

Chapter Thirty-six

Karim opened his e-mail aboard 'Cash Float' and found an encrypted message from Seyed Mahmood. He got his copy of "Up Country" from the book rack and began the laborious task of decoding. When he had completed the job, he reread the communication.

"I am sending Kahlil al-Udhma to assist you in your endeavor. He is a worthy mujahadin who has been trained personally by me. Treat him as your number two man. He will be driving a small van containing armaments for your mission. Please forward to me the details of your plan as it progresses. As you know, you were selected for this undertaking because of your ingenuity and flexibility. But I can not remain in the dark. I must know soon what you plan to do. Do not neglect to keep me informed. Also, do not send your future communications to the banker. Send them directly to me. I have confidence in this cipher."

Karim sat back in the captain's chair and rubbed his cheek with his hand. Mahmood was getting nervous. Too bad. He said aloud to himself, "I will let him know what I want him to know, and nothing more. I do not want someone who is not on site to try to make decisions for me. And as far as Brother al-Udhma is concerned, it's obvious he is being sent to act as an information conduit back to Mahmood. That will be no great problem as long as I am careful around the man."

His thoughts were interrupted by a knock on the hull. He frowned as he slid the pad between pages of the book and placed it in the drawer of the nav station desk.

"Permission to come aboard, Captain Martin?"

It was Josephine Garwood, dressed in a swirl of white. Her skirt was above her knees, which accentuated her great legs. He went to the stern rail and gave her a hand aboard. She gushed, in her southern drawl, “My, what a beautiful boat.”

“Would you like a tour, Ms. Garwood?”

“Please, call me Josie. And yes, I’m dying to see what you have.”

He overlooked the mild double entendre. He said, “And you shall see...it.”

She marveled at the complete galley. “My word, Mr. Martin, is that a dishwasher?” Karim told her, “A lot of this stuff I can’t use when I’m under way, but it’s nice when I’m plugged into shore power, like now.”

He showed her the captain’s stateroom, with its walk around double bed and the head which featured a full shower. She said, “I’m very impressed, Mr. Martin. This is like a floating RV. And I do hope we can go for that cruise up the intracoastal soon. I’d love that.”

“Please, call me David. And we shall take that trip before too long, I promise. But now, I would like to take you to lunch.”

She said, “This time lunch is on me. As I mentioned yesterday, I’ve made reservations at the Shoals Club. And my golf cart is at the end of the dock.”

The road to the Shoals Club ran the length of the island. A portion of the thoroughfare bisected the Maritime Forest Preserve. Karim said, “This is a very beautiful forest. It conjures up thoughts of the woods near the place where I grew up.”

She asked, “Where was that.”

He had made a slip of the lip. His thoughts had been of Iran. He said hastily, “Oh, New Hampshire. Yes, near Concord.”

“It must be quite nice there. You must meet Doctor Welch. He’s retired here from New Hampshire.”

The club was located on Cape Fear, at the tip end of the island.

Over lunch, Karim pumped her for as much information as he could obtain. He was particularly interested in the Thanksgiving Fish Fry Festival.

“Well, I’m not sure how successful that will be. It’s the first time it’s been tried. The promoter is our local doofus, Johnson Gounod. He has gotten an agreement from the village council to section off a half-mile of the beach for the event. Since that august body includes most of the real estate folks in the area, myself among them, we agreed to it, provided he lets us set up booths to offer our services to the people who show up. That ticked him off somewhat, since he had envisioned a captive audience for Gounod Enterprises.”

Karim said, “You are a sharp business woman. Can I trust you to find the best price for me?”

She reached across the table and touched his hand, a trick taught in salesmanship 101. “Why, of course, David. You can bet on it.”

After lunch, they walked outside and stood by the pool for a moment. She said, “I would hope that you might let me put your name forward for membership here at the Shoals. Even in the winter, it’s the hub of Bald Head’s social life.”

“Yes, I’m sure it is. But for now, I’m more interested in finding shelter.”

“Of course you are. Let’s go. I have some really exciting homes to show you.”

“That will be fine. And while we’re out and about, perhaps you could show me where the city facilities, the fire and the police, are.”

They got into her golf cart and headed back up Federal Road, turning left at South Bald Head Wynd. This avenue took them along the beachfront. At the corner of Loggerhead Trail, she pulled the vehicle over and stopped. Pointing west, she said, “The festival will be held here and run for about a half mile in that direction. The main attraction band stand will be set up between Inverness and Dunedin Streets. The biggest crowd will probably gather about two in the afternoon. My booth will be set up next to the event platform. If this thing turns out to be a winner, we’ll probably do it every year. And coincidentally, Southport Security will be all over the place. S.S., Inc. is another one of my firms.”

A small alarm went off in Karim’s head. “Heavy security? Why is that necessary?”

“We aren’t sure what to expect. If we’re invaded by a bunch of drunks and druggies, we want to be ready. And believe me, we will be prepared.”

“Are your men armed? Surely you wouldn’t shoot drunks having fun?”

“Oh, Heavens no. They have batons, but no firearms.”

Trying not to show his relief, Karim said wryly, “It has all the earmarks of being a success. I hope that it will be...for your sake.”

“That’s sweet of you.”

She moved the gear lever into drive and the electric cart glided toward Muscadine Wynd. After stopping twice to show homes, they arrived at a small shopping area where the police and fire departments were located. His charge was to kill as many Americans as he could on Bald Head Island. It was clear now where and when he would accomplish this.

When Josie Garwood delivered him to the dock that evening, she expected to be invited aboard. When an invitation was not forthcoming, she pouted. “I thought it might be nice to see the sunset from the stern of *Cash Float*.”

“I’m sorry, Josie, but I have several phone calls to make. It is very tempting to want to spend the evening with someone as beautiful as you, but I really must take care of business. It can’t wait, I’m afraid. There will be other sunsets, I’m sure.”

She sighed and said, “I’ll accept that as a rain check.”

“Good. I’ll call you soon.”

Later that night he amended the previously unsent message. He added, “*The date certain of the attack will be November 25th, America’s Thanksgiving Day. A large gathering is expected for a fish feast. Praise Allah and the fishes of the sea.*”

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