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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 TWENTY SEVEN



December 4th

The last few nights I have spent with Amin make me think it would be better if I ended my marriage to Simon. I always thought that I was happy as I was but now I'm not sure. The one thing that is stopping me asking for a divorce is the thought of losing Djorff Palace. Amin loves this house even more than I do and if I leave Simon I am sure neither of us will ever be able to come here again. That is my major concern. I will lose Julius of course but that doesn't bother me in the slightest. He is a most irritating child and is always crying. I'm sure he should have been a girl. I haven't spoken about any of this to Amin yet because I haven't come to a final decision but Simon will be home tomorrow and I can't imagine myself going back to my old life with him. I have absolutely no idea what to do.

December 5th

Simon is back and I have hardly seen him. He locked himself away in the library all day reading something or other.

December 6th

3.00am

Last night everything came to a head. Simon found my diaries and that is what he was reading all day yesterday. Just after ten this evening he arrived at the summerhouse where Amin and I were innocently sitting drinking coffee and chatting. He launched into an onslaught against both of us although I must say most of his disapprobation was directed towards me.

"What the hell is going on here Nancy?" Simon shouted hurling my diary across the room at me. "Tell me exactly what kind of affair you think you are having with this man here, who is not only a builder, he also happens to be my friend. I can see the poor man is nothing but a victim in all this but even so I demand an explanation from both of you."

I was so shocked that I was unable to say anything in my defence leaving poor

Amin to try and talk his way out of it for both of us. Of course he denied everything in a valiant attempt to stop Simon making any further attack on me but as it is all down in black and white I knew it was pointless. Finally after a long argument Simon declared he was going to have me committed to the nearest mental institution which happens to be in Aswan. It was at that point I found my voice.

"It's adultery Simon. That doesn't make me crazy" I argued but Simon wouldn't listen. "You can't lock someone up for infidelity" I continued still getting no response. I was expecting him to demand a divorce and indeed I would have been happy for him to do that but sending me off to an asylum is a whole different thing. It sounds ridiculous and on the face of it impossible but I know that Simon has enough contacts in Egypt to make it happen if that's what he really wants. Even Amin went silent once Simon started on with this idea. In a fit of uncontrollable fear rather than anger I opened the desk drawer where I knew Simon kept a small revolver. I took it out and pointed it directly at him. I don't think I had any intention of using it until Simon laughed at me.

"Oh my goodness Nancy, are you trying to give me more ammunition to get you committed" he said. "Put that gun away you stupid woman."

I heard Amin shout "Stop it the pair of you" and then the gun went off. I had never fired a gun before and no one was more surprised than me when I saw Simon falling to the ground. He never made a sound and I could see at once that he was dead. I had killed my own husband and the only emotion I felt was relief that I was not going to end my days in some sort of institution. Amin remained very calm and gently took the gun from my hands. He said I should go back to my room and he would deal with it. He would have to call the police but he told me that he was going to claim responsibility for the shooting and that I should say nothing. Without speaking a word I picked up my diary from the floor and stepping over Simon's dead body left the summerhouse. I am in my room now waiting for the police. I am very calm and don't feel any remorse. Simon was about to do a terrible thing to me and I had to stop him somehow.

4.00pm

The police came this morning and said that I will have to go to with them to the station and make a statement. They said that as I must still be in shock they can wait until tomorrow. I called my lawyer and he came over straightaway. When he got here I told him that I couldn't remember anything and he said that I should try not to worry and he would send a doctor to give me something to help me sleep. The doctor left a prescription but I won't be taking any pills. I need to be fully awake and aware of what I am saying tomorrow.

December 7th

The lawyer came with me to the police station today. It was the most horrible experience. They asked me a lot of questions and although I kept repeating that I had no recollection of what happened the night before last I can tell that they don't believe anything I say. It seems to me that they are trying to make a case against Amin for shooting Simon in cold blood. My lawyer took me home afterwards assuring me that Amin is fine and has an excellent lawyer of his own who is quite capable of looking after him. He told me that the best thing I can do now is to leave Luxor so that the police don't start asking me any more questions which might further implicate Amin. I am not a good liar he said. I only wish I could speak to Amin before I leave.

As soon as the lawyer left I decided to take his advice and get away for a while. It is obvious that I will have to leave Egypt not only Luxor because if I am still in the country the police could subpoena me back here at any time. My stupid lawyer should have known that. As long as I leave the country I don't need to go far and I am thinking of going to Athens. I don't need that crying child hanging around my neck nor do I want to travel with his nanny so I am arranging to send them both back to England. I am sure it will be a matter of only a few weeks before we are all able to come back.

December 9th

I put Julius and his nanny on the train to Alexandria this morning and I have booked them a passage back to England from there. I am flying to Athens tonight. I am not taking much with me. I am wearing my bracelet and the Yemeni fish pendant because I will need all the luck I can get. I am taking only a few clothes, my diaries and Freud's Interpretation of Dreams with me. Why I want that book I am not exactly sure but I am afraid that I might have dreams I cannot understand and it might come in useful.

I heard nothing yesterday or today from either Amin or the police but my lawyer called and keeps telling me not to worry.

December 14th

I don't know what drew me to Greece but something tells me I will find some answers here. I have no contact with Egypt other than my lawyer who never gets in touch with me and I don't want to keep calling him. I will leave it a while and see if anything appears in the newspapers. Luckily you can get the Al-Ahram out here.

December 18th

I have read the newspapers every day and there is absolutely nothing about Simon in any of them. Without information I am totally lost as to what I should do next.

4.00pm

I was sitting in Zonar's cafe today in the centre of Athens still wondering what on earth I am going to do next when I was approached by a middle aged man who asked if he could join me. He spoke perfect English but I think he was a white African because he had a distinct accent. Having nothing better to do I agreed so he drew up a chair and ordered himself a coffee. While we were waiting he explained to me that he had been drawn to me because of the brace-

let I am wearing and he asked me if it was an Ancient Egyptian talisman. We started talking about my life in Egypt and somehow the conversation turned to my immediate problems. I don't usually open up to people and especially not strangers but there was something about this man that made me think I could trust him. When I had finished my story he suggested that as I had no clue what was happening back in Egypt and had no idea what I should do next it might be a good idea if I consulted the oracle at Delphi. That almost made me laugh but the look on the man's face told me he was serious.

"Surely that is no longer there" I exclaimed in disbelief but inwardly wishing it still was.

"Well in a way you are right and in a way you are wrong" he answered mysteriously. "The Roman emperor Theodosius tried to close it down over a thousand years ago in a bid to end all those pagan cults but the site is still there. It is more of a tourist destination now and the place is overrun with charlatans all professing to be able to tell the future. The strange vapours that emerged from the earth back in the days of Pythia still come out of the ground there as not even an emperor could stop that. It is simply a matter of finding someone who can interpret them. You need to look beyond all those who get their prophecies from coffee grains, tarot cards, palm readings and the like and find someone who understands the messages coming from deep underground. What you need is a master of the black arts."

I started to laugh then; I couldn't help it.

"You are telling me that there is someone I can go to there who can advise me what to do and what not to do based on some gas! The way forward will be told to me from a place where all questions have answers and all problems have a solution. I would love to think there is such a place where I could go in this time of uncertainty in my life but even my wildest imaginings don't run to that. Unfortunately, such a place does not exist today even if it ever did. Thank-you for your help but I think I am looking for something more practical than that; something more earthly."

"You surprise me" my stranger answered. "You told me that you believe in the power of that bracelet of yours yet you are unable to believe that there may be other things beyond your comprehension. Go there. What do you have to lose? There is an old woman who frequents the Panelinion Kafeneio in Amfissa, very close to Delphi. She can interpret the vapours and she will tell you what you should do. If you sit in that café long enough wearing that bracelet she will find you. Good Luck" he said, standing up, doffing his cap and making his way towards the door. I tried to call after him but either he didn't hear me or he didn't want to.

Now I have an irresistible urge to go to Delphi although I am sure it is all complete nonsense. I have the time so why not. Yes I will go there in the morning.

December 16th

Delphi is beautiful so even if I never meet this woman who can tell me my destiny it has been worth the trip. The café is right on the southern slope of Mount Parnassus overlooking the valley of Phocis and not only that they serve excellent coffee and croissants. I will sit here a while and if there is no sign of anyone, which I am sure there won't be I will wander over and take a look at the Sanctuary of Apollo. The coffee shop owner tells me that this is the site of the ancient oracle and that Apollo, the God of Knowledge still sends messages from there. He even suggested that he himself was privy to Apollo's messages and for a small sum he could interpret them for me. I have been in Egypt far too long to be taken in by a fraudster like him. As I had been warned by my strange friend from yesterday the café is positively heaving with fortune tellers reading palms and looking into the remains of coffee cups.

10.00pm

I had been in that same coffee shop for almost an hour before an old woman entered and after taking a quick look round came directly to my table and sat down next to me.

"You came from Egypt" she said "and I see you have many troubles."

I was about to laugh in her face until she said "Your husband is dead isn't he but that's not what's troubling you. You have another man in your life and he is in grave danger. Not only that you are carrying his child. Go home to England and bide your time. I cannot tell you what will happen after that because the Gods require an offering for them to be able to release the smoke that carries all the answers."

I decided at once that she was just another charlatan and that she and the stranger from yesterday must have been in cahoots.

"What kind of offering?" I asked, assuming it would be money. I was right. In fact she was asking for an inordinately large sum of money for these supposed visions from the Gods. I was about to tell her that I didn't think any godly advice was worth that much when I remembered I had said nothing to that man about my being pregnant. I only discovered it myself a couple of days ago and I have told no one and I hadn't even felt sure enough to write it in my diary. It might have been foolish of me but I knew that if I didn't do what she was suggesting I would regret it later so I paid her what she was asking and we made our way across to the seat of Apollo. We weren't there very long and I neither saw nor smelt any vapours but the old lady must have done.

"You will never return to Egypt" she said."The Gods say that your life there is over. You did an evil thing and you must atone for it."

Having said that she stood up and walked off back in the direction of the café. I almost followed her. After all I had paid good money and I needed more than that. Then I thought she is not going to tell me anything else unless I pay her and I don't need to waste any more money so I hailed a taxi and came back to the hotel. I want to dismiss it as trickery but as she had told me something I hadn't wanted to hear I am worried. In my experience charlatans tend to give you good news which this woman certainly did not. If this really was a sign from the oracle I now have to look for a way to defy the Gods which as far as I know has never been done. Then I remembered that the oracle never gives a straight

answer. Everything she says can be interpreted in various ways so she would never be wrong but the old lady could have been. I wish I could remember that story about Croesus. From what I recall he asked the oracle if he should go to war and she told him that if he did a great empire would fall. I think he interpreted that as 'yes' but in the end it was his own empire that he lost. Pythia had meant 'no' and he had interpreted her answer wrongly. That must be what was happening to me now and I have paid a stupid old woman a lot of money and she couldn't understand the messages at all. Either that or she is a charlatan but something tells me that she isn't.

December 24th

Christmas Eve and I am alone in a foreign country. In desperation I called the lawyer who told me to go home to England. Amin has been charged with Simon's murder and the lawyer advised ne not to go back to Luxor until after the trial. That stupid old woman's words haunt me even though I am certain she got it wrong or she told me a pack of lies. I will go back to Egypt one day and when I do Amin will marry me. This silly old woman should have known that.

December 25th

I am going to England tomorrow. I must be two months pregnant with Amin's child and I want to be somewhere safe.