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## DJORFF PALACE THE NOVEL

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**The story of two women,  
two revolutions and one house.**

*Marina Hitchen*



## CHAPTER SIXTEEN



*July 23<sup>rd</sup>*

Simon arrived home very late last night and the less said about what I had to go through the better. After it was over instead of going back to his room he rolled over to the other side of the bed and struck up a conversation.

"Something's happening out there" he said. "I can feel it. It sounds much quieter than usual. Don't you think so?"

I told him that it sounded like any other night to me and that I could hear nothing different.

"No something's different; something's going on." he repeated. "I told Valentine as much tonight at the club. I even went so far as to call the Ambassador. He said I was imagining things and assured me everything was under control; everyone on our list was accounted for and the main man, Sadat had gone to the cinema. There had been a meeting in the afternoon he said, at Khalid somebody's house but they had all left there before seven and this Khalid now appeared to have gone to bed."

"There you are then. The Ambassador's right; you are imagining things." I replied hoping he would go back to his room now. He didn't.

"Possibly, but you know I always prefer to trust to my gut instinct rather than the evidence" he said yawning. "Remember the Shepherd's. I was right then wasn't I?"

With that he rolled over and promptly fell asleep. He hadn't fastened his trousers and I could see his penis; flaccid and wrinkled. I averted my eyes and tried to sleep but I couldn't. Simon was snoring now. It must have been around six in the morning when I heard planes circling overhead. I thought about waking Simon to tell him but decided against it in the end. "It's probably nothing" I thought.

At half past seven the phone rang. Simon leapt up to answer it and after a very short conversation he put down the receiver and turned on the radio. Someone was giving a speech in Arabic. I couldn't understand a word of it but Simon seemed to be following it. After whoever it was had finished speaking Simon

switched off the radio and started getting dressed.

"What was all that about?" I asked.

"That was Anwar Sadat" he said; "Our man at the movies. They brought their bloody coup forward and we were taken completely by surprise. Didn't I tell you something was wrong? I just knew it!"

"So what happened and what did he say" I asked. This sounded interesting.

"I don't know all the details or how they managed to pull such a thing off. Sadat didn't say anything about that. He was more interested in trying to justify what they have gone and done. Basically he said that Egypt has passed through a critical period recently with no governmental stability. He delved right back into the past and blamed everyone who took bribes for Egypt's defeat in the Palestine War back in '48. That's almost everybody in authority I would imagine. He said all the army commanders are either stupid or corrupt. He's not far off the mark there either. Anyway they have appointed new commanders now who he says are all of good character and have the ability to do a proper job. According to Sadat they are certain that all Egypt will receive this news with enthusiasm and welcome it with open arms. He promised to be lenient with all those who have been arrested but personally I doubt that very much. The bottom line is the army is taking over the country with some assistance from the police. He assured all of us foreigners that we and our property will be safe and that the army considers itself responsible for us. Let's hope so. I had better get over to the Embassy now to see exactly what happened. Don't go out. There are bound to be mobs on the streets today. I can hear them cheering out there already.

*4.00pm*

Simon was back in time for lunch. He said that it's chaos outside.

"The King is scared to death and is hiding out in Alexandria" he told me, "but the British have more to worry about at the moment than looking after Farouk. They are all furious over at the Embassy about having been taken in so easily. I don't know why no one saw it coming. I did try to warn them. While all eyes

were on Sadat sitting in the picture house most of the other little revolutionaries were driving around Cairo unnoticed in Nasser's car rounding up their team. Nasser cleverly made sure he had the Muslim Brotherhood on his side before making his move and he has the Communists with him as well. Later on I am sure he will deal with them differently; get rid of them altogether most likely, but right now he needs them. Anyway getting back to the story; once they had their team together they arrested the key royalist commanders and then went off to their barracks and took control over there. They sent one artillery unit to the Military General HQ and picked up the army chief of staff and a few other poor bastards who had the misfortune to be there. El-Hilali's out of office again. That's a joke. He only came back into power yesterday."

I hadn't even known El-Hilali was back. I must have missed that. Then again I haven't been following the news much lately.

"Can you believe they pulled this off with less than a hundred men and most of them were from the junior ranks at that? Simon continued obviously still suffering from shock over what had happened. "No wonder they are calling it 'The Blessed Movement.' They must have had some celestial help to pull that off like they did. I mean the audacity of it! Come down to the bar with me Nancy. I need a drink."

We hadn't been in the bar long when Lord Valentine arrived.

"I've just come from the Ambassador" he said without a word of greeting to either of us. "He's received some communiqué from the CIA. It says that this isn't only about anti-British sentiment. In fact that's not even a major factor. It's really about corruption at the very top of the armed forces and it goes right back to that arms scandal in 1948 and the King's attempt at a cover up. I can't say I am surprised. There have been tensions between the monarchy and the ordinary soldiers for a long time now. The average man in the street blames the King for the losses in the Palestine conflict. Well they have to blame someone I suppose and they don't want to blame the army. Nasser's obviously looking for power and I think he has used this tension between the military and the

monarchy as an opportunity to snatch it. He has political ambitions of his own that one. He not only wants rid of the King but most of the aristocracy as well. With the end of British occupation I think he sees himself as becoming head of some sort of republic. Sadat's another one to watch. Poor Naguib seems to be a puppet in all this. Nasser and Sadat are using him in my opinion because he commands such a lot of respect from the military. They'll dispense with him later when the right time comes along. All this nationalistic fervour will spread down to the Sudan: bound to. I'm bloody glad I'm retiring."

He paused for breath there and Simon who I didn't think had really been listening made no comment so I took up the conversation from there.

"Will you go back to England after you retire?" I asked him.

"Dear me no Nancy! I couldn't go back there to live, not after all my adventures. No Barbara and I will live out our days in Alex. We were there during the war. Best time of our lives that was. Did Barbara ever tell you about it?"

"No never" I answered hoping that he wouldn't tell me about it either but he was in full flow by then.

"Well we rented a rather nice little place on the seafront up there and Barbara met up with the neighbours who had this fantastic Italian mansion. The Ambrose Villa it was called; fabulous place. It had this big ornamental turret and that's where we first met Lawrence Durrell. You know who I mean don't you? Durrell the novelist, he's quite famous. He was supposed to be writing up there in that tower but more often than not he was entertaining his little Jewish girlfriend. He was married to someone else at the time but his marriage was already on the rocks by then. I believe his wife was called Nancy too; yes Nancy that's it. Nice girl but totally preoccupied with her new baby. I didn't think she knew what was going on but she must have done because she left Lawrence shortly afterwards and hightailed it to Jerusalem taking the baby with her. Maybe Nancy was a Jew too. I'm not sure about that so don't quote me on it. I didn't really know her very well. Lawrence never brought her out much. Anyway we had some wild parties in those days. Durrell was working as a press

attaché for the Embassy so we saw quite a lot of him and Barbara was great pals with his girlfriend Eve. At the end of the war they moved to Rhodes and all the parties came to an end. There was no one left in Alex who could drink quite like Durrell you see. Can't stand his books though! He used to say they were partly autobiographical and if that's true he must have spent an awful lot of his time with prostitutes. Talking of prostitutes let's get ourselves out to the Auberge again tonight Simon. You look like you need cheering up. There's nothing we can do about this damned coup so we may as well go and get drunk. You don't mind do you Nancy?"

"No not at all. You two go and enjoy yourselves"

Why should I mind? I was glad to be rid of the pair of them so I had no reason to make any objection. I'm sure it wouldn't have made any difference even if I had. It's very bad news that Barbara won't be leaving Egypt. I had rather been hoping that she would be out of Simon's way soon. I'm still not convinced it isn't her who was with him in the Sudan.

*July 24<sup>th</sup>*

Simon did not make his usual appearance in my room last night. I'm not sure if he came back to the hotel at all but he turned up at breakfast shortly after ten. He still seemed very distracted and not totally sober either.

"Did I tell you that the King is in Alexandria?" he asked me. "I must have done. Alex is the last British stronghold and that's probably why the King went up there but he won't be safe even there. Nasser will have that city under his control within a couple of days. He already has the rest of Egypt with him so Alexandria won't be able to hold out much longer on its own. No, the British can't help Farouk now. I heard he's asking the Americans for some support. They won't be able to help him either and even if they could I doubt they would want to. He's a friend of the British Empire in their eyes and no matter what they say in public deep down they hate us. God knows what the plan is for poor old Farouk now. I heard Naguib and Nasser want to send him into exile but some of the others

want him arrested and put on trial. I even heard someone suggest that he should be executed. Bloody ridiculous! Then there is the matter of his son. They can't execute him, he's only a baby. Still he has a claim to the throne and if they don't deal with him now they could be storing up problems for themselves later on. I doubt I'll be going to Alex now" he said changing the subject. "I'll go straight back down to Luxor in a couple of days so you may as well hang on here till then and we can travel back down together."

So I am not going to have any time by myself after all.

*July 25<sup>th</sup>*

Another night without Simon. I don't know where he goes every night and I'm not going to ask him. He can go wherever he wants if it means he is too drunk to come and bother me. He wasn't in breakfast this morning though which is unusual.

The waiter told me that according to the news the Free Officers have now occupied Alexandria. The King is petrified apparently and has left his home in Montaza Palace and moved to his other palace at Ras Al Teen. I was wondering why he had bothered to do that since everybody would still know where he was, when the waiter explained that this palace is right on the waterfront near to his yacht and he might have been planning to make a run for it.

"He can't do that now" the waiter laughed sounding very happy about it all. "Naguib has ordered the captain of al-Mahrusa, that's the name of Farouk's yacht by the way, not to sail without explicit orders from the army. I hope they execute the bastard."

*10.00pm*

I heard on the radio just now that Farouk is probably going to abdicate in favour of his son. No details were given other than that. What in the name of God is the point of making a six month old baby into the King? Surely it would be better to do away with the monarchy altogether.

*July 26<sup>th</sup>*

Simon summoned me down to the bar this morning. It's the first time I have seen him in almost two days. I found him there nursing a glass of brandy. It was not even nine o'clock!

"You probably already know that the King is abdicating" he told me. "He will be leaving the country at six tonight. Most likely he's going to go to Italy. He received a letter from the Free Officers in the early hours of this morning demanding that he abdicate his throne in favour of his son. Farouk was expecting it and already had his own abdication letter ready and today he has issued a royal decree announcing Prince Ahmed Fuad II as King of Egypt and the Sudan. It's all stamped and sealed so that's that. It's over; there is nothing more that can be done. The army will ensure the King gets out of the country safely enough because his son is travelling with him. They say that they won't crown little Fuad yet; he's too young. Personally I hope Farouk's abdication will bring everyone back to their senses. At least it will appease the Egyptian people for a while and hopefully they will see the logic in continuing to uphold the monarchy. Maybe Farouk's son will be better than him and turn out to be a unifying force for the country. Anyway in the meantime a Regency Council has been appointed and the head of it is married to the granddaughter of the last of the Ottoman Sultans. He is going to be the formal representative for this little boy king during his absence. Things could have gone worse for Farouk and all of us over at the Embassy are breathing a big sigh of relief. I know it's all done and dusted but Naguib wants to go on the air and formally ask the King to step down. It's totally unnecessary because all Egypt already knows what is happening. He's just showing off to the people in my view. Anyway I have a translation of the speech he is going to give in a couple of hour's time. Do you want to read it?" he asked handing me a tatty piece of paper.

I read it more out of politeness than anything else.

'In view of what the country has suffered in the recent past, the complete vacuity' (is that really a word I ask myself) 'prevailing in all corners as a result of

your bad behaviour, your toying with the constitution, and your disdain for the wants of the people, no one rests assured of life, livelihood, and honour. Egypt's reputation among the peoples of the world has been debased as a result of your excesses in these areas to the extent that traitors and bribe-takers find protection beneath your shadow in addition to security, excessive wealth, and many extravagances at the expense of the hungry and impoverished people. You manifested this during and after the Palestine War in the corrupt arms scandals and your open interference in the courts to try to falsify the facts of the case, thus shaking faith in justice. Therefore, the army, representing the power of the people, has empowered me to demand that Your Majesty abdicate the throne to His Highness Crown Prince Ahmed Fuad, provided that this is accomplished at the fixed time of 12 o'clock noon today and that you depart the country before 6 o'clock in the evening of the same day. The army places upon Your Majesty the burden of everything that may result from your failure to abdicate according to the wishes of the people.'

"It's a bit harsh isn't it" I said not really expecting a reply. I didn't get one. I made my excuses and left the bar. I don't hold with drinking at such an early hour. A couple of hours later Simon appeared in my room and in broad daylight without even bothering to close the curtains he put me through a most painful and excruciating ordeal. It lasted close on half an hour. I think Simon was having some difficulty after having consumed so much alcohol. At ten in the evening I was subjected to more of the same. I have resolved not to mention sex in this diary ever again. It is a very unpleasant thing to endure let alone to write about afterwards.

Simon informed me that tomorrow we will be leaving for Luxor on the afternoon train.