



~

DJORFF PALACE THE NOVEL

~

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

Marina Hitchen



CHAPTER NINETEEN



January 13th 1954

There are more problems than ever in Cairo now that the Brotherhood has been banned. Yesterday some students were out demonstrating and it looks as though things are getting worse. Nasser isn't going to have the easy ride to absolute power that Simon was predicting.

January 20th

Simon is concerned that I am not pregnant yet and to be honest so am I. We had a blazing row about it today.

"You need to see a doctor" Simon said completely out of the blue over breakfast. "If it turns out that you are unable to have children then you know I will have to think about getting a divorce. I have made an appointment for you tomorrow at a clinic on the East Bank and I want you to go there and get yourself checked out. Don't try to tell me you don't want to go because you are going and I want a full written report bringing back."

"Of course I will go; I'm happy to go but shouldn't we both go. Maybe the problem is with you" I snapped back. The last thing I need is to discover I am infertile.

"No sorry Nancy you can't put it on to me" he replied, and then to my absolute horror he regaled me with a story about him having fathered a child not long before we were married with some woman working in one of the clubs in Cairo. I couldn't control myself then and a tirade of anger and abuse flowed from my tongue without my being able to stop it.

"You are telling me you fathered a child with a prostitute! A prostitute! No doubt you abandoned the poor woman and her baby to fend for themselves as soon as you found out what you had done. Are you sure it was even yours? I was under the impression that prostitutes did not restrict themselves to only one man at a time. It could have been anybody's child. And am I to assume you still sleep with these prostitutes when you are up in Cairo? Maybe that's where you go on all those nights when you leave me waiting for you in the hotel. You

are with those women are you? Then when you have had enough of them I suppose you come back to me. How can you do that? It's filthy. Once I have given you your precious babies I will never let you near me again. "

Throughout my entire outburst Simon sat there quietly, looking at me as though I had gone mad, and maybe at that moment I had. When I finally regained control and no more words could come out of my mouth I sat there in a hostile silence waiting for some kind of reaction. I felt my whole body go rigid but I couldn't cry. What this horrible man had said to me had frozen even my tears. After a few minutes of silence Simon carried on as though nothing was wrong. "My liaisons with prostitutes are not exactly as you imagine Nancy. I do not simply find any woman off the street to sleep with; all of them come from a recommended source and with a clean bill of health. I don't deny having had affairs with prostitutes but as for this particular lady she was more of an escort than a prostitute and I bought exclusive rights to her for a short while. That is why I am absolutely certain the child is mine. When she fell pregnant she told me that this was a hazard of her profession and that it had happened before. She told me she had got rid of more than one baby in the past but this time she planned on keeping it. She also told me that we must never see each other again and that she didn't want me to bear any responsibility for her child. This child she said would be hers and only hers and if anyone ever asked her who the father was she would say she hadn't the slightest idea. I gave her some money, not much to be honest, and I never saw her again. Pity really because I enjoyed her company. You can't judge women like her against the standards you apply to other women Nancy. Prostitution is a job and prostitutes give you what you pay for and ask for nothing more; that's why I use them. It's a very honest profession. You on the other hand are not giving me what I am paying for that is why you will see that doctor first thing tomorrow."

I haven't been out of the house all day, not even to see Amin. This is not something I can talk about to anyone.

January 21st

The doctor is a woman thank goodness. She made a lot of tests and she asked me to come back for the results in two days.

January 23rd

The doctor says that everything is fine and that all my reproductive system is in full working order.

"You need to relax" she said sympathetically. "Sometimes it's difficult to conceive when you are trying too hard and then a baby will suddenly come along when you least expect it. You have been married for quite a while though so it might be a good idea if your husband gets himself checked out as well."

"Thank-you" I said taking the report from her and completely ignoring what she had said I made my way to the door.

"Well good luck Mrs. Paramour" she replied patting me on the shoulder as she ushered me out of the clinic. "Yes" I thought, "I will need it".

6.00pm

Simon has read the report from the doctor and he seems satisfied that I will be able to give him a child eventually and that it's just a matter of being patient.

I will go to visit Amin and my palace soon but not tonight. I still need time to get over the shock of what I learnt this week.

January 30th

I went to the palace today and the work is going much slower than I had hoped. Amin keeps adding new embellishments and whilst it is all very tasteful it is seriously delaying things. I was quite cross and Amin got angry then because he says he has done nothing without Simon's full approval. Once again I am being sidelined.

February 25th

Naguib has resigned. He says it is because the Council keeps holding meetings without him. It seems I'm not the only one who gets sidelined! I suppose I had better go and patch things up with Amin soon but I am in no mood for that today.

February 26th

Nasser has not only accepted Naguib's resignation but he has placed him under house arrest. Nasser is now both the chairman of the Council and the prime minister. Maybe he was all that before and I have only just realised. Anyway whatever he is he has far too much power.

10.00pm

Simon came home late today and is full of what is happening up in Cairo. There is some sort of mutiny or strike going on in the army and they are demanding Naguib's immediate reinstatement and the dissolution of the Council. Simon seems to think this mutiny was planned by Naguib himself before he resigned. Anyway Nasser tried to call for an end to the strike but it looks like he will have to accept their demands for that to happen.

February 27th

Nasser must have had second thoughts and instead of giving in he launched a raid on army headquarters and ended the mutiny that way.

February 28th

Last night what must have been hundreds of thousands of protesters went out onto the streets calling for Naguib's return and Nasser's imprisonment. Simon says that most of the protestors are from the Brotherhood but he is making that up I am sure. I don't think there are that many people in the Brotherhood. A big group from within the Council itself has demanded Naguib's release and

return to the presidency so even the Council is not fully united behind Nasser.

4.00pm

Nasser has had to give in and Naguib is going to be reinstated.

March 3rd

I don't know what Nasser is playing at but Naguib is still under house arrest. Simon thinks Nasser is buying some time to get more of his own people into key positions. Today he gave the post of Commander of the Armed Forces to one of his friends. I think Naguib had that job before he was arrested so it looks like Simon could be right.

March 4th

Naguib is out and is in charge again! They are all behaving like spoilt little children.

March 5th

Nasser's security forces arrested thousands of people today who they said had participated in the uprising. Supposedly the Free Officers have withdrawn from politics now and have put an end to restrictions on some of the monarchy-era political parties. This is all beyond my comprehension and Simon said he can't understand it any more than I can and that I should just ignore the goings on in Cairo because they are not affecting us here in Luxor. He said his work is largely unaffected too. God knows what he means by that. He hardly ever seems to do any work. He is always mooching around the house.

I saw Amin today and he has invited me to go with him to Abydos tomorrow. He has some work over there and he says while he is doing that I can look round the temple. Normally I would have said no because all these temples are much of a muchness to me but as we haven't been getting on too well I agreed to go with him as a kind of gesture. Simon seems pleased now he thinks I am taking

an interest in Ancient Egypt at last so I hadn't the heart to tell him I am only going to Abydos to make amends with Amin. Over supper he gave me a long lecture about how Abydos is considered to be one of the most important archaeological sites in Egypt and how he and Valentine have done a lot of work there at a royal necropolis where lots of the early pharaohs are buried. Apparently it was once the most desirable place in Egypt to get oneself entombed. How fascinating! I hope Amin won't be there all day.

March 6th

The drive up to Abydos was pleasant enough and even the visit to the temple wasn't too bad. The guide who showed me round the memorial temple of someone called Seti seemed to want to get the tour over with as fast as possible which suited me down to the ground. He told me that most of the original structure and many of the artefacts have been lost or destroyed by later constructions and that it wasn't worth spending too much time in there. I was so happy to get this temple visit done with so quickly that I gave him a colossal tip. He then deposited me in a basic but comfortable coffee shop where I prepared myself for a long wait. Amin had told me that he would be at least two hours and I doubt my trip to the temple had taken half that time. Anyway as I was sitting there the guide came back and handed me a horrible bracelet which he said was made from stone and was over two thousand years old. Apparently this guide also works as a guard at the temple and he found this bracelet there one night and as nobody was around to see him he kept it. He said I could have it now as a present and if I wear it all the time it will bring me luck. It is quite hideous; heavy black stone with a scarab carved on one side and a cobra's head on the other. I could never wear it but the guide said that if it is not on my person at all times there might be terrible consequences. He scared me half to death. When Amin came back I showed it to him and he said that if I wasn't prepared to wear it I should put it in my bag and carry it round with me. He said the old temple guards know a lot about protection amulets like these and that I would be fool-

ish to ignore his warning. I thought about the Openshaw sisters and how they believed in all this nonsense and I immediately resolved not be as preposterously superstitious as them. Still the bracelet is now in my handbag and something is telling me not to take it out of there. How silly.

On the way back Amin asked me if I had been to Hatshepsut's temple.

"No why?" I asked. "Is there something special about it? All these temples seem quite similar to each other and having seen Karnak I don't think there is anything to compare it with so why bother seeing the rest."

"You have a point" he said thoughtfully, "but although Hatshepsut's temple is not as grand as Karnak it was commissioned by a woman. I thought that might interest you. You remind me of her in a way. You could be her" he laughed "and I could be Senmut."

I said nothing but tomorrow I will look up this Hatshepsut and see what it is about her that makes Amin think of me.

March 7th

I found something about Hatshepsut in one of the books I bought ages ago on Egyptology. She was one of the most prolific builders in ancient Egypt the book said.

"So that must be why I remind Amin of her." I thought. "This Senmut was the main advisor for all her building work so I see the connection there too."

I was about to put the book down but something in the next paragraph caught my eye and I read on.

'It is obvious that the couple enjoyed a close and trusting relationship and Hatshepsut seemed happy to acknowledge to the world that he was her favourite. She entrusted him with her most important building projects. One of the main pieces of evidence that is used to support the theory that Senmut and Hatshepsut were lovers is the fact that she allowed him to place an image of himself and inscribe his name in a concealed spot in her royal mortuary temple. There is also some graffiti in an unused tomb showing a man who appears to be Senmut and

a figure dressed in the clothes of a pharaoh engaged in sexual activity. There was much gossip and many rumours at the time about their relationship.'

That puts things in a whole new light. I have suspected for some time that Amin harbours romantic feelings for me and now I have the evidence. Yesterday he was giving me a message. I don't know how I should respond but for the moment I will do nothing and act as though his message never reached me. What do I feel about him; anything? I can't answer that question now.

March 29th

The Council has managed to provoke the workers and petty bourgeois somehow or other and there are about a million people on strike and thousands of peasants have gone to Cairo to protest. Naguib is trying to crack down but he's not getting much help from the security forces. Nasser stepped in today and announced that he will revoke whatever it is these protestors don't like so he is now somewhat of a hero on the streets. Simon says this is just the latest move in Nasser's game to get rid of Naguib once and for all.

I am going across to the palace most nights as usual but I haven't given Amin any indication yet that I know about his feelings for me.

April 12th

Everyday literally hundreds of Naguib's supporters in the military are being either arrested or dismissed. His biggest supporter has been packed off to Switzerland supposedly to represent Egypt abroad. Nasser is slowly but surely eradicating Naguib's power.

June 12th

Naguib is almost powerless now but Nasser's following on the streets is still not big enough to secure him in office. He has embarked on a massive campaign to promote himself and is now on a cross-country tour giving speeches all over the place. He has even been to Luxor but Simon refused to go and listen to him

and wouldn't let me go either. Nasser has planned the whole campaign himself and I heard he writes all his own speeches too. He is reaching out to all the Arab nationalists by speaking about 'Our Arab Homeland' and he has engaged the support of Umm Kulthum who is forever singing one of her very long and very boring songs in praise of him. You can't find one bad thing said about him in any of the newspapers these days. Simon told me that's because Nasser has imposed strict controls on all the press.

"All publications have to be approved by the party, which really means by Nasser. Supposedly to prevent sedition" he added sarcastically.

I think Simon hates Nasser more now than he ever did.

July 3rd

I have been having dreams about Amin. They started about a month ago and at first they were all very innocent with him maybe putting his arm round me and in one dream he gave me a small peck on the cheek. I didn't pay much attention to them but now they are becoming more frequent and much more explicit I want to know what they mean. The one last night was so perspicuous that I am afraid to even put into words what happened in it. I don't know what to make of them. It seems as though I am obsessed with the man yet in the day I hardly think of him at all. Against my better judgment but having no other recourse I am going to see if I can find any explanation in that book of Freud's.

11.00pm

I have spent most of the day studying *The Interpretation of Dreams* and I am now more confused than ever. Freud thinks it is perfectly normal to dream about sex and even to dream about having sex with a person you might not even like. There were pages and pages of stuff about men fantasising about sleeping with their mothers and he assumes that's how all the myths about Oedipus and Horus came about. Women don't have the same fantasies about their fathers quite as much according to Freud. I ploughed my way through most of his

boring book but couldn't find much about my own case. Freud likes to write about his own dreams mostly showing him to be a rather vain shallow sort of man. The only thing I did find was something about wish fulfilment. It is possible that what you dream about at night could be what you really want to happen when you are awake. This might be true to some extent but not the sex part. I have no desire to have sex with anyone, not even Amin, so that can't be wish fulfilment can it! The Ancient Greeks thought that dreams foretold the future and Freud is quite dismissive of that theory but I am not so sure. My dream is more likely to be a prophecy of some sort rather than this wish thing. Aristotle believed that all dreams come to us from the devil and Freud doesn't agree with that idea either. I think I might though. Dreaming such things as I do seems like a bad thing to me. What I really want is to stop these absurd dreams altogether. They are beginning to affect my real life now.

July 30th

The building work seems to have speeded up but Amin says it will be the end of the year before it is finished. I go there most nights and have now accepted that Amin and I are in a sort of spiritual relationship that we both know about but never speak about. Since admitting to myself that I am half in love with Amin the dreams have stopped.

October 5th

Simon has been in Cairo for almost a month. He called me today to say that the British are more unpopular than ever in Egypt now. He said that he is lucky to be hanging onto his job because the regime would love to get rid of him. But for the Antiquities Minister who says he is irreplaceable we might have had to leave Egypt. He was laughing down the telephone line and he sounded drunk. "Nasser might hate the British" he said, "but he has to admit we are more trustworthy than his own lot."

October 14th

Simon is back and now that he is sober I can see things are looking very bleak for the British.

"Nasser has backing from the Soviet Union and the States" he said glumly, "and they are all united in their opposition to the British especially over the Suez Canal. Despite all the pressure we are under including, I might add pressure from the UN itself, we are standing our ground and refusing to transfer control of the canal to this regime. I don't know how long we can hold out though even with the French backing us. Nasser and his Council of merry men have started actively funding and coordinating attacks on us in the Suez Canal Zone now."

October 19th

Nasser has signed a treaty with Britain to start the evacuation of our troops from Suez. It is to be completed over the next twenty months. Simon is livid.

"I know it's a phased evacuation" he told me angrily, "but nonetheless it is still an evacuation. We might have agreed to get our troops out of Suez within twenty months but we will continue to maintain our base there. Supposedly we have the right to return there any time over the next seven years. In fact the Suez Canal Company will not be in the hands of the Egyptian Government until nineteen sixty-eight which is still fourteen years away. All these delaying tactics are not much consolation; I think we should have stood our ground. Nobody is very happy about this compromise; not us because we are giving in and not the Egyptians because it's going to take so long."

October 26th

We were at dinner tonight when Simon received a phone call.

"That was Valentine" he said when he came back into the room from the office. "Someone took a pot shot at Nasser today up in Alex. There was some rally going on in Manshiya Square when this Muslim Brother chap squeezed through the crowd and fired eight shots at Nasser. All of them missed. Of course it's possible

that this Abdel Latif, or whatever his name is, is a really bad shot but Valentine says nobody can be that poor a marksman. He said he was less than twenty-five feet away! Valentine thinks this whole assassination attempt was staged. Nasser went on to finish his speech and who does that straight after someone has tried to kill you. The speech was being broadcast on the radio at the time but as it was Nasser's so called celebratory speech for the British military withdrawal from Suez I didn't tune in to it. This will no doubt boost his popularity and give him free rein to go after the Brotherhood. I'm with Valentine; it sounds like a put up job to me."

October 27th

Part of Nasser's speech was published in the English newspapers today; the part he had said after he had been shot at.

'My countrymen, my blood spills for you and for Egypt. I will live for your sake and die for the sake of your freedom and honour. Let them kill me; it does not concern me so long as I have instilled pride, honour, and freedom in you. If Gamal Abdel Nasser should die, each of you shall be Gamal Abdel Nasser ... Gamal Abdel Nasser is of you and from you and he is willing to sacrifice his life for the nation.' I have to admit it does sound a bit polished for someone who was almost killed seconds before.

October 30th

The people are rallying round Nasser now. This assassination attempt, if it was one, has played right into his hands. Now that he is back in Cairo he has ordered extensive political crackdowns. He's arresting thousands of dissenters, mostly members of the Brotherhood, but also some communists, and he has fired over one hundred officers loyal to Naguib. The Brotherhood's headquarters in Cairo have been destroyed as well as some of their business interests in Suez. I think it said on the news that some of the Brotherhood's leaders might receive death sentences.

So this is what they wanted a revolution for. Does anyone seriously believe that life now is better than it was under the monarchy?

November 14th

So Nasser has finally won his struggle and managed to force Naguib to resign from the presidency. Poor Naguib has been put under house arrest again and I don't think he will be getting out this time. I haven't heard of any plans to put him on trial or anything of that sort but its early days yet. Now all his rivals are fully neutralised Nasser really is the undisputed leader of Egypt. He has far more power than the King ever had.

November 15th

Nasser moved from being the chairman of the Council to Prime Minister and now he is the President. Simon says he will not be happy until he has established himself as head of the whole Arab world. I don't know much about the Arabs but Simon professes to. He told me there is a feud going on between Nasser and the Prime Minister of Iraq and the Voice of the Arabs radio station in Cairo regularly calls for the overthrow of the government in Baghdad. It's all to do with Iraq being pro-British and Nasser being an Arab nationalist.

December 9th

11.40pm

Eight of the Brotherhood's leaders were executed today. This would normally give me nightmares but instead I had the most vivid dream about Amin tonight. He was doing the most unspeakable things to me. In this dream my whole body was overcome by a most powerful sensation such as I have never experienced in my waking life. It was so powerful that it shook me awake and when I woke my body felt hot and very weak. I have an overwhelming urge to try to recreate this experience whilst I am awake. I don't know if I ever will do this or even if I can do it.

December 20th

Every time I see Amin now I start thinking about my dream. I only had it the once but I can't get it out of my head. I must try and forget about it and concentrate on our move to the palace. Simon says we can go there the first week in January. Thank God for that! I feel like I have been waiting a lifetime in this villa.