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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 THREE



October 24th

When did Amer start believing in a fantasy world that went far beyond what was being told to him in his dreams and why was I so late in seeing it happen? I had been so sure of myself that I never listened to anyone. Julius warned me years ago that Amer was making things up that had nothing to do with his dreams and Janice tried to tell me his stories had no basis in earthly reality either. Until I was given my bracelet I never believed in the supernatural myself but when that bracelet changed the course of my life and turned my own dreams into reality and when the oracle at Delphi told me my fate I had no choice but to believe. There is more to life than the material world we live in and I have no doubt that Amer's dreams were messages sent to him from a divine source. I know I was not wrong when I encouraged him to interpret them and to believe that they foretold his future but his obsession with numbers, his fascination with the freemasons, the CIA and MI6 were all something very different. These were nothing more than imaginings conjured up by Amer himself and I never taught him how to differentiate between these from the true signs and prophecies. Amer wanted to believe he was someone important but much of his self aggrandisement came as a consequence of smoking too much hashish and even though I knew it I never tried to stop him. What the fundamental cause of my son's paranoia was I will never know but I should have seen he was sick and done something about it. I was so wrapped up in defending Amer's visions to Julius and Janice who thought even his dreams were a sign of madness that I failed to distinguish them from whatever else was going on inside his mind. Because of what Simon tried to do to me I refused to accept Amer needed help and I will now have to live with that guilt for the rest of my life. The only thing I have left now is Gloria. She takes after my side of the family and doesn't have much 'Arab' in her at all so it isn't so easy to love her but regardless of whether I love her or not I have a duty to protect her. I am sure the gods are punishing me over and over again for what I did to Simon and I don't want Gloria to fall victim to the retribution that continues to befall me in payment for my sins.

October 27th

There was hardly anyone at Amer's funeral today. Over the last two or three years he lost all his friends because of his outlandish stories. Janice's parents didn't come. That wasn't surprising because I am sure they still maintain Janice is dead and that Amer was responsible. Lily Johnson didn't come either but her husband did. Henry was always such a gentleman. To my great consternation Julius showed up but I managed to completely avoid him. I didn't need him piling more guilt onto me. Gloria had no idea what was going on and when I wanted her to throw her spray of flowers into the grave she started screaming. That was the only sound that came from anyone. There was not one tear shed for my son today. It is very sad that someone who loved mankind as much as he did should die so unloved himself.

January 1st 1993

I took some flowers to Amer's grave today and I met Lily Johnson there who was doing the same thing. I have had no contact with Lily since the dinner party where I first met Simon almost half a century ago but I recognised her immediately. She is still as plain, still as badly dressed and still as irritatingly serene. I remember how I had hated her then and yet at the same time secretly aspired to be like her. I no longer hate her. I know that like me she is carrying the burden of guilt for not helping my son. Whatever it was that Lily and my son had between them I am not privy to it and Lily is unwilling to share her memories with me. We are two old women each grieving alone for something that is lost that could have been saved and there is no room for blame or animosity.

January 1st 1995

I have not left Extwistle Hall for two years and I don't think I shall leave it again; well at least not in my waking hours. At night I am transported back to Egypt and to Amin. My dreams of Luxor come to me every night now and are more real to me than the long interminable hours of daylight.

May 1st

I long for Egypt and every day I scour the papers for news. It seems settled there and Mubarak still reigns supreme. The opposition parties are weak and divided and do not form credible alternatives to the Mubarak power base. The Muslim Brotherhood remains illegal although its members openly speak their views and some of them have even been elected to the People's Assembly as independents. Mubarak has expanded the role of the public sector and the economy is flourishing. Inflation is halved and spending power more than doubled but if that is helping the majority or not I cannot say. All this is a far cry from the revolutionary days of Nasser and I often think that the people have lost their soul. I yearn for the Egypt I knew then not the humdrum life of Egypt as it is today.

October 25th 1999

Gloria is ten today and I have still not learned to love her. She is a bookish little girl who reads everything and although she likes the stories about Ancient Egypt she seems no more interested in them than in any other tales. She is practical and down to earth and shows no signs of having dreams and visions like Amer and I. I think the spirit of Egypt is lost in her and I need to find a way to recover it.

July 22nd 2002

Had he lived Amer would have been forty years old today but in my mind he is always a child. Every night I go to the summerhouse at Djorff Palace and sit with Amin while Amer plays at our feet. In these dreams everything is as real as in my waking life and I often wonder if life itself is the dream and the dreams are the reality. I remember how foolish I thought Julia Openshaw was when she questioned me on this same thing all those years ago but I understand her now. My dreams are so vivid I must conclude that they are not dreams at all and that I am actually awake in another dimension of time and place.

July 23rd

Sometimes I ask myself 'Is it normal to confuse dreams with reality?' But what is normal? Who is to say what reality is or isn't? Many great philosophers believed that we cannot trust our senses in waking life and as my daily life is nothing more than a jumble of ideas and abstract experiences I have to agree. I am sure that my dreams are images of the real world and what I wake up to every morning is the dream.

November 24th

I spoke to my doctor today about his opinion on dreams. He was here on a home visit because I have started having high blood pressure when I wake up in the mornings. He thinks believing in dreams is a form of psychosis and is the reason for my health problems.

"In my dreams objects still fall to the ground when dropped, lights still turn on when I flip the switch so if I am dreaming why is what I experience so real?" I asked him. "How can you explain that?"

His reply to that was "Reality is only what you perceive it to be in any given moment. You have become so engrossed in your dreams that you now believe them to be real. You have lost your grip on reality and your reality has become the dream. This is an illness. I know a very good psychiatrist who can help you. I don't want you going the same way as Amer."

"I don't need your help" I argued ignoring his last insensitive remark about my son. "Don't you know about Plato's allegory of the cave? I will tell you. What if you were chained in a dimly-lit cave your whole life where you saw only the shadows of real things passing by the entrance to your cave reflected on its back wall? Suddenly you're free and come into the sunlight. Would you recognise this new world as more real than your cave world? And would you be able to convince those still enchained in the cave that there was a greater world outside their dwelling? Would you be able, in Plato's terms, to wake up to reality?"

Of course I was wasting my time talking like this to this very simple, ordinary

man. In his world dreams are considered to be less real than the world we experience while we're awake. Trying to tell him that this isn't the case in all cultures is a pointless exercise. He accepts people might have believed this in ancient times but according to him it is because they didn't know any better in those days. He left leaving me with a pile of pills for my blood pressure and muttering something about me being 'a mad old woman'. I only wish it were possible for me to remain in a perpetual dream state and never experience the reality of wakefulness at all.

September 1st 2008

Gloria has gone to university to study classics and may follow it up with a Masters in Egyptology. At last I see her spiritual side coming through.

October 25th 2009

Next year Gloria will be twenty one and on her birthday I will give her my palace. When I am dead she can have my diaries but I will not let her read them while I am alive. She must go to Luxor and put everything back as it was. Her ancestry means everything to me and I need her to feel the same. So far I have seen she has no more than a passing interest in Egypt's past or present.

Over the years I have followed the political situation there but with less and less interest. Nothing much changes. Back in two thousand the ruling party held all but thirty four seats in the People's Assembly and by two thousand and five Mubarak felt confident enough to hold a presidential election where other candidates were allowed to stand against him. Mubarak still won and was elected for another six year term with over eighty percent of the vote. The leader of the opposition put up a strong fight and when it looked as though he might prove a threat he was jailed on some fake forgery charges. He only got out of prison a few months ago. The Brotherhood, standing as independents as usual have about a fifth of the seats now. I see Mubarak no longer has the support that he once had and the Egyptian people are extremely dissatisfied that his two sons

are wielding so much influence. Alaa, the eldest one is extremely corrupt and his father had to sideline him after allegations of him favouring himself and his friends in government tenders. The younger son, Gamal, has managed to get a new generation of liberals into the government and does a lot of corporate finance work which nobody thinks benefits the country. Since the advent of the Internet bloggers have started to play an important role in organising, and mobilising public opposition but it will take another revolution to unseat the Mubarak dynasty and I don't see anyone in Egypt strong enough to lead one at the moment.

May 1st 2010

I have written my will. It is six months to Gloria's twenty first birthday and I am worried I may not live that long. I will leave Extwistle Hall to Julius which is more of a poisoned chalice than a bequest. The portraits I dislike so much will go to Gloria who can sell them to finance the work in Egypt. She can sell Djorff Palace once it is restored but something tells me she won't do that. It's in her blood to love that house.

October 24th

4.00am

Last night I dreamt Amin came to me in my room at Djorff Palace. What I felt made my heart race and my temperature soar. It was one of the most intense sexual experiences of my life and I feel Amin is very close to me now.

I woke in the early hours to write this which I believe will be my last diary entry. The lawyer knows what he should do if I don't survive until morning.