close confinement, and recommended he be moved immediately to the local Psychiatric Facility and given certain medications.

Late the following afternoon Larbi, the 'chauffeur' arrived and Toni received him in her suite overlooking the hotel garden making sure, however, to foil any of his amorous advances by arranging that the trainer, Lahcen, be there to supervise her daily workout.

After reading the psychologist's letter, M. Larbi reminded her that because the charge against Radouan was murder he would have to justify moving him, to his superiors.

Toni smiled cynically and said: 'You mean it will be expensive.'  
'It could be,' Larbi replied suggestively.

Toni sent Lahcen out on to the terrace and the negotiations began. Le Chef wanted two hundred thousand dirhams; twenty thousand dollars.

Toni laughed and blithely offered him seventy five thousand dirhams.

M. Larbi looked at her sternly and declared she must know very well, that since he would be risking his career and the well being of his wife and children she must give more. Concluding, however, that with the trainer Lahcen skulking around outside it would be pointless to suggest that if she could sweeten her offer with a little friendship, the price might come down, Le Chef stuck to the matter at hand and they settled on a hundred and twenty thousand. He would drop by the following morning when he would require sixty thousand dirhams and another sixty when Radouan was actually moved.

Toni saw Le Chef to the lift and returned to see Lahcen still out on the terrace staring down at the garden. Alone with him for the first time in her life, she felt guilty yet excited by how very simple it would be to suggest that he stay. Deprived of Radouan's presence, which never failed to relieve her deep sense of anxiety, she craved release. And if she asked Lahcen to stay she knew she'd be relaxed for days.

Lighting a cigarette she moved toward the terrace door. There was no question she did not adore Radouan and was totally devoted to him. Yet, exactly as he was attracted to Delphine, so she had to admit she was attracted to Lahcen, this magnificent specimen, who had just come in through the door and was standing there smiling - and ready! Though he had often glanced at her in that certain way, despite what Radouan thought, she had never really dared meet his eyes. But here at the hotel, away from her gossipy maid and the doorman she was sorely tempted. The hotel employed Lahcen and there was no reason why she should not choose to train with him in her suite rather than the gym; and now that Radouan was in jail Lahcen must be very eager to...

She asked him if he would like a beer, He nodded and she went to the mini bar and poured out two glasses. The problem was, she reasoned, despite his friendly face and fantastic body, he was not very bright; which probably accounted for his touch, unimpeded as it was by intelligent thought, being so irresistible. Nevertheless, if she now followed the command of his eyes, it would be impossible for him not to boast about it to someone. Word would inevitably reach Radouan and within days something would happen. Even from his prison cell Toni knew Radouan could arrange to get even with both of them and the consequences would be dire. Knowing what a risk she was taking, Lahcen would probably try to blackmail her. To keep him

quiet she would have to start paying off. Wasn't it all too complicated?

## 56

A few days later when she returned to her flat, now delightfully cool; she received a call from the M. Larbi who apologized for the delay, said he was in the area and asked to see her immediately. It was four in the afternoon and her maid would soon be leaving. Expecting further negotiations, she asked the maid to stay and remain quiet in the kitchen, listening. If she heard Toni cough loudly, she was to come forth immediately with the aspirateur and start vacuuming.

Predictably, when he arrived, Larbi casually mentioned that one hundred twenty thousand dirhams was not going to be enough. 'More was required...'

Observing his meticulous grooming, and the way he moved confidently around her drawing room, Toni asked herself, 'more what?' And soon he let her know that although his superiors were demanding a larger cut, he might be willing to take less. Then as he was about to make a move on her, she managed a coughing fit, and right on cue the clever maid sauntered in and busied herself vacuuming the carpets.

The murderous look in M. Larbi's eyes told Toni she was right about his intentions and she suppressed a giggle. But caution; it would not do to turn him off completely because even if Radouan were moved, she would still have to deal with this man.

'You say more is required,' she shouted over the roar of the aspirator and drew him gently to the far end of the room, 'how much more?'

Her touch inflamed him. He stared at her unblinking; wanting to grab her but not daring. 'As I have told you,' he said hoarsely, 'since the charge is murder and there is every reason to believe your husband is the perpetrator, the price will be thirty kilos - three hundred thousand dirhams.'

‘Well,’ said Toni, venturing into uncharted waters, ‘that’s more than double your last price... is that the final price or will it increase further...’

‘That’s not up to me,’ he replied mysteriously, ‘I’m just the chauffeur ... nothing is ever final.’

Meaning, Toni sensed, if you give him what he really wants it could be less.

‘This is a very large sum,’ she said finally, ‘and it’s actually Radouan’s money so I’m afraid I’ll have to consult him before I can give you anything more... if you could assist me in meeting him tomorrow I’ll discuss the matter with him and let you know the result.’

Le Chef was astonished. He had expected she would yield, send her maid home and invite him to spend the evening with her. How could she not see that a man with his qualifications would be able to satisfy her as no man ever had? His mouth froze in a marginal grin. The sound of the aspirator was driving him crazy. ‘The price of visiting has also gone up,’ he shouted petulantly, ‘even visiting a murderer privately is strictly forbidden, and as more people are coming to know about this case they’ll have to be taken care of...’

‘*Makayn mouchkil,*’ Toni shouted, ‘No problem. What time shall I be there?’

‘Four tomorrow afternoon,’ he barked, ‘and the price will be one thousand dirhams a minute.’

## 57

The following afternoon at the appointed hour, Toni met Larbi and was conducted to the room at the end of the hall where Radouan was brought in looking pale but fit. In English, which Larbi did not understand, they discussed the latest price for the move to the Psychiatric Facility and Radouan forbade her to give anything more than the hundred twenty thousand dirhams originally agreed upon. He could easily survive for two or three more weeks, but cautioned that she should let M. Larbi think they might pay more, yet not commit herself.

‘And what if they start to “question you”?’ Toni asked. ‘This is the room they do that sort of thing in I suppose...’

‘As long as they think we may pay more they won’t... my case is too well known now... they will not want to bring me to court lookin’ like they have...’

‘But darling, there are ways of torturing people that don’t show... really, this money means nothing to me, or to you. Considering the fortune waiting for you, we must be prepared to spend generously.’

Radouan shook his head: ‘you don’t understand these people; jus’ trust me, please. One other thing... I want you to invite Madame Saadi and her Fassi boy friend over for lunch, she’s your Notaire after all and I’m sure she will be happy to show him off. Talk with them and try to draw them out... you’re very good at that. Maybe they’ll slip up and tell you something important. Maybe you can get a feeling about whether this guy could really be Minna’s son... Now go... I miss you too much and would like to stay talking to you forever but this meeting is too expensive! Remember I love you and be GOOD!’

Fifteen minutes had passed. On the way back to his office Toni palmed Larbi fifteen thousand dirhams.

‘This is getting expensive for you,’ he said, his hand lightly grazing her thigh as they exchanged the wad of bank notes. ‘Better you accept my last offer and have him moved, then you can see him any time for free... maybe you don’t know it but Radouan has many enemies in Marrakech, especially among the police. They are really wanting to question him but it is me who is holding them back.’

She felt like kicking him in the shins with her Manolo Blahnik pumps. ‘I explained everything to him,’ she replied, ‘He says the price is so high he must have time to think about it. Perhaps in a few days we’ll be able to make a deal, I hope so. In three days I’ll go see him again.’

Back at her apartment, chain smoking out on the terrace, Larbi’s insinuation that torturing Radouan was just one more chip in his little game left her terrified. Shouldn’t she just pay the bloody money and have him moved?

The next morning Toni had rung up Madame Saadi and invited her for lunch. And as Radouan had predicted, Saadi, eager to show off her new friend, had asked if she could bring Youssef along. Once she got to know him, Toni was certain her intuition would tell her whether or not he was really Minna's long lost son.

And so, at one thirty the following afternoon, there she was, Madame Saadi, in the foyer looking cool and *sportif* despite the heat, her large face radiant, her short fat body covered in the folds of an expensive looking cotton gandoura.

Behind her, taller than Toni had expected, stood Youssef and Madame Saadi introduced him. Youssef extended a firm hot hand and they moved into the drawing room where Toni offered them champagne, the better to loosen their tongues, she thought, and poured out three glasses.

Madame Saadi congratulated her on finally getting her apartment air conditioned and while they made small talk, Toni observed Youssef: small dark brown eyes set too close together, a prominent nose, bronze skin, curly black hair, a thick neck and an athletic physique. This was Youssef in faded jeans and a Turnbull and Asser shirt; dressing up and dressing down. She was intrigued and in a sense charmed, but put off by his confusing manner, which was in turn churlish yet urbane, sometimes haughty, sometimes obsequious. In fact her first impression was that he was not an Arab at all; the mouth was all wrong, the bone structure non-existent, and his lower lip drooped slightly to one side - the mouth of a concealed personality.

As they sipped their champagne and talked, his calculating eyes darted here and there about the room. A face that should have been handsome was somehow twisted, the smile that could have been bright was a grimace, but the body was superb and she could see why Madame Saadi looked so well. Toni had known her for years, almost as long as she had known Radouan, but it was obvious now, despite her new healthy happy look, Madame Saadi was uncomfortable. Her hands flew to her hair, to her bracelets, to her purse and back. The conversation was stilted and one awkward moment followed another. Toni had counseled herself not to be the first one to mention Radouan; Saadi must make that move, and she

was confident Saadi would because she could not afford to lose Toni's account and must explain herself. Explain, for example, why she had called the police, why she had shown the public prosecutor Minna's will, if not her new friend Youssef here as well, and why she had been leaking all this gossip to the international press?

On the other hand, from her side Madame Saadi foolishly assumed that Toni knew little or nothing of all this. She had been called to assist in getting Radouan out of jail, an undertaking where lurked vast money making opportunities; so easy with these rich foreign women, fashionably vague, not inclined to go into details and so easily swindled. But she had not counted on the fact that one of Toni's ancestors had been a Viceroy in India, where successive generations of the family had learned all the tricks and served valorously, while serving them selves as well!

After three glasses of champagne, when Toni had still not mentioned Radouan; instead had asked the happy couple how they met, how Youssef liked Marrakech etc and etc, Madame Saadi's finely honed instinct for self preservation sent a signal up her spine that made her hair stand on end. Nevertheless, she gave what seemed to be a calm, perfectly credible answer: they had met because Youssef had come to see the Baroness who was out of Marrakech at the time. Learning that Madame Saadi handled the Baroness' affairs, Youssef had sought her out with the thought that she could introduce him when the Baroness returned.

'Perhaps you didn't know,' Saadi continued, 'that many years ago the Baroness had a relationship with a man from Fez which resulted in pregnancy and the birth of a male child. That child, now a man, is Youssef.'

'Really!' said Toni pretending to be amazed.

'Yes, replied Madame Saadi, 'but before he could meet her, the Baroness was murdered. I was called by A'hmed her old servant whom you must know. He swore he saw Radouan leaving the house by the first light of dawn.'

'And how did she die?' Toni asked.

'Maybe you didn't know that she was suffering from a wasting disease that greatly reduced her strength. We think she was smothered.'

'Smothered!' cried Toni in astonishment, 'How awful. I'm afraid I've been so busy since I got back I haven't heard any of these details. But why would Radouan have killed her?'

‘He must have heard about Youssef, that he was in Marrakech and people were saying he was her son and heir. You know how people gossip.’

‘But why would it matter if Youssef were her son?’ Toni asked

‘Because she’d already made a Testament designating Radouan her sole heir that’s why! If Youssef had been able to present himself to her, tell her the story of his life, then naturally she would have changed her will in his favor. But he never got the chance. Haven’t you seen the journals...?’

‘I’m afraid I haven’t.’ Toni lied apologetically, ‘I try not to read them. So you’ve known Youssef for some time then...’

‘Not that long,’ Madame Saadi smiled coyly, ‘a few months... Of course I was suspicious of him at first,’ she glanced fondly at Youssef, ‘here in the Maghreb one must be suspicious about everything. But I had him investigated and everything he told me proved true. Can you believe, the very morning she was murdered, that very morning, we had an appointment to go out and see her. Youssef had wanted to go sooner but I wanted to prepare her for meeting him... since she wasn’t in good health... prepare her... she had become so fragile I thought the shock might kill her. I had to be very careful.’ Madame Saadi threw up her hands despairingly, ‘So we waited and then it was too late.’

‘So you think Radouan knew Minna had made him her heir?’

‘Absolutely, I’m certain of it, in fact I have witnesses... people he told.’

‘My dear Saadi, here in Maroc, we all know witnesses can be bought and sold like sheep; for a few dirhams anyone will say anything!’

‘Are you calling us liars?’ Youssef asked coldly.

‘Not at all, my dear fellow,’ Toni replied, sensing she might have flushed her quarry, ‘I’m not saying you don’t actually believe what you’re saying, but that doesn’t mean I have to believe it! I’ve known Radouan since he was sixteen, twenty years in all. We met through the Baroness who had known him since he was twelve or fourteen. She meant everything to him. It’s absolutely inconceivable that he could have murdered her; there must be some mistake. And he certainly didn’t need the money. He’d just made a small fortune on a film deal and on the day we were married in England, I transferred a rather large sum of money into an off shore account for him. I assure you he had no idea her fortune was so large, or what she was going

to do with it. But we wouldn't have cared, and we don't care now. If you are really her son and can prove it to whoever decides these matters, then I can tell you Radouan will be perfectly willing to go along with any decision made by the Tribunal.'

Having unburdened her self of this message, Toni led them in to lunch where the first thing she noticed was Youssef's table manners. For one who appeared so urbane and sophisticated, they were very odd; using a knife and fork, let alone several knives and forks for different courses was obviously beyond him. He wielded the large dinner fork for the fish course, the dessert spoon for couscous and finally finished by attacking the chicken with his hands. He also gripped his silverware in an odd way with his fists and seemed to have great difficulty deciding which hand to use. She thought it strange for someone supposed to have been educated in Paris and Rabat, the son of a man who'd been a member of the sophisticated court of Pasha Glaoui to eat in this manner. And the more she observed him, the more convinced she became that such a creature could never have come from the womb of her good friend Minna.

'How long have you been here in Marrakech?' she asked Youssef.

'About four months now off and on... It was only a year ago the woman I had always thought of as my mother, a maid called Latifa, told me, as she lay dying, the real story of my birth... How my father, our Patron, had ordered her to abduct me from the Baroness' house and bring me to Fez. It came as a shock! I'd always thought of myself as the son of Latifa, whose husband, a local carpenter, had run away.' He gazed at her measuring her reaction, then continued, 'The special attention I received from the Patron had always puzzled me. As I grew older and he sent me abroad to University and bought me expensive presents, of course I began to wonder what was happening.'

Too smooth, Toni thought. 'Did your father whom you call the Patron... did he have any other children?' she asked.

'Yes,' he replied earnestly, 'two girls, half-sisters, who now live with their mother in France. So I assumed, because he had no other male children, that's why he took such a particular interest in me... made me his heir, even though he never told me I was his son. He is dead now... may God make Paradise his abode... the year I finished law school he died. I miss him. We spent many long nights together discussing philosophy and history... He knew many things.'

Toni sipped her mint tea and sat listening, perplexed by his delivery. The fact that he hadn't known he was the Patron's son until recently would account for his crude mannerisms; but it was the WAY he spoke, that rattled her: too well rehearsed, a certain disingenuousness. Or could it be because he was speaking English, a language he didn't really understand? But his English was good, better than his French was in fact! What then this parrot-like recitation? What was it all about? Who else could have known all this?

The afternoon finally ended in a series of apologetic gestures from Madame Saadi as she and Youssef prepared to leave. She was sorry everything pointed towards Radouan. It wasn't her fault that A'hmed had seen Radouan drive out through the gate that morning he left for France. It wasn't her fault the Baroness had left him everything, *Mach Allah*, none of it was her doing. When A'hmed called her that terrible morning what else should she have done? As for the stories circulating in the press, well, she certainly had not spoken to any reporters. 'But this is Marrakech,' she laughed merrily, 'and every one knows Marrakchis are terrible gossips.'

After they had gone, it was obvious to Toni their case rested only on the words of servants, realized she had never really liked Madame Saadi and vowed to distance herself from her as soon as possible.

The light was fading; the timeless cries of the *Muezzins* reciting the call to evening prayers echoed through the palms and on the terrace her thermometer hovered at fifty degrees. As the pink city shimmered like a mirage under the setting sun, Toni lowered the blinds and tried to sleep but could not. The mystery of Minna's death, all the facts and lies, paraded before her like sheep jumping over fences- and jumping back again. The only person Minna ever mentioned who would receive anything on her death was A'hmed who was supposed to receive an income for life. Had A'hmed been afraid Radouan would prevent him from receiving this bequest?

She was thoroughly confused. What a strange, tangled relationship they'd had, Radouan and Minna; such opera, so incestuous; the wild scenes in which Radouan would go crazy and start destroying things. Minna was the mother he could sleep with again and he was her forbidden lover.

Some time later that evening the phone had roused her and it was Prospero calling to say he'd come back from Fez, where he'd discovered something very important and wanted to see her as soon as possible.

An hour later, with a cool breeze ebbing down from the mountains, they dined out on the terrace - supper brought over from the Mamounia because she'd sent her eavesdropping maid home. In the western sky the new moon was a crescent and over champagne and cold chicken, Toni briefed Prospero about her lunch with Madame Saadi and Youssef, while he told her about his expedition to Fez.

Arriving there, he'd changed into an old *jallaba* and located the palace that Youssef had inherited from his father, the former lover of the Baroness. 'It was really just luck,' he went on, 'I spent the first day walking around the Quarter making inquiries here and there trying not to arouse suspicion. On the second day I was just giving up hope, when by pure chance, *Inch Allah*, I happened to strike up a conversation with an old man at a coffee shop where I'd stopped to rest. When I told him I'd come looking for one Youssef, the son of the owner of the palace, this old man, Gamal by name, seemed to come alive, said he was a servant there and invited me to accompany him to his quarters.'

'Entering through a small door at the rear of an enormous compound he led me through dark corridors to a small room where he said he'd been living quietly since he'd retired many moons ago. In fact he believed most people thought he was dead because he almost never went out.'

'We sat down on some old carpets. He prepared tea on a small stove and began talking. Our conversation which began that day continued over the next few days in more remote parts of the city... someone could have seen me entering the palace and become suspicious.'

Although he now feared for his life because of what he knew, Gamal told me that as he was very old and near death anyway, he wanted to unburden himself. At first we talked in generalities but when he realized why I'd come, he was very open and direct.

'He began with the maid Latifa who had abducted the Baroness's son. As Radouan had guessed, she was sent there by the Patron with instructions to pay off the nurse who looked after the boy and bring them both to Fez. The nurse later disappeared and was never seen again; Gamal thinks she was probably murdered. Meanwhile Latifa, who already had a year old son, Moulay by name, was instructed to raise the abducted boy as her own. He was to be called Youssef.'

'So these two boys were raised as brothers,' Toni confirmed. 'Strange, Youssef never mentioned that at lunch. He said the Patron had two daughters and no other sons'

Pero nodded his head. 'Yes, that's correct... you will soon see why Youssef never told you about Latifa's own son...'

'Yes, go on... do go on... at last we're getting some place!'

'Well then,' Pero continued. 'When Moulay was about fifteen and Youssef a year younger... the Patron who'd had no sons with his two wives, began focusing his attention on young Youssef. This aroused strong feelings of jealousy in Moulay's heart. Why should the Patron begin devoting all his time to his younger brother when he'd never bothered with either of them before? And worse... why Youssef when it was obvious that Moulay, even though he was darker, was smarter and more resourceful than Youssef would ever be? The more attention the Patron showered on Youssef, the more willful and arrogant Youssef became. So after suffering the abuse of his younger brother for about a year, Moulay decided to act.'

'At first, everyone thought it was the *kif* and wine that Youssef had started using. No one but old Gamal, who had seen many such cases in his long life, suspected what was really happening. Gamal actually spied on Moulay and discovered that he was cooking up a poisonous brew of *Ch'dak J'mel*, Datura, which he would administer little by little in the tea, coffee, wine and soft drinks which Youssef constantly ordered Moulay to serve him.'

'In time, Youssef's ability to concentrate declined, he began to have hallucinations, became incontinent and by the time he was eighteen, his brain was gone and he appeared to be insane. The Patron was heartbroken. Youssef was confined to the house and no

drugs or alcohol was permitted to reach him, but he did not improve, because of course Moulay was still poisoning him.'

'Then Youssef began to get violent; had episodes in which he would attack Moulay and try to kill him. The doctors recommended that Youssef be committed to an institution, but until it became clear that there was no hope, the Patron refused. Finally he gave his permission and Youssef was sent to a place in Fez where they care for the insane. You can imagine what that was like!'

Toni sighed, 'So if the real Youssef was institutionalized, Madame Saadi's boy friend cannot be Minna's son... I knew it!'

Pero grinned triumphantly: 'Yes, but wait, there's more. When the Patron recovered from the shock of seeing his only son go mad, he began focusing all his attention on Moulay, sent him abroad to study, helped him until he became a fully qualified Avocat and secretly adopted him as his heir! The year Moulay passed his bar examinations in Rabat the Patron died. In his Testament he provided money for Youssef's care and left substantial sums to his surviving wife and daughters who immediately went to live in France. But the bulk of his estate including money in foreign banks, land holdings, the Palace in Fez and everything else, went to Moulay...'

Toni stared at him: 'Unbelievable! Are you absolutely sure your Gamal isn't making up all this?'

'Yes, absolutely. You will meet him. He's a devout Muslim of the old school; obviously an honest man... but let me go on. A few years later Moulay's mother, the maid Latifa, got sick; and as she lay dying confessed to Moulay the story of Youssef. How she had been sent to Marrakech with another maid to steal baby Youssef and ordered to raise him as her own. How the Patron was really Youssef's father and his mother a wealthy Baroness in Marrakech. Knowing nothing of Moulay's treachery, Latifa begged him to go to the Baroness and inform her about Youssef; maybe have him transferred to her care.'

'After Latifa died, however, Moulay did some research, discovered how rich the Baroness was and that he now had the money and legal expertise to further his own interests in a huge way. Large amounts of cash changed hands and in the records of Fez and Rabat, all references to Moulay were changed to Youssef and all the documents pertaining to or mentioning Youssef's name were changed to Moulay. At the same moment Youssef was transferred from Fez to a psychiatric hospital at Casablanca where he arrived as

Moulay! Fait accompli! It was now someone called Moulay who had gone crazy and was locked up!

Toni gazed at Pero through narrowed eyes. 'So, he's a very accomplished liar, I thought so... but what about all the people who must have known the real Moulay in Rabat and Fez? It seems inconceivable...'

Prospero interrupted. 'First of all Moulay, now the false Youssef, let most of the servants go and hired new ones who knew him only as Youssef... all but two who've been paid well for following orders and keeping quiet. As for the townspeople and people in Rabat, he wasn't too worried about them, told them his second name had always been Youssef and that now he'd decided to take it as his first name, because, of course, Moulay was not a real name at all. Also, as he'd been away for long periods of time, people in Fez didn't really remember him that well and in Rabat he hadn't been a very sociable person.'

Pero smiled, 'Really, he thought the Baroness would accept him. A desperate old woman living alone, he thought she would be only too happy to recognize him as her son... didn't reckon on having to deal with Radouan.'

Toni shook her head 'So the Moulay in the Hospital is really Youssef and the one who passes for Youssef is really Moulay...?'

'Exactly.'

'How is this possible?'

'As I said, it happens all the time here. The Patron's Testament was entirely rewritten, as were many other documents. Even Moulay's university records and degrees were changed, all the signatures forged. Only one man who specializes in these things, who works in the government records department... only he knew what was going on. His name is Amran.'

'Can all this be proven in court? I mean, if all the signatures have been changed and no original signature of the Patron still exists... but this must be impossible... certainly there are letters somewhere. We must find this man Amran and confront him.'

'Yes, of course, that's what I'm trying to do, but he's retired and I'm having difficulty locating him. I have Radouan's friend Omar up there looking for him right now. He could have left the country, we don't know. Other signatures of the Patron there may be. The Baroness may have letters of his somewhere but her house has been sealed pending the outcome of the investigation so we can't... we'd

have to have a court order to go in there and look... which I will try to get if I can. After I talked with Gamal, I visited the so-called psychiatric facility there, in Fez. That's how I discovered the real Youssef is not there any more... searched their records and discovered that about the time all the documents were forged, a patient mentioned as Youssef was moved to a psychiatric hospital in Casablanca where he was admitted, on the same day, as Moulay! The descriptions are the same and there is a note that the patient was moved from Fez on that day. So that's what I've found.'

Pero smiled and folded his hands, 'I'm sure there must be other documents that were overlooked by this fellow Amran, but it will take time to discover them. I think you will find Gamal's testimony most persuasive. I had him speak into my tape recorder. He is very old and could die at any moment. Really, it's my opinion at this point it's important we get some outside help.'

'You mean international attorneys...'

'Yes, to act as my advisors... men of experience and influence in Morocco... if you can manage it. The case will have to be presented by me, but I need expert advice. We can't trust any investigations by the Public Prosecutor here or any of the Judges. They will work together, believe me, to benefit themselves and squeeze as much as possible out of this case. Everyone knows the stakes are very high, and the police hate Radouan because over the years he's caused them too much pain and embarrassment to be let off so easily.'

Pero shook his head grimly, 'Now they've got him they'll do everything possible to see him suffer. Moreover, I've just learned that certain executives of companies in which the Baroness had a large stake checked into the Mamounia yesterday. Obviously they don't want to see some "crazy Arab" getting control of these. One of them is the world's largest food corporation with income larger than the annual budget of this country. So they would view this... they do view it... as an Islamic invasion of their territory and their financial network. Believe me; these men are far more dangerous to us than the Moroccan officials. They will offer the government huge financial inducements to see that Radouan goes down... to locate factories here, highways even power plants.'

Toni shook her head. 'As a matter of fact, I was so nervous last night I called London... couldn't stop worrying... couldn't sleep. So I called my ex-husband Rupert who is pretty crazy but like many mad

people often does become quite sane in an emergency. Even though we're divorced, he's still very fond of Radouan and absolutely horrified by what's happening. Right now, as we speak, he's putting together a team of British and French Avocats... some investigators too.'

'I'm not sure we need investigators,' Pero replied thoughtfully, 'they will only cause trouble, we have our own methods... but the Avocats are essential. A show of force is always impressive...' he smiled, 'our minds, they seem to run along the same paths - that's very good. I think we should meet your team in Casablanca, and take them up to Rabat and Fez to meet Bayed... I worry we may lose him. Do you have any influence in Rabat? I mean it's really very important that this whole thing should be moved to the ministerial level... Ministry of the Interior, if possible or even higher.'

'I've been living here for twenty years, what do you think?' Toni smiled conspiratorially.

'We never know,' Pero laughed, 'some people don't want to know anybody, others they know everyone.'

'Really, I should have acted much sooner but I did not trust my own judgment. Now I'll get started right away... meanwhile, I have to tell you that horrible man at the jail, M. Larbi, the one we call the Chauffeur, has agreed to move Radouan to the Psychiatric... Ah, but you don't know, do you...'

'Know what?'

'While you were away in Fez he started fighting again.'

'I was afraid of that...'

'Yes... well it happened. They put him in something they call an isolation cell. I think it's very dangerous for him. Now they can do anything to him... anything! Le Chef says he can have him moved. Radouan says the price is too high.'

'What's he asking?'

'Three hundred thousand dirhams. But now he's charging a thousand dirhams a minute just to see him, I don't see it makes much difference. The problem is Radouan can't stop bargaining, it's in his blood.'

Pero shook his head. 'If they had a noose around his neck he'd try to bargain with the hangman. Move him. Pay the money and move him at once. How much will visits to the Psychiatric hospital cost?'

'No charge.' Toni lit a cigarette. 'I'll arrange it first thing tomorrow.' She heaved a sigh of relief, 'Oh, and one other thing... I haven't told you about my lunch with Madame Saadi and her friend the false Youssef. Of course, Saadi protested, I mean really vehemently protested her innocence. "It's not my fault this," and, "It's not my fault that." She sounded like a duck.... I wanted to ring her neck... and that Youssef... I sat there listening to him slurp his soup and you know I just could not imagine him being related to Minna in any way'

'Well, you were right,' Pero replied, 'nevertheless he's telling everyone who will listen he's her son... and some people are believing him because how else would he know all the details. I'm sure he's gained access to all Saadi's affairs by screwing her night and day... that's what her servants are saying.'

Toni giggled. 'And all these years I thought she was a lesbian.... I must say she looked very well... radiant in fact...'

'Moreover, for the past five months this Youssef, he's had a spy out at the Baroness' place who may have committed the murder. His name is Zouheir.'

'But this... this is too fantastic,' Toni stared at him wide eyed, 'You've been really busy! How did you come by this information? And, oh... did you happen to find that orphan Radouan keeps talking about?'

'Yes, Mokhtar...'

Pero said, 'A friend of ours, Omar's brother Mahjoub, found him in the Medina. Mokhtar said he and one of the other servants, the maid Fatima, saw this Zouheir enter and leave the Baroness' suite after Radouan left.'

'When Saadi drew up the Baroness' Testament and found Radouan was the beneficiary... I'm sure from that moment on she's been waiting for an opportunity to cheat him out of it. Then when Moulay, posing as Youssef, came along she realized he would be the means to accomplish her project. So they hatched a plot, bribed A'hmed to hire this man Zouheir and waited... waited for the moment when they could get rid of the Baroness and Radouan in one stroke. Other servants told Mokhtar that Zouheir had been hired about six months ago. It's this Zouheir who is saying he saw Radouan leaving the Baroness' bedroom just before he discovered her body at dawn. He's supposed to be a server from Fez and the Baroness was pleased with him, but I'm having him investigated.'

Toni gazed at Prospero thoughtfully. 'You know Radouan always disliked A'hmed because he knew all the tricks A'hmed was playing... spoke to him harshly... put A'hmed down many times in front of the Baroness... so A'hmed hates him. Now at last he has a chance to get even.'

'Yes,' Pero agreed. 'He's been waiting a long time for this and whether he thinks the person he hired did the murder, or that Radouan did it, doesn't really matter to him. He will say Radouan did it.'

'Tell me, why are you doing all this for Radouan?'

Prospero sighed and shrugged his shoulders, 'Well he's my first case, one has to begin somewhere, I suppose, and he's my oldest friend... we've known each other since we were six when my family returned here from Israel where I was born.'

'Born in Israel?' Toni smiled... 'Prospero... I love it but it's not a name one hears in Morocco.'

'My mother and father are both Jewish and so I am Jewish, Sephardim on both sides of the family.' Pero rolled his eyes, and smiled shyly. 'My full name is Prospero Manolo Serfati. My mother's family name is Afriat and there are other family names like Zafrani, Segrati, Benhamou, Maleh and Bensimon.'

'Originally my father's family came from Baghdad to Cordoba in the 9th Century to work for the *Umayyad* who had fled the *Abbasid* conquest of Damascus and come to Spain. They were scholars and translators, from Greek to Hebrew to Arabic into Latin. In 1493 we know they were still living in Granada and were kicked out of there by Ferdinand and Isabella and came to Fez. Then sometime in the 17th century when the present Dynasty came to power the family moved to Meknes and began working for the Sultan there and finally landed up in Marrakech.'

'I'm told many Jewish families came here in Roman times and before,' Toni observed.

'That is true.' Pero nodded, 'my mother's family are descended from Jews who have always been in Morocco, at least from Roman times, and perhaps as far back as the Phoenicians 600 BC. We think the Afriat name may have been given to them by the Arab rulers of Languedoc with whom they traded from the 10<sup>th</sup> century AD on. That's when the name Prospere began to be used by us. One of my mother's many uncles was named Prospere and they say there has

always been a Prospero in her family. When I came along my mother who is a great fan of Shakespeare changed it to Prospero.'

'My mother is supposed to be related to the philosopher Musa ibn Maymun, known in Latin as Maimonides. He was a good friend to Ibn Rushd, better known as Averroes who died here in Marrakech in the 13<sup>th</sup> century after twenty years of house arrest in the reign of the Almohad sultan Abu Ya'qub. Fleeing south into the realms of the fundamentalist Almohads of Marrakech was preferable to remaining in the increasingly hostile Christian north.'

'At that time in Andalous the great debate in all three Religions of the Book was Aristotle with his ideas about doubt, measurement and cause and affect. Were these speculations the work of *Shaitan*? Were they not heretical in all three religions of the book? Unfortunately, Islam decided against Aristotle and branded his ideas as *Haram*: sinfull, and forbidden.'

'That debate is still going on,' Toni observed, '...these Fundamentalists in all three religions.'

'Yes, it's becoming very destructive, but in times past in Andalusia, and later in Morocco, Jews were so Arabized and the Arabs were so Hebrewized there were few distinctions made between us and we did not quarrel. Since we are both members of the Semitic race we should be natural allies. Long before Islam we had lived in peace with the Arabs. There were always a few problems, often we had to pay special taxes, but it was better than living with Christians. Now, of course, we have real problems. Everywhere these politicians have replaced kings and inflamed the masses.'

'Pero gazed seriously at Toni, 'After 1973 it was very difficult in Marrakech, so difficult my family moved to Casablanca. I stayed on because we had property here, and I had many school chums. Many times Radouan stood up and defended me during anti Jewish feeling aroused here by the struggle in Palestine. That's why I'm standing up for him now and because I know him, how tender he is underneath all his bravado and that he could never have murdered his friend the Baroness.'

## 60

On the same day in another part of town, though his table manners may not have suited Antonia Howard, the false Youssef was not to be underestimated. In his palace in Fez he had well paid eyes and ears; eyes for the day and ears for the night, who had just called to inform him that someone with a Marrakchi accent, had been speaking with old Gamal into a tape recorder.

Relishing these moments with a cunning sharpened by a life of deceit, his facial muscles tightened and his eyes narrowed as he contemplated revenge, shouted at the caller and berated him in the foulest of terms: 'stupid like a donkey... useless bowl of shit... son of a pig! Why had no one informed him Gamal was still alive,' Gamal his greatest enemy, the man who had abused him as a child. Something had to be done that very night to silence the old bastard! Clicking off, he paced the pink marble floor of Madame Saadi's double salon and tried to ignore her cloying voice calling him to bed.

## 61

The following morning Toni called the chauffeur, Larbi and advised him to go ahead and have Radouan moved to the Psychiatric Facility. Then come round and see her at five that evening.

At lunch there was a call from Pero who confirmed that Radouan had been quietly transferred from his isolation cell at *Boulmaraz* to a room in the Psychiatric Hospital, one leg chained to the side of his bed and watched over by two armed guards. The idea of Radouan now isolated in a private room disturbed Prospero as the guards could easily claim he had attacked them and shoot him.

'Something more has to be done.' He told Toni, 'Either Radouan must be moved to a ward, or the guards must be disarmed... at least now there are no restrictions on our going to visit him.'

By the time Larbi arrived at Toni's that evening to collect his three hundred thousand dirhams, Pero had set up a voice activated recording machine in one of the back bedrooms; with a remote microphone in the drawing room so powerful it could pick up heavy breathing. Toni made a point of going over the transaction and insisted before she handed over the money, Larbi, must promise that the men guarding Radouan would be disarmed.

At first he was adamant that it could not be done, wasn't part of the deal. Radouan was a dangerous man. The guards had to be armed. He wanted his thirty bricks.

Toni was amazed, and amused by his audacity, so she offered him ten bricks more if Radouan was in good shape when he appeared before the Tribunal. She could tell Larbi's mind was wavering. He actually looked around the room as if to be sure they were alone. 'How do I know you will keep your word?' he sneered quietly, 'you are a very tricky woman.'

'How do I know you will keep yours?' she smiled, 'you're a very greedy fellow... I suppose we'll have to trust each other.'

He laughed nervously at her frankness. 'Yes of course,' he said.

She motioned toward a black plastic garbage bag containing the money.

He opened it, counted out the number of bricks and carefully closed it. Then smiling seductively he got up and kissed both her hands, bid her good evening and made his way to the lift.

The next day when Prospero visited the Psychiatric Facility, the guards standing outside Radouan's room had been disarmed but Radouan worried that his case before the Tribunal was only two or three weeks away and hoped things were moving along quickly. Then Pero played the tape of old Gamal speaking and Radouan listened intently on earphones shaking his head in disgust. 'Where is this fake Youssef,' he growled, 'I would enjoy killin' him.'

'Here in Marrakech...'

'He should be watched.'

'Don't worry, I have people watching him. We also found your orphan, Mokhtar... He told us when the police came out there he and the maid Fatima were questioned but not detained. After that, they quickly left Dar Chems, hid in a nearby village and finally made their way back to Marrakech. He said to tell you Fatima was in the closet with him when they saw the server, Zouheir, go into The Baroness' bedroom with a tea tray shortly after you left. He was in the room for a long time and came out with the same tea tray on which nothing had been touched. 'And there are two other servants at the gate who will back up your story and say they saw you leave about eleven thirty that evening, right after supper. Your orphan wanted to come here and visit you. I left him in tears. Are you just... I mean helping him or is there more to it than that?'

'What do you think?' Radouan smiled calmly, 'But you know I've always been very discreet...'

Pero grinned. 'I suspected it... swimming on the other shore from time to time... he's *zween*, I don't blame you. Anyway he wants very badly to see you.'

'Tell him I'll see him soon... *Inch Allah*. And thanks to his sharp eyes and ears I may be saved. But he mustn't tell anyone he knows me, NO ONE. That's very important...'

Pero shrugged his shoulders 'Well, A'hmed knows you brought him out there...'

'That's true,' Radouan nodded, 'but all he knows is that I was jus' getting the kid a job, not that I knew him. Right now if A'hmed or anyone finds out where Mokhtar is, his life could be in danger. He must stay in the house... we must see to it that he gets food. If Mokhtar comes here and tries to see me, tell him I'll deny I know him and never speak to him again... you can tell him that. Tell him I have many spies working for me so he'd better behave himself and stay in the house. Where is the maid?'

'With him in the house.'

'Good, keep them locked in there together. Buy her some new clothes and perfume and buy him some white paint. The house needs painting inside ... let him go to work...have someone watch the place.'

Pero smiled. 'Lady Antonia has been on the phone all day to Rabat... she's also been talking with her ex-husband in London...'

'Rupert?' Radouan brightened.

'Yes, that's his name. She says he's very concerned and has organized a legal team of English and French Avocats who are flying down day after tomorrow to help us.'

'Oh... I'm happy to hear this,' Radouan chuckled, 'I like Rupert. We are like brothers... I never wanted Toni to divorce him. So what are your plans now...?'

'She and I ... we will go to Casablanca where we will meet these Avocats and drive them up to Rabat... *Inch Allah*. There we will be able to meet with officials of the Ministere d' Interieur and present our case...'

'Why Rabat why not here? My Hearing will take place here, not at Rabat?'

'Believe me, my brother, you know our evidence would not be taken seriously here ... the Marrakchi's, you know how difficult they are, and now they are so jealous of you they want to revenge themselves. Moreover, they are being offered many inducements to put a noose around your neck...'

'Who is offering?' Radouan looked offended.

'People from Europe representing companies the Baroness owned that you are due to inherit. Antonia thinks our only hope is to go straight to the top. First we have to prove our case in Rabat, then come back here and present it...okay?'

'I hope you have more than one copy of those tapes you made in Fez...'

'Don't worry, I have three copies...'

Radouan stared hard at Pero through tired eyes. 'You, mon ami, you're savin' my life... why? How can I ever...'

'Because we are good friends, of course,' Pero smiled affectionately, 'since childhood... you always stood up for me when I needed you so now I'm standing up for you because although sometimes you are very BAD, underneath I know you are very GOOD.'

'You really think so? '

'Yes. Over the years, I've watched you take on this tough guy attitude but I know the real Radouan too. Your problem is you have always felt things too deeply. In Morocco this is not wise for it is impossible to show one's true nature... I know you could easily kill with your bare hands and I hope you haven't, but inside I know you are kind and tender... that's why I'm trying to help you now. I've

always thought of you as a poet, a poet who doesn't write, who lives his poetry... a poet of life. Believe me; I know you would never have murdered that lady.'

Pero nodded and smiled. 'And now we have proof that Zouheir entered the Baroness' room, and from Gamal, that this Youssef is an impostor. All we have to do now is catch them.'

Radouan grimaced, 'Yes, we have this Gamal's story, but we don't have much proof he hasn't made it up... same with the maid and Mokhtar. In the end it will be a question of money. Will you visit Fez again?'

'I want the legal team and the people from the Interior Ministry to visit Gamal and hear him speak... once they hear him they will be convinced.'

'Yes and...' Radouan glanced around and whispered, 'These guys, have they been disarmed?'

'Yes... this morning.'

'Ah... then if you bring me a file I will break my chain and escape this place.'

'Are you crazy? If you did that we would lose everything!'

## 63

The following morning when Pero telephoned Toni and told her Radouan's guards had been disarmed, he received further good news. The legal team Lord Rupert had assembled was arriving in Casablanca the following day, and they would meet them; and even more important, her contacts in Rabat had managed to schedule a meeting with officials at the Ministere d'Interieur for the day after that. Pero was relieved. They would be flying to Casablanca the next day. A van and driver would pick everyone up at the airport and drive on to Rabat where she had made reservations at Hotel Farah Safir. On the way he would be able to brief the legal team on various aspects of the case. Fortunately, the French member was a former Deputy Ambassador to Morocco with many contacts in the government and one of the English Barristers was a school chum of a Moroccan VIP.

Pero was pleased. It would be helpful for him to meet and know these foreign Avocats. Before Radouan's arrest, he hadn't even met Lady Antonia for Radouan had jealously guarded his relationship with her and kept it a secret, even from his closest friends. Now Pero understood why. Not only was Toni still beautiful, she was intelligent as well. Perhaps a bit selfish, always referring to things as my this and my that: my plane, my horses, my trainer Lahcen, my legal team, my cigarettes...my, my, my! At first Pero was put off but soon realized he was wrong: not only was she kind and generous, but more important, and quite unexpectedly, she was the most efficient woman he'd ever met! If she said she would do something it got done! If she told you she would be somewhere at a certain time, she was there. It was amazing! Of course the fact that she was rich helped. She could smooth the way and speed things up. People listened when she spoke, bowed, kissed her hands, and generally sucked up. So why was Radouan always telling her she was crazy? It was great to see everything working out so well, no screw-ups, no delays, and NO MONEY PROBLEMS!

At the Casablanca airport they were escorted to the First Class lounge where they had sandwiches and coffee. When the legal team arrived, the driver led them all to the van, which was well stocked with food and drink. What a lucky guy Radouan was, Prospero thought, to have met such a woman, kept her interested in him all these years and finally married her! What would they have done if the Baroness had been murdered before Radouan married Lady Antonia, or if there had never been an Antonia Howard, if the Baroness had died and left everything to Radouan without the money and power to go after it? He would not have seen one dirham. Even now, Pero guessed, it was going to be far more difficult than any of them expected.

During the drive to Rabat, he briefed the legal team about the evidence he had uncovered and played the tape of old Gamal telling his story, translating as he went along. Then Toni gave an account of the long relationship she and her ex-husband had had with Radouan over the years, and how she could not imagine him murdering his old friend the Baroness. She also described her long business relationship with Madame Saadi. How it was Saadi who had called the Marrakech Police, Saadi who registered the complaint against Radouan which led to his arrest, and, despite her denials, Saadi and

her boy friend the false Youssef, who had probably released all this information to the press.

By the time they reached the Hotel Safir in Rabat, the members of the legal team seemed thoroughly familiar with the case and agreed to meet the next morning at ten thirty in one of the hotel's conference rooms.

Alone on the balcony of her hotel suite looking out over the ancient port of Salle and the sea beyond, as she stood puffing on a cigarette, Toni breathed a sigh of relief. For the moment, Radouan was in his bed at the Psychiatric Facility in Marrakech, safely out of harm's way. And from the tone of the afternoon's conversation she sensed, thanks to Prospero and everything he'd discovered, that Radouan's case was strong.

When this mess was finally straightened out and Radouan was free, she reckoned, something really important had to be arranged for Pero. Perhaps he could manage Radouan's affairs - Pero the lion tamer. Without his sage advice, always stepping back and getting Radouan to think about what he was doing, Radouan would be doomed. Yet without Radouan's drive and cunning, Pero would flounder. Radouan, the sleek cat, playful but dangerous, how she did miss him. Still, it was restful to be away from him, from his tempestuous manner, his wild energy and atavistic presence. But no sooner were they separated, than she began to need him again – just what did that really mean?

At first his machismo had irritated her beyond belief, but as she got to know him, she thought she saw a great potential beyond all his conditioning - beyond the poverty and structure of his society which had so sorely disadvantaged him. Despite all this, he had this strange reservoir of positivity, of innocence and purity of being; so different from the men who had populated her former debauched existence in London.

Dealing with his craziness, however, had soon become a full time job, often brought her close to madness and many times she had been tempted to give up, leave him, and leave Morocco. Like the famous lyric poem sung by *Umm Kalthoum*, Radouan had become both her Doctor and her Disease.

Suddenly she saw him cuffed to his hospital bed in Marrakech and shuddered. 'Reality check,' she thought to herself, yes, that's

what this was for both of them. In the future would they be more careful of each other's feelings, more caring?

The sun slid behind the shimmering rim of the Atlantic and in the estuary below, sea gulls called to each other as they settled in for the night. She tried to imagine it long ago, a harbor crowded with Phoenician and Roman ships, later with the Corsairs of the Barbary Pirates, and British merchantmen, carrying the colonists to America.

Over in Salle, the fissiparous lights of a huge sports stadium had gone on and she remembered the last time she had been here in this hotel was with Rupert, buying horses or something. She sighed, flicked her cigarette into the breeze and went inside. Time for a drink, and something to eat, she thought, and wondered as she picked up the phone to call room service, if perhaps, she should invite Pero to dine with her - How diligent he had been, how sweet and comfortable to be with.

Then she shook her head sadly: it was definitely not a good idea. Pas encore - for lunch perhaps, but not dinner here in the suite of a Seaside Hotel. Pero would mention it to Radouan who would start obsessing about them having been alone together and go into one of his operatic rages. Does my husband crave drama, she asked herself, ah yes, just the sort that left her English heart drained.

A room boy appeared with a sheaf of phone messages. Tossing them aside she lit a cigarette, began browsing through a copy of French Vogue and found Delphine staring out at her, wearing outrageous things by Gautier and Thierry Mugler, photographed in Marrakech - page after fabulous page. Now she could see why Radouan had been so attracted to this unusual young woman, why Francesco had jumped at the opportunity to create a film around her and signed her on in such a hurry.

At ten thirty the following morning, after breakfast in the hotel coffee shop, Toni and Pero retired to a conference room where the legal team was waiting. A few minutes later there was a faint knock on the door and two distinguished looking men in dark suits were announced. After being introduced all around by Toni as officials from the Ministry of the Interior, the members of the legal team briefed the two men, setting forth the main points of the case and events which had transpired since Radouan's arrest.

The two officials were curious about why the false Youssef, if he was in fact false, had not gone directly to the Baroness and revealed himself. Prospero replied that there was, in fact, evidence from some servants that a person answering his description did just that, but after one visit was repeatedly turned away on orders from the Baroness herself - which made the elaborate invention by Madame Saadi about why she hadn't taken Youssef to see the Baroness sooner seem very strange.

'And you don't think your Radouan got wind of all this,' they asked pointedly, 'it would be out of character if he hadn't.'

To which Pero replied that Radouan was busy with other things at the time and only saw the Baroness once a week at most. 'I have his word that he knew nothing of all this,' Pero said, 'and if he had, I'm sure he would have been the first one to try to unravel the mystery.'

While the men around her continued their discussion and probed each other's minds about the shareholders and CEO's of certain large multinationals allied with Madame Saadi, Toni detected a certain willingness on the part of the MI men to make a deal. Obviously these companies were prepared to offer large incentives for the Government of Morocco to get rid of Radouan. What could she and Radouan offer? Yet from the tone of their conversation she recognized that this was only an opening gambit. In fact the MI would only be ready to negotiate when more cards were on the table, and then, at the last possible moment.

As the men droned on, her mind wandered and she was suddenly very sure the false Youssef must have been brought to see The Baroness by Madame Saadi, at a very early stage, perhaps as early as five months past. And Minna would have reacted exactly as she had: seen through him immediately, then hesitated, given excuses, and finally avoided him. And, of course, this Youssef would

have come back and pestered her - wasn't the type to give up that easily. After all, he was an Avocat. He was tenacious - thought he was a class act. And when Baroness Minna turned him down, in a rage he conceived a plan: had A'hmed hire Zouheir, then sat back and waited for the right moment to trap Radouan - but how to prove all this? How to prove anything?

And there was the contrary possibility that all along Radouan had known about Youssef. She thought Pero's defense on that point was a little weak. Knowing Radouan as she did, she was sure he would have known Youssef was in Marrakech and bided his time. On the other hand, he might not have known about Zouheir. She reminded herself to call her friend Khalil at the Airport in Marrakech, to see if he could remember whether Radouan was early or late checking in for his Paris flight that morning after the murder.

Prospero was playing the tape on which old Gamal recounted the goings on between Moulay and Youssef. The two men from the MI listened intently but wore blank faces. After the tape was finished they spoke to each other quietly in Arabic. Then one of them asked: 'What proof do we have this man is telling the truth. Who is he? Perhaps this is a story you have concocted and got some old man to speak it into your tape recorder. In any case, servants' testimonies are famously unreliable.'

'The old man is in Fez,' Pero replied earnestly, 'the points he brings up seem to check out. Either we can go there ourselves and interview him or he can be brought here... and there are neighbors who are not servants who will verify that he has lived in the Patron's palace and worked there all his life. Moreover, the man who changed the names in the various documents relating to Moulay and Youssef is alive and willing to tell his story if he receives immunity from prosecution. What he did was illegal, certainly, but as we all know, this sort of thing goes on every day... it's not surprising he thought of it as just another job.'

The two officials consulted again in mumbled Arabic. 'Where is this so-called false Youssef now?' they asked.

'In Marrakech,' Pero replied, 'we have people watching him.'

One of the MI men got out his cell phone, called Marrakech and ordered his contact there to place the false Youssef under surveillance. 'Watch but take no action,' he said.

Then Pero spoke about the notations he'd discovered in the records of the mental institutions at Fez and Casablanca when the

real Youssef was transferred; how he left Fez as Youssef and was admitted to Casablanca as Moulay.

The MI man called Fez and asked them to check out the records in the mental facility there, also to find the old man Gamal and bring him to Rabat, being very careful not to upset him as he was old and might collapse.

When he was finished, Toni spoke for the first time - in flawless Arabic.

The jaws of the two MI men dropped perceptibly and they smiled for the first time. Although impressed as she intended they should be, it was obvious they realized immediately she had probably understood everything they had said between themselves. Continuing on in Arabic, Toni told them she had been an intimate friend of the Baroness for over twenty years; had met this person who called himself Youssef several times, and couldn't imagine he was her son.

Then, informing them of the van she had at her disposal, she suggested they drive off to Fez immediately and interview Gamal. 'It's quite obvious he's too old to travel,' she observed. 'If we try to uproot him and bring him here, we don't know what might happen... he might have a heart attack on the way. I also think it is extremely important we go to Casablanca and meet the real Youssef... perhaps he's not even crazy. And if you have the testing facilities here, as I'm sure you do, we must get a tissue sample from him to compare his DNA with that of the Baroness whose body has not yet been buried but lies frozen in Marrakech. You must admit, it would be the simplest way of deciding this whole issue.'

'Of course,' the MI men agreed, 'we will certainly do that. It should prove conclusively who the real Youssef is; there is no question about that. But will it solve the problem of who killed your friend the Baroness? Moreover there is no absolute proof that this Moulay, the maid's son, poisoned Youssef... nor will there ever be. That Moulay may have assumed Youssef's name is wrong but certainly does not mean he killed the Baroness or even had a hand in it.'

Just then the cell phone of one of the MI men beeped and after a short conversation he clicked off. 'Our men in Fez went to fetch this old Gamal and were told that last night two men dressed in police uniforms (we know they were not police) came and dragged your Gamal off. The other servants and neighbors assumed he was being taken to jail for some reason but nobody really wanted to know why.'

About forty-five minutes ago his body was discovered floating in one of the town wells.'

For the first time the two MI men seemed to have awakened. 'Your case is looking brighter,' one of them said. 'It's obvious this is part of something larger... it's not easy to get police uniforms... it's expensive.'

'Masterminded by whom?' Toni wondered aloud.

'I have learned reliably,' Pero told the MI men, 'That A'hmed, the Baroness' old servant, received a very large sum of money for employing this man Zouheir. I have also learned that A'hmed was told by someone that the Baroness was not going to leave him any money; probably our false Youssef put this into A'hmed's head as a play to bring him round. I'd like to suggest therefore that a background profile be done on this Zouheir and he be picked up for questioning as soon as possible. I have reason to believe he has a long criminal record.'

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In his Marrakech apartment the call confirming that Gamal no longer existed had not eased the false Youssef's mind. No. There was the recording the old man might have made; tapes didn't die, in fact they had a way of multiplying. All the secrets Gamal had known, and what he might have said, how careless to have forgotten about him. The palace in Fez was so large one was never sure who was there and who was not, especially in the old Servants' Quarters which he never visited. A fatal error perhaps, but now with Gamal gone, there was no proof his story wasn't a fabrication and not the voice of Gamal at all.

'So much for him,' Youssef muttered to himself, 'but what about Amran, what to do about the arch forger?'

Retrieving his cell phone, he spoke rapidly to someone in Fez and beeped off. This one will be expensive, he thought, but

absolutely necessary. And now, yes, now the problem of Zouheir... THE BIG PROBLEM... take care of Zouheir, but how? Drive out to the Baroness' *Ksar*, find him and get him out of there? Of course, the police must have already questioned Zouheir but something told him they hadn't really 'questioned' him. Somehow he must reach Zouheir before that could happen, but how?

The Baroness' place would be full of police. There was no way he could go out there without being noticed. Yet maybe, yes maybe there was a way. Couldn't he drive to that village a few kilometers beyond and find some boy who would take a message to Zouheir, warn him to get out of there and bring him in to Marrakech? Of course!

Walking from his apartment house to his car, which he kept a block away in front of Madame Saadi's villa, he passed a parked car with two men inside and was certain they were up to something. Every villa and apartment house in Marrakech had its gardien, every gardien a potential spy. And sure enough, when he reached his car and drove off, the car pulled out behind him.

Heading for the Medina he entered through Bab Dukala, and after a circuitous passage through narrow streets and derbs, managed to lose his pursuers and came out on the far side of the *Kasbah*, through Bab Roub on to the road leading to Ouarzazate. A few kilometers further on he pulled off the road and waited. No one was following him. But now he knew he had to hurry because something was up. The police communication systems were excellent. There was no time to lose.

Reaching a small village not far beyond the turn off to the Baroness' place, he settled down in a disreputable looking roadside cafe, ordered a *tajine* and some coffee and waited. Soon a churlish looking young tough came by selling cigarettes and Youssef asked him if he would like to make some extra money, maybe big money. The youth, Edar by name, nodded hesitantly as Youssef explained he had a friend he had to rescue because the police might be after him. Told Edar he would let him off at the servants' entrance of a big *Ksar* down the road where he must go in and ask to see a server called Zouheir. As soon as he found Zouheir, Edar should tell him to come with him to Marrakech immediately because the police were looking for him and his life was in danger.

Edar would then escape with Zouheir through the back roads to Ourika where they could catch a ride back to Marrakech and come

straightaway to a certain address Youssef had printed out on a scrap of paper. If he completed this mission, he told Edar, there would be five hundred dirhams waiting for him.

Edar stared at him suspiciously and said: 'If the police are involved five hundred is not enough, it has to be more, at least two thousand.' Finally they settled on fifteen hundred; seven fifty then, and seven fifty when Edar delivered Zouheir to Youssef's apartment in Marrakech. In his car, Youssef counted out seven hundred fifty dirhams, drove back to the servants' entrance of Dar Chems, dropped off Edar and continued on toward Marrakech.

A few miles down the road, several police cars sped by travelling in the opposite direction toward the Baroness' *Ksar*. Instinctively, Youssef knew they were on their way to pick up Zouheir and wondered whether this kid Edar would just pocket the money and run, or would have found Zouheir in time to get him out of there. At the very least, the police would have already questioned A'hmed. Maybe he had told them how Zouheir happened to be employed there. But what could make them think Zouheir had anything to do with the Baroness' murder? A'hmed had said very clearly he saw Radouan leaving that morning and never mentioned Zouheir. Yet someone suspected Zouheir, someone high up and if they questioned him he would cave in!

For the first time in his life Youssef panicked. His heart leapt to his throat and losing control of his car he zigzagged down the highway narrowly missing some oncoming cars. By the time he arrived back in Marrakech, however, parked his car in front of Madame Saadi's villa in Gueliz and walked back down the street to his own apartment, he had regained his composure, yet this episode had convinced him that very soon he must leave Morocco. Yes, the time had come to get out.

Idly gazing out the window of his darkened apartment, as if to confirm his decision, he suddenly noticed instead of the usual one or two gardiens lounging in the shadows of the old Jacaranda trees below, now there were three or four more and they were not gardiens! Absolutely, he had to leave at once, but how when all his foreign currency and other valuables were in Fez?

Just then his phone rang and it was Madame Saadi wondering what had become of him. Why hadn't he called her? 'I happened to see you just now when you parked your car,' she cooed 'where have you been?'

'Driving around, a few errands in the Medina,' Youssef replied.

'Why didn't you come up?'

'When?'

'Just now, silly, when you parked your car. I miss you. I need my pleasure. You know, I think you have the hardest beard in Maroc.'

'Are you speaking on your cell phone?'

'No, why?'

'Maybe we can talk then... it's so easy to intercept cell phone conversations... things have been happening... someone discovered an old servant of my father's in Fez who has given... really I thought the man was dead. He hates me because I would never give him my *zouk*. Now he's given out some preposterous story to someone that could be damaging to our case...'

'To whom did he give this story...?'

'I don't know, but I know he spoke it into a tape recorder.'

'Certainly this person knows nothing of recent events... of the Baroness' death...'

For a moment Youssef considered telling Saadi everything but thought better of it. 'There is something else, something more threatening, which is happening. I think the police...'

'Did you say police?' Saadi asked unsteadily.

'Yes police... maybe from Rabat. At this very moment I think they may be questioning your Zouheir...'

'What do you mean MY Zouheir?' she responded sharply.

Youssef was furious 'Aren't you the one who found him! Wasn't it you who informed me about my mother's Testament in favor of Radouan, who offered to introduce me to her... let's get things straight.'

'You're sounding very grouchy,' Saadi said defiantly, 'you need to come... COME! Come over here right now!'

Youssef lowered his voice. 'My place is being watched; probably your place is too. Right now I am standing by the window and seeing several strange men in the shadows below. I want you to help me. I must go to Fez immediately and see about this old servant. You must dress up like you are going out to dinner – right now. Then go down and get in your car and drive out by the Sheraton. Park it there on Avenue France. Lock it up and place the keys behind the left front tire. If any one is watching you can kick the tire like you think it might be going flat. Then reach down, pretend to feel it and drop the keys behind. Very simple... EASY. Then you check into the hotel and

spend the night. Do not come back to your villa. About three in the morning when these spies are asleep I will escape from here, find your car, drive to Fez, do what I have to do up there and return here in a day or so.'

'You're not planning to leave me here to face the police, are you?' she whispered angrily.

'Of course not; how could you think like that...? I swear I'll be back in a few days.'

Saadi's voice became hard and businesslike. 'Really, I think you'll have to think of another way. I mean, you know, it's so hot... and I'm really tired... I just don't think I can do all that, it sounds too complicated...'

'Really you know... right now I would like to come over there and pleasure you...' Youssef muttered, 'you know that, don't you?'

'I suppose I do,' she replied sheepishly.

'Yes, but how can I with all those guys down there in the street? If you do as I say... check into some hotel... drive your car there and call me... I'll come to see you. I'll spend the night there with you and drive to Fez tomorrow morning early. My *zap*... it wants you...'

'Right now, I'm standing here in my bedroom with the lights out looking down the street at my car,' Saadi hissed, 'there is no one around. Why can't you take your own car?'

'Because if I do they will follow me...'

'But there is no one there...'

Youssef interrupted her, 'You can't see the whole street. They are sitting in a car in the shadow of that big Jacaranda tree. Even if I evaded them here, no doubt they have an alert out on me and I'd be stopped.'

'So go buy another license plate.' Saadi said sarcastically, 'I can tell you where to get one cheap, open twenty-four hours... really tonight I'm very tired and it's very confusing what you want me to do. First you say go somewhere and park and kick the tire and hide the key and check in to Sheraton and ... listen, I know every one at Sheraton for years... they will think it's very strange... why should I be checking in, they will ask themselves?'

'Tell them your apartment is being painted... whatever,' Youssef said angrily '... you're just making excuses. Now I can see it's you who is planning to *tat'labbas lia touhma*, leave me holding the bag. *Anta wallou*... You're NOTHING... *Ghabi*, STUPID... *Kharya!* BOWL OF SHIT.'

'What did you call me?' Saadi yelled.

'Shit. You heard me, bowl of shit... sweeper of camel dung that's what you smell like. Your *tina* and your mouth, your whole body it smells like that... degoutant... nauseating... you couldn't get me to fuck you again if you promised me the fortune of *Karoun*.'

'What if I just parked my car at the Sheraton and took a taxi over to your place with the keys...' she said calmly.

'FOOL!' Youssef yelled into the phone, 'You're a fucking fool. I just told you this place is being watched. I'm trying to keep you out of this... if you can't go to the Sheraton, go someplace where they don't know you... some new hotel.'

'There is no place in Marrakech where I am not known.' Saadi replied imperiously.

'Fuck you off!' Youssef growled. 'Really, I don't see how you can call yourself a Notaire when you're so stupid... even this call is probably being listened in on...'

Slamming down the receiver, he stood looking through a crack between the curtains to the street below, watching and thinking, thinking hard, his heart pumping again. Could he get out the back door of the building unnoticed? - Maybe by wearing an old *jalaba* and worn out shoes, rubbing some dirt in his hair... maybe but not likely. There were certain things he had to bring with him; a few important documents... couldn't use his car though, that was certain. But wait! Why not just call the Mamounia, speak to the men representing the companies the Baroness had controlled? After all, he was very important to them. They had to back him up, even if they found out he was not the real Youssef, they had to! He was an educated man. His problem was not the murder of the Baroness at all, but what he did to the real Youssef. With Gamal gone though what could possibly happen? Whoever taped him, whatever Gamal said, there was no proof it was him speaking; the whole thing could have been made up. Yes? The problem now was that someone was watching him. It could be the police. It could also be Radouan's people waiting to catch him, waiting to torture and kill him! Or it could be both.

*H'bel Terbah*. He remembered an old saying: 'Make yourself stupid and you will be the winner,' and thought, BUS. Yes, of course, that was the solution, the cheapest slowest country bus. No one would think of that. The bus station was a ten-minute walk, but how? Yes. He would wait until three thirty in the morning when everyone was asleep, including the people sent to watch him, and then make

his escape. Those spies downstairs, finally they didn't really give a shit, weren't getting paid enough to stay awake all night.

Turning on some lights, he made himself a pot of strong coffee and began going through his papers. Either he had to bring them with him, burn them, or flush them down the toilet. At two a.m. he would turn off his lights. If they noticed at all, the men down there would think he'd gone to bed and begin feeling sleepy themselves. After that he would leave, looking like a countryman in an old *jallaba* under which he could carry what he had to. In the fridge there was a week old package of *kefta* which he would take along in case of dogs; any dogs who might be wanting to bark at him; human or animal, you always had to have something in your back pocket to shut them up!

## 66

Earlier at the Baroness' *Ksar*, Dar Chems, Zouheir, an experienced killer, had suspected a trap, argued with young Edar about leaving; argued and procrastinated until it was too late and the police had arrived. They questioned every one again. One of the gardeners identified Zouheir as the man he saw taking money from a Fassi called Youssef. Then Zouheir was taken to the cellar of Dar Chems, and after an hour of pain and humiliation was ready to sign anything. The confession he made stated that about four in the morning he had entered the bedroom of the Baroness and smothered her with a pillow. And that the kid Edar whom they were holding upstairs in the kitchen had been sent to bring him in to Marrakech, to the apartment of a certain Youssef who had paid him to do the job.

The men who conducted the questioning were not satisfied, however, and after speaking with their superiors received permission to offer Zouheir a deal - wanted to know who had hired him, who was behind the plot - wanted absolute proof. They would equip him with a small microphone and transmitter. He would let Edar take him back to Marrakech as if nothing had happened. When they met the one who called himself Youssef he would press a button hidden in his pants pocket and his conversation would be transmitted to a near by police

car. For this service, if he completed it successfully, Zouheir's jail time would be reduced by one half.

He agreed. The terms of the agreement were written out and added to his confession and he was cautioned to say nothing to Edar, only that he had been questioned and released.

And so it was that as soon as Youssef had finished sorting through his papers, destroying some and stuffing others in a small bag, he had donned an old *jallaba* belonging to his maid's husband and turned out the lights in his apartment as though he were going to bed. Just then, there was a soft but urgent knock on his door.

He looked at his watch. The time was two in the morning. He turned the lights back on again and opened the door to find Edar and Zouheir standing there. He was immediately suspicious. How had they got past the men outside? 'So you came at last,' he said, 'I think this place is being watched, I am surprised no one stopped you.'

'We saw no one,' Edar lied. 'Here is Zouheir. Give me my money and I will go.'

Youssef withdrew some bills, counted out seven hundred and fifty dirhams and Edar left hurriedly. Meanwhile, Zouheir had been eyeing the small apartment; its disarray, Youssef's strange costume. 'You are getting ready to leave this place aren't you,' he said, 'where are you going? Why are you dressed like that?'

'No, of course not...' Youssef laughed anxiously, 'not going anywhere just cleaning up... sorting things out... my maid's been sick... this old *jallaba*... it belonged to my grandfather I often wear it when I'm here by myself. I was about to go to sleep. What happened to you? What took you so long?'

'That kid... he couldn't find the slip of paper you gave him with your address on it but he thought he remembered it. After some time we found you.' Zouheir stared at him wiping his forehead with the back of his hand. 'I need to travel,' he said at last, 'I want more money.'

'More money?' Youssef asked commandingly. 'What are you saying? Madame Saadi has already paid you a fortune; you should have more than enough. Go to her if you need more money. It's not me who hired you.'

'I will go to her don't worry, but first I want some money from you... I have debts...'

‘Your debts are not my problem.’ Youssef said dismissively, ‘you must have kept something back as a cushion...’

‘Ayee, Com’mon...’ Zouheir cajoled, ‘you have plenty of money... just now I saw a big roll of bills when you paid Edar - you have at least a brick in your pocket.’

Youssef glared at him. ‘Look. I took the trouble to drive out there and warn you, risked my neck and paid Edar to get you out of there before the police arrived. Now you’re asking me for more money, you *haria*. *H’mar!* GO! I have no more money to give you and neither does Saadi. But when Radouan goes to jail for good there will be a big bonus for you.’

‘Look, I need money NOW,’ Zouheir said menacingly. ‘You give me some money NOW or I will go to the police and tell them everything, all your plots and plans... you and Saadi...’

Youssef clenched his fists, his eyes narrowed. ‘You know what I think? I think maybe you have already talked to the police - that’s why it took you so long to get here... why no one stopped you outside.’ He grabbed Zouheir by his coat collar. ‘ADMIT IT! THE POLICE HAVE ALREADY QUESTIONED YOU.’

‘NO, NO!’

‘YES YES, I know it.’ Youssef growled and tightening Zouheir’s collar with one hand began to punch him with his other. Soon he discovered the transmitter inside Zouheir’s shirt and in one Karate move had Zouheir on the floor. ‘You stupid bowl of shit,’ he whispered, ‘you’re nothing. Tell them who hired you, who paid you.’

‘Saadi... Madame Saadi... it was her who paid me,’ Zouheir cried.

In a blind rage Youssef smashed the transmitter and began kicking Zouheir.

‘BUT I DIDN’T KILL HER,’ Zouheir screamed, ‘I WENT TO KILL HER BUT SOMEBODY ELSE HAD ALREADY DONE THE JOB!’

‘Is that what you told the police?’ Youssef asked hoarsely.

‘No no. I said I killed her... they made me say it. That’s what they wanted to hear. Believe me, when they start questioning you you’ll say anything... look they took out one of my toenails.’ He pointed at his foot.

‘DONKEY! STUPID DONKEY!’ Youssef grunted astride the whimpering Zouheir, and began to choke him. ‘Stupid man! IDIOT!’ As his powerful hands tightened on Zouheir’s throat and locked,

Youssef gazed at the ceiling and groaned: *Adou akil, khayr min sadeek jahil...* Idiot, Stupid man... NEVER TRUST A STUPID MAN!

Moments later, coming to his senses, Youssef eased his grip, shook Zouheir vigorously, checked his heartbeat, his pulse, and listened for his breathing. There was nothing. He had to think fast. Since he destroyed the transmitter the police would have been on the move. There was no time to lose. Getting up, he checked the small bag he had packed, put on a pair of battered sandals, mussed his hair, and within minutes was out in the hall on his way up the staircase to the roof. He had a key to the roof door, opened it and locked it behind him. The roof of his apartment house had three levels. The lowest level looked down on a large vacant lot overgrown with weeds surrounded by a crumbling wall, a favorite haunt of vagrants. He hung over the edge of the roof and dropped twelve feet to the next roof, then again to the last roof and from there into the vacant lot. And just in time too, as he could hear the police above looking for him, whistling and calling to each other.

Crouching under a bush, his heart beating too fast, he waited. Would they invade this lot and start poking around? If they did, he would pretend to be drunk and his disguise would protect him. The sound of sirens and an ambulance approaching rent the still night air; he thought he heard Madame Saadi screaming but could not be sure. Then he waited patiently and after some time the police gave up and went away. By dawn, everything was quiet and he discovered he was sharing the compound with two men and a boy asleep under a nearby tree. 'Safety in numbers,' he reflected, 'lost in the crowd.' Yes that was it. He would rest there until ten-thirty or eleven in the morning. Then when the streets were crowded with people and cars he would walk unnoticed to the bus station at Bab Dukala and escape to Fez.

In Rabat that same morning, Pero and Toni were having an early breakfast before driving to Casablanca to visit the young man incarcerated there in a psychiatric hospital as Moulay, the man whom they believed to be the real Youssef.

'What time do we leave?' Pero asked.

'About an hour from now,' Toni replied. 'Our people will be ready at ten. The Interior Ministry people are joining us here. We'll take the van up to Casa, perhaps spend the night there, and return to Marrakech as soon as possible.'

'You look worried... is there something...?' Pero asked.

Toni sighed. 'No no, it's just when everything goes so well I have learned suddenly things can go horribly wrong.'

Pero smiled sadly and quoted an old Arab saying: 'One is prepared for the serpent, but never expects the scorpion.'

Toni looked resigned. 'Yes, exactly... but I'm always expecting the scorpion... that's my problem...'

'What could go wrong now?' Pero said, 'don't worry... we have all the evidence... and yesterday this man Zouheir confessed.

'You know as well as I do,' she scolded, 'He has confessed, or so we've been told... but to whom, the Marrakech police? That could mean more problems. And just before you arrived Omar's brother, the spy Mahjoub, called me with the news that Zouheir was found dead last night in the false Youssef's apartment.'

'What?'

'Yes, dead... murdered! He said the police were claiming Youssef must have done it, but of course, it could have been the police themselves. More over he said Youssef has vanished without a trace. Really, they're such tricksters one can't believe a word they say!'

'But Youssef, they were supposed to be...'

'Watching him, I know, but he has vanished... did not use his car either... Really! And they've detained Madame Saadi ... house arrest. Her family is so important they would never dare put her in jail, but I'm wondering what evidence they might have against her? Nobody seems to know. My worry is the people who must be backing our false Youssef, all those foreign companies, will now be offering very meaningful incentives... especially if by some remote chance his DNA should match that of Minna's. But now he's gone,' she shrugged, 'and we don't have a sample and ... anyway, my dear

Prospero, you know as well as I do the government here can do anything it chooses... you know that. The King is a descendant of the Prophet... Prince of Islam... So forget about evidence...What he says happens!

On the drive to Casablanca with Pero, the legal team, and the two men from the *Ministere d'Interieur*, one of the MI men received a call on his cell phone and Toni sensed more trouble. The MI man talked rapidly then clicked off, an expression of disgust mingled with irony lingering on his face 'The one they call Amran who worked in the department of Records at Fez and according to your tape changed all the documents concerning Moulay and Youssef? Well, he has just now been found dead, of poison in a hotel room in Tangier. Either he took it himself or some one gave it to him... nobody seems to know.'

'Does that make our case stronger or weaker?' Toni asked.  
The MI man sighed and smiled enigmatically.

In Casablanca they stopped for lunch and by three o'clock that afternoon arrived at a crumbling Corbusier-like structure which housed the government psychiatric facility.

'Council Flat Modern,' Toni muttered as they entered the reception hall, 'You'd think as his father left a trust to support and care for him he'd be kept more comfortably than this... see how run down it all looks. And not really that clean either.'

'You must be joking,' Pero replied, 'this is luxurious... I mean for a government run place. You should see the facility in Fez where they were keeping him!'

'But he should be able to afford a private hospital... shouldn't he?'

'You're forgetting... the trust which was set up to care for him, was for Youssef. Here, officially, we have Moulay.'

'Of course, how stupid of me... So this is a charity hospital?'

'Charity, Government, it is all the same, Moslem charities: *Habus*. Really, it's not that bad. The people who work here are very compassionate.'

'You've been here before then...'

'Radouan and I had a friend in here, Abel... classmate of ours at university who went on to get a *Doctorate d' Philosophie* in France.'

But when he got his degree there and returned to Morocco he couldn't afford to pay the bribe here to get a teaching position and went crazy, took to the streets and landed up here in this place. Then we began to see him in Marrakech begging for dirhams, for food and last January he died on the street. Maybe Radouan has mentioned him to you. They were good friends.'

'How ghastly,' Toni shook her head, 'They should set up an agency to investigate these things. I mean people demanding money to employ teachers... really! That's insane.'

'They could,' Pero laughed, 'if they could find someone honest enough to run it. But they would never find such a person, because the government encourages a system which keeps power in the hands of the powerful... we should have a system based on merit, otherwise our country will always be a client of powerful foreign nations.'

In the reception hall the Director, who bowed nervously at everyone and tried to kiss Toni's hand, met them.

'If you do not mind,' Toni addressed the MI men and the Director, 'would it be possible for me to see the patient first alone? As you may know the Baroness was an old friend of mine and if this person is her son I think I'll know ... but I must be alone with him for a few minutes... do you mind?'

They deferred to her and the Director introduced her to a fat but very sweet head nurse, who conducted her down a long corridor past identical metal doors with small windows of reinforced glass. Soon they stopped; the nurse peeped in one of them and unlocked a door. 'Moulay, it's me, *habibi*,' she said quietly, 'Moulay? I am bringing someone to see you... a nice lady... I want you to be good.'

She opened the door slightly. Toni glimpsed the patient pacing back and forth and noticed a track he seemed to have worn in the plastic grass floor covering. At one end, there was a cot and chair, at the other a small television on a crude wooden table. The television was turned to a sports channel. The patient paced up and down, robot-like, staring straight ahead out of dead eyes, mumbling to himself.

'There's always a game somewhere,' the nurse sighed, 'seems to calm him down... otherwise he can get violent and, of course, he has no control over his bowels. That's why he has his own toilet.' She pointed proudly to a small room with a washbowl and squat toilet.

Although a human wreck seemed to move before her Toni sensed at once that here, indeed, was Minna's son. How awful, she thought, how very sad!' Moreover, the person who had done this deed had lunched with her just a fortnight ago; it made her ill. However, there was no doubt: his face was Minna's face: the same high cheekbones and forehead, same large deep-set eyes, but green not blue like Minna's; and although the chin was rounder, the skin darker, the resemblance was uncanny. And while the false Youssef's hair was black and woolly; this man's hair was dark chestnut and straight; no one who had known her could fail to recognize that he was Minna's son, and handsome too, had he not had that brain-dead look about him.

'Does he ever communicate with you?' Toni asked the nurse.

'Oh he grunts and groans.' she replied, 'sometimes he manages to curse me. He has much *kalak*, anger locked up inside him.'

'Does he ever speak of himself by name, ever mention the name Youssef?'

The nurse looked surprised. 'Why yes, all the time.' she said, 'It's like he's talking to a person he calls Youssef but I think it's himself he's talking too.'

'What happens when you call him Moulay?'

'Sometimes he stares at me and his eyes they bulge. At those times he can get violent. But I have this beeper; everyone who comes in here has to have one... he's very strong from all the walking he does, and late at night he exercises too, mostly push ups and the like.'

Later after viewing the patient through the small window in the door, one of the MI men instructed the hospital Director to have a tissue sample taken and sent to the lab in Rabat for a DNA test.

Toni asked the Director if he thought the patient would ever recover.

'If it is really a case of poisoning with *Ch'dak J'mel* then, of course, he really isn't a mental case, is he?' said the Director cheerily, thinking he had made a joke. But no one laughed 'He was sent here from Fez as a mental case, psychotic, schizophrenic. He hasn't been with us that long. We were told he had a history of alcohol and drug abuse but *Ch'dak J'mel* was never mentioned. Now that you say so, I see many of his symptoms agree with the effects of that plant... in my experience they are easily confused with severe

alcohol poisoning... attacking the brain in the same way... cutting off the oxygen... really this *Ch'dak J'mel* is a problem. It grows everywhere and is sold in all the souks... also Belladonna, and Mandrake. Many people here are addicted to *maji*, and really, it is not *maji* at all but poisoning they do. In severe cases like this the effects of *Ch'dak J'mel* are probably irreversible.'

'If we were to take him out of here,' Toni smiled brightly, 'I have a place in the country outside Marrakech. If we could bring him there I'm sure he might improve... a more interesting environment might... *Inch Allah*, we never know... it might wake up his brain.'

The hospital Director looked grim. 'Unless you induce vomiting in the first few hours, the effects of *Ch'dak J'mel* are thought to be permanent... You can take him, certainly, we would have no objection to that... he is a charity case so the money we are spending on him here... well... we have many other cases waiting. Really, sometimes I wonder what is happening... it seems these days; half the people walking our streets are mental cases. Our culture, our customs... they are disintegrating...'

Toni addressed the men from the Ministere d'Interieur, 'would you have any objection to my taking him to Marrakech? I mean, when this is all over. I am absolutely sure he's the Baroness' son. Your DNA test will prove it, I know.'

'None at all, Madame.'

Toni nodded thoughtfully. 'And now we must consider what the law here says about such a case. My husband Radouan has, as you know, been designated by the Baroness in her Testament as her sole heir. But now if this man Moulay is really Youssef her son... who is the heir?'

'If she has named your husband as her heir, he is the inheritor, nothing can change that,' said one of the MI men. 'But the government would probably like to see enough money set aside in a trust to take care of this poor man. They would want him to be independent of both you and your husband. Forgive me, but these days people die suddenly in plane crashes and what not... *Inchallah*... we never know. If he is her son and the son of the Patron, a *Cherif* from one of our oldest Moroccan families, we must see that he is protected and able to live comfortably for the remainder of his life; on his death that trust could return to your husband or his heirs.'

'When is my husband due to go before the Court of Appeals in Marrakech?' Toni asked. 'I've forgotten.'

‘Next week, on Tuesday’

She looked surprised. ‘Next week on Tuesday! So soon? Will you be on hand?’

‘Yes, Madame, *Inch Allah.*’

‘Can you give us any idea what position the government will take?’

Prospero asked.

The official paused, looked at his partner and said: ‘a man, one Zouheir, has confessed to murdering the Baroness. We hear he signed a confession with the Marrakech police, but they haven’t spoken about it to us or anyone else. They have also detained the Notaire, Madame Saadi in her house for what reason we do not know. We hear she has admitted to hiring the man Zouheir, but that’s not certain. And now he is dead.’

‘Who’s dead?’ Toni said feigning surprise; not mentioning that Omar’s brother Mahjoub had called her that morning with the news.

‘We thought you must know. The server Zouheir, he was found dead last night in the apartment of the man whom you call the false Youssef... but this Youssef is very tricky and he has disappeared... totally. We are looking for him and we have notified Interpol to watch out for him. However, I can tell you we ourselves view your husband's case very favorably. Of course, as you must know, we do not have the final say in this matter...’

The Interior Ministry men departed for Rabat and Toni and Pero flew back to Marrakech. On the plane, Toni asked him the meaning of what the MI man had said. ‘*We do not have the final word?*’

Pero nodded his head thoughtfully, ‘It means they will advise their boss and the government that Radouan is innocent. Moreover those fellows camped in the Mamounia representing the companies the Baroness controlled... I’ve heard from a reliable source they are offering to build factories here, push for tariff considerations in Europe for Moroccan products, and of course large off shore accounts for every one who helps them.’

He smiled at her affectionately, ‘On the other hand, on our side we have you. That Radouan is married to the daughter of English notables... this appeals very much to our notables... and that you are a long time resident of Morocco, as well... that is very important! If Radouan inherits the Baroness’ fortune, he will be one of the world’s

richest men. Of course, you will make your home here in the South... initiate many projects, create jobs, and give generously to charities... won't you?' Pero tossed his head back, stared at her and smiled broadly. 'They would be dealing directly with you and Radouan, not with the faceless officials of corporations whom they do not trust... and most important, although there is no proof that Radouan didn't kill Baroness Minna, this man Zouheir confessed and that's enough... *Inch Allah*... and now he's dead... which is convenient for every one concerned.'

Toni frowned. 'How can you say there is no proof Radouan didn't murder Minna? What about the two servants at the gate who saw him leave around eleven that night... and what about Radouan's orphan and the maid who saw Zouheir enter Minna's bedroom shortly after that... and what about me? He was with me in Marrakech from midnight on.'

'Believe me there is no proof!' Pero replied seriously, 'We, you and I, we know he didn't do it... but here in the Maghreb you must always remember nothing is settled until it is settled... and I can tell you that testimony of servants is not taken very seriously. Now all that remains is to catch the false Youssef and slit his throat.'

'What did you arrange about our real Youssef? When will he be brought over from Casa?' Toni asked.

'In a few days they will bring him over to the Psychiatric Facility in a special van. At the proper moment I intend to bring him into court and parade him before the judges...'

Toni shrugged doubtfully. 'Really you're not...'

'Yes I am... after playing Gamal's tape, I will bring the real Youssef in before the judges,' Pero grinned eagerly '... You will see. You don't really understand the culture here or the legal system ... it's very complicated... perhaps it's more compassionate, more human. It does not really recognize your kind of logic, which comes out of Roman law, which it finds simplistic and barbarous. It favors closure; a consensus which arises from the interplay between the unalterable utterances of Mohamed, who was after all Gods messenger, and the raw emotions of the prosecutors and defendants: a drama which reveals the true nature of things... crazy logic you might call it... very antique, but that's what will convince the judges as well as the government. However even if we resort to dramaturgy, it is very important we are seen to win this case on its merits... otherwise you'll

be paying off for the rest of your lives. The judges must see and hear for themselves... Believe me I know what I'm doing.'

## 68

In another part of the world, the false Youssef, upon whom Prospero would wreak vengeance, had been cooling his heels in the outer office of the largest and most important of the corporations in which the Baroness had shares. In fact, of this particular monolith she owned a stunning fifty-eight percent, a controlling interest that her father had bought in 1939. Now, the false Youssef was there to persuade the management that it would be disastrous for them to allow these shares to fall into the hands of a Moroccan hooligan better suited to the stables, tending horses and camels, than to the exalted boardrooms of their organization.

Back in Marrakech, Youssef the false, had waited in the vacant lot adjoining his apartment building until half past eleven in the morning, passing the time playing cards with drifters who'd been sleeping near him. Having allowed himself to lose money, he finally slipped away and emerged onto the crowded street through a hole in a crumbling perimeter wall, shuffled along in his old *jallaba* to the bus station, and caught the next local bus going north. No one would imagine that he would use that form of transportation. They would be covering airports, highways, even taxi stands and perhaps, first class express buses, but not the local busses, packed as they were with the sweating bodies of the poor.

In this manner, he made his way, slowly but surely, from Marrakech to Beni Mallal, through Kenifra and Azrau, and two nights and three days later had arrived in Fez where he let himself into his own great house through the servant's quarters. It was three in the morning. With the aid of a pencil flashlight and stealth, he groped his way through the house hoping that he could get in and out of the place without waking anyone. Once in his own quarters he closed the outer door, silently opened his wall safe and withdrew a few bundles of foreign currency, some gold coins (*kefta* for the dogs) and an envelope containing five stamps encased in plastic worth well over a

million pounds. Closing the safe, he retreated downstairs and exited as he had entered, unseen and unheard.

Outside on the street he had debated about taking a plane to Tangier. He had plenty of money now; his French passport, all his papers and permanent visas acquired over the years for France, Italy, The Netherlands, and Switzerland. Still, he cautioned himself, it might be dangerous to show himself around Fez, and so he had shuffled back to the bus station in his disguise and waited patiently for the next bus out of town.

Twenty-four hours later, he was in Tangier where he got himself a room in a cheap hotel and went out shopping. It was cool there. His brain came alive and his paranoia eased. He bought himself some luggage, some expensive sports clothes and two pairs of shoes. Returning to his hotel room, he shaved off his moustache to conform to the photo in his French Passport, changed into his new clothes, checked out of the hotel and caught the next ferry to Algeciras with no problems at Passport Control on either side. From Algeciras, he had taken another bus to Madrid and flown on to Amsterdam where he checked into an executive's hotel, ordered two call girls and spent the evening compensating for all the humiliating moments he'd spent over the past few months with Madame Saadi. The following morning he visited the Philatelist who had sold him the five stamps he brought along from Fez. The dealer informed him that since he had purchased them, the stamps had quadrupled in value and were now worth upwards of four million pounds. He decided to sell four of them and keep one in reserve. A few minutes later, a cashier's check in hand for three million pounds, he walked to one of the more reputable banks of Holland, opened a numbered account, and flown on to Geneva.

Now, looking austerely handsome and business-like in a navy pinstriped suit and a pair of six hundred-pound shoes, he was becoming paranoid. Why had he been kept waiting? Had he walked into a trap? Was someone calling the police, to inform them of his arrival - or maybe even Interpol?

Just as he was about to get up and leave, however, the secretary motioned him to follow her into the office of the CEO, a sumptuous suite filled with expensive antiques overlooking the lake. The CEO's face, carved out of marble it seemed, reminded him of the handsome Gestapo officers in one of his favorite Hitler films - handsome and evil.

They spoke in French.

‘So tell me what has happened,’ the CEO said pleasantly, ‘we’ve had reports from our people in Marrakech but they are very confused.’

The false Youssef stared at him, half-smiling and wondered how much more this man knew. ‘Zouheir,’ he said at last, ‘the man who is supposed to have murdered my mother the Baroness, he was questioned by the police, signed a confession and made some kind of deal with them to come to my place, wearing a transmitter and get me to say something incriminating. I suspected something was up, so I led him on. The Notaire, Madame Saadi, had hired him to kill the Baroness so I am clear on that point... of hiring the murderer. Zouheir also said, and this is very important, that he only admitted killing her because they were torturing him; and that SHE WAS ALREADY DEAD when he went into her room with the tea tray intending to smother her. That is very important!’

‘As he was speaking to me, I realized he was wearing this transmitter the police had equipped him with so I smashed it. I’m not sure whether the last part about him finding her dead was recorded or not. I lost my head... I am very sorry for that... I should not have smashed the transmitter.’

The CEO tapped his pen on his desk and gazed out at the lake. ‘It would be a pity if that last bit was not recorded...’

‘Yes and there is another problem. Someone from Radouan’s gang concocted a fantastic story... went to Fez and got this old servant of ours to say I am really the son of one of my father’s maids... that I slowly poisoned the Baroness’ real son, Youssef, who was brought to our house when I was barely one year old. They are saying this Youssef was institutionalized as insane... and that I then changed identities with him. When the police decided to go and question this old servant Gamal, the supporters of Radouan had him killed. They also killed the man they say forged all the papers to change my identity.’

The CEO stared at him but remained silent.

‘Look. I need your help,’ Youssef said quietly, ‘your clout as they say if I am to win this case.’

‘Believe me, we are doing everything we can,’ the CEO replied, ‘but I understand this man Zouheir was found dead in your apartment.’

'The boy who directed him to my place, a young thug called Edar, he wanted money from Zouheir for bringing him there... he was getting money from me and wanting it from Zouheir as well. There was a fight. This Edar grabbed Zouheir's throat and when he let go Zouheir was dead and Edar was out the door... Really, I think he died of a heart attack brought on by the stress of the torture he'd just endured'

'You didn't try to stop them?'

'Of course I did, but it all happened so fast, by the time I pulled Edar off Zouheir he was dead. Tell me would it be a problem for you to say I've been here in Geneva since the week before all this happened?'

'What about your passport? Won't it be stamped with all the countries which you've passed through on your way here?'

Youssef smiled thinly. 'No problem. Here in Geneva, everything is possible. I also have two other passports, which are not stamped.'

'But that same information will be stored in computers...'

'Of course, but this city happens to be home to some of the world's greatest hackers, who are connected with hackers in Israel and India. To retrieve this information and change it, or just delete it is not a big problem for them, especially with the amount of money I'm prepared to offer. In fact it's easier to alter the information in a computer than to forge a passport... so the passport business is not a problem.'

As if realizing for the first time that Youssef might be as clever and deceitful as he was, the CEO stared hard at him and grinned. 'I have to tell you that the Moroccan authorities are being very careful about all this,' he said, 'that's not to say they are against you, but they want to know exactly what happened... and they are very interested in the inducements we are offering. However, they have been to the psychiatric facility in Casablanca and seen this person you call Moulay. You say he's the son of a servant?'

'Yes, of one of the maids called Latifa, and a carpenter also named Youssef who ran away...'

'They are saying it is you who are the son of the maid. That you poisoned the person they always told you was your younger brother. They say you are Moulay and he is Youssef, son of the Baroness Von Schleebruck. They have taken tissue samples from the person called Moulay at the Psychiatric Hospital in Casablanca and will be

comparing his DNA to that of the Baroness whose body lies refrigerated somewhere in Marrakech. Not that we do not believe you, but we feel you should know these things... ’

With great effort, Youssef pulled himself together and sighed, 'I just told you all this a few moments ago. Forgive me, but really I know my country better than you do, sir... tomorrow, yes by tomorrow that tape with Zouheir, and the Gamal tape from Fez, can be misplaced, erased, lost, or stolen; it's only a question of money. As for the DNA test, there is room for inaccuracy there... and a simple matter to have the final report say what we want... only a question of cash changing hands. For me these changes are as simple as a telephone call,' he took out his cell phone, 'shall I start now?'

'No, no. I believe you...' the CEO replied... 'at the proper moment.'

Youssef gazed at him earnestly. 'I tell you, all these details can be taken care of! What you must decide is whether you want to do business with a person like me... a cultured individual with law degrees from the University of Paris and Rabat... or some dirty gigolo from the Marrakech slums. All that is necessary for us to win is to offer larger inducements than this Lady Howard... or what ever she's called... is able to afford.'

'She is very rich...' The CEO observed thoughtfully and raised his eyebrows.

'Yes,' Youssef said, 'but I doubt she has the proper connections to reach the people who actually do these things... the Marrakech police for example. They have the power to do anything they want with Zouheir's confession and that tape before they are ordered to give it to the Interior Ministry. They can lose it or erase it by mistake; and they hate this person Radouan.'

'I'm not sure our stock holders are prepared to match any inducements Lady Howard is ready to offer... we've already said we'll build factories, etc...'

'Look... I'm due to inherit fifty-eight percent of this company, a controlling interest if you will, and I'm certainly ready to spend part of it to defend myself.'

'Ah then what are you prepared to offer us to get you off the hook?' The CEO replied. 'That is the question.'

Youssef stared at him indignantly, 'Offer! Offer what? To whom?'

'To this company, to the other share holders...' the CEO said blandly.

Youssef began to lose it. 'So, not only Moroccans have to be paid off, but you too!'

'The world over it is the same, my dear fellow,' the CEO sighed. 'These hackers you've referred to, the Moroccan police, the Lab technicians... they won't be that expensive. You can use your own money for that. However, the government will be very expensive. What we want from you in return, in return for saving your skin, we want a percentage of your future stock holdings in this company... half of them to be exact.'

'You mean half of my fifty-eight percent of this company?'

'Exactly.'

'Which would leave me with twenty-nine percent... that's impossible - absolutely impossible!'

'Really, I don't think you have much choice,' the CEO smiled coldly. 'If we pull out of this you're dead... and if you think you can conduct this campaign on your own you're making a big mistake... you couldn't afford it... and for us, it's a big risk'

'Twenty is enough for you,' Youssef groused, still trying to bargain.

The CEO chuckled, 'That would still leave you with a controlling interest, my friend. We have grown so large... believe me, to have one individual owning such a big block of stock does not give us the flexibility or the freedom we need to properly operate a company of this size. We do not want any one person to have a controlling interest. No, I am afraid it's twenty-nine percent or nothing. It's up to you.'

The CEO stared hard at him. 'You will no longer have a controlling interest, but I shouldn't think that would be much of a problem... you will still be very rich.'

They wanted more control, the better to steal the shareholders money, Youssef reflected, and replied: 'And for that you're prepared to do everything necessary to help me win?'

'Absolutely!'

Youssef closed his eyes for a moment. 'Then I agree,' he said looking up, 'whatever you say, no problem...'

'We are cooperating with several other companies in which your mother, the Baroness, had large holdings,' said the suddenly avuncular CEO, not only do we have people in Marrakech, we also

have a team in Rabat who are doing everything possible to see... to present your case favorably at the highest possible levels... please believe me... we want you to come out of this the winner. We certainly do not want to see the control of this company and the others pass into the hands of some illiterate Arab hustler, terrorist, or whatever he really is. As long as you co-operate with us and we can deal with you, you have my word we will back you all the way...'

'I suppose we should put our agreement... I mean something should be written down...' Youssef replied.

'Yes, of course, tomorrow... tomorrow morning... say around eleven. Come back then. The papers will be ready; we will sign a memorandum and have a glass of champagne. Meanwhile I think you'd better find one of those hackers you mentioned and have him cover your tracks.'

Something about the way the interview had ended; the softly arrogant, somewhat dismissive tone of the CEO's voice as he mentioned hour of their meeting sounded wrong, set off warning signals and raised Youssef's hackles. So serious was the sudden premonition that as he walked back to his hotel he found himself debating whether to stay in Geneva and bite the bullet. or make a run for it with his three million and start a new life.

And so rather than walking directly to his hotel, instead he took a path beside the lake, which he knew led to a bank with a cash machine, and tried to think, tried to make up his mind. Maybe he would not even return to his hotel room but take the first plane to somewhere like Thailand or Bali.

Deep in thought, trying to calculate all the different angles of his situation, suddenly he noticed a woman, approaching him along the path and as the space between them narrowed, somehow, he knew he was fated to have her. An exceptional Oriental looking beauty surrounded by a halo of iridescent light. *Inchallah!* It was God's will. Watching her approach, his feelings of ill omen vanished, his whole body relaxed and after the usual preliminaries he took her back to his hotel, spent a fantastic night with her and fell asleep in her arms secure in the belief that somehow everything would work out.

Later, however, sometime just before dawn as he was about to have a go at her for the third time, two masked men with guns drawn, entered his room, demanded that he get dressed, handcuffed him

and escorted him out the rear entrance of the building into a waiting car.

## 69

The Marrakech Appeals Court convenes in a large building with an Art Deco façade and a dusky interior resembling a nineteen forties airline hanger, – distinctly not user friendly.

In a pleasant residential district nearby, Toni and Prospero have been going over strategies for their first day in court: witnesses to be called, in what order, how they would deal with the public prosecutor, the judges and Madame Saadi.

During the night the temperature had dropped and over breakfast they debated whether to walk to the court, or drive as planned.

‘It’s such a gorgeous day I would adore too walk,’ Toni said brightly, ‘these days driving makes me so nervous... or when I’m nervous, driving makes it worse... but I guess we’d lose face wouldn’t we... arriving on foot?’

Pero smiled attentively and feasted on her violet blue eyes. ‘I’m afraid we would... press photographers, various undercover agents, they’ll all be there waiting to see you, to gaze upon you. Really, you mustn’t disappoint them. I’ve asked a friend of mine who owns an agency to drive us in his new stretch limo, which we will inaugurate. As he and his new car will appear in all the journals he’s only too happy to oblige. And you, you must look respectable, like your Queen.’

‘You don’t think I look respectable? Really Prospero,’ Toni chided.

‘You’re always very chic, very sportive but...’

‘Hmm. Oh I see, you want me to look traditional...’

‘Traditional and sexy like Diana. If you have one of those funny big hats you must wear it, and high heels... the French press will hate you if you don’t wear high heels.’

‘Pero! Sometimes you surprise me... where do you get these ideas...?’

‘Television, of course... we watch it all the time, mostly to see what people are wearing. Here in Marrakech, people have always been fashion conscious. Many here are descended from nomadic peoples. All they ever had were their clothes, their jewelry, their camels and their horses so those things became very important. Then the French came and, of course, they were very interested in fashion too... so now our camels have become expensive four by fours and our clothes come from Milan and Paris.’

Toni excused herself, took a quick shower, dressed, brushed out her newly blonde hair, and tied it in a bun. ‘How’s this?’ she laughed conspiratorially, appearing a few minutes later in a long transparent coat over a short skirt revealing her famous legs.

As she sauntered back and forth, Pero clapped his hands. ‘Very good... perfect... just what they’ll expect... now you look like a real Princess or whatever you are...’

‘Now, I’m Madame Antonia al Uld Billah.’ Toni smiled mischievously, ‘I will wear a lavender silk head scarf and these dark glasses too...?’

‘Bring them along for the photographers, but don’t wear them in Court... eye contact is very important here, especially with judges. Gaze at them steadily, keep smiling and remember you are Lady Bountiful come down from heaven to shower their wives and children with Mercedes and BMW convertibles.’

He stared at her adoringly then came to his senses. ‘While you were dressing I had a call from Omar’s brother, Mahjoub. As you know, the Marrakech police have that tape of Zouheir arguing with the false Youssef. The Interior Ministry wants it, but the police here do not want to give it up because it favors Radouan and implicates Madame Saadi. Everyone respects Saadi because her father was a famous judge; she’s part of the Establishment. For them, Radouan is worse than nothing... but they know that tape is worth a lot of money and they want someone to buy it.

‘Won’t it be possible to force them to play it? I mean... if the MI men want it played, they’ll have to... no?’

Pero sighed. ‘They could lose it or erase it by mistake; they could sell it to those corporate freaks staying at the Mamounia. I’m afraid we must negotiate with them very soon. We must have it. If the MI men got hold of it they might also play games... might alter it.’

Toni frowned and lit a cigarette, 'I'm terribly worried about Radouan, he must be going mad not knowing what's happened... suddenly they won't let me visit him and no one will speak to me. I can't even find the chauffeur Monsieur Larbi.'

'I'm afraid Monsieur Larbi is hiding from you.' Pero stared at her helplessly. 'I haven't told you this because I didn't want to upset you. The reason Radouan can't have visitors is that three days ago, the day we returned from Rabat, they beat him up and put him back in solitary confinement, said he was causing too much trouble driving everybody at the Psychiatric Hospital crazy!'

Toni stared back wide eyed. 'I can't believe it... what are they up to?'

'I don't know. It's gone above Larbi, I think... but they're up to no good... either he made real trouble for them, or they have some purpose in isolating him.'

'Yes, like killing him! Oh Pero, what shall we do? When he gets upset his first instinct is to fight...'

Prospero nodded. 'I know. Like Samurais we trained in the same gym... it was hard, very hard... either you were a winner or a loser. Radouan and I and our friend Houcein, we were the winners in our class.'

She stubbed out her cigarette, 'So he doesn't know a thing that's been happening... doesn't even know if we'll be in court?'

'Pero smiled grimly, I'm sure he's not thinking that far ahead; just concentrating on staying alive... but he has great faith in you, you know that... absolute trust.'

As they arrived at the Appeals Court, their limousine was immediately surrounded by reporters and cameramen all shouting at once. Anticipating such an event, in fact, praying for it, Prospero had engaged four photogenic bodyguards to clear the way as chic smiling Antonia Uld Billah emerged with her handsome young Avocat and they slowly made their way through the crowd to the entrance of the court building.

Inside, the lobby and anterooms were crowded with bored looking law enforcement officials, clerks, Avocats and the Press. They were met by Toni's legal team who had the Public Prosecutor, in tow. Until a few hours ago, this man thought he was about to administer a coup de couteau that would finish off Radouan forever.

Now that he'd been informed of certain facts: the tape of old Gamal detailing the history of the relationship between Moulay and Youssef, and that he had not been informed by the Marrakech police about a tape of the false Youssef speaking with Zouheir. All these new developments had left the Public Prosecutor shaken. Large amounts of money had changed hands with the promise that Radouan would die or be sent away forever. His whole career, possibly his life, depended on Radouan being found guilty.

The courtroom was sufficiently depressing to instill a sense of awe if not horror among the often-rebellious elements of the local population gathered there. Seated on hard wooden benches, those lucky enough to be admitted to the proceedings spoke in hushed tones. Supporters of Madame Saadi whispered loudly to each other, while various expatriate friends of Toni's and certain Moroccan notables, fanned themselves and read their morning papers. At the rear of the chamber Radouan's mother, his indigent father, and two of his brothers took their seats.

Then Toni, Prospero and their legal team were led to benches just behind the witness stand in the center of the area facing the elevated dais where the judges would sit. A man whom Toni presumed was the Clerk of the Court walked back and forth in front of them consulting with the Public Prosecutor and his men.

Soon Radouan was led in, hand cuffed and hobbled by leg irons between two husky guards. Toni was horrified. Pale and wan, marks on his neck and forehead, he seemed wrapped in a mysterious aura of solitude and calm that she had never seen before. In some mysterious way that she could not explain to herself, she suddenly knew why Minna had made him her heir.

Seated directly in front of her next to Pero, Radouan did not turn to greet her or even acknowledge he had seen her but stared straight ahead apparently indifferent to his surroundings. She leaned forward and gently pressed his shoulder, '*Habibi*, not to worry, we have a strong case. By the end of this day, I promise, you will be a free man.'

He turned and gazed at her reverently, then quizzically, as if she was not quite real. '*Chokran*,' he murmured wearily, his voice coming from far away.

Glancing around at the grim expressions on the faces in the crowded courtroom, Toni reflected with dismay that maybe he was

right to be depressed. Most of the onlookers were not at all moved by the tragedy of Minna's death, but by jealousy of Radouan. How familiar those tight lips and firm set jaws; so like her nannies, her tutors, even her childhood friends and later an uncle who had tried to ravage her when she was fourteen; all jealous hypocrites. How well she knew that look, felt the monster, its mists and vapors, almost the smell of it.

Fortunately from the beginning she'd had the help of sweet Prospero, the faithful one; but for whom Radouan could have faced disaster. Even so, here in the courtroom, face to face with reality, her certainty that they would win was withering. 'Never count your money, child, 'til the check clears the bank.' The voice of her father calling to her from his grave; Yes, and 'nothing is settled until it is settled'... Wasn't that what Pero often said? The companies in which Minna had been a large shareholder would not have been idle, and might have more surprises for them and more influence than they had counted on. Their representatives were seated somewhere behind her. Certainly Radouan would be able to match anything they could propose, but he would have to inherit Minna's money first! Perhaps Pero was right, a bit of courtroom drama might turn the tide.

A stir in the rear of the chamber heralded the arrival of Madame Saadi entering on the opposite side, her friends nodding, murmuring, Saadi smiling, even waving at Toni. No doubt Saadi was well liked in Marrakech. What she hadn't counted on, however, was Toni's marriage to Radouan, never expected that, no one in Marrakech had.

But hadn't Pero just told her Saadi had been arrested? Why then was she not surrounded by bodyguards?

Toni leaned forward and spoke with Pero in whispers 'This recording of Zouheir speaking with the false Youssef, what do we know of it?'

'First we know the Marrakech police have it,' Pero replied, 'and are not responding to requests for it, not even admitting officially they made it. No one is allowed to listen to it. But Omar's brother Mahjoub has heard it and it's very incriminating for Madame Saadi. Zouheir is asking Youssef for more money and Youssef is telling him to go to Saadi. Certainly Saadi must have known something of Zouheir's reputation as a dangerous psychopath who hung around Marrakech coffee houses waiting for victims. Every one knows he was responsible for several murders and has extorted and stolen money

from many foreigners, but his sister is a highly placed prostitute so nothing has ever happened to him.'

'I must say, Omar's brother has been very obliging,' Toni observed.

'Omar's brother is a *toppa*... rat... all police informers are rats, but he's a R'hamna and Radouan is R'hamna and Omar is one of Radouan's oldest friends, like an uncle, so his brother Mahjoub is cooperating with us. But believe me; he will expect to receive some important favors and presents when this is over.'

'How do we get hold of this tape? We must have it!'

'Certain police officers who are friendly with Saadi and her large, influential family have it, but no one else knows anything. Sounds unbelievable I know, but even the Police Commissioner and the Public Prosecutor, don't know what it contains! So this is very good for us, good leverage that we know... The MI people are asking the Commissioner to hand it over but he's saying he has no idea what they're talking about.'

'Has Omar's brother offered them anything?'

'Money not to destroy it,' Pero smiled, 'which is what they really want. The Marrakchi police, they are telling Saadi and her supporters to pay them or they will hand it over to the MI. Omar's rat brother is negotiating for us at this very moment. You might say it's an auction. Don't worry, like all vermin, Mahjoub is very clever... he will get the best deal he can. Even so it could create a huge scandal... the men who give it to us might have to retire... maybe even leave Marrakech. As soon as Mahjoub has it he will give it to Omar who will bring it here and I will play it as evidence for all to hear. You can be sure the Public Prosecutor would never play it unless he was forced to.'

'Pay as you go, I guess that's the message,' Toni sighed wryly. 'But do we really need it? We know this Zouheir signed a confession with the Marrakech Police. Where's that?'

'Avec le meme, of course... they've all read it... but to get it presented as evidence will cost additional money, and once presented, it will cost more to have it accepted as evidence...'

Toni giggled under her breath 'But really this is so crazy... how do we get money when we're sitting here in court?'

'You won't believe this,' Pero smiled, 'but they're actually saying since you're English they will trust you to pay them later.'

Toni chuckled slyly, 'Well that's certainly a mistake isn't it?'

Pero grinned 'They'll deliver, don't worry. I will begin by playing the tape of old Gamal, and by the time that's over we should have the one of Youssef and Zouheir. Then just watch the fun. And don't be fooled by the respectable looks of these people... they're heartless and ruthless and they admire the fake Youssef because he's an Avocat and because probably he's ready to cut a huge deal with everyone if he wins.'

Pero looked around the courtroom wondering when the judges would arrive. 'And one other very important thing I haven't told you because I just received word on my cell phone: the DNA of the crazy Youssef matches the DNA of the Baroness... there is a certain margin of error which anyone can contest, but it's good news... yes?'

Toni's face brightened considerably, 'Well - how fantastic... brilliant! I knew he was Minna's son... I knew it!' She lowered her voice again to a whisper. 'Now I have some news for you. I was waiting to tell you this until they landed... but...'

'Who landed?'

'The false Youssef, I've had him kidnapped...'

'Mark the work of the Omnipotent,' Pero whispered in Arabic, 'You had him kidnapped? Where?'

'They found him in Switzerland! You remember my plane was in Frankfurt having a tune up? Well, he's on that plane right now flying back. I got word this morning around six, they were just taking off... should be arriving here any moment now... they have your phone number and will call.'

'But who found him... who are *they*?'

'Don't ask. Toni replied with a sphinx like smile, 'I'll explain later.'

'But how will he... what happens when he goes through immigration?'

'He's been given a new passport for the moment, British, and he'll be arriving with two other blokes... very tough, very efficient... on holiday supposedly... golf clubs and all.'

'What if he's recognized?'

Toni shrugged casually, 'If something like that happens, which I very much doubt, my men have instructions to call you and the *Ministere d'Interieur* gentlemen on their cell phones. The MI men are here, lurking in the back of the chamber. If all works out, we'll be able to bring this false Youssef right here to the court. I thought you might

like to add him to the little drama you're planning to stage ... what do you think?'

Pero smiled broadly, 'I'm filled with admiration and I congratulate you... where in Switzerland did...'

'In Geneva... sh sh sh. Our guess was he was there trying to make a deal, just as you said, with that big food company. I thought it was important to capture him before that happened.'

'But how did he get from Marrakech to Geneva without...?'

Toni threw up her hands, 'Who knows. He's very clever. He may wiggle out of this yet.'

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Anticipating the arrival of the Public Prosecutor and the *Cadi*, (Chief Justice of the Appeals Court), three advisory judges had filed in and taken their seats as the clerk called for order and officers patrolled the aisles telling people to shut up. Finally, the Public Prosecutor and the *Cadi* arrived and everyone stood as they took their seats and the clerk of the court began reading the names of witnesses who must come forward, identify themselves and stand by to be called by either side at any time.

First A'hmed, the Baroness' old servant, shuffled down the aisle, recited his name and Identity Card number. Then two other servants Dulla and Rhaman came forward followed by the orphan Mokhtar, who cast a worried glance at Radouan, and the maid, Fatima, who was with Mokhtar when they saw Zouheir entering and leaving the Baroness' bed chamber. Then Prospero and Toni, Madame Aicha Saadi and finally Radouan all stepped up to the stand and recited their particulars.

The Public Prosecutor then called the servant A'hmed back and asked him to tell the tribunal what he had happened that fateful morning. A'hmed, was a dour old man with a long nose, weathered face and watery eyes. Wearing a brown and white striped *jalaba*, he spoke in measured tones, saying that just before dawn on the day in

question he had been awakened by something, looked out the window of his room and had clearly seen Radouan open the main gate himself and drive off. At the time he didn't think it unusual because for many years Radouan had spent nights at the *Ksar* and left at dawn. But when Zouheir came running to him a few minutes later saying he had just taken tea up to the Baroness and found her dead, her body still warm, naturally his mind went to Radouan, thinking he must have done it.

'They often fought,' A'hmed told the court, 'and sometimes he would knock her. Of course, there were many days and months of tranquility between them, but then he would forget and begin treating her like a Moroccan wife and there would be big problems!'

'How often would you say these "problems" occurred?' The Public Prosecutor asked.

'Not so often, maybe four times a year, that's all... but big fights!'

'After Zouheir told you he'd found the Baroness dead in her bed, what did you do then?'

'Well, I went up to look at her, of course, and to see if her heart was still beating... it was not beating.'

'Was her body still warm?'

'I can't remember, I was too upset... maybe it was warm but it had been a hot night so maybe it was cold.'

'What did you do next?'

'Well, I called Madame Saadi because I wanted her advice on what I should do. The Baroness had always told me in case of emergency to call Madame Saadi first. So Madame Saadi, she called the police and drove out immediately with many high officials. They examined everything and took the Baroness's body away to Marrakech. That's how things happened.'

Then Prospero requested permission to question A'hmed and asked him whether he would recognize the man from Fez who called himself Youssef Idrisi.

'Of course... yes I would... but only as Youssef... I didn't know he was Idrisi. He has been to Dar Chems a few times in the past months.'

'So you know him?'

'Yes, of course...'

'And you hired Zouheir on this Youssef's recommendation... he asked you to hire him?'

'Yes he did... and I hired him. We needed someone to serve, one of our servers had just died, and one day I asked Youssef in a casual way if he knew of anybody who could take the job to let me know. Being from Fez, I thought he might know of a really good server.'

'In fact, he paid you a large sum of money for taking on this man...' Pero declared.

'Not a large sum, Sir, not large at all, only the usual commission for hiring someone, that's all.'

'But you took money for it.'

'Yes... but I also received money from Radouan for hiring the boy Mokhtar for the garden... it's customary'

'My information is that the Baroness herself was the one who told you to hire Mokhtar...'

'That is correct, Sir... but still Radouan, he gave me my commission... a few hundred dirhams, that's all... life is expensive these days, sir.'

'And did the Baroness enjoy these visits from this person, Youssef?'

'The first time the Baroness met him, Madame Saadi had brought him out. The Baroness seemed very interested... but after that, although he came many times, she did not want to receive him. She would have me say she was not feeling well, or was not at home... he may have seen her once or twice alone but that's all... she was not well, Sir... seeing him tired her.'

'To your knowledge did Radouan know this Youssef had visited the Baroness?' Pero asked.

'They were never there at the same time.' A'hmed replied.

'What Radouan might have found out on his own I do not know...'

'In fact you dislike Radouan, admit it... you have always been jealous of him.'

'I have always thought he was a very hard young man, Sir, always telling everyone what to do... ordering us all around... hard and mean he was to us but I wasn't jealous of him. Why would I be?'

Prospero thanked A'hmed and called the two servants, Dulla and Rhaman who contradicted A'hmed's testimony and testified the last time they saw Radouan was the evening before the Baroness' dead body was discovered, about eleven p.m. They let him out of the front gate and he drove away.

‘Would you have known if he had come back during the night and left the next morning at dawn?’ asked the Public Prosecutor.

‘Of course we would,’ replied Dulla, ‘we are gardeners but we keep the gate at night and patrol the grounds with our dogs. Radouan did not spend the night. A’hmed is old. He is imagining all these things because he received a large amount of money from the Fassi, Youssef for saying he saw Radouan leave at dawn.’

‘Was this Youssef at the Baroness’ place after she died?’

‘Yes, that morning with Madame Saadi and the police.’

‘Don’t believe him, he’s lying!’ A’hmed waved his stick and shouted from his seat, ‘these fellows are lazy and stupid... half the time they are asleep inside the gate house and people have to let themselves in and out.’

Pero addressed Dulla, ‘How do you happen to know A’hmed received a large amount of money from Youssef for saying he saw Radouan leave at dawn?’

‘We saw it happen. We were working, Rhaman and me... the police had questioned us and we were back at work trimming some old cypress trees. Mohktar was with us. A’hmed came into the next garden with this Youssef... so we stopped working and listened... they were negotiating... Ahmed kept saying not enough, not enough ... finally this fellow Youssef, he handed him a large bundle of two hundred dirham notes... We knew they were two hundred dirham notes because they were blue. From our position in the tree we saw him count out at least two bricks which A’hmed hid beneath his *jallaba*...’

‘Lies, all lies!’ yelled A’hmed, ‘...these donkeys, they have invented all these things because I am higher than them and they are jealous and resent taking orders from me... now they are trying to fix me... I swear it.’

Finally, A’hmed was cajoled into shutting up, sat down quietly and Pero called Mokhtar and Fatima the maid, who testified they had seen Zouheir enter the Baroness’ bed chamber around midnight just after Radouan had left.

After they told their story they were cross-examined by the Public Prosecutor. ‘Why were you two... how did you happen to be in that upstairs closet?’ he asked Mokhtar.

Mokhtar rolled his eyes and said shyly: ‘we were making love, Sir, it was one of the few places we could be alone together.’

Snickers and suppressed laughter swept the courtroom. The Public prosecutor was embarrassed, immediately excused Mokhtar and the maid and called Madame Saadi to the stand.

Rising slowly like some aquatic creature surfacing from the deep, Madame Saadi, draped in a dark wet looking synthetic fabric, waddled down the aisle on three-inch heels; her enormous buttocks rolling, her large tuberous face surrounded by masses of new faux hair, huge eyes blinking, her bulbous nose and full lips set in a determined smile.

Many of the older men in the room seemed attracted to her.

'Ugly, but sexy,' Pero muttered.

Toni suppressed a laugh, and choked.

Prompted by the Public Prosecutor, Madame Saadi spoke at length about her long and close relationship with the Baroness Minna Von Schleebruck and other prominent foreign residents of Marrakech. How her father, a former Public Prosecutor, had known the Baroness since she was a girl of sixteen; that the Baroness was like a member of their family. Drawing on these close familial ties she went on to observe that the Testament she drew up for the Baroness naming the defendant Radouan as the beneficiary had to have been coerced out of her.

'Everyone knows this is the typical game of Marrakchi's gigolos,' she said sarcastically. As the Baroness' Notaire she had tried to dissuade the Baroness from making such a mistake but she would not listen. 'She was hopelessly in love with him, poor thing... it's a shame! A headstrong woman... it was impossible to change her mind.'

Madame Saadi waited for this to sink in and then went on to explain the reason the Baroness was murdered was that Youssef, her long lost son, had appeared and Radouan had assumed she would be making a new Testament in his favor. 'Perhaps they fought about this,' she declared, 'and in a jealous rage he killed her!'

Despite this diatribe and Prospero's objections that it was all pure conjecture on her part, Madame Saadi's professional smile never changed.

When she was finally finished, Prospero himself was called to the stand. The Public Prosecutor questioned his experience in grave matters of this sort and Pero replied with passion that although he was inexperienced that did not mean he could not get at the truth. He

went on to recount the history of his relationship with Radouan and gave a strong defense of his client's character, which surprised those present who knew he was Jewish. Then he pointed out that Radouan had been a devoted friend of the Baroness for over twenty years, and challenged the veracity of Madame Saadi's remarks:

'Everyone knows she's been having an affair with this Youssef Idrisi,' he said provocatively.

Saadi's friends and supporters in the courtroom jeered and shouted at him. When order was finally restored, Pero addressed himself directly to the Public Prosecutor and asked whether he was aware of a confession signed by the afore mentioned server Zouheir, that he had suffocated the Baroness with a pillow shortly after Radouan left the house that evening. And, did he know that a tape recording existed of a conversation between Zouheir and the person who called himself Youssef Idrisi, over more money for a job well done?

The two questions hung in the air like balloons waiting to burst. There was astonishment and consternation in the courtroom as the Public Prosecutor nervously consulted his team and the Advisory Judges. Cries of "don't listen to him," and "get on with it," rose above the general tumult. Finally one of the Advisory Judges asked the Public Prosecutor if he knew of the existence of such evidence and the Public Prosecutor replied that he had heard rumors, but had not seen or heard any hard evidence.

Pero then requested the court be recessed for a half hour until he could arrange to play this tape, in which Madame Saadi was mentioned and a second tape concerning the Baroness' long lost son Youssef. The *Cadi*, granted this request and the courtroom erupted in a collective growl as Saadi's supporters, cell phones beeping dashed outside.

'Round one,' Pero whispered and called Omar on his cell phone who informed him there had been a change of plans. The Marrakech police were willing to give up both the tape and the confession but were insisting on delivering these two items to the court themselves whenever he gave the word.

'Tell them to bring them over immediately,' Pero clicked off, turned back to Toni and smiled. 'As you see, I'm having to change my tactics. First, we'll have the confession... maybe the *Ministere d'Interieur* has put pressure on them. Anyway they will give that excuse... then the tape.'

‘At last!’ Toni sighed, ‘but what about our real Youssef? When do you plan to produce him - if at all?’

‘He’s in the Psychiatric Facility right now, waiting. Omar’s brother says the police are ready to escort him here whenever we give the signal. I have a number to call. We’ll just have to see what happens. I thought just before I started playing the Gamal tape I would call. What do you think? He would arrive just as the tape is ending...’

Toni rolled her eyes, ‘Sounds good... but tell me, why they are suddenly being so cooperative... I mean the Police? I thought you said they would deliver this tape and the confession to the highest bidder? It’s quite unlike them to do anything without first getting paid... I know you said they think I’m reliable but... have we reached some kind of agreement with them...?’

‘I’m afraid I’ve committed you to something rather big...’ Pero smiled, ‘you won’t believe it, but Omar’s brother Mahjoub... I gave him permission to tell them that you and Radouan would become the Patrons of their football team. You’ll have to feed and clothe them; pay for the trainer, transportation... everything! It’s an important team and it will be expensive, but...’

Toni grinned with delight, ‘How brilliant really, what a perfect solution... I love it. We’ll have our very own team – all police!’

‘I thought you’d see it that way,’ Pero said with relief, ‘...and they’re excited about it too. Money would just cause problems; it’s the human touch they want. Those big companies, no matter how much they offer, they don’t have that.’

Toni leaned over and whispered in Radouan’s ear. ‘We’ve won, my darling... I think we’ve won... the other side is caving in. Did you hear what Pero just said about us sponsoring their football team...?’

‘Not until I’m out of here we haven’t won,’ Radouan said with great effort and slumped down in his seat again into his own world. ‘Jus’ don’t be fooled,’ he mumbled, ‘Marrakchi police they never give up... when they’re cornered they’re twice as dangerous.’

‘Pretty obvious someone has dosed him with something...’ Pero observed.

Radouan interrupted. ‘They gave me a shot before they brought me here... I’m comin’ out of it, but...’

Pero gazed fondly at him. ‘Can you blame them?’

A stir in the courtroom and a call to order signaled the return of the Judges as two officers from the Marrakech police delivered Zouheir's Confession and the tape to the Public Prosecutor.

Prospero rose and asked the *Cadi* that Zouheir's confession be read out and the tape of the conversation between him and Youssef be played before anything further happened. The *Cadi* agreed and asked the Public Prosecutor where Zouheir was. When the Public Prosecutor replied that Zouheir was dead, although the *Cadi* threw up his hands in a dramatic gesture of surprise, if not disgust, Pero was sure he knew very well what had happened.

Zouheir's confession was read out by the Clerk of the court. During the reading Pero's cell phone beeped. It was one of the men accompanying the false Youssef from Geneva, who said they had landed in Marrakech and gone through Immigration with no problems. Pero advised him to wait there and he would send a car. Then he phoned the driver Abdou who had been waiting outside and sent him to the airport to bring the three men and the false Youssef directly to the court.

As the reading of Zouheir's confession continued and it became clear it would be difficult to maintain a charge of murder against Radouan, the court dissolved into an angry buzz.

'Not a mention of Saadi or Youssef,' Pero whispered, 'must have been deleted from his statement... Zouheir would never have known the difference.'

Acting on her own behalf as an *Avocat*, Madame Saadi suddenly rose, requested permission to speak and said that, considering the weight of the new evidence at hand, she thought the court should seriously consider dropping charges against Radouan and the case be closed.

To this suggestion Prospero immediately objected: 'Everyone knows,' he replied, 'that confessions of this kind are very easily obtained. And while it is an important piece of evidence, we have other evidence that this man Zouheir did not act alone and was, in fact, only the tool of others - as we hope to show if we are permitted to play the tape which the police have just delivered.'

Over the objections of the Public Prosecutor, the *Cadi* nodded agreement and directed the clerk to play the tape. Pero produced a portable tape player which he managed to connect with the courtroom sound system and addressed the judges: 'This is a tape of a conversation between Zouheir and a man called Youssef who claims to be the son of Baroness Von Schleebruck. It was recorded by the Marrakech police from a transmitter which they attached to Zouheir after he had signed that confession... they offered him a deal if he would wear the transmitter and go back and speak with this Youssef and he accepted.'

An anxious silence spread through the courtroom. The Public Prosecutor and his team looked confused and angry as the clerk turned on the machine:

(G) 'You're getting ready to leave this place, where are you going, why are you dressed like that?'

(Y) 'No no... Of course not... not going anywhere just cleaning up... sorting things out... my maid's been sick... this old *jallaba* it belonged to my grandfather... often wear it when I'm here by myself. What happened to you... took you so long?'

(G) 'That kid... he couldn't find the slip of paper you gave him... after some time we found you. I need to travel. I want more money.'

(Y) 'More money! But Saadi has already paid you a fortune... you must have more than enough. Go to her if you want more. It's not me who hired you.'

(G) 'I will go to her but first I want something from you... I have debts too...'

(Y) 'That's not my problem... you must have kept some back for a cushion.'

(G) '*Aji. Aji..* Com'on, Com'on, you have plenty of money... just now when you were paying this kid I saw. You have a big roll of bills in your pocket... at least a brick.'

(Y) 'Look. I took the trouble to drive out there myself and warn you... risked my neck to send that kid to get you out of there before the police decided to question you and now you're asking me for more money. *Kharya! H'mar! GO!* I have no more money to give you now and neither does Madame Saadi... but when Radouan... on the day that he is found guilty there will be a big bonus for you...'

(G) 'Look... I need money now, you give me some money now or I will go to the police and tell everything... all your plans and plots... Madame Saadi and you.'

(Y) 'You know what I think? I think you have already talked to the police... that's what I think... that's why it took you so long to get here, why no one stopped you outside...(sound of struggle) ADMIT IT! The police have already questioned you.'

(G) 'NO NO NO...'

(Y) 'YES YES... I'm sure of it (more sounds of struggle). You stupid bowl of shit, you're nothing... tell them who hired you who paid you...'

(G) 'Saadi... Madame Saadi, it was her who paid me...  
' (more sounds of struggle, then a crash and... )

In the stunned silence that followed, Prospero addressed the judges. 'In our opinion this tape speaks for itself,' he said, 'but let me review the main points. Assuming it would be an easy matter to place the blame on Radouan who was often at the Baroness' *Ksar*, and often left late at night or early in the morning, this woman, Madame Saadi and her boy friend who goes by the name Youssef, persuaded A'hmed, the Baroness' servant, to hire Zouheir, a notorious criminal character, whom they paid to murder the Baroness. I would ask you to... to consider....'

The shouts and accusations, profanities and maledictions of Madame Saadi's supporters drowned out his final words. 'This Youssef,' someone screamed, 'whoever he may be, he knew he was being taped and was prompting Zouheir to say these things to implicate Madame Saadi!'

'How does any one know who made this tape and why? We do not know!' shouted someone else.

The chamber exploded in an uproar, brought under control finally by shouted warnings of the officers of the court and the persistent pounding of his gavel by the *Cadi*. Through it all, Madame

Saadi, still standing, managed to maintain her perpetual smile. The antipathy of her supporters, however; their rage against Pero, and against the man called Youssef on the tape, played perfectly into Pero's hand and now, thanks to Toni's far reaching efforts, he hoped to clinch his case.

Indicating that he thought Madame Saadi might like to sit down, he again requested permission to call a witness and again over the objections of the Public Prosecutor, the request was granted. Pero entered a number on his cell phone, and moments later, although unshaven, still smart looking in his dark business suit, blue shirt, tie and Gucci loafers, the false Youssef, in hand cuffs, was paraded down the isle to the witness box.

Toni watched carefully as the smile on Madame Saadi's plump lips slowly vanished.

When asked to state his name and occupation he replied that he was Youssef ibn Ali el Idrisi, Avocat.

'Your reason for coming to Marrakech several months ago, could you tell us your reason?' Pero asked calmly.

Youssef gazed at the judges. 'Before answering that question, I would like to point out to the honorable *Cadi* and judges, that less than twenty-four hours ago I was abducted from my hotel room in Geneva, Switzerland where I was engaged in business of a private matter, and escorted back to Marrakech against my will by the two foreigners who brought me into this court - whom I suspect are British agents. Before I say anything else I would like to know what is going on.'

'Are you not aware,' Pero replied, 'that you are wanted for questioning in this country in connection with the murder of the Baroness Minna Von Schleebruck and of a man called Zouheir, and that a general notice to that effect has been transmitted to Interpol by the Moroccan Ministere d' Interieur to apprehend you and bring you back here?'

Youssef hesitated. 'I was not... Any way I am here now. Please feel free to ask me any questions.'

'Your reasons for coming to Marrakech several months ago, what were they?'

'I came to Marrakech because several years ago, just before my father died, he confided to me that I was not the son of the maid Latifa but of a woman in Marrakech called the Baroness Minna Von

Schleebruck, with whom he'd had a long affair. It was a huge surprise for me. Suddenly I had a real father and a new mother...'

A murmur of sympathy rippled through the chamber. 'Yes,' he went on, 'Only then did I understand why the Patron, my father as it turned out, had showered so much attention on me over the years. When he died, I had finished Law School in Rabat and was studying in France. Later, I returned to Paris to finish my studies and receive my French Law degree. So for a few years I was very busy and had no time to follow up on what he'd told me. Then a few months ago I happened to open a magazine and there was a photo of the Baroness at a party in St Moritz and I thought well... maybe you should go to Marrakech and meet her and find out just what your father was talking about.'

'Upon arriving here, I called the Baroness from the Mamounia where I was staying and made an appointment with her. She invited me to lunch the next day. I told her the story my father had told me about his romance with her and how she had become pregnant by him and had a child... whom my father had abducted, brought to Fez and raised as the son of his maid Latifa. The Baroness listened intently to my story but said nothing. After lunch I accompanied her to a pavilion near the swimming pool where we were joined by her Notaire, Madame Saadi.'

'Then what happened?' Pero asked

'Mme Saadi was very kind to me and introduced me around in Marrakech. On one occasion she showed me the Baroness' Testament, and pointed out to me that the Baroness' entire estate was to be inherited by a gigolo called Radouan. If I was really her son as I claimed, Madame Saadi urged me to make every effort to have my mother change her Testament in my favor. When a few weeks passed and I did not hear again from the Baroness, Madame Saadi urged me to go back and try to see her again... which I did a number of times with no success. Madame Saadi had phoned her many times but never reached her. That's when Saadi conceived this plan of installing someone at Dar Chems who would kill the Baroness some night just after this Radouan had left. I would then come forward and establish my claim as her rightful heir... we would split her fortune and Radouan would go to Prison where he could be easily disposed of. She told me the Baroness was suffering from some incurable disease and it would be an act of mercy to save her from months of pain.'

Pero was surprised by Youssef's candor. 'And how did you react to this?' he asked.

'I was horrified!' Youssef replied, 'Absolutely refused to go along with it!'

There was a long, deep-throated scream which seemed to come from the bowels of the earth itself as Madame Saadi rose and shook her fist. 'THIS PERSON IS LYING! YOU ARE A LIAR, YOUSSEF 'BN ALI AND YOU KNOW IT!' Her voice was oracular. 'It was you who sought me out, you who came to me... We did not meet at the Baroness' *ksar*, we met at my office. You made an appointment with me by phone from Fez weeks before you arrived here... don't say we met at her place! And soon after we met you began harassing me to show you her Will and Testament... which I did against my better judgement... and to introduce you to her. And when you met her and she rejected your claim to be her son, then it was you who started thinking of how to get rid of her in a way to make it look like Radouan had done it. It was YOU, NOT ME!'

The false Youssef gestured to the court. 'How can this woman, this cabbage, how can she stand here letting these fabrications slip from her ugly mouth? It was you who found this person Zouheir.' He turned and faced her, 'You who told him what to do, and you who paid him!'

'Yes, with your money,' Saadi yelled.

'Ah, now she is lying again... Madame, it was your money... you who instructed Zouheir to watch and wait. Please, someone, stop her from all these lies...'

'*DJINN!* LIAR! YOU ARE THE DEVIL COME TO DESTROY ME. LYING DEVIL,' Madame Saadi screamed.

'God is great,' Toni intoned under her breath, 'Allah Akbar.'

'WHY WON'T YOU ADMIT IT, WOMAN?' Youssef shouted, 'ZOUHEIR HAS SAID IT. I'M SURE BY NOW YOU MUST HAVE HEARD IT ON THE TAPE THE POLICE MADE. JUST ADMIT YOU PAID HIM TO KILL MY MOTHER.'

'How do I know? How does anyone know whose voice is on that tape?' Saadi said soberly, 'Have we got another recording of Zouheir's voice to compare it with... and we certainly haven't got Zouheir because YOU KILLED HIM! Just play that tape again, please,' she asked the clerk of the court, 'Whoever made it... whoever it is you are talking with, you are prompting him... everyone here felt

it. Like the sly Avocat you are... you with your French law degree... a sly fox that's what you are. FOX!

'No, Madame, sorry. It is you who are the FOX, believe me. I am the son of a *Cherif* of Fez. I am not lying and I am not the devil. In all of this I was only following the will of my father, his dying wish that I seek out the Baroness, present myself to her, and apologize for his behavior. From the moment you met me at her *ksar* and I told you I was the Baroness' son, you immediately put yourself between us... an old trick... as you have done with everyone the Baroness knew or did business with, I'm sure... You tried it with me but you didn't succeed. What you don't know is that my mother was in the process of writing a new will... splitting her fortune between me and her gigolo over there - two-fifths for him, three-fifths for me. So why tell me I would have wanted to kill her?'

'Esteemed judges,' Madame Saadi sighed, 'how can I counter these wild claims and accusations? Lie upon lie, layers of lies - inventions of a crooked mind. If the Baroness were making a new Testament, I would have known about it.'

'Oh no, you would not have,' Youssef objected. 'I took great care to see that you didn't. I even told her of your intentions... how you wanted to use me to get a big fat commission... I told her about your plot against her; to murder her and make it look like her gigolo had done it. I was helping her put her wishes in legal form. The following week they would have been filed in the magistrate's office here in Marrakech and with her bank in Geneva.'

Prospero intervened, 'The Baroness's servant A'hmed has testified that the Baroness received you only once... but after that she made excuses not to see you again.'

'That is more or less correct. What he doesn't know is that she came to see me here in the city several times. You must know one thing, that A'hmed is the tool of this scheming woman, Saadi... always has been. That's why her gigolo hated him... A'hmed was her spy there...'

'And what about your notes, the various drafts for this new Testament you speak of?' asked Pero.

'Unfortunately, the night I decided to leave Marrakech, I destroyed them, burned them in the bathtub of my apartment. Perhaps the police noticed the tub was full of ashes... it was a foolish thing to have done...'

'DEVIL! *SHAITAN!* LIAR!' screamed Madame Saadi.

'*Shaitan. Shaitan. Shaitan,*' echoed her supporters as the courtroom again dissolved in chaos.

'He comes across as a credible witness,' Toni whispered over the uproar. 'I'm surprised... very clever isn't he, very smart... good actor. You can see the judges are tempted to believe him...'

'We'll soon fix that,' Pero muttered defiantly.

The false Youssef was conducted to a seat, order was finally restored, and the *Cadi* spoke directly to Pero.

'Please tell us,' he said in a kindly voice that reminded Pero of one of his law school professors, 'I understand you visited Fez and discovered certain things there. Could you acquaint us with the history of this affair?'

'Honorable *Cadi* and Judges, thank you for the opportunity to make my case,' Prospero replied. 'Ever since the Baroness told him her story, Radouan and I have been discussing what might have happened, hoping we could find her lost son. Radouan's idea was that the child must have been abducted by its father and brought to live in his palace in Fez as the illegitimate son of some servant girl. Several weeks passed and our theory remained just that, a theory. But when I learned there was a person in Marrakech claiming to be the Baroness's lost son, I took it upon myself to go to Fez, and see if I could discover more about this man who calls himself Youssef Idrisi and claims to be the Baroness' son. I can tell you now He is not her son... Not the real Youssef.'

The courtroom exploded again. The *Cadi* pounded his desk until quiet was restored.

'In this regard I would like to ask permission to play a tape recording I made in Fez.' Pero continued, 'The Idrisi house in Fez is very large; you might say it's a Palace. The tape recording I am about to play is of an old servant, one Gamal by name, who lived forgotten in the Servants' Quarters of the palace, and was over eighty at the time. He had worked for the Idrisi family since he was twenty years old and many people thought he'd been dead for some time. My meeting him was God's Will, for he almost never left the house and I had almost given up learning anything when I came upon him on one of his rare outings. Almost blind, he had lost his way, and asked me to give him a hand getting back to his room. When we reached there he insisted on making tea for me, one thing led to another and he began to tell me his story which I recorded over a period of about three days.'

The Public Prosecutor strongly objected that this was second hand evidence, which could not be verified, and asked for an adjournment until the following day. But the *Cadi* turned down the request with a wave of his hand and said he wanted to hear what Monsieur Prospero Serfati had recorded. As a seasoned Judge, it was obvious he was fascinated by the skillfulness with which the young Avocat was presenting his case. Or had word come down from on high that Radouan was to be spared?

The clerk put Prospero's tape in the machine and turned up the volume.

'(Prospero) Salaam Alaykoun, Labas...

(Gamal) Alaykoun 'salaam...

(P) Your name is Gamal?

(G) Yes tha's right. Gamal ibn Abdallah al-Ghalib...

(P) Lucky I found you like that in the street. I was about to ask for directions. I was lost...

(G) And I too. But together we managed to get here. Our meeting was auspicious. It is God's will.

(P) I would never have found you here...

(G) There is no power and no strength save in God the Almighty the Compassionate. I come out only once a month on the full moon. It gives me *Baraka*, the moon.

(P) What was your work here?

(G) I was the chief gardener. I came to Fez from Lebanon. Before that my family came from Damascus and had settled in Andalusia... we are followers of the great Sufi Abu'l-Fayd Thawba'n ibn Ibrahim Dhu'l Nun. He of the Fish.

(P) When did the Patron engage you?'

(G) In the year 1930. I remember it well because we both celebrated our twentieth birthdays that year. His father had just died and so had the Chief Gardener. I was doing the gardens for one of his cousins so I was given to him in sympathy... there is a very large garden here in the center of the *Riad*, a small park attached to the Douirya, many other courtyards and roof gardens. Now, no one cares about them and I am too old so they have gone to weeds - like me. All my work of fifty years, my life's work... it is very sad for me.'

(P) So... you must have known the Patron's son Youssef since he was born.

(G) Let me tell you something (lowers his voice) It is a very big secret around here and almost everyone who knows it is gone. The one you know as Youssef, he is not the real Youssef. A maid called Latifa who was also a midwife brought the real Youssef here. The Patron, he trusted her and sent her to Marrakech to get his son from its mother who had refused to marry him and couldn't keep the babe. After a few weeks Latifa arrived back with a beautiful boy... only a few weeks old but *zween* ... very *zween*.

(P) And did she raise him up as her own son?

(G) Yes she did... that was the whole idea. She already had a son of her own, Moulay, who was not quite a year old when she brought baby Youssef back. It was said Moulay's father was a local carpenter who ran away when Latifa got pregnant, but the father of Moulay could have been any number of men on whom she generously bestowed her favors in those days... our Patron for example... even me! (Chuckles). But no man could live with her. She was too strong minded... had a terrible temper...

(P) And then?

(G) Then? Yes. So Moulay and Youssef grew up as brothers. From the beginning Moulay was told he was Youssef's older brother. But when they were about thirteen and fourteen respectively, we began to notice the Patron was favoring Youssef rather than Moulay. With his two wives he had only daughters so he would come and visit Youssef and Moulay and play with them. Slowly he became attached to Youssef... seeking him out, calling him into the house for long talks... it wasn't normal. This bothered Moulay, as it was obvious to all us servants that Moulay was smarter than Youssef - and he was the eldest! Then Youssef began drinking wine and smoking *kif* and hashish and would often become abusive and try to provoke Moulay in to fighting with him.'

(P) You mean Youssef was drinking and smoking at fourteen?

(G) Yes, can you believe it? And the more the Patron favored him, and probably gave him money, the more arrogant and willful became Youssef... even though he was younger by almost a year, he was bigger and fairer than Moulay and would often beat him. About that time, I began to notice, all of us did, that Youssef was becoming strange. Sometimes he would sit for hours looking at a wall or gazing off into space. Other times he would want to fight or start smashing things. At first we thought it was the effect of the liquor and *kif* he was taking, but as his condition grew worse I began to watch closely

what he was eating and what he was drinking. Another maid, Rachida by name, I told her to watch also. By this time Youssef had made Moulay into his servant. Moulay was afraid of him. But then we discovered that when he thought no one was looking Moulay would pour something from a small bottle into whatever Youssef was drinking, wine, beer, tea or coffee... just a few drops every time. Sometime later Rachida came to me and said she had found a large quantity of *Ch'dak J'mel* in Moulay's room; not only the dried pods, but the fresh plant too which is far more dangerous.'

'A few days later, Rachida took me to a hiding place where we watched Moulay prepare a liquid from the plant and also make sweets with the ground up seeds and almonds and spices to smother the taste of the *Ch'dak J'mel*. These he would arrange on a plate with other sweets and give to Youssef at teatime. I should have gone to the Patron at once, but I said nothing and told Rachida if she opened her mouth I would kill her. It wasn't our business. Then, to be sure, I had her bring me one of those sweets and I ate it. For almost a day I sat unable to move and seeing many visions... some quite awful and at night I could see in the dark. It was very amazing to me so I went to one woman I knew... a *maji* she was and I gave her one of the sweets and she ate it and afterwards she agreed that it was *Ch'dak J'mel* ...tha's how I found out how Moulay was slowly poisoning Youssef...

(P) And you say Youssef was how old at the time?

(G) Sixteen I would say and Moulay was almost seventeen by then.

(P) Did either of the boys know anything about their father?

(G) No. I don't think so. All they knew was that Latifa was their mother and that their father had run away... tha's all they knew... unless the Patron had said something to Youssef and tha's why he became so arrogant...

(P) Then what happened?

(G) Then slowly... little by little Youssef became crazier and more silent. He would sit in a chair talking and fighting with something inside him self and not move at all; or he would swing in a swing hour after hour. Then he lost control of his bowels and began having difficulty seeing; needed the full time attention of someone to follow him around and clean up after him... which became Moulay's job, of course... looking after his sick brother who everyone felt sorry

for. Youssef's brain was tres malade. People thought it was the effect of alcohol and hashish.

(P) Why did you not try to stop Moulay? You didn't need to tell the Patron to do that.

(G) Now I bow my head in shame. That is why I am confessing all this now. In those days we did not think it was our place to interfere in the lives of our superiors. We saw many terrible things. If we got involved we could get killed. Really, only the Almighty could interfere...

(P) And then?

(G) Then the Patron, he began thinking that Youssef had been invaded by a *Djinn*, and took him on a trip around the country visiting holy men, healers and exorcists. For a time Youssef got better because Moulay was not along. But as soon as they returned Youssef became worse. Sometimes Moulay would stop and Youssef would improve. Then he would start up again. It was terrible. At Youssef's hands Moulay had suffered greatly, but not enough to justify what Moulay was doing. There is no cure for *Ch'dak J'mel!* Youssef could never be brought back. I knew it.

'The Patron, he became very sad and shed many tears. Finally he had to send Youssef to a mental institution here in Fez, not a nice place either, but he had become too difficult. After Youssef was sent away, the Patron slowly improved and began paying more attention to Moulay, sent him to good schools, invited him to his private quarters for meals and long talks, and because of the attention he was getting, then Moulay became tender. Everyone liked him and spoke about how devoted he had been to Youssef, how much time he had spent caring for him always visiting him, making tea, and bringing him sweets. But Moulay, he was really two persons; one very smart and well behaved the other very dangerous.

'Then after Moulay finished school here in Fez and learned both English and French, the Patron sent him to study at Georgetown University in America. After that he studied Law in Rabat and went on to the University in Paris where he received a law degree and passed an examination to practice Law in France. The year Moulay received his degree from Paris, the Patron died of a heart attack here in the garden of the *Riad*... had a seizure that killed him. May God bless and protect him. But knowing he was a sick man he made a Testament setting up a trust that was supposed to pay out generous sums of money to Youssef for his care; to the Patron's wife and

daughters and to many other relatives. He mentioned everyone so that no one could say they were left out and attack his Testament. But most of his wealth, he left to Moulay; this Palace, other properties in Fez, houses and palaces in other places, foreign bank accounts. Everything went to Moulay. There were attacks against the Patron's Testament by members of the family who were angry that the Patron had left so much to the son of a maid when some of their own sons were hardly mentioned. Being an Avocat, Moulay, fought them off and never forgot how they had treated him. Moulay was made Trustee of the Trust the Patron had commanded for poor Youssef, which soon became worthless because of the bad investments Moulay made. What no one knew was that Moulay had received huge kickbacks to make those bad investments and doubled his money.'

(P) How do you know all this?

(G) You forget I grew up with the Patron... we were lifelong friends and companions... he had a keen interest in plants and gardening...

(P) So the Youssef, who came to Marrakech to meet the Baroness saying he was her son... this Youssef, cannot be the real Youssef.

(G) That is right, he is Moulay. Be patient and I will explain to you. A year before the Patron died Moulay's mother Latifa became sick and on her deathbed she told Moulay the real story of Youssef. How the Patron had sent her to Marrakech and how she and the child's nurse had taken Youssef away in the night and brought him here to Fez. Because he was really the son of the Patron and a woman in Marrakech, a German woman they called The Baroness who was probably still alive. Latifa also told Moulay that his father might be the Patron; there had never been a carpenter who ran away, but there were other men she saw during that time too, so she couldn't be sure. She said the Patron had favored Youssef because his mother was a great lady while she Latifa was just a maid... Latifa died and by the end of that year the Patron my dearest friend was also dead. People, they began to exhaust me so I just disappeared... most people thought I was dead. But I knew what Moulay was doing because one of his most trusted men was a very good friend to me.'

'From him I learned when Moulay began working on a plan to become Youssef. His biggest problem was the servants who remembered him as Moulay. In the town; he had been away for so long in America, in Rabat, in France, they had forgotten him, but here

in the Palace there was a problem. Slowly Moulay picked three men who were paid very well to do his bidding and keep quiet about it, my friend was one of them and slowly one by one the other servants were dismissed. That was his first step. My friend came and told me all these things and would ask my advice.'

(P) And your advice was?

(G) To keep quiet and not to interfere... it was God's will.

(P) And then?

(G) Then he began the second part of his plan. He found a fellow here in Fez who worked in the place where they keep all the recorded documents... Testaments, Lineage's, Land titles and so on. So Moulay he found this fellow, Amran by name, famous in certain circles as one who can get hold of documents wherever they may be, even in Rabat... find them and make new ones or copies with new signatures. He isn't a bad man; really he's like an *artiste* who is proud of his fine work (laughs). Every one uses him...really he's very talented. My friend saw him in the street one day and spoke with him about what he was doing for Moulay. Then my friend, he came to me and wanted my opinion. I said I didn't have any because I wanted to remain tranquil - in one's old age that's what one wants. So I stayed out of it. But now, now that I am close to death and feel God's will bearing down on me I am telling you these things.'

'Because of the money offered, this Amran he changed everything. All the old records concerning Moulay were changed to Youssef and all those referring to Youssef were changed to Moulay. When this work was completed... it went on for a year or so... Moulay had Youssef transferred from the place here in Fez to some place in Casablanca. If anyone questioned Moulay, anyone here in Fez where he had set up an office as Youssef, he would say that Youssef was his real name and he had dropped the Moulay part, which was anyhow just a *lakab kenia* (nickname). He was the Patron then so everyone had to accept what he said. What happened happened a long time ago and nobody could remember it. And so it was that everyone forgot about the real Youssef.'

(P) Then, as Youssef, did Moulay go to see the Baroness in Marrakech?

(G) No, not immediately. Moulay... The clever thing about him is that he is never in a hurry - unlike the Patron who was always in a hurry. This is why I never believed the Patron could be his father. They were too different. Moulay, he poisoned Youssef slowly,

dismissed the servants here slowly; slowly he had all the documents changed... slowly... slowly. Moulay, a mathematician he is... a mind that is always calculating... no one could ever beat him in chess or backgammon. I always felt sorry for what happened between Youssef and Moulay, but if you start with a lie you get a lie! I always believed Moulay could have solved his problems with Youssef another way but, *Inch Allah*, it was not to be.' Gamal sighed, a long exhausted exhalation. 'Now that I have told you these things I'm sure you will use this information and someone will find out and kill me. Maybe that is why I have told you. I am very old. I want to go. Let happen what will... *Inch Allah*.'

The recording ended and except for an occasional cough and the shuffling of papers at the public prosecutor's table, the courtroom was silent.

Then Madame Saadi stood up, waddled to the well of the court and shouted at the judges, 'You see, he's an impostor,' she turned and pointed at the false Youssef, 'a fake... YOU'RE A FAKE! How can any one believe a word that comes from your mouth? We have all heard the voice of this devout old man, how it rings true. Let us bring him into this chamber as soon as possible and listen to him... Where is he?'

Standing up, Prospero replied, 'Two weeks ago in Fez he was found dead. People say two policemen came in the night and took him away but the police deny it.'

Madame Saadi paced back and forth, stopped, and faced the Cadi and the Judges, 'Gentlemen, I want to say something important, please permit me...'

The *Cadi* nodded assent.

'I want to admit that Youssef here, or maybe he's Moulay... this young man here is right in one thing... he's telling the truth when he says I found and hired Zouheir and introduced them. I also paid him, but with this young man's money, to do this thing. It was very wrong of me I know, but I knew the Baroness was dying and wanted to be put out of her misery... believe me I know it was wrong but it wasn't murder. We women, we are weak, a weak race, everyone knows this... our Holy Books say it. Gentlemen I am a victim of *Ishk*. This young man made love to me and I thought it was real because I had never been with a real man 'till then.'

‘LOOK AT HER,’ shouted the false Youssef from his seat, ‘just look at you, you ugly spinster. I ask you gentlemen, is it likely someone young and *zween* like myself would make love to that? This is her fantazia... a frustrated woman’s fantazia; she was only in it for the money!’

‘Don’t believe him.’ Saadi cried, ‘He wanted to meet the Baroness too much, that’s why he did it... made love to me, weakening my resistance and my resolve.’

‘I had already met the Baroness on my own,’ Youssef yelled, ‘you tried to come between us and you hated the gigolo Radouan because he knew all your tricks and could beat you at your own game. Just observe your position in relationship to him right now, you foolish witch!’

‘Don’t,’ Saadi hissed, ‘... Gentlemen DO NOT listen to this man’s words! He is a swindler like all the rest of them. He had not met our dear Baroness. I was waiting to introduce him to her until I knew him better.’ She turned toward the false Youssef, ‘... then you became romantic with me... yes... you were so tender then... until you got what you wanted... until I took you out there and introduced you to her.’ She addressed the judges. ‘After that he went out to see her many times but she did not think he was her son... told me she remembered all the fuss about the fake Anastasias who appeared claiming they were the daughters of the Russian Czar Nicholas, and refused to see him.’

Turning to the false Youssef again, Saadi shouted hoarsely and dissolved in tears. ‘That’s when YOU had the idea of finding someone like Zouheir to end her suffering... I told him he should settle down here in Marrakech and get to know people who would help him advance his claim. I admit I made a big mistake telling him about the Baroness’ disease and even worse about her Testament, but he beat me repeatedly and made my life a living hell until I showed it to him.’ She dabbed at her eyes with her headscarf, ‘I am a weak woman, weak and middle aged. I transgressed my professional oath but now I am trusting in the Almighty One, Allah the Compassionate... *Allah gha fouroun maheen!*, God is forgiving.’

The *Cadi* drew himself together and intoned: ‘GOD FORGIVES WHOM HE PLEASES... FAVORS WHOM HE WILL...TO MANY HE IS UNFORGIVING.’

‘Please, gentlemen,’ the false Youssef said, regaining his calm, ‘if it please you, as an *avocat* myself, I would like to say something

more on my own behalf. I would like to hear the first tape, the one referred to as a conversation between this man Zouheir and myself... I was not in the chamber when it was played.'

Permission was given and the tape was replayed.

Afterward, Youssef looked shaken, stood up and faced the judges. 'Let me explain what is happening here,' he said, 'Just after I say, "I think you have already told the police", the young tough who brought Zouheir to my apartment, he begins knocking Zouheir because he wants money for bringing him to me. He is kicking him, has his hands at his throat; then when Zouheir goes down his last words... the very last words on that tape should be "I WENT TO KILL HER BUT SOMEBODY ELSE HAD ALREADY DONE THE JOB". That should be there on the tape unless someone has altered it. I remember it distinctly because I was so surprised and angry.'

'You must have smashed the transmitter before that part,' Pero said, his voiced tinged with irony.

'I did not smash any transmitter... it must have broken when Zouheir fell.'

'Anyway we are not talking about that tape,' Pero said evenly, 'you are trying to change the subject away from the tape we have just heard: your life story... change it to some invention of what the killer Zouheir may or may not have said after the transmitter went off. The tape clearly ends there. Experts have examined the cassette and the tape. THE SUBJECT OF OUR PRESENT DISCUSSION IS THE TAPE THAT WE HAVE JUST HEARD. We would like to have your response to that.'

'That tape is nonsense,' Youssef replied dismissively, 'a well-crafted, well-rehearsed story which somebody has made up. Probably you wrote the script and found some old man to read it. I've never heard of this Gamal and I most certainly would have if he had been my father's servant. Moreover, I had nothing to do with the Baroness' murder. There is no evidence to support such an accusation or that I ever poisoned my brother Moulay. I am Youssef ibn Ali el Idrisi the son of my father, a *Cherif* of Fez, with the Baroness Von Schleebruck.'

There was a commotion at the rear of the chamber. Everyone but Radouan stood up and looked as the real Youssef flanked by his fat smiling nurse from Casablanca, two body guards and several

police men, lurched down the aisle and stood there swaying from side to side in front of the Court.

A profound silence descended over the chamber. The real Youssef stood staring vacantly into space. Then Prospero introduced him as the real Youssef ibn Ali el Idrisi.

The false Youssef gestured helplessly at the court and said; 'It is me who is Youssef, not him! He is Latifa's son Moulay, a victim of early addiction to alcohol and hashish.'

The real Youssef turned slowly around, squinting, trying to focus on the speaker's face. Then suddenly, without warning, he bolted from his minders, lurched across to where the false Youssef was standing, clutched his shoulders and sank his teeth into the false Youssef's neck.

The court erupted in moans and cries as the two went down, the real Youssef's teeth sinking deeper and deeper into the false Youssef's neck as his inhuman growls reverberated through the chamber. The guards and the police tried frantically to separate them before Youssef reached Moulay's jugular, but it was the smiling nurse, reminding him of an important football game coming up, who finally persuaded Youssef to let go and leave peacefully.

Then the false Youssef, Moulay, struggled up into the arms of his British bodyguards and was taken off to a nearby clinic for treatment.

'Perhaps we shouldn't have brought him here,' Toni whispered as she watched the real Youssef hobble out of the courtroom. 'Poor thing, where will they take him now? What will they do with him?'

'Back to the Psychiatric Hospital for the time being,' Pero replied, 'we have a special room there for him. Don't worry, they won't harm him. If we win we can move him out to Dar Chems. If we don't... then we'll see. You have to admit it was an unforgettable moment...'

After a short recess the false Youssef was returned to the court where he was deemed strong enough to undergo further questioning.

Prospero addressed him sternly. 'Let us go back to the subject of Zouheir,' he said, 'if you didn't kill him who did?'

'I've already told you that,' the false Youssef replied caustically, 'Edar had the street number but had lost it. Finally they found it. Or this was the excuse he gave for the delay. Then the kid wanted money from Zouheir for bringing him there and Zouheir wouldn't give it to him. After I gave Zouheir more money, the kid got mad and jumped him. He was bigger than Zouheir. Really, I don't think the kid killed him... I think Zouheir had a heart attack and when Edar realized what he'd done he bolted.'

'But on the tape you tell Zouheir you went out to the Baroness' place... to warn him. What about that?'

'Yes, I did. I had reason to believe the police were going to torture him so I drove out but there were police at the gate so I hired Edar to bring him back and...'

Pero interrupted him, '... and you were preparing to leave when Zouheir arrived...'

'That's what Zouheir says on the tape. At that point I hadn't planned to go anywhere...'

'But then you did leave. Why?'

'When I discovered the transmitter, and that it was broken, I knew the police would soon descend on me and I would be blamed for everything.'

'So you flew to Amsterdam. What were you doing there?'

'Relaxing... And excuse me... I must... I wish to remind the *Cadi* ... I wish to remind Him again of the portion of the tape which I think has been deleted... it's very important! Zouheir... he screamed it out as the kid was choking him, "BUT I DIDN'T KILL HER, SOMEONE ELSE HAD ALREADY DONE THE JOB!" I remember this clearly because I was shocked. I was indignant. Zouheir had taken all this money from Saadi and then "SOMEONE ELSE HAD DONE THE JOB." Gentleman! That SOMEONE... THE SOMEONE is sitting right over there...' He pointed at Radouan, 'It is him; her gigolo who has done this thing... what I am saying is that even though we had the idea to do it, he did it first!'

The false Youssef, Moulay sat down and the Public Prosecutor rose and addressed the *Cadi*. 'We have some evidence to enter which has just come to light, Your Honors. According to his

testimony, Youssef here stated that he and the Baroness were working on a new Will and Testament and that when he decided to leave Marrakech, he burned all those notes, many of which were hand written. We examined his flat very carefully and found that not all the papers in the bathtub had been completely burned. We have now finished examining these notes with the assistance of experts and have found writing other than his, notes in the margins, which we have compared with examples of the Baronesses' writing and have found to be identical.'

'We would like permission to examine those scraps of paper with our experts,' Pero said immediately. 'The case of Amran who, incidentally, was found poisoned a few weeks ago in Tangier, shows how easy it is in our culture to forge documents, even scraps of documents, and have them attested as genuine... your Honors... And even if those scraps do prove to be hers it doesn't mean the Baroness had decided to act.'

'The point is,' said the Public Prosecutor defiantly, 'there is a distinct possibility the Baroness was going to change her Testament, and we feel this is important because if Youssef is telling the truth in this, he may be telling it on other points.'

Pero nodded and addressed the judges: 'I would also like to introduce a new piece of evidence to you, Honorable Gentlemen. Fortunately the body of the Baroness was not buried but lies frozen here in Marrakech. So we have been able to take tissue samples and compare them with tissue samples taken from the real Youssef when he was still in the psychiatric facility at Casablanca. Here is the report, gentlemen. I have made photocopies for all of you. Tissue samples were sent not only to the lab in Rabat, but to Johns Hopkins University in America, and the Currie Institute in Paris... all three have agreed that the DNA of our Youssef matches that of his mother The Baroness Minna Von Schleebruck...'

There were gasps in the chamber and Pero smiled. 'There is no doubt about it. DNA tests are now standard all over the world... and we have just now taken tissue samples from this man who calls himself Youssef but is really Moulay and sent them to the same labs.'

Pero resumed his seat. Slowly Radouan turned round to him, his words still slurred, and whispered urgently, 'I've been silent but whatever they gave me is wearin' off and I have been listening carefully to everything... it's getting late, soon the judges will adjourn and I'll be taken back to the jail. This is a most dangerous moment

for me because when you think of what's been said... that tape with Zouheir and Youssef speakin' about Saadi. Well, you know Saadi's family and their supporters. Now they will try to find a way to kill me... seriously... once I'm out of the way they reckon you and Toni would not pursue the case and after many postponements when everyone has forgotten the whole thing a decision will quietly be made in their favor. Believe me; I know these people... a small matter of Youssef's DNA won't stop them.'

He stared hard at Pero. 'So this is what you must do right now... you must call Toni to the witness stand, cross examine her briefly and then you, *Habibti*, mus' speak for some time very favorably, very positively about Saadi. While you are doing this, Pero mus' get on his cell phone and call Madame Saadi's uncle, the head of their clan. You mus' tell them that if they remain calm and pursue friendly relations with us we will see they are generously rewarded.'

Toni and Pero glanced at each other.

'He's right,' Pero agreed, 'can you do it?'

'Of course!' Toni nodded.

As soon as the *Cadi* proposed a recess until the following day, Prospero immediately requested permission to call Antonia Uld Billah to the witness stand. As everyone in the room had been waiting for this moment, permission was granted and Toni took the stand.

There was a buzz of approval in the chamber as she spoke in Arabic. Pero led her through the process of identifying herself; a biographical sketch, a recitation of her interests, her residency in Marrakech and her long relationship with Radouan during which she deflated the proposition that Radouan was a gigolo. Finally Pero led her into a monologue of her relationship with Madame Saadi which gave him time to get on his phone and talk with Saadi's uncle.

'The most important thing about my relationship with Madame Saadi,' Toni said, concluding a eulogy she had managed to extend for almost twenty-minutes, 'is that it has been an extremely stable one. For over twenty years Madame Saadi has been absolutely honest with me and correct in handling my affairs. She sends detailed statements and does not inflate the number of hours she spends working on my behalf.'

Letting this sink in, Toni then gestured helplessly. 'Gentlemen, Your Honors, I cannot stress how much I hope you will excuse Madame Saadi's involvement in this affair. I was one of the

Baroness' closest friends and I'm sure the last thing she would have wanted would be that Madame Saadi should suffer. We all face temptation every day; especially we women as we grow older. Certainly this court must take into account the well-known weakness of women in this regard and a brief lapse of judgement on Madame Saadi's part should not be allowed to blemish an otherwise stainless career!

Shouts of approval echoed through the chamber; not only for Toni's support for Madame Saadi, but for her command of the language. Urgent conversations took place among Saadi's relatives and friends as they immediately sensed that something important had happened behind the scenes.

Madame Saadi smiled on cue and nodded contritely.

Toni resumed, 'And lastly, gentlemen, I would suggest that compassion be extended to everyone involved in this tragic affair which, after all, was brought about by the actions of the Baroness' lover, Ali el Idrisi, of Fez.'

While Toni was speaking, Prospero had been talking to Saadi's uncle, and they had reached an agreement. They wanted the false Youssef, Moulay, jailed as an accomplice to the murder of the Baroness, and were insisting that Madame Saadi be excused. They expected somehow that Toni would be able to arrange all this and that they would be generously rewarded in the future. For this they would insure Radouan's safety.

The court resumed the process of adjourning for three days and Pero asked that Radouan be temporarily released in the custody of his wife, with guards stationed outside her flat, until the trial resumed. After consulting for some time with the advisory judges the *Cadi* announced that because Radouan was still officially charged with murder, unfortunately he could not be released in this way, even for three days, and would have to go back to jail.

Toni sighed.

'Thanks for your speech, *Habibti*,' Radouan whispered over his shoulder, 'you probably saved my life.'

'Poor darling, I'm sorry you're not coming home with me. I'm going to worry terribly about you until Thursday.'

'Don't! *Makayn mouchkil*. I jus' hope they put me back in isolation. It's not comfortable but it's better for me 'cause I don't get in fights... how's Nick?

Toni smiled fondly. 'He's better. The fright of being in jail... I think it did something... got his brain working again... he seems to be more positive.'

'And my father and mother, I think I saw them here...'

'They are in the back of the room, my darling, they are fine. Delphine and Francesco are here at the Mamounia... arrived last night. We're all waiting for the end of this mess.'

Radouan gazed at her and tilted his chin. 'And Lahcen, how's he doing?'

'Haven't seen him in ages,' Toni laughed, 'So busy saving you I haven't had time to exercise...'

'I know you too well, *azizati*,' Radouan grinned and shook his finger at her.

'If you think I would be seeing Lahcen behind your back, you don't know me at all... even after all this you still don't trust me...'

'I trust you, *Habibti*, but women are weak...you just said it to the *Cadi*.' He laughed and turned back to Pero. 'Tell me, are you okay?'

'He's exhausted,' Toni sighed, 'Hard work especially when your client is a wild man.'

'It's you who are saving my life. Evidence means nothing here without money. It's costing a lot, I'm sure.'

'Don't worry, I'll be billing you. You're going to be far richer than I will ever be...'

'You know how I hate wastin' money... I hope you aren't payin' too much... you're not very good at negotiating.'

Toni smiled sympathetically. 'You must see it as life insurance, *habibi*. If we want to continue to live around here, you'll have to learn to be more generous, contribute substantially to social initiatives - that sort of thing! Unless you want to live somewhere else, Argentina, for example... for polo you might want to think of that...'

'I would hate it. How could I ever leave Marrakech - how? My family: twenty generations of ancestors here, are you kidding'? I'd be leavin' them all behind. Who would care for their graves here and in R'hamna? It is me who does all that... no one else cares. One thing I will try to do in this country, if I can, is fix up the cemeteries. They look terrible...'

They were interrupted by two police officers that had come to take Radouan back to jail. He had a few words with Pero, Toni embraced him and he was led away. After he had gone Madame Saadi sauntered by, fawned over Toni, thanked her profusely, eyeing

Pero nervously and said: 'It was a wonderful speech she made about me... thank you both so much... *Chokran!* I will never forget,' and clutched Toni's hands and tried to kiss them.

Toni resisted the impulse to jerk them away from her. 'I know the Baroness would have wanted it this way,' she replied gently, extricating her fingers from Saadi's moist lips, 'I hope I did some good...'

'I don't deserve it, but I hope so too...' Saadi smiled weakly.

'But you haven't been charged with anything, my dear, hopefully they'll just forget about you and nothing will happen.'

'*Inch Allah... Inch Allah...*' Saadi sighed.

'Yes... well it's been an exhausting day, hasn't it?' Toni said and took Pero's arm. 'And now I must go home and rest... I guess we'll all be here again in three days.'

'*Inch Allah.*'

'*Inch Allah.*'

## 73

Outside the court building, Toni and Pero had been besieged by a phalanx of reporters and cameramen who followed them until they reached their car. Another group waited outside her apartment house.

'Please come up for a while,' Toni sighed, 'I'm exhausted... really I think I need a double whiskey ... perhaps you do too... something to calm our nerves, dear Pero, and to forget about that woman slobbering all over me.'

At her flat she excused herself and when she returned Pero had poured out two stiff drinks.

'Do you think he'll be all right now?' Toni asked, 'I'm so worried...'

'Saadi's uncle assured me nothing will happen to him,' Pero said confidently. 'He seemed to think the Ministre d' Interieur had persuaded the police to release that tape - which absolves us. He isn't really blaming us... but I told him as soon as Radouan was free

we'd have a meeting and decide what we can do for them... they know you have deep pockets and suspect Radouan's will be even deeper.'

'What we've done for him has saved his niece,' Toni said grimly, '... wretched woman and the reputation of their family... I shouldn't think we'd have to do much more but I know we will. I doubt the MI tried to influence the Marrakech police about that tape, though.'

'They didn't need to. Their mere presence was enough to frighten everyone. And the fact that we must have known of its existence,' Pero smiled mischievously, 'they can't quite untangle that one, but they're impressed. When they couldn't find out who our contact was they assumed it was the MI.'

'You talked to him, to the uncle, for such a long time,' Toni chuckled, 'really; I was at my wits end trying to think of what to say next.'

'Her uncle, he couldn't resist trying to appeal to me that as a fellow Moroccan I should assist him in trying to swindle you when it came time to negotiate with them... promised to split the proceeds fifty-fifty.'

'That's very interesting ... not unexpected, I suppose... Come to think of it perhaps you should accept his offer. He'll think you're a friend; you can return it to us later and be a mole in their organization... Radouan won't like it, he'd rather drive them out of town, but he will have to learn when you have money you must be devious as well as generous. He's much too headstrong... must learn how to be more oblique... thinks he's really clever because he's an Arab and Arabs are supposed to know all the tricks... but we British... let me tell you, sometimes I think we're the most devious people on the planet... When Radouan realizes how rich he's going to be he won't quibble about paying off...'

Impressed by her cleverness, Pero laughed. 'Oh yes he will, believe me, it's not the money, it's loss of face ... why should he have to pay to get them off his back... you will see, he will wait and wait and finally he will destroy them.'

'I know, but right now let's be realistic ... they're a powerful clan. Radouan sees himself a desert warrior, riding into battle ... that's his madness... what Francesco finds so amusing. But since we have the money it's far easier to pay... call it blood money if you will...'

'This is assuming we win...' Pero replied.

'Is there any doubt?' She touched glasses with him, 'I thought we had won.'

'I don't think it's going to be as clear cut as you think...'

'You mean because Moulay could be the Patron's son too... I can't believe it.'

'The Idrises are *Chorfas*. The mother's blood line doesn't count for much... the male line carries the blood of the Prophet Mohammed. But Moulay's mother the maid was Moroccan, the Baroness was not... so in a way Moulay might be more of a *Cherif* than Youssef.'

'And *Chorfas* are above the law?'

'Somewhat... really, THEY ARE THE LAW! *Chorfas* are often considered to be beyond the law because they have inherited the instincts and purity of early Islam from their pious and learned ancestors - an almost magical idea... the *Mahdi*, Prince of Islam, that sort of thing.'

'And what does this have to do with Moulay poisoning Youssef?' Toni asked.

'It could be seen as God's will. Since there is no proof, it could be argued that the real Youssef was invaded by some evil *Djinn* - God's punishment for the Patron's adulterous behavior. Perhaps the Patron's wives did some *maji* to make Moulay and Youssef fight; maybe they hired a *Marabout* to do *maji* against the Patron... to ruin his life. One never knows! So these are all things which the Judges will be considering... it's in their blood to do so. Islamic Law, *Sharia*, is not standardized or simplistic like Roman law; it's filled with exceptions, and profound insights into human behavior based on thousands of years experience. It's your English way of thinking, based on Roman law, that's not logical... yet in many ways perhaps it's more practical.'

'Dear Pero, I'm so lucky to have had you by my side through all this,' Toni sighed and smiled as if really seeing him for the first time... 'What would I have done? I'm sure I'd have hired the first fixer who came along and probably botched the whole thing... I'll never be able to thank you enough.'

'You don't have too,' he held her hands, 'believe me I'm happy to have been in the right place at the right time, and it seems to have improved my chances of having a good practice here in Morocco. My family is very pleased.'

## 74

The following morning Toni resumed her usual routine; played golf and arrived at the Mamounia gym about eleven-thirty for her work out. At the desk the expressions on the faces of the two attendants told her immediately something was wrong. Speaking Arabic, she asked them what had happened. They gazed at her blankly and showed her the morning edition of L'Opinion. There on the front page was a photograph of Lahcen with the headline: 'Mutilated Body of Mamounia Trainer found in Agdal Gardens,' with a second blurred photograph of two policemen standing over what looked like a corpse.

'We are closed for the day, Madame, out of respect for Lahcen,' said one of the girls.

'But what happened?' Toni cried.

They burst into tears: 'He is dead. A horrible death... we cannot say!'

Toni returned home quickly and called Pero.

'So you've heard the news,' he said, 'someone killed him. No one knows who, but brutally... tied him up with wire, gagged him, and mutilated his body... too bad.'

At the other end Toni reeled and felt faint. 'TOO BAD... It's horrible! He was such a sweet person. Who could have done such an awful thing?'

'Apparently he had many enemies.' Pero replied. 'It happens here... someone says or does something and people want revenge. I'm afraid we'll never know. He was only a trainer, I'm sure the police won't bother finding out unless someone pays them.'

Lighting a cigarette, Toni collapsed on a sofa, stared out at the skyline of the city and listened to the *Meuzzins* calling the mid day prayers. Such a fantastically beautiful place, she thought, why was it so mad? Why did so many awful things constantly happen here? As furious as she was, she knew Pero was right; no one would ever

bother about poor Lahcen. At least Radouan had been sent back to jail or the police might have accused him.

Ah yes, but... Suddenly the horrific notion that he could have had something to do with Lahcen's death terrified her. But no, NO! She mustn't allow herself to think such thoughts. Radouan might have threatened Lahcen but he would never have... or would he? Really, she was probably the only person who knew how dangerous Radouan could be. Slowly she felt herself sinking into the proverbial slough of despond... the thought of it... that he might have organized something like this from his jail cell. Had Lahcen boasted to someone they'd been training together in her suite at the Mamounia that afternoon when she'd met with Le Chef? And, of course, he had mentioned to someone that he was happy Radouan was in jail? Knowing she would never know the truth, and worse, that somehow she would have to live with this uncertainty for the rest of her life, left her feeling outraged and wounded.

## 75

The following day, Prospero picked Toni up at her flat and, having made their way past the world press assembled outside the Appeals Court, had taken their seats and awaited the arrival of the judges. Madame Saadi and her supporters arrived, then Radouan still in shackles with his two guards; the false Youssef, Moulay, with his minders and the Public Prosecutor and his staff. Finally the advisory judges and the *Caid* made their entrance and the clerk called the court to order.

The *Cadi* shuffled the papers in front of him, scraped his throat and began speaking in a low deliberate voice.

'I would like to summarize the evidence heard in this court up till now and then go on to our judgements,' he said adjusting his glasses.

Toni wanted to say something to Radouan, about Lahcen, but held her tongue.

'The most important piece of evidence we have is a signed confession by one Zouheir Antaki, given to the Marrakech Police on 20 April 1998. In it he has stated that on the morning of the 23 March 1998, at about five am, he entered the private apartments of the Baroness Von Schleebruck in her *Ksar*, '*Dar Chems*', off the Route d'Ouarzazate with tea which the Baroness was accustomed to having at that hour. And that, after putting the tea tray down on a table near her bed, as he was helping her to sit up and take her tea, he smothered her with a pillow until she stopped breathing and died. Wiping away any possible finger prints with the towel he always carried, he then made his way downstairs, washed up the tea things and informed the chief servant A'hmed that he had gone up to the Baroness' bedroom at the usual time and when he opened the curtains of her bed he found her dead. A'hmed then called Madame Saadi as he had been instructed to do and she soon arrived with the Marrakech police. When the police questioned him a few days later, Zouheir admitted he had lied to Ahmed about finding the Baroness dead and it was he who murdered her. Moreover, that he had not acted on his own behalf but at the bidding of a certain individual from Fez going by the name of Youssef ibn el Ali.'

'This is the end of his statement which is corroborated by a recording made by the police from a transmitter attached to the confessed murderer Zouheir, as part of an agreement toward a reduction of his sentence. In this recording it becomes clear that the servant A'hmed placed Zouheir as a server in the Baroness' household sometime in November 1997 at the request of the aforementioned Youssef ibn Ali. Although Fatima Saadi aided Youssef ibn el Ali in many ways, there is no evidence to suggest that she acted on her own in this matter, or was in any way the instigator of this murder.'

The false Youssef tried to object but was silenced.

'We therefore accept the confession of Zouheir Antaki, that he killed the Baroness by suffocation, and reserve judgement on whether he was coerced into this act either by threat or offer of money, pending further questioning of the person present in this chamber who calls himself Youssef ibn Ali el Idrisi who shall be held in custody by the Marrakech police until the resolution of this matter.'

'On the matter of the parentage of the person who calls himself Youssef ibn Ali el Idrisi, we have now received reports from our Laboratory in Rabat and from the Currie Institute in Paris that the

DNA in the tissue sample taken from him does not, I repeat, DOES NOT match that of his purported mother, the Baroness Von Schleebruck. In view of this he must be Moulay, son of Latifa, a maid who worked in the household of the Patron Ali el Idrisi of Fez. Moreover, the person we have seen here registered as Moulay in the Casablanca psychiatric facility, who's DNA does match the DNA of the Baroness; he must be the true Youssef.'

'Although the audio tape we have heard here made by Prospero Serfati purported to be the recollections of an old servant, one Gamal, employed for many years by the Idrisi family, it cannot be taken as certain evidence. The fact that these DNA studies back the allegations that Moulay is really Youssef and Youssef, Moulay strongly suggests to us that the person calling himself Youssef did, after the death of the Patron Ali el Idrisi, conspire to have documents pertaining to his identity falsified and his name inserted for Youssef's so that he could come forward as the heir to the Baroness' fortune.'

'Furthermore, as soon as our technicians learned that when Ali el Idrisi died he was not buried, but interred in a crypt in the family mausoleum in the Idrisi Palace in Fez; and that it would be possible to take samples of bone marrow from his remains and compare his DNA with those of both Moulay and Youssef; we ordered this to be done. Now we have just received the results of these tests which confirm that both men are the sons of the *Cherif* Ali el Idrisi.'

A collective groan rippled through the chamber.

'On the tape Monsieur Prospero Serfati played for us, the old servant Gamal repeated the story that Moulay's father was a local carpenter who ran away, However he also indicated it was his belief the Patron might have fathered both boys...which, in fact, is the case.'

'Yet to be resolved in this matter is the problem of a Trust which must be set up to care for the indigent son Youssef. As he is unable to manage his own affairs this court will appoint three Trustees, and supervise the creation of a Trust, to do so. We understand Mme Antonia al Uld Billah has taken great interest in the plight of the real Youssef and has volunteered to move him to Marrakech and provide for him here. We have no objections to this course of action and agree with her that in a different setting he may improve.'

The *Cadi* then addressed himself to Madame Saadi.

'Concerning your role in this affair, Fatima Saadi... you must know, as you are an *Avocat* in your own right, that you could easily be charged with conspiracy to defraud and to commit murder.'

The *Cadi* drummed on his desk.

‘For a Notaire to show a Testament of a client or even discuss it with a third party, even with the heirs or beneficiaries of a Testament, is a serious offence and strictly forbidden. According to our laws and customs you should be punished severely and suspended from any professional work.’

‘As to the excuse you gave that your client, the Baroness, had a terminal disease and desired assistance in ending her life... as a good Muslim you must know that suicide is forbidden.’

‘Considering, however, that this is the first lapse of judgement in your long and admirable career. And considering that you have voluntarily admitted association with the man who called himself Youssef ibn Ali el Idrisi, whom we now know to be Moulay ibn Ali el Idrisi, and that in fact you openly confessed your misdeeds before this court, we will not bring charges against you.’

‘We do, however require that you shall be fined the sum of one million dirhams for these indiscretions, and that you set aside one working day each week for the next five years to make your services available to the poor free of charge.’

In a strident emotion filled voice Madame Saadi tried to speak, tried to start negotiating over the amount of her fine, but was told to shut up. Her supporters angrily defended her and one of the auxiliary Judges threatened to have them all thrown in jail.

‘I’m sure we’ll be paying that fine!’ Toni muttered.

‘That would be," helping them out," ’ Pero replied, ‘its part of the deal.’

The *Cadi* scraped his throat, signaling that he wished to continue and the chamber quieted down. ‘Concerning the involvement of the accused, Radouan-Jannat ibn Ibrahim ibn Abbas ibn Hassan al Uld Billah in the murder of the Baroness Von Schleebruck. It is obvious to us that the wrong man was arrested. We find him not guilty and he is free to resume his normal life.’

‘Allah Akbar! Allah Akbar!’ Toni cried under her breath.

‘His arrest and imprisonment by the Marrakech authorities was premature and must be cited as improper. As he was a frequent visitor at the Baroness’ *Ksar*, evidence of his fingerprints there cannot be considered to incriminate him. We therefore declare that, the provisions of the Baroness’s Testament will be carried out in full, and that this court recognizes Radouan- Jannat ibn Ibrahim Uld Billah to

be the sole legitimate heir to all her properties and assets both here and abroad.'

'Allah Akbar!' Radouan breathed deeply his eyes closed.  
'There is no Victor but God, the Almighty the Compassionate.'

'As for you who came to Marrakech claiming you were Youssef ibn Ali el Idrisi,' the *Cadi* addressed the false Youssef, 'now that you have been found not to be related to the Baroness in any way, we order that you be taken into custody until the Public Prosecutor finishes investigating your involvement in this affair and has been able to question you thoroughly.'

Radouan turned to Pero: 'They'll strike a deal with him you'll see,' he mumbled, 'they want to know how much he can pay.'

The *Cadi* scraped his throat again. 'The case of Radouan is concluded. The case of Moulay ibn Ali el Idrisi is continued indefinitely pending further findings of the public prosecutor. Court Adjourned.'

## 76

Across the row of seats that separated them Toni embraced Radouan. 'It's over darling, it's over!' she repeated many times, patting him on the back. 'Oh *habibi*... *habibi* Radouan, thank God.'

'Thanks to God... *Hamdou' Allah*,' Radouan said his voice husky with emotion.

'He doesn't have to go back to *Boulmaraz*, does he?' she asked as Radouan drew Prospero into their embrace, took both his hands and covered them with kisses.

'No... No, of course he doesn't,' Pero replied, 'you heard the *Cadi*, he's free to go... let's get out of here.'

A short distance away, the angry looking Youssef – now Moulay - was led away by the Marrakech police.

‘They’d better guard him well,’ Radouan muttered, ‘cause if they release him I swear I’m gonna get him. On the head of my mother, I will.’

‘Speaking of your mother,’ Toni said, ‘I think she may be here, and your father too.’

Radouan turned to see his mother in a green *jallaba*, her mouth hidden by a scarlet chiffon *n’gab*, advancing down the isle with his father in a wheelchair pushed by Radouan’s sister Fouzia, grim but never more beautiful. One by one he embraced them and then apologized to Fouzia:

‘I’m sorry you had to go to jail for me, my sister, don’t worry, I’ll make it up to you.’

Then he bent down and whispered in his mother’s ear. ‘My mother... now you must go ahead with preparations for my wedding. Do you think Hafida knows about all this... the trial... the money?’

‘Some gossips,’ his mother replied, ‘I am sure they have heard and have told her, but she doesn’t read and her father won’t allow TV in the house so don’t worry... I will go and set a date with them.’

‘My son, my son...’ his father growled, pulling Radouan’s head down and covering it with kisses, ‘How favored you are to have all these mighty friends and Prospero here working so hard for you... favored by the All Mighty... This evening you must go to the Mosque and pray for the soul of the Baroness... give thanks to God for His blessings on you and ask Him to forgive your sins. Look here is your poor orphan Mokhtar come to say hello... he’s been to see me a few times, crazy with worry over you.’

Mokhtar approached humbly, embraced Radouan’s father, got down his knees and was about to kiss Radouan’s feet when Radouan, embarrassed, lifted him up and spoke rapidly to him in *Chleuh*, one of the major dialects of the Berber language. ‘It’s me who should be kissin’ your feet for what you did,’ he whispered, ‘...Without you we would never have known what happened... This evening very late I will visit you,’ he whispered ‘... *manchou faq a zeen...*’ he said. ‘Ahtajouka...’ Mokhtar nodded and disappeared in the crowd.

Radouan turned to Toni. ‘Where are the great Francesco Monte and his protegee... your co-wife?’

Toni laughed. ‘We didn’t think it wise for her to be seen here, *habibi*... the press, they haven’t a clue about you two... we’ll see

them this evening. I've planned a little buffet supper. Invited all the people who've helped us and some of the enemy too.'

Suddenly Radouan felt far away. Everything seemed so changed. He didn't need to party, he needed close human contact. 'Enemy!' he growled, 'what enemy? I won't see them.'

'Saadi and her family of course... our legal team... the Avocats representing the companies you're going to inherit who've been trying to push Moulay's case...'

Radouan glared at her. 'And you expect me to speak with these people? Are you crazy?'

'Listen to me, my darling,' Toni insisted. 'I am not crazy! I want them to see that you are not the wild-eyed gigolo the press has made you out to be...'

A wicked light flashed in his eyes, 'Ha! But that's me... that's exactly what I am.'

Toni smiled and shook her head gently, 'Darling, really, do not be difficult! We've won a great victory... you've had a life changing experience, we all have, and I can see you've... really these men are going to be very important to you... to us... no matter what you think, you must charm them... pretend to accept their excuses... appear to like them. You must learn to control your instinct for revenge. They expect you to hate them... you must confuse them. In a few years you can do without them if you like... right now we need them.'

'She's right,' Pero agreed... 'You must become trickier now than you have ever been before ... enjoy your victory, quit being so sarcastic with people and learn to flatter them.'

'You need a good adviser,' Toni said. 'May I suggest that right now you hire Prospero before someone else gets him? I noticed the *Cadi* gazing fondly at him... absolutely besotted!' she laughed and turned to Pero, 'You'd better watch out, the legal establishment here is going to want you, you're much too clever for them and they know it.'

'Yes, why not,' Radouan grinned, 'Prospero, Le Grand Wazzier! On one condition though... that you take Fouzia, here, as your wife.' Everyone but Fouzia laughed. 'I'm serious... very serious. Look how beautiful she is and hard working too.' She'll make you a fine wife. Do you agree?'

'Of course,' Pero laughed loudly trying to conceal his embarrassment, wondering wildly what his family, especially his mother, would say.

Fouzia lowered her eyes

‘May you have many fine children, Prospero,’ Radouan’s mother said as if to seal the bargain.

‘And where’s Nicholas?’ Radouan asked and looked around the chamber, ‘Is he all right?’

‘Improved’ Toni replied. ‘Now he’s legal his mind is becoming clearer. He’s back at Pero’s *Riad* supervising some work. He’ll be with us this evening. Delphine and Francesco will pick him up... come, let the driver take your parents and Fouzia back to the Medina and you and I and Pero will walk slowly to my place. You need some exercise but not too much at one time. So do I...’

‘But the paparazzi,’ Pero protested.

Toni shrugged her shoulders, ‘Let them follow us...’

Radouan protested.

‘Tut tut,’ Toni raised her hand, ‘the time has come for you both to learn how to deal with them... to your advantage of course. Come... I’m a pro ... this will be the first lesson. Just keep in mind that we’ve won, and you’re going to be very rich. Don’t make them jealous... be humble... keep saying it’s God’s will. Make them love you. Make love to their cameras as though they were the eyes of beautiful women. Relax and smile... joke with them... be your own inimitable selves! Do you think you can do that?’

‘I feel weak,’ Radouan complained, ‘And during my confinement I’ve become more serious.’

Toni smiled brightly and took his arm. ‘We’ll walk slowly then... give the photographers a chance to take all the pictures they need. It’s their job... Come!’

Radouan held back: ‘I look terrible... I don’t want to be photographed; you know how I dislike cameras...’

She laughed. ‘You’re so vain... you don’t look terrible at all, you look fantastic... you’ve lost twenty pounds... really you look ten years younger. And you must remember what a great story this is... you’re going to be a hero for millions... Mansour, the winner... you’d better get used to it...’

Radouan gazed at her suspiciously. ‘Why?’

‘Oh darling... why, why, why ? Sometimes you’re like a huge baby... really... do not be so obstinate! Come along and be tender, live up to your good looks... nobody has a clue about you. We want the world to love you...’

Lurking near the entrance to the building they encountered Madame Saadi and her entourage. Radouan paused, smiled warmly at his enemy and Toni reminded Saadi that she and her family were invited to supper later on that evening. Then, along with Radouan's old friend Houcein and several bodyguard friends, they walked slowly from the court to Toni's apartment building.

Along the way Prospero tried to identify the sadness he felt, when really he should be feeling joyous. Working all this time with Toni, being constantly near her, he suddenly realized how fond of her he'd become. Was it love..? He hoped not, but it was going to be hard giving her back to Radouan whom he resented sometimes for the way he treated her. As Radouan's adviser, however, wouldn't he still have many opportunities to be with her? Yes. And, of course, Radouan would be very busy with his other wives.

On his part, Radouan rose to the occasion peppering his responses to the reporters' questions with ribald prison jokes and by the time they arrived at Toni's place, he had them kissing his hands.

'See,' Toni said breezily as they ascended in the lift, 'that wasn't as hard as you thought it would be. Francesco is right, you're a natural actor. Just keep thinking positively and project a forgiving and compassionate image.'

Pero agreed, 'I'm your official adviser now and I'm telling you it will make things much easier for us...'

'If I think too much that's when I loose it...' Radouan observed, 'it's when I don't think that I'm happy and can act.'

Toni stared at him and cocked her head, 'You don't think, my love, you brood!'

That evening, as the sun slipped below the palms and the moon rose full behind the Koutoubia mosque, casting a spell of lunacy over the city, Radouan and Toni stood on the terrace of Toni's

penthouse where they would later dine. Ten round tables each set for eight, the vermeil dinner service, Crown Derby china, crystal goblets, huge bouquets of roses.

‘What do you think?’ she asked, feeling a bit self-conscious, smiling obliquely at Radouan.

Radouan paced nervously up and down, eyeing every detail. ‘You shouldn’t be usin’ all this valuable stuff,’ he said at last, ‘all this gold... no one should know about it. You’ll see, they’ll walk off with it... someone will steal it, if not now then later...’

‘Really, darling...’ Toni smiled disapprovingly. ‘Who would steal it... tell me?’

‘Anybody would, somebody... we never know. I’ll have to get some guys in here posing as waiters to watch... I don’t understand why you’re doin’ all this...’

‘I told you before...’

‘Tell me again...’

‘Listen to me then... If we’re going to continue to live here... really, you must trust me... my instincts in these things. Call it a peace offensive. The people who opposed us will be impressed by some of my guests and act differently with us. Now you have all this money you will have to learn how to manage people... if we’re going to live here, and I know you’re determined to do that, we must cultivate friendly relations even with the people who were against you. The establishment here in Marrakech... families like the Saadi’s...the police... It’s important NOT to let them know how you really feel... you’ve told me that many times yourself.’

Radouan shook his head, ‘you don’t understand them. The only thing they believe in is money and how to get it... squeeze and squeeze more... like all the other tricksters in the world but more experienced. That’s the way life is here. We should not be inviting them. Now I have all this money they must come to us... they must crawl. If you show friendship they’ll think something’s wrong... drink your wine, eat your food and laugh at you behind your back... then bite! The world is like that these days... nothing we can do about it... Life is God’s joke...’

‘You really think so? I think you’re being very...’

‘Yes *bibti*... yes!’

Toni sighed. ‘Then what do you suggest we do, it’s getting late?’

‘Don’t you have...?’

'I don't have enough of anything else but this stuff which I never use...'

'I'm gonna call the Mamounia...'

'The Mamounia?'

'Have them send over plates, knives, forks, glasses. You can have the maid start putting this stuff away.'

Radouan called a friend at the Mamounia and arranged to have service for eighty people sent over within the hour. Then he helped Toni and the maid unset the tables and put everything away.

Suddenly Toni stepped back. 'Darling,' she exclaimed, 'you're helping! I can't believe it! Never in your whole life have you ever helped...'

Radouan beamed. 'I want to be with you, close to you. In jail I came to know... began to feel, to understand, that I had... I guess it was being alone in that small cell. It was like... it was exactly like me, that cell... what I had done to myself. That I was livin' inside a... that I had boxed myself into a shell just like my jail cell. So now I have to break out and hope I can do it...'

They embraced.

'It's so wonderful, so marvelous you understand this,' she whispered, 'tonight you'll really have a chance to practice it.'

Radouan sighed, 'I want to run away from tonight... I need to go out alone drinkin' in the taverns... cruisin' around free... The problem is these people are expecting me to revenge myself on them...'

She eyed him nervously, then took his head in her hands and kissed his nose.

'I'm tellin' you they'll be expecting some trick.' he purred.

Toni pointed over his shoulder and turned him around 'See the moon, my darling... look what a glorious night it's going to be...'

'I tell you these people are gonna be very nervous... you'll see... in the back of their minds they'll be thinkin' the food will be poisoned... the roof will fall down on them, or the waiters will pull guns and shoot them all.'

'Don't enter your Sicilian mode again, darling... Please!'

'We people of the *Maghreb*, we are the Godfathers of those who call themselves Godfathers...'

'Really... I can't imagine...'

'You can't imagine but its true... it's a fact... '

'But now you've had some time to think about yourself... your life... I know you're...'

'Yeah... In *Boulmaraz* I had time to think... to think of many things... really, it wasn't that long, but for me it seemed endless...' he gazed at her steadily, 'I learned something important though... that you are... most of the time you are right! Don't look surprised, you know I admire you,' Radouan grinned. 'Believe me I know, I understand what you're sayin' and I'll be good. Jus' watch and see how good I'm going to be... my anger will be buried deeply... they'll never suspect what's going to happen to them...'

'No, darling, NO...'

'Yes, *'bibti*, YES... You won't need to know, but for sure you will hear about their difficulties and the destruction that will overtake them.' His eyes glittered. 'Their weaknesses.... I know them all... especially the one you call Monsieur Larbi, the chauffeur... you will see. Some night when he comes drunk into the *Hamam* he will be raped repeatedly by a squad of eighteen-year-olds - something to remember me by. Believe me; I will see that it is done...'

'Stop it right now, you don't mean a word of what you're saying... Vengeance is mine sayeth the Lord.'

'What is that?'

'The Bible... over and over in the Bible, poor God is always saying this but no one is listening.'

'We Muslims do. We say *Inch Allah*. God's will be done. We say man takes action, God intervenes. I have *Baraka*... I will pray to God and he will help me punish these evil doers... I'm sure...' Radouan smiled at her.

'STOP! Right now, now and forever... Perhaps we should think about living somewhere else if you're going to be so...'

'My place in the world is Marrakech and the *Haouz*... the place of my people for hundreds of years... since the time of your Queen Elizabeth we've been fightin' here for our Sultans, defending our Imams and *Marabouts*. These people comin' tonight are all *arrivistes*. We will stay here, let them leave!'

Later, Toni managed to get Radouan into the bath and afterward massaged him, especially his head which always seemed to bear the brunt of his despair. And while they readied themselves for the evening, a team of boys from the Mamounia came over and set the tables, stocked the bar and brought food.

By nine thirty when their guests began to arrive everything was ready. The atmosphere was subdued but cordial and everyone who had known Radouan marveled at the change that had come over him. Supper was a great success and as the champagne flowed he rose to the occasion, toasted his friends and his enemies alike, cajoled and flattered them, told amusing stories and even sang a few songs with a small Andalusian band he'd engaged.

'A love letter came to me,' he crooned in Arabic as the band warmed up.

'From the moon, a gift of light  
Whose words increase in loveliness  
Like blossoms of delight.  
It has lightened my heavy load  
And eased my sore affliction,  
Which had, O Lady, cast my heart  
Between pity and caution...'\*

\*Pop up: (Free translation from The Thousand and One Nights - 183<sup>rd</sup> Night)

As he sang, Radouan gestured gravely toward Toni and toasted her, his marvelous voice eliciting a glowing response and cheers from the guests, especially the local Marrakchi's, though not from Delphine who sat in a corner with Francesco, and pouted and felt ignored.

'O Lady, you know my great love  
And you know my great desire  
My eyes that sleepless burn with love,  
My heart that burns on the pyre;  
My tears that never cease to flow  
My ever yearning fire,  
O by my sacred love for you  
By my unholy wish I say  
That my poor heart has harbored love  
For no one since you went away.'\*

\*Pop up: ( Ibid)

A flaming dessert arrived, borne aloft by dancing girls and a group of Gnoua musicians. Brandy and coffee replaced the champagne, and as the candles burned low, a woman long noted for her naughtiness and her erudition, eighty years and pencil thin, one of Morocco's more eccentric notables, made her way to Radouan's table and began to sing.

'When a soft, curving shape led him to my embrace

As if he were by a thick vine entwined  
And with its softness softened his hard heart  
He yielded, though at first he had declined,'

Her red hair disheveled, her diamonds sparkling, she gestured toward Radouan.

'Fearing detection by watchful spies.  
He came with caution's armor, the spies to defeat,  
His waist complaining of his hips that weighed  
As heavy as a camel's load upon his feet.  
He came with the sword of his glances girt,  
And clad with the mail of his dusky hair.  
His fragrance brought me news of his approach,  
And like a bird uncaged, I flew to meet him there.'

Applause and cheers interrupted her. No one had heard her sing in years. She beckoned to the musicians who came forward to accompany her with lute, *kanoun*, flute drums and tambour.

'I laid my cheeks for his sandals to tread,  
And their dust, salve-like, healed my ailing eye.  
I embraced him and raised the banner of our love,  
And loosed the knot of my love gone awry,  
And held festivities; and in reply  
Delight came unalloyed and crystalline.'\*

\*Pop up: ( translation from The Story of Qomar-al-Zaman and His Two Sons Amjad and As'ad)

The flute rose above the lute and the drums subsided. An apparition in the flickering light, she cocked her head coquettishly, dabbed at her forehead with her scarf and smiled tenderly at Radouan:

'The moon hanged his mouth with star like teeth  
Like bubbles dancing on the face of wine.  
I tasted in the prayer niche of delight  
What would make a sinner repent.  
And swear by the signs of his glorious face  
That I'll never forget the sign God sent.'\*

\*Pop up: ( translation from The Forbidden Verses of Abu Nuwas)

Her finger then to her lips, like an oracle imparting an omen, she stared wildly from side to side and sang,

'Hush and be patient you who wish to part  
For to embrace is lovers joy.  
But fortune's nature is deceit  
And at the end does love destroy!\*

\*Pop up: ( from The Story of Qomar-al-Zaman and His Two Sons Amjad and As'ad)

Everyone joined her repeating the final chorus; tambours shook and a big drum beat slowly as the party broke up and the guests magically disappeared into the sultry Marrakech night.

After the party had broken up, Francesco, Delphine, Prospero and Nicholas stayed on and recounted the events of the past few months.

'I must say you look very well,' Delphine glanced dismissively at Radouan, 'prison must have agreed with you.'

'Only because you weren't there to torment me, my love' Radouan said flippantly. Why did she always have to gaze at him with such scorn? It was a look he found arousing but absolutely destructive. Why did she have to do this? Suddenly it occurred to him that he had never before been in the same room with both his wives; how to handle them both at the same time was making him doubly uncomfortable.

'More champagne,' he shouted, 'More!'

Sensing difficulties ahead, Toni declared loudly that she had enjoyed the party immensely.

'We should have taped it,' Francesco said. 'Then we could have played it back and seen what really happened... it's really amazing to watch things you thought you were living through, a second or third time... so different from what one manages to remember.'

'Like one of your films,' Toni teased.

'I wish,' Francesco sighed, 'like Delphine's debut I hope... my greatest achievement... she's very inspiring to work with... you will see.'

Radouan lifted his glass 'I hope so too,' he replied trying to sound engaged and agreeable. 'To inspiration... to the success of Delphine's first film.'

They raised their glasses and saluted Delphine. Then Nick raised his glass, 'And I would like to thank Toni and Prospero,' he said solemnly, 'but for them, Radouan and I would still be languishing in that awful jail... in fact, I'd be dead!'

'Really, I didn't do much,' Toni said. 'It was Pero who did all the hard things.'

'Prospero,' Radouan laughed, 'through him we have all prospered and now this is over we can get on with our lives.' Turning to Delphine he asked how long she planned to be in Marrakech.

Delphine ran her hands through her hair, her bracelets clinked and rattled. 'I really don't know,' she replied, and nodded at Francesco. 'He's editing right now.'

'Long enough to attend my wedding, I hope,' Radouan said coolly trying to provoke her.

'What wedding?' She said, pretending not to know about Hafida. 'Are you going to marry Toni again down here?'

'Yes, I am, we will see the *L'adoul* soon but I thought... I think I told you, maybe you forgot... first I have to marry this girl my mother has chosen. Are you getting old ... are you forgetting things? All this hashish it's no good for you... This marriage I have to do it. We've been engaged since before Ramadan but I kept putting it off... then it got postponed because of jail... but today, absolutely, my mother told me it has to happen. I have to begin makin' plans for the wedding party. It will be interesting for you... maybe Francesco can arrange to have it filmed so we can see what really happened.'

Delphine's eyes narrowed as she gazed at him over her champagne.

'I can't believe you,' she said slowly, 'I just can't... those huge unblinking eyes of yours, that naive expression and you tell us these things... these crazy stories. I would like to smash you! Maybe that's what you want. Does this girl know you are already married to Toni and me...?'

'Of course not,' Radouan replied, 'why should she?'

'Because it's her right as a person, her human right.'

'It's not her business. Her business is ME, not you or Toni. When you marry me here in Morocco I might tell her, but at the moment it's not necessary.'

'How old is she...?'

'I thought I told you, she's fifteen.'

'Fifteen!'

'Yes, fifteen... the same age as my mother when I was born. Many French and English kings have taken fifteen year old wives, believe me, it's the right age to have strong children...'

'Just tell us; please... try to tell us exactly why you are doing this.'

'Because of my mother...'

'I don't believe you, not for a minute... you're a grown man, what does your mother have to do with it?'

'You jus' don't know my mother... how our culture works. Women... mothers... they control everything. We men... we're just fightin' to stay alive. It's her, my mother, who must find me a wife... how would I know which girl would be best for me?'

‘But you already have two wives... here we are, Toni and me. Your mother, doesn’t she know about us?’

‘She might, but she knows it’s not her business. Even so, she would think of them as fake marriages because they weren’t performed here. You must remember the R’hamna were never city Arabs. We were pastoralists and holy warriors. Our laws, our customs, they come direct from Qur’an, not the *Sharia* of the Caliphs or Imams, or intermediaries like Ghazali but the voice of God through Mohammed, transmitted orally for fourteen hundred years. Long ago because the men were always fighting, the women they decided everything... controlled the hearth... the animals... marriages... and sometimes the money. It’s the same today.’

‘The Prophet’s first wife was a rich widow whose money and devotion gave him time to listen to the voice of God... and our R’hamna women... mostly they are the daughters of religious men, Sufis, *Marabouts* and so on... But you must remember we are Muslims for only twelve hundred years at most. Before that we worshipped the Gods, and Goddesses, so the memory of those times is in our genes... the memory of *Saba* and its queen who visited Solomon. So the women, they all know each other... what’s available in the marriage market. We men, we do not know... are not even permitted to look at girls, so how can we know? And your mother, of course she understands you better than anyone else; so she knows which girl will be suitable for you.’ He gazed steadily at Delphine and then said quietly: ‘You can divorce me if you want...’

‘What will your mother do when you finally tell her you’re married to us?’ Delphine persisted.

Radouan sighed with impatience ‘Probably she already knows... she thinks I’m crazy, I’m sure, but she would never say anything. To her, more than one wife means trouble... even the Prophet’s wives they fought. Many wives means fighting and *maji* because of jealousy... which is why my mother would think I’m crazy... which would be true if you and Toni were Moroccan women but you’re not...’ He turned to Nick and Francesco. ‘Everyone knows European women don’t do *Maji* ...’

‘Oh, you think not? Let me tell you a few things,’ Francesco said.

Nick burst out laughing: ‘European women have powerful *maji*... they just don’t call it that.’

Radouan stared thoughtfully at Toni and Delphine. 'I see my two European wives have become friends... tha's good... or is it? Believe me, there is no need for this girl Hafida to know anything about the two of you for many years. Be sure, I will keep her busy having children... her hips are made for child bearing... tha's her destiny... she wants to fulfill her destiny. Tell me, what is it to be rich and not have children?'

'You see this poor girl Hafida like an animal,' Pero chided him.

'Of course,' Radouan scolded, 'we are all animals, what do you think?'

Delphine gazed at him. 'Animals don't wear clothes,' she said.

'In Persia dogs and cats always wore clothes... monkeys too,' Radouan declared.

'Well, we are not in Persia... and already there are too many human animals on the planet... now you propose to make more... remember you said whoever had the most children would be wife number one...'

'I never said that, never... what I said was, whoever had the first male child.'

Delphine raised her voice. 'I must be number one you know that! My career demands it!'

'Blah, blah, blah...' Radouan began to yell at her. 'We all know that. Be number-one if it pleases you. But then you must tell the journalists that you married me before I married Toni... Do whatever you want... it's not important...'

Delphine dabbed at her eyes: 'One minute you're adorable, the next you're awful... so awful. What can I do? I DETEST YOU!'

Toni closed her eyes and sighed 'Darling, darling Delphine, please do not do anything rash, something you'll regret later ... when in doubt, take no action... stay married to him... you must... You see, I have this marvelous wedding present for you which I'm sure you'll love... but if you divorce him now I'm afraid I'll have to...'

Radouan glanced sharply at Toni and wondered what she was up to... Why were his two women being so nice to each other when really they should be screaming and tearing-out each other's hair? It was good they were not, but still very strange. 'What present?' he asked.

Toni glanced at her watch, 'Ah, one o'clock, the perfect time to show Delphine her present. The streets down there will be empty...'

'Down where?' Radouan growled.

'In the Medina, of course.'

'You want to drive to the Medina now?'

'Why not? We can park at the Prefecture... *Riad Zitoun Jdid* and walk in. Pero has a car and there's yours. Delphine and Francesco can go with Pero and you and I will take Nick.'

Radouan remembered he'd promised the orphan Mokhtar he would stop by and see him... so he would be going that way anyhow. On the drive there he tried to get Toni to tell him where they were going and what she was giving Delphine that required a trip to *Riad Zitoun Jdid* at this hour, but she would not give in.

'Surprise, surprise,' she hummed airily evading the issue.

Radouan scowled, 'You know how I hate surprises,' he said, and tried to think of a way to escape after she'd finished whatever she was going to do.

'I know, *habibi*, how you hate surprises, but I'm sure you'll approve of this one. It will keep her from divorcing you... You wouldn't want her to divorce you, would you? It would be embarrassing.'

'No, of course not... but maybe I don't really care. I don't know. It's you who is important to me now.'

'M mmm...' Nick crooned softly. 'Friends, lovers' no more...just friends, but not like before...'

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At the Prefecture they got out and walked. Two sleepy guards saluted, then asked for cigarettes, and they proceeded on *Riad Zitoun* past *Derb Narcous*. Then Toni turned left into the maze of lanes between *Zitoun Jdid* and *Zitoun Kdim*, left then right, then left again and stopped before a massive door set in a high buff colored windowless wall.

Delphine, in five-inch heels not meant for navigating the Medina, was breathless. Inserting a large bronze key in the lock Toni turned it and from the other side came the ominous growls and

whines of several dogs, then the hoarse cry of the guardian warning her not to open the door.

‘D’accord, bien, bien, c’est moi, Madame Antonia.’

Finally the door swung open and an old man, his face lost in the folds of his *jallaba* salaamed them into a dimly lit foyer where now securely tied, three magnificent Salukis growled and fawned. Lights went on as they proceeded through carved stone passageways to a spacious courtyard where a large obsidian pool reflected three stories of carved white marble arches, rising on all sides before walls of cream colored *tadelakt*.

As they stood listening to the water splashing in the pool from a large scallop shell fountain, Nick admired the fine Saadian carving, the old cedar wood ceilings of the rooms surrounding the courtyard and the magnificent mosaic work of the floors.

Having seen it all before, Radouan paced impatiently around the courtyard while Francesco and Delphine and Pero oohed and ahed approvingly.

‘So, what is this place? Who lives here?’ Radouan said at last.

‘No one lives here,’ Toni said.

‘No one!’

‘It’s one of my... I bought it on a whim years ago for a few thousand dirhams ... been restoring it little by little. Now it’s finished.’

‘The shape of the arches... Grenada... when was it built? Pero asked.

‘Eighteenth century...’ Toni replied, ‘... rather late for Marrakech... but the craftsmen’s style was fourteenth century...’

Bewildered, Radouan studied her face. ‘So we’ve known each other all these years,’ he said finally, ‘and now we’re married, and all this time you’ve never told me, never spoken of this place. How many other hideouts do you have...?’

‘Not too many,’ Toni smiled slyly, ‘I’m sure you have a few of them your self.’

‘You have more than one then...’

‘Yes, I do have others, *habibi*, it’s like a hobby... takes my mind off my problems... like when you disappear for days... I mean, fixing them up and then selling them... mostly to friends. My father was not a generous man, you know; before he died I had to make ends meet. Rupert was also famously extravagant.’

‘No,’ Radouan said icily, ‘it’s where you take people like that fellah Lahcen...’

‘Lahcen is dead... or didn't you know?’

A terrifying look, a kind of empty expression, spread across Radouan's face as though some ancient being had suddenly materialized inside him. Toni stared hard at him.

‘I know, I know,’ he replied, fighting for control, his eyes averted, ‘So... where's Delphine's present? We came here... didn't we come here to see that? Look how she's waiting there patiently... she loves presents... like food for her.’

Toni looked up at the architecture, and gestured.

‘Wavin' your arms like that,’ he asked impatiently. ‘What does it mean?’

She smiled hopefully at Delphine. ‘This... this place is the present. Six bedroom suites each with its own *hamam* and with a staff of five... you'll be well taken care of I'm sure. Basically, darling, I think it's important for you to have a place of your own here in Marrakech where you can feel at home ... hide from the press and your future fans and stalkers who will certainly get lost trying to find you here...’

Delphine gazed at Toni. Tears ran down her cheeks. ‘I can't believe it,’ she whispered... ‘It's too much... really I don't think I can...’

‘Rien... rien du tout,’ Toni said nervously, ‘don't be shy... I can see you're slightly overwhelmed, but don't be. Really, I can't think of anyone I'd rather give it to... the perfect setting for your future... I can hear the gossips now... "You know she has a hideaway down there in Marrakech and a handsome Moroccan lover." The columnists will love it!’

Impulsively, Radouan picked up Delphine, waded across the reflecting pool and lifted her into the shell shaped basin of the fountain; the spray spurting up between her legs and wetting her chiffon caftan until it clung to her body. Every one applauded. ‘The owner of the house!’ Radouan roared, ‘what a zouk!’

‘Ma e possibile che pensi solo culo?’ Francesco shouted.

‘Not when I can help it,’ Radouan yelled over the sound of the water.

‘You're awful,’ Toni cried, ‘I thought you'd reformed!’

‘In the jail I DEFORMED. Because everything there is so horrible you feel deprived so you try to think of all the great moments of your life... ‘Cause you realize life is... that it is made up of moments like this... Anyway, Marrakchi woman, she likes her ass admired, what do you think?’

'I think... you're still drunk?' Toni shouted.

'Of course... after five bottles of Champagne what you think?'

'Ah yes this moment!' Francesco exclaimed, '... fabulous... her legs, her thighs, those high heels... all that running water and her innocent expression as she struggles in his arms... outrageous!'

Radouan helped Delphine down from the fountain. She staggered across the pool and gave Toni a wet embrace. 'I can't believe it...' she whispered breathlessly, 'how can I ever thank you?'

'By helping me take care of this lunatic when I'm too old to do it,' Toni whispered back... 'By helping me take care of him now; look at him there sitting on the edge of that shell... Do you agree?'

'Of course! Yes!'... Delphine replied conspiratorially, 'we will supervise him closely.'

Radouan splashed across the pool, lifted Toni up and carried her out to the fountain. Soon Nick, Francesco, Delphine and finally Prospero were all in the pool splashing each other.

'I saw you whispering to her,' Radouan said under his breath. 'What were you sayin'?'

'Making sure she won't divorce you,' Toni laughed. 'If she divorces you, she must return this place to me. It's in the deed I've drawn up.'

'And she's agreed?'

'Of course. You think she'd let a place like this slip through her fingers?'

Radouan pushed her away. 'Fuck you off... what you're sayin' is she doesn't want me, she wants this place!'

'Not at all,' Toni whispered, 'It's just an incentive for her to live through some of your darker moments...'

'Like *reshwa*, I suppose.'

'Yes, a bribe is one kind of incentive... like a low interest loan from the bank.'

'What darker moments? What does that mean?'

'When you lose it and go crazy, darling.'

'Me, I don't go crazy... You just think that but I always know exactly what I'm doing.'

'And deny everything afterwards...'

'Sometimes I forget...' Radouan said stubbornly.

'That's what I mean... I'm saying if one can manage to live through those moments when you forget yourself... those truly awful

moments that can last for days... then your other side, your tender side, comes through...'

'OK... I like you so I have to torture you...'

'What did you say?'

'What, what?' he laughed maniacally 'I like you so I have to provoke you. If I didn't like you, believe me I wouldn't waste my time.'

'You like me, you don't love me...'

'LIKE? Yes, *Oheepouka*, like is better than LUV... who knows what LUV is all about? But LIKE, it means sweetness, tenderness.'

Toni pouted, 'You're not exactly tender when you go crazy, darling you are mean.'

'I'm not mean.'

'I don't mean miserly, I mean brutal... you know very well what I'm saying...'

He blinked his eyes. 'Why are you starin' at me like that?'

'Sometimes you seem like a stranger to me. I want you to tell me about Lahcen... promise you will do something... I know you can find out who killed him if you want to.'

'I was in jail at the time, remember? Stop thinkin' about him. Lahcen has surrendered to the Angels of Allah... you want to spoil this whole evening'? He was nothin'... now he's less than nothing.'

'I want an investigation...'

'Iwanna, Iwanna... jus' like Francesco...' Radouan was beginning to loose it. 'Lahcen is gone. Somebody killed him... probably over money. Forget him.'

The old guardian stood in the shadows, looking on disdainfully. 'No problem, Ali,' Toni shouted... 'Il fait tres chaud... *makayn mouchkil*... Il y a peux-tu me ramener, s'il vous plait?'

As they splashed about in the pool, Delphine's laughter echoed through the building. 'How will we ever get into the Mamounia looking like this she warbled?'

'We'll just walk in wet...' Francesco shouted, 'nothing surprises those people, especially as you're with me.' He smiled at her knowingly. 'I liked you up there in the fountain... a new Venus... Yes, this place, it could be the setting for your next film... it inspires me... French model in Marrakech meets Arab Casanova... culture clash... fights... Passionate red evenings...'

'How would it end?'

‘End? What an odd thing to ask, my dear, you’re always surprising me... who knows? One never knows the end until it happens but we need a happy one.’

Delphine smiled cynically, and glanced over at Radouan in Toni’s arms. ‘Just look at him over there with her.’

‘La Pieta,’ Francesco nodded, ‘... mother and child... sometimes he’s a baby, then suddenly he’s a monster.’

‘Sometimes he’s his mother's lover.’

Francesco winced. ‘It’s an underground tradition here.’

Delphine splashed him. ‘Yes, very FAR under...’

He splashed her back. ‘Look, Toni’s given you this place... so be happy... you’re going to be a big star and you have a handsome mysterious husband who is suddenly as rich as Croesus.’

Delphine stared at him suspiciously, ‘How rich?’

‘Very very rich, my dear... and you are his wife!’

‘You mean I’m one of them.’

‘Believe me, there is enough for a hundred wives.’

‘I suppose we’ll have to show up for his wedding to that child then...’

‘But, of course,’ Francesco smiled indulgently. ‘You’ve never been to a Moroccan wedding - like your wedding to Radouan in Italia, only much crazier... you will enjoy the madness. We’ll take a day or two off and come down.’

The old guardian returned with fresh glasses and more bottles of iced champagne. They all toasted each other and cavorted in the reflecting pool, but when the first light of dawn appeared and it was time to leave, suddenly they discovered Radouan had gone missing.

How cruel, Toni reflected sadly. Angry with me for even mentioning poor Lahcen... Had nothing changed... yes, nothing and EVERYTHING! They searched the building but he’d vanished. ‘Over the roof tops, no doubt,’ she said hopelessly, ‘I’m sure he knows them by heart.’

Prospero felt her pain and was furious with Radouan; longed to drive her home and make love to her, but decided against it.

Then Toni suggested Delphine and Francesco should take Radouan’s car and leave it at the Mamounia and she and Pero would see Nick home and tuck him in.

They drove in silence to Bab Taghzout, punctuated by groans and bursts of song from the back seat. At the car park they steered a

wobbly Nick down the narrow derbs to Pero's *Riad* where they managed to get him in bed and he passed out.

Alone in the *Riad's* scented garden, suddenly Toni felt something momentous was about to happen, an irrational feeling she tried to dismiss by inspecting the vegetation. As she paused at an unusual night blooming plant, Pero slowly took her in his arms and embraced her. She looked up at him, their eyes fused; he kissed her cheeks fondly, then her eyes and finally her lips. She burst into tears and cried on his shoulder, then tried to think of something to say to break the spell, but gave up and abandoned herself to the moment, to Pero and the moonlight filtering through the ancient cypress trees.

## 80

Having escaped over the rooftops to his hide out, the former house of the poet Chaiir el Hamra, Radouan lay drunk under the lemon tree with Mokhtar, who had removed his wet clothes, covered him with a towel and stroking his forehead, pressed his arms and legs. Through a champagne haze Radouan sensed that during his absence something had changed between them. Suddenly Mokhtar was a young man, not a boy, now his touch, carried a new message, a message of commitment, which scared Radouan and found him resisting the temptation to yield. They bathed, had mint tea and *majoun* that Mokhtar had prepared, and made love. Radouan was tripping on the *majoun* thinking of Nick who had been exactly his age when he was Mokhtar's. Forbidden! No problem between men and youths but between two grown men, especially if one was married, serious problems, but... Forbidden by whom?

From a great distance he heard Mohkhtar's voice, deeper now than before, swearing eternal love. Never had a guy said anything like that to him before, not even Nick. Eternal love... what did that mean? Gazing up he brought Mokhtar's face into focus, watched his lips as he spoke, kissed them many times, and remembered vividly how many nights he had lain awake in his solitary prison cell imagining this moment. Then he panicked. If he continued on this

way with Mokhtar, his life could become HELL! Young men longed to be protected by older men, and would be faithful unto death, yes, but security and money were the real issue, not love. Or were they? Suddenly he was confused, wanted to stop the clock and lock up Mokhtar like before, which was absolutely impossible... Or was it? In the morning, he would explain their relationship had to be different; that he would set Mokhtar up in his own place, create a job for him and find him a wife - maybe Fatima the maid who had been with him in the closet that night. And he would tell him that never, *Inch Allah*, would they see each other again like this... It would be hard for both of them, Radouan thought, and maybe he should seek his father's advice; crazy as the old man now was, he knew that he had made love many times with Chaiir el Hamra under this same lemon tree.

## 81

Two days later, having discovered proof of the Baroness' conversion to Islam among her papers and receiving permission, Radouan had her taken from the facility where she had lain frozen since her death; had her prepared for burial with herbs and spices, and carried into the forecourt of the ancient shrine of *Sidi Bel Abbas*.

For the next three days, he stood motionless at the head of her coffin as a seemingly endless parade of officials, friends, and well wishers came to bid her farewell.

Then the palace sent a detachment of the King's guard to help Radouan supervise her transit from Marrakech, some twenty kilometers, to her Ksar, "*Dar el Chems*," where the funeral would take place. Drawn slowly by a white Hummer, the gun carriage carrying her body made its way out of town through Bab Gh'mat, followed on foot by Radouan, surrounded by holy men, and the Baroness' dear friends. A flautist sat on top of the Hummer piping mournful odes. The route d' Ouarzazate was lined with mourners, wailing and throwing flowers. At her estate, on the steps of the mausoleum she had built, the *Wali* of Marrakech, a life long friend, eulogized the Baroness in a

panegyric he had composed himself. Then Radouan repeated the prayer for the deceased: "*Bismillah Ar-rahmani Ar-rahim.*"

"In the name of God, the forgiving and compassionate,  
Hey, obedient soul, go back to your God, surrendering  
peacefully,  
And enter among my creatures into Paradise.  
Every soul will taste death.  
From God we come and to Him we return."

In the grove of old olive trees that surrounded it, the afternoon breeze sussured through the carved stone lattice walls of the mausoleum. Below an azure blue dome, the bronze coffin was carefully positioned on an elevated dais facing east, to be encased later in white marble, the outline of the Baroness, her right arm gesturing toward Mecca carved in bas relief. Not very Islamic, this physical representation, Radouan had thought, but he was intent on carrying out her wishes. According to her instructions, refreshments were then served while a famous Lebanese chanteuse, accompanied by a small orchestra, sang "Far Away From You," a song made famous by that "fourth pyramid of Egypt," Umm Kalthoum.

Remaining alone in the mausoleum Radouan fasted and prayed for three days. Then gathering his thoughts together and with a new-found enthusiasm for life, he began making plans for his wedding to Hafida.