



~

DJORFF PALACE THE NOVEL

~

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

Marina Hitchen



CHAPTER TWENTY THREE



August 1st

I have lost my bracelet. I opened the bag I usually keep it in today looking for some keys and it's not there. I knew I should have transferred the bracelet to my new bag as soon as I stopped using the old one but unfortunately I didn't. I have been trying to think back to when I last saw it. It must have been the day those sisters left. I think Julia asked to have another look at it over breakfast or it could have been when we were sitting in the summerhouse waiting for their boat to arrive. I was so upset that morning that I wasn't concentrating on anything. I have had a good look round but I haven't found it yet. I am sure it will turn up somewhere. I asked Simon if he had seen it but he didn't even bother to answer me. He is too preoccupied thinking about some meeting between our Foreign Secretary and the French one with the American Ambassador which is going on in London today. No doubt the Ambassador here will let Simon know what was said as soon as he finds out himself.

August 2nd

Simon has now been updated by the Ambassador. America is against any form of military intervention so Britain is going to do something in secret along with France and Israel. How it will be kept a secret I don't know. I still haven't found my bracelet and I am going to stop looking for it now and just wait for it to show up.

August 3rd

Simon is never off the phone to the Ambassador these days. Today he heard that Gaitskell, the opposition leader in England is getting cold feet. "He admits that Nasser is behaving like Mussolini and Hitler" he told me "but he thinks we shouldn't allow that to colour our vision. He's scared of upsetting the United Nations and has sent a formal letter to Eden saying he will not be able to support any action that violates the UN charter." Simon is disgusted by what he calls Gaitskell's cowardly behaviour.

August 7th

Eden is going ahead with his plans regardless. He's trying to change them a bit and aim more at destroying Egypt's economy but he still wants to go ahead with an assault on Port Said. General Stockwell who is in charge of our campaign thinks Eden's new plan is too weak as it won't destroy the Egyptian military. The French are still supporting us and Israel has agreed to come in with us as well.

August 9th

Some Labour MPs issued a statement yesterday stating that forcing Nasser to denationalise the canal against Egypt's wishes would violate the UN charter. Simon is of the school that thinks to hell with the UN because if Nasser goes unchallenged we will lose control of the whole of the Middle East. Stockwell has his own plan which would begin with a two-day air campaign and he wants to capture Alexandria first and Port Said after that. Simon says this will need thousands of troops so we can't do it without France.

August 10th

Gaitskell has written to Eden again and the Ambassador in Cairo has been sent a copy. Of course he read it out to Simon over the phone who promptly called Valentine and repeated it to him. I didn't catch all the conversation but Gaitskell's letter goes something like this.

'I could not regard an armed attack on Egypt by ourselves and the French as justified by anything which Nasser has done so far or as consistent with the Charter of the United Nations. Nor, in my opinion, would such an attack be justified in order to impose a system of international control over the Canal. If the matter were to be taken to the United Nations and if Egypt were to be condemned by them as aggressors then, of course, the position would be different. And if further action which amounted to obvious aggression by Egypt were taken by Nasser, then again it would be different. So far what Nasser has done amounts

to a threat but it is only a threat which does not justify war.'

I think this was meant to be a private correspondence. These diplomats are so indiscreet!

August 14th

General Keightley has been appointed commander of operations with a Frenchman as his deputy. I think Stockwell is still overall in charge which according to the Ambassador is madness.

"He is too excitable" Simon said repeating to me the Ambassador's opinion which he is now purporting to be his own. "The problem with Stockwell is that he has rapid mood swings. One minute he is optimistic and then the next he is depressed. Despite his unpredictable streak he can hold his nerve under fire but even so the English would have preferred the French chap to be in charge. No matter who it is who's in charge we have to get on with this invasion soon if we are to avoid the bad weather but Eden is confusing things. He's not clear about his objectives. Does he want to retake Suez and leave it at that or does he want to topple Nasser at the same time?"

August 24th

There has been a conference of all the nations that use the canal. Over twenty countries sent a delegate to it. I don't think they actually decided anything. They never do at these conferences.

August 26th

I lost my baby this morning. It started with cramps in my back and abdomen followed by heavy bleeding. Simon called a doctor but there was nothing he could do. I am now resting up in bed very depressed. Simon is refusing to talk about it.

August 30th

I think they are going to go back to the original plan of attacking only Port Said because it requires fewer troops. Not everyone is in agreement with this but I can't concentrate on it because I am still depressed about losing the baby.

September 1st

I am sure this miscarriage is linked with the loss of the bracelet. I never liked to think of myself as being superstitious but what has happened cannot be written off as pure coincidence. I have to find that bracelet before anything else bad happens.

September 6th

I think Israel has agreed to join the war.

September 8th

It is final; we are going to seize Port Said and not Alexandria. There is still disagreement between the military and the politicians but Eden is adamant because he says there will be fewer civilian casualties this way.

September 11th

Well I thought it was final but some politicians still aren't happy because this plan only allows us to re-take Suez and doesn't get rid of Nasser. Simon naturally thinks Nasser needs annihilating and spoke almost nonstop about it "If we sit back and let Nasser consolidate his position and gradually acquire control of the oil-bearing countries he can destroy us. If Middle Eastern oil is denied to us for a year or two our gold reserves will disappear. If our gold reserves disappear sterling will disintegrate and if that happens and we have no reserves, we shall not be able to maintain our defence forces. And a country that cannot provide for its defence is finished."

I thought this very melodramatic and I also assumed it was Simon's own think-

ing but it turns out to be what the Permanent Under-Secretary wrote in a letter to Eden yesterday. I found that out in the evening paper.

September 14th

Eden made a speech in parliament a couple of days ago and the American response was, 'we do not intend to shoot our way through the canal'. I think that is exactly what we do intend to do and our agreement to pursue diplomatic channels is merely an attempt to buy time because, thanks to the Ambassador, I know full well we are continuing with military preparations.

Some idiot was sent here to suggest to Nasser that an international body should be set up to run the canal. Even I know Nasser would not agree to that!

September 20th

Simon thinks the Israelis are planning to invade the Sinai. Then again Simon also thinks the CIA is taking overhead photographs of the ally's activities. I believe Simon's imaginings to be nothing more than that; imaginings.

September 27th

Eden has somehow got the impression that the Americans will not oppose an attempt to topple Nasser. I don't know how he can believe this because Eisenhower has been clear from the beginning that 'the world would be outraged if all peaceful means weren't pursued first'. Maybe Eden thinks that Nasser's engagement with the Soviets is bringing Eisenhower round to his way of thinking but I can't see it myself. France and Israel think Britain might back out of any conflict now and if we do they are prepared to go it alone.

30th September

France and Israel are making their own plans for war without us. I don't know how the Ambassador finds these things out so quickly but he does and he wastes no time in calling Simon to tell him. They all need to stop these silly squabbles

and take some action.

October 5th

The British have officially been informed of the supposedly secret Franco-Israeli alliance.

The UN had a meeting and adopted a resolution recognising Egypt's right to control the canal as long as it continues to allow passage through it for foreign ships. Nasser now believes the danger of invasion to be very low. He must not be privy to Embassy gossip.

October 12th

Barbara Valentine is coming! Valentine is sending her to Luxor so that she will be out of any danger from the war. That's if we have a war and don't just spend another six months talking about one.

October 18th

Barbara is here but seems to be more interested in talking to Simon than to me.

October 20th

I was sitting with Barbara today in the summerhouse and Amin was doing some work in the garden when Barbara practically accused me of having designs on him.

"Your little Egyptian contractor is rather handsome isn't he Nancy? Don't tell me you haven't noticed; I can see the way you look at him. You need to be careful. Simon has a terrible jealous streak in him and who knows what he will do if he catches you ogling another man, especially one of his employees. I have seen Simon's jealous rages before."

"Don't be ridiculous" I retorted. How she had come to the conclusion that I am attracted to Amin I don't know. I will never forgive him for that incident with Caroline and I hardly even look at him nowadays. I was more concerned as to

how Barbara seemed to know so much about my husband and I immediately turned the conversation in that direction.

"You have experience of Simon's jealous rages then do you?" I asked in what I hoped was an accusing and insulting manner. I should have remembered how thick-skinned Barbara is.

"Let's say I have seen him at his worst" she replied in a most ingratiating tone of voice, "and the less said about it the better so we will leave it at that shall we." She refused to be drawn out any further on the matter and the only logical conclusion is that she is the woman in the photographs and she must be the one who Simon had his jealous rages over. I knew it!

It was at that moment she pulled my bracelet from in-between the cushions of the chair she was sitting on.

"I thought I could feel something underneath me there. Look Nancy; what a hideous bracelet. Is it yours?"

"Yes it is" I answered practically snatching it from her fingers, "and hideous or not it is a very important talisman. Julia Openshaw told me as much."

Barbara could do nothing but laugh then.

"Well you must take better care of it then. Who knows what misfortune could befall you if you lose it again. Honestly Nancy I thought you had more sense than to listen to those silly sisters."

I quickly put the bracelet into my bag resisting the urge to tell her about the part the bracelet had played in my pregnancy and subsequent miscarriage. She would only have ridiculed me even more. She has no spirituality that woman.

October 21st

I caught Simon and Barbara in the library today looking at the Sudan album. They snapped it shut as soon as they saw me enter the room and Simon casually put it back on the shelf as though it was any ordinary book. That confirms it now. It is definitely Barbara in those photographs. I didn't say anything. I only hope this stupid war is over soon so that she can go back to her husband. I don't

even have Amin to talk to now.

October 22nd

There are a lot of meetings going on mainly in France and Simon thinks Israel is disclosing their own plans for war with Egypt. I don't think they are keen on our plan of sending Israel in first as the aggressor and us and France coming in later as though we are the peacemakers but Simon said if they want our help they will have to do as we say.

"It's took the best part of three months for us to get Eden to even include Israel so Israel had better forget all about their fantastic plan."

"What is their fantastic plan?" I asked hoping for a brief answer. I was interested to know but didn't want one of Simon's monologues. I really should know better by now.

"Well" he said taking a deep breath which I recognised as a sign that I was in for quite a lecture, "they want to reorganise the whole region. They think Jordan should be divided. So that Iraq would get the East Bank while the West Bank would be attached to Israel. Lebanon has too many Muslims, mainly in the south, so if Israel expands up to the Litani River Lebanon would become more of a Christian state. Someone has told the Israelis about some oil discovery in Sinai and that it would be good idea to snatch the entire Sinai Peninsula from Egypt and they could then lay a pipeline from Sinai up to Haifa where they have an oil refinery. We can't support these plans of course but we can't cut Israel out now either because we want a legitimate looking pretext for the war. Eden should have struck earlier when he had more support and if he doesn't do something very soon he will lose the next election. Anyway from what I gather it's settled now. Israel will invade the Sinai and Britain and France will then intervene purportedly to separate the warring Israeli and Egyptian armies. We will then put forward the argument that Egypt is unable to control such an important waterway and that it needs to go back under Anglo-French management. As I said before the Israelis don't like this idea but they don't have a lot

of choice."

October 23rd

Nasser must be suspicious that we are plotting behind not only his back but America's back as well. He has suddenly brought in a set of new laws allowing the state to arrest anyone without charge. He is stripping people of their Egyptian citizenship especially if they are Jewish. All the mosques in the country are calling out that every Jew is a Zionist and as such an enemy of the state. Lots of Jews have had their bank accounts frozen or even confiscated and hundreds of them have lost their jobs. Some of them have been ordered to leave the country and according to Barbara, who has a number of Jewish friends, they were allowed to take only one suitcase and forced to sign declarations 'donating' their property to the Egyptian government. I'm not sure I believe that but after what she told me about the Cecil Hotel I suppose anything is possible. The Metzger family are amongst those who have been deported but that again is only hearsay coming from Barbara.

October 24th

The Israelis have started their move on the Sinai.

October 29th

The war has started at last. The Israeli Air Force has launched attacks all over the Sinai. Simon said the Israelis were expecting Jordan to help Egypt out but he is doubtful. "Unless there is a direct benefit for Jordan they will never get involved" he added. Simon doesn't like Jordanians.

11.00pm

"That stupid Egyptian Commander, Field Marshal Amer didn't even realise they had been invaded" Simon laughed as soon as he had come off the phone from his nightly exchange of gossip with the Ambassador.

"He thought it was only some petty little raid so didn't raise the alarm. By the time he figured it out the Israelis were running riot all over the Sinai. That's what happens when you promote your friends to jobs they are not capable of doing. Nasser should have known Amer wouldn't be up to it. I've heard he's drunk a lot of the time. Amer's idiocy has made things easier for us and we are ready to go in tomorrow to implement phase two of the plan."

October 30th

Actually the paratroopers went in last night and many Egyptians have already surrendered. There were a lot of Israeli casualties though before the Egyptians finally capitulated. The Ambassador doesn't know everything it seems. I heard that on BBC radio early this morning.

The Egyptians have sent a warship up to Haifa now as some kind of threat to Israel.

11.00pm

This morning Britain and France sent ultimatums to Egypt and Israel as planned.

October 31st

The French disabled that Egyptian warship up in Haifa without much difficulty so that didn't constitute much of a threat.

The Security Council held another meeting yesterday calling upon Israel to withdraw to behind the established armistice lines. We vetoed that and instead launched an air attack against our planned targets in Egypt then landed troops at the northern end of the Canal Zone. The UN has spent the whole day in meetings making more of their silly resolutions that no one ever listens to.

Nasser sank about forty ships that were in the canal and closed it to all shipping. That stupid Field Marshall Amer kept all the Egyptian troops in Sinai leaving us free to do whatever we want over in Suez. I don't know what he's thinking of. If the Canal Zone is seized all his army will be trapped over there in the Sinai. He

must be drunk like Simon said.

11.30pm

It was very late this evening before Nasser finally stopped listening to Amer and gave the order himself for his forces to leave the Sinai and retreat back to the Canal Zone

Simon heard that our bombers had planned to attack Cairo airport today but Eden put a stop to it when he learned that American civilians were being evacuated from there.

November 1st

There have been protests in London against the war. There was a debate on television last night where the anti-war mob was calling the other side criminals for supporting such a war. The government is furious because they had told the BBC they must be pro-war and there is some talk now of the government taking over the network. Simon says he blames Eden for not going to war back in July while everyone was still angry at Nasser's nationalisation of the Suez Canal Company. He says the general public have lost interest in it now and don't see it as a reason for war.

"Back in July Eden claimed that the Egyptians would hopelessly mismanage the canal but that hasn't happened. If we are completely honest this new management is not much different to our old one."

Strong words coming from Simon, who as a rule doesn't concede anything to the Egyptians.

"All that secrecy didn't help" he went on. "Eden did nothing to explain to the British people why it was he felt that war was necessary. Men were getting called up for their National Service confused that some of the government appeared to be preparing for war while at the same time Eden himself was telling everyone he wanted a peaceful resolution and was opposed to attacking Egypt. The other half of the government didn't know what was happening and the opposition

were kept completely in the dark. In Parliament yesterday Gaitskell called the invasion 'an act of disastrous folly whose tragic consequences we shall regret for years.' He said it will have done irreparable harm to the prestige and reputation of our country America is putting a lot of financial pressure on us to try to get us to end the invasion. Our oil supply is already restricted by the closing of the canal and we were looking to the IMF for help but the Yanks have blocked us there. If America carries on we will have to devalue the pound and we simply can't afford to do that. On top of all that the Saudis are refusing to supply us with oil now. I think we should invade Kuwait and get some oil from them. "

So we don't even know if we can finance this war now we have started it. So typical of men playing soldiers!

November 2nd

The morning newspapers are full of the goings on in the British parliament. To all accounts it almost degenerated into a fist-fight after several Labour MPs compared Eden to Hitler. Everyone gets compared to Hitler these days if someone doesn't like them. Anyway Eden continued insisting that we are not at war with Egypt. "There has not been a declaration of war by us" he said. "We are only in an armed conflict."

It looks like a war to me. The bombardment by the British and French air forces yesterday were so severe they caused President Nasser to order his pilots back to base last night and I believe he has requested diplomatic assistance from Eisenhower. The UN has called for an immediate ceasefire again and the reopening of the Suez Canal which no one took any notice of as usual. Mountbatten has sent a letter to Eden telling him to stop the invasion because it is costing him too much politically. No one is listening to him either.

November 3rd

Mountbatten tried again today to stop the invasion and got a very nasty response. 'Some people in England today say that what we're doing in the Middle East

will have terrible effects in the future... The reality is that we have checked a drift. With a bit of luck we've not only stopped a big war in the Middle East, but we've halted the march of Russia through the Middle East and on to the African continent.'

I forget who it was that said that although Simon did tell me.

An Israeli plane attacked one of our warships by mistake today thinking it to be Egyptian. No one was killed thank goodness.

The Israelis have gained control of the Gaza Strip and their only remaining objective is Sharm el Sheikh.

November 4th

What is happening back in England is far more interesting than the war itself. There are anti-war protests almost daily under the slogan 'Law, not war!' The one this afternoon was the biggest yet and I was glued to the radio for most of the day. One MP accused the government of a policy of 'bankruptcy and despair'. His speech was most persuasive even to me and I am not even against the war.

"We are stronger than Egypt" he said, "but there are other countries stronger than us. Are we prepared to accept for ourselves the logic we are applying to Egypt? If nations more powerful than ourselves accept the absence of principle and take on the anarchistic attitude of Eden and launch bombs on London, what answer have we got, what complaint have we got? If we are going to appeal to force, if force is to be the arbiter to which we appeal, it would at least make common sense to try to make sure beforehand that we have got it, even if you accept that abysmal logic, that decadent point of view. We are in fact in the position today of having appealed to force in the case of a small nation, where if it is appealed to against us it will result in the destruction of Great Britain, not only as a nation, but as an island containing living men and women. Therefore I say to Anthony, I say to the British government, there is no count at all upon which they can be defended. They have besmirched the name of Britain. They

have made us ashamed of the things of which formerly we were proud. They have offended against every principle of decency and there is only one way in which they can even begin to restore their tarnished reputation and that is to get out! Get out! Get out!"

The crowd then marched on 10 Downing Street chanting "Eden Must Go!", and attempted to storm the Prime Minister's residence. The ensuing clashes were all shown on television.

November 5th

Sharm El Sheikh was attacked last night and by early this morning the city had surrendered. I think Amer, the Egyptian Field Marshall, would like to surrender completely to the British and has already tried calling for a ceasefire. After declaring 'Nobody is going to surrender' Nasser took over command himself. Despite all the Egyptian losses Nasser's reputation remains untarnished. He does put out a lot of propaganda though on that Voice of the Arabs radio station. Today he broadcast an appeal for civilian volunteers and promised to give them all rifles. If they take him up on it I think we will have a problem of whether we should be shooting at civilians or not.

We had some trouble today near Port Said because when it comes to street fighting the Egyptians are much better at it than us. Nasser has sent hundreds of reinforcements there and he went out to the Canal Zone himself to boost the morale of his newly armed volunteers.

November 6th

We have gone in to Port Said and the Egyptian commander there tried to request a ceasefire but of course Nasser wouldn't let him. Eventually though he came to his senses and made a proposal to surrender the city.

6.00pm

This proposed truce turned out to be a ploy to buy time and we stupidly fell for

it. When the fighting started up again vans with loudspeakers went through the city announcing that London and Paris had been bombed by the Russians and that World War III has started. Honestly you can tell the Egyptians anything and they will believe it. Anyway it did spur them on a bit and we looked to be in trouble at one point.

Nasser proclaimed the Suez War to be a 'people's war' and as I had predicted this presents us with an unsolvable dilemma. If we are to be responsible for the deaths of civilians world sympathy will lie with the Egyptians. If we don't shoot at these so-called civilians then their army snipers could hide among crowds of these apparent non-combatants and shoot at us with impunity.

10.00pm

This tactic of Nasser's worked very well on Eden who is terrified of being labelled a murderer. In his attempt to limit the number of civilians getting killed he keeps interfering which slowed down our eventual taking of Port Said. Simon said that by doing this Eden had prolonged the street fighting which has actually resulted in more deaths than there would have been.

November 7th

2.00am

A ceasefire was called at 9.00pm last night but it was only a few minutes ago that it came into effect. Eden announced it without telling either France or Israel beforehand. Simon can't understand it because he says that the Suez Canal could have been completely taken in less than twenty four hours. The French are livid.

3.00pm

I heard on the radio that the Russians have been threatening to come in on the Egyptian side. Eisenhower is afraid that this might be the beginning of World

War III. Khrushchev could be expected to commit any irrational act according to Eisenhower but personally I think Khrushchev is bluffing and has no intention of joining in.

Luckily we managed to secure Port Said before the ceasefire.

Israel has declared a great victory against Egypt and says they will be taking no more notice of the armistice lines. I listened to one speech and whoever it was that was making it said that Israel has every intention of annexing the Sinai. They have got far too carried away by their success and this speech immediately brought international pressure on Israel to withdraw to behind the armistice lines immediately. We are also under pressure to completely withdraw from Egyptian territory.

November 8th

Britain and France have agreed to withdraw from Egypt within a week; Israel hasn't agreed to anything.

World opinion seems divided. There are many who believe that if Nasser is not stopped the Soviets will support him with an anti-western movement and even those who don't go quite that far still believe the Arabs should be taught a lesson. On the other hand most of the press, the Labour Party and other left wing groups are all against Suez. It looks like being a political disaster for Eden.

November 10th

Israel is refusing to withdraw from Gaza and Sharm el Sheikh.

November 15th

Eisenhower spoke on the radio and the television today about Israel's refusal to withdraw, explaining why the UN has no choice but to exert pressure upon Israel. By that I presume he means some sort of sanctions. Barbara, who is still here, believes that Russia's threats of siding with Egypt are what brought about the ceasefire. I heard her having a long discussion with Simon about it today.

She is a very stupid woman. Even Nasser admits that it was the economic pressure from America that saved him although it is Khrushchev who he is thanking publicly.

November 22nd

Barbara has left to go back to Alex. I am glad in a way but she did get Simon off my back for the last few weeks. No doubt I will have to begin listening to his boring monologues again. In fact he started on one over dinner about Winston Churchill.

"Churchill says he can't understand why our troops were halted. To go so far and not go on was madness he says."

"Yes and he also said that while he might not have dared to begin the military operation, nevertheless once having ordered it he would certainly not have dared to stop it before it had achieved its objective. I heard that broadcast too Simon" I said triumphantly cutting him off before he launched into any more detail.

December 10th

Egypt might have lost the war but indirectly they have ended up as the winners. Egyptian sovereignty and ownership of the canal has now been confirmed by both the United States and the United Nations. This, Nasser says, has erased a mark of national humiliation. To us it is a disaster. Instead of teaching Nasser that breaking international law does not pay, Suez has shown him and every other tin-pot dictator that every transgression will be forgiven where money or oil is at stake.

December 22nd

Both we and the French have completely withdrawn our troops. The last of them went out today.

Field Marshall Amer publicly accused Nasser of provoking an unnecessary war and then blaming the military for the result. I don't know why he's bothering

since Nasser is up and down the country proclaiming a great victory over the combined forces of the United Kingdom, France and Israel. Despite his military defeat Nasser has come out of it a hero to the Arabs because we all had to leave the Sinai and the Canal Zone. In his speeches Nasser attributes this to some extraordinary strategy of his and tells simplistic children's stories about his military prowess. Listening to these speeches you would think that even the fall of Port Said had somehow been a victory for the Egyptians. I know they can't read but surely they listen to the radio. Simon explained that the Arabic stations never told the truth throughout the whole crisis and the Egyptians believed they were winning from the very beginning. Anyway it's over and life is gradually getting back to normal.