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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 THIRTY ONE



January 1st 1962

Here I am at Extwistle Hall; somewhere I thought I never would be. I arrived back in England three days ago to terrible weather and no heating in the house. If Simon left all the money he said he did for the repairs then someone must have cheated him out of it. The place is falling down. The sitting room, the office, four bedrooms the library and the kitchen are the only rooms fit for habitation which I would say is about a third of the house. There are six horrible portraits in the office and another one in the library but apart from these paintings there is very little by way of decoration. The carpets would have been lovely at one time but that time is long past. The furniture is all big and uncomfortable and as for the plumbing I don't know what to say. Thank goodness I won't be here for long.

Julius has a new nanny. The last one refused to get on the ship in Alexandria and Julius travelled here with a couple from Lancashire that I have never met and don't want to meet. Simon's lawyer met them off the boat and took Julius home with him until he engaged the services of this new nanny. She is old, ugly and unpleasant but I may as well keep her while I am in England but I won't be taking her back to Luxor with me.

January 4th

I went to visit my parents today only to find out that my mother is dead and has been dead for more than five years. My father said he had sent a telegram but I never received it. The old farmhouse looks very small compared to what I remember and my father isn't taking care of it nor is he doing much farming. He was already very drunk when I got there although I reached there well before lunchtime and all he talked about was how mean and selfish I am for leaving him destitute when I am so obviously wealthy. Simon was right. I should have cut my parents out of my life forever but I am just too sentimental.

I stopped off at my mother's grave on the way home and bumped into the vicar. It is the same vicar that was at the church before I went to Egypt. He was

with two ladies who he said were new to the village but it turns out they have lived here for five or six years. They wanted to know everything about my life in Egypt and no wonder living in a place like this where nothing ever happens. I told them almost everything apart from how Simon had died. I changed that part and said he had died of pneumonia. That was a bit ordinary for them so I embellished it and told them how he had been in a fight with his Egyptian workers and ended up in the hospital where he had contracted the pneumonia. I explained how Simon had been much older than me and had not objected to my taking a lover whose child I was now carrying. They looked a bit shocked at that point so I explained how the culture was different over in Egypt and how almost every woman in the upper classes took an Egyptian lover because the men were always away at war or at some far flung archaeological site. I told them that I would be returning to Egypt once I got Julius settled in a school and how once there I would be marrying the father of my unborn child. I haven't enjoyed myself so much since I left Luxor and I'm afraid I got carried away with my little stories. The vicar's face was a picture.

January 30th

The lawyer called and said the murder trial is over and Amin has been found guilty. There will be an appeal of course but not for at least another six months so I have to resign myself to staying in England for longer than I first thought. It will be better to give birth here anyway because that hospital in Luxor where Julius was born was not at all hygienic.

I am very depressed so I went shopping to cheer myself up. I bought a beautiful landscape of the Lake District by someone called Percy Kelly. It's very simple and not something I would normally buy but it really took my eye. I will put it in the summerhouse when I go back to Egypt and get rid of all those awful paintings of African women that Simon liked so much.

February 5th

I have written to Amin care of his lawyer. He needs to know that he is to be the father of my son and that I love him and think about him every day.

March 3rd

I received a reply from Amin today. I'm afraid I burnt it the second I finished reading it and now I wished I hadn't. He said that I should forget about him and never come back to Egypt. He is obviously overwrought and worried that the truth might come out about Simon's death if I go back there. He suggested I should try to get some help for myself by which I assume he knows how depressed I am about leaving him and Djorff Palace. I don't know why his letter made me so angry because I am sure he never meant to vex me like that. I will tell him when I see him. There is no point our writing to each other when we can't convey our true feelings. It must be even harder for Amin who is writing in a foreign language and can't express himself like he could in Arabic.

July 22nd

I gave birth to a beautiful baby boy today. I have named him Amer. I cannot find the words to describe how I feel. I don't think I have ever felt love like this before. Even what I feel for Amin cannot compare with what I feel for this tiny child. I can see the Arab in him already and I cannot wait to take him home to his father in Egypt.

August 4th

I received a brief note from my lawyer in Egypt. Amin lost his appeal and is to be hanged. The lawyer didn't give me an exact date but he said that by the time I received this letter Amin would most likely be dead. I want to pour out my feelings but I can't. My hand is frozen and I can barely hold the pen.

August 5th

I am never going back to Egypt. I have spoken to my lawyer and he will rent out the villa and the money he gets from that can pay for the staff at the palace. I told him to keep Mamdouh and his wife and one other guard. No one should go into the palace apart from them until I give further instructions. The grand reception must be kept in perfect condition and they should do their best with the rest of the house.

From today I will write only the most important happenings in this diary. There won't be many. To all intents and purposes my life is over and if it weren't for Amer I would end it once and for all.

October 12th

I had a problem with that stupid vicar today who does not want to baptize Amer because he is illegitimate. What nonsense. It's hardly the child's fault and I told him so. He agreed to do it once I threatened him with the bishop.

I had a bigger problem with the registrar.

"You should know that legally including the father's name on a state-issued birth certificate requires his participation" he told me in an extremely officious manner. "I know you listed him on the application, but that in itself won't allow you to put it onto the actual birth certificate without the father's signature on a legal Acknowledgement of Paternity form" he continued.

"The father is dead" I shouted back. "Dead, dead; are you understanding that or not." I made such a fuss that he called his manager in Leeds who told him to do what I wanted. My son is now officially Amer Amin Fawy and is to be christened so next week.

July 22nd 1965

Amer is three years old today and I threw him a big party. Julius started crying and asked me why he never gets any parties. I tried to explain to him that he is not the same as Amer. I told him it is because I loved Amer's father and he is

different because of that. I have no feelings for Julius but didn't go so far as to tell him that. Afterwards I regretted saying anything but he would have found out eventually I suppose.

September 28th 1970

I try never to think about Egypt but Nasser died today and it's all over the news.

October 1st

Nasser's funeral made the headlines and once again I am forced to remember Egypt. It said on the news that there were five million mourners there but I doubt there were that many. Nasser can still get his propaganda out even after he is dead. It was all very flashy with a gun carriage pulled by six horses and a flyover by MiGs. All the Arab leaders were there apart from King Faisal of Saudi. At least he's not a hypocrite. King Hussein had the audacity to actually cry and I heard Gaddafi fainted. I do miss all that drama of life in that part of the world. Of course the Russian president was there but he was very stoical. I think the French Prime Minister went as well which is a bit two-faced. I don't think we sent anyone but I'm not sure. Anyway the crowd was completely out of control shouting things like 'We are Nasser' and it wasn't long before all the foreign dignitaries had to be evacuated. They are going to name the mosque where Nasser is buried after him proving that to the Arabs Nasser was as near to a god as any man can be.

October 2nd

The newspapers are full of obituaries praising Nasser proving once again that his propaganda machine lives on. They are saying that after Nasser rid Egypt of British the country became an influential power all over the world. It was all down to his charismatic leadership according to the press. They all went on about social justice, democracy, education and all sorts of other social welfare initiatives Nasser supposedly introduced. His abysmal human rights record

which has always been brushed under the carpet has been totally erased. I wish Simon were alive to see this.

Goodness I haven't thought about Simon in years. Apart from his monotonous monologues he did have some interesting things to talk about and I miss him for that if nothing else. We had a good life together some of the time and I wonder what would have happened if I hadn't killed him. Would he really have had me committed? I have to believe that he would otherwise I have ruined my life for nothing. I don't think being incarcerated here at Extwistle Hall is so much different from being in a mad house in Aswan but at least I have Amer here with me.

November 15th

Sadat has succeeded Nasser as president but the general consensus is that he won't last. Nasser's supporters have picked him because they think he can easily be manipulated but I don't think so. I think Sadat is tougher than they think and he is going to surprise everyone.

May 15th 1971

I just knew Sadat would show them! He has started something he calls a 'corrective revolution' and got rid of all Nasser's big supporters from the government. He is encouraging the Islamists which I remember Simon telling me Nasser quite rightly suppressed. I suppose Sadat needs them for support now but I am sure he will come to regret it later. Following all this on the news sometimes makes me think I am still in Egypt and I think the time has come for me to talk to Amer about his ancestry.

May 17th

I explained to Amer today that he is half Egyptian. I don't think he understood much so I am going to tell him all the stories about Horus, Isis, Hatshepsut and Tutankhamun so that he can get an idea of what being an Egyptian is all about.

July 22nd

Amer loves all these stories and today we had a 'Pharaoh's' birthday party where Amer played Tutankhamun and I dressed up as Nefertiti. Julius was very difficult and refused to play anyone other than Hatshepsut. Julius loves dressing up in women's clothes.

October 31st

I am following the news from the Middle East to try to explain to Amer what is happening there. He is very interested in the problem of Israel and has a lot of questions for me. I explained how Israel is occupying the Sinai which actually belongs to Egypt and he said he wants to be a soldier one day so that he can go and fight for his country. Sadat is looking for a diplomatic solution so hopefully there will be no war for Amer to fight in.

November 3rd

Sadat is building up his army because neither America nor Israel will agree to Egypt's request to return the Sinai to them. The Soviets refused to send more military support to Egypt so Sadat has expelled all the Russian advisers. Maybe there will be a war after all.

February 3rd 1972

Sadat has finally released Naguib from the isolation Nasser imposed on him. About time! Naguib has been under house arrest for almost twenty years but if his house was anything like Djorff Palace maybe it wasn't all that bad. Then again if it was like Extwistle Hall I know exactly how he must have felt.

August 26th 1973

Sadat has a lot of support for a war with Israel; all the Arab states of course and all the member countries of the African Unity. The newspapers say that there are over one hundred countries siding with Sadat and Syria has offered to fight

alongside Egypt against the Jews.

December 1st

Things haven't worked out as Sadat expected over these last few months. Egypt started off well when they made their initial attack back in October although the Syrians weren't much help. The Syrian government persuaded Sadat to move his forces deeper into Sinai which was a big mistake because the Egyptian army suffered huge losses there. Sadat should have withdrawn his troops much earlier but he told them to keep advancing. It was a disaster and the Israelis managed to reach Suez. As expected America supplied Israel with weapons but for once Saudi Arabia came down on Egypt's side and retaliated with an oil embargo against the States. Eventually the UN stepped in and called for an end to the hostilities and asked for peace talks to begin. Amer follows everything on the news and knows much more about it than me. He has developed a passion for Palestine and fancies himself being a big Army General one day and says he will be the one to get Palestine back for the Arabs. He is often practising his strategies out in the garden with Julius who makes a very reluctant soldier.

March 5th 1974

Israel withdrew the last of its troops from the west side of the Suez Canal today.

March 17th

The oil embargo has ended. The Egyptians think they have had another great victory when actually they would have lost but for the UN. This is all very similar to the days of Nasser when he pretended Egypt's successes were all down to him.

March 25th

Amer has started having some strange dreams. They are all centred round a cave full of swords somewhere in the desert just outside Luxor. He interprets this to

mean that he will have great power one day and fight in a major battle to save Palestine. In some dreams he survives to become a great leader but more often than not he is killed directly after his army's great victory. He believes these dreams foretell his future and I told him about Freud's theory that dreams are nothing more than wish fulfilment but like me he prefers the 'prophecy' version and truly believes his dreams will become reality one day.

January 5th 1975

Amer now thinks himself to be a reincarnation of Tutankhamen. He asked me if this were possible and I told him I didn't know. Julius, whose birthday it is today, told him he is mad and needs to see a doctor. I was very angry with him and didn't give him his present. I relented at teatime after Amer begged me to let Julius cut his cake.

April 12th 1976

I caught Amer smoking some hashish today. I have no idea where he got it from but I suspect Julius gave it to him. I pretended to be very angry but in fact I am happy to see Amer following in the footsteps of his father. He is so much more of an Arab than an Englishman.

October 4th

Amer is very disturbed by some visions he is having which he is sure came from the god Horus. He is dreaming of four camels which he interprets to mean that he must have four sons. He is very worried that he may get killed during a conflict in the Middle East so he thinks he needs to be married at an early age in order to have these four children before he leaves to the war.

October 5th

Julius spoke to me today and more or less told me that I should find a doctor for Amer. He said he thinks all these dreams and imaginings are not normal and

I should get him some help.

"Amer is an Arab Julius" I tried to explain, "and is much more in touch with his spiritual side than either you or I. Please do not come to me saying Amer is sick when the truth is you just don't understand him. I have lived in a part of the world where mysticism is seen to represent reality and I have evidence of my own that proves there is a lot of truth in what they believe over there."

Julius was suitably unimpressed and suggested that I was 'as mad as him' and he would hold me responsible if anything happened to Amer. I cannot believe Julius thinks like this when he is clearly the one with problems. He has started wearing eyeliner now and has pierced one of his ears. I am now sure beyond any doubt that he is a homosexual.

September 8th 1977

Julius has run off to London with Jack, my houseboy. I am not in the least surprised at Julius but I am shocked at Jack getting himself involved with another man. Jack is a very masculine type and gave me no indication that he might be queer. Not only that he was a good worker and I am sorry to lose him. As for Julius I am glad to see the back of him. He never did let up on his quest for finding Amer a psychiatrist and was forever trying to get me to put him into a hospital. He is like Simon.

October 15th

Julius has no money and is threatening to return home. Apart from the embarrassment of having a rampant homosexual for a son I don't want him here influencing Amer. I have told him to stay in London where he can live out his sordid little life and I will send him some money every month. I am writing him off completely and have arranged with my lawyer to deal with it.

December 14th

It seems like Sadat visited Israel last month and America's President Carter is

helping Egypt and Israel to make some kind of deal. I have lost interest in it all but Amer is very upset and is calling Sadat ' a traitor to the cause'. According to Amer most Egyptians feel the same way and are very angry with Sadat operating on his own like that even if it does mean Egypt getting the Sinai back.

March 9th 1978

Amer says that all these peace negotiations have angered Horus and that soon he will call Amer to lead a crusade against Israel to save Palestine. He is talking about getting married again but I think it's too early for that and I tried to tell him that Horus will wait.

June 21st

Jack is back from London. He explained that he had been taken in by Julius and his offer of a high life in London and had never really been a homosexual himself. Even if that's true I am not taking the risk of having him back in my household. He has learnt a lot of sneaky ways from Julius and he may try to seduce Amer next in order to get money out of him. I gave him fifty pounds and sent him packing.

September 28th

Egypt signed something with Israel today. It was all Carter's idea and I am starting to agree with Amer when he says Sadat is a traitor to the Arabs. Nasser might have been a megalomaniac but he would never have betrayed the rest of the Middle East just to get the Sinai back. I have avoided talking to Amer about this although I know he saw it on the news.

December 31st

The year has ended with Amer in a much calmer more philosophical frame of mind. He knows that at sixteen he is far too young to be leading an army to war. He thinks he may have another ten or twelve years to wait before that happens

and he has settled down to a normal life and stopped talking about marriage. He asked me if I would go with him to visit Luxor and I promised I would one day but not now. I hate to lie to him like that but he pushed me into it. Today I showed him my bracelet and he was fascinated by the idea of talismans. He wants my fish pendant and I said I will give it to him on his twenty first birthday. Egypt seems so near to me now. Sometimes I dream I am there with Amin playing with our son down in the summerhouse. I am starting to live for these dreams but unfortunately they do not come that often.