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DJORFF PALACE THE NOVEL

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

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CHAPTER THIRTY FIVE



As soon as Mohamed arrived at just before six he thrust an official looking piece of paper into my hand.

"There's your proof" he announced triumphantly.

As it was all in handwritten Arabic I glanced at it and then stared at him blankly.

"It's my grandfather's death certificate" he said looking at me as though I should have known that. "He died in nineteen seventy five: - of a heart attack."

This was remarkable news and my mind started working overtime trying to figure out what must have happened. I spoke my thoughts out loud as they came to me.

"Well someone must have lied to my grandmother; or maybe Amin won a later appeal and no one told her. Or he could have got his death sentence commuted to a prison term. Have you any idea when he came home from the prison Mohamed? It doesn't really matter does it? The main thing is that we know he got out of prison and was never hanged. That's really good news."

"No Gloria that's not what happened. If you let me continue I will tell you everything I know and I have something else to show you too. Listen; my grandfather had only the one son. He wanted more children but he was not able to have any. He contracted tuberculosis shortly after his son was born and it made him infertile so you see he couldn't possibly have been the father of Amer. Your father must have been Simon's son.

"Whatever are you saying Mohamed? Tuberculosis is a bacterial lung infection" I replied trying not to be dismissive of his valiant attempt at proving we are not related. Undaunted Mohamed carried on.

"This afternoon you told me not to interrupt you and I would be grateful if you paid that same courtesy to me now. TB can also attack the reproductive system and cause tubal blockages and although it is very rare in developed countries it is a significant cause of infertility in countries like Egypt; ask any doctor. Anyway as I told you I have something to show you. I have the letter your grandmother sent to my grandfather from England and not only that I have three letters my grandfather wrote to her that he must never have sent. They are all very similar

so I imagine these were drafts and he finally composed another one; the one he sent to her that she burnt."

He handed me a well preserved lavender envelope and as I took it from him a whiff of the scent hit my nostrils. After all these years the letter was in near perfect condition. I opened it and with some trepidation and started to read."

Dear Amin,

I have been back in England for over a month now and still cannot think of it as being home. I long for Luxor and for Djorff Palace but most of all I long to be back with you. I am with child and by the end of the summer you will be a father. I await news of your trial and as soon as this horrible business is over I will come back to you.

Yours

Nancy.

"So what do you want me to understand from that?" I asked handing the letter back to him. "This only confirms what is in the diary it doesn't disprove anything."

"Ah but you need to read my grandfather's reply now. As I told you there are three of them altogether but two of them have a lot of crossings out and alterations. I think the third one is nearer to the one he must have finally sent to your grandmother. The tone of it is much more sympathetic in this one" he replied handing me a grubby piece of lined paper that looked to have been torn from a cheap book of writing paper.

"Dear Mrs Paramour,

You need not trouble yourself like this. I am not on trial. They have the men who killed your husband in custody and their lawyer is building a case for them claiming self defence. As you are aware your husband was a violent and aggressive man and I think everyone who ever worked with him has come forward to speak on behalf of the perpetrators of this crime.

Try to remember if you can the night before Simon was killed. We were in the summerhouse when he came down there very angry about something you had written in your diary. In it you were imagining our friendship to be something more than it was and Simon was furious at what you had written. He knew it wasn't true because for one thing I could never have entered your house at night unnoticed and more importantly on many of the nights you claimed to be with me you were actually with Simon. I tried to tell him that it was just an innocent fantasy on your part and was completely harmless. He wouldn't accept it and said that you needed a doctor. "Nobody writes this kind of thing believing it to be real" he said. I tried reasoning with him and telling him that I wasn't in the least angry but he wouldn't listen. He was going to have you put away as soon as he got back from Assuit he told me. That is why you left Luxor Nancy. I encouraged you to go if you recall and you left the very next morning. The day you left Simon was bludgeoned to death by three of his own workers. Because I had been with Simon the night before I was called to the police station and asked what we were talking about. They wanted to know if I could shed any light on why the workers got into this fatal conflict with Simon which of course I couldn't. I had no idea.

I know why you created this alternative world for yourself Nancy. You must have had a terrible life living with Simon. I saw all the bruises and listened to all your improbable stories about how you came by them. It is over now and you are safe. Try to get some help. I am sure that very soon all those terrible memories will fade and you will look back only on the good times.

I remain your friend

Amin Fawy.

Tears started streaming down my face as Mohamed took the letter from my shaking hand.

"You can read the other two versions if you like but they are not very kind. In them my grandfather more or less agrees that Simon had a point in wanting Nancy to see a doctor. That's probably why he never sent them. I don't know

what he wrote differently in the letter he finally did send but he never heard from your grandmother again. I assume the only way your grandmother had of coping with his rejection was to believe he was dead. "

"All Nancy wanted was to be loved" I cried. "She never wrote anything in her diary about her husband beating her; she was too proud to admit it even to herself. Do you know Mohamed; all the time I was reading my grandmother's diaries I had doubts about this affair she supposedly had with Amin. Something didn't ring true. They never spoke together about it for one thing and Amin never offered my grandmother any words of love or affection; but to make up all that and actually believe it? That's almost harder to believe than the diary itself; and what about my poor father? His whole life was a lie; mine too if it comes to that. I am no more an Arab than my Uncle Julius and Simon must have been my grandfather after all. Oh my God Mohamed. What a terribly sad story. Can you go now please; I want to be on my own. Just leave me; I will be fine by the time you come back later. We can go to the party then as planned just like you said earlier on today."

With that Mohamed left me with my thoughts. For me everything is much simpler now but for my father and grandmother life had been very complicated. They were both living in a dream world of my grandmother's own making but my poor father didn't even know it.

I put it right out of my mind as I got ready for the party at the Gezira Garden. I tried on three different outfits before settling on a gold dress black stockings and high heeled boots. I knew it would be cold but I had no idea if it was going to be a 'dressy' affair or not.

It was after eleven when Mohamed showed up dressed in jeans and jumper. Well he wasn't in a galabeya so I took that to mean everyone would be a bit dressed up at least. When we reached the party the buffet was closed and all the entertainment had finished apart from the whirling dervish. There were people of all nationalities there in all manner of attire from ball gowns to shorts and tee-shirts so I needn't have worried about what to wear. Just before midnight a waiter

handed out party bags with paper hats and streamers but Mohamed snatched mine off me before I had a chance to open it. "I like to take them home for the children" he explained. I hardly ever think about Mohamed having an Egyptian wife and three young daughters but it was brought home to me with a jolt.

"Am I prepared to be a second wife?" I was thinking when he asked me if I would marry him.

I said I would without fully realising that I was taking on a whole family, not just a man and that this man would never share a home with me. We would share a palace though.

We went back to the villa shortly after midnight where Mohamed insisted that I was the one first footing. After toasting each other he left and that's when it hit me exactly what I had agreed to. I was not going to have a husband who stayed with me at nights and who I cooked, cleaned and washed for. My marriage would be more of a permanent courtship.

It had been a big day and I no longer wanted to think about the past or the future so I fell into bed and dreamt about the hotel.

As the month of January progressed Mohamed's extravagances became greater. He built a laundry, a bread baking room and added an extra room and a wooden tent to the gazebo. None of these were in my original plans and none were budgeted for. I was completely out of funds and although Mohamed never mentioned money I thought he must be running short too. By the end of the month work on the hotel had ground almost to a standstill.

To make matters worse on the second anniversary of the revolution protests again erupted in cities all across the country. As had now become the norm security forces fired tear gas at protesters trying to force their way into the presidential palace and state television offices and by the end of the day, hundreds of protesters had been injured. The next day the sentencing to death of twenty one people for the part they had played in the Port Said stadium disaster sparked further unrest and the government was reported to have lost control of Port Said completely. In an attempt to regain control Morsi announced a state of

emergency in the Suez region and called all the opposition parties with their leaders to talks but the leading opposition party refused to begin discussions until a new government was put in place and the country's constitution modified. The protests spread to Cairo where thousands of people gathered in Tahrir Square to show their solidarity with those killed in Port Said. Egypt's Defence Minister made a brief appearance on state television warning both pro- and anti-Morsi groups that their disagreements could lead to the collapse of the state and was threatening the future of the coming generations.

If anything the month of February was even worse. All work on the hotel stopped but neither Mohamed nor I spoke about it. There was no rush to complete a hotel in a city that had no guests. The media did little to help and often exacerbated the problem. One newspaper reported that police forces dragged a protester, stripped him naked, beat him with batons, and took him away in a security truck and this incident was quickly picked up by the BBC. It wasn't long before similar incidents were being shown on all the international news channels. State television did their best to contradict these reports and interviewed one man who had previously claimed to having been beaten by police now saying that the police had in fact saved him from thieving protesters. This was swiftly followed by an interview with the man's daughter on CNN. She stated that she had been at the scene of the attack and said that her father was now simply afraid to talk because of the pressure bring put on him. The Interior Minister threatened to resign and the Minister of Culture actually did resign over the police assaults and all this was done in front of the eyes of a now very cynical world. On the second anniversary of former president Mubarak's ousting, people gathered outside the presidential palace, now demanding that Morsi also leave office. Throughout the rest of February and all through March protestors, civilians and police continued to die in alarming numbers. On the last day of March an arrest warrant was issued for Bassem Youssef, host of a satirical news programme, for allegedly insulting Morsi. Youssef confirmed

the arrest warrant on his Twitter account by saying he would hand himself in to the prosecutor's office, jokingly adding, 'Unless they kindly send a police van today and save me the transportation hassle'. As Jon Stewart from America's 'Daily Show' claimed to be a friend of Bassem Youssef he sent a message to Morsi saying 'What are you worried about? You're the President of Egypt! You have an army! Youssef's got puns and a show; you've got tanks and planes.' The event sparked international media attention. The very next week a youth group was created opposing Morsi and attempting to collect twenty two million signatures demanding his resignation. Egypt was big news now and reporters were looking for any story they could find to discredit Morsi and the Brotherhood. Hamas, one of the Muslim Brotherhood's biggest allies outside of Egypt was being widely blamed for the orchestrated attacks on prisons throughout the country during the uprising against Mubarak. In those prison breaks, more than thirty leaders of the Muslim Brotherhood who were imprisoned by Mubarak at the outbreak of revolution had escaped including Morsi himself.

The next big news item was that of seven Egyptian soldiers who were kidnapped in the Sinai on the sixteenth of May. The kidnappers were demanding the release of members of an Islamist group detained for almost two years. About a week later the soldiers were released and president Morsi was televised greeting them upon their arrival at Cairo airport. Despite this show of support for the kidnapped soldiers the press reported Morsi as having being concerned for the safety of the kidnappers just as much as for the safety of the kidnapped soldiers themselves. When a security officer, was assassinated while investigating the identity of the kidnappers his friends and relatives started chanting against the president and during the funeral the Interior Minister was forced to leave the ceremony.

In the middle of June the protests reached Luxor. It started when Morsi appointed an Islamist as governor of Luxor. He was almost certainly linked to the Luxor Massacre fifteen years ago where almost sixty tourists had been brutally killed and tourism workers in Luxor demonstrated outside his office

eventually forcing him to resign a week later.

Morsi appeared on television then where he delivered a two-hour-and-forty-minute monologue to the nation which Mohamed laboriously translated to me. It was supposed to be a reconciliatory speech but from what Mohamed translated to me it sounded to be full of threats and accusations targeted against his opponents. Far from relieving the situation the speech made Morsi's opponents even angrier and they threatened to take to the streets on the last day of June in an uprising aimed to oust the president. Two days before the planned uprising an American student was stabbed to death in Alexandria as he stood by observing the demonstrations and CNN had a field day with the story.

On the penultimate day of the month thousands of Egyptians converged on Tahrir Square to demonstrate against the Egyptian President, still demanding his resignation from office. They were using all the same slogans they had used when they ousted Mubarak two years earlier.

The last day of June marked the one-year anniversary of Morsi's inauguration as president, and millions of Egyptians were now out demanding him to step down but Morsi refused to resign. A forty eight hour ultimatum was then issued to him, demanding that he respond to the demands of the people.

The next morning anti-Morsi protesters ransacked the national headquarters of the Muslim Brotherhood, throwing objects through the windows and looting the building. The Egyptian Armed Forces re-iterated their two-day ultimatum threatening to intervene if the dispute was not resolved by then. Four more ministers resigned that morning including the Minister for Tourism. On the second of July the Foreign Minister also resigned but Morsi continued to reject the forty eight hour ultimatum declaring that he had his own plans for resolving the political crisis. The Defence Minister then told Morsi that he would impose a military solution if a political one could not be found by the next day. The Al-Ahram newspaper confirmed this and reported that if there was no resolution the military would suspend the constitution and draft a new one, and would also appoint a prime minister from the military.

In response Morsi declared, in a late-night television address, that he would 'defend the legitimacy of his elected office with his life. There is no substitute for legitimacy' he added as he vowed never to resign. Army leaders responded with a statement entitled 'The Final Hours' in which they said that the military was willing to shed its blood 'to protect the people against terrorists and fools'. As the deadline set by the army approached, military leaders met for emergency talks but just before the deadline was reached Morsi offered to form a consensus government. It was too late. The Defence Minister Abdul Fatah al-Sisi spoke at night from Cairo and said that although the army was standing away from the political process it was using its vision as the Egyptian people were calling for help. Following this Morsi was unceremoniously removed from power, the draft constitution was suspended and the Chief Justice was named interim president. ElBaradei, The Sheikh of Al Azhar, the Coptic Pope and members of the opposition youth movement, who were all present during the Defence Minister's statement, then came on television one by one and spoke in support of the coup. Morsi refused to accept his removal from office, and many of his supporters vowed to reinstate him. They organised a series of sit-ins which continued all through the summer until they were finally dispersed in August.

By the end of the summer Mohamed admitted that he was also out of funds and that we needed about another five million pounds to complete the work. We considered going to the bank but with tourism as it was I had my doubts that we could cover the repayments on a loan of that size. Then out of the blue Uncle Julius called to say that a private buyer had made an offer of one hundred and fifty thousand pounds for my forged Hogarth portrait. It was under the valuation given by Sotheby's but we needed the money. The painting was sold and we received almost one and a half million Egyptian pounds into our account in September so work on the hotel began again. Mohamed spent most of this money on a coffee shop which had never been in our plans but seemed like a good addition to the hotel.

Tourism this year was now at its lowest point since the revolution but security

in Egypt was improving and there were hardly any demonstrations. Presidential elections are to be held in the New Year and Abdel Fattah El-Sisi was looking like the favourite to win. In October Fuad, the son of King Farouk publicly announced his support for Sisi but whether that helped or hindered his campaign I couldn't say. No matter who won we would have to open the hotel soon. We decided that our best option would be to get a short term loan of four million from the bank until the properties were handed over to me and I could sell the villa. We estimated the villa would bring no more than three million but we were confident, even with tourism as it was that we could comfortably cover a loan of a million.

On New Year's Eve we went back to the Gezira Garden to celebrate one year of our engagement. As the clock chimed in two thousand and fourteen Mohamed promised that we would be married in our own hotel within three months and that next year we would be bringing in the New Year there. I said nothing but I had my doubts because we still had a lot of work to do and the bank had not yet approved our loan. Mohamed the eternal optimist was not willing to compromise on cost at all and although it is completely out of character for me I ceded total control to him and gave up thinking about it.