

Chapter Thirty-nine

The three-bedroom rental house Josie Garwood finally leased to David Martin was one she owned. It had sat empty for six months. It was located on a quiet cul-de-sac in the better part of town (better being a relative term. Southport is not Hilton Head.). She had high-balled the price and he hadn't quibbled. She also had signed him to a lease on a small warehouse she owned about two miles from the residence.

She was somewhat miffed that Martin had seemed to lose interest in consummating a romantic liaison with her once their business had been completed. She had been flaunting their relationship among her friends. To save her beautiful face, she dropped hints that he might be gay. She shelved the idea of suggesting him for membership at the Shoals Club.

Kahlil al-Udhma arrived in Southport three days after Karim acquired the house. When he knocked on Karim's door, he looked like a cartoon version of a terrorist. A five-inch beard hung from his chin. He wore a long-sleeved Cairo shirt and cotton baggy pants. A cotton turban hat sat atop his head. When Karim opened the door, Kahlil bowed slightly and said, "Salaam aleikoom. I am Kahlil al-Udhma. I believe you may be expecting me."

Karim said with obvious anger, "You fucking fool. Come in quickly, before one of my red neck neighbors sees you and calls Homeland Security." He reached out and grabbed Kahlil's shirt front and pulled him inside.

Karim said, "This is Southport, North Carolina, not Tehran or New York, you idiot. And you are supposed to be my number two man in this operation? I don't think so.

As soon as we unload the van, Mr. Muslim, you shall be on your way back to Brooklyn. In the meantime, come with me. I have American clothes I will give to you.”

Kahlil was shaken. He said, “I’m sorry, Karim al-Hadji. No one told me how to dress or really, what to expect. I am here to help you. I thought I would be greeted as a brother in arms, not as a fuckup. If you send me back, I will be disgraced. And Seyed Mahmood will be very angry with me. Please, let me stay and help...please.”

Karim said, “Well, if you can somehow get your shit together and keep it there, I’ll give you a chance. Maybe. But for now, let’s make an American out of you. Come with me.”

Karim took a shirt and a pair of jeans from a closet and handed them to Kahlil. “Give me the keys to the van. Then go in the bathroom and shave off that beard. And don’t give me any shit about growing it for Allah. Allah wants us to kill infidels, and we can’t do it if we are wearing a sign on our face that telegraphs our intentions. You do what I tell you without argument, do you understand?”

“Yes, I do.” This was the first time any Muslim had spoken to Kahlil in that manner. The truth was that Kahlil was the former Thomas Garrity, a last year’s graduate of Brown University, who had converted from collegiate agnosticism to Mohammedanism while a senior. He had been a foreign language major, specializing in Middle Eastern languages. His exposure to these courses led to a study of Muslim ideology. He was swept up in the romance of the battle between the true believers and everyone else. He had thrown in his lot with the followers of Allah and had been lauded frequently for his acumen in being able to see whose side would eventually prevail. He loved the attention, since he had previously gotten very little of that in his young life. He

hoped to someday win the hearts and bodies of his allotted seventy-two virgins in Paradise, which would be six dozen more than he had had here on earth. And the beard had been a welcome bonus. It had hidden his acne and weak chin.

Karim went out to the driveway and opened the back of the van. Inside were three unmarked wooden crates. A small valise was in the passenger's seat. He took the suitcase out and carried it back into the house. Inside, he set it on the kitchen table and opened it. It contained only clothes and a small kit bag with soap and deodorant.

Kahlil came into the room, looking like an All-American dork. Karim asked, "You have no personal weapon?"

"No. Mahmood said it would get me in trouble if I were to be stopped by the police."

"He was right about that. Let me see your driver's license."

Kahlil pulled his wallet out and handed it to Karim. It contained a New York commercial driver's license, a Visa card and two hundred dollars. "You had no trouble on your trip?"

"No. I am a careful driver."

"Good. Now come with me."

They went back to the van and before they got in Karim said, "You drive. I want to see if you really are a cautious motorist."

Out on the street, Karim issued terse instructions to his new Number Two, directing him to the warehouse. The facility was a stand alone wood frame building, badly in need of paint. Karim had already had a local sign painter write the name of his pseudo business on the walk-in entrance next to the overhead door. In red letters, it said

‘All-Sports Distribution’. The day after Karim had firmed up the lease he called Carolina Security and made arrangements to meet one of their technicians at the building. His orders were to install a silent alarm system with motion detectors and door intrusion detection strips. The tech indicated that the alarm would notify the police by phone connection if a break in occurred. Karim had the man make the notification go to a buzzer in his house and not to the police. He said, “I’ll call the cops myself.”

When Kahlil stopped the truck in the driveway of the warehouse, Karim alighted and unlocked the small door. He went inside and pulled the chain hoist which opened the main entry. He called to Kahlil to turn the truck around and back it into the warehouse. Once inside, he reversed the chain and lowered the overhead door.

“And now let me see what you have brought us.”

They unloaded the boxes and set them in a neat row along the side wall. Each box was stenciled in black with the legend, ‘Sporting goods’. Karim asked, “Do you know what is in these crates?”

“No, not for sure. I’m aware of what they are supposed to contain, but I did not witness their packing.”

“Where did you get them?”

“They were in the back of the Al-Fatih Mosque in Brooklyn. Before that, I don’t know where they came from.”

“Okay. Take this crowbar and prize the lids off the boxes, and be careful.”

As Kahlil took off the pine tops, Karim removed the contents of each and stacked them in front of the box. The inventory consisted of eight Tec-9 9mm machine pistols and 200 50-round magazines, fully loaded.

Karim was pleased. There was much more ammunition than he had expected. He said, “Kahlil, place the Tec-9’s on that work bench by the back wall. You’ll find a can of gun solvent, a barrel rod and several clean cotton rags in the cupboard below the table. Clean the cosmoline off the weapons and then put them back in the crate.”

While Number Two was performing his task, Karim double checked each of the boxes to make certain there was nothing else besides the ammo in them. When Kahlil had completed the weapons clean-up, he helped him place them back in their cases.

He looked the area over to make sure there were not any obvious telltale signs that this might be a terrorist’s lair, then instructed his assistant to open the main door. When it was raised, he backed the van out and then leaned out of the window and said, “Close the door and come out through the pedestrian exit.” While Kahlil was taking care of that chore, Karim got out of the truck and met Kahlil when he came out. He said, “Get in the van. You drive again. I’m going to lock up.”

On there way back to the house, Karim said, “I’m going to keep you on the project. With a bit of training you might become a worthy participant.”

Kahlil was much relieved. “Hey, thanks Boss. I’ll do a good job. I promise.”

Karim said, “Boss. I like that. Yes, I’m the boss. Don’t forget it.”

Two blocks from the house, they passed the Piggly Wiggly grocery store. Karim noted the advertising marquee out front which said, “Order your turkey today. Only two weeks until thanksgiving.”

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