

**KONSTANTINOS BOURAS**

**THE MANDRAKE'S VOICE**

**(novel)**

Copyright: Konstantinos Bouras

Smolenski 22

114 72 Athens

GREECE

Tel.-Fax 003/210/3619249

Mobile tel. 003/6942616402

e-mail: konstantinosbouras@tee.gr

web-site: [www.konstantinosbouras.gr](http://www.konstantinosbouras.gr)

**Synopsis:**

**THE MANDRAKE'S VOICE**

**by Konstantinos Bouras**

**A love-story in Maroc. A Greek lawyer falls in love with a local barber.**

*Marrakesh. Djemaa el-Fna. The square full of snake charmers. Midnight. Akis, the Greek lawyer meets Karim, the barber. They spend their first night together in an expensive hotel. The day after next Akis must leave. But he is to return. Many times. He spends one week with his Arab lover in a villa run by an alcoholic Frenchman. In this paradise of fantasies a strange tropical plant blooms; the plant, their love.*

*And the Mandrake, the plant which when uprooted screams and whose scream drives all those who hear it insane becomes a symbol of their desperate attempt to hold on to each other among a more of racial hatred and dirty transactions.*

*It is not long, though, before they are cast out of paradise. And their wanderings around Morocco commence, closed in claustrophobic hotel rooms for fear of the police. Bribes are on the daily agenda. Danger unites them to the point where they begin to suffocate and it is not long before the countdown begins.*

*Dedicated to all those who helped me*

*Write this fable.*

*The placenames, hotel names and*

*Peoples names were chosen at random.*

*References to historical persons*

*Are part of the story between*

*The characters. Let us not forget*

*the words of A. Chekov,*

*“Literature is a white lie”*

**Konstantinos**

## *Chapter One*

“We write to see what we have lived. To get close to the Unknown which charms souls and darkens our logic”, he wrote on the packet of Gauloises he would toss absent-mindedly into the rubbish bin outside his office.

In a while he will leave for the airport. Usually there are no delays on the Royal Air Maroc flight from Casablanca to Marrakesh. He puts the manuscript in an envelope for the publisher. He'll post it when he goes out. He writes the same message on two pieces of paper. One for his wife, the other for Haris. He'll post them when he goes out. Due to the festivities they won't receive the notes until after his return.

“The airplane flies for Casablanca. Six hours wait in the airport and after a half-hour flight to Marrakesh. Was it a simple transaction or something more? I don't know if I'll be back. Akis”.

# - three three zero - \* - one two three four - # - handset – call. Three seconds waiting. No connection. He tries again. Cancel the call block.

At the other edge of the world the phone rang as usual. Once. Then afterwards silence. Then it rang again.

Aisha ran. However, it wasn't her brother Karim but that crazy Greek who had fallen in love with him. What a pity! The line went dead.

At the other end of the world, in Athens, Akis, half-drunk, hung up the phone. It was time for French class. At lunchtime his friends from work had come by for food. They had drunk a lot and now he had no desire for the French Institute. He got dressed to go out, to find a cute looking boy to spend the evening with. Then he thought better of it and sat absent-mindedly at the typewriter and began striking the keys forcefully. Having fixed himself a coffee he sank back deep into the armchair. The video he watched was a French porno movie, by Cadinot. The best gay porno movies with a plot. Then he thought it time to do some exercise. His mobile rang.

It was his personal medium. The medium turned up out of the blue without being called. He came by the office, offered work and later while drinking coffee below the wooden, carved window Akis had brought back from Marrakesh, said,

“Do you know that when you sit below that, from the shoulders down you are gold and your head is ashen?”

Then he asked to see photographs of Karim. He couldn't stand looking at more than one.

“Do you mind if I don't continue? A great confusion. You have lived seven lives all together. Mother-son, father-daughter, brother-sister, brother-brother....”

Then Akis let his mind wander to the second last night he had slept side by side with Karim in the three star hotel in Marrakesh. It had been the end of July. Three and a half months had gone by. He saw his dream. Karim was a Mauritian warrior from the 12<sup>th</sup> century and Akis a beautiful princess. She bore him many children. One day Karim left for war never to return. And he never did return. He was only forty years old. The princess lived for another forty years raising his children and his grandchildren and the great-grandchildren. None were like him though. Every night that she lay down alone to sleep she cursed his name. And she swore that if she were to ever meet him again in another life that she would have her revenge on him.

Now that other life had come. When morning came, Akis told the half-awake Karim about his dream. He told him that he would try to abandon him in this life and soon too. This time, however, he would chase after him.

Karim stared at him with his pupils dilated, like a child. He asked Akis to tell him more. Akis refused. In a moment of unease they both stroked each other's shaved pubes. One next to the other.

They had shaved the day before in the afternoon around four, Karim at his house with the palm trees and Akis in the bathroom in the hotel. It was the evening when Akis would visit Karim at home, to meet his mother and his brothers and sisters. The night before, three nights before the end, Akis had seen her in his sleep. Bony, barefoot, with huge eyes and her head looking at the floor. The woman who put up with her husband having a second spouse, the humble woman who had given birth to a black child who looked nothing like the rest of the family. The woman who loved him more than

anything despite the fact that his childish going ons often made her feel ashamed. Karim was a forty year old child.

And it was that night that they went to visit her. Akis wore a white, colonial suit with a linen tie. He left the hat because he knew it would annoy Karim. They were received without any fuss around twilight just before the street lamps lit up. Karim and Akis were shown the way to the wooden spiral staircase and they received a proper when well inside the house. The sisters walked behind them slowly waving their long skirts to see to their needs and a spotty Berber, the youngest brother, a student of biology, approached them hesitantly, somewhat jealous. He would have liked to be in his brother's position next to that handsome white man and share in those goods.

Karim laughed like a child. He handed out Akis's gifts. A leather handbag for his sister, material for a suit for the brother and some silk material for Karim's mother.

While the men were eating couscous the women sat on the flat roof knitting. During the day it had been 40°C. Now that it was night it was somewhat cooler. They spoke about his brother's studies and about post-graduate studies in Europe. Karim laughed and took pictures of them. Then he showed Akis his room. A carpet, a pillow where he could rest his head, and the television Akis had given him in April.

"That's why I like to sleep on the floor," said Karim.

During this fourth trip within seven months Akis noticed worryingly that Karim was becoming more distant, was moving away from him in a way, was sleeping on the floor and not under the sheets next to him. During the night Akis would wake up, speak Greek to Karim, make love to him in vain until the Arab complained that he wanted to sleep and that the Greek weighed too much despite having lost twenty five kilos inside six months! He left frequently, not to play football for hours on end on the beach at El-Jadida as he had done in April, nor to go to his barber's shop, nor for shopping; no longer did he bite Akis tenderly on the chest before leaving. Only on the first day, twentieth July nineteen ninety five did Karim drag Akis in front of the mirror and make love to him while writing the name "Karim" in Arabic characters with a black bic pen all over the Greek's body.

"You are better than Fatima. You are more than a man and a woman. I've had sex with Guy too. But you are always clean and so handsome," said Karim.

Hearing this the Greek relished in jealousy, in possessiveness, in passion because no one had ever spoken to him like that up to now, because no one had ever loved him like that before, not even his own mother, who at that very moment was calling his wife in Athens to learn just with who exactly her son was. She had had three miscarriages before Akis and two after. She had tried to strangle him between her legs for 12 hours but that child was tough. Even though he had emerged bruised, with one eye which stayed closed for a week and an indent on his skull, he was determined to live and still insisted on this thirty three years later.

The medium had told Akis about this Fatima woman that Karim frequently referred to while cumming. She was his first lover who had abandoned him to marry someone wealthy. They had had one child out of wedlock, a son who bore no resemblance to him. Following this Karim had come to the city and never again went with another woman, nor loved any of the Europeans he fucked, that was until he met Guy. Guy, an elderly man from Avignon, diabetic, hotelier by profession and unloved, but with thousands of young men to 'see to his needs'. He understood Karim's hidden qualities, however it was too late for him to love. Karim, nevertheless, loved him. The Frenchman spent an entire fortune on the Arab, never quite managing to completely figure him out, never being able to understand this person's devotion to him, never understanding why an experienced hotelier from Avignon let himself have sex with a male prostitute without a condom. Because Karim, just like all the boys in his country who went with dirty white men, were male prostitutes!

The Frenchman left extremely mixed up, a few days before the Moroccan tourist arrived in Avignon for the second consecutive summer. The visa was ready, all that was needed was a phone call from Rony, a childhood friend of Guy, who ran a guesthouse in Marrakesh for Europeans tired of work and vices. As if work by itself is not the most powerful of drugs and a vice! A phone call from Rony to a female acquaintance of his in the French consulate in Rabat was enough, someone emblazoned a stamp on the passport of this dark-skinned man and in his mind he had already travelled in his mind's eye to Paris from Avignon with the TGV when Guy told him over the phone that he wasn't going to send him the money for the plane ticket because he had met a Spaniard and there was no longer any place for Karim either in his house or in his life.

It was then that Karim went out onto the streets like a crazed man. He went with old toothless men, with those suffering from syphilis or hepatitis, with prostitutes; it sufficed that they were white and that there was even a forlorn possibility that they would take him back with them to their country. Why had Frenchman given him a barber's shop and all the tools and had paid for him to learn the art? In order to dump him without any feelings of guilt. Now he couldn't go back to that barber's shop, nor wear the blue apron with Karim written on it for the customers, nor light up the neon sign "Boutique Guy" because Karim was a proud man and did not like to owe anything to anyone.

"How little I understood about you, Karim!" thought Akis and he almost cried. He couldn't stand it. "It's too late now for remorse. Shut up and write your story from the beginning. Just as you lived it."



## *Chapter Two*

It was the second boy in a week who sat feeling uneasy in Akis's neoclassical armchair, with his clothes still on, and who had been asked to leave without being touched. The first time he laughed and began screaming at the empty walls,

“Karim, if I had you here I'd beat the shit out of you!”

And he had really beaten the shit out of him that penultimate night in July. They had gone together to the airport for departure in the evening. In the afternoon they had eaten in a respectable restaurant. Akis drank and spoke about the many things which had been bothering him over the last seven months. About the hepatitis B which he had just about got over. His friend Haris, the doctor, had told him to dump Karim since he was sure that Akis had got it from him. Haris had known him for 17 years and knew how much he was afraid of illness. Up till then he had never had anything. Then suddenly last March without experiencing any of the symptoms of the illness he decided to have blood tests done. The Australian antibody was slightly positive and some substances showed that the illness was recent and that the body had reacted perfectly but he had not fully recovered yet. It was exactly three months after his first night in the Hotel Atlas Asni in Marrakesh, 27<sup>th</sup> December 1994.

Akis had been walking all day in the magical and mysterious city of Marrakesh. Haris had gone off and left him in order to accompany some youth, the son of an engineer from the group with which they were touring around Morocco. The penultimate day.

He went out and walked around the souqs. No one really bothered him, apart from a prostitute wearing a yellow jellaba and a few boys who suggested that they take him on a tour following at a distance of three metres for fear of the police. He managed to shake them off and calmly wandered around the city which seemed familiar to him, like he had lived there for seven centuries. Yet another city which seemed familiar from the first moment. He didn't feel like reading about metaphysical theories nor about rationalizing anything. Passing outside an opium den an old, stoned man came out and called him 'father'. He considered it to be a perfectly natural declaration of respect to himself and passed by. Further along in a shop with semi-precious stones inside a souq,

built of brick and covered in cane rods which collapsed inwards during every heavy downpour, the shop-owner invited him home for tea in order to meet his son, an intelligent 15 year old boy, because he explained that in a past life he must have been a Berber since he bartered for an azurite stone which looked just like the eye of Christ Almighty in Christian churches just like a dyed-in-the-wool Berber would have done.

Yet further down, he was trailed by a lanky youth with a scarred face. He was dressed in black and was pushing drugs. Akis told him that he didn't need any drugs – he got high on himself. The youth moved away looking at him with a blank look on his face.

He had crossed the entire city; his feet hurt. Evening was falling and a dark shade of orange marked the western sky in this country, so foreign and yet so familiar.

Returning to the room he found Haris asleep, exhausted from his efforts to visit all the hammams in the city with the youth and be on time for the scheduled dinner in the hotel.

Akis had a shower and put on black jogging bottoms he had brought with him from Athens. It was the first time he had ever gone out in gym wear in a foreign country, out at night in a magical city; a night that would leave a mark on his soul.

On his last evening in Athens he had dreamt of a large white house with no furniture, with walk-in wardrobes, and transparent walls letting the light flood in from all directions. The rooms were narrow and the corridors labyrinthine. Outside was a colorless industrial city with chimney stacks and a verdant green meadow where the sheep grazed undisturbed. Haris left the house with a bag full of school books and went to die leaving the house to him. “Strange,” he thought in his sleep, “I never had such a large space for all my books. This house will be mine. But he's going off to die. He's being set free.”

Nine months later he would acquire his own house in the most unbelievable of ways. He would paint it white and it would have many rooms for books and a room for Karim with an interior balcony which looked out on to a strip of the western sky, but Karim would never come and stay in his room.

That evening, he put on the black jogging suit, applied some scent, carefully did his hair using the hairdryer and accompanied by Haris who was permanently distracted, Akis went out like a lost soul into a city around which he had walked all day. He had

seen the amazing Djemaa el-Fna square with its snake-charmers and its palmists. At the first kiosk he bought a 1 litre plastic bottle of coca-cola. He shook it in the air like a club when a glaring young butcher, tall and dark, approached him with his broken French. Not much needed to be said because his smile said everything that needed to be said, his eyes were deadly serious. Akis gave him the bottle as a down payment. He had learned the tricks from the locals in Fez. For a few dollars boys and even married men with many children were ready to exchange bodily fluids white men and much more. They were passing by a large park. Akis gave Haris the go ahead to walk on while he went for a walk with his new friend among the trees. The whole thing was a setup and soon ended with Akis losing out. Two condoms and the contents of his wallet disappeared into thin air together with the terrified thief. He wasn't frightened at all and went back satisfied to his friend the doctor. Being experienced, he hadn't lost that much money the rest being in the soles of his shoes while the bulk of it was in the hotel room in the suitcase with the combination lock. He had nothing to fear since he knew what price men and things had here, or so he thought. That night he would play a game with no rules, a game to the death. His soul was ready and willing for it. After all, he had come to Morocco to die.

Morocco had been a fantasy of his since eight years old. A fantasy for twenty five years now. A whole quarter of a century. And then there was the other fantasy. Magician in a tribe of cannibals, himself a vegetarian. His victims experienced his sexual mania before succumbing to the knife in a state of delirium. He had children with all the women in the village and had initiated all the teenagers sexually-speaking before then became men.

They stopped at an open-air shop in Djemaa el-Fna. He bartered fiercely for a drum from the last century with designs applied by burning the leather. Haris bought a somewhat kitsch red pouffe. Akis's hands beat out a rhythm on the drum as if acting by themselves, the sound was one he felt he had known for many years. He was left with only a few coins which he gave to an old beggar woman and so he, an important lawyer who knew how to demand and take fantastic fees, who struck fear and excited the courts, because he always managed to unearth some jurisprudence, a loophole which allowed him to win the case and increase his clients assets, was left without money.

Haris counted his money. He didn't have enough for a quick and ready meal with fish at the tables set out in the square. He wasn't afraid of food poisoning despite the fact that the tour guide had terrified the group about the matter in order to have them penned up all day so he could take them to some shops which were, as he said, "like museums," so the group could spend their money their allowing him to collect his commission. Akis and Haris had left the hotel shortly before dinner without knowing why and now it was almost midnight, they had no money to eat nor get a taxi which would take them and their wares back to the hotel.

While Haris was chattering away Akis was absorbed in other matters. Hypnotized, he passed through the clouds of smoke from the open air rotisseries and moved to the other side of the square where he bumped into someone with a broad white smile which seemed just like the sun to Akis.

When he heard Karim laughing on the phone a few days earlier he had said to him, "Since you can still laugh after all we've said and done, keep laughing forever, Karim, because life is long and ridiculous. And when you laugh the sun always comes out for me even in the middle of the night, just like on that first night in Djemaa el-Fna."

"Are you Spanish?" Karim asked him.

"No. I'm Greek, Yunan."

"They say that the Greeks are more sexual."

"They say the same thing about Moroccans."

They began walking along the street from which they had come. They forget about Haris and the well-dressed young Arab youth who seemed effeminate from a distance and who had been accompanying Karim shortly before.

The spoke of banal, commonplace things, the same things everyone says in these cases, however they knew now that it was at least four. They would meet the other two at the hotel, the hotel which they reached in a taxi paid for by Karim. On the way they ran into Haris who was walking up and down lost in his thoughts, making small hand gestures to emphasise his reply to himself. They dragged him into the taxi. Thankfully, Haris agreed to wait down in reception for an hour and the security men in the hotel did not notice their entry thinking they had come in separately and that they had gone to the disco out back. The same did not hold true, though, for the second evening.

They made love like **two wounded gladiator unicorns**, like a white horse mounting a black one, like rabid, wild beasts trying to prove that they exist, that they were still breathing, still able to grow flowers in the desert.

Akis's grandfather and Karim's father were sitting calmly on the armchairs opposite, wagering about the souls of their unborn great-grandchildren.

When Akis's grandfather had died, Akis had lain down with his cousin who was twelve years old. Akis was just eight and he had never touched another body apart from his own, and those of his mother, father and grandfather. Shortly before the old man, long-afflicted with cancer, had died he had called Akis to his bedroom, thrown out the grandmother and had kissed Akis on the forehead. He had gone on the campaign to Asia Minor and come back with a Turkish girl. However, his wife soon got rid off her without much hassle. Since then they bore an infinite hatred for each other and poured this hatred out in bed once a week, every Saturday evening just after the weekly bath.

That evening his grandfather was satisfied because his grandson lived up to his expectations and Karim's father was scratching at the carpet with his invisible, white shoe due to his unease.

This cockfight was to last seven months and at the end both would come out both defeated and humbled.

## *Chapter Three*

“They came between us, Karim, they came between us.” He came out of the cinema in tears where a film about the margins of Parisian society had been playing. An Arab, a Jew and a Black guy had come head on with the police, with racists and the mayor’s bodyguards.

“They came between us, Karim, they came between us. The others and mostly ourselves.”

He wasn’t paying attention – a car braked suddenly! His instincts though were still alert. He put his hands on the bonnet and passed over the top. Some passersby admired the acrobatics. He just kept on walking and crying.

“I have to do some exercise tonight. One hour before I sleep. I also have to look at that brief I’ll deliver tomorrow. I must be strong. Karim doesn’t want me when I cry.” Two Kurds passing by, who had seen him crying, made some comment about it.

At some point that first evening Haris came in. He demanded to make love to Karim. Karim let Haris have sex with him but didn’t enjoy it. They didn’t finish. At that moment Akis hated his friend. That moment was to poison Karim’s life a great many times.

“You’re jealous of everything,” he said to him.

And Akis answered, “You’re right. I’m even jealous of myself.”

Haris demanded that they throw the Moroccan out of the room.

Then Akis heard himself saying, “No way! He’s a prince. You can’t pigeonhole him.”

Karim looked like a terrified, wild beast. “I’ll never forget those eyes,” thought Akis, “they’ll haunt me until the day I die. It’s something beyond mercy.”

He held Karim in his arms all night long and sang lullabies to him as if to the son he would never have and whispered poems and songs from the Greek islands in his ear. And he adopted him that evening and loved him deeply, more than his own life.

When Haris went down to breakfast in the morning, Akis gave himself to Karim. And Karim screamed like a pirate who had found some treasure. If only it had ended

there.....but it couldn't. Akis gave him some aftershave. They arranged to meet at five in Djemaa el-Fna outside the post office.

The group spent an indifferent day in the souqs. They found a guide and paid him well to buy various souvenirs for them. Akis argued with a pair of aged Greeks from another group who refused to pay for their own guide. It was then that an old man who had been following the scene shouted his bit in:

“That Yunan is good. Islam. Islam.”

The evening was slow to come. Akis spent a long time doing his hair which needed cut. Karim had told him he was a barber with his own barber's shop; that he was his own boss...Eleven months later he would become the servant of the mayor of a small Moroccan town and he would love him more than ever.

## *Chapter Four*

That night Andréas came over to watch porno movies. Akis needed him now that he and Karim had broken up for good.

The previous Friday, in other words one week ago, Karim had called him and told him an imaginary story about the mayor of a provincial town. He was looking after his children and planting palm trees in his garden. Karim wanted to play with Akis's guilt. He wanted a father in the place of Guy, willing to put his hand in his pocket at any time, willing to love him. But Akis wasn't a naïve old faggot from Avignon, a former hotel owner with *diabetes mellitus*. That night he had too much to drink and he wanted to have fun. So he made Andréas call Karim. Andréas told him his name was Marco Antonioni, that he was staying at Hotel Safi, room three hundred twenty five and that he would be waiting for him to enter the hotel from the entrance by the pool.

“You know, just like with Giuseppe who gave me your number,” said Andréas.

Giuseppe was a gynaecologist from Rome to whom Karim had turned when Akis abandoned him. He resembled that crazy Greek, only that he was completely passive, he wasn't a bull in bed and he paid just like anybody would pay a common whore. He hadn't realized how intelligent and talented Karim was. Karim took him to Rony's house to introduce him, to find a safe place to shelter their love, for Giuseppe would be back in Marrakesh. But Giuseppe would not come back because Paolo had told him the story of Karim and Akis and he took to his heels because he was not in love with Karim and was afraid of that crazy Greek. Karim was also afraid of him and rightly so.

And Akis thought to himself, “Thank you very much, Karim. I made my friend Andréas play this little joke on you not because I don't love you, but because I love you exactly for what you are. A whore. The Koutoubia of Marrakesh, the name the world and his wife know you by.”

One night that they were drunk on ouzo that Akis had brought from Greece, Karim made a confession:

“Old men from all over the world call me the "Koutoubia" of Marrakesh.”

The Koutoubia was a phallic-shaped tower near Djemaa el-Fna.



Karim hung up, shocked that he could not hide his whoring nature from Akis. What shocked him most was that his being a whore did not prevent that man from loving him. And he loved him just like he loved his sins.

“Forget about me, Akis. I can't go on. You keep asking for the truth. You question me, you put me in tight corners, I can't get away from you. I don't need truth. Magic is enough for me.”

Akis replied, “I won't leave you. I'll always run after you. Because you're my other half. Because I can't live without you. Because I want you just the way you are. But you hate yourself.”

“If I give you back the money you gave me, will you leave me alone?” asked Karim.

“No. I gave you my soul and I'm not taking it back. I'm very persistent and I'm not used to losing.”

He hung up on him after saying goodnight.

‘This great love has beaten us both’, he thought and he went into the streets, while Karim was going onto the streets of Marrakesh.

Soon he met Sakis, a twenty-nine year old, a well-known whore who had not yet accepted his true nature. He selected him because tonight, just like Karim, this young man wanted to "cheat" on the man of his life who would be calling till late from the hospital where he worked and next day Sakis would lie to him saying that he went out with Maria, a friend of his. Such lies are like stabs in the back for a man who controls or thinks he controls another human being.

He handled him with a great deal of tenderness and vulgarity at the same time. And the young male whore showed just how much of a whore he was, fantasizing about orgies with soldiers and scouts and body-builders. And all this happened in the light of a candle reflected back from the tears of Andréas.

On the other side of the world, Karim picked up a white man who looked like Akis; they went to a cheap hotel. He had sex with him using two condoms on top of each other and stole his wallet, after having threatened him saying that he would call the police to arrest a pervert who was taking advantage of a pure-bred Arab.

Akis spent the night dialling Karim's number. Karim didn't answer the phone though. And he loved him even more, he loved him to death, whatever suits you.

Then he had some brandy and smoked cigars and decided to spend his sleepless hours narrating the story from where he had left off.

Second day of their acquaintance. December twenty eight, nineteen ninety four. He was one hour late and Karim was there, at the post office of Djemaa el-Fna. He did not dare complain. Haris made a joke about Akis's hair whose styling was the reason for the delay. They gave Karim money to buy souvenirs and pouffes for them at the price a Moroccan would buy them for, that is one tenth of the price. He told them to wait for him at the corner.

Haris said, "If he comes back with all that money we gave him, he's the best."

Akis knew deep down that he would be back even though he was the biggest piece of scum on the face of the planet, the Sarah Bernhardt of prostitution as he liked to call him.

He came back carrying the things he had bought half-price. So they rented a carriage, a *caleche*, and drove triumphantly through this magical city. Akis was singing and Karim stuffed money down the front of his shirt just as they do with the 'dancers' in strip joints. And Akis was happy because he had met and fallen in love with and was loved by the biggest whore who ever existed.

The carriage left them at Rony's villa in the European quarter. The villa with its lower middle-class and vulgar decoration, sheltered the vices of European visitors to Morocco without them having to fear the police and the public prosecutor. There was also a venerable Muslim doorman who welcomed them as soon as he saw Karim's face. That was where the two lovers would stay in future. But not tonight. Rony, a sixty year old alcoholic, bald and with *diabetes mellitus* as he confessed to Haris, gave them many business cards to take to Greece and wished them goodnight making theatrically feminine gestures.

Haris, acute and discerning as he was, told Akis in Greek that the "madam" was annoyed by the visit, without bothering to explore the matter any further.

They took a taxi to go back to the hotel. Karim argued with the taxi driver about the extravagant sum he was asking for. When they tried to get into the hotel, the security man stopped them, just like the previous night.

Haris was glad because he wouldn't have to stay up again. He suggested that they went to a hotel and rent a room as common customers. But Akis was afraid.

“What are you afraid of?” Haris asked. “This country is a huge brothel. You are afraid of what people will say. That's all.”

They had dinner at a little tavern nearby Rony's, Rony who had refused to put them up for the night.

“Go to a hotel,” he had told them.

Akis knew he hated him, but he didn't want to know why.

They walked through dark alleys. They made love beneath a palm tree. Then they went to the terrace of a café called "The Renaissance" to have a drink.

Karim showed him his identity card. He had told him he was twenty eight years old. The card said thirty two. Actually he was forty. Karim asked Akis to take him with him, to work by his side.

“I hate this country. I'm not a Moroccan. They're all thieves and whores,” said Karim.

Afterwards they tried to get into a disco, but the doorman didn't let them because they weren't properly dressed and Akis's jacket had dust and leaves on it.

Akis bought some chewing gum and gave them all to Karim after having kept one for himself.

He walked him to the hotel, but Akis didn't ask him to try to get inside again. He was tired. Besides he knew they had a lifetime ahead of them. He gave Karim the change from the one hundred-dollar bill for the dinner and the drinks.

“This is for the taxi you paid for yesterday,” he said.

And Karim was happy.

“Goodnight.”

## *Chapter Five*

The next day Akis awoke with herpes on his lips. He was paying for his farce with Karim in cash. He turned the automatic call back facility on the phone on and worked on a case for two hours at the computer. At some point he heard Karim's voice. He ran to the phone.

He asked for forgiveness.

Karim asked, "Who was it? Your friend? Not that I care..."

"Of course you care just like I care. You're jealous, I'm jealous...listen to me. Life is ridiculous. Enjoy yourself. Go with the world and his wife. To good hotels and charge high prices. The art of making love, just like all fine arts, has its price in this world. I love you just the way you are and I have accepted what you are. No one else will ever love you like this," said Akis.

"Then why are you doing this?"

"Because you won't tell me you love me."

"There are other people around me. Customers. In the barber's."

"OK. I'll call you again tomorrow."

"At one thirty. Because afterwards I'll take the bus to go back to my boss, the mayor."

"Are you telling me the truth about that job?"

"Yes. And don't come for New Year because I'll be working."

"I'm coming."

"I won't be in Marrakesh."

"It doesn't matter. I'll take a suitcase full of money with me and go with all the boys in Djemaa el-Fna."

"You'll leave Morocco a poor man."

"That's no concern of yours. It's not as if I don't have it."

"I'll see that for myself when I come to Greece on the twenty fifth of March. All you have to do is get me my visa."

"That's easy now that the bitch, the consul, who wouldn't give it to you has lost her position."

“Since when?” asked Karim triumphantly.

“It’s been three months now.”

“Why didn’t you tell me?”

“Because you wouldn’t speak to me on the phone and I felt humiliated using Guy’s name to get you to answer me.”

“That’s all over now.”

“I know. I did all I could to make that happen. To get you to leave Rony’s warehouse, for the sake of your health.”

“Thanks. We’ll talk again tomorrow, at one thirty.”

From one o’clock Moroccan time to three o’clock Akis called. Karim did not appear. That ruined his evening. He threw himself into exercising with the springs. Around midnight Haris passed by and recommended an ointment for the herpes.

“Karim never loved you. You were nothing more than a client. Why can’t you understand that? Don’t go at Christmas. You have a wild instinct and you control it with a will of steel. If you do go, don’t drink. You’ll kill him and you’ll end up in jail in Morocco forever,” said Haris.

“I’ll become the leader of the prison and I’ll start an uprising.”

Jail was one of Akis’s old fantasies. But then maybe all those hours he spent in his office spilling over case files and all those hours exercising and raising anemones and cyclamen in pots, at one time, weren’t they a kind of prison?

Dawn broke with Akis working at the computer.

It was Monday the twenty seventh of November. The eleventh month of their acquaintance. Something told him that tonight Karim would phone him.

He sent a fax to the hotel in Marrakesh to make a booking from the twenty eight of December until the tenth of January and then he made a great many calls to clients.

Since the day he had met Karim he had become a callous professional. The only thing that interested him now was money. Even those clients of his who were friends ceased being friends. He looked at them politely and yet demandingly just like any other clients.

He received a call that the shop from which he had ordered a dining table and six chairs in the island style. They would be delivered. It was one of the most expensive

shops. He had no cash. His first call was to Thessaloniki and he arranged for them to deposit the balance of the fee they owed him into his bank account.

He went down to Athens to buy some herbs for his winter decoctions: eucalyptus, rosemary, sweet-scented pelargonium...

The light glared against the meat hanging in the market and the bloody faces of the young butchers there. One with a black moustache was bantering with a blond pony-tailed butcher with blue eyes. He returned home worn out and fell asleep with two candles alight – one black, the other purple.

It was already dark by the time he woke up. He sank into the armchair in his office and began studying some briefs.

He was waiting for the miracle to happen. Twenty ninth December nineteen ninety four. Departure of the group by coach from Marrakesh to Casablanca. The next day they would fly to Athens. The clouds rose orange above Marrakesh's Koutoubia Mosque and Akis's eyes were bleary. One woman, the wife of the president of a chain of shops, who had come on the trip to marry off her two spotty and graceless daughters, made some jabs to him about his night time activities. She had seen him in the small tavern where he had dined the night before with Karim. He did not condescend to answer her. He satisfied himself with photographing the red clouds, red from embarrassment. It was the first day far from the man of his life. Other days would follow and he had to get used to this idea of lasting absence and presence at the same time, get used to it in his mind, his heart and in his dreams, namely in the deepest chambers of the labyrinth of his soul, there were the Minotaur dwells.

## *Chapter Six*

The medium had told him that the previous night would be the one when Karim would call. He stayed up all night exercising on his bike and watching gay porno movies on the video. It was about dawn when he fell asleep for two hours after having lit two candles. One black and one yellow. The housekeeper who woke him took fright at the expression on his face.

Last New Year's Eve found him at Haris's loft watching the fireworks from Lycabettus with other faggots, everyone screaming all together to welcome the new year in. He left them flabbergasted without even having some pie or drinking champagne.

It was the first time in ten years that he hadn't performed a strip show for them dancing among lit candles.

He sat on the pavement on Acadimias Street by a dying olive tree and cried. That was how he saw in nineteen ninety five. And he would cry and laugh and hurt during the whole year.

Rony looked surprised when Akis told him on the phone on New Year's Eve to tell Karim to wait for him at the airport because he would be there in five days.

He had to wait for three and a half hours before he could catch the next flight to Marrakesh. He was young, handsome, rich and alone and was radiating love. The policemen at the airport made innuendoes and asked him for his passport every five minutes.

He was saved by a famous, old, asthmatic, lawyer from Seville.

"What are you reading young man?"

"A scientific treatise."

"In what language?"

"Greek."

"Are you a lawyer?"

"How can you tell?"

"Are you right-wing or left-wing?"

"I'm not interested in politics at all."

"Then you must be right-wing"

"..."

"Does your wife know you are here?"

"How do you know I'm married?"

"I'm not just anybody. You will see for yourself. I can read your mind and the future. Our meeting is not a coincidence. When you are my age you will be very rich just like me."

"Do you come to Marrakesh often?"

"Two or three times a year. Via Geneva where I keep some accounts. My wife doesn't know about the second ticket. I stay at the Sheraton in Marrakesh and it only takes a small tip for young men to be allowed to come up to my room. What annoys me most is that the police are everywhere."

At that moment two policemen came again to check their passports. A lady near them was eavesdropping, even though Alberto's French was so awful he did not understand what he was saying himself. He turned and gave her a dressing down for being nosy.

"Is this your first time here?"

"It's the second in two weeks. I fell in love."

"That is very dangerous," Alberto warned him.

"I know."

"I admire you. I don't even remember how it feels to be in love."

During the flight he said:

"If your friend is not waiting for you, you can come and stay with me at the Sheraton."

"He'll be there," replied Akis confidently.

The Spaniard laughed with the certainty of his young colleague.

At passport control, they spent a long time examining Akis's passport. The Spaniard then said they were lawyers and that they were travelling on business. Then they stamped the passports and let them go without further ado.

Karim wasn't there.

"Will you join me?"

"No, I'll wait."



Alberto exchanged some money and waited. Then Akis remembered. He had not calculated the time difference and Karim should have been there forty five minutes before.

Alberto waited patiently. A small cab stopped in front of them and Karim stepped out; tall, wearing a black jacket and glowing like the sun. At least that is how Akis saw him.

Then Alberto took out his spray cologne. He sprayed some on Akis and said:

"Always remember that in love everything must be perfect." And he left without saying hello to Karim. Did they know each other?

Akis did not kiss Karim in the Arab fashion as Karim had expected, but shook his hand instead.

They spent the afternoon in the room. Rony rang his bell for dinner and said various things outside their window mocking them to make them come out.

"Let's go. I can tell he's not happy from the tone of his voice," Karim said.

After dinner which seemed to last forever with all those French faggots chirping away, they went straight to their room.

Rony was up all night drinking the *Parfait d' Amour* that Akis had brought from Greece and at dawn he had a diabetes crisis.

The two lovers did not sleep until dawn.

In the morning Haris called because he was worried.

Akis answered in French that he had found paradise lost; answered in such a way that Rony could hear and turn green with envy.

Only that his paradise was to become as horrendous as hell itself at certain moments.

But he was determined to go all the way with it, to empty the glass of its last drop.

Even now. Even after all this hatred and violence, even after having seen each other's true face up close and having been terrified. Even now he is ready to stand before him and touch him, seduce him or rape him. December twenty eighth. One month had passed. He was waiting for Karim to call.

His housekeeper said that somebody had called but hadn't spoken. She also made some allusive gestures and innuendoes to which the young lawyer did not react.

## *Chapter Seven*

It was cold in the room at Rony's whorehouse when dawn broke. Akis looked around. Karim was sleeping with a satisfied smile on his face. Months later when he would wonder if that person had fallen in love with him, he would remember those moments with infinite tenderness. He woke Karim up with infinite kisses and made love to him despite his protests. Was he really putting up a fuss or did he really not want it? When this experienced whore went with others was he active? And now that he was with Akis, was he passive, letting himself enjoy pleasure in all its forms? Akis would never learn the answer to this since whores know how to fake it and tell lies. And after all, the customer is always right. Gaby, Rony's old, former 'partner' insisted that Karim was mainly passive. When Akis asked Karim himself, he said that it was the first time in his life that he had ever had sex like that and that Guy was too old for such feats. On the other hand, though, the young Greek performed several feats that only Greeks know how to perform. The experienced Karim reviewed his past and found no other Greek in his list of lovers and came to some conclusions.

"Greeks are crazy and sexual," he said announcing his findings to Akis.

Over the course of the next two months he would see this in practice, that Greeks are crazy and sexual, not knowing any bounds. However, that morning Akis loved Karim more than his own life. He was the only man with whom he risked having sex without a condom. And when Karim did a Moroccan massage with the soles of the feet, poising his huge body on the Greek's spine, Akis thought to himself:

"If I'm going to die, there's no time better than now."

Akis taught him how to say "I love you" in Greek and the words for the sexual organs because with him, Karim was shy like a small boy. Was this yet another trick, another part of his art or had he regained his virginity when faced with the great love shown to him by the Greek? Yet another question that no one could answer. Later when Akis at some point said to Rony that Karim was shy, the French whorehouse owner was taken aback and asked,

"À quelle heure?"

It was wrong of him to have asked because at some point he managed to destroy the magic in this great love, searching for the truth like a follower and user of Kant's pure reason.

That morning Akis lent Karim his dictionary, French-Greek and Greek-French and he uncovered that Karim hardly knew how to read or write in French let alone in Arabic.

They went to the Jardin Majorelle and wandered among the narrow alleys and sat on the benches no longer occupied by tourists. Akis took pictures of Karim beneath the pergola with its intense indigo colour. The colour of love. Karim walked around like a horseman charging and in his left hand he held the small dictionary open. This photo which was developed and enlarged in several sizes would come to be a knife in Akis's heart and so he decided not to hang it on the wall of his new office, instead shoving it away in a locked wardrobe so that the cleaning lady wouldn't see it. However, one day six tiles fell off the wall in the kitchen without breaking or without breaking any of the crystal glasses on the table at the moment. The opening was just the right size for the frame containing this photograph of his true love. But he decided not to hang it there because there was something about the photo which frightened him. Karim's face was wild and childish at one and the same time, decisive yet sad, mature yet tender, black and yellow from the way the sun fell on his face through the leaves casting a shadow. Karim had exactly the same picture in his barber's shop. He wasn't excited about the idea of photos. But together they took thousands of them. Souvenirs and property, poor reminders of a great love which carried them up to the stars. They spent the whole day in the gardens. While eating they were silent and absent-minded. At some point Akis squeezed the juice from a lemon into some Moroccan carbonated water, Oulmez, not being able to pronounce its name properly, and Karim made fun of him because he said it like OulmFes like the name of the imperial city, Fes.

It wasn't long before the other faggots took a liking to them and Akis started dancing *tsifteteli* and belly dances beside the fireplace while the Moroccan youths who 'worked' in Rony's house were beating out the rhythm on drums of various sizes. He felt like he had been born there and that was why it all felt so familiar to him. From time to time he thought he would reply in Arabic if someone asked him something. It was like heaven. If he had ended it all at the end of that week, if he had never gone again, he would have

been left with memories of an unclouded happiness. But when exactly are we supposed to stop? Maybe it's pain and betrayal and separation which give pleasure its true dimensions. People who put up walls around their feelings in order not to get hurt, what do they gain?

'They end up being afraid of getting old and are scared of their own shadows,' thought Akis.

Today he hated Karim all morning more than you can imagine. He sent another fax and phoned again to confirm his hotel booking. When he decided to rest a little after eight hours of frantic professional activity by lighting a yellow candle in the crystal candlestick, he began imagining that he was already in Morocco, that it was already the twenty eighth of December – it was only one day short of a month away after all – that he had hired an old Buick with a manly driver with photographs of his seventeen children stuck to the windshield, that Akis was smoking a cigar wearing his white colonial suit and his white straw hat, the one he had worn that previous April in Rabat, and that he stopped, dressed like this, in front of Karim's barber's shop in the narrow alleyway in his neighbourhood. The street urchins came out to pass the time of day and Karim's mother and sisters looked on from behind the grille and that his brother was there too, the spotty one who had uttered dirty words to him recently over the phone, and Karim had prohibited Akis from speaking when his brother answered... and that Karim would come out with that angry, wild look of his and he would pretend to be indifferent spitting out from between his teeth a,

"Qu'est-ce que ce? What's all this again?"

This Greek always managed to surprise him. He was no wanker like all the other white men who came to get laid in Morocco.

Because Akis had come on a journey that his soul had craved for since the age of eight – craved for for twenty five years now – a journey which had caused him troubled sleep, prophetic dreams, and he wanted to die in this mythical country as if he had lived and died seven lives there already. His old self would die and another self would rise from the ashes, more familiar, wilder, without the agoraphobia of a boy who had grown up in a small provincial town in the Peloponnese, playing erotic games with other boys in half-tumbled down houses, on hillsides, below olive trees and in the corners of stone walls surrounding fields with the ashen trunks of fig trees.

Every time he sent mental images to Karim on the other side of the world of the wealthy Greek- or rather American – who goes to Morocco to take revenge on him and to squander his dollars on the boys, he ran away and became jealous and sent him telepathic images of dedication and love because as an Arab he could put up with the bodily ‘infidelity’ of his lover, but what he could not put up with was the idea of him squandering his money for the sake of other boys in Morocco.

That evening as Akis, half-asleep, was thinking all these things, Karim was in a small garden in a provincial town in Morocco where he worked in the Mayor’s house and he was looking at the nude photograph Akis had taken in Nafplio and sent to him out of hatred and hopeless lust during the first week of their official separation when Guy had hastened to Marrakesh to win the heart of his former lover whose head had been turned by the young, handsome and wealthy Greek faggot. Haris had taken the photo and Akis was as handsome as a Greek statue because his own vanity required that he remain in the mind of his lover in the most perfect of ways, the way of the poet, who prefers separation to decay and love of routine.

And Akis really had left despite the indecisiveness in his soul. And every single day he now wrote a chronicle of absence, a chronicle of a great love.

Just then his friend, Alexandra, phoned. She knew the whole story and followed it with the greatest of understanding because she had experienced much the same thing in Algeria. Just as he was telling her about his thoughts he began to hear the sound of the fax in the headset, the fax which was in the next room, his office, and someone was trying to send him a blank page through an already busy line. Karim was communicating with him by sheer force of will, perhaps helped on a little by the various herbs he constantly drank and was trying to appease him! When Alexandra understood what was going on she freaked out. Only Akis laughed heartily to himself because he knew what was going on. He was proven right once again that he had fully understood the soul of this boy who slept around but who was only fully loved by his mother and by Akis. And he was ready to abandon her for Akis’s sake and follow him. Now he was sure of it. He no longer needed to be jealous of the other lovers taken by this Moroccan whore; they were just clients. Because as Alexandra said, “everyone gives and takes what the can,” and those others had just given money for a black, over-used and aged dick.

Things were quiet that evening and he spent his time working until late. His friend Dimitris – the medium – called him to confirm the accuracy of the ‘contact’ earlier in the evening, repeating that the Greek and Moroccan had entered into a mystical marriage blessed by the stars. But Akis didn’t feel like listening to more of this. For him the memory and perfection of his fantastic imagination sufficed, a poem which he would recite in his soul every evening for the rest of his life and he had to protect it from any sudden touchdowns with reality. Maybe he ought not to go, he thought. What would he do if he saw Karim touting for business with old men in the square while he was supposed to be working in a small Moroccan provincial town as Karim had told him repeatedly, abstaining from the sins of the flesh?

With these thoughts floating around his head, he slept soundly having done one hours exercise on the bike watching a detective show on television and drinking two gulps of Napoleon brandy.

## *Chapter Eight*

Dinner at Rony's was an entire ritual. Between serving courses, the servant Abdul sat with them and played with the cat. The ones who didn't want to dine were sitting on the sofa in front of the fireplace. The hunks who were on a diet or who were tired and hadn't had much sleep were beating out rhythms on the drums. Karim hardly spoke and kept Akis at a distance. He behaved as if he was one of the servants. He was also helping Abdul serve the food, something which annoyed Akis because he saw him as a lover and not a whore and he didn't want to see his 'love' pretending to be a servant. He pointed this out to him many times but Karim insisted that he was being helpful, that he wasn't helping out of obligation and that Rony was like a father to him. One day he found them locked in the kitchen and Rony came up with the excuse that Karim was giving him his insulin injection. Everything was still peaceful then, at least on the surface, because this spoilt Greek hadn't yet revealed just how jealous and vicious he could be, characteristics which could destroy them and blow the bottom out of these transaction-based relationships.

‘And now my Karim is playing servant to a fat mayor in a provincial town. Maybe his duties include making love to him or having to put up with his fat and soft penis inside him’.

That very thought cut straight to the heart of him because he was still in love with that dark-skinned boy who was a master of the art of love, who drank down ground-up herbs in little bags made out of newspaper all the time.

"They're good for my stomach," he used to say.

And he kept asking if Akis would take him to the doctor if he got ill while in Greece or if he only saw him as a sex object.

It was then that Akis started to love him. And so did Karim. They were like defenseless babies in each other's arms. Alone, tender and defenseless, locked in a miserable room in a brothel, strangers to the world, strangers to themselves, just like others but different at the same time, social and agoraphobic, whores and saints in a country that was a huge brothel, in a cruel and inhuman world where the survivors were

the ones who could slaughter without guilt and then wipe the blood of the sword on the silk nightdress of their lovers, their whores or their slaves.

And Karim had felt like Akis's slave many times. He begged him with tears in his eyes not to reveal to the Frenchmen that he was passive with him in bed. Every time he went upstairs to the communal toilet wearing the *robe de chambre* that Akis had given him, he avoided old Gaby who was waiting there to touch him.

One day during lunch Rony indirectly suggested that Akis help Karim get his driving license, in other words give him money. He also suggested, since he would be coming to Morocco frequently in the future and would stay at his house, that he open a dollar convertible account with the Commercial Bank of Morocco to avoid the great many thieves in Morocco. Akis arranged to go to the bank in the morning with Karim.

At dinner Rony had drunk a lot and attacked Karim out of jealousy.

"Tesez-vous! Ne parlez pas! Il vaut mieux."

He told him to be quiet and discreet because he knew that the Greek was not a fool and that he liked to stick his nose into everything.

Then he told Akis that he should try to find a boyfriend in Greece because the Arabs were a dishonest race.

"C'est le soleil. (The sun's to blame.)"

Was it that Rony suspected that the hysterical acts of this rich, young lawyer would make the best whore leave the house and that he would defame his business to his best customers or was it that he just wanted to protect him from the destruction he could see coming?

A customer upstairs complained that he was cold at night and that his boy - a completely feminine, toothless and lispng faggot - was shaking by the fireplace while wearing a jacket.

Akis imitating Marilyn Monroe said, "I sleep completely naked. I only put a drop of perfume under my ear. That's because I sleep beside the sun."

Then he drank a lot and danced more provocatively than usual.

Karim was looking at him with contempt and hurried of their room.

The minute Akis came back, Karim was sulky and didn't want Akis to touch him. Maybe he was thinking of his mother whom he loved very much and what she would think of her son for being away from home for a week. It was only when the Greek



lawyer burst into tears that he hugged him, kissed him on the cheek and cradled him all night in his arms. In the morning they would go to the bank together. The experienced Moroccan whore was playing with this white "colonialist's" desires. Maybe he cared for him, maybe he even fell in love with him - that was for sure - but a whore never forgets the job. Tonight in Athens it is raining and Akis's heart hangs heavy with sadness. He knows there is nothing to be done to mend things and that the situation is only getting worse. And he's too selfish to try to do something. Writing is like putting the heated edge of a sword into a wound and pushing it until the pain is unbearable, until there are no more tears to shed and screams don't make their way out of the mouth. In the future he will be able to accept the magic whenever it comes along - if it ever comes along so intense and true again - without wanting to learn the truth. Because as Karim used to say, "Why do you keep asking questions? Why do you pay Abdul to find out about my past? Why do you make Rony drink to loosen his tongue so you can interrogate him? You poor white man, what you need is magic. That's what is missing, not the truth."

But this white man was a lawyer, specialized in penal law and just like a whore, he couldn't forget his profession, not even while involved in a great love affair.

Now this rich and successful lawyer has turned to writing. The man who defended killers and con-men, the man who knew every aspect of human psychology and suppression mechanisms, the man who used legal loopholes without compunction, is now writing to consolidate the simple truth.

He saw his lover, this naïve and not particularly intelligent whore, as a monstrous criminal like the ones he used to defend and get off the hook. And for the first time he was in a dilemma.

His sense of reason was sitting behind the prosecutor's bench and condemned this brazen whore to a life of hard labour and deep down in his soul and his body the other Akis, the real one, found him not guilty, his body being the jury containing all the races of the world, all religions, professions and classes.

And his real self cursed the other, it cursed this profession that helped him make ends meet. If he could, he would gladly destroy this sense of reason that was blowing his love sky high.

"If I had Kant's "Pure Reason" now I would tear it to pieces and would burn them in the flame of a candle."

Then, while listening to the rain, he fell asleep exhausted into a dreamless sleep.

He woke up in a sweat in the middle of the night. One month had passed. He was in Ouarzazate, in the desert where the camel-drivers were desperate for him to hire a camel, a hut and their bodies.

He had to work today as well, in order to make money for the trip his soul so anxiously anticipated. And at the same time he feared and wished that some urgent work would come up to prevent him from going.

## *Chapter Nine*

Dawn broke – it was the day they would go to the bank. Karim said to Akis, “That costs a lot,” when Akis asked once again to become a white stallion riding a black mare.

“But up to now we have done it countless times without me paying. And the first evening you even let Haris do it,” was the response.

“Yes, but he didn’t penetrate.”

He was bargaining like a Berber in the bazaar selling his own flesh because it was the only thing he could sell; that tired, forty-year old body which experienced its last moments of strength and still shone out from the drops of morning sweat. He was bartering just like Akis did with his clients. And the young lawyer loved him all the more for this, identifying with him but at the same time hating him. Just like he hated himself and his work, a job which was like a lead weight around his soul, a job which sometimes brought him down, so far down that in his despair he wanted to die.

The point is that Akis started playing Karim’s mischievous game in full knowledge that it would be difficult, if not impossible, to escape from this lethal transaction, from the prison house of a purchased love which had cost so much.

Karim brought him breakfast in bed. Tea with lemon and a piece of crispy toast. The diet. All because Karim had asked him to lose a few kilos. Rony suggested that Akis stay just as he was since the Arabs like men who are just a little plump. Akis, though, only cared about what Karim thought. And since he had asked him to lose weight he would lose twenty five kilos in seven months. Later while looking back at the money Karim had spent at his expense he would tell the enraged Haris in a humorous manner that Karim had cost him less than a weight loss centre in Switzerland. Before leaving the room they made love and Akis felt drunk like he had smelt all the flowers in the valley of the Flowers. Although Akis had only touched one flower, he kissed the innermost petals of a desert rose and this flower opened to accept the unspoken dew of this kiss from the crazy Greek and his heart which was palpitating with love.

In the bank Karim demanded that they open a joint account but the manager told him that a local could not have a foreign currency account unless he worked abroad.

“But I will go abroad to work. And this gentlemen is my boss,” he said.

Akis turned and looked at him as if he had never seen him before.

In the end they managed to open an account in Akis’s name only and Karim, by now enraged, made such a fuss that the manager, also furious, locked himself in his office.

They left the bank angry.

“Why do you react like a small child? It’s dangerous for both you and me,” Akis explained.

“I hate the Moroccans. I’m not Moroccan. They are all thieves, whores and jealous. They all want a bribe. If you’d given the manager a bribe he would have opened the account.”

“I didn’t know. If I’d known I would have done it,” said Akis, followed by, “Whatever I have is yours.” He was surprised to hear himself saying this.

The domestic squabble was interrupted by two policemen, one with a yellowed, choleric face full of hatred and the other tall and stupid. They asked for ID cards and passports and asked them to escort them to the police station.

‘The bank manager must have sent them,’ was Akis’s first thought. He went on to tell them somewhat condescendingly that he was a lawyer and that if they messed with him there would be trouble because he knew what his rights were.

It was then that the choleric policeman reminded him of the Moroccan law prohibiting white men from walking around the streets with Moroccans at a distance of less than 3 metres. And that his own distance had been much less, almost non-existent, because Karim was holding him by the arm!

“Don’t worry, Sir. Wait here for your friend to come back from the Station.”

Akis’s heart almost broke in two. He looked at Karim. He was calm and collected. Like it was the thousandth time it had happened to him. Then he remembered that the same thing had happened the first night while bargaining over the price with the taxi drivers in order to spend the first night of their married life together in the hotel and one of the taxi-drivers, outraged with Karim’s attitude, which was spoiling their taxi rank, had sent them to the police.

Three minutes later, Karim was back with the same expressionless face. The tall policeman said “Thank you” to him obsequiously while his choleric colleague recommended that Akis be more careful in future. The policemen bade Akis farewell with respect but not Karim, whom he seemed to know, and they left together.

They returned home slowly without talking. Once they had closed Rony’s door behind them Akis fell into his arms and smothered him with unlimited tenderness. During those three minutes of absence he had come to understand just how much he really loved Karim.

“Don’t carry on like that and don’t say a word to Rony. I just had to pay 10 dirhams. Exactly their daily wage,” said Karim.

‘Three hundred drachmas, nothing,’ thought Akis.

Much later when Karim betrayed him, when Karim would refuse to come to Greece preferring Guy’s house in Avignon, Akis would recall this very scene. However, Guy had no real intention of ever inviting him, simply wanting to deprive the Greek and Karim of their great love. And of course, naïve Karim, simple Karim fell into the trap because he thought of Guy as his father. Guy went in June straight after the Greek had left, immediately after their long month of happiness together. He rented a Mercedes to dazzle Karim, taking his Spanish friend with him, allegedly his lover, so as to make Karim jealous. Because you see Karim had never really been able to accept that the aged French faggot had abandoned him for a fucking Spaniard; a Spaniard just like those in Djemaa el-Fna who lined up begging Karim to go with them at any price. Guy returned, invited him to a friend’s house, a villa with a swimming pool in the most aristocratic suburb of Marrakesh full of palm trees, and offered him one of the cocktails so beloved of the young Arab. Because for him Karim was just a young Arab. Guy told him he would give him the money for the ticket to Greece and whatever else he wanted. Under one condition though. That he took Guy and the Spaniard together with him and that they all lived in the Greek’s house. Karim, being naïve, accepted not seeing the game Guy was playing. His tricks count among those centuries old survival mechanisms passed down from generation to generation. However, rich white men had their own ways to fool him. Destroying the life of simpler, more innocent minded natives was just another form of entertainment for them. And Guy was truly playing with Karim. The reason was unknown. Maybe he did it out of boredom, out of

wounded pride for a love that had cost him dearly or maybe he was just plain old jealous. When Karim came to understand that he was a pawn in Guy's game, he was working as a servant in the mayor's house, and he would dream of a Greece now lost to him and the sandy beaches with their turquoise seas even though Akis had promised that he would wait for him forever, but he knew deep down that the young Greek egoist would never come back.

And he thought it best to tell him so on the telephone to flatter him,

"Now you are number one."

Because the fourth time that Akis had come to Morocco in July, he had beaten Karim, having drunk a litre of *pastis*, sworn at him and locked him out of the hotel room. There had been a huge scandal. The police were called but the next day Akis could remember nothing. From the tidbits of information given to him by Karim and the receptionist he must have screamed something like this,

"I'll kill the fucking Frog who came to buy you like a slave with his money. And he pretends to be your father. And you believe him. He's deep in your heart somewhere and nothing will get him out of there. I don't like playing second fiddle. Go on, get out, get into the square, you Moroccan whore, go find some old men to fuck with. White men have no morals so take what you can get from them. Because prostitution pays well. But you, you'll take their wallet too if you can and their suitcase full of dirty underwear. You take what you want! Go on get out!"

And so he threw him out of the room. Karim went down to the square, drank one or two orange juices from the open air benches, bought Akis a sandwich with meatballs, those that he really liked, and found Akis sleeping like a log after he had unlocked the door. They made love all night long with the Greek raving on and on that he would belong to Karim forever and that no one else would ever use his body.

"You are the last man I'll go with for the rest of my life."

Karim was simple-minded and naïve and believed deep down in his soul in everything this drunken, white lawyer who loved him told him.

However, at the end of August when the only thing he needed to for the visa was a fucking piece of paper from Greece and Karim demanded that Guy come with him to Greece, the Greek, furious with jealousy, thundered over the phone at him,

“No way. Stay where you are forever Karim. Because if you come here and sleep around I’ll kill you. I’m going now.”

“OK, but you’ll call again many times. You’ll just end up begging me to come.”

And indeed he did call many times. But not to beg Karim to come; he called blinded by the need to seek revenge; he called out of a wounded ego; he called because of a love betrayed.

And he brought everyone into it; Rony, Guy, the Italian gynaecologist Paolo and his friend, Benny the painter, and Giuseppe, Karim’s last conquest. While Akis was running round in Greece trying to ensure that Karim got his much-sought after visa, Karim went into the Djemaa el-Fna square and picked up a Spaniard and an Italian, Giuseppe, entered Hotel Safi by the pool entrance – well-known to him since he was a professional – paid a visit to both men and the next day went to Rony with Giuseppe to introduce him so they could stay there in future when the Italian next came to Marrakesh, so they could be together freely, without any fear of the police. However, they bumped into Paolo. He was a friend of Akis. They had met at Rony's and had his mobile phone number. Quite by coincidence, Paolo also knew Giuseppe. Karim tried to cover things up telling Paolo that he and Akis had broken up but even so he begged him not to say a word to the Greek about Giuseppe. Paolo, though, who understand just how great a whore Karim was and knew him from back when he was with Guy and wanting to expose Benny, his boyfriend, who was never satisfied with the monthly sum sent by the Italian gynaecologist to help provide for his wife and kids and to stay faithful to his foreign husband, just like all the Moroccan whores said to their foreigner partners, even if they had more than one, but now asked for an enormous amount to open a boutique in the souq. Rony supported him in this because as a merchant before having turned ‘madam’ thought that he would be able to send all his clients to Benny’s boutique and collect a commission from them. In other words, nothing new for Morocco since even the street urchins did it. Paolo, though, had no intention of giving so much money. He called Akis and begged him to tell him whatever he knew about Benny. The Greek lawyer didn’t know a thing about Benny except some half-truths he had heard from Karim while drunk and that Karim had gotten angry with Akis when he had asked Benny to paint his Moroccan lover from a Polaroid photo he had taken. Karim had not liked the idea and said he didn’t want his portrait done “by him”. He

also recommended that Akis didn't buy anything from him, not even the painted silk scarves that he sold for a fortune, nothing at all. And whenever Akis wanted to tease Karim he would say,

“When I leave you I'll get it together with Benny.”

“If you leave me, don't ever come back to Morocco because I'll slit your throat. I let you fuck me so that you won't leave me. I've never let anyone fuck me.”

And one evening in April when the Greek got furious from Karim's whoring tricks, when Karim had said that they'd never fuck again unless Akis paid well and when he threatened to go back onto the streets to find someone younger and more handsome, a more obedient boy, Karim fell at his feet kissing them. It was then that the Arab submitted and let Akis fuck him saying,

“But don't forget, you mustn't ever leave me like that Frenchman whose name I don't even want to say again.”

Akis knew little about Benny but his experience as a lawyer and his recent immersion in the psychological makeup of the Arabs helped him form quite a good picture of this intelligent and talented boy who spoke quite a few languages, corresponded with the whole world by mail, who had lived in Switzerland with the banker, Alain, and who drank a lot, provoking Rony's protests,

“When the Arabs drink, they really drink.”

A boy with a wonderful sense of humour, full of life, slim with a small belly protruding (due to the alcohol) and eyes as black as coal, eyes with a gleam in them, not dark and menacing like Karim's eyes.

The Greek lawyer used all his experience to wangle the truth about Karim from Paolo, while Paolo only told him a few vague facts and lies about Benny, facts and lies though that would turn everyone who came and went from Rony's house against Karim, Karim who had betrayed him. For example, he said that Karim was a hepatitis B carrier and that he passed it on to all his lovers since he didn't use a condom. Paolo told him what old Gaby, Rony's ex, had told him, that Karim was one hundred per cent passive in bed. Akis told him that Karim had made him leave Rony's house in April and that Rony had lost a generous client. The excuse used by Karim was that, “it's a house full of whores and illnesses. It's not right for you or for me. What's more Rony pays commission to the boys who bring white men here.”



A commission that Karim would have collected for bringing Giuseppe if the rabid and hurt Greek hadn't got in the way, if he hadn't phoned everyone there was to phone, if he hadn't turned everyone against Karim, exiling him forever from that paradise lost of Moroccan male prostitution, the only refuge in all of Morocco safe from the police because Rony had paid fantastic sums to bribe them while also spreading round the story that he was the former lover of the now dead brother of the king, Mohammed the Fifth, and he had the necessary gall to play the 'madam' openly in a country where prostitution was prohibited by law!

All these things went through Karim's mind as he sat alone in the provincial mayor's house playing the servant. He thought to himself how much he had underestimated his Greek lover and that the only thing he wasn't was an wanker. And now that there was no forlorn hope of his return, Karim appreciated him and loved him and desired him more than ever.

But we haven't got that far yet! It is a January afternoon and Karim and Akis have just returned from the bank. The bell rings out for lunch.

## *Chapter Ten*

December the third, one thousand nine hundred and ninety five. In his office Akis opened his laptop between two lit candles and three golden rings. The first was a thin ring with a red stone - the stone of love. Karim had given it to him after having bought it with Akis's money on the last day of January. The second was somewhat heavier and kitsch. It was one of the Moroccan rings that goes well with flip-flops. It was similar to the one Karim was still wearing and they had exchanged them just before they got terribly drunk one day of July. The third ring was a heavy piece of 18 carat gold with a Minoan engraving and he had bought it at Nafplio when Karim was fucking around with Giuseppe in Marrakesh. Akis had ordered two similar rings, his own a bit larger because his fingers were fatter than Karim's. He stopped the craftsman on time before he had engraved their names on the rings. It was on the day after that horrible night when Karim demanded to come to Greece with Guy and Akis had told him to go to hell.

That night he was waiting for Costas, a blond angel, Karim's "replacement". But he didn't call. It had been more than three weeks since he had last heard from him and he had been patiently expecting his call because he knew he would be back. He would be back no matter what. Without asking for anything in return. And he would be there in flesh and blood. And Costas teach him the meaning of inner calm by giving him massages, massages that he would give to others as a professional physiotherapist. And he would leave after seven hours of sex, after having told him that he didn't enjoy having sex with him.

"Imagine if you had enjoyed it," Akis had told him.

"Goodbye old man."

He called him old man even though Akis was only ten years older. Costas was twenty three.

Instead, Mohammed from Alexandria called. This pure and naïve guy that helped him understand the Arab soul and had brought Akis to a state of sexual ecstasy while dialling Karim's number so that he could listen to the words that the experienced Greek lawyer was saying to his Egyptian lover and make his Moroccan lover jealous. But instead of Karim, his spotty brother also called Mohammed, answered the phone and he thought that the Greek was masturbating for him. His mind didn't go any further. His

desire for that educated white man with the blond hair and the sophisticated gold-framed eyeglasses and blue eyes made him believe that Akis's orgasm was a declaration of love to him. Karim heard of the incident from his brother and the green-eyed monster grew inside him. He feared that Akis would fuck his brother and then the whole family would find out that the manly and well-hung Karim, the **Koutoubia** of Marrakesh was fucked by the crazy Greek. The Egyptian, however, completed the task that some good or evil deity had assigned him and following a second, lukewarm sexual encounter didn't show up again. Akis wanted to thank him for having talked to him so much about the mythical Alexandria and his childhood loves with the purity of a man who lives without thinking, so he paid for some AIDS and hepatitis tests the Egyptian had. Fortunately, the tests were negative. Because at some point Akis was drunk and at some point fantasized that he was doing it with Karim and there was no place for condoms between them. Nobody has sex with their other half, with their own body with a condom, just like nobody wears a sterilized glove to masturbate.

And Karim was his other half. The medium insisted. The sexually experienced Greek had been sleeping with boys ever since he was eight and twenty five years had passed since then, and statistically speaking, he was able to draw conclusions. He knew that his relationship with Karim was more than a simple transaction. And the Moroccan whore knew that and he took advantage of it in the same way a child milks its mother's breast.

"If you're going to count, don't give me anything. Neither my father nor my mother nor brother count the money they give me."

"But I'm too young to pay for love."

"You don't understand a thing."

And he didn't understand indeed. And now that he has begun to understand the Arab soul, how pure and cunning it is, how selfless and calculating it is at the same time, the situation is beyond repair and he feels uprooted from a great love, exiled from his own self, in a country that means nothing to him. Whenever he goes to the bank at Syntagma, he looks at the square he's seen a thousand times before as if he is seeing it for the first time.

The Egyptian from Alexandria helped him understand that the average Arab was ready to devote himself body and soul to the white man that would "love" him, that is satisfy his basic necessities - food, money, entertainment and good sex. That was a type

of devotion that no European had offered Karim. And the irony was that he threw away the devotion of a man who loved him with all his heart, while the devotion that both the Egyptian with the stinky breath and the spotty Moroccan offered didn't mean anything because he hadn't fallen in love with them.

If he ever let his heart and soul gambol so freely ever again, love an Arab again, he would know.

'Do we learn from other people's mistakes? I don't know.'

He never gave him the second expensive ring with the Minoan engraving. He kept it in a safe place and he would probably never give it to him or anyone else. Whenever he felt desperate and lonely, he would put the rings on and would put his hands together in a dramatic gesture of despair.

'Too much opera'. Watching opera was his hobby.

Another sleepless night. The telephone didn't ring. Run of the mill boys never come for a third time. They disappear after the second meeting. And one time is never enough. As if they want to demystify sex and then leave. After Karim, Akis experienced a sexual mania that was buried somewhere deep within him. His friends jokingly called him 'maenad' since he would stun his partners, if not exhaust them physically.

It was as if a sleeping Negro stud had awoken up in him. Suddenly he formulated a theory in his mind. A tall, blond, blue-eyed European had the soul of a Negro and a manly Negro with eyes like burning coals had the soul of a white, tall, blue-eyed man with an undulating voice and graceful movements. Each looked for their other half so that they could live as a whole, just like a heterosexual looks for a beautiful woman to mate with. The situation is more complicated with homosexuals. It seems that they carry the memories of previous lives they have lived either as a man or a woman, and souls fight within their bodies, finding expression in an unpredictable way. An effeminate homosexual with a sudden erection and the desire of a stallion provokes 'active' boys that find themselves playing a 'passive' part, wanting to slaughter him, for in the alchemy of flow and the exchange of material and energy, the mixture is explosive and one of them has to get out of the way. That is how Akis explained the enormous violence that he used almost every time he had sex with Karim. There was a confusion of gender and persons. One night in April when Karim had eaten two roast chickens (deux poulets) and fresh, Greek cock twice, he said:

"Tomorrow that we're going to Casablanca we'll cut that thing off."

And his eyes had a strange glow. The Greek got out of bed in the middle of the night. He got dressed, put on his white, linen suit that made him look like a colonialist from the period between the wars, wore his straw hat and slept again in those clothes, on the leather armchair of the cheap hotel by the station, listening to the trains come and go, the cockroaches on the table eating the breadcrumbs and the sound of the people in the next room fucking. That night his "darling" had reacted like someone from the streets and it had seemed as if he wasn't the tender boy that Akis had fallen in love with. Fortunately, he had taken many photos of him with that innocent expression, when he looked him in the eyes with that childish look, full of desire, as if he was his first, childhood lover, unsuspecting of the violence and the evil that would come.

"I was thirteen when I first slept with a female whore and thirty three with a male whore," he told Alexandra that evening she had stopped by for a cup of coffee, a chat and a mutual confession-psychoanalysis session.

"That's not fair."

"It is, because the first whore helped me love women and the second to love men."

'But let's take things from the beginning.'

It was two days before he left in January and Rony's bell was calling them for lunch. Later on Rony himself with the undulating, theatrically effeminate voice of his would call the naughty lovers who were always late, making everybody wait.

"The house may be humble (that is lower middle class) but it has some rules. And I'm the mother here."

Poor Rony, even though he had seen so much, he still loved people, but he couldn't stand them. That's why he drank.

"I've never been to the theatre, but a friend...(he never uttered the word 'client' and wouldn't take money in front of others always pushing the money away as if protesting, his gestures being well practiced, even though when it came to their bills he robbed everyone blind), a friend (he made pauses as if he wanted to think) used to say that, 'I'm a born actor.' I think he was a theatre critic and he was going to the post office to fax his reviews to Italy since he would stay in Morocco for ages hardly ever having sex. He was a strange, very fat man. He fell on the sofa like a woman in a harem. I called him

the sultan of Italian theatre and he could even sell his own soul for a sausage. The boys that fucked him said that he liked them to shit on him and give him golden showers.

'Rony's drunk again and his tongue's loose,' Akis thought. 'When he starts he just doesn't know when to stop. But he's a good man and he mustn't have any enemies. Otherwise, no matter how shrewd, he wouldn't be able to maintain that type of business.'

Karim had assured him that there was no other house like that, at least not so obvious that all the taxi drivers in Morocco would know of. The only thing that was lacking was a neon sign in the airport directly under 'Bienvenue'.

From time to time a boy would have a dispute with a client about the fee or a wallet would disappear, but those were problems that were solved within that small society of the villa and the offender would not be allowed to return. Just like it happened with Karim.

Rony liked Akis and he had tried to warn him several times, but in vain.

## *Chapter Eleven*

Two completely theatrical figures appeared at lunch, the lunch announced the by bell which has been ringing out for two chapters now. One was Alain, the banker from Geneva and his friend Max, barman from Aix-en-Provence. The latter had a plain, childish face and teased Rony about his business and profession, that of ‘madam’, something that the lower middle class ‘French madam’ from Avignon could not stand resulting in him screaming out at the top of his voice,

“Mauvai ai ai ai ai aise! (biiiiiitch!)”

Alain wore two masks, that of the effeminate faggot ballet dancer and that of the serious and unscrupulous, balding banker. The first Alain wore a wig and sang and danced with the most feminine voice Akis had ever heard. A show of such bad taste it ought never to be repeated. Then suddenly he would switch over to his second role as a banker and his voice and face would harden.

‘Now that’s an interesting face to observe,’ thought Akis, ‘Maybe you pay a little bit more than an ordinary hotel but it’s worth it for the people you meet.’

Unfortunately during mid-April Karim took him away from Rony’s house in a hurry and dragged him from hotel to hotel afraid that the Greek would learn about his past and his character and dump him.

And while the show went on and everyone was eating, Alain danced away with a towel on his head and Rony squawked,

“Il est plus que quelquechose! Il est vraiment plus que quelquechose!” (He really is something else!)

It was one of those phrases he repeated often. It was just then that Paolo walked in with Benny. Alain froze when he saw his ex lover in the arms of another man. He sat down at the table like he had aged a little. The newcomers welcomed those already there and sat down beside the fireplace.

When Alain recovered, he asked,

“What’s the Berber with the gorgeous black eyes called?”

Benny didn’t answer and Rony stopped them in their tracks before things got out of hand between them saying, “Alain, no more apéritifs from you from today on. And

you, Benny, you drink too much. The Arabs are slow to start but when they start they just don't stop. From today on only water."

He got up himself and served Oulmez to both of them. Benny grimaced in disgust.

And he meant it. He didn't want a scandal.

Alain asked Akis to dance and dance they did for quite a while in a very queer way. He also asked Karim to dance but he didn't feel like it and Akis was glad because he didn't want that hurt, know-all queen to win over his lover. Although he hadn't thought of it until that moment, the expressionless, professional look on Karim's face gave the impression that for a good fee he could be bought. It was then that he truly fell into the trap set by this inconceivably cunning Moroccan whore.

Akis grabbed Karim in a hurry and left the meal to go and rent a carriage, a *caleche*, to visit Palmerie, the neighbourhood with ten thousand palm trees. The others, slightly peeved, bade them farewell with innuendoes.

Karim, having left Akis in hiding, bargained for quite a while and returned with an old and blind carriage driver, so old and blind that Akis was afraid to get into the carriage. However, he proved to be very discreet, and much more than discreet, deaf too. So Akis was able to stare deep into Karim's eyes and to whisper sweet nothings to him in Greek and the little Arabic he knew.

"But we came here to see the sights!" protested Karim.

"Your eyes, your lips, your nose, your mouth are the most sun-drenched and exotic places for me!" replied Akis.

Karim laughed happily. Akis sang and Karim placed bank notes down the front of his shirt and sprayed him with fantastically shaped bottles of scent just like they do at weddings as they passed through various neighbourhoods and suburbs and very close to his house and his barber's shop.

"When you come again I will invite you to my house to meet my family and to eat couscous. The most delicious couscous you have ever eaten."

"But I don't like couscous," responded Akis.

"That's because you haven't eaten home made couscous."

"And what will you say to your family?" enquired Akis.

"If I tell them that you'll take me to Greece to work they won't have a problem."



The Moroccan was in a hurry to replace Guy. The role of the white protector which was vacant.

He showed him the field of sand where he played football with the street urchins every Monday or Tuesday when he didn't have much work in the barber's shop.

That barber's shop, as he would discover later, never really had much work because the neighbourhood was new and the customers didn't know Karim and despite his being a good barber his mind was not on that job but on prostitution.

They reached the palm trees and the old man not only agreed to take their photograph but the picture he took was among the best they had taken – and one of the few with both of them in it. Akis was still a little fat. In the July photographs – the last ones – he would glow like an Olympian God.

The children from the area came over to beg. Akis gave them Greek coins by mistake and the child in Karim ran after them to catch them.

“I want the Greek coins for myself for when I come to Greece.”

They passed by Hotel Palmerie where Karim used to come with Guy to drink coffee. And Guy used to spend two or three hours in the hammam fucking with the masseurs. Karim had the whole time free to make a few calls to the rooms upstairs.

They got back into the caleche to return home even though the sun still had not set in the West. Akis wanted to go back because at that moment he was happy and was afraid that the police might come again or someone else would interrupt them, a former lover or customer of Karim's and the moment would be spoiled. Of course the prostitute made no complaint about being locked up again in the choking atmosphere of the room since they were still in the honeymoon period and he enjoyed being with his hyperactive Greek lover.

There was no one at the villa, not even the doorman. They opened the door with the key Rony had given to Karim. Passing by madam Rony's closed bedroom door they heard Rony and Alain, the two girlfriends, drinking Moet Champagne and chatting to each other. Karim went upstairs and had a shower. The door to their rooms was exactly opposite the ground floor and Akis was taken aback when he heard Alain propose to Rony,

“If you manage to get the barbarian Berber to fuck me tonight while the Greek is asleep or better still to let me fuck both of them, I'll pay you whatever you ask.”

Rony, completely drunk, agreed without hesitation.

Akis thought to himself, “that spoilt Swiss, bitch thinks that anything can be bought.”

And he would prove to be right.

Karim came down clean and freshly shaved with his hair and moustache combed but Akis liked to ruffle it up.

They made love all afternoon and Karim was perfectly happy and obedient like a woman in a harem.

‘If I had never come back,’ thought Akis, ‘I would have been left with memories of a great happiness, almost unbearable happiness.’

However the sickness had a cycle to pass through before leaving him.

‘Would I ever have got over it?’ he reflected to himself. ‘I really don’t know.’

They slept like happy children, cut off from the barbarous world, in an oasis. However, they were soon awoken, centre of a noisy bazaar with the others circling over them, tearing at their clothes trying to buy them. That evening Rony had invited all the faggots in Marrakesh to dinner.

## *Chapter Twelve*

Before going to bed Akis worked out watching a porno by Cadinot about Morocco called "Chaleurs". Then he lay down without having had a drink and without having called people at random talking dirty to the men who answered the phone. He never talked that way to women because he loved women. He decided not to go to his house-office for New Year's Eve. He had bought it three months before at a good price and had just finished furnishing it. He woke up from the sound of the dripping tap. As he put on his gold-framed glasses hastily, one of the lenses fell out but fortunately it didn't smash. He put the tape of Oum Kouloum on the deck and it got chewed up.

'It seems that the Moroccan magician is reading my thoughts about not going and has decided to torture me. I give up. I'll obey just like a horse under the whip. In the morning I'll call the plumber. On Monday I'll take my glasses to the optician to get them fixed. I'll fix the deck on my own.'

And he continued sleeping, this time in peace.

'It is vain to try and get away from yourself'.

Especially when his own self, that is his other half, hated himself as well.

Next day he went out to take care of some things at Syntagma Square and walked through the National Gardens. He saw the kiosk in the gardens by the public toilets that stands all by itself. He hadn't been to this cruising place for years. The last time was three years ago or maybe more. A hysterical faggot who was working as a doorkeeper at the entrance of the national theatre on Agiou Konstantinou Street and used to hang around in the gardens had taken a broomstick and was trying to scare off his rivals who were there night and day and took all the boys. One other time as he was passing by he heard screams for help. The guards in the gardens and the police didn't seem to be doing anything to actually guard this sacred place of first necessity where both experienced 'users' and unsuspecting tourists sought refuge. His friend Haris had recently told him that the place was now a robber's lair. That didn't prevent him from going to this "temple". On the contrary, like a maniac, he sought out any experience where the risk factor could increase adrenaline levels, so necessary for his mentally draining work. But the toilets were empty and dirty as always. On his way out he ran into the infamous robber.

"Do you want to have a good time? Don't push me. You come in here and pull down your trousers and fuck in front of the world and small children, but there's no police around. That's why you do it."

Akis started walking after he pushed him away. One hour of working out per day did him good. He took out his mobile.

"Go away or I'll call the police."

"I don't give a damn. I'm a policeman myself."

"Maybe, but I'm a lawyer. You'll be in big trouble."

"I won't leave unless you give me some money to buy a packet of Marlboro."

"I don't have any change."

"Let's go to the kiosk to get some."

At that moment they saw a family with their little girl that was playing with the swans. Akis ran and sat on the bench next to the child mother's.

The robber started shouting hysterically.

"You know all the tricks in the book! You're unbelievable! But when you take off your trousers in the toilets, someone ought to come and take them so that you come out only with your tie on."

'So he's a surrealist on top of everything', Akis thought to himself and left so that the child would not have to hear what was happening in the world at that age and because her mother looked at him annoyed. He got angry. Just when he was ready to give him five hundred drachmas to buy cigarettes, he swore to himself that he would punish him. He quickened his pace and forced him to follow him, out of breath, along Vassilissis Sofias Street and up to the Evangelismos Hospital where he found a taxi and got in making a mocking gesture.

Akis thought to himself, 'the poor bastard.'

He returned to his office, turned the computer on and continued his story.

That night Karim was helping serve the dishes. He seemed to be distracted. He forbade him to talk to him and sat away from him. Akis had asked him to go out for dinner but when Karim asked for Rony's permission, he said that the man that Karim didn't want to see would not come after all. 'Some ex-lover', Akis thought. 'I don't believe that it's someone who could hurt him because otherwise the smart Arab would have convinced me to go somewhere else for dinner. Unless Rony, who wanted the

Greek faggot to be there no matter what, had vetoed it. My exotic love is definitely starting to get interesting.' From that point on his love would be so 'interesting' that it would take his breath away.

At dinner they served mussels that Karim hated and he didn't them eat at all. Akis didn't like them much either but he got carried away by that colourful and joyful company and ate many of them with lots of lemon juice so that they wouldn't turn his stomach.

Across from Akis sat an Italian in his fifties, Mauro, ex dancer at a cabaret, now an important merchant in Marrakesh, who immediately and without pretext, made a pass on the young Greek.

"I came here ten years ago. I had been sacked from a cabaret and came here and the only thing I had with me were the clothes on my back. Red and yellow trousers with rhinestones. I went out into Djemaa el-Fna and the first to paw me were two policemen. I had them both. Then I found a nice boy and had a relationship. We opened a boutique in the souqs with European clothes. Now I own a boutique with clothes from Italy. Abdel and I have broken up..."

'Another Abdel, another slave', Akis thought.

"Abdel and I are not together but we're still friends. Now when I go out at nights, I put a banknote in my pocket, my credit card in the sole of my shoe. Morocco is a magical country. If they join the EEC, I'll leave. I'll go to Mexico or somewhere else. Of course I have many problems. You have to bribe the bank manager to make a deposit. But here I don't feel stressed. You say "*inshallah*" with the locals and everything goes fine."

When Akis didn't respond to his flirt, he rudely said:

"Who do you think you are? Some Byzantine empress? Don't you have an ass? Where does your shit come from?"

Karim remained neutral but his eyes were laughing because Akis hadn't surrendered to the rich merchant. He was incredibly jealous. He was even jealous of fat taxi drivers and old mullahs, he was jealous of everybody. Sometimes Akis thought that Karim saw him as a whore. 'It takes one to know one,' thought Akis. Sometimes when they walked at night along Mohammed V Avenue, he made him walk in front of him to see if he was sashaying and then made observations:

"Don't walk on the edge of the road. Whores walk there so that a car could stop and pick them up."

Was Karim, a genius of a whore or a naïve urchin from the desert? Or even both? Karim could persuade the jury that he was innocent, even if he had committed the worst crime. A virgin and a whore, a lower middle-class man with the vice of a Roman patrician, cowardly and bold, sentimental and cynical...

Dimitris, Akis's friend, the medium insisted that Karim was the other half of his soul and that their love was written in the stars.

'Maybe I'm just the same as him. There's a chance for me to achieve self-awareness.'

That night last January, a crazy old faggot sat next to him with his hair dyed bright orange. At some point he spoke Greek! He used to be an officer in the war between Italy and Greece and was wearing well. He only knew three phrases in Greek. 'Good morning', 'good evening' and 'from behind'. And at the sound of the last one he would laugh theatrically, even more theatrically than Rony whose head would make a three hundred and sixty degree turn, with his mouth in a perfect 'O' shape. This crazy old man told him unbelievable stories about Piraeus after the occupation, about the boys who dumped their girlfriends to follow him into the parks, about his conclusion that all modern Greeks, just like ancient Greeks, are gay. And he kept on talking all the time.

As time passed Akis became the focus of everybody's attention. Every five minutes Toni, a hairdresser from Marseilles said:

"There's a handsome, young Greek in Morocco. If I hadn't seen it for myself, I would have thought that those French faggots were exaggerating as usual."

But Akis was real and in love with a "dirty Arab, a wild face" as he used to call Karim. That night he forgot himself, forgot his love and had a taste of Cavafy and Durrell's lost and mythical Alexandria. He drank too much and didn't notice that Karim and Alain had been away for an entire hour. He had completely forgotten about it and he only remembered it as he was writing his story. When they came back, Alain walked in first with a triumphant look on his face followed by Karim who pretended to be serving dessert, slices of orange sprinkled with cinnamon. Akis read aloud the French translation of one of Cavafy's unpublished poems about the handsome boy who deserves to enter the highest artistic circles too, even though he's a whore. Karim looked at him stunned and retired angry without showing up again all night. Akis stayed until

everyone had left. He drank and danced and recited more poems in French. He even read an excerpt of Durrell's "Alexandrine Quartet".

Until the veteran of the Graeco-Italian war, impressed, asked him:

"I knew about Cavafy, but was Durrell one of us?"

When he went back to the room Karim had covered his face with the sheets and was crying.

"What's wrong?"

"Why do you speak with them? Why do you dance? Why are you having fun with them? They are whores. They go on the streets and fuck. Every day they go with someone else. And they're full of diseases."

"People are innocent. All people. I truly believe that. Besides, you were the one who brought me to this house, not me. Come on. Don't spoil one of best nights of my life."

"I don't understand you. I love you but I don't understand you. You're complicated."

This was a phrase that Akis would repeat a few months later. The same happened with many phrases. One would say them and the other would repeat them on another occasion, their roles reversed. It was as if he was fighting with his other half. And battles like these don't have winners.

Karim didn't want to be touched and Akis was too tired to insist. They slept like loving brothers. And the Arab purred with pleasure like a kitten.

## *Chapter Thirteen*

In the morning he woke up late from the noise in the courtyard just outside his window.

Rony was playing the cassette Akis had brought from Greece with songs by Manos Hadjidakis. Just then he heard Melina Mercouri's resonant voice say,

"There was a misunderstanding and no explanation was given..." He opened the window and froze. Alain was sitting as happy as a pig in a sty in a chair with a blue barber's apron round his neck with the name KARIM written on it in large yellow letters and Karim was standing behind him, joking as he cut his hair. Various faggots and young men had come to the window on the upper floor and were amusing themselves by making jibes.

Akis shut the window and lay down again. His heart was ready to explode from jealousy. That cunning Arab had succeeded in getting him caught up in his game. Today was the day he would pay him back and he wanted to get as much as he could; to take everything, even the shirt of his back if possible. And thus it was.

Putting on the most indifferent, undulating voice he could muster up, he called out to Karim, "Karim, bring me my breakfast. Tea with lemon, no sugar."

"I can't right now. I'm working. In a while."

Silence.

"I can wait," said Alain.

A little while later Karim brought him his tea. They looked each other in the eyes long and hard. For the first time there was hatred in both their glances.

"Are you sensitive?" Karim asked him ironically.

"Are you shy? What time of the day or night are you shy?" responded Akis.

Their first domestic squabble.

"If you don't hurry up fast and finish with that crazy faggot I come out there, take the clippers of you and make him as bald as a coot so that he can't go to the bank for three months!"

Karim let out an uneasy laugh. He knew that the crazy Greek was capable of doing it.



“Please, just let me do my work. He’s paying me well.”

“For what exactly?”

“To cut his hair in his room, but I took the money and I’m cutting his hair in the yard because I told him that the light in his room didn’t help me,”

Akis laughed like he didn’t mean it and he certainly hadn’t been convinced by what Karim had said. But he let it drop.

After this he put on his red, silk robe-de-chambre and stepped out triumphantly just as Melina was singing, “*love that became a two-edged sword...*” and he said, “Karim will now cut my hair for free.”

Everyone clapped. Karim laughed to himself. Even the good-hearted Alain laughed. Now that the whole story is over, Akis has even invited Alain to Greece to stay with him.

A little later Rony’s bell rang out signalling that lunch was ready but Karim had not yet finished Akis’s haircut. It was the best haircut he had ever done because it was done with love.

‘And it’s with love that I will write this novel, Karim, to keep our tale in my mind forever with all its details, because my heart will never forget you.’

Before going for lunch they went into their room and Karim placed a thin gold ring with a red stone on Akis’s finger.

“This stone signifies love. I’ll never forget you.”

“Now we are married.”

“We have been married for a while now. From the twenty seventh of December nineteen ninety four. From the first night we slept together.”

They made love in silence. And Karim called him Fatima and Akis heard himself call out, half-suffocated by the pillow that Karim held tight over his throat,

“I am Fatima.”

“You’re better than Fatima. You’re more than a man and a woman.”

“I’m your father, your brother, your mother, your mistress, your wife, your husband, I’m your child and you’re my father...”

Rony interrupted their delirium by knocking on the window in the most impolite fashion.

“Everyone is waiting for you,” he shouted.

“Start without us,” Akis shouted back.

Karim stared at him deeply and said, “If you ever abandon me I’ll kill you. I’ve given my body to you for you to do whatever you want so that I’ll never lose you.”

Then he opened the shopping he had done while Akis was asleep. A wonderful jellaba, various bottles like those they use to sprinkle newly-weds with scent and two amazing wooden carved windows that Haris would covet upon seeing them at the airport while waiting for Akis, crave so much that he would keep them for himself. Akis was so happy that he didn’t mind at all.

“Did you have enough money?” asked Akis.

“No,” replied Karim like some reflex response.

While Akis had closed his eyes and was relaxing after the sex he began to feel banknotes falling on his face from the ceiling. He opened his eyes and saw Karim’s face very close to his own, his eyes glowing and he heard him say,

“With you, my treasure, there’s no need for money.”

‘Why didn’t I walk out of his life that afternoon forever? Why can’t I hold on to that as my last perfect memory? Why did we have to destroy everything?’ Their great love had reached its zenith. Nine months later those who had been peeping on them would fall on them, mangle them trying to take the last remnants of the burnt, pieces of their love, as a fetish and a cure-all.

“Keep the change. And tomorrow I’ll give you money so you can get your driver’s licence.”

At lunch they had their photograph taken with all the others. They danced together and the barber from Marseilles took their picture. Alain tried to cut in on their dance but they didn’t pay the slightest bit of attention to him. That evening he even accompanied them to their room in his drunken state wanting to take part in the farewell celebrations. That was his vice. To get between couples but not necessarily to break them up. But that particular evening, the last thing they needed was Alain. And Akis put that point across extremely clearly. Alain shut the door accommodatingly after having sung the whole of “Don’t Cry for me Argentina” and then went out into Marrakesh, to the bars to pick somebody up. He returned totally pissed accompanied by a boy. It was dawn. Akis was not asleep. He thought that if he fell asleep he would die of happiness.

In the morning he told the prematurely awoken Karim, "I'm not leaving."

"Be careful of Morocco. It's dangerous for you," he replied like a sibyl.

For the last seven days he had closed the barber's shop and now he was impatient to get back to it. Akis thought though, 'or is there another client waiting for him? Who knows? I'll never find out.'

At the airport Karim told him a lie, that the police man wanted an enormous bribe so as not to unpack those amazing windows. Akis gave him the money to give to the policeman. It wasn't long before he realized that he had pocketed it himself and that he had given nothing to the policeman. He didn't care. He was too much in love to care about such small details. However, such things would begin to bother him when his desires were unrequited, when he could no longer stomach the fact that this great love had died and he would then ask for his money back since he couldn't ask for his heart back and the screw that had come loose in his head, the screw Karim had lost in some muddy Moroccan souq.

"Write to me."

"Of course I'll write. And every Monday at three o'clock Moroccan time I'll be at Rony's and I'll be waiting for your call."

"And I'll write you thousands of letters, enough to fill five suitcases. And I'll send photos."

"And bring the photos with you when you come again. Don't be long."

That morning Karim had suggested photographing him nude to take him back to Greece with him. And Karim had asked him to leave the most important parts of his body in Morocco. But then shame overcame him and he wouldn't let Akis take his picture and to date Akis hasn't left any part of himself in Morocco.

'How did we end up like this, Karim? How did we end up like this?' Akis fell asleep crying mournfully in his cold, king size bed in Kolonaki where he lived. Outside the heavy rain continued to fall. And as the days went by and the pages of their story filled up with words, the other's presence in his dream faded away. One morning Akis would awake and he would have to learn to walk again, to talk, to move, to work in a world empty of myths, a world without even the myth of love, a world where the streets were full of rubbish and pollution and the buildings grey, the people whores. And not one corner of the world is left unharmed. No means of transport, no travel agents for a

week or two in paradise. Akis had already woken up in this world. He was doing his best not to crack up due to his memories or his fantasies of a great love, to be able to continue to set the guilty free.

‘Goodnight, Karim, goodnight. Wherever you are now, in whoever’s arms you are, be happy and always smile like the sun. When you smile, the sun comes out for me even in the heart of winter. Goodnight, light of my life.’

## *Chapter Fourteen*

He woke up unwilling to do any work. A trial scheduled for next week was adjourned for the ninth of January and that destroyed his plans for that trip to Morocco which had already been postponed so many times.

He wished that a Jordanian prince would fall in love with him so that he could live in wealth. After his unfortunate love for the Moroccan, his vanity wounded, he needed someone to give him his own weight in diamonds and gold.

‘This is my chance to put on some weight. One year of starvation is enough.’

A friend of his who used to be his client came to visit at noon. He had a customs and excise office. But that was just a front. In reality he was a bookkeeper. Many 'important people' with their wives turned to him and not just for things to do with betting.

He was the first client that impressed him because he was intelligent and he looked at people so penetratingly as if he had seen all the dirt and malice of humankind up close.

The lawyer opened his heart to his client and he responded in every way and with due respect.

"My father was the chief of the police and he disinherited me because I didn't go to university. But he was a saint. He didn't hurt a soul. He helped many people during the German occupation."

"He wasn't a saint and you know it. He was a bum just like you. You wanted to see him as Santa Claus. That's why you didn't get along. He would be happy at least if you became a tubby professor with thick eyeglasses.

They remained silent for some time. The lawyer was staring at the monitor of the computer which was off as if he was reading and the client was trying to figure out the lawyer.

"Why did you call me here today?"

"To show you photos of Karim."

"This has gone too far. You have overestimated him. He's a chicken. And a fool. Because he didn't understand how much you loved him. He wouldn't dare make a move unless you do something."

"What would you like to drink?"

"A beer."

"Anything stronger?"

"I don't need it to see your photos."

The lawyer put the photos on the wooden-carved table in front of him. A prisoner from Halkida had carved the table which depicted two peacocks by a fountain. He gave him two red albums and one black, the one with the letters. And then he went out to the balcony because he didn't want to see the expression on his face.

Five minutes had gone by and nothing was heard. He came back inside. The face of that man who had seen just how it is to go on the streets and seen the "basest" sides of the human soul and body, was glowing as he looked at the photos.

"What a man! How much did you give him?"

"Two million drachmas."

"And did you get it? I mean...did you fuck him?"

The lawyer nodded.

"He was crying in my arms like a baby."

"Cheap at half the price. You fooled him. You really are something. This man loved you. And it is not over. Each photo is a life on its own. Is it OK if I don't see any more?"

"Of course."

"What will you do if he comes here?"

"I'll buy him a studio in the neighbourhood."

"If that man went out in Kolonaki wearing a white linen suit, people would stand in a queue, and anybody smart enough would become rich just by giving people their number in the queue.

This prospect did not sound at all thrilling to Akis. When he was finally alone he went through the letters Karim had sent him. He relaxed on the sofa and took up the story from where he had left off.

On the first Monday of January after he returned from Morocco he called at Rony's but Karim wasn't there and neither was Alain and Rony was sarcastic.

'This crazy faggot is drunk. Karim is in Alain's room and Rony is taking the piss out of me.' He hung up feeling offended. When he asked for an explanation in April, Karim said that it was the Monday that he had been out for his driving license.

‘Arabs! They always have an excuse. I'm fed up with the Moroccans. I'll go to Jordan.’

When he found the first letter in the mailbox with a Moroccan stamp and the big, childish letters with spelling mistakes he could not wait and opened it at once. It was a card with two horses. On the back it read:

"Here are two horses. One is me and the other is you. Pick which one you want to be. The small or the big one?"

And Akis answered to this letter, the first of the numerous, overwhelming letters Karim wrote during those six months until July. "I'll be both the small and the big horse." And the Arab laughed with this greedy Greek who knew to play like a child. Every night Karim went to his childhood friend and neighbour, the electrician, so that he could read aloud those letters written on fine paper with beautiful handwriting which spoke of so many things and made him dream of a new life in Greece.

‘A life that he would probably never know,’ Akis thought now in bitterness.

Sometimes Karim had this electrician write for him:

"My darling Akis, your voice always touches my soul and I am patiently waiting for you. I'm waiting. Kisses all over. Karim."

The phone calls at three o'clock every Monday were now an institution. And when Rony closed the business for forty days, that is for the month of Ramadan so that he would not provoke the fanatic Muslims, Akis wrote one letter per day and sent them by registered mail.

Sometimes the phone rang at night. Akis had moved the phone next to his bed just in case it rang and he would miss the call and the answering machine would pick up. Then he heard Karim's husky voice making love to him over the phone, asking him for money because the barber's shop wasn't going well and begging Akis to take him to Greece.

‘He probably didn't have any luck with his clients tonight and has turned to me.’ Akis thought. But he was not so much in love yet or the green-eyed goddess of envy hadn't taken him over otherwise such a thought would be a stab in his heart. Or the supposed loyalty of the Arab hadn't cost him much yet for him to have such demands.

Karim asked him for money to get a telephone. Akis sent him the money because he couldn't live without hearing his voice.

Later on, that telephone soon contributed to the demystification and destruction of his love. Because his love belonged to him. Exclusively. He needed his love. And he had created it. Karim was just playing his part. Like a good professional. For as long as he could take it.

At some point Rony opened the shop again and Karim was always there for the Monday call and Rony was more and more servile because he had plans with Karim to take all the money from that arrogant Greek who was crazy about his Arab lover, as if he had found a black diamond and was afraid that someone might steal it.

While speaking words of love, Karim was now asking for various amounts of money which Akis sent to him as cheques drawable on the account in the Commercial Bank of Morocco, inside securely sealed, registered letters cunningly folded over so that the employee at the post office would not pay any attention when sealing the letter, since Greek legislation prohibited the export of foreign currency in that way.

When Akis announced over the phone that he would go to Morocco and would stay throughout April, Karim answered that he could close the barber's shop, but he asked for a huge amount and wrote a letter:

"My sweet Akis, you are always in my thoughts, but unfortunately my body needs you. The shop is not going well. I can stay with you for one month. But not at Rony's all the time. Just for thirteen days because after that point many people come from Europe and Morocco. Recently the police came and arrested everybody using noise as a pretext. The sexual practice I use with you is an exclusive privilege of yours. I wouldn't like anyone else to know. Kisses all over. Karim."

Once he called him late at night to ask him whether he agreed with not staying at Rony's for the whole month.

Akis didn't have any reason to disagree. He started packing from March. He had bought a new suitcase because the large one he had didn't hold all his things. Every day he bought a present for Karim. A robe de chambre, a watch, a comb, a walkman, decent underwear for the hammam, tapes with Greek songs and songs by Oum Kouloum, etc.

He went and ordered the finest clothes. He had lost ten kilos and his female friend Anatoli and her brother helped him to choose a safari-style, white, linen suit with cream leather shoes and a white straw hat. It was then that he bought the golden frames with



the thin lenses with a special layer so that they did not reflect the light and looked as if they were skin coloured.

The last night before his flight he was exhausted from his preparations. Karim called to ask if he was actually coming, but Akis didn't get to the phone in time so the answering machine put him on hold. Karim heard Akis's sleepy voice along with the voice of the machine and thought that he was in bed with Haris, so he made a terrible scene over the phone in the middle of the night, a fact which pleased the Greek.

The honeymoon had not started yet and they had quarrels almost on a daily basis, alternating with their great love and exploration of the exotic Morocco that was deeply imprinted in Akis's memory, as if he had lived ten lives in that country.

Within thirty days they realized that they could not live without each other, but at the same time it was impossible to live under the same roof without killing each other.

'That would be the subject for the following chapters' Akis thought, as he lay exhausted on the sofa.

He woke up late in the evening. He went to the video club and rented 'The Sheltering Sky', and 'Out of Africa' which he watched while working out. His mind once again flew to enchanting Morocco and he had no intention of going to Jordan or anything like it.

"The day after is a full moon. It always affects me. On Friday either he or I will call. Everything will depend on that phone call."

However, he knew they couldn't start over again, even if the Arab would like to wipe away all the swearwords of unleashed hatred and unsatisfied lust from the blackboard of their rankled love.

## *Chapter Fifteen*

The eve of the full moon. A night of self-destruction. A hustler in tight jeans and a red cap flagged him down at the side of the road. He had something of Karim's cheek and was a soldier in the commando battalion.

Akis took him to a cheap hotel at the end of Athinas Street. When Akis was a student in Law School he had come here and was able to see the Acropolis from between the broken bars on the window standing there in the haze of pollution over Attica and it always reminded him of the skull they had in the medical jurisprudence class. He used to go there once a week from the time he was eighteen until he turned twenty five. He went with two gentlemen. One was a forty year old banker married with two children. He often spoke to Akis about his oldest son who was studious like Akis and shy. They resembled each other.

“My youngest is another case all together though. Even though he's only eight he's a real women's man. He chases after the ladies.”

Akis played with his sense of guilt and Dimitris – that was the banker's name – satisfied by the services Akis offered, paid well without Akis even having to ask for the money. Akis never counted the money he took.

The other 'gentleman', another Dimitris by name, was sixty with two children too. His son was Akis's age and studied in the Physical Education Academy. His daughter was just finishing High School and Akis, through the intermediation of her father, gave her classes in expressive writing for a substantial fee while he and all his friends always ate well and for free in the family taverna. Every Friday he went to the cheap hotel with his 'sugar daddy' because he really did look on him as a father figure, the same hotel he took the other Dimitris to. His sugar daddy would kiss him lovingly on the forehead while they had boring sex using a double condom- the fee – five thousand drachmas placed in his pocket. Using this money Akis bought the whole Oxford series of ancient Greek classics, part of which he was forced to sell to a second hand bookshop while he was doing his military service when his parents cut off his benefit, just as they had done a great many times when he was a student.

Today in the same hotel but with the tables turned this time, he watched the hustler get undressed with the view of the Acropolis in the background. He had a perfect body was well hung and by and large was passive.

‘Yet another young faggot who pretends to be a whore to wash away his guilt and get some pleasure out of love. Later he might justify it all to himself by saying ‘I did it for the money, to top up my pocket money sent by my poor parents.’ And of course he’ll go back and tell the other soldiers that he went with a rich lawyer from Kolonaki and he fucked him and that the lawyer enjoyed it so much that he gave him a gold watch and a chain.’

What’s more Karim would say exactly the same things to his family whenever Akis phoned and screamed that Karim was a whore at anyone who happened to pick up the receiver.

It was around that time when he phoned Paolo from Italy and Paolo told Akis that while he was chasing up the visa in August Karim had been with Giuseppe selling love to him just as he had done with Akis and that furthermore they had gone to Rony’s to spend the one or two weeks of their honeymoon together rather than to Hotel Safi where Karim entered via the pool entrance, where there was a risk of being spotted by the doorman who would not be satisfied with a small bribe or would simply be jealous of the tall Arab with the moustache, the charming smile and the oh–so wealthy clients who waited patiently in their rooms for him to pay them a visit.

The soldier gave the best he could and was ‘hot’ in bed. He kissed Akis on the mouth a great many times with infinite tenderness and whispered the same sweet nothings that he used to hear from Karim. When it was all over he was rather hesitant in taking the fee they had agreed to and longingly told the experienced lawyer to watch out for himself.

It was the most moving phrase that Akis could have heard from a whore during that phase of his life just when he was trying to disentangle himself from a great love by killing it.

The further he went with his writing he came to the conclusion that even the whores in the desert have the right to fall in love.

That day in April he arrived at the airport in Marrakesh with tens of condoms in his bag because the blood tests had shown that while he had just about managed to get over

Moroccan hepatitis B in January and he had just become immune, the Australian antigen was still positive.

“Don’t go,’ his friend Haris said. Acting in his capacity as doctor he advised him, “Karim is dangerous for your health. You are such a hypochondriac how can you let him have sex with you without a condom and kiss that dirty Arab on the lips for hours on end. Who the fuck is he anyway?”

But the only thing Akis could do was to go. First, because his desire had overwhelmed his sense of logic and when he fantasized about that dark-skinned body belly down waiting for the Greek entry from behind he came close to dying of pleasure. And when he remembered the Moroccan massage Karim had done on him with the soles of his feet balancing all his unwieldy weight on his white body so afflicted by the sedentary lifestyle and the abuses to which it was put, he often thought, ‘If I’m going to die young let me die now in this divine state.’

And he went. ‘Love and money make the world go round.’ His body was overflowing with love just like his suitcase with dollars. And Karim was waiting for him at the airport because he knew, he was sure about both of them. When the Greek had told him on the phone:

“I’m in love with you,”

The Arab answered, “I’m happy with you. Money... presents...”

The conclusion was easy to reach, “If you want to stay with me, keep on giving. When you stop, I leave.”

In just one such conflict of desires and interests Akis heard himself say on the phone, “I’ll come. A Greek millionaire with a suitcase full of gifts and a suitcase full of money.”

From here on in the experienced whore would run circles round him, imposing a role on him and the myth attached to that role. And he would let himself sink into it just like you let yourself sink into the lukewarm sand of an oasis in an imagined desert when you have walked so much that the only thing you want is to sink into and drown yourself in the warm shroud forever and to let the blue-bottles walk over your face and you to look up at the world, the desert, the same desert unchanging for all eternity: an undulating surface of sand dunes.

“But I haven’t gone to the desert yet. Maybe I shouldn’t put off my New Year’s trip?”

Akis and his cyclothymia. He would certainly make an interesting subject for a Ph.D dissertation.

Karim was waiting for him at the airport with his manly build, his well-groomed moustache, his deep masculine voice, the most masculine voice Akis had ever heard speak words of love into his ear. Akis kissed him crisscross just like the Arabs do and at that moment he knew that the same scene would repeat itself infinite times. And the Arab understood the same thing too and taking him for granted he would underestimate Akis and lose him, lose him forever.

When Akis entered the courtyard of Rony’s house wearing his white safari style linen suit, his white shoes, his white straw hat and gold glasses, Rony accompanied by Abdul and Radizah who had appreciated his generosity the previous January, welcomed him with shrieks of admiration. Abdul being observant by nature noticed that he had lost weight and Rony being drunk as ever was not able to keep his bitchiness to himself and said,

“Our Greek poet playing the snob.”

When Rony had asked what line Akis was in he had replied poet.

Karim helped him undress, took off his shoes and kissed his feet saying,

“Don’t ever leave me.”

He went upstairs and had a shower.

When he came back he found Karim sitting on the floor with the black of his eyes glinting angrily. Akis pretended he hadn’t understood a thing and lay down looking at him. Silence.

“Come on, let’s lie down together now.”

“How do the suitcases open?”

“They have a lock. I’ll show you later. Come here. Let’s talk.”

The interrogation continued. Karim put on his cold, neutral look and sat beside Akis.

He was forced to tell Akis about Guy with whom he had lived for three years, that they had spent a summer together in Avignon, that they had lived together in a friend’s villa in Marrakesh with palm trees and not in Rony’s awful whorehouse, that he had given him a lot of money, that he sent money every month, that he had bought all the

equipment for the barber's shop and that when he was getting ready to go and spend a second summer in Avignon and he had got his visa with the help of Rony who knew a lady from the French consulate in Casablanca, Guy had told him that he now had a relationship with a Spaniard and that he shouldn't come. That was how they split up. One summer ago. And Karim went onto the street to find a replacement for his dead daddy. Six months later he came across Akis. Twenty Seventh of December one thousand nine hundred and ninety four.

"How old was Guy?"

"Sixty. An old classmate of Rony's. The same body, the same voice."

Akis thought to himself, 'in other words bald, skinny with a belly, a diabetic and alcoholic with ruddy cheeks and more feminine than a transvestite from La Cage aux folles. How can I ever replace a man like that?'

He was in love and just like all lovesick men he wanted to hold first place in his lover's arms and – more than all – he wanted to hold first place in his lover's heart. As the days passed by during their month long honeymoon he came to understand that Karim still loved Guy. He even asked Akis to grow a moustache like the one Guy had. Once while they were making love he called him Guy. He even asked him to lose a few more kilos so that he would resemble Guy more. And when Akis left for Greece Karim asked him to send the same amount of money Guy used to send each month. Following all this Akis couldn't even stand hearing the name 'Guy' and they asked each other to learn the other's language so as not to speak the language that heartless Frenchman had taught Karim. And whenever Akis started going crazy from his jealousy and his anger he asked everyone, even Karim himself, even Rony's mother who came the following week, and Karim would respond saying, "why do you keep reminding me of that name when I have almost forgotten about it?"

When he said this his eyes seemed to take on a pained darkness which frightened the Greek.

On the first evening of their month-long honeymoon Akis took out the condoms he had hidden among his shirts and placed them on the bedside table willy-nilly together with the KY jelly he had brought with him so as not to inflict any pain on his lover.

"What are they?" asked Karim angrily.

"Condoms."

“Why? Why now? The other time we didn’t need them.”

Akis didn’t say a thing. He stared at the person who had infected him with a serious disease asking him what he was doing and he didn’t know what to say. And when Karim told him in a matter of fact way, “I won’t ever have sex with you using a condom, my darling.”

The experienced whore who never trusted anyone told him of his love every day, gave Akis everything, took risks without following any plan, played the game of life and love as if he was playing Russian roulette. And with him the self-destructive Greek lawyer threw his whole self into this dangerous game.

They had the best sex of their whole lives. Karim hurt and begged Akis for mercy or at least to use a little KY. Karim just did not want to be fucked and things between them became more violent, almost inhuman.

A wild struggle for power had started. Karim’s heart was up for sale in the slave market. The bidder’s: Guy and Akis. Guy hadn’t left. That much Akis knew. He had pretended to leave just like any self-respecting customer to get the price lowered.

The swords were drawn. The battle had begun and all three would come out losers, both the rival lovers and the desert whore.

## *Chapter Sixteen*

He had grown up in a desert village where he stayed until he was twenty five. His childhood love was Fatima, a brunette with fat buttocks whom he sodomized in the ruins of a house. He used to mercilessly bite her breasts looking deep in her eyes. And she would not make a sound. One day they married her off to a rich man. He raped her in those same ruins to take revenge on her. And the first boy she gave birth to was his. Since then he had no desire to see her or any other woman. When women went by them in the street, he used to spit and mumbled loudly so that Akis could hear him:

"Whores!"

That night at supper, Rony, Abdul, Rony's cat and old Gaby joined them...

"A great comedienne!"

That's how Rony introduced him to Jean-Pierre, a bank employee from Montpellier, a fifty year-old, fastidious man who liked feminine, completely passive hunks, with no body hair at all.

Beside Gaby there was a stupid guy from Morocco with an athlete's body. Whenever he opened his mouth, and fortunately that was not often, he talked about his sister who worked as a chambermaid at Atlas-Asni Hotel.

"That is where Karim and I spent our first night together," said Akis.

"They let you go together in the Atlas -Asni?" Jean-Pierre asked. "Incredible."

"We weren't that lucky on the second night," Akis said. "The police were waiting for us at the entrance as if they knew we were coming," Akis said, looking meaningfully at Rony who avoided looking at him.

Akis always suspected that right after they had left his house, that is he and Karim, Rony had called the reception of the Atlas-Asni.

That night at supper there was a bold French hairdresser who unfortunately stayed for many days and every second word he uttered was '*putain*'.

When Akis said to the host that he was annoyed, Rony hurried to explain that it was an idiomatic expression from the south of France and had nothing to do with the word 'whore' which sounded the same.



‘People in glass houses shouldn’t throw stones,’ Akis thought. Rony's mother used the same expression. She got on the bus and the ferry and came from Avignon on the next day. She was delicate as a bird, a middle class woman, who chirped all the time just like her son. She gave the impression that she would outlive everybody in there.

That night a gallery owner joined the company after some delay. He was very masculine and huge like a Viking, like the ones depicted in children's stories, with yellowish hair, a beard and moustache. He looked like a chrysanthemum. And when the young whore from Casablanca who was impressed by his Mercedes escorted him for three hundred dirhams per day, that is about nine thousand drachmas, and used to walk around bare-breasted showing off her breasts as firm as lemons proposed to Akis that he slept with them, Akis would have said ‘yes’ if Karim hadn't struck him with that look that would not take ‘no’ for an answer.

It was the night that Paolo was expected to arrive from Rome, the one who went out with the painter Benny, but because of a strike at the airport at Rome, he would not arrive until after midnight.

"The staff at the Greek airport were on strike as well, but not at the time of my flight", Akis said with childish petulance.

"God’s own your side," Rony said with an expression on his face that would not take ‘no’ for an answer.

Gaby was pawing Karim who was sitting next to him and Akis was furious. The host called the former lover to order and to change the subject he told Karim to wait for him after supper so that he would help Paolo carry his baggage.

Akis thought that this honeymoon had not got off to a particularly good start.

Abdul asked him to dance while the Moroccan would play the drums, just as they had done in January.

"I don't feel like it, not without the fireplace", Akis said. "Besides I have lost weight and I feel tired. Some other time."

And Abdul who was discreet, did not insist.

Rony went to the airport to wait for Paolo and Akis went to have a shower.

He put on his bathrobe and returned to the room. Karim was not there. He called out for him but he didn’t come. He threw a book against the window. The glass broke. But Karim did not come.

He put on his slippers and went to the dining room. Karim and Abdul were flirting, fondling the young whore. Everybody else had left.

"Karim, could you help me with something?"

The whore said something gross in Arabic and laughed. Abdul did not dare to.

"I can't right now. In a while," Karim answered.

He went back to the room foaming at the mouth.

After a while Karim came unwillingly and discontented.

Silence. Then the storm broke out.

"When I call you, I want you to come."

"You come and sit with me!"

"Why did you put up with Gaby pawing you?"

"He did it for fun. He used to do that when he was visiting Guy and me at Avignon."

"In Greece we call it pawing and not having fun. Besides, I don't want you to help serving or carrying Paolo's baggage. You're not Rony's slave. You're my lover and I'm proud of you."

"Everybody leaves, though, and I stay here..."

(Silence)

"You don't love me."

"I don't? Haven't I been waiting for three months? Did I not come to the airport? Do you know that I look at the cards with the Greek islands you've sent me and each time I lie down I dream of our life in Greece?"

"Have you used the condoms I left you in January?"

"No. I gave them to some urchins living on the streets of the village I go to every Saturday, the one where I set up shop at the bazaar and cut the villagers hair."

"And what did you do all that time without sex?"

"I've been waiting for you. Sometimes I dreamt about you. And I used to wake up at night with my underwear wet and would curse because we don't have a shower in the house."

Akis hugged his lover. He'd love to have believed that fairytale he was living, which sometimes he surrendered to reaching seventh heaven, and other times he questioned falling into deepest abyss of dark Hades.

They made love like teenagers. They kissed on the lips like birds and Karim exclaimed:

"Comme des enfants! (Like children!)"

At that moment a traditional Greek island song was playing on the tape deck, "*Don't ever fall in love with migratory birds because they fly away and your loves flies with them too...*"

But it was too late to back away. Both of them had been caught in nets set by some merciless Gods who were waiting for the birds to kiss in the air so that their joint weight would make them fall like ripe fruit which smashes into a thousand pieces the moment it hits the earth making their seeds spill out to be fertilized by the rain and resurrected again.

Karim was kissing him on the eyes and Rena Koumioti's deep voice sang out, "*Don't kiss me on the eyes, I'm afraid of separation. Kiss my lips if you want so I'll always be yours. Because since olden times they have said that kissing the eyes means separation.*"

And Akis embraced him passionately to make the best of those unique moments, to grab time by the hair and freeze it.

That evening Karim asked several things of Akis and he got them: one suitcase so he could come to Greece, half Akis's underwear and shirts, and the pullover Akis had been wearing in January, two towels for the hammam, and the tape deck and all the cassettes, and the batteries...

And only when he said, "Buy me a car," his eyes glazing over, did Akis respond, "when you come to Greece."

'But he'll never come to Greece,' thought Akis. It was something they both wanted and were both afraid of. And their soul put unsurpassable barriers in their way which destroyed their love and drove them apart.

That evening they slept like logs and at some point during the night Akis heard his friend Paolo arrive.

The following morning he met him in the bathroom and asked how he had spent the night.

"Making love," was the roguish reply from the Italian gynaecologist.

The next day he invited him to their room. And Akis bought a painted silk women's jellaba from Benny and Benny gave him a scarf, a present for his ex wife. They had never actually divorced and had remained good friends. Akis commissioned Benny to paint Karim's portrait.

"I'll bring you a photo in a while."

However, when he told Karim, he lost control.

"I don't want you anywhere near that thief. He's a whore."

He hated him and was envious of him.

One day when Akis had really hurt Karim while having sex with him and Karim had taken him to the most expensive restaurant in Marrakesh to punish him without having warned him about the class of their night out and when Akis realized he didn't have enough cash on him and had to pay with his credit card, he said angrily,

"When I leave you I'll get together with Benny."

"In that case, don't ever set foot in Morocco again." He gestured that he would cut his throat. The next day Rony's mother arrived, a prim and proper lower middle class woman who immediately befriended Akis.

They sat down to eat. Karim was absent. He worked all day at the barber's shop and came only in the evenings. Jean-Pierre reported to Karim on Akis's movements,

"He's more prudent than I am. He spends the whole day on the roof, staring at the palm trees and writing."

Rony added gracefully,

"He must be writing some porno story because for the rest of the day you two are locked in your room."

Karim smiled satisfied. Despite that, he couldn't trust white men and spied on his lover as much as he could.

And when he was sure that Akis was being faithful to him, when he took him for granted, he lost him.

That afternoon, the young whore brought home a local that André had picked up at the post office, which, as Akis came to understand, was the largest meat market in Marrakesh together with the café Renaissance.

The local, a hairdresser, rushed to finish lunch and to finish with André, collect the one hundred dirhams and get home to a waiting family. What we called dark beauty. Below the make-up, skin which seemed particularly white.

André asked how he could send red roses to a girl from a good home whom he had met in a gallery.

Adbul offered to help him, for a small fee of course!

“I’ll send flowers to Karim as well,” said Akis.

“But Karim is no girl. He’s a strapping man.”

Akis shut up.

Later he asked Rony’s mother if she knew of Karim from the time when he had stayed in Avignon with Guy.

“Yes. One day they came to my house to eat,” she said surprised.

Rony, sceptical, looked at the Greek. After dinner Karim phoned to say that they had eventually got round to installing a phone in the barber’s shop, the phone Akis had paid for.

“Don’t give the number to a soul,” demanded the Greek.

“But a telephone is only a telephone,” replied the Arab diplomatically.

“Did you deposit the money in my account?”

“Yes, I’ll bring you the receipt.”

“Did you change any money.”

“Yes,” he replied curtly hanging up the phone because a customer came in.

Akis promised him that he wouldn’t phone often.

Jean-Pierre filled him in on gay life in Morocco,

“All the boys fuck but don’t admit it. I like them young and hairless. I’d never fuck Karim. I always have to hide my money and leave small change lying around for them to steal. They satisfied with one hundred dirhams but even with fifty they don’t say ‘No’. All of them ask for paid holidays in France. It’s a myth buried deep in their minds. If they suggest it, be ruthless, say ‘no’ otherwise they’ll keep on and on about it until your nerves can’t take it any more.”

“Can you stay with a Moroccan in a hotel?”

“Only if both of you are well-dressed and hand over your passports at reception. Why don’t we go for a coffee at the Renaissance?”

“No thanks. I’ll have a nap.”

However, he couldn’t sleep. He invited Rony to come and have a parfait d’amour in his room. The alcoholic, French diabetic could not say no.

“I want to ask you various things about Karim,” he warned him.

“Under one condition, that whatever we say stays with us.”

He gave his word, a promise, though he would never keep.

He returned to his room. He filled two Bohemian crystal glasses he had brought from Greece with him and waited.

A while later there was a knock on the door and Rony stuck his red nose round the corner.

“All Moroccan men are whores. Once I had a lover. Morocco is a cursed land. If the pope was a sinner God would curse him to be reborn in Morocco. Who told you about Guy?”

“Karim did.”

“You see? He’s frank. But...he’s an Arab. They have a different mentality. The sun’s to blame. They have sex with anyone, anywhere, anytime. Just like flies.”

“He asked me to take him to Greece. If my mother saw him she would have a heart attack on the spot.”

“Then don’t take him. And when he asks, say ‘We’ll see’. At some point if they go to Europe they may change. They become faithful and hard working. But that’s quite rare. Listen to me. I’ve met many people. Both here and in Avignon where I worked in a bar and they sacked me following some to-do when they accused me of pushing drugs. You are an angel. You are young, handsome and rich. Get out of here. Go to Europe. Find a boy and when he leaves, find another one. My house will always be open to you. I’ll give you the key to the front door so you can come whenever you want. But don’t trust Moroccans. You have no experience with Arabs. And you’re as innocent as an angel.”

Then he told Akis the story of his life.

“When they threw me out of the bar I came here because I had met the brother of the present King and he was my lover. He gave me money and I opened a golf course. When he died the good custom left though. I opened a gallery but it didn’t go well. In the end I had gathered together a significant amount of capital for Morocco and decided

to withdraw from public life so I bought this villa. However, I was all alone with just my cat, Zoë, for company. In my loneliness I planted such a large number of trees in the garden that became a jungle when they grew and you just couldn't get past them. One day a friend of mine called me; she's a duchess, now poor and who rents out her castle to pairs wanting to spend their honeymoon in aristocratic surroundings. When we hung up, I thought to myself, 'I may not have a castle but I can do the same thing. What's more I have some people around for company.' I phoned Avignon immediately. The bars were soon full of posters. My first visitors were Max and Jacques, then a couple, now just friends. Shortly after the rooms couldn't hold all those who came and I built an extension, where the dining room and the living room with the fire place are now..."

Akis interrupted the stream of verbal diarrhoea, hugged him and give him a kiss.

"Thank you so much. You have helped me. " The Frenchman cried like a child in his arms.

"No I thank you. You remind me of my father."

Each wept for quite some time on the other's shoulder. The Frenchman heard the Greek whisper in his ear,

"I can't live without Karim. It's the first time in my life I've fallen in love like this."

"Listen to me, my son, a glass of liqueur is better than love. Just that you can't stay with a glass of liqueur in your hand forever."

That evening when Karim came and found the bottle of liqueur in the middle he was enraged with Rony.

"Let him drink the one you give him. Not mine."

He put the bottle in his rucksack to take it to the barber's shop in the morning.

He put the foreign currency he had exchanged in the suitcase together with the bank receipt and went to the kitchen to bring a large water glass full of pastis to get his own back on Rony by striking where it really hurt. Akis went up to have a shower.

"The money is less than it should be," said Akis.

"You shouldn't have told me."

"I was afraid that someone would steal it when I was in the shower and you were in the kitchen."

"But the suitcase is locked..."

Then he admitted,

“I bought a few things for the barber’s shop. And I got this jellaba for you. I was keeping it as a surprise for you.”

And with that he unfolded the newspaper to reveal the most beautiful jellaba Akis had ever seen in his life.

“Guy never counted the money he gave me.”

“Go and find Guy then. I don’t want to hear his name again. I can’t accept that you used to sleep with that dirty old man for three years.”

“He’s not an old man. He’s sixty.”

“Don’t defend him.”

(Silence).

They drank pastis until they were drunk. He took photos with the Polaroid and Karim’s eyes shone like those of a child. Then he told him that he had a problem with his mother whom he respected and adored and who didn’t approve of her sleeping here and there.

“Only whores, she says, sleep here and there, whores who go with someone one minute, someone else the next and in the end they either end up in hospital or in jail. Please, Akis, be tender with me. I have a problem at home, my brother will throw me out when my mother dies. I have problems at the barber’s shop. It’s not going well. I don’t want to have problems with you as well now.”

“Please, Karim, let’s not eat with the other’s tonight. I can’t stand this whorehouse you’ve brought me into. I’ve never slept in a house like this. I may be polite with the others and may seem to be enjoying myself but I’m just doing it for you. Let’s get away from here.”

“We will. I promise you.”

(Silence).

That night Karim would not let him enter his body. It was then that Akis revealed to him that in the afternoon Rony had told him that Karim was passive. Then he repeated the entire conversation to him. The Arab was outraged.

“And he has told me lots about you. That he will charge you more and give me a cut.”

Akis was speechless. And when Karim asked him to enter him the Greek refused.



“But I’m paying!” said the drunk Moroccan throwing banknotes over the bed. The drunken Greek first slapped him then burst into tears.

“Let’s never let money get in between us, Karim.”

They drank the rest of the liqueur and slept like brothers.

The following morning they would go to buy a television for the barber’s shop.

While at the shops they argued because Karim prohibited Akis from bargaining with the shopowners.

“I’ll make you wear a veil every time we go out.”

“But I know the different brands of TV better than you.”

“I asked my friend the electrician and he told me to get a Sony.”

They bought a Sony and had breakfast on the terrace of a café overlooking Djemaa el-Fna. The morning square seemed to be covered in a fog made up of the smoke of open air rotisseries and the breath of the people there. A berber was dancing for the tourists and it seemed as if the cap on his head with a tassel was being moved by mechanical, wind up head.

‘We are marionettes,’ thought Akis, ‘marionettes with a small degree of liberty and some capability to choose. And the one who pull the strings bet among themselves about when and what mistake we’ll make. And when they get angry they smash our skulls open hitting us against other marionettes or they throw us into the fire.’

Karim the magician once again mixed herbs into his morning orange juice. His face looked as if it had aged and he seemed to be in pain.

‘Today he looks forty. And he is,’ thought Akis.

“What’s wrong with you?”

“My stomach aches. If I get ill when I live in Greece will you take me to the doctor?”

Akis stared at him deep in the eyes and nodded ‘yes’ with his blue-green eyes which Karim would kiss for hours and hours on end.

The desire to cry once again overwhelmed him as he wrote that phrase on the yellow watermarked writing paper using his gold pen. It was the same paper he used to write all those thousands of letters which Karim kept in the suitcase Akis had given him.

‘Now my letters have no recipient and I am writing pages that belong nowhere, pages I will publish under a pseudonym just in case someone might learn and not make the

same mistakes as me. Because love is a desert rose. And the slightest awkward breath will make it crumble into dust and fall to the ground.’

Around midday Jean-Pierre returned the fifty dirhams to Akis that Karim had lent him so he could pay for the young boy he would spend the night with.

At lunch a pair of restaurateurs from Paris sat next to them.

“A Greek in Marrakesh! If they had told me I wouldn’t have believed it,” said the fat, effeminate restaurateur.

The tall and thin one rejoined, “Melina Mercouri often comes to our restaurant with a black fur coat.”

Later when Akis went for an afternoon nap, Rony, Jean-Pierre, André and the two restaurateurs would gossip about him,

“That Greek is head over heels in love with Karim! Imagine! With an Arab anyone can have for fifty dirhams. And he spends huge sums on him.”

Akis, lying on the king size bed where he had met the greatest love of his life, felt a pain stabbing at his heart,

‘They will separate us. I just know it. They’ll come between us and separate us.’

When Karim, tired for a whole day on his feet, came back he repeated the entire conversation to him holding nothing back.

Once again the Arab had the expressionless, Moroccan look which meant nothing and said,

“Don’t worry. We’ll get away from here. Let’s go and eat now. Then you can give me a foot massage because they hurt.”

Karim smiled with his tired eyes and slapped Akis tenderly on the cheek.

At dinner Jean-Pierre asked Karim, “Did Akis give you the money?”

“What money?” said Karim pretending to know nothing.

Jean-Pierre looked at them with the awkward smile of a child put in his place, who has been asked to pay for the same thing twice.

Over the coming months Akis would take the same look of a rejected child.

The days passed quickly. Jean-Pierre left saddened. He would be back the following year on his leave and André left with the young Moroccan whore who begged him in tears to take her with him and to marry her. And the crude, bald barber whose every second word was ‘putain’ commented,

“Just ideal for a bride, a virgin and well-behaved. On the plane back to Paris they should hang a banner saying ‘Just Married’.”

And he bargained with her over the price of a quickie and she, she laughed teasingly among her tears.

‘The people in this country are wonderful actors,’ thought Akis who was following the tears mixed with laughter worthy of a great actor. ‘They get so carried away by their roles that they begin to believe it’s true. Just like Vivien Leigh playing Blanche Dubois went out drunk into the streets and went with passers-by these Moroccans fall in love with their clients, the clients they are selling love to.’

Catholic Easter was over and everyone had left. Each day Akis sank deeper into his sea of happiness and envy. Each day he felt closer and closer to that dark-skinned body which seemed to be coming out of his own body. And each would cry more in the arms of the other like two orphans in a harsh and unrelenting world. A world that would come between them and separate them and cast each of them far from the other, doomed to spend a life time searching for the other never to find the other.

He spent his mornings writing and stroking his new moustache which Karim had asked him to leave so that he would resemble Guy. And when Rony noticed it he commented,

“Akis that is not a good idea at all. You can’t just follow someone’s brain wave every day.”

The experienced ‘madam’ understood that the Greek had a deep crazy streak in him, that he ‘played’ with people and that one day he would cause a great deal of turmoil in the house thanks to his jealousy. And that day was not far off.

On the evening of the full moon, when Karim refused to allow Akis to take him from behind, the Greek downed a whole bottle of cognac and shaved off his moustache in an ostentatious manner before the stunned eyes of the Moroccan.

It was then that Karim gave in to him.

“Come on. And please don’t drink so much. I don’t want to be married to an alcoholic.”

Tonight it is a full moon again. The full moon of December. Akis is waiting for the phone to ring to hear Karim’s voice.

‘Nothing yet. Perhaps tomorrow.’

## *Chapter Seventeen*

One month later in Djemaa el-Fna wandering around the open air rotisseries with the wooden benches where customers, tourists and locals all sat together, he met the same old beggar woman from the first night they had met. However, this time he didn't give her money. He sat down at a place selling meatballs. He liked dipping them in the hot sauce made from tomato juice and pepper. Suddenly he froze. He heard Karim's voice behind him utter his name. He turned around. Karim was sitting with his back turned and was talking to a client. The client was old, bald and fat. Karim sounded drunk, "So I met this Greek, what a case. He fell head over heels in love with me and treated me like a prince. He didn't want to accept that I was a whore though, that that is what I do for a living and so I dumped him. He kept on ringing for months afterwards sometimes threatening me, other times begging me to take him back. But I really don't like clients who are wankers."

Akis's hand reached out for the long Arabic sword he had picked out a while before in a souq, a sword ordered by his friend Sasha who had an entire collection of them. He stood up, turned around, unsheathed the sword and screamed, "Karim" and the whole of the Djemaa el-Fna froze, the rotisseries stopped squeaking and the smoke stopped wafting into the sky. The two heads fell on to the muddy ground. Karim's head rolled over and kissed the old man's cheek, who had a patchy white beard. At that moment he tumbled on top of them but the blind old woman did not fall. Akis gave her the rest of his money, just as he had done on the first night one year before and with that he awoke drenched in sweat.

In order to work out the demons wracking his soul he sat at the computer and took up the story from where he had left off...

The last day that Karim was to spend in the house of ill-repute and fallen angels started with screams. Rony was beating Radizah who was crying, beating her because some blankets were missing.

His mother intervened and broke them apart saying, "don't hit her, you fucking alcoholic. You'll not find another like her."

Later in the day the blankets were found and Rony apologized. Then he started screaming at the workmen who were building the new room on the roof. Today he had

started drinking from early on in the morning. Perhaps because tomorrow he would lose his best customer and friend, Akis. The Arab had managed to steal him away. Rony, however, vowed to take revenge on Karim for that and to destroy him. And there was just enough of the whore in Rony to exclude any margins for failure.

Akis went out wearing his gorgeous red jacket to make some business calls to Greece. He also called Karim at the barber's shop. He answered the phone with a deep masculine voice which softened when he heard Akis's voice. He told Akis that he had found a replacement and that tomorrow they could leave.

"Behave yourself, and go back to the room quickly and wait for me. If you want have a coffee at the 'Renaissance'," he added with a condescending tone in his voice.

"There's no need. I'll just go straight home," said Akis.

He heard Karim say OK, his voice happy.

When he turned the key in the front door he heard Rony calling him to the phone. It was his ex wife.

Rony couldn't believe it when he learned that Akis had been married. He had never met another Greek and this one here had seemed somewhat exotic.

That evening it drizzled. And Karim arrived well-dressed to take him to an open-air folklore spectacle with horses and Berbers and fighting and pretend Berber weddings in luxurious tents.

"Poor Rony should have put up a tent like this at the villa," said Karim, "instead of those choking rooms."

The whole evening he was distant and absent. Until Akis was forced to ask him, "when was the last time you were here?"

"Why do you remind me of him? Just when I'm on the verge of forgetting him you remind me of him."

'Guy again,' thought Akis. He popped up between them at the most inconvenient of times and spoiled their paradise in which each of them was sinking deeper and deeper each day.

The rain had stopped and the show started as normal below a fiery sign, "bienvenue chez Ali" (welcome to Ali's). Karim sat looking at the lights with his large child-like eyes and mourned the lover who had abandoned him and forgot about the lover leaning on him under a raincoat.

‘If I had Guy here now I would strangle him,’ thought Akis. Later on he would threaten to do much worse things to him. But the Frenchman, being old and evil, would avoid that meeting.

When they got back to Rony’s they were almost sulking. Dinner was over and the French hairdresser they had met in January had arrived that evening and he all the more surprised when he saw Akis there again with the same hunk.

“Here again?”

“Same as ever. I just love Morocco.”

And he was with the same effeminate, toothless fairy who seemed to be an old acquaintance of Karim’s.

He asked Rony for the bill since they would leave early in the morning with some imaginary Greek police chief who had come by car via Italy, France and Spain, who was staying at “Mamounia” and who would take them on a tour of Morocco.

Rony didn’t believe a word of it and charged twice as much as normal. You see he had calculated that the Greek would stay all of April and had planned to build the new room on the roof with Greek drachmas. Akis didn’t have enough banknotes with him and promised that he would return to pay the rest to Rony.

“Whenever you come back. I imagine you’ll be back soon. Isn’t that so?”

“I don’t know.”

In the morning Radizah wished him good luck. However, Rony had taken all his money and he didn’t have anything to give as a tip to her or Abdul like he had done in January. The two of them looked at him with the dignity of two faithful hounds whose master eats without giving them even a bone.

He heard the door close behind him. Rony had come out to see him off. The taxi was waiting.

Karim, thinking ahead, had booked a room at the Hasna Hotel. When they arrived Karim handed over both his and the Greek’s passport at reception unperturbed and walked in the direction of the lift as if he knew the way by heart. Akis’s heart almost broke even though Karim had assured him that there was no danger because the hotel belonged to the King’s daughter and the police were not allowed inside. Nevertheless Akis gave a more than generous tip to the boy who carried their suitcases to their room. They both got into the shower and made love under the hot water. Later while relaxing

by watching the French channel on satellite, Akis pretending to be indifferent, asked Karim, “how long is it since you’ve been to this hotel?” Don’t lie to me. Because I am able to read minds and sometimes my soul is disturbed by visions of the future.”

Unperturbed, Karim kept on watching television. The only thing he said was, “It was just after he left me. I needed to cum.”

“It was with an Arab, wasn’t it?”

Karim, astounded, nodded in consent.

“I ‘saw’ him the minute you walked into the room first and he was waiting indolently on the bed for you.”

“What else did you see?”

“I’d prefer to do the rest to you myself.”

Karim laughed awkwardly. He had started to feel like a trapped beast. Like a lion from the jungle caught in a trap.

And as each day passed Akis felt more and more like a slave to that black demon.

A wild game had commenced, a game between conqueror and liberator. They played with each other like cat and mouse. ‘Just that even today I don’t know who was the cat and who the mouse,’ thought Akis. One thing was for sure though, that both of them had begun to feel asphyxiated, jealous of each other. They had begun spying on each other. One was constantly in the other’s thoughts twenty four hours a day even when asleep. Akis began to see the same dream as his lover. He would take a taxi to go and spy on the barber’s shop. However, after many hours of wandering around he uncover that the address to which he sent the letters belonged to another barber’s shop and not to Karim’s which was in the basement of his house. They passed through newly constructed areas with the taxi which all seemed the same, through new blocks without street signs on the roads, muddy open air markets, by children who looked at him through the windows, children who all seemed the same. The taxi-driver, an intelligent Berber with seven children photographs of which were next to the steering wheel, struck up a conversation with him, a philosophical conversation on good and evil in the world, because Akis had told him he was an author and that he was writing a novel on Morocco.

“I believe that here in Morocco evil is something more powerful than good.”

The taxi-driver smiled with his eyes in the mirror.

“Are you married?”

“Yes.”

“Children?”

“No.”

“You know, little wisdom is to be found in books with the exception of the Koran.”

Akis did not fall into the trap and refused to enter into a theological discussion with him.

Then he returned to the tourist quarter of town and the taxi-driver asked him if Akis wanted him to accompany him while shopping.

“No thank you.”

“Perhaps I could have a drink with you in the hotel and you could tell me about your next book?”

“It’s not possible. I am waiting for my friend.”

“Is he Moroccan?”

“No. Spanish.”

Then he asked for an excessive fare and when Akis laughed the taxi-driver replied blushing with shame, “It’s so that evil doesn’t triumph in the world.”

‘He did me a favour,’ thought Akis, ‘I will never understand these people, not even the person I love.’

He got into the shower. Just as he had stepped out and was drying himself down, Karim, banging like a manic at the door, paid a surprise visit on him.

“Don’t lock the door when I am coming.”

“I wasn’t expecting you until the evening.”

“Why are you naked? Who are you waiting for? Some boy from the hotel?”

“I was getting ready to sleep alone. That’s why I locked the door. Today I paid a visit to your hair salon.”

“That’s impossible. At what address?”

“The one I send the letters to.”

He laughed sarcastically.

“I don’t live there.”

Then he threw himself on top of him and twisted his gold glass frames.

“Why are you covered in sweat?”



“Today I didn’t have any customers so I left the boy in charge and went to the field to play football.”

“How old is the boy?”

“Fifteen.”

“Is he good-looking?”

“He goes with women,” protested Karim.

“Yes, I know, just like you,” replied the experienced lawyer. “Fire him and hire some old, toothless man with no hair.”

“But old people don’t work.”

They started the game without even realizing. And each day they were drawn further and further into it. Three months later they were to reach rock bottom with the only way out being to climb up helter-skeleter, one standing on the other’s head and vice versa.

Tired from a life of profligate love-making to which Akis was not used, he spent the day in the room keeping an accurate account of his great love in his dairy interspersed with periods of watching the French satellite channel on television and sleeping. At one point while looking through the grille on the window he saw Rony’s clients walking along Mohammed V Avenue. It was like a parade just outside his window. Even the officer from the Graeco-Italian War who only knew how to say, ‘good day’, ‘good evening’ and ‘from behind’ in Greek was with them. One week passed. He felt like a thing imprisoned. He left the hotel almost running to get to a card phone two blocks from the hotel and the Moroccan men of all ages paraded behind him hoping that he would pay some attention to them. One evening Karim was late in returning and made the excuse that, “I customer came just as I was closing up shop. What else could I do? Turn him away? Anyhow it’s not as if I make a lot of money.”

When he refused to let Akis fuck him, Akis began getting dressed in silence.

“Where are you going?”

“I’m going to find some young boy to fuck. I’m bored in here. I’m bored of you and your coquetry.”

It was then that this strapping man, two meters tall, burst into tears and begged him, “stay. It’s very late and it’s dangerous outside. They’ll rob you, take your watch and gold glasses and might even kill you.”

Then he let Akis fuck him even though he didn't want it. It was a Pyrrhic victory that Akis, deep down, didn't want not matter how much he lusted after that body, a body which had infected him with hepatitis.

"I can't have sex with you if you don't want to do it. And it doesn't bother me about the money I give you...it's just that you make me feel like a whoremonger, a dirty old man."

"But you're not. Look I've never done it in my life before. I let you fuck me so as not to lose you. If you leave me after this I'll kill you."

From that night on their love turned into an inhuman struggle. Two animals locked in a cage, lacerating and eating at each others flesh, biting instead of kissing and raping instead of making love. A violence which even the cannibals have surpassed. Only at night in their dreams did they lie down to make love on the cool, verdant banks of a river with dense shrubbery. A black and white horse that all passers-by wanted to mount but they would let anyone mount the other apart from the other. And when they became enraged an angel descended from heaven, half black, half white, with a harp to calm them down. In their dreams their love flourished, entering a world of fairies where there are no borders, no consulates, no visas and everyone and everything, animal, plant or mineral, speaks the same language, the language of dreams, the language of poetry. In this world the black and white horse had wed and their marriage would last beyond death and for another seven hundred lives. Because it had been blessed by the stars.

The following day they were to set off by train for Rabat to go to the consulate for the visa.

Tonight Akis really wanted to phone him. He knew he was there. And he was enraged by the practical joke he had played on him with the Hotel Safi and the supposed Marco Antonioni, with whom he had a rendezvous in room three hundred and twenty five at ten o'clock on Saturday in a Marrakesh where the red light comes on and the whole world becomes a huge whorehouse.

Tonight he didn't sit mechanically dialling out the number on his mobile phone. The more of the story he wrote the less he needed to hear that magical voice in whose nets he was trapped for nearly one year now. Because his own voice, his soul's voice, which for the first time spoke out to him so clearly and prolongedly, and not just in his dreams now, charmed him more now than one hundred Sirens.

He fell asleep and that of Odysseas tied to the mast. Now he knew what the song of the Sirens was. That voice deep inside us, wild and tender, the voice of an angel and a demon, an unpleasant voice which we can't help liking.

“Good night, Karim, good night.” On the CD player **Oum Koulsoum** is screaming in desperation ‘I love you’ in Arabic, ‘**Amourik**’.

## *Chapter Eighteen*

That night he dreamt of Karim throwing swords at him from the wall of the bedroom where his photo hung with the blue colour of their love at the Jardin Majorelle. Akis stuck his chest forward so that Karim wouldn't miss a shot. At the end his chest was dense with swords like an ancient helmet crowned with feathers. He woke up in a sea of happiness.

The Marrakesh railway station hadn't changed much since the French occupation and Akis with his linen, colonial suit and white straw hat looked as if he was waiting for the director for instructions in a period movie.

"With this hat you'll draw everybody's attention on the train. I hope you won't take notes through the whole journey."

"What's that stain on your trousers?" Akis attacked him.

The night before they left the hotel to go for dinner. They paid at reception for their seven-day stay because they would check out early in the morning and Karim took the passports and put them in one of the pockets of his leather jacket. At that point Akis had second thoughts and asked him for his passport as they were walking past the doorman. Karim didn't answer. Further down, when Akis asked for it again, Karim gave him both passports and quickened his pace, angered. Akis stood in the middle of the road angered and returned to the hotel. That night Karim didn't come back until late. He was wearing the same green, well-creased trousers.

"What is it? I don't see it."

"It looks like semen."

Karim didn't say anything and Akis didn't make any more comments. But it was poisoning his thoughts. Things were really hotting up now.

They found a coupe for themselves. Karim devoured some sandwiches with sardines and anchovies he had prepared.

As they were leaving Marrakesh, they saw a desert landscape with twin palm trees. Akis looked at him and knew they would never break up. Because they had grown in the same soil. They opened their eyes and looked at each other. A few years of torpor would pass, others would enter their lives and then they would meet again. This was the trip that would allow them to really get to know each other but the time had not come

for them to live together. Their soul was unprepared and insurmountable barriers arose in the whole adventure about the visa which was now beginning.

Karim was sound asleep. Akis was looking at his fleshy, well-shaped lips and felt like he had given birth to him. And he loved him with limit. Karim could feel that and was sleeping relaxed under the warmth of the sun and his love.

A young merchant came up to the coupe and immediately started a conversation with Akis who gave him his card because he was travelling to Europe on business and had also visited Greece. Karim was listening to the conversation his eyes half closed while he was sleeping.

They reached Rabat, the city where Karim had lived as a teenager after his father had died and he stayed with his brother who was at the police academy at that time and who was now in charge of a department on the border with Algeria. The one Karim calls "father". The one he phones frequently.

They settled in the "Station" hotel, a filthy hotel for alcoholics and whores. When Akis complained that the sheets were dirty and made his foot allergy worse, Karim answered:

"A hut is more than enough for me."

Akis wanted to be romantic, but the experienced lawyer in him suggested that the Arab was trying to save money so that they wouldn't spend all the money during their honeymoon, so that he could keep some for his own bank account. Yet he had no reason to complain because these were the best three days of their relationship. They walked through the florist shops, the souqs, the park crowded with students who were studying for their exams walking among the trees. They ate some chicken that was so delicious that Karim exclaimed:

"Aujourd'hui j'ai mangé deux poulets et deux *poulia* grecs (Today I had chicken and a Greek cock).

Akis, looking through his albums piously sees Karim as careless and happy child in those photos they had taken during those days.

The Greek Embassy, however, told them to go to the Greek Consulate in Casablanca.

"I'm not going to Casablanca," he said in a childish manner. "It is the city of trade."

"You're going whether you like it or not, because it is the only place to get the visa."

At night, after having had a calm evening, Karim refused to give himself to Akis. And when Akis persisted, his eyes glowed with anger and he said as if with the voice of a stranger,

"Tomorrow at Casablanca we'll cut that little worm off. The Greek got dressed, put on his suit and hat and slept in the armchair.

However he didn't say anything about the drinks they had charged them with. In all likelihood some customers who had the drinks on the ground floor coffee shop had given their room number. He gave a dirham to the beggar woman who was standing outside. It seemed as if the same old woman followed them like fate from town to town. She was identical with the one he had seen that first night in Djemaa el-Fna, and it seemed that they had to give money to her regularly to propitiate her, just like he was giving money to that black demon that had stuck on his soul and was sucking it out of him.

"She will stand outside the hotel every day waiting for you to come out," Karim said.

The trip was uneventful and they arrived at the Casablanca station early in the morning, at the time people were leaving for work. Karim commented:

"We're the only tourists on this train."

Once again they settled in a cheap hotel which was even more miserable than the last one. On the ground floor there was a bar full of alcoholics. And it was only morning.

At first they went to the large mosque, but couldn't get inside because it was not visiting time. Suddenly a very tall, old man approached Karim as if he knew him and said something. Karim answered in Arabic and then the respectable man looked at Akis. They left in a hurry. Akis made a scene:

"You're very popular with crocks."

One night at Djemaa el-Fna, Karim who had got drunk with ouzo told him:

"Les jaunes m'appellent le Coutoubia de Marrakesh," and had shown him the phallic-shaped tower.

The consul was sitting in her dark office and hated them as soon as she saw them. It was so obvious that they were happy together, she couldn't stand it. And she swore that, as long as she was there, the young Arab would never get the visa, even if that meant abuse of power. She refused to take the young lawyer's card and was so aggressive that, when they went out, Karim said to himself:

"Greeks are crazy, wild and sexy. At the French Consulate they gave me the visa in five minutes."

He would go back three more times, each time he would fill in new papers but wouldn't get the visa. And when, after they had broken up, Akis discovered by chance that the consul's husband was a client of his and that, had he known that, he could have asked him to help as a favour, he went crazy because he realized that it wasn't meant for Karim to come to Greece and that their relationship was destined to go through this triple refusal to grant a simple tourist visa, because Greece would not acknowledge its citizens the right to put up a foreigner.

Happiness was unknown to them as it is for orphans. That afternoon they enjoyed their love until late in the evening, they made plans about the future and didn't sleep. The white knight rode his black horse for some time. And the Arab cried out:

"Only a Greek could do something like that."

And when they relaxed and looked each other deep in the eyes, Karim suggested hesitantly:

"Tonight we'll find a handsome boy and will bring him here. We'll kiss him on the cheek and we'll tell him to leave so that we can make love."

Akis agreed and added:

"When I'm old, I'll find you a very handsome boy to keep you company."

"But I'll grow old too."

'I forgot that he's older than I am', thought the lawyer. But Akis was too happy to get into such rationalizations.

They went out to play football near the park which was transformed into a wild meat market at night. The boys were attracted to Akis just like a bear to honey and Karim played absent-mindedly lost but instead of having this childish stubborn expression, he smiled benevolently. He was happy. They dined on spicy dishes at a rotisserie. Karim ate a whole chicken and Akis had meatballs dipped in his favourite piquant sauce. After dinner Karim proposed that they go for a walk in the park where the cruising took place.

"No, it's dangerous. They beat each other, they steal and then the police come."

"You seem to know more than I do. Let's have a walk then."

Karim didn't want to go back to the room. He felt like a beast trapped in the Greek's love and tonight he wanted to let it all hang loose.

"Let's go find a boy."

When Akis got angry, Karim complained like a child:

"That's not what you say when we were in bed."

They walked until exhausted. The Greek begged him to find a taxi so they could go back. Instead the Moroccan quickened his pace. At some point Akis stopped a taxi and told him to get in.

"No, you'll come with me for a drink," Karim said.

The Greek got into the taxi. He bought a bottle of pastis, went up to the miserable room without even a TV set and started drinking. Half an hour passed. One hour. An hour and a half. When the door opened and Karim walked in with an innocent look and a bottle of water, Akis was already blind drunk. He grabbed the bottle of water and threw it against the wall and it smashed. Karim was watching as if it was the only water he had in the middle of a desert. He cried like a child.

"I paid ten dirham for that bottle."

"Why are you late?"

"I had a drink and walked here and got lost and couldn't find the hotel."

The lawyer could not trust what the defendant was saying.

Karim undressed him and made love with him, even though they were both exhausted and before sleeping, as he held him in his arms, he said:

"Don't leave me too. I've been dumped by a woman and a Frenchman so far. If the Greek leaves me too, I'll break my heart, for my heart is to blame for falling in love."

Akis smelt Karim's fragrant armpit and had a dreamless sleep, because the dream was there in flesh and blood and was holding him all night long.

In the morning Karim said:

"You were snoring like a white horse."

They went to take some photos with the pigeons and the water-sellers in Casablanca Square.

But the lawyer could not rid his mind of the idea that the Arab had a close friend in town and that he had paid him a visit last night.

They took the bus to El Jadida and it was drizzling. The dream Akis had would soon turn out to be a nightmare.



## Chapter Nineteen

Akis read in the *Book of Imaginary Being* by Borges:

*“Like the barometz, the plant known as the Mandrake borders on the animal kingdom, since it gives a cry when it is torn up; this cry can drive those who hear it mad. We read in Shakespeare (Romeo and Juliet, IV, iii):*

*‘And shrieks like mandrakes’ torn out of the earth, That living mortals, hearing them, run mad. . . .’ Pythagoras called the plant anthropomorphic; the Roman agronomist Lucius Columella called it semi-human; and Albertus Magnus wrote that the Mandrake is like man himself, down to the distinction between the sexes. Earlier, Pliny had said that the white Mandrake is the male and the black the female. Also, that those who root it out first trace three circles on the ground with a sword and look westward; the smell of its leaves is so strong that ordinarily it can deprive men of the power of speech.”*

Hotel Merah was right on the coast in the sweetest town in Morocco, with the waves of the Atlantic lapping right up at its doors. Akis and Karim were given a room with a view to the sea. The rain had stopped and some street urchins were playing football on the sand. Karim had a bee in his bonnet. He opened the suitcases hurriedly and threw all the clothes out, put on his sport shorts and mauve vest given to him by Akis which made his look really sexy and before leaving asked Akis, “In Greece do boys play football on the beach?”

“No.”

“Then I will not be able to come,” he said storming out of the room.

He felt the ground had been pulled out from beneath him and that a sword had been driven deep into his heart. After the shower he put on a bathrobe and sat on the balcony. He could see Karim in the distance, a mauve dot. Hours went by. One match ended. Another began. At one point they made Karim referee because he was the oldest. One small boy kept hitting Karim as he tried to explain some things. Akis started seeing red. He went down to the beach in his swimming trunks and bathrobe far from the makeshift pitch. He spread the bathrobe on the sand and stared towards the horizon. It was evening. Suddenly three shadows startled him. Three spotty Moroccans began manhandling him, trying to take his watch and walkman. They made

indecent proposals about fucking with them there and then. He screamed for Karim but he heard nothing. He struggled hard using his nails and teeth and managed to throw them off. He had bitten his upper lip and was spitting blood. The Moroccans made off like defeated animals. They had been watching the match! He dived into the sea. The water was cold. He swam into deep water without even realizing it. Suddenly he felt a paralysis from his waist down. "Hysterical paralysis," he thought. He had been afflicted by it before. At the point or moment of danger or when death was approaching he was overcome with an indescribable feeling of peace. He let the waves throw him to and fro and ended up back on the beach near the bathrobe. He crawled along the sand with his hands. From the waist down he was dead. He stayed there watching the sunset until the sun had sunk below the horizon and was lost. Then Karim appeared.

"Can you help me get up?"

"I can't, I'm tired."

"If you don't I won't come to the room."

"Don't come then. Stay here."

"For God's sake. I'm paralyzed. I can't move."

Karim raised him up without saying anything. He wrapped the bathrobe around him and carried him up to the room and put him to bed.

"What happened?"

"Three scumbags attacked me and tried to rob me and rape me and I froze with fear."

"Why didn't you shout?"

"I shouted but you didn't hear me. You were too busy with the boys."

Karim sat opposite him in a chair and looked at him with his eyes glowing like coals. He was a child trapped in his love. And Akis felt like a disabled dirty, old man.

"Let's go to the hammam. It'll do you good."

"In a while. I can't move yet."

Karim begged him to go.

"I've never gone to a hammam. I'm ashamed."

"My baby's ashamed. Come on, baby. You'll go with your brother. And he'll give you the massage with the soles of the feet that you like so much."

Then he told him in a rough voice, "and don't you dare look around you and embarrass me."

He couldn't see anything. His gold glasses had steamed up. However, he could feel the desire of all those brown bodies for his white body making the air heavy like lead. When he came out into the ante-chamber which served as the changing room and he wiped his glasses clear, he could see that all eyes were on him, wanting him.

Karim asked him not to make love that night so that they could keep the feeling of cleanliness and open pores. They fell asleep like children in each other's arms.

In the photograph Akis took before they fell asleep, Karim was smiling, his happiness reflected in his eyes.

They stayed for three days in that magical, provincial town, still free of tourists. They played a little football with the street urchins and ate 100% fresh fish and squid dipped in a piquant red sauce in makeshift taverns by the port.

Karim spent hours bartering for a car to take them to the other seaside town, Essaouira. He chose the fattest, ugliest and shiest taxi driver although he was far from cheap. He was jealous of all the Moroccan men who approached Akis and he forbade him to speak to anyone, not even to the receptionist. If he could he would have made Akis wear a jellaba to hide his provocative body under his tight jeans, and yashmak to hide his lips deprived of pleasure and his blue-green eyes.

Akis had begun to feel suffocated.

It was late in the evening. And as the narration goes on Akis would not like to meet Karim again, although he knows that they have much more to see together in the desert, and the cities of Ouarzazate and Zagora and for Karim, the desert rose, to barter for him at a good price.

## *Chapter Twenty*

Akis woke up from the cries of the storks that had built their nests on the trees along the length of the courtyard of "Hotel Marah". When Akis saw them on their first day there, he said to Karim,

"That is exactly how we'll built our own nest."

Things were out of his hands though. Enemies, barriers and races would come between them. But the greatest obstacle was their own self.

Karim was sleeping next to him peacefully, like an eight-year-old boy.

'I burden this relationship with a perplexity that is not only unnecessary to that simple child from the desert who only wants to survive, but this very perplexity will burden our love and will drag him down to the bottom,' Akis thought.

That night he dreamt that they had a red child. Karim was planting flowers in the desert. At some point, when the sun was warming the universe, Karim needed some water for his plants. He broke the red child that was a jug and watered them.

"Wake up. It's eight o'clock."

"Let me sleep for a while more. I don't have to be at the barber's until nine."

"We're not in Marrakesh. We're in El Jadida and the taxi will be here at half past eight."

While Karim was shaving, the Greek complained.

"Yesterday you left me all day while you played football with the street urchins."

"And tonight I'll leave you again to go and plant flowers in the desert."

The answer gave Akis the chills and he didn't say anything.

The taxi driver was a good man and as soon as he realized the relation between the two men, he opened up to Akis while Karim was sleeping.

"My wife and child are in France. I studied at an acting school in Paris. I was acting in a play by Molière when I met my wife. We got married and had a girl. But we had problems and I wanted to come back here. I couldn't live away from my country. There was no chance of finding a job as an actor in Morocco, so I bought the taxi. I got married again and I'm happy. Every summer I go to France to see my daughter. But every time I need a thousand papers to get the visa.

"Do Moroccans who work abroad feel homesick?"

"Yes. Sooner or later they all come back."

Akis turned and looked at Karim. Karim opened his eyes slightly and smiled at him.

They went past some villages that all looked identical. There were police roadblocks everywhere, but they let taxis go through.

It was almost noon. They stopped at a village. Akis gave Karim some money to buy steaks and minced meat. He asked the taxi driver to join them for lunch.

None of them spoke.

Essaouira had a muddy beach and there were no vacant rooms in good hotels. After wandering around, Karim found a room in an inn for locals which didn't have a toilet or any running water.

The Greek lawyer was outraged.

"I can't stay in this room."

"What to do? There are no police here and I can play ball on the beach."

"Let's go to Safi."

"Safi is a smaller village and there are no hotels."

"Let's go to Agadir."

"It's too far. And the police are everywhere. We would have to walk separately and eat separately. We wouldn't be able to go anywhere together."

But there was another problem. The taxi driver's license didn't cover the Agadir area. The driver asked Akis to give him a pen, he wrote "Agadir" on the license and said:

"Let's go. You're like my friends."

On their way they saw a camel. Akis gave the camel driver some dirhams and Karim took photos of the strange Greek as he was kissing the camel on the mouth.

When they got into the taxi, Akis said:

"Its breath stank."

"They probably don't have running water and toothpaste," said the poet in Karim.

They also took photos of the taxi driver. In fact Karim took a photo of him as he was pissing and told him that Akis would mail it to him from Greece. But as they found out later, the taxi driver had given them a false address on purpose.

The landscape was wild and they only saw a few villages on the way. It was Berber country. From time to time they would see people, sitting on the ground, leaning against

ruined walls by the road, with their legs wide open like grasshoppers, having their siesta.

"They don't speak Arabic here," said the taxi driver. "Fortunately, my mother has taught me Berber because otherwise they wouldn't trust me and wouldn't get into the taxi."

Further down they almost fell on three villagers who were going back home from the fields.

All the way to Agadir they played a tape with songs by Oum Kouloum. The road had sharp turns and below the sea could be seen among a bare landscape with scattered rocks that reminded Akis of Mani in Messinia, Greece.

The sun had set and the lights were on in Agadir when they arrived. The town looked like a well-dressed whore and Akis was impressed.

"Today I'll pick a hotel," said Akis angered.

He told the taxi driver to go to the Sheraton.

Karim refused to get out and ask at reception whether there were any vacancies. Akis went and asked if he could use his credit card, because their stay would cost a fortune. He came back and paid the taxi driver who was astonished and greeted them as if they were crazy. They entered a luxurious room on the fourth floor with a view to the square and the blue swimming pool.

Karim laughed in the bathroom.

"Why are you laughing?"

"Because the room is too expensive and you don't have any money."

"I'll go from room to room and get the money."

(Silence)

They ate those huge sandwiches that Karim had prepared cutting a loaf in two and having put sardines and anchovies and yellow cheese in the sandwich.

"We're in an expensive hotel and dine like poor people," Akis said. Karim didn't make any comments. He just kept on eating and was happy.

When the Greek got undressed, the Arab observed:

"The spots on your legs are getting worse. It must be the cheese and sardines."

It was the allergy he had, and it was psychosomatic. He knew that soon Karim would leave him to go to the other rooms. He knew it and couldn't do anything about it, but push it back to the deepest recesses of his soul.

The sex was explosive. The mirrors on the wardrobe by the bed helped.

'Prostitution. The most perfect relationship,' Akis thought. He knew very well that it wasn't so and that his soul needed an intelligent blond boy with blue eyes and red lips as a counterbalance, a boy that would love him and ask for nothing in return, not even a telephone card to call him. Costas, that blond angel had called him the week before from Crete and told him that he couldn't come.

"Come whenever you want. I'll be waiting for you and will also have champagne on chill. But come only when you really want to, and be with me in flesh and blood and ask for nothing more than my body and soul."

But deep down he was afraid that Costas wouldn't come back. He had completed the catharsis his hurt pride needed and by that time he would probably be in somebody else's arms, giving pleasure or his professional massages or both. 'I hope he's well wherever he is.' And he wasn't at all jealous.

Next morning Karim put on a clean sports kit and took off. Akis spent the morning shopping for very expensive knick-knacks as souvenirs. He walked up and down the beach three times where children were playing ball. Karim was not there. The boys followed him and they spoke to him in Italian or Spanish or German. We refused to answer. He sat on the benches, next to American tourists and wrote in his diary like a maniac.

He went back to the room and slept. Karim returned late in the evening covered in sweat.

Akis didn't make a scene. When the Arab put on his fine white linen suit, Akis didn't ask where they were going for dinner because he knew. Akis went out. He came back in to kiss him. The Moroccan barber got upset because he had spoilt his well-groomed moustache.

He had dinner at a miserable Italian restaurant. He had his favourite dish, pasta a la bolognese and a large glass of beer.

It was late when he returned to the hotel. A short while after, Karim came and knocked on the locked door.

"Come back in a while, I'm with somebody else."

"Comme des enfants! (Just like children), said the Arab and patiently waited for Akis to open up. When he entered the room he looked everywhere but under the bed.

They had amazing sex. And Karim cried out:

"I had sex with the other one as well. But you're always clean and young and handsome and sexy."

The Greek was too happy to ask who the other man was. It could have been Guy or the customer next door. He wanted to believe that all the stuff about prostitution was just a fantasy of his and that Karim was just a devoted child, somewhat immature, who needed a dad, who wasn't particularly smart and who needed protection in order for him to survive. But that was not true and he knew it. It was their desire for each other that was driving them crazy and confused them and mixed up their roles and behaviours in an explosive blend that just a tiny spark would ignite causing a blinding explosion.

They were both sexually experienced. They had both met many women and men, but when they got undressed and their eyes reflected each other's image, they were two small children touching for the first time a body that was not theirs. The Moroccan called Akis "my little one" and the Greek called Karim "my son". Next morning Karim paid for the hotel.

"You didn't have so much money when we left Marrakesh."

"It's the money you gave me for the green suit. I bought the material, but I'll pay the tailor when the suit is ready."

It was the dark green suit he would wear to come to Greece and they had chosen the material carefully to suit him. At Rabat Akis bought shirts and ties and shoes for him. It was the same green suit that the Moroccan referred to the night he demanded over the phone that Guy come to Greece with him and stay at Akis's place. Then Akis screamed:

"Stay in Morocco forever Karim!"

"Why Akis? I'm happy with you. Aren't you happy with me? I'll wear my fine suit and come and you'll be waiting for me at the airport."

The Greek didn't say a word. Then the Moroccan said angrily at the other end of the phone line,

"Suit yourself Akis. But you'll keep calling me, begging."



He had made a fatal mistake. He was out in his calculations about the young lawyer's selfishness and love.

Before hanging up, Akis screamed,

"If you come here and have sex with another man, I'll kill you Karim."

He had already met Giuseppe and had taken him to Rony's house as the replacement for Akis saying that he had got rid of that crazy Greek because he made terrible scenes.

He found out from Paolo who had told him about it one month later. Paolo had called to find out about his own lover, Benny, who had asked him for an enormous sum to open a gallery with Rony's help who said that he would send his clients to the gallery for a commission. Akis was completely honest with Paolo and told him that he knew nothing about Benny, except a few things Karim had told him, and that Karim didn't seem to like him. For one week he would call at his former lover's house shouting "whore!" at him, his mother, his sister and brother. And when they, as Karim's accomplices, attacked him back calling him a wanker and started laughing at him, when he had to put up with the offensive declarations of his spotty brother who liked "educated wankers" as he used to say, he decided to take revenge on him. He couldn't talk with him in a civilized manner.

Karim had prepared his defence in advance,

"I can't go on with you Akis. You always asked for so many things. You were a pain in the neck. You're too complicated for me."

Then he met Mohammed-Ali from Alexandria and on a Sunday afternoon he dialled Karim's number from his mobile, put the phone on the pillow and had Morocco listen to their orgasms in Kolonaki. Karim listened to the first orgasm, in astonishment and jealousy. Mohammed, Karim's spotty brother listened to the second and when Akis shouted "Mohammed, you're the best lover I've ever had!" the stupid Moroccan, graduate of the school of biology at the university, thought he was referring to him.

Before that call Karim used to hang up on him or would say, "what do you want this time", or would tell him that he was over with boys and that in the summer he would get married and that he would send him an invitation for the wedding and that he would give Akis his first child for adoption. After that he started to speak to him again over the phone, and Akis was happy they could speak again normally because his soul could not stand the things they had said and done to each other.

On the seventeenth of September he was with Haris at Cassandra in Halkidiki. He was swimming naked in the waters off the rocky beaches and was mourning, instead of being in Morocco, at Rony's, arguing with Guy who still had the hots for Karim and had rushed to claim his rights over the Moroccan's body that he had paid a fortune for. He had even sent two postcards to the Greek from Avignon that read:

"I hope you find your peace of mind. Emotions are always difficult to control. You're young and life lies ahead of you. I hope to meet you some day and help you so that you don't suffer any more. Guy."

Beneath the superficial politeness, the Greek could see the desire of the white colonialist who was being robbed of his slave. And he didn't go to Marrakesh, to Rony's slave market to place his bid. But he did set a trap for his lover. He forced Guy to ask Karim make a deposit at the Commercial Bank of Morocco of the significant amount of fifty thousand dirhams (one and a half million drachmas) that Akis had given Karim for the tickets and the bribes for the visa, as well as for his stay in Casablanca as long as he needed to get the visa. The French hotel owner who wasn't very smart fell for it and asked Karim to give him Akis's money back and when Karim refused, Guy turned to Karim's brother, manager of the Agricultural Bank in Safi.

But the cunning Arab answered:

"I didn't steal the money. He gave it to me."

"So that you could go to Greece, not to come to Avignon, after having called a thousand times asking me to invite you. Give me back the six hundred thousand I gave you when you turned to me whining that you didn't have money for the tickets to Greece and that you would lose the love of your life that happened to be the same age as you."

"But Akis is a gentleman. He didn't ask for his money back. You're not."

Then the Frenchman became furious and told him that he knew everything about Giuseppe and that he gave his address and phone number to all the old men who had gone to the French Consulate of Marrakesh to celebrate Bastille Day on the fourteenth of July.

Then the witty Moroccan who always had an answer up his sleeve, said,

"Go away and don't call me any more. As soon as you found out that I was with a young and handsome Greek you hurried here just after he had left in May and you gave

me money and invited me for a drink by the pool at your friend's villa so that you could come between us."

They had this conversation in front of the entire family over Sunday lunch where they had the delicious couscous that his younger sister had prepared. The Frenchman left Marrakesh feeling older and more ill and when Akis called him from Halkidiki to see if he had beaten his opponent, he almost hung up on him saying,

"Don't see him again. He's crazy. And don't go to Morocco again."

Then he kindly refused the Greek's invitation to put him up in Athens and made it clear that it would be better if he never called him again.

Karim was very angry when Akis called.

"Don't call me again. You drove Guy away from me."

Rony had sent Guy after them to take revenge on Karim for having taken the best client from the house and to take revenge on Akis who had stolen the best whore.

So he told Guy over the phone,

"Karim is having a relationship with a Greek hunk and will go to live in Greece."

And Guy, who had paid a fortune for three years of the Arab's supposed loyalty, wanted revenge and to sleep with the handsome Greek if he could, because he was fed up with the Moroccan and besides, he hadn't called him for over a year after he had dumped him.

Akis swam naked for hours and sunbathed on the steep rocks under the mastic trees that stank:

*Now I'm in the wrong place  
and the wrong time  
I move to the wrong beat  
trapped in the prison of my life  
unable to bathe in the light of the  
red moon*

*Now I cry, helpless,  
for the hounds have  
gnawed our diamond*

*and the jewel of our love  
has faded in the hoarfrost  
from another man's covetous breath*

And further down:

*Even worse than  
frenetic mice  
unicorns desiring a  
return to the much-caressed womb  
hounds biting at each others  
throats  
hyenas disinterring their young  
shrill and lecherous  
sounds echoed in the dusky evening  
while the carcass of our love  
floated by on a boat  
devoid of flowers*

Three months of mourning had passed. The family sent Karim to a provincial town to work as the servant and baby-sitter at the mayor's house.

Karim who was fed up with that situation called Akis and begged him to start licking up to the Consul to get the visa. Then Akis played that practical joke on Karim with Giuseppe's supposed Italian friend, Marco Antonioni, who was supposed to be waiting for Karim at the same hotel where he had entered from the entrance by the pool and had fucked Giuseppe.

But we are still at the end of their honeymoon in the amazing month of April. Karim paid for the stay at the Sheraton and came out proud without Akis asking him where he had got the money from.

They took the bus because they didn't have any money. They passed through villages that didn't even have water and looked neolithic. Akis shuddered when he imagined life

at the side of his beloved, dressed in women's clothes, waiting the entire day for him to come back. He had this wierd feeling that he had lived several lives in those villages.

Karim was absent-minded throughout the journey. He was thinking of his home and the barber's shop he had left with his replacement and of his mother who would make comments on his life as a whore. At the station he begged Akis with his childish glance,

"Take me with you. In the suitcase. Two men cannot live together in this country. I should get a European nationality. I only want to return every three years to see my mother. I don't care about my brothers and sisters."

'Perfect!' Akis thought. 'We're two children clinging on each other trying to escape from their horrible reality and live in a dream, in a paradise that doesn't exist. He wants to live in the European Athens of nineteen ninety five with all that pollution and misery, and I want to live in a Neolithic village with no water, wearing a yashmak for the rest of my life!'

That sudden realization of the dead-end struck him like lightning. And from that moment, his instinct for self-preservation would slowly but steadily undermine their love until he would see it burning before his eyes, Akis burning with it as well.

They had dinner at the Hotel Hasna restaurant and Karim told Akis to sit in a chair that faced the entrance so that he couldn't respond to the provocative glances of the dark-skinned waiters.

"I've found a treasure and I don't want to lose it."

That was the most blunt and cynical demand for ownership that Akis had ever heard. The amazing thing was that his desire interpreted that financial demand as proof of loyalty!

When they went up to the room, Karim was on edge and didn't want to have sex. He was anxious to go back to his mother, his shop and to someone he had probably abandoned a long time before.

Akis got into bed, writhed for some time from his unfulfilled sexual desire and in the end drank half a bottle of pastis to fall asleep.

When he awoke the sun had set. Karim had brought his large, blue towel with his name on it to give him a haircut. Akis felt like a baby and abandoned himself to Karim's skilful hands.

"My brother is a barber," chirped Akis in a childish voice.

Karim didn't speak. At some point he said,

"I'll cut your hair short so that no other barber touches this little head."

It was the second time he had given him a haircut. It was better than the first one. He would give him one more haircut in July. It would be the best haircut of his life and then he would have to go to that old barber who had been giving him haircuts ever since he was a child, a nice, good-hearted faggot who kept laughing all the time or he would have to look for another barber, probably in Jordan.

"How much do I owe you?" Akis asked.

"Just your body."

"I'll give it to you tonight."

He had made up his mind to take revenge on him for his refusal in the afternoon. Two more days and their honeymoon would be over. The countdown had started.

They had dinner with the petit electrician who kept Karim's mail. He had very smart eyes with a frightened look in them, but he was afraid of his client and hesitated to talk about Karim's past when the lawyer questioned him in English so that his Arab lover wouldn't understand.

They ate at a good restaurant with a fountain and a statue that resembled Hermes by Praxiteles.

Karim said gracefully,

"Someone has sent me a postcard from Greece with a similar statue."

Akis thanked the electrician for the great letters and promised to send with Karim a watch that they would buy the following day, but which Karim would never give to the electrician because he had decided that their correspondence should stop.

On their way back to the hotel, he told him to go ahead because he wanted to make a phone call. But he was very late in coming back. So Akis returned to see what had happened. Karim wasn't in the booth. After a while he saw him coming out of the park where Akis could distinguish the figures of other people. There was a man wearing jogging bottoms, his phallus protruding tall and proud like a cypress. It was the same park Akis had gone into on that first night a while before he met Karim.

The Arab had a semen stain on the back of his black trousers, just like the last time before leaving for Rabat.

The Greek didn't want to have sex that night.

"Why? You were fine in the evening when I cut your hair. Suit yourself. We'll still be friends. And he turned his back, didn't sleep immediately and when he eventually managed to sleep, it was a troubled sleep. In the morning they would go to the Ourika valley.

## *Chapter Twenty One*

*If we could turn back time  
To the moment just before the last breath  
Before it is too late  
Just before the body is thrown  
on the heap of corpses  
in search of our own  
just after  
everything has been said and done  
all that is left  
is to reap the salty taste  
from that quenchless corner  
of your body.*

Karim awoke and let the white rider gallop on his naked back without a saddle. Then he put on his trainers to climb up to where the waterfall starts.

They arrived by taxi, an old Mercedes, after Karim had spent ages bartering with the driver for a reduction. They reached a small, muddy road surrounded by tourist shops and taverns. The torrent was raging and from time to time would burst its banks, muddying the road. They climbed on the small stone wall and walked along it. Three months later local youths would be huddled together at that point supposedly touching the tourists at random with their naked, muscular chests and their swollen packages in their trousers.

They were equipped with the necessary sandwiches with sardines, cheese and anchovies and bottled water. Akis carried the lot. Karim held only the camera, well-protected in its case so that it didn't get splashed by the raging river.

At the foot of an impressive mountain, they met one or two groups with native guides. They were trying to ascend the mountain. Most would quit half way up because you had to pass through a narrow and precipitous gorge and at many points you had sink your legs into freezing cold water right up to the knee.



Akis asked his lover that they sit a little to rest at the foot of a tree.

“Stay here. I won’t be long.”

Akis saw him climb up the mountainside like a wild goat and in the blink of an eye he was gone from sight. The Greek took out his notebook.

‘He’s a wild animal,’ he thought, ‘which cannot stand being caged in. You’ll pay for it, Karim.’

He got undressed and put on a tanga bathing suit leaving his abundant chest naked. He took his rucksack and slowly began the ascent. He met one or two German groups on their way down. The Moroccan guides made some remarks about his chest.

He stopped by a rock to rest. In the distance he could see Karim descending hastily. Taking off the bathing suit, he pretended to be writing. Karim passed by him smiling and Akis simply said, ‘Hello’. He also left him the camera.

In a while Akis saw Karim spying from behind a tree a little further down. A group of French people were making their way up.

‘The Moroccan guide is gorgeous. I’ll ask him to take a photo of me,’ thought Akis. He climbed onto a rock and struck the most whore-like pose he could and the young, black-eyed Berber fell for it immediately. He left the dumbfounded group and started photographing Akis making saucy comments. His enjoyment though did not last for long because Karim came, jumped onto the rock like a black demon and threw Akis into the water, having caught the camera in mid air so as not to get it wet. The young guide ran off and the group did not utter a word. They just stood a little further up looking at the scene.

“Now you’ll pose for me.”

The shoot lasted one hour and would tempt even the most devout cleric. Then the Arab got into the water and gave Akis a passionate kiss and would have gone further. But.

“Be careful. There are police around,” said the lawyer.

“Like I give a damn!”

“The police are just like your French. You remember about them whenever it’s in your interest.”

Then he started hitting out at him. The Greek stared him in the eyes and sent back the same powerful feelings. Then the kicks started. They descended the hill helter-

skelter. At one point Karim tore his swimming trunks in a tuft of plants and kissed Akis's genitals rabidly saying, "this is mine, and this and this...". Then he bit Akis hard all over his body and wrote his name with a pen everywhere. Karim on the chest. Karim on the navel. Karim around the pubic hairs, Karim on the backside. Karim in the armpit. Karim on the spine...

Then the Greek started shouting, "I'm yours Karim. For ever. Do whatever you want to me. And if someone else takes my body I'll pierce him with a pointed sword."

They got dressed and walked back a large part of the way. They passed through a village and Karim had his hand around Akis's throat and from time to time slapped him. The children of the village followed them and a little girl asked for a pen. Akis gave her his. Women were washing their clothes in the river and hanging them to dry in the trees. In a field, red and green from the multitude of poppies, Karim picked one and offered it to Akis. Then he made him pose like Saint Sebastian. However, they spent a long time taking photos and Karim, the black demon, became impatient. As they were walking downhill, Karim said, "When my mother dies, my brother will throw me out of the house. Send me money to buy one."

"You are unbelievable at bartering," said the lawyer half-joking.

And the Arab laughed like a child caught in the act of stealing a sweet from the cupboard.

They went back to the hotel and washed. They got dressed. Akis had to go to Rony for the last time to pay the rest of the money he owed and to return the key he had found in Karim's pocket.

"I'll never go back to that house again," said the Arab.

They took a taxi together and Karim explained to the taxi driver, a fanatical Muslim, where to go. He would wait and take him back to the roof of the sinful café Renaissance. Once Akis was out of the car the taxi driver began making many indiscreet questions about what work Karim's lover did, where he was staying, what he was going to do in that house of ill-repute so well-known throughout all of Marrakesh, if he had children and so on.

The villa was in darkness and no-one answered the bell. He was forced to open up using the key. Rony was alone with his mother and Adbul, unshaven with red eyes

from the booze and the pot was not boiling in the kitchen. The police had burst in that afternoon on the pretext of some row and had escorted everyone to the police station.

“And my friend Paolo?” asked Akis.

“No, thankfully. He had gone on a trip with Benny. Where’s Karim?”

“At the barber’s shop, I think.”

“When will he be coming again?”

“I don’t know. We split up.” That was what Karim had asked him to say.

“There was no need to bring me the money. You could have done it next time you came to Morocco.”

Rony escorted him to the outer door perhaps doubting whether he would ever see him again.

The taxi driver started the inquisition again, but the lawyer drew on a long cigar and answered none of the questions.

From the roof they could see all of Marrakesh, that whore putting on her pieces of jewellery one by one to go out and once Karim learned the particulars he said, “ Poor Rony. Serves him right for talking badly about me. And I thought of him as a father figure.”

Akis said nothing. It was the last evening of an enchanting honeymoon and he didn’t want to spoil it for any reason. They ate at a good Italian restaurant with a fountain and statue and when they got back to the room Karim knelt down, took off Akis’s socks and shoes and kissed his feet saying, “Please don’t ever abandon me.”

His eyes were gleaming like crazy.

While they were making love he remembered his professional calling and asked for money to buy meat for his family for the celebrations they would have in a few days time. The sum was enormous. Akis stopped, took out his cheque book, signed a cheque for twice the amount Karim had asked for and threw his arms around his lover again who was ecstatic.

In the morning as Akis was waiting for a taxi he chatted with the young boy in reception while Karim who was having his breakfast, the juice of many oranges just as always, like someone who suffers due to his liver, was looking at them clearly dissatisfied with the whole situation. He did not help load the suitcases into the taxi because just then two policemen were passing by.

At the airport he didn't pay any bribes for the two wooden carved windows he had bought.

Karim said, "Send ordinary letters not registered post so I don't have to wait for hours in the queues at the post office. I won't write to you at all. The telephone is enough. Once a week. Don't phone all the time. I have a problem with my family. It's not normal for a Moroccan man to be married to a European. After the festivities I'll go with my brother to Safi for 15 days. Don't send photographs. I'll see them when I come to Greece."

When they finally split up Akis would send him a photograph of himself naked – so he could remember what he had lost – with his face smiling from that time he soaked in the valley of Ourika the previous July.

The kissed each other on the cheek and Akis was the last to go through luggage control, not wanting to go at all, tears in his eyes.

A sly Berber policeman asked him if he had anything to declare and the lawyer replied with such indifference that they let him go through without even opening his hand luggage.

## *Chapter Twenty Two*

So he returned to Greece and started working like crazy so that his soul would not accuse him of letting the Arab destroy his career. Whenever he thought of Karim making out with the hunks at the beach at Safi he turned green with envy. He became the consultant of a large company on the stock exchange, as if the clients he already had were not enough. And in the afternoon, instead of taking his usual nap, he worked out with the springs. The chairman of the board of directors of the company he worked for was the husband of the consul who had hated him. He never asked him what his wife's profession was or why she was never present when they had dinner together. It was as if that visa was never destined to be issued. He went insane thinking of him going on the streets of Casablanca, to the park where all carriers of AIDS went to sentence strangers to death. He even worked at nights. He was going insane and did not eat a thing. And he even worked out at night watching detective movies on video. And he pictured him sleeping with syphilitic whores and squeezing their breasts until they bleed...

Sometime he came back from Safi and it was as if ages had passed. He asked him whether he had received the thousand marks he had sent by registered mail.

"Not yet."

"Don't worry. If it gets lost. I'll send you more."

The next day he had the manager of the post office look. Karim had received the registered letter on the day before at the Marrakesh post office. He asked him again. He said the money was not there yet. The money was for the visa. Then he sent another thousand marks by registered mail. As he came out of the post office at Syntagma Square, a drug user wanted him to buy stolen watches. He bought them all at a relatively high price. A few metres further on he gave five thousand drachmas to a tourist who had lost his passport and wallet and was raising money to get back home. He worked more and more with each passing day and he lost weight and became more handsome day by day and he called Karim three times a day so that he could hear his voice and have the strength to go on working. Alexandra warned him that he was losing control of the game, because she had gone through the same situation with Ali from Algeria and they had broken up a thousand times in eight years. And he still cheats on

her and has her under his thumb. Alexandra seems to have lost it and dreams about swords and knives. But it seems that we do not learn from other people's experience. He started calling more often asking whether he had received the money when he knew he had. And started showing photos of him to everybody he knew, asking if they knew him. He even started asking his clients. And in this confusion, he fucked one of them, even though it was his principle not to open up to clients, but Alexander had had an eye on him for years. However, he could not stand the sexual fury of the lawyer and ran away. The only reason he still worked with him was because he was good at his job and charged less.

Suddenly he lost track of Karim for one week. The family that was part of the game and lived on the Greek's money, just as was the case with Guy's francs, covered up for him. He started calling fifteen times a day and losing control. Either his brother or his sister who spoke French would answer the phone. His mother used to answer with a curt 'yes' and sometimes different voices speaking entire sentences in Arabic were heard on the phone making him regret not having learnt the language. Once when Karim's brother told him that Karim had not slept at home and hadn't come back, he said, "Please tell him to call Akis, the Greek, because he cannot sleep."

And then Karim appeared again and they started afresh. So he went to Casablanca for the visa on his own. And the consul refused to issue it. Then Akis prepared to go.

One night he called him from the Corinth isthmus to make the announcement:

"I'm coming on Thursday."

"No!" Karim screamed. "Why?"

"To help you get the visa."

"Don't come."

"That's not possible. I have already paid for the ticket."

"Bring lots of money, Akis," Karim said in a low voice.

"I will Karim. I'll bring lots of money. Just don't say it in such a cheap way."

"Come and don't bring anything. Just you. Your body and your soul."

He packed, filled his baggage with presents and banknotes reciting verses from the poet Nikos Kavadias. "You long for gold, take, search, count. I want to stay motionless for years by your side. Until you become fate, death and rock."

The temperature at Marrakesh airport was over forty five degrees and he was melting in his linen suit. Karim came in a friend's van, unshaven and wearing flip-flops. That is how they entered Hotel Hasna.

He gave him the presents.

"I don't need them to make love with you."

He gave him a drink.

"I don't need to drink to make love with you."

And when he was naked, the Arab was ashamed and could not hide the mycosis all over his chest and under his armpits.

They made love in silence. Karim wrote his name on the Greek's body.

Then the lawyer asked:

"Well? What's up?"

"Guy is back."

(Silence)

"So, what do you want Akis?"

"Nothing. Just you. But I'm going to kill that dirty Frog who heard that you are with a young and handsome Greek man and came to get a share. He came to buy you and you were impressed by the his lesbian friend's villa with swimming pool."

He rubbed him with a cream he had brought from Greece for mycosis. The next day he would buy one with the same composition from the pharmacy and Karim would state:

"It is not as effective as the Greek one."

He gave him one of the watches he had bought from the drug user, the silver one. It shined on his dark-skinned hand and he showed off during supper. But when it was time to go to bed, Karim slept on the floor. From that point on everything happened very quickly. Because destruction hits you like an avalanche. Akis mounted him all night without waking him up, as if it was his last chance to enjoy him before others got between them and tried to separate them. And he drank too much, thus accelerating the dive in the deep well which once was the still pond of their love.

## *Chapter Twenty Three*

At night he dreamt that they were twin mandrakes in the desert. Karim black, Akis white. They were lying huddled together perfectly in each others arms, staying cool during the long hot days of the heatwave, keeping warm with the other's breath, hugging each other on those cold, tropical nights. The sand did not stick to their leaves but the water found refuge among their roots. They were the happiest plants in the desert. Until one day when the hand of some demon snatched them and threw one to Greece and the other to Morocco. Their screams drove all those who heard them insane. The pain was unbearable. Twelve centuries of searching have passed since then. And finally, they found each other and took root again in the first, dusty footpath in Djemaa el-Fna, there where the opportunity first presented itself. The soil was fine, though, and the street cleaners uprooted them. This time the pain was measured because they had not managed to embrace yet. And then they dreamt of putting down roots in Greece. And then came a consul, a bird of prey, ripping their eyes out until, so full of rage, they hurled themselves at each other like frenetic mice. They dreamed of living in Africa. However, the Berbers would not leave them in peace not even for one night with their shrill songs and their barking and their refrains which were always something like:

“Rob him – Rob the white pig.”

And when they retreated to rest, the throng of white men came screaming hysterically and wearing suspenders, sex aids and carrying whips from sadomasochist clubs and their refrain was:

“Rape him, abuse him, make him your slave, the dirty Arab.”

He woke up drenched in sweat.

They went out to go to the bank. Karim had asked him for one million centimes which he had borrowed from his brother, the banker, for his trip to Greece. Akis gave him the money. He also gave him a thousand Marks to have with him as foreign currency at the Hellenikon airport. He also gave him his money so that Karim could pay.



When they came out of the bank he asked Karim for some money to take a taxi back to the hotel because the Arab would go to his barber's shop. He gave him 10 dirhams.

"It's not enough."

"It's more than enough. You'll have change left over."

Akis went back to the hotel on foot. It was forty degrees Celsius outside. The thermometer was constantly rising. He drank some ouzo without having eaten and fell asleep. His lover who was wearing the towel with his name on it, awoke him in the evening and he spent two hours in the bathroom cutting Akis's hair; the two of them not talking to each other. It was the best haircut he had ever had in his life, the best haircut his hair so maltreated by shampoo, car fumes and anxiety had ever had.

"How much?"

"It depends. If it's the best haircut you've ever had then it's expensive."

Akis didn't hesitate a bit in paying for such a haircut. He lived an entire lifetime in 10 days.

He was afloat on a sea of happiness both when Karim was there and when he was absent. There were times too when he wrote his name on his lover's white body so as not to lose him and other times when he felt so suffocated and that he wanted to go out and run around for the whole night.

In the evening they went out shopping. Karim told him to wait on the roof of the coffee shop which had a dominant view over the square.

A young Italian with thick glasses for hypermetropia was sitting next to him. A little farther on was a Japanese man constantly snapping at things with a phallic-like lense. In the square below tourists were coming and going. A Berber was entertaining little children, his head bouncing up and down as if dancing and on his head he wore a multi-coloured cap with huge tassels. Snake charmers, sleight of hand artists and prostitutes with egg yolk yellow jellabas were to be seen. The Italian turned to him and said, "Your friend is waving to you."

He bent his head and looked. Karim, heads above the others in the crowd, was greeting him like an emperor from his throne, a gladiator in the arena with all species of wild beasts.

Three hours had passed in one minute among the torpor of the heatwave, the monotonous sounds of the Berber instruments and the stench of the rotisseries. Sacrifices to the unknown god of profit.

Karim sat opposite him on the rooftop of the coffee shop between Djemaa el-Fna and Akis. The Koutoubia was hanging like an earring from his left ear. They stayed there until it turned dark. Then without saying a word they hugged and headed down Mohammed V Avenue, westwards, for the hotel which sheltered their love. Even mandrakes which have been uprooted for years drive passers-by insane with their smell. And treat those who have not yet fully lost their way in life.

## *Chapter Twenty Four*

The paper on which Akis was writing was dark blue like the sea at **El-Jadida** where they would spend a week. A taxi brought them early in the day to Hotel Marah from Marrakesh. Karim slept on the way. The receptionist, a lanky woman, that the Greek thought he had seen in every hotel reception in Morocco, told Akis that the room with a view to the sea would be vacant after one o'clock. It was a quarter past eleven. They left their baggage by reception and an effeminate, myopic Arab with thick glasses promised he would look after them.

"Are you a lawyer? I'm very glad to meet you. Welcome to our hotel."

Akis gave him a generous tip. They put on their swim suits in the lockers around the pool as it was seen from the façade. Karim was terrified to see Akis wearing his tanga swim suit and his thin, but well-shaped body after his having worked out for the last three months.

He suggested that he swam with his shorts, but Akis refused.

Two groups of scouts had camped on the beach. At least that was what Akis thought, but Karim explained that it was a camp for the children of civil servants. An entire parade of boys walked on that beach every time Akis passed, with his camera hanging around his neck. Karim followed feeling somewhat awkward. He told him to stay somewhere where he could see him and started playing football. Using his lover as an excuse he also took photos of the other boys that were unwinding playing football. He also took photos of some muscular lifeguards who passed in front of him wearing provocative red swim suits and red hats.

During a break, he told Karim who had come to drink some water:

"To me you are the most handsome boy on the beach."

"I can't say the same for you."

The idea to taking revenge for the offense crossed Akis's mind. He went for a swim angered and asked the Arab to take photos of him. He posed provocatively, making passers-by feel awkward. And when he swam away from the crowd in the sea, the lifeguards rushed, almost tripping over each other, to his rescue.

"But I'm not drowning," Akis said.

"You're not allowed to swim in deep water."

When he came out of the sea leaning on the lifeguards who kept finding pretexts to paw him, Karim said:

"My white horse can swim deeper than anybody else. I'm proud."

And the Greek was proud of his black horse that played ball like a bull.

He opened the book of poems by Tahar Ben Jehloun that Karim had bought from a bench with old books or torn pieces of books. Sometimes you could also find half-burnt cards and excerpts of letters in all the known languages, unknown to multilingual Akis.

The name of the book was "*Les amandiers sont morts de leurs blessures*". He opened the book on the page with a poem about the love of a Moroccan woman which ended in marriage. Sometimes her husband woke her in the night and quickly ejaculated on her thighs and immediately fell asleep again. 'Unbearable', Akis thought. The poem closed with the phrase: "L'amour, cette solitude" (Love, that solitude).

He looked around. A muscular boy wearing a chain around his neck, with something to do with parachutists hanging from the chain was staring at him. Two young boys asked if they could lay their towel next to him. After a while they asked:

"Sir, can we sit closer?"

"No."

"Can we have sex with you?"

"No."

He looked at them in surprise. They couldn't have been over fourteen.

"Would you like us to invite you over our house to have some couscous?"

At that point Karim came to drink some water.

"What are they saying to you?" he asked looking at them angrily.

"They want me to go to their house as a guest of honour and eat couscous and meet their family."

"Moroccans are crazy," Karim said laughing and went back to play football.

Further down there were two Frenchmen around seventy five who were flicking through some art books and their dark-skinned boys were carelessly reading French magazines and were fondling each other. Some women who were dressed up to the neck sitting next to them under a cream-coloured parasol were watching indifferently, as if they had seen this a thousand times and now it made no impression on them.

Then Abdelkarim came - another Karim- and bent over to read the cover of the book. He was thin and dressed in white. He was twenty-five, a chemistry graduate, a professional whore. Akis told him he was Italian. Karim had told him not to say he was Greek, so Akis talked with him in Italian. He knew of the book and he automatically translated some poems for him with an ease that impressed the Greek lawyer.

Karim, his own Karim, came again for water without saying a word.

"Is your friend Moroccan?" Abdelkarim asked.

"No, he's Egyptian."

"Has he visited your home in Rome?"

"Several times."

Then the parachutist came closer to listen. He stood up to go for a walk. It was high noon, the beach was crowded and they couldn't walk without being stared at.

The parachutist was watching.

"When will we meet again?"

"Today at six. When the sun sets."

He went back, took his things and told Karim who was waiting for a new match to begin:

"Let's go. The room must be ready by now."

"I'll play one more match."

"I'll wait for you at the hotel. Ask the receptionist for the room number."

They had already left their passports at the reception. The effeminate Arab helped Akis with the suitcases and wouldn't leave the room, not even after Akis was forced to give him a generous tip. Finally he gave him his card and promised to write, after having given the notebook where Akis wrote the poems so that the persistent Arab could put down his address.

He drank almost half the bottle of ouzo he had brought from Greece.

He was still in the shower when Karim knocked at the door furious.

"Why did you lock?"

"Just in case somebody came to rob me while in the shower."

"Europeans are always afraid of being robbed. I refuse to stay in this hotel."

"Suit yourself. Why?"

"Because the receptionists wouldn't tell me the room you're in. They said I was dirty."

"But you are," Akis said without looking at him.

"Who, me?"

Then he went out on the terrace to eat the fruit they had bought on their way from El-Jadida.

When Karim came out of the shower, Akis tried to kiss him.

"I'm not having sex with you again. Your breath smells of ouzo. And I'm not letting you mount me again. I've never done this thing before."

Akis saw red. He slapped his lover extremely violently. He was surprised by what he had done, but the Arab was staggered. His black eyes glowed with hatred.

"Nobody has ever done that to me. Not even my own mother. I don't want to be married to an alcoholic."

"And I don't want to be with somebody who lies all the time. You've been passive in bed with me a thousand times. And you will be as long as you're with me. Because you like it. Because you're gay just like me."

The Arab guffawed.

"But I sleep with women."

"A quelle heure?" the Greek guffawed in turn.

Karim pulled Akis by the arm out on the terrace and showed him the crowd on the beach. They looked like ants on a golden plain at harvest time.

"Do you see all those people? I can have sex with all of them. It's you I love. But why do you keep asking me to be the woman?"

"Because I'm in love with you. And it's the first time in my life that I have fallen in love with a man. And I can throw alcohol away. I prefer your kiss."

The bottle hit the iron door which led to the beach, but didn't break. The lid just came off and the ouzo was pouring out slowly.

The guard who always stood by the door to prevent annoying people coming into the hotel was looking at them stunned.

"The customer is always right," Akis shouted from above.

Karim rushed down before any more than a few drops had managed to spill out. He lifted the bottle in the air and greeted him as if he was saluting him with his sword.

He went up to the room and they drank together and laughed and made love as if nothing had happened.

When Akis awoke Karim wasn't there. It was late in the evening and the sea had covered part of the beach with a thin layer of water which reflected the sky.

He got dressed and went downstairs taking his camera with him. The twilight made the photos he took against the sunset look almost black and white. Karim was still playing football with the street urchins. Abdelkarim was also there. He took photos of the Greek on this liquid mirror, the clouds like a crown around his blond hair. When he developed the photos in Greece, he looked like he was wearing his swim suit in a snowy landscape. And the low rocks with the algae in the middle of the sea looked like the grass under the snow that melt under the hooves of the horses.

Karim interrupted their tête-à-tête shoot.

"Let's go. It's getting cold."

"When we're together the temperature is always perfect to me, my love."

"Don't call me that in the middle of the street. And don't talk with all the boys on the beach. However I'm glad that you're not afraid to walk around on your own. You're old enough and I don't need to look after you."

They ate at a tavern by the harbour. They had fish and squid dipped in a piquant red sauce. They went to an open-air, roughly built disco by the hotel where they watched the show. Akis felt dizzy at the sight of all those handsome boys. When Karim went to make a phone call home to ask how his employee had done with the barber's shop, many of those boys grabbed the chance to touch Akis, pretending to walk very close to him as if they weren't interested in him at all. Young whores were there dressed in red or yellow, bargaining their prices with the boys.

Karim came back and took him away from this snake pit. The storks had perched in their nests and they went back to the room where they had the most violent sex to date in their relationship. And they hadn't had not even a sip of ouzo.

In the morning they were woken up from the hollow sound of the sea. Karim was sleeping on the floor, by the French doors with the sheets wrapped round him. Akis crept under the sheets and made love to his Arab lover. Then he fell sound asleep. 'God, may this happiness never end!'

It was almost noon when he woke up. From the balcony he saw Karim playing football with young children, so young that with every move he made, Akis was afraid that this tall man with the fierce face and bushy moustache would crush them like nuts between his legs.

He sauntered out without his camera, but took the poems of Tahar Ben Jehloun with him.

Abdelkarim was waiting for him at the same place, and so was the parachutist. They spent two hours reading poems, especially "The whores of Tetouan" that Akis liked so much. And Abdelkarim was translating for him into Italian. They arranged a rendezvous for five o'clock at the eastern end of the beach, just before the exhausted Karim interrupted them. His rival left in a hurry, after putting down his address on the notebook where the Greek wrote poems. And Akis promised that in the evening he would give him a card with his own address, a promise he had no intention of keeping.

They had run out of water. Karim lay on the wall by the road.

"Go to town and get some water."

"They sell water at the kiosk further down."

"Here they have Sidi Harazem and I want Sidi Ali. Do you have bottled water in Greece?"

"No."

"Then I can't come."

The Greek lawyer asked his lover to give him a banknote because the Arab had all the money and took the road to the town under the burning sun. The next kiosk was more than two kilometres away. He felt humiliated. He wanted to take revenge on the man he loved more than anything in the world. The parachutist was following him. If he had been in Greece on an island, he would have fucked him right there in the middle of the street. Just like dogs. But when the Arab tried to start a conversation, he kindly pushed him off. And he put his tail between his legs and left. 'He's not as dangerous as I thought', Akis thought.

He came back exhausted. Karim drank without saying thanks and scolded him for falling for it again because he had paid too much for the Sidi Ali.

"Let's go to eat something," Akis said.

"I'm staying here," Karim replied. His eyes had a dark glow in them.



After the Greek had asked him a thousand times, he finally followed him to their usual hangout at the harbour.

"Let's get a taxi," the Arab said.

"No, we'll walk there and we'll walk again back to the hotel," said the lawyer obstinately.

As they were walking back, after having eaten squid and fish, at some point Karim lay on the wall at the edge of the road and neither moved nor spoke. Akis went back to the hotel and slept after having drunk lots of ouzo. It was four o'clock when he awoke and Karim was not there. He had a shower, wore his tight jeans and his red cotton T-shirt, took fifty dirham from the briefcase that Karim had given him as a present and went out. He walked for ages without seeing either of them. And after he had walked for three kilometres, suddenly Abdelkarim appeared like a vision.

"As a teenager I fell in love with a girl. But she betrayed me. She was sleeping with others as well. Now I want a handsome boy like you to marry me and for us to remain faithful to each other. And some day he could put me up at his house in Rome."

'They all say the same', Akis thought. 'But it doesn't matter because this shows their mentality, going beyond the surface, beyond the misery of routine and the need for survival'.

"I have six brothers and sisters. I've taken exams to get into the police. Three thousand applications for one hundred positions."

"Will you finish your studies?"

"If I manage. But then unemployment among chemists is high."

"Do you often talk with tourists in the same way you talk with me?"

"No. Anyway, you have to respect what other people want. There are women and children listening. I live here. The town is small. I must not expose myself."

They were far away from the populated area. No alarm bells rang in the lawyer's mind.

'He's as harmless as a lamb', he thought. 'He should be afraid of me'. He looked around. The landscape resembled the surface of the moon. In all likelihood there was someone resting beyond those small rocks, either a local or even the police. There was no place for them to hide. Then Abdelkarim suggested that they sat on the sand in the middle of a vast beach, away from the rocks and the road. Akis pulled his T-shirt up to

his chest and opened the zipper. Karim pulled his white shorts down to his knees. They masturbated caressing each other's body.

'Like twelve year-old children', Akis thought.

"So much milk," the Arab commented on the Greek's performance.

"Tomorrow a mandrake will grow here," he said. "And it will have deep roots and will listen to the sounds of the sea. And whoever tries to uproot it, will die. And whoever hears the weeping of the sad mandrake, will go mad from sorrow. And whoever hears its laughter will be terrified."

"Come back soon. I like your body and you speak like a book. You'll rent an apartment on the beach and I'll be with you all day. I can have sex more than five times a day."

'My sweet Abdelkarim', Akis thought with infinite tenderness.

They had a coke at a bar on the way. It was dark already. Akis showed him with a gesture that he could keep the change. He thanked him kindly looking him deep in the eyes.

Akis left without looking at him. He wanted to end their acquaintance there and then before falling into the abyss he had already fallen into with the other Arab.

Karim, his Karim, was standing in the room with his clothes on and had left the door ajar. Akis thought he must have been standing there for some time. They didn't say anything until Akis had a shower; they got dressed and went out for a walk. They sat on a bench. The expression on Karim's face was like that of an old man; wrinkles appeared on his face and he said, looking towards the sea:

"Travel, live. The world is full of people."

"But I want you..."

(Silence)

"You come to a country as a tourist, you meet a man and fall in love with him. You leave. Twenty years pass and you return. At some point you'll meet again, that much is certain."

His voice sounded deep and he spoke like the witch doctor of a primitive tribe in the desert.

"Whom are you referring to? Me or Guy?"

From that moment he refused to look at him or talk to him.

'Berber obstinacy', Akis thought.

When an old man sat next to them and started chatting about Islam in Arabic, the Greek took off angered.

An hour had passed. He had played and lost a game at the fair. They were still talking.

After a while Karim asked:

"Why don't we go to eat something?"

The Greek didn't answer but followed him. He went inside a good restaurant. The lawyer stood outside the door, crossed his arms in front of his chest and watched him for an hour as he was eating slowly. The rest of the customers and waiters were looking at them in a funny way. What a scandal! As soon as Karim came out and stood in front of him and looked him in the eyes, Akis slapped him and left after having taken the golden ring he had given him in January off his finger, and hurried back to the room.

He had just closed his suitcases and was ready to leave, when Karim walked in absolutely calm and demanded,

"Go to the town and get me a Sidi Ali."

Akis went down to the bar by the pool and paid a fortune for a bottle of cold Sidi Harazem. They fucked like wild beasts on the terrace without saying a word and the sea was shining as if the sun had risen at midnight.

## *Chapter Twenty Five*

In the morning they woke up quite late, probably from the sunlight passing through a gap in the curtains.

“Get dressed quick because the taxi driver will be waiting,” said Karim.

Akis put on his white linen suit but didn't put on his hat.

“What will I wear?” asked Karim.

“I'll lend you my white trousers, the ones I brought from Greece and haven't even worn yet.”

They fitted him like a glove even though he was taller than Akis.

They went out. There really was a tall, thirty something, skinny taxi-driver with angular shoulders and an triangular, pointy face waiting for them with a broad smile. It was difficult for Akis not to faint, dizzied by his beauty. Karim, on the other, was far from indifferent. He sat up front and talked non-stop in Arabic the whole way to Casablanca in his deep, erotic voice. The taxi-driver seemed to be dizzy. Akis sat in the back. No-one spoke to him at all. The trip was without colour in the blinding morning light.

He opened up the book of poems by Tahar Ben Jehloun and read about a nymphomaniac who went down into the square after midnight and went with wild passers-by who penetrated her without her saying a word, “*trop heureuse pour parler*”. Was his Karim like the woman in the poem or was he himself like her? The conversation in Arabic continued like a torrential stream and Karim was laughing happily not even bothering to turn round to look at Akis. Akis felt like a child that none of the other kids would play with. A child locked behind bars while the other kids are playing football directly below his window, shouting “Prisoner, Prisoner!” at him. Their voices were piercing his eardrums just like voices violently awoken from the lawyer's childhood on the island where his family spent their summer holidays.

They reached the consulate and Akis stayed behind in the taxi while the driver accompanied his lover, Karim, inside to see the twisted consul. They came back shortly afterwards and were having a heated discussion. Karim didn't explain a single thing to him. They got into the taxi and started wandering round the backstreets of

Casablanca asking passers-by for directions. In the end they stopped in a narrow street with a translation office and started going in, coming out, going in, coming out. Akis got out of the car to stretch himself. Finally, they left the framed licence to practice the trade of barber somewhere and all got into the taxi to head back to **El-Jadida**.

“What happened?” Akis asked in the middle of the journey interrupting the stream of conversation between the Arabs who seemed to be enjoying themselves.

“Greeks are crazy,” said Karim, “In the French consulate I got my visa in one hour. That woman wanted all my documents translated. We’ll come back tomorrow and stay the night. The day after she’ll tell me ‘yes’ or ‘no’.”

Karim took up his conversation unabashed, laughing in a flirting way. They stopped in a small seaside town with a castle just outside of El-Jadida. Without even asking, Karim went and bought chops and minced meat for the meatballs Akis could not do without. They sat alone at a narrow table which only had room for two people and Akis sat alone at the other edge of the shop. He left quickly and went out without saying a word to them. He took the camera and went to the castle. He felt awful. He wanted others to give him their love, not for him to have to buy it. He was late in coming back and the friends were waiting for him somewhat restlessly. They then asked him to take a photo of them while holding each other’s hand affectionately. Karim then took a picture of him in a rush, and somewhat carelessly, because the photo which came out wasn’t even and Akis’s face showed just what an awful state he was in.

They returned. Karim told the taxi-driver to wait for them tomorrow morning at the same time. When they went into the forecourt of Hotel Marah, Akis, seeing the storks in their nests, let rip, “Well that was really nice. When you come to Greece I’ll sit at a separate table with **my** friends. I’ll speak nothing but Greek and I won’t say a fucking word to you.”

“Learn Arabic then!” was Karim’s riposte. Karim’s voice had a cheeky and domineering tone which Akis was only now hearing, noticing it for the first time and it annoyed him.

Later when Akis asked a friend of his, a specialist on ‘Arab’ matters he was told that it was absolutely normal for the male leader of a family to sit up front and to talk with the taxi-driver while the women sat in the back in silence.

“Do you think I’m some sort of Moroccan woman with a yashmak?” he asked as they went into the room.

Karim did not answer. He took off the trousers, put on his clothes, prepared his travel bag, took out all the documents for the visa from his leather briefcase, left the money on the dressing table and walked out leaving the door open.

“I’ll go back to Guy. At least he loves me. What have you given me?”

Akis heard himself scream, “Karim! Karim! Karim!” after three minutes had passed and he had drunk half a bottle of ouzo back in one go.

Karim appeared slowly from behind the opening in the door and took the bottle from Akis.

“You called for me?”

“No.”

“I must have imagined it. I came back so as to avoid a scandal in the hotel. But I won’t just talk to you, we’re not small children not to talk to strangers. And you won’t ever make love to me again. Otherwise I’ll go back to my barber’s shop. I don’t want to do that.”

“Very nice then. Go and do it with everyone except me. Do it with the foreigners in the bushes in the park beside Djemaa el-Fna. The first evening we had sex you did it without asking for anything. But then I made the mistake of showing you my weak spot for you and you exploited that. “

“But I’ve never done that in my life.”

“You did it with Haris as well on the first night. And you were insatiable. Because I had already fucked you three times.”

“But he didn’t penetrate me. I didn’t let him put it inside.”

That at least was true, Haris had confirmed it.

“Stop drinking. Do you want to have sex?”

“No. I don’t want to feel like I’m raping you, nor that I’m paying you like a whore. In Greece we have a song which says something like, ‘love has no price, honour has no price and anyone who can love gives it freely. If you have a little love give me some to sweeten my heart...’”

The Arab sang with him like a small child and his eyes in their utter blackness welled up with tears.

‘My God,’ thought the Greek, ‘we are all innocent and guilty. Money and love rule the world. God forgive us.’ He was in awe. He got dressed and went and stood beside the wide blue sea.

Then he went back to the room and simply said, “Please, let’s go somewhere else this afternoon to swim. The water is shallow and muddy.”

They took a bus which took them to Sidi Bouzi, a large beach on the Atlantic with waves breaking forcefully on the shore. No-one was swimming apart from Akis who dived into the water like a man deranged. Karim played football until the sun set. He also kept an eye on Akis’s things so that they weren’t stolen. Akis got dressed and went for a long walk as far as the rocks covered in algae, there where there were no longer any street urchins playing football, nor tourists, nor sunbathers. Only children gathering shells in the rockpools. It was in this lunar landscape he met the nameless Priapus. Eighteen years old, an electrician, he spent his evenings there. But Akis had no appetite for adventures while walking barefoot on the rocks in the middle of the sea with the whole beach opposite them, far away, with all the people appearing like dots watching them. The young satyr chased after him with his weapon extended while the children gathering shells didn’t seem to take any notice. It was probably a regular sight for them. He returned to the beach out of breath, his naked feet cut open by the sharp edges of the rocks. Karim was still playing football. He sat down in a coffee shop above the sea and ordered a tonic water and an orange juice for Karim who was coming. He had picked up a shell as thin the shell of an egg.

Karim grabbed it immediately between his thumb and index finger and crushed it into tiny pieces looking the Greek deep in the eyes. ‘Had he seen it all?’

Akis drank his tonic water and Karim his juice while staring deep into his eyes. Then he stood up and took the coastal road almost running, arousing all the young men he met. Karim came running behind him and asked him for money for ice cream. At some point Akis got bored of running, bought Karim an ice cream and looked for a taxi. There weren’t any. They walked along the road with all the others, most of whom were locals. The Greek lawyer thought to himself, ‘they must all be going somewhere’ and when they had been walking for some time he saw his lover pretending to be a bird.

“If we had wings wouldn’t we have reached there by now?” asked the Arab poet.

Then a little later he said, “If that bitch doesn’t give me a visa I’ll come to Greece on foot. Or we’ll go and live in Mexico where no visa is needed. Or I make a giant poster with your body and we’ll plaster it over every wall in Casablanca and we’ll start accepting clients. And so we won’t have to wait 20 years for you to come back.”

“Why did you say this afternoon that Guy has given you more than me?”

“I was angry because you didn’t give me your trousers which really suit me.”

“But I bought them for you, you idiot. They’re not even my size. You’re taller than I am. I went into a really expensive shop and said to the owner ‘the best clothes for a Moroccan prince’”.

“Why didn’t you say something?”

“Because you are always demanding something. Like a child. And you don’t know how to give. What have you given me?”

The Arab didn’t answer nor did he seem to be thinking about it.

They stuck out their thumbs to stop a car and an elderly tourist stopped immediately as if struck by lightning. When he saw Akis though he refused to take them.

Shortly afterwards they discovered where all those people, mostly young Moroccan boys and girls were going; to a decrepit bus waiting for them at the edge of the road. More than three times the number of people who fitted got in the bus. Akis sat alone at the back among a crowd of hooligans who were ripping out the seats and throwing them at the others while the women were smiling at him condescendingly. Karim sat up front beside an elderly woman. The journey was a nightmare. Akis would have preferred to have gone back on foot. ‘Imagine I never go to football matches,’ thought the lawyer. Karim didn’t even think once to look round and see what his lover was doing among the outraged crowd of strangers. At some point they eventually arrived.

They ate the usual fish and squid covered in piquant red sauce and then they went to play a little bit of football.

Akis said, “Tonight you’ll play only with me. Whoever wins gets to fuck the other.”

The Arab laughed. In a while though he stopped laughing when the Greek started constantly breaching his net.

‘Three months training in Greece haven’t gone to waste,’ thought Akis.

“I’m not playing with you. You’re playing like you’re crazy. You’re always high. You have to be more careful. Think ahead about what the other is going to do.”



“Or stop him from blocking your moves. I know that from the courts”

The courts where had a won a few cases by bluffing and at moments when his opponent couldn't see what was coming.

That night they both went out covered in sweat and the defeated Arab refused to pay in kind for the bet he had lost.

‘He’s proud and very manly. He only lets others fuck him when he really wants, not like a whore. I really like that. Or maybe he’s a really experienced whore and knows how to bargain with his much used virginity? I’ll never find out because he doesn’t know himself,’ thought the lawyer.

The night passed by without them having sex. They woke up on time but the handsome taxi-driver wasn’t waiting for them. Akis carefully observed his lover’s face. Karim seemed like someone betrayed and when they passed by the storks’ nests carrying the briefcases, he turned and winked. And his eyes shone with that deep smile that the Greek would never forget because no-one had ever looked at him in that way before.

An elderly taxi-driver who was passing by stopped. Both of them sat up back. Akis balanced the half-opened bottle of ouzo, whose lid had become stuck when he threw it out of the hotel window, between his legs. By the time they arrived the trousers from his beautiful suit had become soaked. The moment they entered the room of the none to cheap El Kandara hotel, right beside the Greek consulate, Karim mockingly asked, “Did you wet yourself, my child?”

They spent the day quietly. Karim went to the consulate and handed over the translations of his papers. Akis asked him to visit the large mosque; he refused. ‘He’s afraid he’ll bump into the same elderly client of his,’ the lawyer suspected. ‘Something is happening in this city. The Arab’s mien changes when he comes here. And he seems to constantly want to get away from me. I must be on the look out constantly. And I won’t let him exhaust me like the last time,’ thought the lawyer. They ate at a fast food place by the sea. Both felt happy that life was a fluffy white cloud and that they were travelling on it without a care in the world.

Back in the room Karim drank all the ouzo and let Akis have sex with him all afternoon long while raving, “Hit me. Do want you want to me. I’m yours. Take me

away from here. If they don't give us the visa we'll go and live in Mexico. Don't phone again to check if I'm home since I'm yours. I'll always love you."

Then he started hitting him forcefully all over his body.

"Don't say a word. I'm doing it because I love you."

But the Greek didn't seem to have any intention of protesting.

A little later the Arab started feeding him like a bird with little balls of saliva he formed in his mouth. And when they fell back tired on the pillows the Greek wrote a poem which he translated roughly into French. It was about the former clients of a prostitute who didn't understand his value and abandoned him and the Greek praised them because their harshness demonstrated his own love. The poem was entitled, "Jealousy".

"Is that me you're talking about?" asked the Arab somewhat upset.

"No. It's simply a poem."

"Do whatever you want now but in the evening you'll let me go out for a walk."

"Agreed? Don't you want to cum?"

"No. It's not necessary," said Karim from the shower, "Tonight I'll make love to the prince who's waiting for me."

'I won't leave him alone for a second, not even long enough to take a piss,' thought Akis, 'he's blind drunk.'

They went out. Night was falling. Karim kept ducking into phone booths and phoned somewhere in Morocco talking in Arabic. Akis was spying. Then he asked Akis to buy him a new pair of shorts and a t-shirt for football. Akis bought him the most expensive kit. They walked, and ate and went into the most expensive stores. Coming out of one, Akis showed him a beautiful soapdish with the green skyscrapers of New York.

"When did you buy it? I didn't see you pay. You are a big time thief," said Karim.

Akis did not want to prove him wrong but simply laughed in an affected manner since he wanted his lover's complicity so that he could get into his soul and 'read' it just like he frequently did with his clients.

'But the result is meager. Even after all that, despite the evidence I have at my disposal, I don't know a thing about this forty-year old child, about this virgin whore who seems to be giving up his virginity for the first time when he makes love...'

They ate and then went to play a little football. There they met some young boys who used to hang out at Rony's.

"Fuck! They saw us and they'll tell him."

"What do you care? Don't ever go back to that house."

They said goodbye and left. Seeing the dark park Karim pulled him by the hand and told him to come in with him.

"No. It's a meat market. And it's dangerous and depressing."

"No it's not. You can meet some old man who'll take you to Europe."

'He is completely drunk and his tongue is loose,' thought Akis.

They went back to the room and Karim tried on his new shorts, t-shirt and Adidas trainers.

"Sleep. I'll be back."

'He'll go to the park saying he's going jogging. Just like he did that day in Agadir when I lost him'.

"No. I'll come with you. I've eaten a lot and want to walk."

Karim lay down on a bench in the small square opposite the consulate.

Hours passed. The Greek wrote in his notebook and the Arab stared into space. Across from them a Moroccan spread out his mat on the grass for evening prayer. Leaving, he greeted them with a solemn mien.

'He must be a cleric,' thought Akis.

"Why are we waiting here?"

"For it to turn midnight so I can phone my brother in the police."

"Does he get home so late?"

"He's gone to visit someone. The kids answered the phone."

Later Akis was to find out that he had phoned Guy and that the phonecards he stole from him and those Akis gave him when leaving so he could phone Greece were used to phone Avignon.

The Greek lawyer had no delusions. He was constantly rigging traps for him. And Karim kept falling into them. Because Karim knew that each time the Greek's love for him would overlook the impropriety. And when he was sure about that and when he went just that little bit too far, they lost each other for good.

Karim took Akis's notebook and started to make crude drawings of their love-making writing "I will love Akis forever" next to the drawings in poorly-spelt French. His childish doodles and quotes resembled those decorating all the trees of Casablanca carved out with a key or a nail but it was just what the Greek wanted to hear that evening to continue living his fairytale.

Karim made his phone call.

"Why are coming so close? Do I spy on you when you make phone calls?"

Akis didn't manage to hear if he was speaking French or Arabic.

'As if that would change anything.'

At last they managed to fall asleep. Another night without sex. Akis woke up late next morning. Karim had already come back from the consulate and was readying the suitcases to return to his beloved El-Jadida.

"What happened?"

The Arab didn't answer and his face was expressionless like the masks made of black Atlas stone which Akis had bought on his last trip to Agadir. And it was those masks that Akis looked at when in Greece, thinking back about that magical country and his lover or to be more precise, his lover in that magical country.

They paid and walked quite a distance to the taxi rank.

Everyone there was arguing about who saw the client first and who had been waiting longest in the rank. Karim didn't say a word. A quarter of an hour went by. Akis went to get into a taxi but the others blocked his way. Then he started cursing the Moroccans and their country in Greek. In a decisive move, he took one of the suitcases in each hand and threw the travel bag over his shoulder and started walking rapidly towards what must be the direction of El-Jadida indicated by the signs. Karim followed him out of breath as did the whole rabble of taxi-drivers swearing in fluent Arabic.

When Karim said, "Stop. I can't go on. I'm tired," Akis stopped the taxi-driver he had chosen, got into the taxi having loaded up the suitcases and travelled without a word to El-Jadida where they ate at the same seaside town without saying a word. The only difference was that the ugly taxi-driver looked on the stubborn Greek who knew how to get what he wanted with some admiration.

Once they got into the room Karim, his eyes welling up with tears, asked him, "do you want to have sex?"

“No. It’s not necessary. Tell me what happened with the visa.”

“There’s still one paper from the Council missing which I am not really entitled to and I’ll have to bribe them in order to get it.”

“You’ll pay the bribe and get the paper!” ‘The whole world is the same,’ thought Akis.

The afternoon passed without event. That evening when listening to the outdoor music and watching the boys and girls enjoying themselves, when it was time for Karim to phone home, Akis, quietly and decisively said, “Tell your mother to prepare couscous because tomorrow evening I’m coming to visit. I can’t phone and talk a lot to people who don’t know me. I feel ridiculous. Moreover, I’m a serious professional.”

“But I didn’t take Guy to the house until after two years of getting to know him.”

“How do you expect to come to my country and stay with me forever and show me up to all my racist friends when you can’t even welcome me to your own home for one evening?”

Then the Arab looked at him with pained eyes and moved towards the telephone. He returned and his face was expressionless again, or rather, surly.

“You’ll come to my house tomorrow.”

He put his hand on the nape of the Greek’s neck and quietly whispered into his ear, “If you abandon me, I’ll cut off your head.”

“Tomorrow in the souq you’ll choose the best gifts for your family. I’ll give you a thousand marks.”

“It’s enough for them to be satisfied.”

The birds had roosted in their nests. Akis and Karim went back to the hotel.

## *Chapter Twenty Six*

They woke up peacefully from the sound of the sea. Karim pushed the bed to the terrace. They made love there looking at the empty beach. The smooth sand was waiting for the footsteps of the street urchins.

Akis packed his suitcases and sent Karim to pay. He wanted his lover to be proud. And he was proud of his lover.

While walking through the courtyard they looked at the storks for the last time in their nests. Karim left the suitcases to get some rest and clasped his hand, staring at him with a glance that the Greek could never figure out.

It was as if he was saying 'don't leave me'. Or was he saying goodbye to their paradise?

They went out to find a taxi. None came by. Karim stuck out his thumb, with one leg slightly bent forward.

'This must be the professional way', thought the lawyer.

An old man suddenly pulled up and he almost caused a pile-up. But when he saw Akis and the baggage, he pretended to be buying cigarettes from the kiosk on the other side of the road and disappeared without looking at them.

Karim left him to go to the taxi rank and came back with an old, toothless taxi driver. He sat in the back seat and had his hands between his suitcases and caressed his ribs looking at him like a child behaving naughtily in class.

Akis was happy and didn't think about anything.

Soon they reached Marrakesh which was extremely hot due to the heatwave and the temperature difference compared to the northern town of El-Jadida by the coast caused Akis to feel dizzy. He was leaving the next day. 'What a pity! We won't have time to go to the Ourika valley'.

They settled in the "Miriam" hotel.

"I have to go and buy some meat and the materials for the couscous."

"Do you want any money for the presents?"

"No. We'll pick them out together in the evening."

Akis had a swim in the pool alone because the groups that usually dominated the hotel with their chirping were out on a tour.

He had a sound sleep in the air-conditioned room until four o'clock in the afternoon.

At that time Karim was home, shaving his genitals. In absolute synchronization the Greek did the same.

The sun set and Karim came.

"Let's make love now because at night we'll be stuffed after dinner."

"We should buy a film to take some photos at your house."

They got undressed.

"What time did you shave at?" asked the lawyer.

"At four."

"So did I. Last night I dreamt about your mother."

"What does she look like?"

"She's very thin and short."

"..."

(Silence)

"Now, listen and don't think I'm crazy. In the afternoon I dreamt that we have lived other lives together. In one of them you were a Mauritian warrior and I was a beautiful princess. We had fourteen children. You went to the war and got killed. For thirty three years I was alone. And every night before going to bed with your pillow in my arms, I swore that in my next life I would be born a man and would punish you...Do you want me to tell you more?"

"Yes..." (He had this distant expression again. Like a mask).

"I can even see the future."

"What do you see?"

"That you'll leave me. That they'll take you away from me. I'll come after you and then God help you."

They made love as if in despair.

As they were going out of the hotel, Karim gave him a searching look.

"You look very chic and serious. And your voice sounds deep."

"It's for you. Tonight I'm meeting your family."

"When I come to Greece, I'll meet your parents too."

"Yes."

(The Greek panicked even at the very thought. Suddenly he had second thoughts).

"We'll go for a drink until it gets dark so as not to be seen in the neighbourhood," said Karim.

They headed to the "Renaissance". A Dutchman in his forties stopped Karim trying to start a conversation.

"Good evening..."

'They certainly know each other', thought the lawyer.

"Viens mon petit!" (Come, my little one), said Karim and took him by the hand towards the lift, ignoring the Dutchman. The old man at the lift greeted Karim in a friendly way and Karim smiled at him.

'He's a regular', thought the lawyer.

Time passed without them talking. They were both anxious. He had a sip from Akis's beer on the sly. Alcohol was prohibited for Arabs. And so was prostitution. Two whores were walking between the tables, indolently moving their buttocks under their yellow jellabas.

The taxi left them at a safe distance, in the poorly lit, new neighbourhood. They walked by an empty field. Karim was walking quickly. Akis in his white clothes walked behind him. The house was dark and the door was ajar. Before entering, Akis looked at the sign on the barber's shop which read "Boutique Guy" and it was like a snake had appeared from the grass suddenly and had bitten him and he hesitated.

Karim gave the presents they had bought together at the souqs in the evening.

Leather handbags for the two unmarried sisters, nice, dark, green material for the spotty, shy brother who was finishing his studies on biology and a very chic, traditional dress for the mother. And lots of salami and sauces and fruit and sweets for dinner.

The younger sister who spoke French said with a smart expression:

"Bienvenue chez nous!" (Welcome).

Then the women withdrew to the terrace. Karim showed him his room. Akis took off his shoes. A thick carpet and cushions. A low, round, wooden table and the television by the skylight.

"I took it from the shop because all the urchins would come and hang around without having a haircut.



'So that I wouldn't call and ask his employee where he was', Akis thought. He was jealous of those boys that Karim would corner saying the same words he used to say to him, often laughing:

"C'est bon pour la santé!" (It's good for your health).

He had regretted that he had been bringing booze from Greece for him to hide it in the barber's shop.

"I sleep on the floor. I like it," he explained.

'In April, however, we used to sleep in each other's arms, one inside the other,' Akis thought. He had a conversation with Karim's brother about his studies and how much postgraduate studies would cost in France.

"As soon as I graduate, the only thing I have to look forward to is unemployment."

Karim was taking photos.

The three men ate in silence. Time had passed without Akis realizing it.

They went up to the terrace in silence to greet the women. They were sitting on the floor on a beautiful carpet, knitting.

'His mother is identical to the one I dreamt of', Akis thought. He felt awkward.

Everybody kept their voices down to avoid being heard by the neighbours.

'Just like the Greek provinces in the thirties'.

Only Karim was telling jokes in Arabic and moved in a nervous manner like a shadow puppet.

Akis looked at his lover with worship in his eyes.

"He's somewhat crazy," the mother said by way of excuse.

His younger sister who was the same age as Akis was translating for him.

"A touch of insanity makes life longer," Akis said and the mother looked at him approvingly, her eyes laughing. Just like the way Karim was looking at him!

"Why don't you take my youngest daughter to Greece? She made the couscous you ate."

He greeted them shyly, kissing the mother's hand heartily. She pulled her hand away in gratitude and greeted him in the Arabic way, putting her hand on his heart.

They sneaked out like thieves in the night for fear of the neighbours.

They walked in silence in the neighbourhood that was now asleep. Karim ran into a friend of his riding a motorcycle. Akis stood at a distance, but he couldn't avoid the envious glance of the boy and Karim laughed, proud of his lover.

They walked a long distance to get a taxi.

"Thank you very much Karim."

'Now that I've met your family I can leave.'

"It's a pity we didn't see the shop. If you abandon me now that I took you to my house, I'll cut your throat," said Karim as if he had read his thoughts and the Greek's hairs stood on end.

## *Chapter Twenty Seven*

The taxi left them quite some distance from the hotel. They walked in silence.

They passed by the park near the phone booths.

“Go on to the hotel. I’ll come soon.”

“No.”

“The police are outside. We shouldn’t go in together.”

“No. I won’t leave you alone on the last evening. You remember the police and your French when it’s in your own interest. Tomorrow I’ll be in Greece and you’ll be free to do whatever you want.”

Karim, angered, followed him. There were no policemen. They slept without having sex and in the morning Karim refused to let Akis caress him.

“We’ll go to the souq to buy some materials and scissors and combs for the barber’s shop. Then I’ll leave you. I’ll come back around midday to eat and then I’ll take you to the airport.

The ticket said the flight was at four.

Karim was cold and distant. The visit to his house had changed him. He seemed to be behaving like he had been married to the Greek for the last seventeen years. The lawyer did not like that one little bit.

Akis asked him to buy him a gold ring like the one he had given Karim in January.

“The one with the red stone is effeminate and I can’t wear it in Greece.”

The ring was heavier than Karim.

“My finger is bigger than yours.”

“It’s because you’re older too,” said the Arab.

‘What a liar!’ thought the Greek, ‘he’s a least 40 years old.’

“Follow the groups so you can see the Bahia palaces for free. I’ll take the things to the boutique. I’ll wait for you to come down to reception.”

“No. Come up to the room. I want to kiss you.”

He followed the tour groups and got into the palace for free, which paled before the Arab palaces of Granada he had visited many times while in Spain.

On his way out he gave 100 dirham to a street urchin to guide him back to the hotel. The heat was unbearable and he felt as if he was under the influence of drugs.

He packed his bags and waited.

Karim phoned up from reception.

“Come down.”

“You come up.”

“No.”

They paid the bill and left the bags and two, authentic, wooden-carved windows – the last - which Karim had got for him yesterday, in reception to look after them.

They went to eat in the expensive restaurant with the fountain and the statue. The Greek was angered by his lover’s coldness and drank three gin and tonics.

“You can’t ask me to change. And don’t call to check up on me. I like to go out in the evenings.”

“But I changed for you. I went on a diet and did one hour’s exercise a day so you would like me more. You infected me with Hepatitis which I only got over because my body is strong and I didn’t once complain to you about it.”

‘Give me another thousand marks for the visa expenses.’

“I’ve paid for that visa a hundred times over.”

“If you’re going to count every penny don’t give me anything then. Nobody counts when they give money to me.”

“I’m giving you this in full knowledge that you don’t want to come to Greece.”

He also gave him his last dirhams.

They didn’t speak again.

The airport was empty. The flight had left in the early hours of the morning. The time on the ticket was wrong. The Greek lawyer asked to see the airport manager and managed to find a seat on the flight to Athens via Madrid two days later.

“Do you have to pay the difference?” asked the Arab, worried.

“No. I’ll ask for compensation from the travel agent’s because it means I’ll miss a trial on Monday.”

Then he changed his stance and stared at Karim as if in heaven and said, “Another two days.”

The lover’s eyes sparkled. This time they went to the Hasna Hotel – old customers.

“I’ve left my passport at home. I’ll go and get it.”

“It’s not necessary. I’ll bribe them,” said the lawyer.

“No. I have to go anyhow. I have something to do in the souq. Rendezvous at eight on the roof of the coffee shop above Djemaa el-Fna. Bring a bottle of *pastis*.

He left him 100 dirham.

Akis bought a bottle from the cellar behind the hotel where the Arabs went with black bags and left with the worst watered down drinks circulating in Europe.

He paid exactly 100 dirham.

He didn’t open the bottle. He fell asleep. At four o’clock Karim, who had brought his passport, paid a visit and kissed his sleeping lover on the forehead.

“Rendezvous at eight. Be strong. Don’t you worry about a thing – I love you.”

“More than him?” asked the half-asleep Greek.

“Yes”, Karim nodded and his eyes welled up with tears.

He awoke from the evening lights falling on the mirror.

He opened the bottle of *pastis* and started drinking. The more he drank the angrier he became. Penniless, he would have to walk three kilometers along the burning tarmac to get to his lover. He kept drinking and getting angrier. He felt like a defeated imperialist shortly before being kicked out of the country. He kept drinking and getting angrier. He hid both passports and the money below the sheets. He continued to drink. Then a void. He could recall nothing.

‘I’d give a year of my life to learn what I did and what he said to me that evening. The only witnesses are Karim and the all-night staff in reception. That night I murdered my love. I need to go over it again, figure out what happened.’

“Classic hysteria,” diagnosed Haris. “You’ve had at least two other episodes. I’m talking about the ones when I was present. During one you chased after Spyros attacking him and ending up taking a piece out of his back. And the other episode was at the wine festival in Dafni when you drank five kilos of mavrodafni wine. You did a striptease and spoke only in English with an Oxford accent. Both times I put you to bed and the next day you couldn’t remember a thing. If you go again at Christmas don’t drink a single drop. He’s a lamb. You’re just a danger to yourself. Your soul is that of a wild pirate and your conscious control over it is just as wild. You’ve had it if you drink there. Wherever he’s hiding you’ll find him and you’ll kill him. And you’ll end

up rotting in a primitive Moroccan jail in the same cell with AIDS carriers, no light, no paper, no pen.

‘Light, paper, pen. Those things are better than love. One day do you think I’ll be able to live with just them?’

## *Chapter Twenty Eight*

The last day of their love affair. Karim was sleeping naked stomach down and was coughing.

Akis was now at peace, as if the storm was over.

He mounted his black horse and galloped through evergreen valleys where mandrakes grew and the sun chirped on the canopies of the trees and the sky was glowing and the sea in the background was turquoise and clear so that you could even see the smallest shell.

"Come with me to Greece."

Then Karim chuckled. He turned around. His face was swollen, his right eye was blackened and his lip had a cut.

Akis took care of his lover without asking questions. His mind was blank, like a denture one leaves on the bedside before going to sleep.

"Where is my passport?"

Akis lifted the mattress without knowing why.

The two passports, the keys to the suitcase and the money were there.

They went out without saying a word. Karim had left his motorcycle at some distance from the hotel so that the employees would not understand that he lived in Marrakesh. This was Akis's first ride. Yet Karim left him in the middle of Mohammed V Avenue.

"I forgot something at the room," he said.

"What's that?" the Greek asked in a soft tone.

The Arab's eyes were laughed cunningly.

He stood on the pavement. He was shaking. And his sweat smelt of pastis.

A whore approached.

"Italian?"

"Yes."

"Io ho il cazzo duro."

When the Greek did not react to this advertisement about his size, the Moroccan asked angrily:

"Are you waiting for someone? Do you enjoy fucking with your friend?"

"He's the best fuck in the world," Akis answered calmly.

The Moroccan left swearing.

When Karim came back Akis told him what had happened.

"Did you tell him that the friend you were waiting for was a Moroccan?"

"No. I'll never do anything to hurt you," Akis said in a hoarse voice.

Karim stopped the motorcycle at the lights and turned around.

"You really don't remember what happened last night?"

"No, Karim. What happened?"

"I'll tell you when we arrive at Ourika. Not here."

They didn't exchange a word. Karim left his bag with Akis while he was bargaining for the taxi.

The lawyer opened the bag and found the half empty bottle of pastis and a sandwich with meatballs from the day before.

'God!' he thought, 'a litre of pastis, four hundred grams of ethyl alcohol could even kill an elephant. I'm really strong!'

At that point he saw two handsome boys who were also looking for a taxi to Ourika.

"Come with me. We're going to Ourika as well."

When Karim saw them, he made it clear in fluent Arabic that they would pay for their share of the taxi and he, as well, sat in the back seat, between the Greek and the handsome eighteen year old Berber with the innocent look of a virgin. As soon as the taxi accelerated, the Greek realized how drunk he was. He was laughing and talked dirty during the entire journey. When the boys got out just before Ourika, he stepped out as well and gave his card to the more handsome of the two. He would never write.

'It seems that some things only happen a few times and to certain people. But why?' Akis wondered.

The driver was having fun with his eccentric client.

"He's a millionaire," Karim said by way of excuse.

They walked to the foot of the waterfalls walking on the narrow wall so as not to get wet, and thousands of half-naked bodies touched them supposedly by accident.



"Shall we go up to the waterfalls?"

"No. You go up if you want to," Karim said as he was soaking his feet and filling the bottle with cold water.

"What happened Karim?" the Greek asked in a serious tone.

"When I realized that you wouldn't come to our rendezvous, I took the motorcycle and came to the hotel. Once I entered, the room stank of pastis. You were naked and you beat the shit out of me. 'Go to Djemaa el-Fna to fuck old men! Whore!' is what you screamed at me and you punched me in the face. I told you I would call the police and you said 'go on and call them if you dare'. Then you threw me out of the room and locked the door. All the customers had come out and were listening. And I paid a generous bribe to the receptionists so as not to call the police. I asked them for my passport and they said that you had it. I went home and ate. I bought you a sandwich with meatballs, a bottle of fresh orange juice and came back.

You had unlocked the door and you acted as if nothing had happened. You drank all the juice and we made love. You shouted that if anyone ever got inside you, you'd cut his genitals off and would make him eat them. You really hurt me last night. I know why. Because I took your money.

"I'm sorry Karim. That was not me. It was my race. You'll always be a smiling sun to me."

"It was you. You shouted 'I'll kill Guy. I don't like being second'.

"Take a photo of me to send it to Guy."

Karim took the camera and his eyes were glowing with greed.

'He's using me as a bait to get back the lover that abandoned him,' the lawyer thought.

In that photo Akis had a lecherous expression on his face.

Karim drank the pastis that was left. Akis read aloud poems of Tahar Ben Jehloun in French and talked to him about hepatitis and how to protect himself from sexually transmitted diseases.

The half-naked boys were undressing them were their eyes. Karim was silent. And their last day passed in happiness. They ate. Karim asked the waiter to take a photo of them. Then they rented a tent by the river and lay down. Next to them was a banker with his family who offered them some tea. Akis gave them the fruit that remained.

They walked their way through the traffic jam. Karim scolded a Moroccan who was making a pass at a Frenchman.

"That is not allowed in Islam," he said.

Akis was speechless to see that his lover had such a split personality.

The same happened when the Greek said one day:

"You're handsome. You remind me of Omar Sharif."

"But that Egyptian is homosexual!" the Moroccan said.

They had a hard time finding a taxi and Karim was abrupt when Akis tried to say something, as if he was speaking to his Moroccan wife with a yashmak.

The traffic jam was interminable.

In the opposite lane a really expensive BMW, the latest model, stopped. The driver was an Arab, more handsome than Omar Sharif when he was young, opened the window and asked the taxi driver something while looking at Akis.

"What did he say?" Akis asked Karim.

His lover remained silent and pretended to be looking out of the window to the other side.

"He asked where he could find you to send you flowers," replied the taxi driver.

The Greek opened the window and gave his card to the most handsome Arab he had ever seen...

Through the entire journey Karim was silently pushing a pocket-knife in his ribs. Akis didn't make a sound.

They took the motorcycle to go back to the hotel. A pale-faced policeman stopped them. Karim gave him ten dirhams.

'He's the same one we bribed in January outside the hotel,' the lawyer thought.

They went back to the room and Karim surrendered without hesitation, shouting while the Greek rode him for the last time.

"C'est mon paradis!" (It's heaven!)

Akis was hurt because the tall, manly Arab with the deep voice gave himself so easily.

"Tonight we'll make love all night," Karim said before leaving. And turned around to add:

"The man in the BMW would only want to fuck you."

Akis slept so as to be in shape for the night. And took two of the pills with ginseng and royal jelly. 'Things don't always end up as we expect them to,' he thought.

Karim came for dinner, but his mind was not there. His ulcer played up on him and took the powder that he had rolled up in newspaper. He wasn't speaking.

When Akis tried to say something, he interrupted him:

"Don't speak. You said too much today."

The Greek shut up.

At the table beside them sat a huge German, whose fat hung over the edge of the chair, along with his also fat Berber lover. Akis was hurt at that sight.

"As soon as I leave, you'll go with him!" said the lawyer in a sadistic manner and Karim replied like a snake whose tail had just been trodden on:

"You needn't say that. And we don't eat the salad along with the main dish."

On their way, he stood by a four-star hotel and said:

"This is where you'll stay next time. I'm not going back to Hotel Hasna."

After a while he added:

"This time last night you were screaming."

They walked on in silence.

Karim sat on the porter's chair outside Hotel Hasna and refused to go inside.

"I work here. The money is not great, but I'm content."

The lawyer stood beside him silent.

"I want to go for a walk," Karim said.

"I'll come with you. It's our last night together. We don't know anything about the future. We have to make the best of our time."

Karim was standing still. He stood immobile and laughed like a stubborn child.

It was past midnight. Benny passed with his motorcycle and greeted them.

"Great!" Karim said. "Now he'll tell Rony you're here."

"I don't care. I'm through with that gentleman. I don't owe him a thing. And I'm not going back to that house."

Time passed slowly. It was almost one o'clock. Akis got tired standing upright. The receptionists came out to see what those eccentric customers were doing for so long out in the cold of the tropical night.

"I'm going for a shower and I'll be waiting for you," the Greek said.

He went to buy a bottle of water, but he forgot that he didn't have any money on him.

We went back to ask Karim for money. The chair was empty! Then he went into the streets. He went to the place where they had had dinner. They were closing. He went to the roof of the "Renaissance" café. He asked the old man at the lift.

"Is my friend here?"

He answered something in Arabic.

He wasn't there.

He walked back exhausted. Half way he saw Karim running on the other side of the street towards the Renaissance café in panic. 'We'll be looking for each other just like that for the rest of our lives,' mused the lawyer with absolute clarity of thought.

It was too late and the crystal of their love had been crushed into thousands of tiny pieces.

"I love you Karim, but I don't understand you."

"I went to make a phone call."

"To whom? Where? Why didn't you say so?"

"I didn't want you to ask. I went back to the room and the door was locked. I knocked but you wouldn't open. I thought you were angry. I went down to the reception. The key was there. They told me that you had been out. I ran after you before you got raped and slaughtered and robbed."

"I came back to ask you for some change to buy a bottle of water. And the chair was empty. I went insane. I thought you would never come back and I went to look for you because I was worried."

"I bought some water as well. You're a constant source of problems for me, Akis."

"So are you."

They went back to the room. Karim lay down with his clothes on and watched TV. Time passed. Soon they would have to go to the airport. He tried to kiss him but the Arab refused. He tried to touch him and Karim pushed him away. Then Akis started experiencing the symptoms of cold turkey and started writhing on the floor with spasms and sweating terribly.

The Moroccan was watching television. Akis turned it off. He got up and turned it back on. Then the Greek fell on him. He took the ring off his finger and the watch he

had given him. He took the money out of his pockets. He also took the traveller's bag with the last presents and threw them out of the window.

Karim turned off the light and slept.

Akis went down to pick the things up. He put back the ring and the watch on Karim's hand and put the money back in his pocket.

"Goodnight my love. Goodnight."

And he slept next to him for the last time, wearing his white linen suit.

Soon the telephone rang.

The taxi had come. They didn't say a word.

At the airport Akis said:

"I'll be waiting for you in Greece."

"If they give me the visa, I'll come. On one term. You'll never get inside me again. It causes great stress for me. Ask for anything else."

This statement was unexpected and hurt the Greek man in love.

The European man left walking backwards. His eyes red, he looked at his lover for the last time who was sitting cradling his head in his hands.

He knew this was the end and not just a quarrel over something trivial as usually happens between people in love.

He cried during the entire flight. And he would keep on crying. Five months would pass and he still wouldn't be able to accept that their love was dead and he would refuse to bury it.

## *Chapter Twenty Nine*

*Moroccan lovers*

*The poet is an eyewitness*

*To myth*

*Doomed for a lifetime*

*to trace each other's footsteps*

*through the cycles of the moon,*

*is the pain less for the killer or the killed?*

*And in the morning hoarfrost*

*how can one tell the difference*

*between two brothers*

*half-buried in the sand?*

*I walked in the desert of rocks*

*on the dark side of phenomena*

*And the seagull gave me a vacant look*

*With the dignity of those in despair.*

*Do we learn our lessons,*

*or do our lessons*

*learn from us*

*as Rimbaud would say?*

*If we could turn back time*

*To the moment just before the last breath*

*Before it is too late*

*Just before the body is thrown*

*on the heap of corpses*

*in search of our own  
just after  
everything has been said and done  
all that is left  
is to reap the salty taste  
from that quenchless corner  
of your body.*

*Now that everything has fallen into place  
And the dead are in their tombs  
I crave the flames  
Which took us up to  
Heaven  
with the flaming cores of the stars  
and our hearts  
as I watched them writhe  
and bleed in the moonlight.*

*Now I'm in the wrong place  
and the wrong time  
I move to the wrong beat  
trapped in the prison of my life  
unable to bathe in the light of the  
red moon*

*Now I cry, helpless,  
for the hounds have  
gnawed our diamond  
and the jewel of our love  
has faded in the hoarfrost  
from another man's covetous breath*

*In my sleep I still see  
knives and swords  
threatening your breath  
but now I just turn over  
because whatever will be, will be.*

*Each morning I say 'farewell'  
for you haunt my dreams  
my conqueror, your figure crudely swaddled  
in mummy's bandages  
then I look at the still sea  
out of my window  
and the seagulls  
suspended in the abyss,  
rapacious and unique  
like you.*

*Even worse than  
frenetic mice  
unicorns desiring a  
return to the much-caressed womb  
hounds biting at each others  
throats  
hyenas disinterring their young  
shrill and lecherous  
sounds echoed in the dusky evening  
while the carcass of our love  
floated by on a boat  
devoid of flowers*

Cassandra, Halkidiki 17.9.1995



Akis returned to Greece and threw himself headlong into his work. In a matter of days he made millions of drachmas. Karim went to the consulate three times about the visa. Each time the consul said no. And each time Akis sank into a sea of ouzo. And each time Karim paid some bribes for a new paper. And each time Akis pictured him in the city of sin, Casablanca, making love in the park without a condom and sleeping on the park bench. The third time he begged him to phone him, the evening before the third refusal. Karim hadn't written to him, nor even phoned him, even though Akis had left him an adequate supply of phone cards. Only Akis phoned. Ten times a day or more. So that evening he wasn't expecting Karim to phone him. He went to the Herod Atticus Odeon with some actor friends. After that they ate in a taverna, 'The Herodion' and got drunk. When he entered his office with the nineteen year old taxi-driver, gorgeous as sin, he heard Karim's deep, beautiful, complaining voice on the answering machine. And while he was having sex with the nineteen year old, Karim called again but Akis didn't make it to the phone on time.

The following evening he phoned him in Marrakesh. The consul had finally agreed to give him the visa, but only for a month and only if he produced a reservation slip for a hotel in Athens.

"Why didn't you tell he that I'm going to put you up?"

"I gave her your card but she replied that in my application 'hotel' was written."

"I wrote hotel because Anatoli advised me that it would be better."

Then Karim, drunk and angry, said, "tomorrow you will send me a hotel reservation slip by fax and I will come with Guy and we'll stay at your house."

"Why are you asking that of me, Karim?... Stay there forever and if you have sex with another man I'll kill you."

Karim had already met Giuseppe. They had spent a week in Hotel Safir where Karim entered by the swimming pool entrance. Karim had taken him to Rony to stay there when he returned again. He had begged Paolo not to say a word to Akis.

Akis began calling one hundred times a day, screaming 'Whore' down the phone regardless of who answered. Karim phone Guy and pleaded with him to take him away from there. Akis then began phoning Guy and slandering Karim. Karim would not come to the phone when Akis asked for him.

‘He’s in Oujda at our brother, the policeman’s and he’ll be back on September the fourteenth,’ his brother or sister would say.

He went to Nafplio for three days to calm down. He climbed to the top of the Palamidi fortress on foot. He phoned Guy from his mobile, who let it slip that Karim was in Marrakesh and that Karim phoned him every evening just as he had been doing for months now, even when Akis was there in July.

It was then that he phoned, impersonating Guy, and as Guy, asked for Karim.

Karim came to the phone and when he heard Akis telling him that he loved him in Greek he was petrified.

Then a new round of lies, threats, tears and rendezvous and retrogressions at Rony’s on September the fourteenth began.

In the end Akis went to Halkidiki with the dumbfounded Haris. He swam naked around the rocks and read ‘The Sheltering Sky’ by Paul Bowles, wrote poetry and broke down into tears. Haris didn’t know how to console him. He called Karim at least 20 times a day in Marrakesh and didn’t speak.

Guy hastened to see if the Arab who had exploited him for three years loved him. Rony, Abdul and Paolo revealed everything about Giuseppe and about the anniversary of the fall of the Bastille while Karim was distributing cards with his address and telephone to all the dirty old men who were there. Guy felt betrayed. He asked for his money back and Akis’s money too. Then the entire family threw Guy out of the house and told him never to come back. He wiped the slate blank and swore never to return to Morocco. Rony also threw Karim out of his house because he was losing his clients one by one thanks to the crazy Arab. Karim’s brother, the bank manager, found him a job as babysitter for the house of the mayor of a small, provincial town and made him promise that he would never lie down with men again because he was a disgrace to the entire family and that the following summer he would finally marry a Moroccan virgin. Karim phoned Akis and the first thing he asked was for Akis to be his best man and to adopt his first born son. Then he asked him to take him to Greece with no strings attached and let him do whatever he wanted. Then to take him to Greece but without sex since he had promised not to go with men again. Akis then got angry and set up the farce with the supposed Marco Antonioni and made him agree to a date in room three hundred and twenty five in Hotel Safir. They spoke one other time and laughed like

children up to no good and Karim told him the name of the town countless times so that Akis would come and save him from slavery and take him away to Greece for good. However, both of them knew that they couldn't start over from the beginning. Karim didn't phone again. Both his brother and sister told Akis that Karim would be back in 15 days or a month. They too repeated the name of the town countless times. They didn't hang up abruptly nor did they call him an asshole like they had done two months before and Mohammed, spotty Mohammed, didn't dare talk to him in a vulgar way. Once again he started calling ten times a day without speaking. They began playing Oum Kouloum singing 'I love you' in Arabic. Once he thought that the hoarse voice he heard from the other side of the world actually belonged to Karim. He shut himself away from the world at nights waiting for Karim to call him. Whenever somebody didn't leave a message on the answering machine he wanted to believe that it was Karim.

He had bought a new office. Work was going swimmingly. He drank a lot and couldn't sleep. He stayed up late exercising on the bike watching porno flicks on video or watching 'The Sheltering Sky' or 'Out of Africa' or 'Casablanca'. And how he wrote. Like a thing possessed. He would sleep only one hour but would wake up fresh as a daisy because each night in his sleep he would meet his lover. Sometimes they would make love, other times the Arab would throw him Roman spears which the Greek Saint Sebastian would plant in his breast. Sometimes the Greek Othello would decapitate of his lover and a nameless rival with a saber. Both heads would roll in the mud of the Djemaa el-Fna and the old beggar woman- fate - would trample over them. Time went by. Work went swimmingly. The novel all but wrote itself. His outwardly fresh appearance gave no clue as the private hell he was going through. The only thing was that his voice had deepened. The childish carefree attitude had gone. And his clients began to think, 'At long last. He's become a man.'

## *Chapter Thirty*

That night he saw Karim in his sleep. Karim's hand emerged from the picture frame opposite the bed and gave him back the ring Akis had given to him in January on the day that the love affair commenced. They had just returned from the palm trees with the caleche. Karim said 'farewell' and there were holes in the place of his eye.

The next morning he decided to cancel his ticket to Morocco and book a new ticket to Jordan. He phoned the travel agent's office which had made the reservation for Amman and they told him that the reservation was confirmed. It was a direct flight. All he had to do was go to the Jordanian Embassy in Psychiko with a photo, his passport, a six thousand drachmas for the visa to be issued. Suddenly the whole idea bored him. He didn't feel going all the way to Psychiko. It seemed far. In reality it was only a quarter of an hour away from his office. It was as if his soul had nowhere to rest, apart from Karim's body lying indolently in the middle of the desert on a brass bed with silk sheets under the sheltering sky.

He went to the other travel agent's having made up his mind to cancel the ticket to Morocco.

"I found a solution," said the travel agent. "I'll put you on a plane back via Madrid with a one day stopover."

"OK" 'I'll visit the Prado Museum to see the picture by Goya showing a young man about to be executed. I don't remember what it's called. The young man whose whole life flashes before his eyes just before he meets the shadow of death."

"You do realize though that it is sixty thousand drachmas more."

"It doesn't matter."

He paid for the ticket, went out and jumped with joy. As he left the travel agent's his eye was drawn to the young men flirting in Syndagma Square as if it was the first time he noticed going on. They were well dressed and discreet and at first glance you couldn't tell them apart from passers-by.

'Is Karim really in a provincial town or is he still a whore in Marrakesh? I really don't know. I'd love to pay a him a visit as a client, from a different country with a different name."

That evening his friend, Paolo the Italian gynaecologist, phoned him and told him that he had paid a detective from Italy to follow Benny in Marrakesh for one month. The evidence was heartbreaking. Once or twice a day Benny would visit the café Renaissance. When he didn't go to Rony's with his clients, Rony who did say a word in order not to lose his clientele, they went to hotels and when the client was in a hurry they hid among the bushes in the park, sometimes in full daylight, other times after dark. In one photograph taken at six o'clock in the evening, Benny is seen fucking a Spaniard without a condom. In the next photograph, both Benny and the Spaniard frightened by the flash, are seen running off. Benny denied everything over the phone when Paolo told him it was over between them.

Akis would meet his friend at Rony's on the twenty eighth of the month.

The days passed as if Akis was delirious. He alternated between joy and sadness, like iron being wrought, one minute in the fire, the next in the water.

## *Chapter Thirty One*

The twenty seventh of December one thousand nine hundred and ninety five. The anniversary of their first meeting. He spent the entire day wandering around the souqs. A tall Arab with a wild mien and black eyes shadowed him. He went back to the hotel, had a showered, put on the same black jogging pants and the French beret he had been wearing that night. On leaving the hotel he bought a litre of coca-cola from a kiosk. He met the same boy, the butcher. They exchanged the same words, gave him the coke and made love in the park and the Arab fled having stolen his wallet. He walked slowly towards Djemaa el-Fna and gave his last dirham to the same old beggar woman whom he had met that night. As he walked through smoke wafting from the rotisseries with the tall Arab dressed in black, with his wild face, following him.

He climbed onto the roof of the café with its dominant view over the square.

The Koutoubia glowed in the twilight. Life went on as normal in Djemaa el-Fna. Tourists wandered to and fro. The Arabs went wherever life took them. Suddenly, the sun darkened and two black eyes locked their fiery glare on the pupils of his eyes.

He just about managed to call out 'Karim.' And the tall Arab with the wild face lifted him off the ground with his strong arms.

He spent the rest of his life blind in a whorehouse. People from the twelve tribes of Israeli came and went and the house overflowed with gold. However, he didn't care about money, didn't count it. They had hired a fat, peaceful accountant for that purpose.

He spent the whole day waiting for that moment in the evening when Karim would come and feed him like a bird with pollen and royal jelly which he rolled into balls with saliva from his mouth.

And one night when his wet nurse didn't come to him because he was lying dead next to him on the silk pillows on the large brass bed in the desert under the sheltering sky, the white man saw the light again.

He returned home and his clients were waiting for him and the furniture in his lawyer's office was covered with a thin film of dust after his having been away for two weeks.

He was thirty four and the African plague had passed. But for the rest of his life he would recall it as a deep well which he had fallen into twice. The first time falling jubilantly into a white void; the second, striving to climb up to the nightingale which sang on the sun-drenched canopy of a poplar at midnight.

“We write to see what we have lived. To get close to the Unknown which charms souls and darkens our logic”, he wrote on the packet of Gauloises he would toss absent-mindedly into the rubbish bin outside his office.

In a while he will leave for the airport. Usually there are no delays on the Royal Air Maroc flight from Casablanca to Marrakesh. He puts the manuscript in an envelope for the publisher. He’ll post it when he goes out. He writes the same message on two pieces of paper. One for his wife; the other for Haris. He’ll post them when he goes out. Due to the festivities they won’t receive the notes until after his return.

*“The airplane flies for Casablanca. Six hours wait in the airport and after a half-hour flight to Marrakesh. Was it a simple transaction or something more? I don’t know if I’ll be back. Akis”.*

