



The Sheikh's Last Gamble (Desert Brothers Book 2)

By Trish Morey

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When infamous billionaire gambler Bahir Al-Qadir is forced to protect his ex-lover, Marina Peshwah, it seems Lady Luck has finally deserted him.... He's tried to forget the spoiled princess, but even the relentless heat of the desert has failed to burn the intoxicating image of her from his mind. Now he's about to discover that their passion left them with more than just memories....

Marina is once again at the mercy of the man she loves to hate. She may hold the winning card, but with such high stakes this proud sheikh will go *all in* to claim his heir!

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Editorial Review

About the Author

Trish Morey lives with her husband and four daughters in a special part of South Australia, surrounded by orchards and bushland, and visited by the occasional koala and kangaroo. With a lifelong love of reading, she penned her first book at the age of eleven, after which life, career and a growing family kept her busy until once again she could indulge her desire to create characters and stories – this time in romance. Visit Trish at her website: www.trishmorey.com.

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Bahir Al-Qadir hated losing. For a man barred entry to more than half the world's casinos for routinely and systematically breaking the bank, losing did not come often or easily. Now, as he watched yet another pile of his chips being swept from the roulette table, the bitter taste of loss soured his mouth and a black cloud of despair hung low over his head.

For three nights now he had endured this run of black fortune and still there seemed no end to it. And not even the knowledge that roulette was a game designed to give the house the edge was any compensation. Not when he was used to winning. How ironic that Lady Luck had deserted him now, just when he had been counting on a stint at a casino to improve his mood. He might have laughed at the irony, except right now he was in no mood for laughing.

Still, he managed to dredge up a smile as placed his last pile of chips on a black square, and glanced the way of the croupier to let him know he was ready. So what that he had already dropped the equivalent of a small nation's gross national product? He was nothing if not a consummate professional. The back of his neck might be damp with perspiration and his stomach roiling, but he'd be damned if any of the vultures around the table watching him come undone would read how bleak he felt right now on his face or in his body language.

The croupier called for any more bets even when he would have known there would be none. One by one the other players had dropped out, content to watch the unthinkable, to watch Bahir—the famed 'Sheikh of Spin'—lose, until there remained only him and the numbered wheel.

With a well-rehearsed flick of one wrist, the croupier sent the wheel spinning; a flick of the other sending the ball hurtling in the opposite direction.

A feeble and battered thread of hope surged anew. *Surely this time? Surely?*

Bahir's gut clenched as the ball spun. The damp at his collar formed a bead that ran down his back under his shirt. And, despite it all, he forced his smile to grow more nonchalant, his stance more relaxed.

'Rien ne va plus!' the croupier announced unnecessarily, for nobody looked like making another bet. Everybody was watching the ball bounce and skip over the numbered pockets as the wheel slowed beneath it.

Finally the ball lost momentum and caught in one of the pockets, fighting momentum and bouncing once, twice, before settling into another and being whisked suddenly in the other direction. He knew exactly how it felt. He'd felt hope being ripped right out of him in much the same way for three nights running now. Surely this time, on his last bet of the night, his luck would change? Surely this time he might regain some tiny

shred of success to take with him, to show him his gift hadn't abandoned him completely?

Then the wheel slowed to a crawl and with sickening realisation he saw: *red*, the colour rendering the number irrelevant. It was done. He had lost.

Again.

He thanked the croupier, as if he had dropped no more than the price of a cup of coffee, ignoring the shocked murmurings of the onlookers, intending to walk out of here with his head held high, even if he felt like dropping it into his hands. What the hell was wrong with him?

Bahir didn't lose.

Not like this. The last time he had suffered a run like this...

He pulled his thoughts to an abrupt halt. He wasn't going down that path. The last thing he needed to think about on a night such as this was her.

She was the damned reason he was here, after all.

'Monsieur, s'il vous plaît,' came a smooth-as-silk voice alongside him, and he turned to see the shark-faced Marcel, the host the casino had assigned to him tonight. The perfect host up until now, keeping both his distance and his expression free of the smugness he was no doubt feeling, Marcel had meantime ensured that he had wanted for nothing during his stint at the table. 'Sheikh Al-Qadir, the evening does not have to end here. If you wish, the casino would be only too happy to extend you credit to prolong your entertainment.'

Bahir read his face. The man's bland expression might tell him nothing, but there was an eagerness in his grey eyes that made his skin crawl. So they did not think he was done with his losing streak yet? A momentary challenge flared in his blood, only to be quashed by the knowledge that all he'd done here since he'd entered this establishment three days ago was lose. So maybe they were right. Which gave him all the more reason to leave now.

Besides, he didn't need their money. He had won plenty of that over the years not to be worried about dropping the odd million, or even ten for that matter. It wasn't the money he cared about. It was losing that did his head in. It pounded now, the drums in his head beating out the letters of the word: *loser*. He smiled in spite of it. 'Thank you, but no.'

He was halfway across the room before Marcel caught up with him. 'Surely the night is still young?'

Bahir looked around. A person could certainly think that here. Locked away under the crystal chandeliers, surrounded by luxurious furnishings and even more luxurious-looking women, and without a hint of a window to indicate the time of day, it was possible to lose all concept of time. He glanced at the watch on his wrist, realising that, even leaving now, daylight would beat him to bed. 'For some, perhaps.'

Still his host persisted. No doubt he would be amply rewarded if he hung onto his prize catch a while longer. 'We will see you this evening, then, Sheikh Al-Qadir?'

'Maybe.' *Maybe not.*

'I will arrange a limousine to collect you from your hotel. Perhaps you will have time for dinner and a show beforehand? On the house, of course. Shall we say, eight o'clock?'

Bahir stopped then, fingers pinching the bridge of his nose, trying to produce enough pain to drown out the thunder in his head. Not for the first time was he grateful he hadn't accepted the casino's oh-so-generous offer of accommodation in-house. There were advantages in turning down some of the casino's high-roller benefits. The ability to come and go as he pleased, for one.

He was just about to tell Marcel where he could shove his limousine and his show when he saw it—a flash of colour across the room draped over honey-coloured flesh, and a coil of ebony hair held by a diamond clip—and for a moment he was reminded of another time, another casino.

And, damn it all, of another woman; one he had come here expressly to forget. He shook his head, wanting to rid himself of the memories, feeling the blackness inside of him swell to bursting point, feeling the rush of heat from a suddenly pounding heart.

'Shiekh Al-Qadir?'

'Go away, Marcel,' he snarled, and this time the pinstriped shark took the hint and with a hasty goodnight withdrew into the sea of gowns and dinner suits.

It wasn't her, he realised on a second glance, it was nothing like her. This woman's face was all square jaw and heavy brow, her lips like two red slugs framing her mouth, that honey skin more like leather. And, of course, how could it have been her? He'd left her with her sister in Al-Jirad and surely not even someone as irresponsible as she was would abandon her family so soon after the trouble they had all gone to to rescue her from Mustafa?

Then again, knowing Marina.

He cursed under his breath as he headed for the exit.

What the hell was wrong with him tonight? The last thing he needed to think about was *her*.

No, that was wrong. The last thing he needed to think about was her honey skin, and how she'd still drawn him like a magnet, in spite of the passage of time and despite the hate-filled chasm that lay between them. Yet she'd stepped out of that desert tent and he'd still felt the tug in every cell of his body. What was it now—three years? More? Yet still she'd managed to make him hard with just one glance from those siren's eyes, a glance that had turned frosty and cold the instant she'd realized just who one of her rescuers was.

Still she'd moved like liquid silk, mounting the horse like a natural, her limbs as slender as he recalled, her body still willowy slim despite time and the two children he knew she'd borne.

He might be on the losing streak from hell, but he would bet everything he had that her satin skin was just as smooth as he remembered it to be, whether it be under his hands or in the long slide of her legs wrapped around him.

Curse the woman!

He would not think of her or her long limbs and satin skin! There was no point to it. She was trouble, past or present. She was the worst kind of gamble, the wager lost before the wheel was even spun.

A doorman nodded and bade him a good evening as he passed, even though the night sky outside was already softening to grey. He looked to the cool morning air for the balm it should have been to his overheated skin and fractured nerves, searching for the promise of a new day.

Instead he felt only frustration. He rolled his shoulders on an exhale, protesting the unfamiliar stiffness in his back and neck. When before had his muscles ever been bound so tightly? When before had his spirits ever felt so bleak?

But he already knew the answer to that question. He didn't want to go there either.

He curled into a waiting limousine and tugged his bow tie loose as he sagged against the upholstery, suddenly weary of the world, suddenly restless with his life. He'd thought the casino would liven his spirits. Instead, his luck had let him down and ground him further into the mire.

He looked vacantly out of the window, past the palm-lined esplanade, over the white-fringed sea. Monaco was beautiful, there was no doubt, and justifiably a magnet for the rich and famous and those who craved to be. But right now Monaco and the entire south of France seemed stale, empty and utterly pointless.

No, there was nothing for him here.

He needed to get away, but to where? ...

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