

Chapter Thirty-three

Karim al-Hadji sat across from Josephine Garwood, the owner of Garwood Realty in Southport, North Carolina. She was a stunning forty-five year old woman, near the crest of the hill of life, but not quite over it. Her shoulder length blond hair framed a face that reminded him of the American movie star, Sharon Stone. Karim noticed that she wore no wedding band, but that her right hand was adorned with one that might have been a wedding ring in happier times. Two fingers over from that was a colossal opal, circled with diamonds. Under sharia law women should present themselves modestly. American women would laugh at such a restriction if indeed they had ever heard of the dictate. Ms. Garwood in particular. Her ample bosom had closed many a real estate deal for her.

Money and beauty. This was intriguing enough to Karim that he felt a stirring below the belt. It had been too long since he had enjoyed the essences of a woman. And an older one always fascinated him. His first sexual experience had been on a hot Persian day in the pistachio orchard where he and his brother made summer money. A woman of the village, nearly twice his fifteen years, had approached him to help her carry her basket to the collection trailer. When he went with her to pick up her woven container he was surprised to see it was only half filled. A series of astonishing events followed in close order. He had gone nuts among the nuts. Twice.

Ms. Garwood woke him from his momentary reverie. She noticed his gaze had lingered on her upper torso, a portion of her anatomy in which she took inordinate pride. She looked on her bust as being as important to her sales efforts as her book of multiple

listings. “So, Mr. Martin, you are looking for a rental house and a warehouse. As you might have guessed, a small town like this does not present a wide choice of properties from which to choose. But I do have a few things that might interest you.”

“Ah, yes,” he said, “I’m sure you do. Tell me about them.”

She spun her chair around to face a computer monitor on the credenza behind her desk. She turned it on and then leaned to her right and dragged a straight back chair close to hers. Looking somewhat coquettishly over her shoulder, she patted the chair seat and said, “Come sit here. All my properties are on line. We can look at them together.”

Karim walked around the desk. As he passed behind her he could see down her blouse to the valley between the hills of paradise. He sat next to Ms. Garwood. The scent of Fracas perfume filled his nostrils. As she clicked her mouse, his mouse began to click as well. She began a running commentary on the properties available. Her arm was extended to reach the mouse pad. She leaned slightly to her right and her breast brushed against Karim’s arm. It stayed there.

He interrupted her patter and said, “I will require a fairly large house. I am going to be setting up a new distribution center for sporting goods and will have workers and suppliers in and out frequently.”

She glanced at him and said, “That’s very interesting. What sort of goods will you be handling? I might want to see if I can get a wholesale price from you.” As she said this she grinned and leaned a tad closer.

“That is a real possibility. When my shipments begin to arrive, I’ll invite you over to see what I have.”

She asked, “Where are you living at the moment?”

“I have a boat at the Bald Head Island Marina. If I’m not being too bold, I hope you’ll visit me there soon. Perhaps we could go for a cruise up to Morehead City. I hear the seafood is really quite good there.”

She evolved visibly, her Southern Belle persona taking over. “Why, sir, that is bold...but not too so. And by the way, my home is also on the island. I love it there. Would you be interested in a beach house over there? There are some real bargains right now. The summer season is over and there’re always a handful of people who decide to unload their property this time of year.”

He did not want a house on Bald Head, but he wasn’t going to say so. “That’s an excellent idea. Perhaps you could come to the marina tomorrow, say about lunch time, and we could see what you have that I might be interested in. My boat is called *Cash Float*”. He was again checking out the peek-a-boo portion of her blouse, causing her to blush as she said, “Why, yes, I can do that. I have an early morning appointment here in town, but I’ll catch the eleven o’clock ferry back to the island. I want you to be my guest at the Shoals Club for lunch. The food is delicious.”

He said, “Thank you. That’s very kind of you. I’ll look forward to tomorrow...eagerly.”

She blushed again. “As will I.”

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