

Two Wars
A novel

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All characters in this novel are fictitious and any resemblance to real persons, living or dead is purely coincidental.

**The Author
Cairo, Egypt.**

(1)

Saber Mazloom the fifty-year-old high rank governmental clerk was too sad. In the living room he was sitting on his usual chair wearing his pajama. He was showing the TV that he had bought few months ago. He stood suddenly, but his knees failed to bear his body and he collapsed on the chair he just left. His dry mouth and throat increased the stinging pain he had and his tongue was stick to his palate. The heart ran as fast as a crazy horse. He buried his face in his hands. He felt suffocated, and then he rested his back on the seat back and started to cry spasmodically.

‘It can’t be,’ he cried it out. ‘The devils did it to us.’

‘How come that happened to us?’ Amina Rashed, the primary school teacher came from the kitchen to see her husband cry for the first time since his father had died.

Nagwa their elder daughter, the twenty-two-year-old student in the faculty of Economics and Political Sciences hurried with bare feet, rushed into the living room, and cried loudly, ‘what happened to Ibrahiem?’ She asked about her cousin. He was also her husband-to-be and he was a captain in the Egyptian army. They tied the knot but postponed the wedding until he would return victorious.

Gamal Abd El Naser finished his famous speech of 9 June 1967, announcing the setback and his resignation. Few days ago, they had been talking about the time the Egyptian army would enter Tel-Aviv. They had no doubts that their heroes in the army would do the job. They had a great faith in Naser.

Emad the twenty-year-old student in the Faculty of Engineering was listening to the same speech from a transistor radio in the balcony looking at Ramsis street in Abbassia district in Cairo. He saw the first waves of the demonstrations less than a quarter of an hour after Naser’s speech.

‘People refuse the resignation of Naser and they want to fight again,’ Emad rushed to the living room to tell his parents and sister. ‘I’ll go down to see the demonstrations.’

‘No, you don’t go!’ Amina said to him.

‘Let him go,’ Saber said before Amina could clear her point of view, and then added as if he found something to do, ‘I must be in the committee now.’ Saber was the secretary of the Abbassia district committee of the Arabic Socialist Union, the only political party in

Egypt then days. He wore a black suit and a black tie as if someone dear died.

‘I’ll go with Emad,’ Tamer the twelve-year-old pupil said to his mother.

‘No, never you go. Emad is big enough to take care of himself,’ Amina said sharply.

‘I’m not young. I finished the primary school certificate exam and you promised me that I can go alone when I finish it,’ Tamer started to cry.

‘If you don’t stop you’ll have a good beat,’ Amina threatened.

‘Come with me and we’ll listen together to the radio,’ Salwa the sixteen year old girl came to the risqué of her young brother as she knew that in those circumstances the threatening of her mother was no joke.

‘No!’ it was Nagwa who cried and fainted when Saber and Emad went out and found that nobody answered her question about Ibrahiem. Her mother and sister carried her to her bed and tried to tone the transistor radio to listen to the BBC or the VOA to know what had really happened.

On his way to the district committee Saber met a neighbor.

‘The demonstrations block the whole Queen Nazly Street. Do you think that Naser may return?’ the neighbor asked.

‘It’s called Ramsis street or you prefer to live in the royal era before the revolution,’ Saber said.

‘Ramsis is a king also,’ the neighbor said sarcastically.

‘Naser will continue as a leader. The situation is much like what happened in 1956 and at last we were the victorious,’ Saber said ignoring the sarcasm of his friend.

‘I hope so but I’m afraid that I think the situation is different from 1956,’ the friend said.

All the way Saber was trying to convince himself that it would be a matter of days and then the world would be against the aggressors but something deep in his brain cast doubt on that possibility. When he reached the committee, he had his usual seat beside Noor Sultan the chief of the committee.

‘Of course it’s a great success that we could mobilize people to demonstrate and to insist on Naser as a president. What we did is a historical step that history will record it proudly. Our sacred duty is to

support the command-ship and there will be no leader but Naser,' Sultan said finishing his speech.

'We sacrifice the soul and blood for Naser,' one of the members shouted. Others repeated the slogan.

'But I think that we've to ask for a special committee to investigate the cause of the defeat,' Saber said.

'This isn't a defeat,' Noor shouted with a very high voice. He looked at Saber and added, 'this is just a setback.'

'What so ever you call it but we've to know exactly what had happened,' Saber defended his point of view.

'I think our sacred duty is to liberate the land not to condemn each other,' Noor shouted at Saber then he looked at the members and shouted, 'no voice should be louder than the battle's voice.' A pause of silence followed then Noor gave Saber a sharp look and started to expose his second man and competitor in the committee, 'I think one of the main causes of the setback was that some of the supposed responsible persons were not present in their places. I think you've to be with the civil defense groups right now.'

'Well, I went there the moment the war began to find that they don't have a plan and all they do was to shout at people to switch off the light,' Saber felt cornered and his gradually fading voice exposed him more.

'You'd report to us to tell the higher level to take actions,' Noor continued reprimanding Saber. At last, he ignored Saber and said to the members, 'we shouldn't return homes until Naser accept to withdraw his resignation.' He stood up leaving the place without shaking hands with saber as usual or even bidding him farewell.

The early morning of 10 June was the saddest day the Egyptians lived in the twentieth century. For Mazloom family it was both the saddest and the unforgettable. In the dawn just half an hour before sunrise, heavy knocking at the door annoyed Saber and Amina.

'It must be Emad forgetting his key as usual,' Saber said opening his eyes after failed trials to fall asleep due to the sadness that inhabiting his heart and the sorrow overwhelming his mind, and the hot humid summer of Cairo.

'I'll open the door for him,' Amina got off the bed. While she was wearing the slipper, the knocking at the door continued and was accompanied by a harsh voice of non-comprehensible words. Her transparent nightgown exposed more than covered her body and

showed her underwear, so she looked at her husband and said, 'I don't think it is Emad who is at the door. You better go to see who's knocking at the door.'

Saber went to open the door while he was wearing the trousers of the pajama on his way. The knocking on the door did not stop.

'Open the door,' a harsh voice ordered and followed by louder knockings.

'Who're you?' Saber's loud and sharp voice expressed his anger about the rudeness of the visitor.

'Are you Saber Mazloom?' the voice was louder and sharper.

'Yes, but who are you?'

'Open the door or we'll break it.'

'If you do not tell me who are you, I will call the police at once.'

'What the police will do for you. You are son of a bitch. We're from the intelligence service,' the voice shouted angrily as if it was humiliated.

'What's the matter?' Saber asked the first giant he faced when opened the door.

'Sorry to disturb your intimate pleasure Mr. Saber but you're wanted,' the black suit and the black eyeglasses the giant wear in spite of the darkness and the hot summer beside the masked face and the rude language were the ID of the dawn visitors as Egyptians called them.

Three other lower rank men wearing yellow coats rushed into the flat and before Saber could warn his wife and daughters, the females found them in their bedrooms. Amina and her two daughters in the nightgowns accompanied by the young Tamer fled for the reception and stood by their helpless man.

'There should be some mistake or misunderstanding,' Nagwa said to the giant.

'I am Major Hussein Yousry from the intelligence service and we do not do mistakes,' he lit a cigarette and let his eyes run over the pretty girl's body under her transparent gown.

'Have you got permission from the prosecutor general to be here and to arrest my father?' Nagwa insisted to show him that she knew the rights of citizens, the very same rights her father did not care about when he as a member in the Socialist Union defended all human rights violations as excuses to safeguard the revolution.

'What's permission? I don't need permissions.' Hussein took two steps toward Nagwa, caught the gown touching her breasts with his

fingers, and added, 'you may wipe your ass with those permissions. I'm the law. You could use the books of laws that you've read in the university as toilet papers' He pulled the gown suddenly and tore it exposing her flesh.

'Oh,' Nagwa screamed. She threw herself into her mother's arms. Salwa ran and brought a robe for her.

'We found nothing,' one of the men came from inside.

'Go with this queer,' Hussein pushed Saber to be picked by the man, who wrestled the poor man's arm. 'Let him wear something and bring him back in less than five minutes.'

'Could you tell us please, where we can ask about him,' Amina asked the arrogant officer.

'Of course, the dawn visitors have only one place that is behind the sun,' Hussein said smilingly.

While the three men in the military jeep were accompanying Saber, Hussein was on his way to Heliopolis, the affluent Cairo district where his second wife Shahinaze Al-Sharbatly was. She lived in the palace of her father the Pasha (*the equivalent to a Lord*) who lost his title after the revolution along with most of his properties. Dr. Kamal, her brother fled to London after graduation and married an English woman. She failed to follow him. She found a job as a presenter in the Radio English Program. She met Hussein in the Heliopolis Sporting Club. When he admired her, she had two options, either to be his second wife or to be his mistress. She predicted that the first choice might protect her and her relatives from the harassment of the new influential revolutionaries and her predictions proved to be right. Even her career, was favorably developed after they chose her to present the TV English news and to present some other programs. Hussein needed her as a stylish wife to be beside him in the parties and social events where his first wife Safia, a daughter of an Omda (*a farmer property owner and a governor of a village*) might be a source of embarrassment in front of his colleagues where the farmers' habits of talking and eating had no popularity. Shahinaze had never asked him to divorce his first wife and the few hours he spent every three or four days, in the main bedroom of the palace were more than enough for her. The last time she saw him was one day before the war. That day he told her confidently that he would take her to Tel-Aviv in the near future to spend a holiday there after the Egyptian army would liberate Palestine.

He parked his car in the garage of the palace in Beirut Street off Oroba Street that leads to Cairo international airport.

Shahinaze was in her bedroom when he entered and took off his jacket and threw it on a chair.

‘High,’ he said.

‘High,’ she was semi-sitting in her bed. Her sad voice was strange to him.

‘What’s wrong with you? Didn’t you sleep well?’ he asked.

‘I didn’t sleep at all. I spent the whole night listening to the transistor radio trying to know anything,’ she said. She was astonished that there is no any sign of sadness in his voice.

‘About what?’ he asked.

‘About the war, the army and the land,’ she said angrily.

‘Everything is okay, our agents told that they had cooperated with the members of the Arabic Socialist Union and had arranged the demonstrations with a non-precedence success. Moreover, this is just the first step. The second step will be the army’s taking the Israelis by surprise,’ he said it confidently as if there was a secret plan to liberate the lost land. He took off his shoes and lay beside her.

‘I don’t think so,’ she was about to scream.

‘For you knowledge Naser will withdraw his resignation and nothing will change,’ he said smilingly.

‘I don’t think that there is anything may make one happy after we had lost the war,’ she was disgusted.

‘We didn’t lose the war. It was a conspiracy to topple Naser but as long as he’ll continue to be the president, then the aggressors failed,’ he said proudly.

‘As simple as it is,’ she said ironically.

‘Of course,’ he said as if he was lecturing on an idiot.

‘What about the land that we’ve lost,’ she said furiously.

‘We’ll liberate it,’ he was so confident.

‘When does this happen?’ she asked. She desperately needed hope.

‘In time,’ he said indifferently. He picked a block-note that she kept beside the bed, and with his Parker pen, he drew the Sinai map. He gave her a lesson about the geo-strategy of the peninsula. He explained how armies lose and retake it easily. ‘So there is no problem at all.’

‘What the rubbish you’re talking about. These words may help the system to absorb the people’s rage who fed up with the dictatorship and atrocity. They sacrificed their freedom and rights hoping that the

system may liberate Palestine one day. Nevertheless, anyone who knows little about policy knows that it is a regime of liars and deceivers who are corrupt. They expelled his majesty the king to crown several kings instead,' her voice was loud.

'Naser is not a king. He is a great nationalist,' he shouted back.

'But the great fault he did was leaving those sons of bitches do to us what they have done? If they had the slightest signs of dignity they would suicide,' she left the bed.

'Don't forget that I'm member of that regime,' he grabbed her from hair.

She knew that his sadistic drive turned on. 'That is what you do all, you beat women and flee when real men are needed.' She knew how to put more fuel on his sadistic drive. Humiliating him verbally excited the monster that always overwhelmed his soul and body.

'Don't ever talk to me like this,' he said while he was wrestling her arm. He threw her on the bed.

'Since when slaves tell their masters how to talk,' she said. She faced him and kicked his chest with her bare leg.

'We're the masters of this country, you bitch.' He caught her leg and turned her on her abdomen. Then he pulled up her gown and beat her buttocks. He pulled down her underwear and whipped her bare buttocks with his belt. He sodomized her and he felt the satisfaction of overcoming her. He did not care about her being satisfied. After ejaculation, he pulled up his trousers. He never let her see him naked. He took underwear, a shirt and another black suit from the closet and went to the bathroom. He bolted the door.

While he was having a shower, she masturbated herself.

He came from the bathroom dressed fully. He picked his eyeglasses and was ready to leave.

'Do you make the same thing to Safia, beating her before sleeping with her or sometimes you sodomize her?' she asked.

'No, she is a farmer. She does not know much about sex games. She lay on her back and parting her thighs. If she does not want to have a boy as we have only two girls, she will never sleep with me. Do you believe that I forgot the shape of her buttocks?' He laughed at his last statement. 'I only beat her when I'm angry with her. I give her a good beat then. That's nothing to do with the sex.'

The threatening voice and the merciless face he wore when finishing his words made her feel pity for the woman with whom she shared her husband. 'Have a mercy on her. You leave her alone most of

the times. You never take her out and in spite of all that she grows up your girls.'

'When there is something wrong I'll never be merciful,' he shouted at her. He stared at her for a while but his mind thought of his father beating him when he was a child. His father always used his shoes to beat him and if the mistake had been unforgettable then his father would have bound him to the bed leg after been beaten by a whip. He might have stayed for a whole day with no food. 'I may stay in office for days investigating this son of a bitch Saber Mazloom who thinks like you and he asked for an investigation to know the causes of the setback.' She felt pity for Saber Mazloom whose name in the Arabic language means the man of patience who justice had never done to him.

Hussein returned to his office from Saber's cell after he gave the innocent prisoner a good beat. He phoned Safia his first wife and told her that he might stay for about two weeks or more in the office as he thought that the man would need a special treatment to confess.

Dr. Kamal Al-Sharbatly the physician had fled the country after their properties had been confiscated leaving his sister Shahinaze with Bahgat Pasha their father who was forbidden from traveling abroad. She failed to follow him after their father had died. He received the news of her marriage to Hussein with much disgust. He married Joan, an English doctor and they settled in London. Since the news of the defeat, he went into a sad mode and sometimes he could not control a teardrop falling from his eyes.

'How come you're the Egyptians insist on Naser and refuse his resignation instead of try him for what he had done?' Joan asked.

'What's most important to us all is to fight again as soon as possible to liberate Sinai,' he said.

'Even after what he did to your family?' she wondered.

'Yes, many families had the same fate, but what's matter now is the country itself,' he said.

'You are the Egyptians have the greatest tolerance and you may forgive anything your rulers do to you,' her words were somewhat sarcastic.

'Please stop it. After all I know that you are the British hate him because he could force you out not only from Egypt but also from the whole Africa and other third world countries,' he was angry enough

that both kept silent. It was the first time they disagreed about something and he used a higher tone than a gentleman might use.

Ten days after they arrested Saber, Amina and Nagwa went to Abd – Allah Mazloom’s house to see if he could ask anyone to know the whereabouts of Saber. He was the brother of Saber and the father of Ibrahiem.

‘How come they do that to Saber and he’s one of them?’ Samira Yehia, the wife of Abd–Allah exclaimed. She looked at her husband and added, ‘he always was at odds with you when you criticized any decision of the government.’ Her husband was a publisher and had a private publishing house and she ran her own clothes shop.

After two weeks of investigations, there were no data against Saber. Hussein was not convinced. Hussein took his seat in his office and as if he was a command starting a battle, he shouted at the soldier standing at the door.

‘Let that queer in,’ Hussein’s fist knocked at the desk. Three men surrounded Saber; one of them pushed him. He fell on the ground.

‘Won’t you tell us about other conspirators?’ Hussein said to Saber.

‘I’m no conspirator. If I knew that there would be any plot against the revolution, I would be the first to tell the police.’ Saber said.

‘Bring the two sluts,’ Hussein ordered one of the men. He kicked Saber and said to him, ‘Your wife and your daughter are the price for you hiding the abettors.’

Amina and Nagwa saw Saber at the ground. Nagwa threw herself on her father. ‘Dad, what did they do to you?’ she said crying it.

‘I’m ready to sign any blank paper. You may write what you like. But I don’t know anything about any plot,’ Saber said as a last proposal to save his wife and daughter.

‘I don’t damn care about satisfying the prosecutor general who is interested in papers,’ Hussein said.

‘I may kiss your shoes to have a pity on them not on me,’ the panic-stricken father caught Hussein’s shoes and started to kiss them and repeating his words.

‘Will you tell me?’ Hussein said. When Saber continued on begging him to leave the woman and the girl, Hussein gave his order to the men surrounding them, ‘fuck them.’

‘God will take our revenge on you,’ Saber shouted.

‘Shut up,’ one of the men hit Saber’s head with the fist. Saber lost consciousness.

In less than two minutes, the three men tied Saber to a chair. Saber’s protruding tongue and dropped arms showed that the God’s mercy saved him the worst sight a father and a husband might see. Saber died. Amina lost her consciousness when she saw a man over her daughter and another one catching her arms. She regained her consciousness to find her daughter’s lower half-naked while a man was on top of her. Saber’ corps was not in the room. As soon as the man finished his job with Amina, the three men left the room. Nagwa and Amina remained sitting on the floor in a corner of the office embracing each other and crying. Hussein entered the office and looked at them in an ecstasy and satisfaction as if he won a great battle.

‘Saber confessed then he committed suicide,’ Hussein said.

‘You killed him,’ Nagwa shouted, cried and screamed.

‘If I did, I would tell you. I am not afraid of anybody. Nevertheless, I will forgive you, as I know that you are sad for him. We will give you a death certificate stating that the cause of death a heart attack. He was a cardiac patient and it’s normal for these patients to die suddenly,’ Hussein said.

‘Can we go now?’ Amina asked.

‘Sure,’ he said. He took two personal cards from his wallet and gave every woman a card. ‘You may contact me at any time if you need any service.’ He put a hand on Nagwa’s buttocks while she was wearing her skirt, ‘I know you’re a good girl. You do not worry about what had happened. I will help you. I know you are faithful to the regime. Of course, the funeral will be too limited and there will be no condolence service. You know that the country passes a critical path now.’

(2)

Amal Rashed the secondary school English teacher and the widow of Dr. Nabil Ismail spent the last sixteen years in Ismailia city. She was Amina's younger sister. The beautiful city became part of the front line after the six-day war. Four weeks after the war was more than enough time for her to know that it might be longer than she had previously predicted to see the soldiers cross back the Suez Canal to its east bank. She decided to leave the city especially that authorities asked people to leave on their own. Alternatively, the government would mobilize them to other cities to live either in refugee camps or in rapidly prepared buildings that lacked the vital and essential facilities. Younis her brother in law paid her a visit. He was an accountant in the Suez Canal Authority. The offices of the authority had to move to other cities. He could find a place in Alexandria where his laws lived there.

'I may help to find you an apartment there,' he proposed.

'Thank you but I decided to move to Cairo at my sister's house. I think it'll be temporary arrangements until I find a place in Cairo. Saber will help. He has influence, you know.' She did not know that her brother in law died. Her sister did not tell because of Hussein's warning about condolences service.

'When shall we return?' Elham the seventeen years old girl asked her mother.

'I don't know, but I think it may take a year or two to get ride of Israelis,' she answered while she was closing the garden gate of their house.

'Why did you prefer to go to Cairo instead of going to Alexandria with uncle Younis and his family?' Elham asked.

'Because with aunt Amina and Uncle Saber we'll feel more at home,' she answered.

When Amal knocked at her sister's door, her worst nightmare would not tell what she was about to know.

'When Saber died?' she asked Amina.

'Two weeks after the setback,' Amina said.

'Why did they arrest him first of all?' Amal asked the question that most probably its answer was unknown even to those who sent him to the prison.

Amal went to Nagwa's room to find the girl on her side with her face looking at the wall and her thighs and knees were bent.

'How are you Nagwa?' Amal asked her niece who did not notice her loving aunt coming. She thought the girl was too sad for her beloved father only.

The girl just wept in silence. She did not turn to face her aunt. Shivers overwhelmed her thin body. She was more destroyed than sad.

'Do you feel cold?' Amal covered her niece with the bed covert.

The girl showed no response to her aunt's trials to comfort her. On the contrary, her crying sounds became audible.

'I saw your mother broken and she needs you beside her. I know you're strong. Saber was a dear to all of us. He grew me up after your grandparents died. He was a big brother to me and even he took the role of a father,' Amal said. She cried while she was kissing her niece several times. 'Hold up yourself and you must know that the family needs you now more than any other time.'

'I'm broken,' Nagwa said and turned to look at her aunt then stared in her eyes and added, 'they raped both me and mum in front of dad. Then they killed him.'

Amal became so bewildered that she could not force a word out of her mouth. She moved her head from side to side several times then with her two palms, she slapped her own face. 'Rape, you mean the word?'

'Yes,' Nagwa confirmed.

'Sexually you mean?' Amal whispered.

'Yes, I'm not a girl anymore. I'm waiting for the period to make sure that I'm not pregnant,' Nagwa confirmed.

'Oh, no, God will revenge for you. Those sons of bitches, may God send them to hell.' Amal cried and shouted.

Amina came and closed the door. She knew that Nagwa told her dear aunt. 'We did not tell anyone. I need you more than anytime. Thanks to God, you're here to take care of the family. I'm finished.'

Amal hugged her sister and said, 'you shouldn't be ashamed of what had happened. You aren't a sinful. They're.'

Amal took the place of Amina as the mother for both her girl and her nephews and nieces. Amina spent most of her time sitting in Saber's chair reading recites of Quran and asking God to revenge for him, her daughter and herself. The most serious psychological effect was that Amina developed the habit of washing her hands several times for no

obvious reasons. She spent also long times in the bathroom having several showers per day. The headache she felt was so severe that swallowing Aspirin tablets became another habit. Amal took her to a doctor who gave her tablets for the hypertension. When Amal told the doctor about what had happened to Amina and Nagwa, he advised her to take them to a psychiatrist. Both the mother and her daughter refused to go because they felt they could not tell about what had happened.

It was a dark moonless night and the autumn water was definitely colder than the summer. However, crossing the Suez Canal swimming from the east bank to the west one was the only hope for Ibrahiem and the four soldiers who stayed alive out of about one hundred men troops after returning walking their way in Sinai desert. They had managed to hide during the morning and to walk by night but sometimes the Israeli warplanes found their whereabouts and rained them with rushes of bullets. That was followed by Israeli ground troops attack on them in unbalanced battles. Most of the time they suffered from shortage of water and food but sometimes the Bedouins supplied them with few amounts for free. They also heard about some Bedouins did courageous role in hiding the soldiers and safeguarding their way back to the east bank of the Canal. The five men moved to the water carefully not to make any sound.

‘We’ll try to swim under water as long as we can, not to be discovered. If one needs a breath, he quietly ascends and raise his head only,’ Ibrahiem finished the instruction.

It took half an hour for the five men to reach the west bank. They fell asleep. In the early morning, the sun rose from the east side awakening them. They saw the Israeli flag flying on the land they left. Silently they gave it their backs and walked with broken hearts, hoping that one day they would swim to the opposite direction.

Thurya Mazloom the student in the faculty of commerce did not lose the hope that Ibrahiem her brother would return. But, unbelievable emotions overwhelmed her when she saw her brother coming toward the building while she was in the balcony

‘Mother, it’s Ibrahiem,’ Thurya ran out of the flat.

‘My son,’ Samira cried and followed her daughter to the building stairs that led to the gate.

In the street, they met Ibrahiem with tears of joy. Abd-Allah thankfully prayed for God that he saved his son.

‘How are you son?’ Abd-Allah whispered in Ibrahiem’s ear as he noticed tears in his eyes.

‘I’m fine,’ Ibrahiem responded then added in despair, ‘but people have changed.’

‘How come you withdrew?’ Ali the young brother in final year of the secondary school asked. The tone was discriminating more than wondering.

‘One day we’ll know what had really happened,’ Ibrahiem felt shame that the army was not up to the level that people had hoped.

‘The defeat was so shocking that people need to express their angry,’ Abd-Allah tried to lessen Ibrahiem’s embarrassment but his words did the contrary.

‘They gave us orders to withdraw even before there was a real combat. While we were withdrawing, we had to fight against warplanes and tanks. They did not send our fighter jets to help us. They did not care about the gasoline and supplies. In short, there wasn’t a plan for withdrawal. Only five men out of about one hundred could reach the west bank of the Suez Canal.’ Ibrahiem’s voice was loud and full of rage. He felt that the family was not convinced, as they had not expected the defeat at all. ‘Excuse me; I’ll go to change the military uniform.’

In civilian clothes, he decided to go to his uncle house. On his way, he just avoided greeting anyone he knew. People did not care either.

‘Ibrahiem, I can’t believe it,’ Elham shouted on seeing him standing at the door.

The whole family welcomed him but he noticed that Nagwa was absent. Few minutes later Nagwa came wearing black. When he saw her, he noticed that other women and girls wearing the same color. He looked at his uncle’s photo that was hung on the wall. He saw the black ribbon on the corner.

‘Did uncle Saber die?’ he asked the question that he knew its answer. He could not bear anymore. Silent tears at the start then he cried out like a baby.

‘May we have a walk? I’d like to have a word with you,’ Nagwa suggested.

Amal looked at her niece and knew that the girl would tell her husband-to-be about what had happened to her and to her mother.

When they had their usual table in Misr and Al-Sudan cafeteria in Ramsis street near Abbassia square, their favorite place, the waiter did not greet Ibrahiem as usual but gave him the cold shoulder.

‘How come uncle Saber died?’ Ibrahiem started.

‘They arrested him and they told us that he had a heart attack but I have doubts that he was killed,’ Nagwa said.

‘Why?’ he was astonished that the regime did that to one of its most faithful men.

‘Why what?’ she said indifferently. ‘Why did they first arrest him? Or why did they kill him? Or why do I believe that they did that to him? The answer is simple because we live in a fucken regime that did all the evil things to us. And because we believed those sons of bitches that had been deceiving us.’

‘Tell me the whole story!’ he tried to stop her rude words that it was not her habit to say them.

She told him the day they arrested her father but she did not mention any thing about the day she and her mother had been raped. ‘Things had changed. What I mean is that I want a divorce.’

‘Why? I don’t understand the drive behind your request. Is it a shame now to be an officer’s wife?’ he wondered. He felt that he came from the war to another country and met other people.

‘No, the problem is within me. You can’t understand but I can’t be your wife.’ She turned her face avoiding his eyes.

‘It’s strange enough that I don’t really understand.’

‘Please divorce me. Please do. For the sake of the memory of my father don’t make me suffer more.’

‘I won’t. I think the death of uncle Saber just disturbed your thinking.’

‘Don’t put more pressure. Just divorce me. I can’t be your wife.’

‘Are you in love with someone else?’

His question enraged her. ‘You know that I’ve never loved but you.’

‘Then I’ll forget what you said.’

‘Ibrahiem, I’m not a virgin.’

Her shocking words blocked his mentality for a second then his hand moved before he could talk and slapped her forcibly on face. ‘You’re a slut. Why did you do that to me and to the family? I’ll kill you.’

The waiters came but she dismissed them.

‘Have a mercy on me. I’m no sinner. They raped me in front of dad. That was the last scene he had seen in the last minutes of his life.’ She stood up and left the cafeteria. He went after her.

They did not exchange any words on their way to Saber family’s house. At the building gate, she saw tears in his eyes.

‘No, you don’t cry. It’s our fate,’ she said.

‘But you’re a victim and innocent. I want you now more than anything.’

‘No, you don’t know what they may do in the future. It was my dream to be your wife but I can’t deceive you. Simply I can’t.’

‘Tell me who did that and I swear I’ll kill him.’

‘That’s why I’ll never do. If you need another sister and a friend, you will find me. I promise I’ll never be to any other man. God may help me to revenge. Who knows? Say it please. Say that I’m divorced. If you love me, divorce me. I beg you.’

‘You’re divorced.’

She rushed into the building. And he walked his way in slow step.

(3)

The Egyptians spent the summer waiting for the war to retake Sinai and to revenge for their dignity. When the rulers let them down, they used their secret weapon against the regime. Jokes that made them laugh but the hidden sarcasm was sharper than knives' edges. Smiles against disasters might be why this people had survived for seven thousands years on this land. But the enraged youth started to talk loudly in universities, factories and everywhere. By January 1968, the students asked for radical changes. It was the first time strikes and riots were directed against the system since 1952.

The students in the Faculty of Engineering were among the most active. Riots went out and took the direction of Ain Shams University. It was also the first time the police fought students since 1952. The hidden rage erupted and exploded, and the dictatorship took off the mask to show the students its claws and canines. The silk glove of the iron fist was not present anymore and the heavy sticks in the police soldiers' hands gave the students a lesson. *'The police beats us while the Israelis in Sinai,'* was the slogan the students said, but that made the system beat harder. Many students were arrested, many fell injured and most of them could flee. Emad Mazloom was one of the lucky who ran away.

'Why did you come early?' Amina asked him. She was sitting on Saber's chair as usual since her husband had died.

'Because there was a riot and the students clashed with the police. But we could give the police a hard lesson. Some soldiers ran when we threw stones that fell on their heads like rains of hell.' Emad said proudly.

'Please Emad, don't share in riots again,' she said anxiously.

'You don't worry,' he said.

'I've to,' her tearful eyes made him listen. 'Policy in this country is a major risk. They know who arrange the riots and who share. I can't stand another visit of the dawn visitors who had arrested your father.'

Amal talked to him more harsh and she was about even to slap him. She did not stop talking harsh to him until he promised her not to share. Amal had the full authority in the house as a mother for her nephews and nieces since Amina withdrew and chose to do one activity only. That was reading recites of the Quran.

Next day Nagwa was on her way home when a car stopped near the bus stop where she was waiting for the bus that would take her to Abbassia from Cairo University.

‘Are you Nagwa Mazloom?’ A man wearing a black suit and eyeglasses asked her politely.

‘Yes, but who are you?’ Nagwa asked.

‘A friend carrying a message to you from another friend,’ the man said.

‘I don’t know you and who’s that friend,’ she said.

‘Major Hussein Yousry,’ he was amused to her shiver when she heard the name. ‘He wants you to be at this address tomorrow morning at eleven o’clock exactly,’ he gave her a small piece of paper. ‘There’s also a phone number.’

‘What if I don’t go?’ she made a great effort to control herself. Her face was pale and she was about to faint.

‘He can bring you at anytime, you know. Therefore, I think you’re wise enough to obey him. Many wish they could have just few words with him. Be a good girl. And for your knowledge, he’s a very generous man with those who are faithful to him. And lastly don’t forget that your brother Emad shared in the riots of his faculty. For your sake Major Hussein didn’t arrest him.’ His smile was drawn and he gave her a scaring stare in her eyes and added, ‘Emad shouldn’t share in riots anymore.’ He went to the car and left.

She vomited and felt that she would fall down. She called a taxi.

‘Take me to Abbassia please,’ she said to the driver.

‘No, sorry the traffic is too heavy,’ he said.

‘I’ll pay you what you ask regardless of the tariff.’

Nagwa reached home to find Emad show Salwa and Elham a mark on his back. He was telling them proudly how the students had retaliated and had thrown the police with stones the day before. But he had received a hit before fleeing the seen. Involuntarily Nagwa slapped him on face and while he was surprised she embraced him and cried her words, ‘pleases don’t play politics in this country, for our own sake. They’re just animals and won’t leave you.’

In her room, she told Amal about the next morning appointment. Both women looked at each other and their eyes told much. They knew that there was no escape.

(4)

It was 11 am when Nagwa pressed on the bell of Hussein's apartment in Garden City. The British had inhabited the district during the colonial era. He opened the door and he was wearing a pajama and a rob de chambre. He used to use the place for his pleasure.

'Welcome,' he said and kissed her hand.

She took few steps then stood in the middle of the reception and looked around her in bewilderment.

'Have a sit. Be at home,' he said.

She sat down on the nearest chair. She adducted her thighs tightly and pulled her skirt slightly down to cover the few centimeters above her knees. Her dry mouth made her prefer not to speak so she kept silent.

'You try this. They call it Hussein's cocktail,' he gave her a crystal glass full of a drink.

Her trembling hand made her use her both hands to catch the glass. She tasted the bitter drink then she put the glass on the table.

'Thank you for coming,' he said as if she had a choice not to do.

'What do want from me?' her faint voice and her avoidance of looking at his eyes were enough signs for him that she knew the answer of her question.

'First drink your cocktail,' he said.

'It's bitter,' she responded without hesitation.

'You'll admire it next time,' his tone was sharp and she had no other choice.

She drank it all. She knew that there would be several next times.

'Emad shouldn't share again in the riots,' he ordered then he added in a softer manner, 'for your sake I removed his name from the black list.' He pulled her ear slightly then with his palm then he rubbed her neck.

'I told him,' her voice was suffocated as she tried to control herself not to cry. She knew that she had to pay the price for not arresting her brother. She let him unbutton her blouse and even she tried to cut short the time she would stay so she unzipped her skirt.

'Let's go inside.' He put his hand around her waist and led her to the bedroom.

She stood in the middle of the room while he was sitting on a big-armed chair. 'What do you like me to do?'

‘Strip down to your panties,’ he said. He liked her innocence. His investigations told that she had no experience. ‘Take this,’ he threw at her a strip of tablets he took from the rob pocket. ‘This is a contraceptive pill. You’ll need them. Take one everyday.’

‘Thank you.’ She could not pick the strip that fell on the floor. Her trembling body bent over so that she could pick the strip, but he was behind her pulling her panties down. She lay on bed and parted her legs, ‘you may come on top of me now.’ After her words, she had nausea and an immense urge to vomit and she hurried to the bathroom.

‘Do you feel better now?’ he asked her when she returned.

‘Sorry! But it is my first time,’ she said in a faint voice. ‘No,’ she remembered the rape day. She put one hand on her breasts and the other on the triangle between her thighs, ‘it’s the second time.’

‘Come here you bitch!’ he was standing in the middle of the room. His threatening voice and the way he looked at her was too rude as if she were his slave.

‘I’m not a bitch,’ she picked her panties and started to wear it.

‘What’re you doing?’ he slapped her on face.

She fell on the ground. ‘You’re an animal.’

He grabbed her hair and turned her on her belly. ‘You’ve to be more polite. I’ll teach you a lesson.’ He beat her buttocks then he put his index into her vagina. ‘I’ll teach you the real love. This is lesson one.’ He moved his finger in and out of her vagina until she had an orgasm. Then he put his finger into her anus.

‘Oh, it’s painful,’ she said but she was relaxed after her orgasm. She started to build another one. ‘Oh, no, it’s very painful.’ She screamed when he was sodomizing her.

‘Think about the pleasure I give you. It’s worthy to feel pain,’ he said proudly. He was leading her to the door.

‘I’ll try,’ she said.

‘You’ll come here next week. Don’t worry about Emad. You may call me at any time if you need anything,’ he said while he was opening the door for her.

Few days later Nagwa received an official letter from a famous governmental newspaper telling her that she was chosen to be a trainee in the journal. Both Amal and Nagwa knew that Hussein was behind the opportunity that many dreamed. Her monthly wage would be fifty pounds, or three times a university graduate might receive those days.

Ibrahiem was in Cairo to discuss some reports with the command-ship. After he finished he had a whole day to spend with his family. He phoned his uncle's family and knew that Nagwa was living alone in a flat in Garden City. He decided to pay a visit to Amal to discuss the matter with her. The aunt told Nagwa to come.

'What's the problem with you Ibrahiem? You know that I'm working now and earn the enough money to live on my own,' Nagwa said to Ibrahiem.

'It's not about money. I think that if you need anything my father will be more than happy to cover,' he said.

'We've enough. My father's pension covers everything but she insists on living alone. Since she has worked in the newspaper she thought that this is a license for her to do what she likes,' Emad said angrily and left.

'I'm not here to have lectures about what I should do and what I shouldn't. Everybody has to mind his own business,' she shouted. Ibrahiem left and Amal blamed Nagwa for her words.

'They don't know what forced me to do so. Living here makes everybody know what I'm really doing. They'll know that I'm a slut and they will never understand,' she said to her aunt. Before saying good-bye, she asked about the girls and her younger brother Tamer.

'They went to the Consumer's governmental shop. They say that there are sugar and tea. They may have a chicken as well or some oil for cooking,' Amal said.

Nagwa phoned Hussein. After an hour, a van came in front of the house and four soldiers carried several boxes filled with foodstuffs. Amal decided to send some to Abd-Allah house.

'Some soldiers carrying food stuff are on the door,' Thurya said to Ibrahiem. She thought her brother had sent them. When he discovered that Nagwa used her contacts to obtain the foodstuff, his doubts about her indecent conduct became certain. He dismissed the soldiers and phoned Amal and told her not send anything that Nagwa might get in the future. Objections came from his mother Samira but his father's opinion was that Ibrahiem did the right thing. Few hours later Ibrahiem was ready in his military dress to leave.

‘Take care,’ Samira hugged him. The army was engaged in the exhaust war. Everyday families received bad news about their sons. Many martyrs and injured officers and soldiers brought sadness and tears to their families. Nobody knew when the end would come.

‘Nasser accepted Roger’s initiative for a truce,’ Nagwa said to Hussein.

‘It is a good maneuver. Now the Israelis have to do the same. We need time to build our air defense,’ he said what he had heard from his commands.

‘Yes, I see.’ Few times, she agreed with him about policy. ‘But the Palestinians refused this move and their radio attacked this step.’

‘They will be convinced later on. Anyhow we decide the war steps,’ he said.

‘When shall we fight?’ she asked.

‘In time,’ he said the same answer.

‘At least mothers may have sometime to dry up their tears before crying again,’ she said.

‘They should have been proud of their martyr sons. The early Moslem women had celebrated when they had been told that their sons had been killed,’ he said.

‘First time I know you have an idea about Islam,’ she said sarcastically. They were both naked on the bed.

‘You’ll have a good beat for that,’ he started to beat her, and then he sodomized her.

Ibrahiem was standing among his men teaching them how to use a new weapon.

‘Captain Ibrahiem,’ a soldier saluted him. ‘The colonel wants you in his tent.’

Colonel Mohamed Zaher was looking at the Suez Canal map when Ibrahiem entered.

‘High!’

‘You will fly to Russia soon. Now you go to Cairo. Be ready for departure next week.’ The colonel said.

When Ibrahiem was in the military jeep that was carrying him to Cairo, he was reading a critic about Nagwa’s first published novel. When she had been graduated, she became one of the permanent journalists and started to write novels. Publishing her novels met no

obstacles due to the intelligence influence behind her efforts. However, she had the talent and most critics admired her creativity. He was happy for her and he never regretted that he was her husband one day. Two days later, he was in Moscow.

In her new flat in Garden City, Nagwa was in the bathroom having a shower when she heard the doorbell ringing.

‘High,’ Nagwa opened the door. She was wearing a robe ‘You may come in.’

‘Thank you,’ Shahinaze looked at the wall watch and added, ‘sorry for coming ten minutes earlier.’ As a presenter in the TV due to her husband’s influence she had to do some services for him and for the intelligence. They decided to make Nagwa a star among writers. She heard about the new writer whom some was telling that she was a mistress of an intelligence officer. She had doubts about her husband and the young girl as he had asked her to invite the young writer to her program. He told her that the girl was one of the faithful persons in the press.

‘It’s all right and thank you for choosing me to be your guest in your weekly program.’ Nagwa said. Since the success of her first novel, many media persons had contacted her. ‘Few minutes and I’ll be ready.’

‘Do you see my show?’ Shahinaze asked Nagwa ignoring her wish to be dressed.

‘Never done before and never heard about it,’ Nagwa answered directly. She felt that she was rude to tell the famous presenter the embarrassing truth. She tried to be more decent, ‘I usually listen to the foreign broadcast. Only I show TV when they broadcast a film. I know you double as a TV presenter and a radio presenter in the English program but I prefer BBC to know the truth.’

‘In fact the BBC has become more popular than Sound of Arabs Radio after the Egyptian media had broadcast lies about the number of warplanes that our withdrawing army claimed falsely that it had dropped,’ Shahinaze said. She sat down and crossed her legs and the miniskirt showed much of her thighs.

‘What do you like to drink?’ Nagwa decided to give her guest something then she would change.

‘Coca Cola,’ Shahinaze said.

Nagwa picked two imported bottles from the fridge.

‘Who manages to provide you with the imported and boycotted drink?’ Shahinaze asked about the influential man who could get the governmental banned bottles.

‘Someone, whom I think you don’t know,’ Nagwa said but she could not hide the disturbance she felt for fear of uncovering the intimate relationship with the presenter’s husband.

The hesitation and the disturbance of Nagwa proved the rumors that Shahinaze had heard. ‘How come I don’t know my husband?’ she laughed.

‘Who’s your husband?’ Nagwa said.

‘Never mind, let’s talk about that after the conversation for the program,’ Shahinaze gave her a smile full of bitterness and pity.

‘Do you think that I’m your husband’s mistress?’ Nagwa was afraid of Shahinaze. She sat down on the nearest chair.

‘What do think of me? Am I an idiot?’ Shahinaze enjoyed the silly play.

‘I’m not a mistress of anybody,’ Nagwa said. Her trembling hands when she tried to pick up a cigarette were an enough proof that she lied.

‘My husband is not anybody. He’s Hussein Yousry the sadist intelligence officer, who fucks women in ass,’ Shahinaze smiled.

‘You must be crazy,’ Nagwa said.

‘You stand up,’ Shahinaze pulled the bathrobe belt and undid the knot.

‘What are doing?’ Nagwa cried. ‘I’m forced to be. He threatened me of arresting my brother. He had ordered his men previously to rape my mother and me in front of my father who had died on the spot.’ Nagwa fell down on the Iranian Shiraz carpet that Hussein had stolen it from one of the royal family palaces and cried.

Shahinaze remembered the man whom her husband had arrested and remembered the name Saber Mazloom. ‘Your full name is Nagwa Saber Mazloom?’

‘Yes,’ Nagwa was still crying.

‘I know your story,’ Shahinaze helped Nagwa to sit on a chair. ‘I’m also one of his victims. I had two options either to be his mistress or to be his wife. Being his wife served the family’s interest. That’s why I have married him.’

Nagwa let the robe wide open. ‘Tell my how I can go away without doing harm to my family. I don’t enjoy sex with him. I don’t enjoy sex at all. It became something disgusting to me.’

'I believe you. That's what I had felt in the early days of marriage. I don't hate you,' Shahinaze took Nagwa's head on her breasts and rubbed her hair. The old victim's tears fell on the recent victim's head. 'Rumors circulated. You know media persons. They live on them. I decided to settle my doubts when he asked me to have you in my program. He told me that you're one of the faithful journalists. I can't refuse his requests, you know.'

Both women cried then Shahinaze kissed Nagwa in mouth. Both were panting then Shahinaze said, 'let me teach you the true love. We'll enjoy it both.'

Shahinaze's small Fiat car engine suddenly stopped on her way from Garden City to Heliopolis after she had recorded the conversation with the new novelist for the radio program and set a date for her to be in Maspero TV building to have her videoed for the show. After several trials with the key of the march, Shahinaze decided to take a taxi. All taxis refused to go. She heard a man asking another about the Quran recitals in the radio and the TV. She went on feet to the radio and televisions building in Maspero, but security forces were around the building. It was five o'clock in the afternoon when she decided to return back to Nagwa's flat.

'The BBC says that Naser died,' Nagwa said when she saw Shahinaze at her door.

'It can't be. He leaves us in the worst situation. Did the TV broadcast the news?' Shahinaze asked.

'Not yet,' Nagwa said.

'My car has broken down and the traffic is blocked,' Shahinaze said.

'You welcome. I was about to prepare something to eat,' Nagwa said.

Shahinaze knew her way to the bedroom. She chose a gown then took off her cloths.

'May I prepare the bath for you to have a shower?' Nagwa said to the naked Shahinaze.

'It's a good idea.'

Few minutes later, both women immersed themselves in the bathtub. The telephone rang. Nagwa took the bathroom receiver that was hung on the wall.

'Sorry but I won't come today as something serious has come,' Hussein was on the other end of the line.

‘Yes I know. They say that Naser died,’ Nagwa responded to his arrogance.

‘Who is the bloody fucken liar who told you such lies? The president is quiet well and he’s in a good health condition,’ he shouted.

By then Vice President Anwar Al-Sadat was reading the official letter announcing the death of the president. ‘I let you listen to him,’ she said. She approached the receiver to the transistor radio. ‘Didn’t they tell you the time they are going to broadcast the news. They have to trust you more. Honey they deserve punishment. You’re a colonel now and they should have asked you before deciding to tell the people.’ The wife smiled and the mistress laughed.

‘Okay, just stay at home until you’re sure that everything is secured,’ he said. He felt humiliated and was too nervous and added, ‘I’ll give you a lesson.’

In his office, Colonel Hussein put the phone mouthpiece after he had dialed Shahinaze several times without response. ‘She must be in bed of one of her homosexual friends,’ he thought. He called one of his aids using the internal line. ‘You may add to the list the students who shared in riots regardless of their ideology. Security has the top priority now. I’d like the names of your list to be registered in New Valley Detention Center tonight.’

In Moscow lieutenant colonel Ibrahiem was in his room studying when a Russian soldier knocked at his door.

‘High comrade, the command wants to talk to you,’ the soldier said in slowly spoken English.

Ibrahiem went to the beautiful Lieutenant Galena, the secretary of General Alexander Yuri.

‘Hello Galena, the General asked a comrade soldier to tell me that he wants to have word with me,’ Ibrahiem said.

‘Yes I know,’ she opened the door that separated her small room from the large office.

Alexander invited Ibrahiem to have a sit. He stood beside the window and kept looking at the road. ‘I’ve bad news for you and for your Egyptian colleagues,’ the general started. ‘In fact I’m as sad as any Egyptian. President Naser died. I’d like you to tell all the Egyptian officers in this institute that the people of the Soviet Union feel very sorry for the great and respected leader. I decided that lectures and training will be stopped tomorrow as I know your feelings towards the beloved president.’

‘Thank you General. Excuse me,’ Ibrahiem saluted the General.

‘You may dismiss,’ the General said then shook hands with Ibrahiem.

On his way to his room, Ibrahiem felt how much he missed his transistor radio. The only news they know was the articles of the official Russian newspapers translated into English and Arabic. During weekends, he and his colleagues went regularly to the Egyptian Military Attaché office. There they might read the Egyptian newspapers while sounds of Om Kolthom and Abd-El-Halim were filling the place from a recorder.

Galena received a phone call from the Russian Intelligence Agency KJB. They asked her to observe the Egyptian officers to know their feelings and reactions. She told the General that she would stay in the institute for the next few days.

In his room, Ibrahiem met with the other four Egyptian officers. In the capacity of being the highest rank among his colleagues, he gave them some instructions. ‘I’d like to tell you that most probably Galena will stay tonight. She may take us tomorrow to one of the restaurants in Moscow to chat with us about the internal situation in Egypt. No talks about politics, this is the first rule. Even in Arabic, as I have doubts that

she understands the Arabic language. Of course, the possibility of her having a secret hidden recorder is high. Don't forget that we're friends to Russia but we aren't and won't be communists as they like to see us.'

'I may have a plane to expose her,' a junior lieutenant said.

'We're here to have a special training. This is our only mission and duty. Having her exposed or not is the duty of other branches of the army. I've told the Military Attaché about her trials to recruit some Egyptian officers. He has taken the proper actions. Gone the days when some wanted to work everything. Now everyone has his own work to do,' Ibrahiem said sharply.

In the early morning, Nagwa and Shahinaze were naked in the bed when the doorbell rang.

'Who's at the door?' Nagwa shouted as she was wearing a bathrobe.

'Salwa, your sister and Elam, your cousin!' Salwa's voice told Nagwa about her sister's anxiety.

Nagwa opened the door. 'What happened?'

'They arrested Emad,' Elham said. 'My mother gave us your address and asked me to tell you about him. She feared that they may have the telephone lines monitored.'

'Mom is nearly dying,' Salwa said.

'Have a sit,' Nagwa said and hurried to the bedroom to dress. 'He'll return today.' She did not notice Salwa and Elham going after her to the bedroom. At the room door, she undressed and threw her robe at the bed. The eyes of the two girls saw Nagwa naked and followed the thrown robe to the bed where Shahinaze was also naked and pulled the bed sheets to cover her body.

'Sorry,' Elham said and returned backwards.

Salwa stayed in the bedroom looking at Shahinaze and her sister not knowing what she had to do. The shock of seeing that scene froze her.

'We'll talk about that later on,' Nagwa said. She looked at Shahinaze and said, 'don't worry. They won't tell anyone.'

'Where are you going?' Shahinaze asked.

'I'm going to Hussein's office to save my brother,' Nagwa said.

Nagwa dropped the two girls in Abbassia and drove her small car to Hussein's office.

'What do you want to release Emad? I think everything you have asked me has been properly done,' she said.

‘Your brother has returned safe to your family,’ he said. ‘It was a mistake as he was registered in the black list since he has shared in the riots of 1968 but I’ve removed his name for good.’

‘I remember you always say that you don’t do mistakes,’ she smiled ironically.

Nagwa went directly to the family where she hugged her brother and repeated her advices for him not to play politics in this country.

‘I know you have many questions,’ she said to Salwa and Elham in the girl’s bedroom. When she had not a response she added, ‘well I’ve to confess that I’m a bad woman. I’m ruined.’ She tried to hide her face not to let them see her tears. Her voice showed her oppression. She wept and added, ‘it may be my fate but I always try to put the family first. I know that you think I’m a slut. Okay let it be the case. I’ve no other choice.’ She took a step to go out of the room.

‘You are my dear sister,’ Salwa caught her and let her big sister cry at her shoulder.

‘And my cousin,’ Elham shared her cousins both hugging and crying.

‘Aunt Amal told me what had happened to you the day father died,’ Salwa said. ‘She did because one day we wanted to live with you when we had a fight with her as we wanted to be out until midnight and to wear micro-skirts as you.’

‘Miniskirts are enough for you at the moment,’ Nagwa tried to force a smile.

‘But still I’d like to ask you about the woman,’ Elham whispered.

‘They call it homosexuality,’ Nagwa whispered. She felt shame and shy. ‘As I’m forced to be a slut and a mistress to a fucken sadist, I cheat on him with his own wife whom was forced to marry him. I put it like that. You know this the first time I spend a night with her but I think I’ll continue to flirt with her. I consider this my phase one revenge.’

‘I heard about homosexuality,’ Elham said. ‘I’d like to know if the woman is Shahinaze Al-Sharbatly the TV presenter.’

‘Yes, she is,’ Nagwa said.

Two hours later Nagwa and Shahinaze were in the train for Alexandria. They decided to spend some days together in Shahinaze's flat where she used to meet her boyfriend and her several girlfriends.

'Do you think Sadat will be the president?' Nagwa asked Shahinaze.

'He may be in the office as a puppet for a while until they arrange for Ali Sabry to replace him. Don't forget that Ali Sabry is the Moscow's man,' Shahinaze said.

Some months later, Nesreen Noor Sultan who was graduated since one year from the journalism department in the Faculty of Arts, Cairo University. She needed a recommendation to work in one of the governmental newspapers. Her father did not like to exert his influence during the few months that followed her graduation. He did not want to weaken his political position during that particular time.

'Nesreen had her degree ten months ago and you did not help her to be in one of the big newspapers as you had promised her,' Alia his wife said.

'Well, after few days it'll be the meeting of the Central Committee of the Socialist Union. We'll teach Sadat a lesson. After one week when we'll finish with him, then your daughter may choose the position she likes. This clown Sadat thinks that the treaty he has had with Moscow would empower him. But our group is the real Moscow's men in this country,' he said with self-confidence.

'Always you give out lectures about policy when we ask you something. I don't damn care about policy. What I want is to a job for my daughter. She is no less than Nagwa Mazloom is. In spite of her father's death and there is nobody backing her, she writes in one of the big newspapers and now everybody in this country knows who's Nagwa Mazloom. She has a Fiat 1100R,' she said.

'Tell your daughter to go to Nagwa if she's in a hurry. Nagwa may help her,' he said. He did not have the slightest doubt that Nagwa was doing her best to ask about the man behind her father being arrested. 'Her father was one of my best friends in spite of the differences in opinions,' he added.

'Nesreen goes to Nagwa!' she was astonished. 'Since her father's death, you haven't visited them. Even you told us not to visit them also,' she said.

‘Nagwa knows much about policy and she knows that I’ll be in a position that may empower me more. She’ll help your daughter as she may think that I prefer it that way, not to interfere myself,’ he said. He thought that if Nagwa knew that he was the man who told the intelligence about her father she would not help his daughter then he had to get rid of her by any mean.

Hussein Yousry sat on the bed in Shahinaze’s bedroom. He took off his shoes and undid the tie and the collar button. ‘After few days we’ll teach Sadat a lesson.’

‘What do you mean by "we"? You and me? Or perhaps you talk about someone else. I don’t think I’ll do,’ Shahinaze laughed.

‘Laugh now; of course you like this American agent clown. Tomorrow you’ll know how much influential your husband is,’ he said.

‘I’m afraid that you might have done a mistake with your calculations,’ she said.

‘Our group comprises the defense minister, the interior minister, the intelligence chief, the vice president and the faithful members of the Central Committee of the Socialist Union. He’s finished. Moreover, the Soviet Union supports us’ he said confidently and proudly.

After lecturing in politics he swore at her, beat her, sodomized her, had a bath and left.

It was midnight when Hussein came to Nagwa's flat. She was busy preparing her bag as she was flying next day to Moscow to attend a conference for third world writers.

‘Have you got the dollars?’ she asked him.

He gave her a closed envelope and said, ‘This is one thousand dollars. That is a fortune in Russia. There’s also an address of a friend in the embassy. He’ll help you change the dollars in the black market not to lose in the bank.’ He caught her hand and added, ‘I’ll miss you.’

After having sex with her the same way he had with Shahinaze few hours ago he was ready to go.

‘Will you send someone to take me to the airport tomorrow?’ she asked.

‘Of course, and you go through the VIP hall,’ he said proudly as he liked to show up how much he could break regulations. ‘Upon your return one will bring your family to wait for you in the same hall and your bags will come directly from the plane without being inspected by

the customs officers. Your flight tickets have been upgraded and you'll have a seat in the first class.'

'Another service,' she said.

'You welcome,' he said.

'One of the old friends visited me today in the office. She's a daughter of an old friend to my father. She has a degree in journalism. She'll be of benefit to you in Al-Akhbar newspaper where the liberals have much influence. Her name is Nesreen Noor Sultan. This is her address,' she said.

'No need for the address you know. I can reach and bring jinni and dead people buried since ages in this country and perhaps in other countries as well,' he said.

'But she's a blond with just a beautiful ass and I don't like to see you fucking her,' she said it as if she was too jealous.

'You don't worry. You've the most beautiful ass in the world. There is no such a woman that can compete with you. Moreover I'm mad in love with you,' He said.

Both did not believe each other. She was sure he would have Nesreen as one of his mistresses. That was what she wanted precisely. He had doubts that she knew something about the conspiracy Nesreen's father had done to Saber. He was afraid that if the case was that, then Nagwa had started the way to revenge. Then he had to get rid of her. When he left, Nagwa wept for her father and swore again to have her revenge from Noor Sultan and Hussein Yousry, and their families and to destroy them more violently and ferociously than what they had done to her and to her family. Nesreen's beauty was Nagwa's guarantee that Hussein would not leave her away from his bed.

Hussein went directly to his office and called one of his aids.

'First, tell our office in Moscow to put Nagwa under surveillance day and night,' Hussein said.

'May we arrest her in the airport?' the man said.

'No, no one touches her until I decide. Second, Bring this girl here,' Hussein gave the man a small paper and added, 'do the job very politely. No harm.'

Gloria was typing when Nagwa came in to ask about Ibrahiem.

‘Oh, yes. Lieutenant colonel Mazloom, I think he’s in the classroom now. You may leave a message for him,’ Gloria said.

‘I’ll leave the address of the hotel and the phone number,’ Nagwa said.

Later, on the afternoon, Ibrahiem was in the lobby of the hotel waiting for Nagwa.

‘How are you?’ he said.

‘Fine,’ she gave him a hug.

‘I miss you,’ he said.

‘I miss you too,’ she said.

‘Don’t you think that you’ve to rethink your decision?’ he asked.

‘What decision?’ she knew that he was trying to convince her to remarry him. ‘My decisions are final,’ she added.

‘Do you still love me?’ he tried once more.

‘More than before,’ her eyes were pouring continuously.

They went out for a walk. The spring was colder than Cairo’s winter. Wherever they went, they saw people standing in queues. When they returned to the hotel, she wished if he would accompany her to her room. In her room, she had an immense feeling that she wanted to kill Hussein. Then she thought that if she could make him suffer it would be much better for her revenge. She wanted him to feel the pain of humiliation her father had felt when he had seen his wife and daughter being both raped while he had been bond to a chair. She wiped her tears and smiled at the fact that Shahinaze had been cheating at Hussein with her and with a boy friend. She swore in God that she would ruin the life of any relative to Hussein or Noor Sultan. She thought of Nesreen being in the bed of Hussein suffering the pain of sodomizing. When she would return to Egypt, she would plan to let Noor know about his daughter. Revenge would be her sacred mission and promised herself to achieve it.

In Cairo Nesreen was waiting for Hussein in the Nile Hilton’s lobby. It was 10 pm when he came.

‘What’s the news?’ he asked.

‘Many in Al-Akhbar newspaper claim that the setback is the result of the dictatorship of late Naser. I think they will take the side of any liberal group against the system. Some says that Sadat himself encourages them,’ she said.

‘Good analysis,’ he said. ‘But we’re waiting for the directives to move. The zero hour is too near than many may think.’ He stared at her eyes and then he said, ‘let’s go to a safer place so that we may chat more freely.’

Hussein opened the car’s door for Nesreen. He ordered the driver of his Mercedes to be in the military Jeep that always accompanied him carrying two well-built bodyguards since he had decided to play in the conspirators’ team.

In his flat, he prepared his special drink, and forced her to drink it all.

‘I’m a virgin,’ she said when he started to unbutton her blouse.

‘Don’t worry. Before you’ll marry, I’ll send you to the best gynecologist in the town. He’ll make another better hymen that will pour more blood,’ he laughed.

‘I heard that a man may do the job without introduction,’ she said while she was unzipping her skirt without blushing or shyness.

‘You heard or you knew?’ he asked. He stared at her eyes for seconds and added, ‘you practiced it. Don’t lie to me or I’ll be too angry.’

‘In fact I practiced it with a friend,’ she confessed.

‘I’ll teach you something else,’ he said then put her on her belly.

‘It’s painful from behind,’ she said while he was removing her panties.

‘Did you try it before?’ he asked her.

‘Once or twice,’ she confessed.

‘Or more?’ he asked her in a manner as if he was encouraging her to tell.

‘Yes,’ she said.

‘Did you like it?’ he asked her.

‘Yes,’ she said.

As soon as they finished their first sexual adventure, they heard rapid and continuous knocking at the door.

‘Who’s that son of a bitch?’ he asked angrily. He left the bed and added, ‘it must be an idiot who asks about another flat.’

‘Open the door or we’ll break it. We advise you to surrender or we’ll shoot directly,’ a voice said.

He knew that language that he mastered it long ago, so he asked, ‘will you arrest me?’

‘Yes, we’re from the military intelligence service,’ the voice said.

He opened the door. He was taken wearing the robe and she was taken wrapped in a bed sheet. It was the night of 14 May 1971, or Sadat's corrective revolution.

Nagwa answered the phone in her room to find that Ibrahiem was waiting for her. They had no date and she was about to go to attend a session about the role of the novels in supporting the third world causes. She decided not to go and asked the receptionist to let him up. She asked the room service to send oriental breakfast for two. She opened the door so that Ibrahiem would come into the room directly. Her heart started to beat. Still she was considering Ibrahiem as her man and the only love. He came smiling. She did not notice the newspaper he was carrying. He chose to have a sit on the chair beside the window.

'I've good news,' he said.

'Did you finish your study and you are going back home?' she wondered.

'Sadat closed detention sites for good,' he said.

'I don't understand,' she said. She forgot about longing for her cousin.

'He led a corrective revolution and arrested the powerful men in the government and decided to lead the country respecting the law,' he said and gave her the newspaper he had carried for her.

She read the first page quickly and then went through other pages to know certain news. She smiled, then laughed, and then cried. She knew the arrest of Hussein and Nesreen. She knew that she was taken wrapped in bed sheets. She was too happy that she jumped several times and hugged Ibrahiem. Her innocence and childish behavior returned to her. Both felt that the president move brought their hope back. Hugging started to turn her on. She kissed Ibrahiem on face several times. He thought she did as a sister. The heat inside her body brought back the memories of their engagement and both started to kiss each other passionately. Suddenly he stopped.

'What happened?' her husky voice was a begging to continue.

'I think we've to marry,' he said.

'I told you that we'll never do that,' she said.

'Why?'

'You don't know what will happen in the future. And you won't forget my past. Your friends the officers may know about me. When I'll be back to Egypt, they may question me and everybody may know that I

was forced to be a mistress of a corrupted officer. People remember scandals forever,' she said.

'I don't understand you. If you're in love with me then there's nothing prevents us from being together,' he said.

'It is not about love, you know. It's about me. Still I have something to do with those sons of bitches. I'll drag them to courts and I'll make sure that they will spend the rest of their lives behind bars,' she said.

'The government will do that on behave of every Egyptian,' he said.

'The government will arrest them for a while until the risk they pose diminishes and their influence vanishes,' she said.

'But you put yourself in a position that may expose many thing and the whole story may end up with you in jail also,' he said.

'Yes I'm going to expose many things but I didn't share in any conspiracy. Don't forget that journalism is too near to policy and I won't be in jail,' she said.

'Then everybody will know that you were a victim,' he said.

'I was a victim but to say the truth I got benefits also. Being victimized was not ethically right to have advantages. To say the truth I'm a slut and I don't like my cousin to marry a slut,' she said.

'You torture yourself for something you aren't responsible for,' he said.

'I have one thousand dollars and I fly in the first class. The intelligence paid for this hotel, the best in Moscow. You know why? Because Hussein fucks me. He fucks me in ass and I sleep with his wife to cheat on him. He gave me the thousand dollars for being his mistress like any other prostitute. That's I'm. I won't marry you. I won't be your wife. I can't deceive you. You're the only person, whom I can't deceive because I love you,' she fell on the bed and cried. She did not notice that he left the room.

In Cairo Shahinaze was in her house in Heliopolis waiting for dawn visitors to come to her after she had known the news of arresting her husband and his mistress. Her friends expected the same thing so she received no phone calls. She gave her servants a holiday not to let them see her being arrested. They came.

‘I was forced to be either his wife or his mistress and I preferred the first,’ she said to the prosecutor who was investigating Hussein’s case.

‘But investigations tell that you have a lover and you meet him in Alexandria,’ he said.

‘Yes, and to your knowledge I’m a lover to Hussein’s mistress also. We both do that as revenge to him.’

‘Did he tell you about the conspiracy against the president?’

‘Even if he did, what could I do while he was in the intelligence?’

‘Thank you. You may go,’ he said.

She could not believe that they would leave her. In fact, there was nothing against her and being a daughter of an ex-Pasha was enough evidence that she hated all men like Hussein.

In Cairo Airport when Nagwa returned, they arrested her.

‘Are you Miss Nagwa Mazloom?’ a police officer said.

‘Mrs. please. I’m not a virgin. I was raped in the detention site of the intelligence. Later on I was forced to be the mistress of Hussein Yousry the famous intelligence officer.’

‘Would you please come with me?’

‘But please I’d like you to rape me in front of him and better if you do that to his two wives too. I’ll appreciate that too much,’ she was serious.

He did not respond but he kept silent all the way.

She told her full story and it was enough for the prosecutor to release her.

‘One last word before I let you go. Take it as an advice from a father. You may see a psychiatrist. And I’d like to tell you that your accusations against him may lack evidence so there is no point in having a scandal,’ he said.

‘I’ll drag him to the prison for killing my father and raping me. He will have a life sentence for that,’ she was fully overwhelmed with the idea of having her own revenge. She did not tell about her mother.

Next morning newspapers wrote much about the journalist that was forced to be a mistress. Emad threw and tore the newspapers while shouting, ‘I’ll kill this bitch.’

‘Amal,’ Amina called her sister to calm down the enraged son.

‘What are you doing? Stop shouting and listen to me,’ Amal said.

Nagwa opened the door with her key in a critical time. Emad ran to the kitchen and took a knife.

'She was forced to do,' Amal said. She was standing between him and his sister.

'I prefer I would die. It was much better for me,' he said. He dropped the knife. He tried to control himself but he failed. He cried and swore at his sister. Then he said to her, 'I don't want to see any of you.' He picked the knife again.

'Get out now Nagwa,' Amina said.

'Mom, you want me out,' Nagwa said. Her silent tears fell. It was too much to hear it from her mother.

'Don't be angry at your mother. She tries to protect you. Emad is too nervous,' Amal said to Nagwa at the door.

'It would be better if you let him kill me,' she said and left.

The prison cell where Hussein Yousry lived was a hell for him in the first days. Other prisoners knew him and marks of his torture on their bodies were enough cause to maltreat him. Some tried to take revenge. Once he was beaten, so violently that he was transferred to the prison's hospital. But the authorities did not want the political prisons to be much humiliated or killed as there were many Nasserists still active outside. The big problem for Hussein was his old friend Noor Sultan. The old man could not forget that his daughter now in prison, was naked with Hussein when they arrested them.

'Hussein Yousry,' a soldier shouted after he opened the cell door.

'A visit,' he said with much indifference.

'Who came?' the arrogance was still in Hussein's voice.

'I don't know.' The soldier responded in disgust.

Hussein in the prison's uniform felt too much humiliated when he saw Nagwa and Shahinaze together waiting for him. Both wore full make up and the best teasing dresses they had.

'How are you?' Shahinaze said smilingly.

'Did they beat you? Did they rape you? I hope they did,' Nagwa laughed.

'I don't want to see any of you both,' he said.

'We don't want either,' Shahinaze said. 'But don't forget that I'm your wife. That's why I came here. I want a divorce or I'll go to courts and ask for both divorce and compensation as you forced me to marry you. I've many witnesses and lawyers who like to see you behind bars for a long time.'

'You're divorced,' he shouted it several times. 'You may get out now.'

'Not before telling the inspector of the prison to register it,' she said coldly.

Now it was Nagwa's turn to give him some more hard time.

'But I promise that I'll make you prefer death rather than hearing my name,' Nagwa said.

'I had to arrest you. It was my fault that I trusted a slut like you,' he shouted at her.

'But you did not do. It is your fault. It is your stupid arrogance that made you think that you're always safe even after killing a man

and raping his daughter,' she remembered her father and wished he would be alive to see her humiliating the monster. 'I swear in God to take revenge from you, your family and anyone belongs to your fucken person. I think they will bring Safia to rape her to force you to tell about the abettors with whom you had met in her home. I told them that you had told me about the safe you have in her bedroom in which you keep the foreign bank accounts' numbers.' She laughed loudly with her tears falling in hysteria. 'Soon they will have her here.'

All the three were shouting at the same time when soldiers entered and took him to the inspectors' office.

'Calm down,' the inspector said.

'I want to divorce both my wives,' he said it as if he were giving instructions to the inspector.

If someone wanted to know the real political life then detention sites were the ideal places to go. Both Noor Sultan and Hussein Yousry had several enemies among detainees. But both of them engaged in several rows. Sultan always remembered that his naked daughter was in Hussein's flat. All in the prison knew that this humiliating fact for any eastern man was a torture itself. They made jokes at him as a revenge and forced him to fight Hussein.

'Why don't you ask him to marry her?' a detainee said to Noor. 'At least let him behave like a respectable man even once in his life.'

Noor did not comment.

'Most probably he will refuse marrying a woman who jumped in his bed for a job. If an opportunity comes in the future she will repeat that,' another detainee said.

It was so humiliating for Noor that he picked a stone and ran after the detainees while the others were laughing at him. Suddenly he saw Hussein and involuntarily he changed the direction and hit Hussein on head. The Ex-Colonel screamed and fell down unconscious. Others pushed him away and the soldiers came to the injured risqué.

Hussein was admitted to the hospital for few days and the inspector ordered his soldiers to send Noor to the isolation. Both found it more scandalous if they would not come into good terms. Hussein proposed to Noor asking for Nesreen's hand. The old man agreed.

'Hussein Yousry will marry you,' the female guard said to Nesreen. She had no choice but to agree. She hoped that one day they

might be out and she would ask for divorce. Hussein wished the same thing.

It was too enough that a journalist, a TV presenter and an Ex-Colonel to be protagonists of a scandal to be circulated among media persons; then rumors reach everybody in the city that its people were bored of the non peace non war situation. That was too shameful for Saber's family. Amina went into sever depression that she did not talk to anybody. One day Amal prepared a breakfast to her bedridden sister. She called Salwa to carry the tray. The girl went to the bedroom her mother was sharing with her aunt. Amina did not respond to her daughter's several calls to get up. The girl caught her mother's cold hand and she understood. Silently she went to the kitchen where Amal was washing dishes. Salwa stood silent while her tears were dropping uncontrollably. Amal finished the dishes washing and turned to find her niece crying. The girl threw herself on the aunt's shoulder.

'Mom died,' she whispered.

Abd-Allah Mazloom went to his brother's home when he knew the bad news. Samira his wife and Thurya his daughter accompanied him. He sent his son Ali to tell the family, to send a telegram to Ibrahiem who was on the front line and go to Al-Ahram daily to publish the bad news as all the middle class families had been doing.

'Did you tell Nagwa?' Thurya asked Salwa.

'Aunt Amal is waiting for Uncle Abd-Allah to convince Emad that she should attend her mother's funeral. Emad swore he would kill her if she came,' Salwa said.

'But the funeral service will be after the noon pray. That means they have to move within one hour,' Samira said.

Nagwa was in her office in the journal. She was trying to call the lawyer to know his plans about the next step in the court. Phoning someone needed at least an hour to have a line in Cairo then days. She saw Tamer her younger brother coming into her office. His look told the story.

'Is it mom?' she asked. Her breath stopped waiting for his response.

'Yes, she died this morning and the funeral is to be after the noon pray,' the fifteen years old boy fell on the chair and cried.

She tried to comfort him but she cried with him instead. She drove in the heavy traffic of Ramsis street to Abbassia district in silence.

‘I wished I could finish my revenge job before she dies but I swear in God that I’ll continue until I kill Hussein,’ she cried it out on the chest of Amal.

‘I warned you not to come here,’ Emad was strangulating her.

‘I sent Tamer to tell her,’ Abd-Allah said. He freed his niece.

‘But,’ Emad tried to protest.

‘Enough is enough,’ Amal shouted at Emad. ‘We know that she is a victim. From now on Nagwa will come here, as she likes. This is her father’s house after all.’

Ibrahiem could not attend the funeral. Nagwa was in the girl’s room when he came next day. Nagwa told the country about her story but she only told her aunt Amal and Ibrahiem about her mother’s rape story. Ibrahiem felt pity for the woman and his eyes poured heavily.

‘Please don’t. I cannot stand your tears,’ Nagwa stood in front of him whispering and broke down into tears.

He supported her not to fall then he carried her to the girl’s room.

‘I think about killing Hussein,’ he said to Nagwa.

‘Leave him to me. I’ll make him wish he had not been born,’ Nagwa said. She depended on an elbow and took her cousin’s hand as support and she rested in a semi-sitting position.

Emad rushed into the room. Still too angry that Nagwa in the house he shouted at her, ‘Don’t play tricks with Ibrahiem. I’m your brother and his cousin and I refuse that my cousin marries a slut whom is unfortunately my sister.’

‘Stop it,’ Ibrahiem shouted at Emad. ‘I proposed to her several times but she refused to marry me. If she agrees, I’ll marry her right now and I’ll be too proud of her. She is a victim. She ruined her life to save the family.’ His hand trembled. He panted staring in Emad’s eyes to have a response. He turned his face to Nagwa and said, ‘we’ll marry today, agreed?’

‘No,’ she cried. ‘Even my brother calls me a slut. What do you think of others would say. They call me a slut that became nonsense to me but they will call you a pimp and I refuse that to you. They will only remember that I was Hussein’s mistress. They will never think of what forced me to do. Always people discriminate women. I can’t afford being a cause for your humiliation.’

‘I don’t care about anybody,’ Ibrahiem shouted.

‘But I care about you not to ruin your life. You’ll never forget my past,’ she shouted. She inhaled a deep breath then screamed repeatedly and involuntarily. ‘Get out. I don’t want anybody here. And I don’t want to see any of you.’ She fell unconscious. When she brought back she found Amal, Salwa and Elham in the room. She knew that Ibrahiem left.

‘I’ll go to my flat in Garden city,’ Nagwa said.

‘No, you will live here from now on,’ Amal said. ‘The only way to silence people is to live with us again.’

‘Then nobody will propose to Elham and Salwa.’ Nagwa said sadly.

‘Don’t torture your soul,’ Salwa hugged her. Amal and Elham cried.

She insisted on leaving and promised she would come frequently.

The famous lawyer who gave Magid Noor Sultan a job as a trainee told him that he had to find another office to work in after the training year.

‘Circumstances changed,’ the famous lawyer said.

‘I understand,’ Magid said.

But it was too difficult for him to find another office to work in. He spent most of his time in home studying the several cases against his father. His sister was not prosecuted in front of the court that had been trying her father. They sent her to the conduct court; a new court the government devised to judge opponents whom would not be prosecuted if they were sent to the ordinary courts. The circumstances of her arresting naked in Hussein’s bed made him sad and even depressed. He asked his mother to go to another lawyer to defend his sister. Even the case of his father was not his completely. He was just assisting a renowned lawyer. Also, this lawyer refused to employ him in his office. It was the rule that would live long in the east, which was prosecuting a politician made his family suffer for what he had done. Alia his mother sold some of her jewels to help him open an office. He rented an affluent apartment in Roxy, one of the commercial headquarters in Cairo. He lost the motivation and he went to his office just to escape the society. However he found that his closed-door office was a good place for him to cry alone.

Alia the wife of Noor Sultan also suffered from her friends too much. The last time she went to Heliopolis sporting club was the worst experience in her life. She had a sit with two friends who were wives of ex-ministers. It was a hot day and the waiter brought the fresh lemon juice they preferred to drink.

‘Did you read this novel?’ Lola said while looking at Alia to see her facial response.

Alia looked at the book on the table. It was Nagwa’s last novel. On the cover, a man and a woman were drawn wrapped in bed-sheets and surrounded by policemen. The title was very humiliating. It was “the politician’s daughter.”

‘Do you think she means someone or it is just the writer’s imagination?’ Nanny said while looking at Lola.

‘I don’t know,’ Alia left.

‘The lemon juice, it will help you,’ Lola said.

They laughed when their friend who had given them the impression that she had made a concession to be their friend after their husbands had left the cabinet, left. They knew she would not come again.

‘At least our husbands were not corrupted and they conduct a normal life now,’ Nanny said.

‘And our daughters did not sell their bodies. I hope she won’t come again,’ Lola said.

‘I don’t think she will. After all I’m sure that the intelligence is still active and I don’t like them to be after me for this arrogant hypocrite woman,’ Nanny said.

Metro cinema in Talat Harb Street was the place where Nagwa’s first film was screened first time. The story was hers and she wrote the scenario and the dialogue. Shahinaze was beside her. She was very anxious to see her first movie experiment. The press and media were talking too much about the story. The censorship refused the film but she could win her battle against it. There was much applaud from critics, artists, directors and producers. The producer invited her and others to attend a reception in Hilton hotel.

‘We know that you were a socialist but what I see now is that you turn your back to the revolutionary principals,’ a critic said to her during the reception party.

‘I’m a socialist but we should not forget the democracy. Being a socialist does not mean I support totalitarian regimes,’ she said.

‘You’re talented but don’t you think that the Nasserism era helped you to be a writer, a chance that many other talented might not have?’ a journalist said.

She knew the man was one of the journalists who had worked for the intelligence spying on his colleagues. He was arrested for few weeks after the corrective revolution of Sadat. The prosecutor found nothing against him. She also knew that he knew about Hussein. He was one of his agents who had helped her when she had had her first job. She decided to attack.

‘I think you had the same chance as a prize for the services you had provided for the corrupted Colonel Hussein who took me as a mistress for a while after he had ordered his monsters to rape me. I was his mistress so he helped me. I did not tell about my colleagues as you have been doing all the time. And I want to see the response of the people about the film. This is my parameter of success,’ she said.

‘You’re a slut,’ the man shouted at her.

She responded by throwing an ashtray at the man’s head. He threatened to go to the police but he did not.

Next day while she was waiting for her friend Shahinaze in Groppi café the famous pastry in Talat Harb Pasha street in metropolitan Cairo she read in the magazine her story with the agent journalist.

‘What did you do yesterday?’ Shahinaze said after dropping her handbag on the table.

‘Oh, hitting this monkey yesterday,’ Nagwa asked.

‘No, but talking about the relation with Hussein is not proper anymore. It makes people remember. And it will make your family always angry at you,’ Shahinaze said.

‘If I don’t talk about that I’ll be cornered as some my think it is my weak point,’ Nagwa said. ‘I expose myself not to be exposed.’

‘Stop fighting ghosts,’ Shahinaze said.

‘I’m not fighting any ghost. There is a real man in a prison cell who had killed my father and ruined my life. There is a lover whom I love and I can’t marry him because this killer used his influence to make me a slut,’ Nagwa turned her face to hide tears in her eyes.

‘Sorry I did not mean to torture you anymore but I think that I’m your best friend and I have to tell you may opinion,’ Shahinaze said. She caught Nagwa’s hand between her to comfort her. She noticed that her friend started to cry so she added, ‘let’s go to may place.’

Always in Shahinaze bedroom Nagwa felt victorious that she made love to Hussein’s ex-wife on the same bed he had been using for many years.

‘Relaxed under the bed sheets,’ Shahinaze smiled at Nagwa who felt that something serious Shahinaze was about to declare.

‘What do you want to say?’ Nagwa asked.

‘I want to immigrate to London,’ Shahinaze said.

For a while, Nagwa kept silent. She felt terrified to lose one of the three persons with whom she could talk about her sufferings. The other two were Amal her aunt and Ibrahiem but it was rarely that he was not at cross with her. At last, she said, ‘is it a final decision?’

‘Yes, my brother lives there you know. Here most people discriminate me. They think that I used Hussein to save my family then I got rid of him because he fell down. I agree with them as sometimes I

ask myself that if the conspiracy succeeded, would I ask him to divorce me risking the safety of my family. The answer is simply no. I have never loved him but I got many benefits because I was his wife. He helped me to have a carrier in the TV you know. I want to have another life. I want to forget what had happened here. Even my uncles and aunts think about me as a cheap woman who had sold her body to save her neck. They forgot that their necks were threatened more than mine,' Shahinaze said.

'Did you apply for a governmental permission to leave?' Nagwa asked.

'They refused. I'm a blacklisted. Like the early days of the revolution until I married Hussein. I was blacklisted because I'm a daughter of an ex-Pasha and a landlord. Now they put my name in the blacklist because I was a wife of a leftist and corrupted intelligence officer. I don't know what to do about this,' Shahinaze said.

'I'll write about that,' Nagwa decided to help her female lover and friend. She looked at her lover, kissed her on mouth, and added, 'I'll miss you.'

'Don't write about my problems. You have enough troubles and this will make people remember what Hussein once said during one of rows with you in the court when he declared that both of us are lesbians. People have no tolerance for sexual scandals despite the fact that they like to know the fine details too much,' Shahinaze said.

'I'll ask Ibrahiem to help you,' Nagwa said.

'Do you think he can help?' Shahinaze asked.

'Now he's a high rank officer and perhaps he knows someone who can help,' Nagwa said.

Nagwa dialed her uncle's number.

'Hello,' she said. The receiver of the call on the other end of line just closed the line. She repeated the trial but it was in vein. She was sure that it was Ibrahiem refusing her calls. He was too angry because she had been repeatedly refusing his proposal to marry her. He thought that she preferred to conduct a corrupted life. He was not convinced that she preferred him unscathed. She decided to go to her uncle's apartment.

'Hello,' she said to Ibrahiem when it happened that he opened the door. 'Will you throw me out?' she waited for his response.

'You are welcome,' it was her uncle's voice coming from the reception.

Ibrahiem extended a hand for her. Their hands touching brought smiles to their faces. Samira the wife of her uncle Abd-Allah and Thurya her cousin stood to greet her as she entered into the reception.

‘This is your house. Your uncle’s house is yours. You don’t need an invitation to come in at any time,’ Abd-Allah gave her a hug.

She told them the story of Shahinaze and asked Ibrahiem if he could help her. He promised to do. She had a dinner with them and Ibrahiem insisted that he would drive her to her apartment in Garden City.

‘Congratulations for Emad's graduation. He passed the final exam and became an engineer,’ Ibrahiem said.

‘Thank you. Aunt Amal told me this morning,’ she said.

‘Didn’t he tell you?’ Ibrahiem asked.

‘You know he does not talk to me at all,’ she said. She turned her face to the other side and used her handkerchief to dry a teardrop. ‘When I’m there he leaves the house.’

‘I’ll talk to him. Enough is enough. Tomorrow he will come to my office so I’ll send him with a warrant officer to the Recruitment Authority to apply for exemption from the army as you know he is now the only custodian and sponsor of your sister and your brother,’ he said.

‘Emad is still young but I think that grown up persons should respond to phone calls first,’ her voice was too sarcastic.

‘You know that I’m angry because you refused me as a husband,’ he said.

‘You know why I did. And you know that I need you beside me. I’m a famous person now but I feel too isolated,’ she cried.

They did not talk until they reached Garden City. When he stopped the car, she opened the door and hurried to the gate of the building. She cried her way until she threw her self on the bed.

When Alia Massoud found that her friends in the club showed uneasiness with her accompany, she stopped going there. She spent most of her time in her bedroom.

‘Have you taken your medicine Mom?’ Magid asked her.

‘I think so,’ she responded. She wore a masked face. She stopped wearing make. Even she left her white hair non-dyed.

‘I think you have to take your medicine regularly,’ he said. He opened one of the small bottles and picked a capsule. He filled a glass with water.

‘I told you I took my medicine,’ she was nervous that her son or her world now, did not believe her. ‘You are like your father. He didn’t trust anybody.’

‘From now on I’ll give you the medicine,’ he said. He spent most of his time home as well as his crippled mother. He did not hear a response. He looked at her. The first thing he saw was her hand falling beside her. He knew but he cried, ‘Mom, don’t leave me.’ But she did.

In the Arabic country, that Emad had been working day and night; he did not have weekends so that he might add them to his annual holiday. He spent his few days before his holiday buying some presents to his family. He did not buy one for Nagwa although he was always thinking about her. Angry with her and trying his best to forget her but deep in his heart he was sympathizing with her. Her news were filling the newspapers as a celebrate writer. He packed everything and hired a car to the airport.

‘Egyptian?’ the customer officer asked.

‘Yes,’ Emad responded.

The officer looked carefully at the passport then with arrogance he asked, ‘why are you here?’

‘I’m working as an engineer,’ he responded.

‘Why aren’t you joining your army? Or won’t you fight again?’ the officer asked sarcastically.

‘I’m exempted from the army,’ he said. He was about to loose his temper.

‘Never mind, you won’t fight. Next time the Israelis will enter Cairo. Your army does nothing but fleeing battles.’ The officer laughed.

‘Our army does not flee. Every army may lose a battle but we are still fighting. The Prophet’s army lost some battles but it won at last,’ his voice was loud.

‘You compare your defeated army with the army of our great Prophet. This is blasphemy. You must be a communist or an infidel who does not believe in God. You must not come here again. I’ll arrest you and you will be deported,’ the officer said.

Nobody listened to Emad.

Tamer was as anxious as his aunt Amal while they were waiting for Emad outside Cairo Airport. Ali his cousin tried to calm them down but he was as anxious as they were.

‘Yesterday I dreamt a bad dream about Emad. May God save him,’ Amal said. She wiped a teardrop from her eyes.

‘I think something urgent had happened so he postponed his holiday,’ Ali said.

‘He could send a letter with anyone to tell us,’ Tamer said. ‘I’ll ask in the air carrier company about him.’

Salwa hurried to open the door but when she found that Emad did not come she became too anxious.

‘I think he had an urgent work and soon we’ll find out what had happened,’ Amal tried to be calm.

‘No, something bad had happened to my brother,’ the pessimistic girl who lost her parents cried.

‘Believe me no one knows why he did not come,’ Amal hugged her.

‘I’ll tell Nagwa. She may find out a method to contact him. You know journalists have methods,’ Salwa did not wait for a response but hurried to the phone. Several times to have a line failed. She decided to go to her sister. Amal asked her to wait until next day morning as it was too late and nothing would be done after midnight.

Next morning Emad reached the Cairo Airport deported without his luggage. Even his money was confiscated. He was accompanied by a security officer from the Arab country. A report from the officer accused him of being a communist. He was taken to the State Security Office. After about two hours, he was given papers and a pen to write his story. He was asked to rewrite it. Then a State Security Officer came to him. Emad thought of the day they took his father and was scared.

‘I’m not a communist. The words of the Customer’s Officer there were very offensive,’ Emad said.

‘I know,’ the officer felt pity for the young man who lost everything due to the arrogance of the customer officer in airport of the rich Arab country. ‘Anyone would say and behave like you. You can go.’

‘Can I use a telephone to call my family to come as they confiscated my money and I don’t have money to hire a taxi or even riding a bus?’ Emad requested politely.

‘Sure.’

Several trials failed as the phones in Egypt were in a miserable condition.

‘Take this,’ the officer gave him a five-pound banknote.

‘No, thank you. I can manage,’ Emad stood up.

‘How could you do? It is long way to Abbassia.’

‘I’m not a beggar. I’m an engineer. I’ll walk to Abbassia.’

‘Take this or I won’t allow you to go.’

Nagwa was very enraged when she knew what had happened to her brother. She went directly to the family’s house. She used her key to open the door and rushed to Emad’s room. She extended her arms to embrace him. He was semi-sitting on bed and did not move.

‘Get out,’ he said coldly.

She stood and her arms fell slowly beside her body. She stood still for a while then she slowly turned and left the room. She went to the living room and Amal followed her.

‘It’s too much. I’ll talk to him,’ Amal said.

‘No, he didn’t grow up yet.’ Nagwa stood up trying to control herself not to cry. Her eyes met Amal’s and her aunt noticed her silent tears. The two women embraced and wept silently.

Nagwa was nervous but insisted on going to the newspaper to meet the Chief Editor. It was not the first time one of her articles not to be published due to censorship objections. ‘Not this one,’ she thought. She preferred not to drive.

‘You refused my report,’ she shouted. She did not consider the presence of other journalists in the Chief Editor’s office.

‘Have a sit,’ he said.

‘This is my brother’s story.’

‘I know and the journal isn’t open for family affairs. Second many similar stories happen and if we publish them then our brotherhood relations with Arab countries will be much damaged.’

‘I don’t care about what you call brotherhood relations when my brother loses his money and his belonging. He spent a night in jail because he did not want to lose his dignity.’

‘But I care about these relations that serve the higher interests of the country in war time.’

‘War time! What a lie and a cheat you say. Laymen say that we won’t fight. Your president just gives excuses not to fight.’

The Chief Editor asked other journalists to leave the room. He sat beside her on a big sofa. He started to calm her down. It took half an hour to calm her down then his secretary opened the door and gave him a piece of paper. He read it and gave it to Nagwa.

‘I have nothing to do with this,’ he said.

‘I know,’ she responded. She excused collecting her papers to be ready to go to the women magazine where she would write about fashion and arts but not about politics anymore.

Nagwa parked her car in the garage of Shahinaze’s villa where Hussein used to do in the past. She hurried and knocked at the door then pushed the button several time. The woman who grew up Shahinaze and refused to leave with others who left after the ex-Pasha properties had been confiscated opened the door. Nagwa knew her way to the second floor where Shahinaze’s bedroom was one of other four bedrooms. Nagwa opened the bedroom door without excusing and found Shahinaze in the attached bathroom in the tub.

‘Ibrahiem told me that they lifted your name from the blacklist,’ Nagwa shouted victoriously.

‘You mean I can fly to London,’ Shahinaze said. She stood up and hugged her friend.

‘Of course you can fly to London or to anywhere you like,’ Nagwa said.

Shahinaze dried her body quickly and showered the face of her friend with kisses of joy. They ended up on the bed practicing their intimate relationship as if celebrating the victorious moment.

Next week the farewell in the airport was so painful to Nagwa and to Shahinaze that both hugged long before Shahinaze entered into the

departure hall. They promised to send letters and to call each other. Shahinaze invited Nagwa to spend her holidays in London.

Nagwa drove her car to the center of the town where Samira the wife of her uncle Abd-Allah Mazloom would open a new shop in Shawarbi Street to sell smuggled cloths. This street became so famous that all mid and high class families went there to buy imported and smuggled cloths. After the opening ceremony, the family was invited to a party in the nightclub of Hilton Nile Hotel. A belly dancer finished her show then a singer started singing the songs of the legendary Egyptian singer Abd El-Halim. Ibrahiem preferred to sit in another table with Emad and Ali. The song that made both Nagwa and Ibrahiem look at each other at the same moment was one of Halim's called "lost" or "SAWAH." Its words were:

*I'm lost and walking to all countries.
The step between my lover and me is too long.
A too long way in which I'm alone
The night becomes nearer.
The morning bad us a farewell*

Ibrahiem wore a masked face all over the song but tears came to Nagwa's eyes. Her breath became interrupted due to the silent crying. Egyptians say the slaughtered bird dances due to agony and she decided to dance to be away and not to let her companions see her cry. She started. Her short skirt exposed more than covered and her blouse covered a small piece of her breasts. Emad was too furious.

'I'll strangle her,' Emad stood up. Ibrahiem's grip around his arm stopped him.

'She is a victim,' Ibrahiem said.

'She tells lies about being victimized. I don't buy that. She is just a whore who went to the bed of a corrupted intelligence officer to be a celebrate writer,' Emad tried to free his arm.

'No, she was rapped. I divorced her because she insisted on that. Anytime that she agrees to marriage I'll marry her at once. I'm angry with her because I thought she might change her opinion one day and we would marry. This intelligence officer threatened her to arrest you and to ruin your future if she would not respond to his deviations. This is the true story,' Ibrahiem said and let Emad go.

Nagwa found Emad in front of her. She stared in his eyes that were pouring tears. He kissed her hand dorsum while they were dancing together.

‘Sorry, Ibrahiem told me your story,’ he said.

‘Please don’t cry. You’re my brother and son and man,’ she said.

‘Did they do the same to mom?’ he asked.

She did not answer but she buried her face in his chest and cried more. He understood. He supported her to a chair where Amal, Salwa and Elham came around her.

‘I’ll join the Military Technical College to be an Engineer Officer in the army,’ he said.

Magid Noor Sultan spent in home most of his time. Sometimes he went to the club to read ads in newspapers alone. Sometimes he walked from Abbassia to Heliopolis then to the airport to take a taxi to return to his home. When he remembered food, sandwiches were enough. Sometimes he found himself in strange areas. A friend met him in Giza square south of Cairo.

‘Hi Magid,’ the friend said.

‘Hi,’ Magid said. He tried to remember the friend.

‘I’m Moustafa. We were colleagues in the faculty of law. I live here after I married,’ he said.

‘Yes, I remember you,’ Magid said.

‘You grew older. Your hair is grey. Are you married?’ Moustafa said.

‘No,’ Magid said.

‘I think you were in love with a colleague, weren’t you?’ Moustafa said.

‘I don’t remember. Who was she?’ Magid said seriously.

‘Are you all right?’ Moustafa said.

‘Just tired. Where are we?’ Magid asked.

‘In Giza square,’ Moustafa said. ‘My home is near. Would you come with me to have some rest?’

‘No, I’m fine. I’ll take a taxi to Abbassia. Have a cigarette?’ Magid said.

‘Let’s have time together. I know a near café.’ Moustafa said.

Magid told Moustafa about what happened after his father had gone to the jail. He asked Moustafa if he knew any lawyer to employ him. Moustafa suggested that Magid would go to Libya where they welcome Nasserists.

‘Can you help me?’ Magid begged his friend.

‘I’ll try,’ Moustafa promised.

Two weeks later Magid was in Tripoli airport. He fled with a forged passport.

‘This passport is forged,’ Magid said to the Libyan customer officer. The officer looked at him but Magid continued, ‘I’m a Nasserist. They sent my father, my sister and my brother in law to jail. I could flee.’

The advice of Moustafa made wonders. They welcomed him. Next day the Libyan newspapers made him a hero. They gave him a

journalistic job, a flat, a car and a good salary for his weekly articles to criticize Sadat. He also became a TV presenter to talk about Naser and to condemn Sadat's government and everything Egyptian. He did the work.

Ali Mazloom went to his mother's new shop and found her busy counting the cash before keeping the money in the safe.

'Well, I want twenty pounds,' he said.

Samira closed the safe then without turning her face to him, 'you think that I own a bank or what? Yesterday I gave you ten pounds. When you'll have your degree, they'll give you seventeen pounds per month.' Samira said.

'I'm not going to work in the government with the science degree. The only job for a science college graduate is a teacher. I'm not going to be a chemistry teacher,' he said.

'When you finish the army service we shall see what you are going to do,' she said.

'I'll go to the military college to be an officer. Conscripts now go to the army and God only knows when they will be dismissed,' he said.

'The army will give you about thirty-five pounds. You spend fifty or more per month,' she said.

'When the war is finished I'll work with you in the trade besides working in the army,' he said.

'First you have to finish your study and I don't think it is suitable for a final year chemistry science student to spend most of his times in cinemas,' she said.

Jermyn, a Lebanese woman entered into the shop carrying a small bag.

'Can I help you?' the sales assistant girl asked her.

'Are you the owner?' Jermyn asked.

'I'm the owner,' Samira turned her face to see the beautiful woman. 'Can I help you?'

Jermyn showed Samira some smuggled women panties to sell.

'Well how much for the piece?' Samira asked.

'One pound,' Jermyn said.

'Too much, sorry,' Samira was sharp.

'How much will you pay for the piece?' Jermyn asked.

'I don't need now. May be next time,' Samira insisted on letting down the woman so that the best deal might be stricken.

‘I’ve three hundreds and I did not sell to anybody until now. You will be the only shop that has this style. It came from Italy to Lebanon. I brought them. I can bring you anything you request in the future. This is my phone number in Cairo if you change your opinion,’ Jermyn said. She turned to leave. She stopped at the entrance of the shop and turned again to face Samira. ‘It is afternoon now. In the evening I’ll be in this street again to sell the goods to other shops.’

‘One hundred pounds for the three hundred pieces,’ Ali said.

Samira smiled and stared at Jermyn’s face to see the reaction.

‘Are you kidding? Say something good to have a deal,’ Jermyn said.

‘It is final,’ he said.

‘You kill me,’ Jermyn said.

‘How can I kill this beauty?’ he said.

‘Thank you,’ Jermyn laughed sarcastically. ‘But one hundred pounds are not suitable at all. Your sister knows that.’

‘I’m his mother,’ Samira said. ‘But how come you knew he is my son?’

‘I can’t believe he is your son. You must have married too young,’ Jermyn said.

‘How come you knew?’ Samira insisted on asking the question and ignored the compliment.

‘As he interfered in the bargain he must have a say. Who is he then? A brother or a son,’ Jermyn said.

‘You are intelligent. But why did you choose this shop to start with?’ Samira asked.

‘The elegance of the goods in the shop window attracted me. I knew that you would value good goods,’ Jermyn said. ‘Two hundred fifty pounds and this is final.’

‘One hundred fifty,’ Ali said.

‘Say a word madam. I’ll bring you what you want from Lebanon,’ Jermyn said.

‘Two hundreds,’ Samira said.

‘Some more,’ Jermyn begged.

‘No,’ Samira said.

‘Agreed,’ Jermyn said. ‘Will the gentleman accompany me to take them?’

‘I’m ready,’ Ali said.

‘Take the goods to the home in Abbassia and I’ll bring them here in tens,’ Samira said.

Ali drove his mother's small car to Mohandseen district in Giza. Jermyn noticed that his eye moved to the right corner of his globes frequently. She pulled down her mini-skirt she was wearing several times. Suddenly he used the brakes to stop the car before colliding into another car.

'I think it is better to concentrate on the road. Looking at my thighs will be a bad excuse for your mother if you break her car,' she said smiling.

Jermyn used the key to open the flat door and invited Ali to come in.

'Hi Jermyn,' Jasmine her younger sister came from inside. When she saw Ali she stopped for a while not knowing what to do while she was wearing only one of the elegant panties her sister had brought from Lebanon. 'O' my god,' she screamed and ran to the bedroom.

Ali had a sit in the small reception listening to the conversation between Jermyn and Jasmine that ended with both laughing. Both sisters came carrying a big bag. He stood and carried the heavy bag.

'Have a drink?' Jasmine asked Ali.

'No, thank you,' he said.

'Bring him some of the Lebanese sweets that I brought from home and make some tea for us,' Jermyn said to her sister. She looked at Ali and said, 'she lives here in Egypt. She is a student in the Cinema Institute. She wants to be a director. My family is proud of her and they encouraged her to come to Egypt despite the fact that we are a poor family. I run a small cafeteria in Beirut. I find that trading in cloths is a good chance to spend sometime with her every month. Would you open the bag please to see the goods?'

Jasmine came carrying a tray and he stood and took the tray. He spent three hours with them chatting and laughing then he left. He intended to go next morning to the Cinema Institute.

Nagwa was used to spend much of her time in the family home especially when Emad was at home. The day of his graduation from the Military Technical Collage was a happy day. This day Ibrahiem came to celebrate with them. Nagwa was too happy not only because of the graduation of her brother and the presence of Ibrahiem with them but also because next morning it might be her final revenge. The court would say the final verdict about Hussein and Noor Sultan as perpetrators and sharing in the killing of the victim Saber Mazloom.

She did not tell anybody and hoped the judge would declare her final victory. The happiness and laughs attracted Ibrahiem. Salwa switched on a cassette recorder and Nagwa danced like a butterfly. She needed some fresh air after dancing and went to the balcony. Ibrahiem went after her.

‘Will you marry me?’ he asked her. He knew the answer but his love to her always overwhelmed him to the point that several trials became his habit and hope.

‘Do you insist on marrying a crazy woman?’ she smiled.

‘I love crazy women,’ he said.

‘Do you love another crazy one?’ she asked. She gave him a look that made him remember her jealousy of the old good days.

‘You know whom I love,’ he felt that time stopped waiting for her word to revive the past.

‘You propose to me after tomorrow 11 am in Misr and al-Sudan cafeteria. It’ll be in same place and same time as what happened before. You will find me wearing the same cloths. They are not fashionable now but I keep them. Even the accessories I wore that day I’ll wear them again,’ she said.

‘Why after tomorrow?’ he asked.

‘Because tomorrow I shall close the past history page for good. I’ll be Nagwa whom you knew. Don’t ask now. Tomorrow everybody will know. Tomorrow the judge will sentence the killers of my father to death or at least to twenty-five years behind bars. Didn’t you read the newspapers?’ she said.

‘Yes, I did. I’ll be waiting for you tomorrow,’ he said.

‘If you don’t come I’ll kidnap you,’ she went to dance again.

‘The court found defendants Hussein Yousry and Noor Sultan not guilty,’ the judge said.

Nagwa stood. Journalists’ cameras were flashing. She went towards Hussein and Noor behind bars. She swore at them.

‘I’ll drag you to courts again. Next time I’ll say you forced me to be your mistress and your ex-wife will be my witness. She knows about raping me in your office. Fuck you,’ her words and screams were recorded by the cassettes that the journalists carried.

She went to her apartment. She found the old cloths that she had them washed and ironed to be ready when she would meet Ibrahiem. She threw her self on the cloths and her tears wet the cloths of the lost hope. She tore them while crying. ‘No hope.’ She cried it.

Next morning her photos and words were on the front page of the morning newspapers. She went to her office. The telephone on her desk rang. It was Ibrahiem.

‘What the hell did you do yesterday?’ he was enraged by the photos and her words of having a relationship with Hussein. ‘Why do you always make people remember your past?’

‘We have no hope Ibrahiem. I found journalists whisper about my story with Hussein even before the judge who needed witnesses entered the hall. They know. In Egypt, people always remember scandals. They never forget it. Forget what I told you about today’s meeting. I tore the cloths and I’m not coming. People see me a slut and I don’t like my cousin to marry a slut,’ she said finally.

In Abbassia, Emad was more furious than Ibrahiem when he read the morning newspapers. He swore and shouted.

‘Tell this slut not to visit me when I have a holiday,’ he said to his aunt, then carried his bag, and left for Suez where he would be first lieutenant engineer in a mine battalion on the front line.

‘When she comes don’t tell me to meet her,’ Tamer the younger brother who was now in the second year of the secondary school year said to his aunt.

In the same day, Ibrahiem received an order to go to Ismailia city to be a command of an infantry battalion that its command was martyred. He left his office in the training center and went home to say good-bye to his family.

‘I don’t like you to see any of Nagwa,’ he said to his sister Thurya when he gave her a hug before leaving.

It was the wedding day of Salwa. All family was present. Salwa came from the hairdresser who did everything from her hairdressing to her make-up and dressed her in white. Samira's new big car was decorated with flowers and Ali drove it for the bride and the groom. Ahmed Al-Dory a young businessman whose father was a friend to a neighbor had proposed to her. Both Amal her aunt and Abd-Allah her uncle convinced Salwa that it would be better for her to marry a rich man than working for seventeen pounds per month after she had obtained her degree from the faculty of commerce. Abd-Allah reserved a hall in one of the big hotels for her wedding party. Emad and Ibrahiem could have one-day absence permission from their units on the front line to attend the wedding day. Both gave Nagwa the cold shoulder. Al-Dory shook hands with Nagwa coldly. Even her younger brother Tamer wore a masked face when she spoke to him. But Salwa, Amal and Abd-Allah insisted on her coming to the party after the official marriage ceremony was finished. Ali drove Samira's car and the bride and the groom were in the back seat with Elham beside her cousin. Ibrahiem drove the car for his father and took Emad and Tamer. Thurya drove her small car and her mother accompanied her. They invited Amal to have a ride but she preferred to be in Nagwa's car.

'I'll talk to Emad and Ibrahiem. I noticed they avoided you,' Amal said.

'Even Tamer doesn't like to talk to me,' Nagwa said. 'I feel isolated.'

'You went far that day when you were in the court,' Amal said.

'It is the revenge of my father. You know that it is not only me but also mother was severely hurt,' Nagwa cried. 'How come do they want me to forgive a man who ruined all my life? I was innocent like other girls. I had dreams about Ibrahiem and me. I wanted to have a boy from him. They don't understand that if I stopped I would feel more humiliated and more despair. What makes me alive is my dream about going to my parents' graves to tell them that I took their revenge.'

Amal, Nagwa, Elham, Samira and Thurya sat around the nearest table to the bride and the groom. Thurya avoided talking to Nagwa not to anger Ibrahiem. He was sitting with Emad, Ali and Tamer.

Salwa's mother in law was standing near Nagwa and speaking to one of her relatives. 'I warned Ahmed. I advised him to keep his wife away from her sister,' she said intentionally and raised her voice so that Nagwa would hear.

Nagwa turned her face furiously. The woman wore a sarcastic and humiliating smile and left to greet another woman.

'You don't worry. Nobody can separate sisters. Ahmed is a kind man,' Amal said.

Nagwa did not respond. She stood up and went to say good-bye for the couple.

'It is early Nagwa,' Salwa said. She preferred her sister would stay more.

'I have commitments in the early morning,' Nagwa said.

'You may consider our home is yours and we want to see lot of you when we return from the honeymoon,' Ahmed said.

'Of course,' she said. She was not sure if he said the truth or it was just a compliment.

When Nagwa left, Ibrahiem came to Amal.

'May I have a word with you?' he said.

'Of course,' she said.

'There is a friend of mine who is a major doctor in the army. He is a neurosurgeon. He wanted to marry Thurya but she does not want to marry an officer. I thought about telling him about Elham,' he said.

'But she is still a student in the final year,' Amal said.

'Nothing will prevent her from obtaining her degree,' Ibrahiem said.

'I'll talk to her,' Amal said.

'I talked to her and she has no objections,' he smiled.

'Then, let's meet him,' she looked at her daughter and found that the girl was listening to them smilingly.

Salwa lived with her husband in a flat in his family's building in Heliopolis. From the first day, she knew that Ahmed's mother who lived in a flat next to her was the real ruler and controller of everything. It was afternoon when Ahmed returned home from his office. He did not kiss her but went directly to the bedroom.

'What is the matter?' she asked him.

'I've some headache,' he said. His face told that he was angry too.

'Let's have lunch as I'll go to the hairdresser,' she said.

‘Why?’ he asked

‘Because we’ll meet Elham and Dr. Tawfik to go to the cinema,’ she said.

‘O’ I don’t like doctors. They are arrogant and think they came from another planet. That is why you will go to the hairdresser?’ he exclaimed.

‘Yes,’ she responded shortly.

‘Was Nagwa here today?’ he asked.

‘Yes, she was at a friend of her in Heliopolis and just stayed here for about quarter an hour,’ she said.

‘You know that my mom does not like her,’ he said.

‘She did not come to visit your mom. She came to see her sister,’ she said.

‘I don’t like your sister Nagwa to come here again,’ he said.

‘It was no secret that she is my sister before you proposed to me,’ she angrily said.

‘Just try to manage so that she does not come frequently,’ he said.

‘She does not come frequently. We’ve married since two months and she came twice. In fact, my family does not like coming here at all. I’ll lay the table and I’ll go to the hairdresser,’ she said.

‘Won’t you eat?’ he asked.

‘No, thank you,’ she went out of the room before letting him see her tears.

‘Just one thing,’ he raised his voice. ‘The hairdresser fee will be deduced from your pocket money.’

She bit her lower lip and ran to the bathroom to cry alone.

The two married couples went to the cinema then Tawfik suggested that they dine together.

‘Food in restaurants is not good and it is expensive,’ Ahmed said.

Salwa felt embarrassed by her husband’s comment.

‘I invite you,’ Tawfik said.

‘Okay, but won’t it be better if you invite us to go to the cinema next week?’ the merchant always controlled Ahmed’s thinking.

Elham and Tawfik laughed and Salwa became too furious.

‘I have headache and I prefer to go home,’ Salwa said.

Ahmed insisted on having dinner together. They went to the Merry-land nightclub in Heliopolis where Soheir Zaki the celebrate belly dancer were dancing on Om Kolthom songs’ music. The night was amusing but the bitterness of Ahmed’s stinginess did not leave Salwa.

'I think you enjoyed the meal,' Salwa said to Ahmed while she was undressing.

'Yes it was a good meal,' he said.

'When will you invite them?' she asked.

'I don't know but leave it to circumstances,' he said.

'Do you think we have a future together,' Salwa said.

'What do mean?' he asked as if he did not understand what she meant.

'I'll try to work,' she said.

'Why? I think we don't need your job,' Ahmed said.

'But I need it. I need to be away for a while. Away from your mother. I need to have my own money so I can go to the hairdresser without annoying you,' she said.

'I think when we have a baby many things will change,' he said.

'For the worse,' she said.

He tried to kiss her.

'Don't touch me now,' she said.

Shahinaze found a job as a writer about the Middle East in one of the tabloids in London. She worked as a representative for the BBC as well. It was six pm when she received Nagwa's letter. It was on the table beside the small stair that was leading to her studio in the first floor in the small building near her brother's flat at Kensington in London.

4 August 1973.

Cairo,

Shahinaze Love,

I hope you spend happy days. The only thing I do here is to go to the office to write the weekly article. I cannot write in my novels. I don't know why.

In fact, I feel too isolated. I go to Abbassia only when Emad is away in his unit not to have more rows with him. Since the court raw, we have not talked to each other. He is now a First Lieutenant. Usually I meet my aunt at the school in which she works but last time I felt that her colleagues whispered about me. Perhaps I have obsessions. But when I go to Salwa and Elham, I feel that their husbands prefer I would rather disappear.

Ibrahiem is always busy. I miss you. Sometimes I think about immigration to where you are and most of times I think about death. At last everybody

dies. It makes no difference to die here or there. But death makes us wait for him too long to come.

Once I was at the family's home when I heard Emad telling my aunt that he would not leave his room until the slut leaves. The word slut was filling my ears when I drove my way to Garden City. It was late night and I stopped my car beside the River Nile. I walked for a while. A car stopped. I walked and the boys chased me, three boys in their early twenties. They did it to me in their car at Mokattam mountain area. They gave me ten pounds before driving back to the Nile River Street. I wrote SLUT on the banknote. I regret it but believe me I had no intention to do that when I stopped my car. I went with them as if I was hypnotized. When they asked about my name, I told them Nesreen. Of course, you know her. She's Noor's daughter and Hussein's wife. I don't know why I said her name. All was involuntarily. I'm scared and I cannot promise it will not happen again. I went to a psychiatrist but I just told him that I was too sad. I could not tell him the real cause that brought me to his clinic was that I'm afraid of being a prostitute. The word prostitute is scaring.

Sometimes I imagine Ibrahiem living with me while our kids playing around and the whole family is in our home. But something inside me calls stop it. I have self-guilty sensation that drives me mad for what I did this night. I avoid going out and I only go to office. Sitting in front of the TV to show the silly programs is what I do. I refuse many invitations for fear of returning home late and doing that again. I drink too much to sleep. I lost weight.

I'm sorry but you are the only person who may listen to my sufferings.

I'm waiting for your letters. You promised to write to me everyday. Don't forget.

Nagwa

Ali joined the army as a conscript after graduation. He had a short leave from his unit and went to Jasmine at the cinema institute. They fell in love to each other. Her sister Jermyn blessed them. Ali feared that both Samira and Abd-Allah might refuse the idea of proposing to her now. Nobody knows when he would finish the service. He decided to go ahead.

‘Could you tell me where we go?’ Jasmine said.

‘You will know,’ he responded.

She found the small car in a desert road. ‘Where are we going?’ she asked seriously.

‘To Alexandria,’ he responded.

‘Are you crazy? Do you think I’m loose or what? Stop the car right now,’ she said.

‘Don’t get me wrong. My parents are there to spend the summer. I’ll let you know them and I’ll ask them to marry you. You will spend the day with my sister Thurya in her room. I’ll spend the night in a hotel,’ he said.

‘But Jermyn is in Lebanon now,’ she said.

‘We shall tell her the arrangements when she comes,’ he said.

‘My parents are there in Lebanon,’ she said.

‘My father will invite them to attend the wedding of course. I think Jermyn has told them and they agreed,’ he said.

Thurya did not like Jasmine but as her parents agreed, she did not argue much. She tried to give Jasmine the best treatment not to anger her parents. In the evening, Ali took to Jasmine to El-Raml area. After some walk in the commercial area, they chose Cecil Hotel to have lemonade. In the lobby, Ali saw Salwa his cousin and her husband Ahmed. The first look at her masked face told him that she was not happy with the husband who sitting besides her reading a newspaper while she was reading a magazine. The usual smile disappeared from her face and rigidity of its muscles ruined the make up she wore. They were waiting for some Libyan client of Ahmed.

‘Hi, Salwa,’ Ali gave her a sudden kiss on cheek.

‘Oh, Ali,’ her smile returned. As if a sudden vitality filled her and replaced the boring, that filled her. “Who is this beauty?”

‘Jasmine,’ he said. ‘We’ll be engaged soon.’

‘You are not engaged yet,’ Ahmed said.

‘When her parents come from Lebanon we’ll invite you to our engagement party. She studies cinema in Cairo,’ he said.

Salwa invited them to accompany her and her husband. Ahmed did not share them in their talks. When the client came, he left the table and took him to another one not to let Ali know about his business deals. Salwa preferred to leave her husband and go for a walk with her cousin and his lover.

‘I hope you call me when you are back to Cairo,’ Jasmine said to Salwa.

‘Sure, and I’ll ask Elham to accompany me and we’ll visit you in Cairo,’ Salwa said. ‘See you.’ She entered into the hotel and the couple went to where Ali had been parking his car.

'Your cousin is friendlier than your sister,' Jasmine said to Ali.

Salwa returned late to the hotel. She found her husband in the room. She started to collect things so they would leave for Cairo next morning.

'I expect you to think twice next time before going out with this Ali,' Ahmed said.

'Why? He is my cousin and I went out with him and his fiancée,' she responded.

'And I think it is not proper to hug or to kiss him anymore,' he said.

'He is a brother. Are you crazy or what?' she said.

'Crazy to tell you not to go out with a lose boy who came to Alexandria with a woman without being married. Crazy to tell you not to kiss other men. You have to know that my family is conservative and they don't like your family's misbehavior. A sister who declares that she is a whore and a cousin who travels with women are not the kind of behavior that I like my future kids behave,' he said.

'Divorce me,' she said calmly.

'You must be crazy. To tell you what I like is my right. I spent too much to marry you and I'm not going to lose that simply,' he said.

'I feel disgusted when you touch me. If you don't divorce me, I'll tell that you are not a man. You just come on top of me for few seconds. I don't feel satisfied with you. I don't want any of your damned money. My sister and my cousin are not liars about themselves. My sister is a victim. But you and your family always cheat in commerce. I shall tell the police about your corrupted methods if you don't divorce me now. I'll go to my uncle's home in Alexandria and I'll go back to Cairo tomorrow morning alone. You may send the divorce document to the Abbassia address,' she said.

'You are divorced,' he said. She scared him of telling the police and of telling the society about his manhood weakness that any Eastern man cannot admit. 'But I'd like you to sign a paper saying that you leave the dowry.'

She signed the paper.

When Nagwa knew the news of her sister's divorce, she felt sadder. She did not leave her flat. She did not go to the magazine in which she worked. Even she did not respond to telephone calls. Her colleagues were too anxious that something bad had happened to her.

They went to her flat after she had been absent for a week. Several knocking at door gave them no response. Her car barked on the street alerted them more and they decided to break the door. They found her sitting on her bed. She did not talk. The slightest trial to touch her made her scream. They called Amal who came with Salwa. She was admitted to a hospital where doctors told Amal that she had a nervous breakdown. Next morning the newspapers found rich material in her story to write about. Journalists who disliked her wrote more about her story. Not to be condemned as hypocrites, opportunists or spiteful they put the poisons in honey and made their articles merciful by asking the government to treat her abroad.

Shahinaze left the BBC studios and took the bus to Maye Fair district. Near the Egyptian Embassy, there was a shop that was used to sell the Egyptian newspapers and magazines. She always preferred to ride the bus. She did not like the tunnels of the underground. In the bus, she felt that she was still on earth, living and not buried beneath. From Maye Fair, she went to her brother's home Kamal. He was still at hospital but Joan his wife received her with a smile.

'You gained some weight. It is a week now since I've seen you last time,' Joan said.

'Yes, sometimes I eat like a horse,' Shahinaze responded and went to the refrigerator and poured herself a glass of Coca Cola.

Joan was busy cooking the meal. 'I hope you will like this food,' Joan said.

'I think I've to go now. Here're some Egyptian newspapers for Kamal,' Shahinaze said.

In the small studio, Shahinaze ate some fish and chips that she bought on her way home then she started with one of the magazines. Nagwa was writing regularly in it. There was not any article signed by her friend. The letter she had received few days ago made her anxious about her friend. She felt something wrong. She decided to phone her friend. But she stopped while she was going to dial. She saw Nagwa's photo. A small one but the words under the photo told much. She knew that her friend was admitted to the hospital. The magazine said that her friend was just fatigued. She read a call to treat her friend abroad in another magazine. She knew the full story. She decided to fly to Cairo. She had a plan. But Kamal would object to the idea of going there. He considered her success to travel to London a miracle that the probability of its repeat was near nil. She did not like to anger him.

'Hi,' Joan extended a hand to her sister in law while sitting in her usual place in the pub that she and her husband were usually spending the nights.

'Hi,' Shahinaze said. 'Is Kamal still working?'

'No, you have to go to the barstool and ask him to buy you a drink. Don't be wicked and send him twice there.'

'No, let him go twice. I want to talk to you. I've a plan to make a fortune,' Shahinaze said.

'I'm all ears,' Joan said.

'Our palace in Cairo that was confiscated may return to Kamal and me. Sadat gave the green light to his government to study the cases of the aristocratic families. So if we apply we may take many of our properties again,' Shahinaze said.

Kamal was standing listening to his sister while she was telling his wife her story. 'But I think it took a long time for you to come here. I don't like you to risk going there. Your safety is more important than properties. Case closed,' He said sharply and nervously.

Both Joan and Shahinaze looked at silently and Shahinaze understood that it would much better to leave the matter for her sister in law. Two days later Kamal agreed and his sister was ready to spend a week in Cairo.

In the hospital where Nagwa was admitted, both Salwa and Amal spent much time. Nagwa spoke few words but her movement did not improve much. She needed someone to catch her hand not to fall. Tamer the younger brother visited his sister once and stayed less than a minute. Neither Emad nor Ibrahiem appeared.

'Is this Shahinaze the TV presenter who immigrated to England?' Amal asked Salwa. They were sitting in the hospital reception.

'Yes, she is. Do you think she came to see Nagwa? It will be too helpful for Nagwa to see her,' Salwa said.

Shahinaze extended a hand for Amal. 'You must be aunt Amal. I knew you because Nagwa looks like you too much. She told me a lot about you.' She looked at Salwa. 'Are you Salwa or Elham?'

'Salwa.'

Nagwa forced a smile for few seconds when Shahinaze was at the door then she could not control herself and wept. Shahinaze sat beside Nagwa and took Nagwa's face on her shoulder to comfort her.

'Why? You're very well. Many crises have passed and you could overcome them. You are strong,' Shahinaze said.

'My sister was divorced because of me, you know,' Nagwa whispered. 'Her husband thinks that I'm a slut. Even my brothers think so.' She put her mouth too near to Shahinaze ear and in a lower voice she added, 'they are damn right.' She wore an idiot smile and said, 'I'm worse than a slut.' Droplets of tears and the idiot smile were just the mask of her depression.

'No, you told me that your sister was not in good terms with her husband,' Shahinaze said.

‘I swear I would ask for a divorce,’ Salwa said when she heard Shahinaze. ‘He was hypocrite and his avarice was the real cause.’

Shahinaze stayed more than two hours then she asked Salwa to go with her to phone Ibrahiem and Emad in their units.

Next morning Salwa was waiting for Shahinaze in Groppi at Heliopolis. Ibrahiem came first.

‘Hello. How is Nagwa?’ he asked.

‘She was much better yesterday night. Today I have not seen her yet,’ Salwa said.

‘It is supposed that Emad will come with us. The hospital is at Roxy near here, I think,’ he said as if he was going for a duty.

Shahinaze came and before she had a seat, Emad appeared.

‘I think we may have some tea before going there,’ Shahinaze said.

‘I prefer to,’ Salwa said.

‘First,’ Shahinaze looked at Ibrahiem. ‘Do me a favor. I’m going to hire a lawyer to apply to the government so my brother and I may take some of our properties. Of course, this needs someone influential to recommend. Second, the lawyer himself may forget the whole matter if nobody follows him up. Nagwa whom I trust too much is ill and this why we are here.’

‘I’ll follow up the lawyer’s work,’ Salwa said.

Emad who came because Ibrahiem phoned him made an angry face. He did not give Shahinaze any friendly impression when she had phoned him the day before.

‘I think you know that I’m a daughter of an ex-Pasha,’ Shahinaze said. ‘I met Ibrahiem before. Nagwa told me much about you all that I consider myself a member of her family. I don’t think you do any good for her at all. Since when victims should be punished because, they want to fight for justice. If she did not do what she had done, you Emad might have been arrested, beaten or fucked.’

Her word made all taken aback.

‘Mind your words.’ Emad said angrily.

‘But it happened to some men also. I remember my ex-husband Hussein when he returned home sometimes proud as if winning a war and told me that they did it to an opponent.’ Shahinaze said. She stared in Emad eyes and added, ‘did you prefer that to be done to you or to your sister?’ she smiled. When he hesitated to say a word, she laughed.

‘I know much about you,’ Emad said. He felt that his words are meaningless.

‘And what you know is true,’ Shahinaze said to Emad. She looked at Ibrahiem to ignore more arguments with Emad. ‘When Nagwa asked you to do me a favor to help me to leave the country you was hesitant because you knew that I was and, I insist on it, I was a lesbian. You did not like our friendship. Our deviations if you like to call them deviation were part of our psychological reactions to injustice. Don’t worry. I’m not a lesbian anymore and even if I’m, things are not like that. Moreover, Colonel, I know you are in love with Nagwa but you just run away. You are angry with her but you did not help her to overcome her crisis. You have discussed the matter with her. You just say don’t do that and when she insists on taking her revenge that is step one to her cure, you go away.’

‘God has taken the revenge for her and others. But she makes people remember what had happened,’ Ibrahiem said.

‘But they did not send Hussein to the gallows,’ Salwa said. ‘This is the revenge of our honor and our father. If I were her I would do the same thing.’ She looked at Emad, ‘it was you who had to insist on having the revenge. It is the justice.’ She stood up, ‘Shahinaze let’s go to Nagwa. Nothing more could be said. If they want to follow us they know where the hospital is.’ Before leaving, she looked at the men with disgust, ‘don’t forget that we are from Upper Egypt. Our revenge is our honor. She won’t have peace until she sees this devil hanged.’

‘I asked her to tell me who the devil was when she first told me but she refused to tell. I would have killed him,’ Ibrahiem shouted.

‘And you will be serving twenty five years in jail. Or they might have killed you. Taking revenge with own hands might have ruined the life of the whole family especially during that time. She tried to do that legally.’ Salwa left. Shahinaze followed her.

Nagwa was trying hard to force some words and some smiles. Shahinaze and Salwa felt that she was improving but slowly. The astonishment and the wide-open eyes with a real joyful change of Nagwa’s face made them look at the door. Ibrahiem and Emad were at it stepping into the room. Emad kissed the ill sister in her front then he could not control himself from hugging her. For the astonishment of the women, Nagwa started to talk and her smiles were true.

‘I wish I could stay more but I have to return to the unit this night,’ Emad said.

‘Me too, I have to go now,’ Ibrahiem said.

‘Take care,’ Nagwa said.

‘Next time I’ll spend more time with you,’ Emad said.

‘You promise,’ she said.

‘I promise,’ Emad responded.

‘Next time we’ll talk much,’ Ibrahiem said.

Both kissed her good bye.

While Ibrahiem was driving, Emad was silent.

‘Why do not you speak?’ Ibrahiem said.

‘I’ll kill Hussein. I’ll shoot him when they bring to the court next time. I’ll shoot him. I swear in God I’ll do,’ Emad said.

‘This will add to Nagwa’s suffering. She sacrificed herself to ensure your safety,’ Ibrahiem said.

‘At least when they send me to the gallows I’ll rest in piece,’ Emad said.

‘Rest from what?’ Ibrahiem said.

‘From this helpless and hopeless life. Can you tell me what we are doing? They train us for a war that will never come. I spend few days every month with the family. Aunt Amal cooks some good meals for me during these few days. This is not a life. When I see Nagwa, I feel pity for her. But the idea that she had been raped kills me day and night. I try to forget this idea. I want it to be deleted from life. But what had happened could not be changed. I hope we fight even if I die. At least it will be an end. Sometimes I want to destroy everything. I want to fight and I want to kill Hussein. All my dreams became so violent that sometimes I say sarcastically that a civil engineer like me should build something. But I’m in a mine battalion to implant mines in some places and to remove others from other places,’

‘The war may be too soon,’ Ibrahiem said.

‘You must be dreaming. These words I heard several times from Generals and high rank officers like you Mr. Lieutenant Colonel. Well let it happen. At least the country and the army may regain some dignity,’ Emad said.

By then they reached where Emad would take the bus to go back to his unit on the Suez Canal.

Shahinaze flew to London after Nagwa was discharged from the hospital. She spent her last day in Cairo in Abbassia with Nagwa and her family. Nagwa and Salwa shared the same room they had been sharing all their lives. Doctors advised Nagwa not to return to work for a while.

‘Where are the novels of Nagib Mahfouz, Ihsan Abdel Dodos and Yosef Iris that I had left them under the bed?’ Nagwa asked Salwa.

‘I don’t know. When I’ll be back I search for them,’ Salwa said. She was about to finish her make-up.

‘Where are you going?’ Nagwa asked.

‘A friend of mine works in an accountant office and she my help me to work in this office. It will take at least two or three years to have a job through the manpower ministry. It may be in a remote governorate or in another carrier most probably teaching which I don’t like,’ Salwa said.

‘Why do you wear excessive make up?’ Nagwa asked.

‘The good looking is too important,’ Salwa said.

‘Take care. It is too easy to do mistakes. And it is too difficult to abandon them later on,’ Nagwa said.

‘Don’t worry. I know what I do. Have you taken your medicine?’ Salwa said.

‘Oh, yes. I want to return to work as soon as possible,’ Nagwa said.

Tamer the younger brother who finished the secondary school came to Nagwa. When both Ibrahiem and Emad talked to her, he followed them. The conversation between his sisters awakened him.

‘Aunt Amal, a cup of tea please!’ he shouted while still on bed in his room.

‘Aunt Amal is in the school. Do it yourself,’ Salwa shouted back while she was moving her hand to Nagwa as a good-bye sign. She stopped and said to her sister, ‘don’t do him anything. He is just a lazy. He is not young now. Few days and he’ll be a university student. Aunt Amal spoilt him.’

‘Salwa would you make me a cup of tea please,’ he entered the girl’s room and when he saw Salwa’s bed he lay on it.

‘I’m going out,’ she left the room.

‘I’ll do two cups of tea,’ he said to Nagwa.

‘No thank you. I just want you to help me to find the novels that I had been keeping them under the bed,’ she said.

‘I sold them few months ago. I was short of money and I thought you would not need them again. I took them to a library that trades in old books,’ he said.

‘You must be crazy. They worth a fortune not in terms of money but in value,’ she said angrily.

‘Nobody has told me that you want them. I thought you had read them all,’ he said.

‘Of course I did. But I like to reread them again and again. Every time one finds new ideas in their drama,’ she said.

‘I can bring anyone of them from this library,’ he said.

‘Shut up,’ she said. She left the room.

He went to the kitchen, made some tea, and brought her a cup where she was sitting in the reception.

‘Have you ten pounds?’ he asked.

‘Ten pounds? Why?’ She asked.

‘I’ll go to Alexandria with my friends to spend some few days there before I start studying in the faculty of commerce,’ he said.

‘Did you tell Aunt Amal?’ she asked.

‘She will not object. I’m sure,’ he said.

‘If she agrees I’ll give you the money,’ she said.

He kissed her and in less than ten minutes, he was ready to go.

‘Where are you going?’ she asked.

‘To where my friends stand at the street corner to arrange for the trip,’ he said and left.

In London Shahinaze was in her small flat. This morning she was busy writing some paragraphs for her weekly BBC program. She had to finish them before afternoon, as she would go for the night shift this day. The phone rang.

‘Did you hear the news?’ Joan was excited at the other end of the line.

‘No,’ Shahinaze said.

‘There is a war in the Middle East,’ Joan said.

‘It must be some clashes. That’s all,’ Shahinaze said.

‘No, the news tells about a big war. The Egyptian army has crossed the Suez Canal,’ Joan said.

‘Are you sure?’ Shahinaze cried with joy. ‘I’ll go to the night shift. There I can get some more news,’ she said. She finished the phone

call and went to have a shower. The flight of thoughts annoyed her. She felt anxious about the situation and what consequences if the war would end with another defeat. For the first time she wished she were in Egypt.

The news of rising the Egyptian Flag on the east bank of the Suez Canal and Nagwa's listening to the BBC that confirmed the news improved her condition very much. She dressed and wore make up for the first time since her illness.

'Where are you going,' Amal asked.

'I'll go to the magazine,' she said.

'But doctors said you must have a rest for about two weeks,' Amal said.

'But they said also that if I feel better before that I can go out,' she said.

The first thing Nagwa did in the office was writing an article about the war. She had to write about fashion only. She took the article to the Chief Editor and he agreed to its publication as a trial. She spent many hours in the magazine receiving news, which made Egyptians proud and happy. They knew that the military hospitals started to receive some injured soldiers and officers. The number was less than what was predicted but she felt annoyed. She was annoyed about Emad, Ibrahiem and Ali. It was after midnight when she decided to go to her uncle's home first on her way back to give them their support and to tell them that the injured are few. They were having two sons fighting in Sinai to worry about. She developed a stronger family feeling and became more sympathetic to others since she had been improving. Thurya opened the door for her and gave her the cold shoulder. Both Samira and Thurya thought that she was behind Ibrahiem's refusal to marry which was right. In fact, Thurya felt indifferent towards her but she always put her mother first especially when Samira became richer than her father after she had opened the cloths shop. Neither Thurya nor Samira knew about Ibrahiem's visit to Nagwa in the hospital. The mother was planning for Ibrahiem to marry a girl from a rich family. Even if Thurya knew about her brother's visit to her cousin she would not tell and angry her mother. It was not that her brother had told her not to know her cousin while he had been angry. It was her plans to be the mother's daughter and to share her in financial arrangements to have a larger slice of the cake.

‘You may come in. I’ll call my father,’ Thurya said. Neither she gave her cousin a hug nor did she shake her hand. She did not ask her about her health condition. She did not go to her parents’ bedroom where her father was sleeping. But she went to the living room where her mother was listening to the radios from everywhere. They talked to each other in whispering voice.

Nagwa stood in the middle of the reception, as she had no intention to stay for long. Samira came.

‘Have a seat. I want to talk to you,’ Samira said. She did not greet her.

‘Hello, if uncle Abd-Allah is sleeping, there is no need to wake him up. I’m here to tell you that the news said that the troops are safe. That’s all,’ Nagwa said. She was astonished by the way that they received her.

‘I’d like you to know that Ibrahiem will marry a girl when he comes from the war,’ Samira started to seize her. ‘Of course when he marries it will be improper for you to come here. Anyway, after what had happened in the court both Ibrahiem and I decided that Thurya should not know you anymore. I don’t like my daughter to have the same fate of Salwa your sister that she was divorced because of your reputation. If you want to talk to your uncle about something you may go to the publishing house or tell Amal to phone us.’

Nagwa found herself in her small car crying involuntarily. She tried to hold herself. She did not know if she was crying because Ibrahiem would marry or because of the humiliation. The humiliation she was feeling was not so painful like the news she knew. But she tried to reason the facts. Ibrahiem had to marry years ago. She asked him to be a brother. He proposed to her several times but she refused, so she could not blame him. But her tears were uncontrollable. To reason the fact that was torturing, did not make sense to her. If he was, beside her now, she would scratch his face with her nails or she might bite him. The idea of he being a husband to somebody else had never crossed her mind. She would kill him when he would come, she thought. No, she would admit that she had committed terrible mistake when she had turned down his several proposals. But she was too angry with him. He had to tell her not to let his mother telling her in a humiliating way. She never thought that he did not know anything about his mother’s plans. She found herself using the key to open the door. Her dignity prevented her from telling Amal or Salwa who were engaged in a discussion with

Tamer about him being late. He tried to defend himself but Salwa's sharp voice silenced him.

'High Nagwa, you look very tired,' Amal said.

'Yes, I'm. I stayed in the magazine writing for long hours,' she said.

'Have a shower and refresh,' Salwa said. 'Elham is here as Dr. Tawfik will be in the military hospital and he does not know when he will come home.'

'Well, where is she?' Nagwa forced a smile.

'In our room. We're again in the same room together,' Salwa said.

Another one would be threatened by divorce if her husband knew that she stayed some days with her, Nagwa thought. 'But I think I'll go to my flat tomorrow to be nearer to the magazine.'

'No you will stay until you are in a good health,' Amal said.

'No, tomorrow I'll go to Garden City,' Nagwa said decisively and went to collect her cloths.

Amal called Nagwa to her bedroom to have a word with her.

'What's the matter? I feel you're sad,' Amal asked.

'Just annoyed about Emad, Ali and Ibrahiem,' Nagwa said but Ibrahiem was in her mind before sayings the statement.

'You said that the injured and the martyrs are few,' Amal said.

'Oh, yes but the military operations are still going on,' Nagwa said.

'Why do you want to go to Garden City?' Amal asked. Nagwa kept silent but Amal continued, 'I'd like to know the reason. I think it is my right as a mother for this whole family.'

'I want to be on my own. That's all,' Nagwa said.

'It is all about Elham. You think that your presence may make troubles to her with her husband later on, don't you?' Amal said.

'There is no need to have another divorced woman in the family. Especially that she is pregnant now,' Nagwa said.

'You are my daughter and I won't let you down or let you go,' Amal said.

'And she is my sister and I'll never do harm to her. Aunt Amal, Salwa was not happy with Ahmed. Anyhow, she will be divorced. But Elham is happy with Dr. Tawfik. And I see him a good and kind man. We have to keep this happy marriage. Don't forget that my own brother Emad did not like me to be here at a time. All men think that if their wives know a bad woman it's a matter of short time and they will see

them behave like the bad woman.’ She panted and said before exploding in uncontrollable weeping, ‘and their sisters also.’

Elham who was extending her hand for Nagwa to comfort her and said, ‘no, Nagwa, Tawfik never said anything bad about you. And I would not allow him to do. He likes you. This is the truth. He thinks that any woman might behave like you. He was always defending you and he believes that you are a victim. You are my cousin but in fact, I feel that we are sisters. If it was possible, I would phone him but you know that he is in a military hospital and it is wartime. I promise I’ll discuss the matter with him in front of you to be sure that he likes you. If you leave I swear I won’t spend the war days here.’

Nagwa responded and spent the war days with her family.

Dr. Kamal returned home to find Shahinaze helping Joan in setting the dinner table. It was Ramadan. Both he and his sister had to eat at sunset that was an hour ago. But he had not changed the habits that he had known since childhood in his father’s palace. He had a shower then he wore his rob de chambre. He put a small cassette in the recorder so that they listen to the voice of Sheikh Mohamed Refaat reciting few verses of Quran. Then the Sheikh’s voice announces the sunset pray and fasting end. Then they started their dinner.

‘Pasha,’ Shahinaze called her brother using their father’s title that he would have had in old days in Royal Egypt that his Egyptian friends and relatives in London used to use. ‘I have some bad news.’

‘From the war front?’ he asked.

‘They say that some Israeli tanks could cross to the west in a counter attack,’ she said. In fact, she was annoyed and hoped he would assure her.

‘It happens in wars. I think the way they manage this war is different and the Egyptian Army will destroy them,’ he said proudly.

‘But I think Egypt has to stop fighting now,’ Joan said.

‘Not before taking the whole Sinai,’ he said involuntarily. He lit his pipe, stood and walked towards the window. He looked at the street through the widow glass then turned to face the two women. ‘If the Americans will intervene frankly then the war should stop. I trust Sadat and I think he is wise enough and not a stubborn. I think he will take the proper decision.’

In Cairo, the news of the small Israeli force that could cross the canal put the Egyptians under stress of controversial feelings. They

wanted to continue fighting but they knew that it would be catastrophic to continue after the Israelis used some new American weapons.

Tamer returned home late and he awakened Amal. 'I volunteered in the people's defence. They will send us to Suez,' he said.

'I think it is enough that the family has three men fighting,' Amal said half asleep.

'Don't you think that I'm a man too? They will train us to be ready for the combat,' he said.

Neither she nor the other three women in home could change his mind.

But next morning, both Egypt and Israel declared that they accepted a ceasefire. All were satisfied and they looked forward to know what would happen to disengage forces.

Nagwa returned to Garden City. It was better to be near to her workplace and to be in the metropolitan area. Many intellectuals used to gather in some cafes to chat sometimes and to go to see an exhibition together, to show a film that they would discuss later on, to listen to a new poet or read a short story that they would criticize. One day afternoon, she returned home very tired. She had her lunch with a friend in restaurant. She undressed and did not wear a gown but lay on bed. She did not know the time when she heard the phone ringing. It was dark. She switched on the lights of the reception. The ringing stopped before receiving the call. She felt cold and returned to the bedroom to wear something. She decided not to go out that night. Anyway, she had a lot to write about. She was about to finish her new novel. The phone rang again.

'Hello,' she said. It was Salwa. 'Oh, no,' she left the mouthpiece drop. She felt unbalanced and extended a hand not to fall. 'Oh, my God. Oh, my God.' She screamed loudly and fell on the floor. She put a hand on her mouth. 'Oh, my God, not him, not him. No God but Allah, Mohamed is the Prophet of Allah, not him My God,' she thought while trembling. But it was him. Emad martyred while removing a land mine to make the area safe for the victorious troops.

Nagwa avoided her uncle's family members while the family during the condolences days of Emad. Samira was in a terrible condition. She was sad for the guy. She was also too anxious about her son Ali who did not return from the front. Ibrahiem, his father and his cousin Tamer received men who came for condolences. He could not understand why Nagwa was neglecting him.

'Why are you neglecting Ibrahiem?' Salwa asked Nagwa.

'Everything has changed,' Nagwa said.

'Even your emotions towards him,' Salwa said.

'You don't understand,' Nagwa said and went to her room.

Samira had self-guilty feelings for what she had done to Nagwa. She thought that her son Ali was missing because God's punished her for her maltreating the niece who had come to ask about her uncle's family. She would accept any punishment but not including her son, she thought.

'I think you must go to Nagwa. I think she needs everybody around her now,' Samira said to Thurya.

'All of us need that. She lost a brother and we don't know anything about Ali my brother. May God save him,' Thurya said.

Amal entered the girl's room to find Nagwa holding the picture of Emad to her chest and crying.

'I considered him a son,' she said when she saw Amal.

'I know. But God chose him as a martyr. It is the God's will,' Amal said. She took Nagwa's head near her chest and rubbed her back. 'Why don't you talk to Ibrahiem?'

Nagwa did not respond but the spasmodic crying told Amal much. She thought that the couple quarreled again.

'I think it is time for you to rethink your life. There are many men and you have to think seriously about marrying someone else. I think Emad's soul and your parents' souls will be happy if you will do that.' Amal said.

'Let's see what will happen,' Nagwa said. It was the first time she did not object to the idea.

It was a trick from Amal and she became dead sure that something serious happened between Nagwa and Ibrahiem. She knew her niece and her agreement to marry somebody else was like a suicide for the woman who suffered much.

Salwa was beside Samira and Thurya when Ibrahiem excused himself. He had to be next morning in his unit on the front. He found that his mother was asking them to run the shop. She lost the desire of anything since the family had been officially notified that Ali had been missing. His brother Ibrahiem being a Colonel could not find out any more data. He felt somewhat enraged as the time was not suitable for such talks but he was enraged more when he found that both the sister and the cousin started making arrangements for the shop to be reopened after a week.

‘Won’t you see Nagwa before leaving?’ Samira said.

‘I think she needs some rest now,’ he said and left. He thought a lot about her total neglect of his presence. She did not even shake hands with him. He thought she expressed her refusal of being married to him.

Salwa and Thurya worked hard in the shop. Salwa knew from the first day that this had been a temporary job. She was not one of the owners. She took a high salary. Thurya never made anything embarrassing to her cousin but after sometime the fixed salary Salwa received made her think of alternatives. She learnt the secrets of cloths trade. She knew how to maximize profits. Usually they left the shop after midnight, but that day Salwa had to leave early because she would have a trip to Port Said city where she would buy some jeans for the shop from the free zone. She knew somebody who would help her to smuggle them away from the customer duty officers. She checked her make up in the small back room before leaving. They had to be too stylish and a la mode women to have the admiration and trust of their high-class customers. That helped selling their goods to the women whether they were from the high class or from the new rich class of postwar period. Both women studied English and French languages to speak in them with the high class that graduated from foreign language schools and to add some foreign language words in their statements with the *novo riche*. The later group usually asked them to choose for them. Some customers preferred to deal with Salwa and others liked Thurya. They succeeded to have some sort of friendship with some women.

‘Wait a minute,’ Thurya said. She picked a paper tissue and removed some of the rouge that went few millimeters outside the lips angle.

‘Is there anything else?’ Salwa asked.

'No,' Thurya said. 'Did you take the one thousand pounds?' Thurya said.

'No, I told them last time that I'd give them a check. This is much better as I'll try to make the date after three months. They'll agree as I intend to take a big sale. We'll distribute them in Alexandria and to some other shops at other districts in Cairo. Before the three months the account will cover the check,' Salwa said.

'You are a devil. But I'm afraid of that,' Thurya said.

'Well, I sign the checks and I'll use my account,' Salwa said.

Thurya knew the rules. Taking the risk should be compensated. 'Then you must have a percentage.'

'We'll talk about that later on. We're a family,' Salwa said.

'We're a family but business is business. You will have thirty per cent of the profits of this sale. Agreed?' Thurya said.

'Agreed.'

Salwa drove her small car to Garden City. She decided to see Nagwa. It was about seven pm. She parked her car behind her sister's and entered into the building. Nagwa was listening to Haleem's songs when she heard doorbell.

'Who are you?' Nagwa said while sitting in the reception. She was wearing only a T-shirt and tiny underwear. The fans around her failed to improve the high temperature of Cairo' hot summer.

'Salwa.'

Nagwa opened the door for her sister. She noticed that her sister was looking at nakedness questioningly. She smiled sarcastically and said, 'don't worry. I'm alone.'

Salwa picked a magazine and used it to further move air in front of her face. She threw the magazine and picked a tissue to dry up the few drops of sweats around her neck. Then she unbuttoned her blouse, unzipped her jeans trousers, and finally settled on a big cushioned sofa behind her sister.

'Do you want to eat something?' Nagwa asked.

'No I had lunch in a small restaurant near the boutique,' Salwa said.

'Then go to the fridge and bring us something to drink. It is too hot,' Nagwa said.

On her way to the fridge, Salwa asked her sister, 'do you need anything from Port Said?'

'No. But what Aunt Amal was talking about?' Nagwa said.

‘That’s why I’m here. She insists on returning to Ismailia. She says that Tamer or I may need the apartment in Abbassia. I argued that the apartment is hers now and she must know this. When Tamer graduates, he has to go out if he will marry. And I don’t think I’ll repeat this bad experience again. We have to keep this apartment a family home that collects us together.’

‘I said to her the same words but I don’t know that you won’t marry again and I don’t see a good reason for that,’ Nagwa said.

‘There is no such a man who will accept that his wife is out until midnight.’ Salwa said.

‘Do you think that you continue like this with that bitch Thurya forever?’ Nagwa said.

‘First I don’t see the girl a bitch. Second, soon I’ll have my own boutique in Zamalek,’ Salwa said.

‘You need a fortune to start,’ Nagwa said.

Salwa discussed the matter and she explained that if she succeeded in having some sales by checks she would do that for her own boutique.

‘Do you think that bitch Thurya will allow you? She will tell everybody that you are fired and she will ruin your reputation,’ Nagwa said.

‘No, because she wants to have her own trade and wants to buy the shop to work for her own instead of working for her family,’ Salwa said.

‘And Ibrahiem will be the big loser. Their parents spend their time in the balcony waiting for the missing son who will never return, as all know that after two years now he must be dead. Ibrahiem is an officer and he takes some money from his father every month provided that the business is going on,’ Nagwa said. It was the first time she talked about Ibrahiem since two years. The tone of her voice proved to Salwa that her sister’s emotions did not change.

‘Nagwa, everybody thinks about his interests and benefits now. The money will be for the whole family. I think uncle Abd-Allah will arrange something for him. Thurya will take her own share and she will start her own business. He chose to be an officer. This does not mean that his sister should work for him. Their father closed the publishing house. What is the difference?’

‘Yes, circumstances have changed. They will change more,’ Nagwa said.

‘Let me ask you a question,’ Salwa said.

'I'm all ears,' Nagwa expected the question so continued; 'you want to ask me about Ibrahiem. You noticed that I defended his rights. Yes, I still love him. Even after he decided to marry someone else, I had to be away from him.'

'I never heard about that. You know that Thurya tells me everything,' Salwa said.

Nagwa told Salwa about what Samira had said to her when she had visited them during the war.

'Oh, I see. Ibrahiem does not know anything about this story. Aunt Samira was thinking about his marriage but he refused the idea. But I never thought that this wicked woman talked to you like that. Anyway, she did not like our father much if you remember. Thurya has nothing to do with this whole story,' Salwa said.

'But Ibrahiem said to Thurya not to talk to me and not to know me at all,' Nagwa wore a masked face.

'It may be when he was angry with you,' Salwa said.

Nagwa went to prepare dinner. Salwa heard her singing in the kitchen.

Tamer stood on a table in the cafeteria of the Faculty of Commerce in Ain Shams University. He was engaged in a fierce discussion about politics. He decided not to attack anybody but to talk about the services he would ask the university to do for students if they elected him for the Student's Union. He had the charisma to gather students around him. He needed some money for printings some pamphlets for his propaganda.

Amal prepared the table for Tamer to have lunch. He ate while standing. He left most of his food untouched.

'You must eat. You did not have your breakfast. I left sandwiches for you before going to school but I found them untouched,' Amal shouted.

'I have to go to Salwa in the boutique right now,' he said.

'Salwa is in Port Said,' Amal said.

'Oh, shit,' he said.

'Mind your words. I'll never allow you to say such words here or anywhere,' she was too angry.

'Sorry,' he kissed her cheeks and hands.

'What do you want from Salwa?' He was an open book for her.

'Twenty pounds,' he said.

‘Why do you want this sum? The cigarettes you smoke make you penniless. But twenty pounds means that you plan for something more,’ she said.

‘I promised you that I won’t smoke anymore,’ he said.

‘I swear in God that I’ll beat you with the slipper if I discover that you smoke again. Tell me why do you want the money? And don’t lie.’ She said decisively.

‘I need them to make some ads for my electoral campaign,’ He said.

‘Electoral campaign,’ she beat her chest with her both hands. ‘I’ll call Nagwa. She is the only one who can teach you a lesson for that. We don’t have anything to do with politics.’

When Nagwa knew the news that her brother was a runner for the Students Union elections she went mad. She thought about calling Ibrahiem to be beside her but changed her mind. She left the office and drove her car to Abbassia. Involuntarily she passed at the building where her uncle family lived. She saw Ibrahiem getting out of the military car and heading towards the building. He saw her. Their eyes met. She stopped the car. He changed direction and went towards her car. She got out of the car before he reached it. They extended hands for each other but she threw herself and his arms received her.

‘I need you,’ she said.

‘Always I’m at your service,’ he said.

‘Someone told me that you would marry. It was during the war,’ she said.

‘I’ll never do. Why did you believe that? You had to ask me,’ he said.

‘I’m stupid,’ she said.

‘No, you are in love. I had to ask you also,’ he said.

‘Your pride prevented you. I know you,’ she said.

‘Who told you this big lie?’ he asked.

‘Not important. I know the truth now,’ she said.

‘We may have lunch together with parents,’ he suggested.

‘Let it be at aunt Amal’s house because I need you to talk to Tamer with me.’

She told him the story. He sent the driver soldier to tell his parents that he would be late and not to wait for him.

Abd-Allah Mazloom and his wife Samira spent most of time in the balcony. They did not loose hope that one day they would see their son Ali again. All around them felt pity for the parents who refused the fact. They told each other about stories of some men who were lost in wars, accidents and disasters but they just appeared again. Even the miracles that happened to some patients in hospitals were tales to be told as well. Tales were repeated many times. When one started to tell the other listened to stories as if it would be a new one. They listened to the news from a transistor on the small table on which glasses of tea were changing several times a day as if they did not like the glass full or empty.

‘Yesterday while I was in the bank I heard good news,’ Abd-Allah said.

‘About the lost soldiers?’ Samira asked hopefully.

‘They say that Israel keeps some war prisoners in its prisons. I believe Ali is one of them. Don’t forget he was an officer in the Chemical Warfare. He used to make smokes in front of the attacking troops not to be seen. The Israelis don’t like us to have such officers. They did not record their names in Prisoners of War’s files not to be obliged to exchange them,’ he said.

‘Yesterday while I was sleeping I had a dream. It was a vision more than a dream. I saw him eating with us. His military dress was very tidy and he was very smart,’ she said then after a pause of silence she added, ‘oh I miss him too much. I wish I see him before I die.’ She picked her handkerchief to dry up her tears.

‘I never say fairytales. I’ll phone Ibrahiem to check information about war prisoners. He is a Colonel and he knows persons, who know information,’ he stood up and walked slowly to the reception. After that he went to Ali’s room. They kept the room for the lost son. Even his cloths were kept in his closet. Abd-Allah looked at his son’s photo. He closed the door and had a sit on the nearest chair and cried. ‘May God save you my dear son,’ he whispered the statement several times.

Hussein was in his cell in the prison. A soldier opened the door and looked at him.

‘What do you want?’ Hussein shouted while he was half asleep. ‘I don’t like any son of a bitch like you disturb me. I told you that before.’

The soldier who knew that the political prisoners were not like others did not respond. He waited until the monster calmed down then said, 'The command of the prison wants you in his office.'

On his way he met his father in law Noor Sultan who was accompanied by a soldier also.

'This bitch Nagwa must have filed a new lawsuit against us. If I was out I would kill her.' Hussein said to Noor.

Noor did not comment and kept silent while walking.

In the office the Brigadier asked them to sit down. He took a piece of paper and started to read, 'the president of the Arab Republic of Egypt, ordered the release of Mr. Noor Sultan and Mr. Hussein Yousry on bases of health conditions. He also decided to release Mrs. Nesreen Noor Sultan after she spent half the period sentenced.' He looked at them and added, 'congratulation.'

'When can we leave?' Noor asked.

'Right now. Pack your belongings and a car will be waiting for you to take you wherever you want,' The Brigadier said. He let them hug each other then he added, 'usually lucky men who have this decision send a cable to thank the president.'

'You do that for us,' Hussein said.

'It should be handwritten first. I think you know that,' The Brigadier said.

They did.

Nagwa and Ibrahiem met each other frequently. Their relationship was stationary never waned and never developed. As if they were afraid of talking about marriage for fear that they would not have it at last. As if a hidden force binding them to each other, they could not do but to search for one another. They always met in public places. They had an undeclared agreement that they would not talk about marriage. But sometimes jealousy forced Ibrahiem to argue about a blouse that revealed much or a skirt that was too short. Frequently she obeyed him and never wore such cloths again but sometimes she enjoyed the game and argued the subject to make him more jealous. She tried to mind her words not to say the bad words she was used to use when she laughed with her friends or when she was nervous. If it happened that she caught him watch a pretty girl or a stylish lady when they were out together, she would express her jealousy with jokes first. If he insisted on either denying or repeating she would have gone mad. Usually she explained that in spite of being free to do what he liked it

would be improper to look at another woman when she accompanied him. The family condition also was an obstacle for their relationship to be developed. It was difficult for him to arrange for marriage while his brother was not known to be alive or dead. Or he thought so. It was too difficult for her to be a daughter of law to her Aunt and Uncle after the confessions she had told in the court. Or she thought so. She listened to his opinion about her articles, novels and new films. Then she might go crazy if he criticized anything. It was not that she did not accept criticism but she thought that he had to support her all the way. A wife husband relationship but it was without its complementary sexual part. Sometimes she felt that she needed him beside her on bed. Next day she would meet him and do anything to anger him. Few times she invited him frankly to her flat but he turned down the proposal. He did not want to have a relationship with her while his dignity made him hesitant to propose marriage again after the several refusals he had received. Another fact they noticed and never discussed. It was that sometimes when people saw her while being in public places, whispers about her past would start. Perhaps they were mistaken about their conclusion that they never discussed it, but she noticed his rigid face and sometimes he preferred to leave.

They were having lunch together in a small restaurant downtown when Salwa and Thurya accompanied them. Despite the separation both Salwa and Thurya did some business together. They would buy huge amount of goods and they would agree about distribution plans so that they could fix prices. The two businesswomen were engaged in a discussion that both Nagwa and Ibrahiem found it silly. Ibrahiem was meandering to the extent that Nagwa waved her hand in front of his face at last to orient him again.

‘Where are you?’ Nagwa said.

‘Oh, thinking about my parents. I don’t know what and how to answer their questions about Ali,’ Ibrahiem said.

‘I think you tell them the truth,’ Thurya said. ‘Ali is absent for two years now and after another two years they will tell us that he’s dead.’

‘I don’t think I can do that. In fact it is difficult even to me to think that he died,’ Ibrahiem said.

‘Of course it is difficult to me also. But I thought that you are an officer and you are accustomed to the facts and realities of life,’ Thurya said.

Nagwa felt nervous about the girl who had indifferent feelings towards the death of her younger brother. 'I think there is no need to make them suffer now,' she said. She looked at Ibrahiem and added, 'we hear about some absentees who returned after a long time.'

'Fairytale,' Thurya laughed. 'I don't like to be deceived by illusions.'

'I did not think that you are so hard-hearted before,' Salwa said. 'The idea of Ali being dead is scaring. Now two guys from this family lost their lives. Please stop talking about this subject.'

Salwa and Nagwa dried up few tears. Ibrahiem excused himself to go to the toilet where he cried alone. Thurya left because she had a meeting with some other businessmen.

When Ibrahiem returned he felt at ease when he found that his sister left. The three decided to go to cinema. They chose cinema Roxy at Heliopolis. It was 5.30pm so they decided to take their three small cars. It was about 6.15pm when the small cars parked in Roxy square. Nagwa stayed in her car. When Salwa and Ibrahiem felt that they waited for her longer than expected they went to see. She was crying.

'What happened,' Salwa said anxiously.

'They released Hussein. I've just listened to the news,' she said hysterically and repeated the statement.

They failed to calm her down. Salwa insisted that she had to take her sister to Abbassia. Nagwa refused but Ibrahiem insisted that Nagwa would not drive and took her in his car. All the way from Roxy to Abbassia she did not speak despite his several trials to talk to her.

'You go up with her and I shall go to Roxy and I'll drive her car to bring it here. Don't let her go out until I come,' he said to Salwa.

'What do you think of me to take decisions on my behalf,' Nagwa said sarcastically to him.

He did not respond.

In Salwa's room she held the picture of her father and mother near to her chest, 'I swear I shall continue. Sorry dad and mom that I stopped,' Nagwa whispered.

When Ibrahiem brought her car she refused to meet him. 'Tell this arrogant officer that I don't like officers at all. I don't like to see any of them. They are like their president who deceived us and convinced us that he would defend our freedom and take our revenge. Now we know that the president is like any other officer. Officers are

important for him regardless of what they committed against people. We are priceless slaves. Damn with all officers,' she shouted at Salwa. He heard and left.

Nagwa did not wait for the next morning but tiptoed her way out at dawn. It took ten minutes to reach her apartment in Garden City instead of nearly one hour through the traffic jam of the noon. While she was undressing one of sleeves did not leave her arm smoothly. She pulled it nervously cutting it and freeing her arm. She stood naked in the middle of the bedroom not knowing what to do next. She went to the reception and poured herself whiskey and drank it at once. She took papers and a pen and started to write. After about an hour she found that the torn papers filled the small rubbish basket. She tried to concentrate more but after another hour she was too tired without finishing the job. She screamed involuntarily and she threw the bottle that failed to help her towards a long mirror breaking them both. She tried to calm down. She chose a big chair and tried to relax. She fell asleep. The door bell rang at about noon.

'Who are you?' she asked while tuning her head right and left in astonishment about what she had done with the torn papers.

'Salwa,' she heard.

'Use your key,' she gave her sister a key to spend sometime during the day after the morning shift of the boutique. Sometimes Salwa spent a weekend with her for change.

Salwa did not astonish at the nakedness of her sister. Nagwa was used to spend most of her time in home naked especially when she was writing a new story. As if she wanted to be free of everything to liberate her ideas. Salwa was also used to undress as well in Nagwa's flat regardless of the climate conditions thanks to the air-condition that Nagwa was one of the few who had it then.

'How are you now? I passed at your office but they told me that they did not see any of you,' Salwa said. As if she expected the answer she did not stop and added, 'when we'll have a good telephone service. It takes shorter time to visit someone than waiting for a line.'

'Please, prepare something for us to eat until I have a shower,' Nagwa said. She knew that after calming down she would write.

'I'd like you to forget this Hussein forever,' Salwa said loudly from the small kitchen.

Nagwa did not respond until she had her shower and came to the living room where Salwa put their breakfast on a small table. Before

having the first bite of food she said, ‘I remember you told me that your husband once forced his way through you while you both had a big argument and you was angry but he insisted on having sex. What did you feel then?’

‘Humiliated,’ Salwa said in a low voice.

‘If you were raped in front of your parents and later on beaten regularly then sodomized, what would you feel? I wished this fucken Hussein would shoot father instead of letting him see his daughter and wife,’ Nagwa stopped and regretted her slipped tongue.

‘You said wife? Did they do that to mom?’ Salwa said and her hand started to tremble. The silence irritated her more and she screamed, ‘answer!’

‘No they did not do anything to mom. Just they forced her to see me,’ Nagwa said. She did not know how this tongue slip happened. She did not want any of her brothers and sisters know what happened to their mom not to hurt them. The pain would not be forgotten. ‘Believe me it was a tongue slip. They just threatened father but he died before they touch her.’ Her trembling voice and shaken body told about her lies.

‘They did it to mom. They did it,’ Salwa cried and screamed. She controlled herself to stop and said, ‘from now on you leave the revenge for me. I’ll hire a professional killer to kill this fucken Hussein. I swear in God I’ll do. No, it will be after kidnapping him and his wife and daughters and their rape will be the last thing he will see.’

‘No Salwa. Leave him to me and live your life. I’ll manage,’ Nagwa said.

‘How can you manage? The court refused to punish him because there are no witnesses. You will only write an article.’ Salwa said.

‘I shall make his and his family’s life hell,’ Nagwa said. The masked face that Salwa wore annoyed Nagwa too much so she added, ‘tomorrow I’ll start and I’ll write an article attacking the government for that decision.’

‘Are you an idiot of what? This decision is the president’s and they will never publish your article. But I can manage. I’ll go to our village in Upper Egypt and I’ll hire men to do the job,’ She collected her cloths, wore them despite Nagwa’s begging to stop.

‘No,’ Nagwa screamed. ‘You will end up in the prison. Enough is enough.’ Involuntarily she hit her sister. Then instantly she embraced her.

'I can't believe it. I can't believe they had done that to mom. They came to take me but I was at uncle Abd-Allah home. They took mom instead of me,' Salwa cried and both sat silent.

Nagwa went to the Cairo Telephone Central in Ramsis Street for the third day since she had sent her article to the Lebanese newspaper. Her trial to publish it in Lebanon came as a response to the Chief Editor's refusal to publish it in the women's magazine in which she was working.

'Hello, it is Nagwa Mazloom the Egyptian writer,' Nagwa said to the man on the other end in Lebanon.

'Yes I'm the Chief Editor Madam. I saw you telex today because I was in a holiday. I received your article that you had sent to your friend in Lebanon who works in this journal. Tomorrow we'll publish your article and I'll send you a copy with an air stewardess in the Middle East Airways. But to be honest I have to tell you that this article will cause you big troubles. You attack the president himself. You don't have such freedom in Egypt until now. Sadat is a kind man but not to this extent,' the Editor in Chief said.

'Never mind, publish it please,' Nagwa said.

She drove her car to the magazine.

In her boutique, Salwa was too nervous. She tried not to talk to her assistants and confined herself to her office in the top level of her two levels boutique. The coffee boy brought her the cigarettes she had asked. She was a non-smoker but all of a sudden, she started to smoke three packs three days ago. She took a sip of her morning coffee.

'Shit,' she shouted and pushed on the ring button to call the coffee boy again. 'Since when you idiot I drink my coffee sweetened.' She threw the cup towards his face. She called the senior sale assistant. The girl came to her and was too anxious.

'Yes, Madam. Any problem?' the girl said.

'No. I shall be out for a week. Please be sure that everything is going on normally. I have zero tolerance to faults now,' Salwa said.

The coffee boy brought another one to her. It was sugar free.

'I think I have been here for about two years and I know that you trust me,' the girl said.

'Of course, I consider you one of the family. I know what you want to say. It is a personal crisis and I'll manage it,' Salwa dried up a teardrop.

'Are you crying madam?' the girl asked.

'I think that I humiliated the boy. Give him ten pounds and comfort him. I'm going now to Nagwa's flat. Tomorrow I'll be in our village in Upper Egypt. It may take a week or even ten days to be here again. The money is in the safe. Take any decision you think that it is right,' Salwa stood up and before leaving desk she added, 'Oh My God, I was about to forget. Give the new girl twenty pounds I was too rude to her yesterday.'

'You're too kind Madam,' the girl said.

'Not too kind as you think,' Salwa said.

It was dawn when Nagwa heard the knocking at her door. She was reading her article in the Lebanese journal that was sent to her with an air stewardess.

'Use your key Salwa. I'm in bed,' she shouted.

'Open the door,' a man shouted back. She opened the door, 'who are you?'

'Would you come with us please?' the security officer said.

'There is no need for please. I know I have no choice,' she smiled. She expected them. They did not go with her inside her bedroom to change.

In a small room they left her about three hours alone. A soldier opened the door.

'Are you Nagwa Mazloom?' he asked.

'Yes,' she responded indifferently.

'Come with me!' he said.

'Is it time now?' she asked.

He looked at her wondering what to say. He did not respond.

She was allowed to enter an office of a high rank officer. In less than two minutes, she unzipped the dress she had chosen to be easily undressed. She wore no bra and no panties.

'I'm ready to be raped,' she said.

The shocked officer stood up, left his desk, and turned to see the window. 'Put on your cloths,' he said quietly.

'Why? This is what you do here. It happened to me here before. You may know Hussein Yousry. He ordered his soldiers to rape me. You may do and don't worry. I've no witnesses,' she said.

The officer left the office. She cried in silence. She stayed in the office for about an hour. Then he came to discover that she was still naked.

‘Please put on your cloths and the General wants to see you. We don’t torture or violate the rights of human beings now since the Corrective Revolution,’ he said.

‘Then why did you come at dawn like the old times?’ she asked.

‘It was a mistake. You are not wanted. We want to tell you that you are not allowed to write in foreign journals without permission. You had to be told through your work place,’ he said.

The General was waiting for her at the door of his office. He extended a hand for her, ‘sorry for the misunderstanding. You may have a seat.’ He sat beside her on the sofa. ‘I studied your case personally and I know that you have the right to be too angry. This Hussein Yousry was a monster.’

‘Then why did you release him? I know he has no illness. They raped my mother in front my father also. Is it justice to reward him forgetting his victims,’ she cried uncontrollably.

‘Sometimes political decisions need other calculations. Sometimes we release a person to follow him up. Moreover, I can tell you that he will flee and this may help us to expose a hostile net taking a base in a foreign country. Their foreign bank accounts may be of value to us. I tell you that confidentially and I do because I feel that you need an explanation and you deserve that,’ he said.

‘Thank you,’ she said.

‘Before you leave may I ask you about your new novel? I’m one of your readers and I think you let readers wait long for a new one,’ he said smiling.

‘Next month it will be on shelves of libraries. I’ll send you a copy,’ she said.

‘It will be a pleasure if you do. These are my phone numbers.’ He gave her his personal card.

Sidi Al-Mazloom village was a small one in Minia Governorate. Salwa hired a car from Minia city to the village. There she did not know where to go first. She had distant uncles and cousins. Nearly all of them were used to come to her father’s house when they have something to do in Cairo. She thought twice about going to her eldest distant uncle Mahmood, as she was not sure that it was the correct step. She asked

him to take her to the Omda (the landlord) who was an uncle also but younger than Mahmood. On their way to the Omda, they were riding two donkeys. A boy was running beside her to save her if the donkey decided to run or she was to fall. The skirt she wore exposed a great deal of her thigh and the boy could not prevent his eyes from having a look. Mahmood hit the boy with his stick and decided that they should return to his house to wear one of decent dresses of his wife. At last, they reached the Omda's home.

'Welcome to your home,' the Omda extended his arms and hugged her. 'You are the daughter of a beloved man and beloved woman. You had to come to the Omda's home immediately but Mahmood is our biggest man here. Going there is the same as going to the Omda.' The Omda said.

'I need four men,' she said.

'I'll tell the Omda,' Mahmood said decisively.

'You tell me Mahmood after dinner,' the Omda said.

'Salwa will have dinner with her aunt, my wife,' Mahmood said.

'Then your wife and daughters should have come with you here. Today here and tomorrow we come to your home. Send for them to come here,' the Omda said.

'Then tomorrow you and your family will have lunch with us,' Mahmood said.

'It will be an honor to do,' the Omda said.

'The honor is ours,' Mahmood responded.

It took two hours for the dinner table to be set. Mahmood and the Omda invited Salwa because she was their guest from Cairo to have dinner with them. Other women waited for them until they finished before they would dine.

After dinner, the Omda asked Salwa and Mahmood to have tea in his office and ordered that nobody would come in.

'What do you want my daughter?' the Omda said.

'I want to kill Hussein Yousry,' she said.

'I told you that I shall tell the Omda,' Mahmood interrupted her.

'We don't kill my daughter,' the Omda said.

'It is taking revenge,' Mahmood said.

'Tell me the story,' the Omda said to Mahmood. He looked at Salwa, 'you go to spend sometime with your aunt and cousins.'

'But I want to discuss the subject in more details,' Salwa said.

'Taking revenge is men's business. Mahmood will tell me and we shall decide. That's all,' he said decisively.

Nagwa continued her routine writing in the women's magazine but the relations between her and the Chief Editor went from bad to worse. As a Nasserist, the Chief Editor did not like what Nagwa wrote and she did her best to prevent many of Nagwa's articles. In the evenings, Nagwa spent much of her time in a small café in the downtown where she was used to meet her friends from the press and media. Her new novel was about to be ready for publishing but the problem was that the publisher asked her to make some changes. She used offensive language that was not usually used in literature. She decided to publish it as serials in the magazine but the Chief Editor refused. Instead of going to the café, she drove to Zamalek where a producer's office was in one of its buildings.

'I'll be happy to transform this to a film. But do you think the censorship will agree to the idea?' the producer asked her.

'Then I understand that you refuse it,' Nagwa said.

'No, if I refused it I would say it. But leave a copy to me and I'll do my best and you start writing the script,' he said.

'Agreed,' she said.

Nagwa returned that day to her flat very happy. She found her sister Salwa in the reception listening to one of the legendary singer Om Kolthom.

'I'll have a shower then let's have the dinner out,' Nagwa said.

'Why?' Salwa said.

'Today I agreed with the producer to transform my new novel to a movie,' Nagwa said.

'First I will tell you that Ibrahiem is angry with me,' Salwa said.

'Why?' Nagwa was too astonished.

'Men came to him from the village and told him that the Omda is angry because he did not tell him before about Hussein,' Salwa said.

'Who told the Omda about Hussein?' Nagwa asked.

'I went there to hire some men to kill Hussein. They knew and they considered the revenge is theirs,' Salwa said.

'What did you tell them exactly?' Nagwa asked.

'I told them everything happened in the detention site. Of course I did not tell them about you being his mistress because they will not understand that you were forced to do,' Salwa said.

‘What did they say to Ibrahiem?’ Nagwa asked.

‘I don’t know exactly but he came to the shop in Zamalek and shouted at me a lot then he left too angry,’ Salwa said.

‘Do you think I phone him now?’ Nagwa said.

‘Yes please, you know that I don’t like to have a row with anyone especially Ibrahiem,’ Salwa said.

‘I did not talk to him for about three months now. I’ll try to invite him for the dinner not mentioning you and when he comes I think we can discuss the matter,’ Nagwa said.

Hussein and Nesreen lived in Noor’s house. The three felt that their destiny is just the same. Noor asked Hussein to find a way so that they might go to Libya where Magid was leading a comfortable life there. Both Noor and Hussein had bank accounts in Switzerland and they just wanted to be abroad. Hussein was looking through the window after he had promised Noor that he would find a way. He saw two villagers looking at the house and going around it several times.

‘They sent their men after us,’ Hussein said.

Nesreen did not know what her father and her husband’s plan responded, ‘who sent whom?’

‘The intelligence sent men to know what we are up to. The stupid officer who sent them had to know that I would notice them. I think they are not well trained. In old good days I had much better agents when I was in charge.’ He said.

‘Please stop talking about the old good days because they were not good at all. After all, we spent years in the prison. Let’s discuss what we are going to do now. I feel imprisoned again in this house,’ she said.

He looked at her but he did not respond.

Noor came carrying a cup of café. He did it himself because he wanted to do anything. There were not servants in the big house. They closed most of rooms and lived in two bedrooms and the reception. The telephone did not ring at all. They had used it to call family members or friends when they came to the house after the imprisonment years but their trials did not open the closed social circles with those who once had welcomed them. Noor had a seat near to the old white and black TV.

‘I think the 6 o’clock news is now,’ Noor said.

Nesreen stood up, ‘I’m going out for a walk.’

Hussein did not respond but closed the window’s rapier and looked through the slits of slivers to see what the two men would do

when Nesreen would walk in the street. His young pretty wife did not draw the attention of the two villagers.

‘You may go out Noor,’ Hussein said.

‘Why?’ Noor asked.

‘Because I want to see what these stupid guys will do,’ Hussein said.

‘Do you think they are following us?’ Noor said.

‘Yes and I want to put a sound plan for fleeing the country,’ Hussein said.

Noor went to a nearby café but the two men did not follow him. Hussein knew they were after him personally. When Noor returned, he found Hussein irritated.

‘Why are you nervous?’ Noor asked.

‘I’m not nervous. They are after me because they know that any plan to flee the country depends upon me. I should stay here while arranging the escape. We have to tell Nesreen,’ Hussein said.

At about 10 pm Nesreen returned. She went mad when she saw ashes of cigarettes on the carpet around Hussein.

‘Why didn’t you use the ashtray? I’m the woman who cleans here. We have no servants. The slums that you came from are different from houses in which we live now. Do you understand?’ she said.

‘Then you do the job of the servant. This is the rule here. I put the rules. I’m the law in this fucken house. It happened that you and your father in my group. It is your bad luck that I’m your husband,’ Hussein shouted at her.

‘You have to be more decent when you talk to your wife especially when I’m present,’ Noor shouted.

Hussein was dependant upon the money Noor was hiding. Noor depended upon Hussein to flee the country. Hussein stopped.

‘And you have to talk to your husband more decently as well,’ he said to his daughter.

They told her their plans. Hussein spent all night observing the two men. By dawn, he went to the bedroom. The humiliation that he received from Nesreen was turning him on. He thought about Shahinaze who had understood when he needed further insults. Nagwa understood that as well. He approached his wife and decided to insult her so she may retaliate to his pleasure. He caught her arm firmly. She got up.

‘You are just a slut whom had been fucked all around when you were in the collage,’ he said.

'You are just an animal who does not know how to treat ladies,' she said. She tried to force him with the other arm.

He started to build up what he wanted. 'I'll teach you a lesson,' he said. He turned her on her belly and took off her panties. He forced a finger into her anus. 'This is the ass that had been fucked continuously.'

'It hurts. You are an animal,' she tried to liberate herself.

He sodomized her. He calmed down. 'I love you Nesreen. Really I do love you.'

She looked at him. She saw a tortured face. She took his head on her breast and emotionally she said, 'tell me your story. I think you suffered a lot. I'm your wife. Let's have a chance to live together. I understand something now, which you need for pleasure. Tell me about yourself.'

Tears dropped on her flesh between her breasts.

'My father and mother tortured me a lot when I was a child,' he said. He cried. It was the first time he felt sympathy from a woman. Safia was just obedient. Shahinaze and Nagwa gave him the impression of being forced to do. Nesreen found no way but to live with him and wanted to be understanding. 'When I had got bad marks in the school I had been beaten severely by my mother's slipper and my father's belt until mother would have brought the whip. He had been whipping me until she would have brought the fire hot fork to burn me. I have permanent marks in my back. Sometimes he deprived me of the food for a day or two. It had been too important for my father to make me an officer because all our family men had been farmers except him. He had not had a university degree and had spent all his life waiting for a governmental promotion. We had been living in the city and in the village everybody had been considering us of a higher social class. He had been dreaming about marrying me to the Omda's daughter Safia and he had achieved his dreams.' He cried loudly.

She understood him. She had studied psychology in the faculty and she knew how parents might make sadist.

Ibrahiem parked his car in front of the restaurant where he would have a dinner with Nagwa. He took few steps then he stopped when he saw Salwa. Both women smiled and he continued. He had a sit beside Nagwa facing Salwa. Two half-filled bottles of beer were on the table.

'First time I know you drink beer,' he said to Salwa.

‘Sometimes I do,’ she took a cigarette from her Kent cigarette box.

‘I think you asked me to come to discuss what Salwa did in the village,’ he said to Nagwa.

‘I feel tortured. When Nagwa told me about what happened to mom I wanted to revenge,’ she said.

‘How come you want to kill? You will be just a criminal. God revenges for your mom and dad. And I think there is a law in this country,’ he said.

‘But the law needs witnesses. They torture people behind closed doors and the judge needs witnesses,’ Nagwa said sharply.

‘I understand that you agree to what Salwa tried to do,’ he said.

‘No,’ Nagwa said firmly. ‘But please don’t tell about the law anymore,’ Nagwa said.

‘Ibrahiem, we are from Upper Egypt. Our revenge is our honor. I went there to spare you and Tamer my brother the duty of taking revenge,’ Salwa said.

‘I completely refuse this and I think vendetta will end gradually. We are the intellectuals should start that,’ he said.

Salwa stood up and spat on his face and left.

‘I’m sorry. I did not think that this girl is crazy,’ Nagwa said. She took his hand between her hands.

‘The Omda did the same when I tried to clear my point of view but he did it in the phone,’ Ibrahiem said.

Hussein told Noor and Nesreen not to switch on the lights in the room in which he spent most of time observing the two villagers who were observing him. He was waiting for Nesreen. He sent her to buy something and to contact some persons.

‘Well this is the farmer’s cloths you asked me to buy. I think they will fit you.’ Nesreen said before she had a sit.

‘Did you meet to my assistant?’ he asked.

‘Yes,’ she said. ‘He says that tomorrow he will tell me the final arrangements.

‘Good job,’ he said indifferently.

‘Will this man come with us to Libya?’ she asked.

‘If he likes that he may come. Why do you ask?’ he said.

‘I did not like him. He is very ugly and rude,’ she said.

‘But he does fine jobs. He is faithful,’ he said.

Nagwa returned to the flat to find Salwa drinking her fourth whiskey glass and smoking her second pack.

‘It is good that you did not marry this queer,’ Salwa said. She was drunk.

‘What’s the problem with you Salwa? You are used to be smart, decent and understanding,’ Nagwa said.

‘They fucked mom,’ Salwa tried to stand up to go to the toilet to bring up. She fell again on the sofa and vomited on the floor.

‘It is all right. You drank a lot,’ Nagwa said.

‘You know if you died I would take your revenge even if I did not know what had happened to mom. But you just failed to take your revenge and hers. Someone should take the revenge. Your brother Tamer is just another queer. I phoned him to kill Hussein. I did not tell him that I told the Omda who considered it his responsibility first to know the response of Tamer. Your brother is just another queer. He did not accept to kill the monster,’ Salwa said. ‘We have no men.’ She laughed hysterically. Then she cried.

Nagwa helped Salwa to go to the bathroom. She filled the tub and the cold water helped the drunken woman.

Safia was in her father’s house setting the table for the lunch. Her father’s driver came annoyed.

‘Dalal and Maysa disappeared,’ the driver said.

‘My daughters!’ she cried.

Her father Sheikh Abd El-Gawad the ex-Omda came to her risqué but it was too late.

‘I knew he would kidnap them. Hussein is not a human. He has no heart. I feel that I won’t see them again,’ she cried.

‘How come he kidnaps an eighteen and twenty years old girls,’ Abd El-Gawad said. He looked at the driver, ‘tell me the whole story.’

‘I was waiting for them at the train station as I do everyday. When they came, I opened the door for them and they rode into the car. Then someone hit my head from behind and I fell. I tried to stand but I saw four men jump into the car and one of them hit me several times on my head and I fell unconscious. When I brought back I did not find the car,’ the driver said.

Hussein wore farmer’s cloths and he was sitting beside his daughters. They knew him but were just scared. The car stopped at a desert road and they were transferred to a lorry where Nesreen and

Noor were at the back. The driver of the lorry was chosen by Hussein's assistant. He was a man of the desert. His job was to carry anything through the desert away from the police's eyes. The three men who accompanied Hussein to kidnap his daughters drove back after being well paid. The assistant accompanied Hussein and his family. By the night, the lights of Ben-Ghazi the Libyan city became nearer gradually.

Nagwa read the first articles written by Noor and Hussein few days later when the communicating officer brought the Libyan newspapers to some journalists to respond. He asked them to write attacking the Libyan regime. She heard Noor's sound in the Libyan radio that night. She phoned the Omda and told him. He sent for his men to be back.

After few days, Salwa knew. She read an article in the newspaper accusing Noor and Hussein of betraying the country. She went mad. She phoned the Omda.

'He escaped. Your stupid men stood in front of the building like stones and he escaped. When you say that you will do something, I think this is a promise Omda. You have no men. You have queers,' Salwa shouted at the Omda.

'The idiots said that when they asked the porter he said that the devil went out wearing a farmer's dress and covering his face with a shawl. I gave them a good beat. The revenge is mine even if we shall go after him to the end of the world,' he said.

'Bullshit,' she said and threw the receiver.

Next day Nagwa read in the classified ads that Olalla boutique in Zamalek was for sale. She phoned Salwa.

'What do I read about your boutique?' Nagwa said.

'I'll quit,' Salwa's voice was too sad.

'Can we have lunch together?' Nagwa said.

'But don't say to Ibrahiem or Tamer. I deleted them from my life,' Salwa said.

Amal heard Salwa telling Nagwa that she did not want to see any of Tamer and Ibrahiem. She noticed the tense relations between Salwa and Tamer and failed to know the cause. She entered Salwa's bedroom.

'What happened Salwa?' Amal asked.

'Nothing,' Salwa said.

‘My daughter, sometimes one thinks that his or her point of view is right and other persons are terribly mistaken. But after a while things change,’ Amal said.

‘Why did not you tell me that they had fucked mom as well as Nagwa? Don’t answer. I’ll tell you. Because everybody thought that, the small decent Salwa is so delicate that she might be severely hurt. But you will know how this delicate woman will just revenge. How the family dignity will be preserved.’ Salwa said. Suddenly she screamed. She stood and threw a vase breaking it then she cut her gown then fell unconscious. Tamer came, carried her, and called a doctor. The doctor asked Amal to transfer her to a hospital to be treated from a nervous collapse

Nesreen worked in the same newspaper in which her brother had been writing. She spent most of her time in the newspaper to be away from home. She lived her days as if waiting for something that would not come. She did not share the high optimism of her husband, father and brother or returning to Egypt victorious. Even her articles were not so aggressive against the Egyptian regime like the articles that the three men wrote. She tried to write about women and fashion to avoid policy. Her relation with Hussein's two daughters was good as the three felt that they had no choice about their fate. She asked Hussein to let her do her role as a step mother to spare them his brutality. They preferred to talk to her and they felt as if she were their big sister more than a mother.

Salwa was happy when the doctor discharged her from the hospital. Ibrahiem came to accompany her with other family members.

'Thank you for coming,' she said to Ibrahiem.

'You welcome. It is my duty. Who else may accompany you? I'm more than a cousin. I'm your big brother,' he said.

'I know. I hurt you too much,' she said.

'Don't mention it. I shall visit you in your boutique. When will you return to work?' he said.

'After few days,' she said.

In the house Amal was setting a table for dinner for the whole family. She tried to force Salwa to eat more. Salwa was on treatment. Part of her illness was anorexia nervosa that made her refuse food as a reaction to her primary condition. The doctor put her on a psychotherapy program. She lost weight and Amal was too anxious about her. When she went to have a rest in her bedroom, Amal had a sit beside Nagwa.

'Will her condition improve?' Amal asked.

'Yes, Ibrahiem and I talked to the doctor and he assured us that it is a temporary condition,' Nagwa said.

'What is most important is that you make sure that she takes her medicines,' Ibrahiem said. He looked at Tamer and said, 'don't ever make her nervous.'

'Dare you? I swear that I'll give him hard time if he does,' Amal said warningly.

'If he does anything bad to her, you just phone me,' Nagwa said.

Few days later Salwa went to her boutique. The first thing she did was telling her staff that the boutique would not be sold as she had planned before. The café-boy brought her a cup of Turkish café with cake, her usual snack before doing anything. She took a sip from the cup then she asked him to take it. She felt pit nervousness so she decided to go to Groppi to meet Thurya. The waiter brought her hot chocolate but she did not touch it. Thurya came delighted.

‘If you see Tamer, please tell him that everything is ready,’ Thurya said.

‘I don’t understand,’ Salwa said.

‘Tamer knows a man who needs one hundred thousand dollars. I don’t know why this man needs this entire sum. But the profit is two piaster for the dollar so this makes a total of two thousand pounds. Tamer asked me to share him and I have my contacts you know. The banknotes are in my safe right now,’ Thurya said.

‘Oh my God, are you crazy or what? What if they discover what you are up to? Both of you will go to jail,’ Salwa said. It was severely punishable to trade in foreign currency then days.

Thurya just laughed and left.

Salwa went to Garden City. On her way she bought the three governmental newspapers and some magazines. She needed to be alone for a while. In Nagwa’s apartment she felt at ease especially when Nagwa was in the magazine. She relaxed on a sofa then she heard the click of the door key. Nagwa threw her hand bag and dropped herself on a big chair.

‘This bitch the Chief Editor did not publish my last article because it attacked Libya for receiving the Nasserists who fled the country,’ Nagwa said.

‘Calm down first,’ Salwa said. ‘Have you tea?’

‘No, thanks, I’ll call the office of the culture minister and I’ll complain. I hope they send her to the prison and fuck her,’ Nagwa said.

Salwa stood up and slowly she went to the kitchen. In the kitchen she turned her head right and left several times. Her eyes drove her towards the fridge. She opened the door and picked the first plate she saw. She sat on the ground and started to eat. She finished the plate and stood up and took another one. ‘Fuck her,’ she was whispering.

Nagwa finished her phone calls and discovered that Salwa was not in the living room. She called her but her sister did not respond. She

went round the apartment until she entered the kitchen. Salwa was sitting on the floor eating with her both hands and empty plates were around her.

‘Salwa, what are you doing?’ Nagwa asked.

‘They fucked mom,’ Salwa said and she started to bring up.

Nagwa helped her sister and took her to the bathroom. She helped her sister to dry up her body before dressing her in a gown and took her to the bedroom. Salwa was flexing her knees and elbows on the bed. Nagwa tried to comfort her and the sick woman went into deep sleep. Nagwa was about to meet the minister next day so she stayed in the home. She spent the day in cleaning the kitchen, washing her sister’s cloths and cooking. After two hours Salwa woke up in a good state as if nothing happened. Nagwa prepared the dinning room for their lunch but Salwa could not eat but for small pieces of bread and very few amount of salad.

‘You don’t eat Salwa,’ Nagwa said.

‘Please don’t push me. I feel nauseating,’ Salwa said.

‘When are you going to the doctor?’ Nagwa asked.

‘Today,’ Salwa stood up. ‘I’ll change and I’ll go to the boutique before going home.’

Next week Nagwa became the youngest Chief Editor in Egypt because the minister was convinced that she was right. She wrote an article attacking Hussein, Noor, Magid and Nesreen. Before sending the article to the print she received a phone call.

‘Hello, yes I’m Nagwa Mazloom.’

‘Please don’t tell anybody now until the president declares himself.’

‘I understand.’

‘The Israeli prime minister responded positively to Sadat’s initiative and the president will go to Jerusalem.’

‘Oh, my God, I can’t believe.’ She switched on the TV.

A journalist rushed to its office. ‘The BBC says that Sadat will go to Jerusalem,’ the young man said.

‘Close the door and keep quiet,’ she said. She gave him papers and a pen then ordered, ‘write about the president’s trip.’

She started writing about the trip with controversial feelings.

Shahinaze in London received the news of Sadat going to Jerusalem with strange feelings. She was not sure about the reaction of

Nagwa. She decided to phone her and she knew that Nagwa was supporters of the new policy. Then she asked her about the reaction of Ibrahiem.

‘I don’t know. I did not talk to him about that. But people here just want to go out of this mess. They want to build upon the military victory. Every family here lost a son. Enough is enough,’ Nagwa said.

‘But the Palestinians here are very angry. They say that Sadat cheated on them,’ Shahinaze said.

‘But Yasser Arafat was present when Sadat proposed to go to Jerusalem and he applauded,’ Nagwa said.

The conversation ended without predicting anything. Shahinaze spent the evening at her brother’s home. When she was discussing the subject with him she found that Kamal had some objections.

‘Do you prefer killing each other while there might be a chance for peace?’ Joan asked Kamal.

‘I don’t say that but if Israel wants peace then why it does not apply the UN decisions directly. I doubt that this step may lead to anything. Perhaps it will divide the Arab stance for nothing,’ Kamal said.

‘But it is already divided and they will not help us financially to fight again. If the condition continued it will lead to another “no war no peace” state,’ Shahinaze said.

‘I think you are right but something inside me just rejects the whole thing,’ Kamal said.

‘This is the psychological barrier that Sadat told. Anyway wars end on negotiation tables. France and Germany are now allies. Nobody thought about that during the world war two,’ Shahinaze said.

‘This man will be either a hero or a big loser,’ Kamal said.

The day Sadat landed on Israel would never be forgotten in history. It became clear that only few political groups opposed the step in Egypt. The hero reception given to Sadat when he returned made the emotional people think that peace and development would change their life quickly. Tamer was with his friends in the faculty of commerce. He was in the end year. He was engaged in a discussion about peace and war. A Palestinian student shouted at them and cursed Sadat. It was a big fight and the security took them all. When he returned he told Salwa about what happened.

‘Are you crazy?’ Salwa cried. ‘The rule in this house is no policy.’

‘But I support the government,’ he tried to defend himself.

‘Father supported it before,’ she said and phoned Nagwa.

An hour later Nagwa had a big fight with Tamer. She slapped him on face.

‘I think enough is enough. I’m not going to have lectures from a whore or a mad woman who is still on treatment. I’m old enough to decide for myself,’ he shouted.

Nagwa felt humiliated but she felt that Salwa was broken by her younger brother’s words. Salwa left for her room silently. She locked the door after her.

‘Okay man. From now on you will never have a piaster from me or from the crazy woman. Men don’t take money from mental patients or whores,’ Nagwa said and went to Salwa’s room. ‘Open the door. For my own sake and for aunt Amal’s sake please open the door.’

Salwa opened the door and threw herself on Nagwa’s arms. ‘I hope I was the whore not the crazy who spent days in the asylum,’ she cried.

Nagwa insisted that she would take her sister with her. When they were about to leave Ibrahiem came. Amal phoned him. He talked harsh to Tamer. When Ibrahiem was accompanying the humiliated women Tamer just threw himself at Salwa and apologized to her. He kissed her hand and cried. She embraced him. Nagwa insisted that Salwa would live with her.

Next day it was a hard time for the whole family. Ibrahiem was in his office. His parents were alone after Thurya left for her boutique. The doorbell rang. It was a soldier carrying a letter for Abd-Allah from the Army headquarters.

Mr. Abd-Allah Mazloom

Your son Ali Abd-Allah Mazloom is absent for four years now. His absence was due to military operations during October 1973. The army has the honor to tell you that your son was considered a martyr according to law. Please come to the military pension department to have the compensation and a monthly pension.

Best regards

The Chief

The military pension department

Tears fell from the father.

‘Oh, no, it can’t be,’ Samira fell down.

Nagwa made sure that her sister took her medicines and that she went to her psychiatrist regularly. They laughed at what the doctor was asking Salwa to tell or to do. He was exploring the dark side of her personality or they thought that. He asked a lot about her relation with her ex-husband and if he had been raping her. It was not his fault completely as Salwa did not tell him that the victim was her mother. She became bored of lying on his couch. The medication improved her markedly to an extent that the woman could eat normally and returned to her Olalla boutique. But there was something hidden made her cry when she showed tragedy films or hear about people's sufferings. The memories of Emad and Ali were her favorite when she closed her bedroom door. She was used to see family pictures just to remember the events when both were alive and then she would cry. Something nobody knew.

Thurya came to Salwa's Olalla one day. She closed the door behind her as if she was about to tell a secret.

'I'm thinking about going to Europe,' Thurya said.

'Why?' Salwa did not understand what her cousin was about to tell.

'I'd like you to come with me,' Thurya said. She stopped to see the reaction on Salwa's face.

'First what are you going to do in Europe? If I know you I can say that you will not go for tourism,' Salwa said indifferently.

'Business,' Thurya said. She waited for Salwa's reaction.

'I see you are going to buy some cloths and bring them. Port Said city in Egypt solved this problem now after the government declared it a free trade city,' Salwa said.

'This type of business is not good now. A friend wants to send dollars to Switzerland and we'll have ten percent,' Thurya whispered.

'Are you crazy?' Salwa screamed.

'Calm down,' Thurya said. 'Two or three trips and we'll lead a comfortable life as long as we live,' Thurya said.

'But we lead a comfortable life now. The last thing I want to do is smuggling dollars then going to jail,' Salwa said.

'I need three persons. We shall travel separately to different destinations. Then we fly to Switzerland. We'll enter it with forged passports, and return to where we were. We'll destroy the forged passports and return home with the real ones. No body will know anything,' Thurya said.

'No, I'm not going with you,' Salwa said.

'I told Tamer and he will be our third partner. Don't tell anybody and think twice before turning the proposal down,' Thurya said and left.

In the evening Thurya was at a party in Zamalek. The businessman who asked her to smuggle dollars for him was treating her like a princess.

'The devil cannot plan with such cleverness,' the man said.

'The problem is that Salwa did not decide yet,' Thurya said.

'Did you tell her that she and her brother would travel but you would not go there?' he asked.

'Of course I did not. When they reach Switzerland, they will find a telegraph waiting for them that I won't come because of some emergency. I plan to be admitted to a hospital here. They will carry all the money. If they discover them, I shall tell that I don't know anything about them. I will not apply for Switzerland visa or any other European visas during this time. They will have their ten percent and I'll have my twenty percent while I'm here. I'll tell them that I'll be the third person who travels because I'll take care of guys who will help them pass the custom department which is true,' Thurya said. She looked at the businessman and added suspiciously, 'you are sure of these guys, aren't you?'

'Of course, after all the money is mine and its safety is more important to me than your cousins' safety,' he said.

'I'd never forgive you if something bad happened to them,' Thurya said.

'You don't worry,' he said.

When Thurya returned home, she found her brother Ibrahiem reading a book about the 1973 war and writing some comments on a notebook.

'You should have some rest Ibrahiem. Tomorrow you will get up early,' she said.

‘I think I have to read everything written about the 1973 war as I teach now in the military college and cadets ask too many questions,’ he said.

She brought a sum of money from her handbag and gave it to Ibrahiem, ‘your pocket money. It is supposed that I would give it to Dad tomorrow to give it to you. I think you take it now. I’ll do the calculations and I’ll leave them to Dad with the rest of the money he had asked me to bring from the bank,’ she said.

‘Dad gives me the money. It is his money. I don’t take anything from you,’ he left the room angry.

Tamer filled the application form and gave it to his friend in the collage. He took the decision. He decided not to tell his sisters.

‘Are you sure they will accept it?’ Tamer asked.

‘Yes, they want students to have a base in the university,’ his friend said.

‘But I see that most of the members of the Socialist Union hurried to be in the new party,’ Tamer said.

‘Because they know the President’s party will be the ruling party. In our country it is better to be one of the regime’s men,’ his friend said.

After a week Tamer became a member of Misr Party, the first party Sadat formed to inherit the Arab Socialist Union.

Nagwa chose a table that was in a corner of the small restaurant that was in Talaat Harb Street. She became somewhat famous and she did not like to spend the time with Ibrahiem in smiling at people or signing their autographs. He came in time as usual. He was still angry with his sister.

‘But I think Thurya did not do a mistake,’ Nagwa said.

‘But she has to understand that she does not pay my pocket money,’ he said.

‘She understands that but she manages the family properties now after uncle Abd-Allah stopped working,’ she said. She did not like Thurya but found her innocent this time.

‘What type of management is it? Buying some lands and selling them after few months at a higher price. That is what she does. Is this my Dad’s business?’ he said.

‘We are not here to talk about the type of business you prefer. This is another story that you can discuss with her. She asked me to meet you and to tell you that you have more than she has in the family

business and it is your right to have more if you like. There was a big misunderstanding,' she said.

'You mean that as long as Dad and Mom don't work then we inherit them. No, I believe that the money is theirs and everything is theirs. I don't talk to Thurya but tell her if she tries to give me the impression that parents are no longer have the authority she will confront me,' he said. He stood up.

'Are you leaving? We agreed that we'll have lunch together,' she said.

'I think I've to leave now. You always surprise me. I would not be ready to meet her now if you invited her,' he said.

'But I did not invite her. I did not tell her that I would meet you today,' she said.

'I think it is better that I go. I am not in the mood now,' he said.

'Always you leave when something happens that you don't like. You do not discuss. You think people understand your wishes and they should behave correctly as you exactly like them to do. It is impossible that all do the right thing all the time. There is something called compromise. Even the right and the wrong are variables. You have to know how others think before judging. Understand then be understood,' she said angrily.

He did not respond and left.

At the evening Nagwa was writing in a new novel when she noticed that Salwa did not speak much. Usually she would ask her sister to stop talking not to distract her flow of ideas.

'What's a problem?' Nagwa asked.

'Nothing,' Salwa said.

'But you don't talk as usual,' Nagwa said.

'I see that you are writing and I don't like to make disturbances,' Salwa said.

'You know you don't disturb me,'

'I said nothing happened,' Salwa said sharply. She added before her sister would ask, 'and I take my medicine. I did not think about those who raped mom. I try to forget the whole thing. And I know God will revenge. Is there anything else?' she panted. She left the dinning room where Nagwa was used to write on the dinning table. In the kitchen, she picked a plate from the fridge and started to eat.

'Why? What happened that angered you?' Nagwa asked.

'I said nothing happened,' she left the kitchen to the bedroom, got off her cloths, and lay on bed.

'What are you doing?' Nagwa was too anxious about her sister.

'I'll masturbate myself to have a relief as you advised me. You asked me to do when I'm tense, didn't you?' Salwa said.

'Okay, masturbate yourself as you like. But when you go out of this room you are going to tell me the whole story,' Nagwa said decisively.

Suddenly Salwa cried and told her about Tamer, Thurya, and their plans for the European trip.

Thurya was calculating the profits that the family would gain from her last land trade operation when the telephone rang. She thought it was the businessman. She hurried to pick the mouthpiece but it was Nagwa.

'Hi, I'd like to see you right now. You may come to my flat. I know Ibrahiem forbids you from coming to me because I'm a slut. I don't think you told him about Europe, you slut. My brother will not go and you will cancel his trip or I'll tell Ibrahiem. I'd like you to come right now because Salwa is in a panic attack and nothing will relieve her but you because this is a proof that I scared you. Never mind if you find me with a man or a woman in bed, after all, sex is not the only sin. You are a slut like me. I may do harm to myself but you smuggle money and fuck the whole country.'

After one hour, Nagwa opened the door for her cousin while she was naked.

'You see I don't hide anything. Go inside and open the door of the bedroom. You will find Salwa there. Tell her that Tamer will not share you in your whoredom and never use him again,' Nagwa said.

Thurya followed the instructions.

Next morning Thurya was still nervous. She came to the boutique to find Tamer waiting for her. When he saw her he put the passport on her desk.

‘No, keep your passport and forget everything about flying to Europe,’ Thurya said.

‘Why? What has happened? Yesterday you told me that we have to fly to Europe next week,’ Tamer was too disappointed. He felt that his dream of being rich vanished.

‘It is your sister that ruined everything,’ she said.

‘Thurya, if Salwa does not like to do this business, I can do it alone. You give me the dollars that she would carry,’ he said.

‘Keep quiet. Are you crazy?’ she left the desk and led him to her back office. She closed the door behind her and turned to face him. In a sudden surprising movement she slapped him on face vigorously. ‘I’m the boss here. When the boss gives you instructions, you just follow them. I told you not to mention anything about dollars. I don’t want to go to jail because of a stupid guy’s slipped tongue. It is easier for me to cut your tongue.’

He was taken by surprise. He did not say anything.

She felt that she went far. After all, he was her cousin. She said, ‘you sister Salwa told Nagwa.’

It was enough for Tamer to know what happened. However, he did not want to lose the high profit Thurya had promised. ‘Then as I told you I’ll do the job alone.’ This time he was whispering it.

Thurya smiled and said, ‘I changed plans.’

‘Are you going to tell me about your new plans,’ he said.

She needed to fix her new plan so that nobody would ruin it again. She stared in his eyes and said, ‘meet me tomorrow in Palmira. It is a restaurant in Heliopolis. It is quiet and we can discuss your role.’

Nagwa was absorbed totally in papers in front of her. She was writing the final chapter in her new novel. She did not notice Jasmine entering her office in the journal.

‘Good Morning Miss Nagwa!’ Jasmine said.

Nagwa looked at the Lebanese beauty standing in front of her desk and laughed. ‘You are one of the few who call me Miss. I think you don’t know much about me,’ Nagwa said.

'I know that you were engaged to Ali's brother Captain Ibrahiem,' Jasmine said.

Nagwa noticed that Jasmine said her martyr cousin's name with passion. 'You must be Jasmine, Ali's lover. He told me about you.' Teardrops that were falling from both women's eyes united them. Six years had passed but mentioning Emad or Ali always brought tears to her eyes. Nagwa involuntarily looked at Jasmine's hands and found no ring.

'Do you talk to Ibrahiem?' Jasmine asked.

'Yes, of course I do,' Nagwa responded. 'Why do you ask?'

'I want to talk to Captain Ibrahiem,' Jasmine said.

'He is a Colonel now. Could you please tell me why you want to talk to him,' Nagwa said.

'I'm a director of documentary films. I want to make one about the real heroes of October War. I want everybody knows about Ali,' Jasmine said.

'Let's have lunch together. I know a near small restaurant and it's quiet enough to talk about that,' Nagwa said.

Relations between Nagwa and Ibrahiem were tense as most of times but they were never cut. She used to call him at office when she wanted to meet him. Jasmine was in a hurry because she would fly to Lebanon in two days and she wanted a final decision about her project. She decided to call him at home to tell him about the request of Jasmine and if he could help her to take shots in Ali's home and to meet his parents. Jasmine also needed an army permission to take shots in the units where Ali had served. She was not sure that Ibrahiem would not object to make his parents remember their son's memories.

'Hello, Aunt Samira. It is Nagwa.'

'Hi, how are you? It has been long time since we saw you,' Samira's unwelcoming voice made Nagwa tense.

'Can I talk to Ibrahiem?' She tried to control her voice not to be sharp.

'Sorry, but Ibrahiem is not in now. He went to buy a heavy coat and other things because he will fly to London next week. Didn't he tell you?' Samira was happy that her son did not tell Nagwa whom she disliked.

'No, he did not tell me. In fact I've not seen him since a month,' Nagwa was nervous.

‘They told him to be ready three months ago,’ Samira said. ‘Anyhow, I’ll tell him to phone you but please don’t tell him that I told you about his mission because these things are confidential. I should not have told you but I think he trusts you like us. I think he’ll tell you but in a later stage.’

‘Thank you,’ Nagwa said quietly and ended the call. She inhaled a deep breath. But it was not enough to relief her. ‘Keep quiet,’ she thought ‘after all you have no right to know all about him.’ She picked the Rum bottle without a choice. She filled a glass before she knew what type of drink she might swallow. She remembered her promise to Ibrahiem to stop drinking. She felt that he wanted to punish him for not telling her by not keeping her promises to him. She drank and refilled her glass several times. Then she threw her self on the sofa and cried.

Thurya found Tamer drinking beer while he was waiting for her in Palmira. He was smoking Marlboro. She had a sit.

‘Have you a drink?’ Tamer asked Thurya.

‘Coffee please,’ she responded.

‘Have a cigarette?’

She took one. ‘Tamer, tell aunt Amal that you will go with me to Port Said to receive cloths and other goods that I bought. Tell her we will stay there ten days to upload them. Tell me her response and if she will tell your sisters the crazy one and the slut one.’ She extinguished the cigarette in the ashtray and stood up.

‘Aren’t you going to have your coffee?’ he asked.

‘You drink it or aunt Amal will discover that you are drunk and she will tell Nagwa to punish you,’ she laughed loudly. ‘Before I leave I may ask you a question. Are you a good lover?’

He was taken aback and he did not say anything.

‘We’ll know the answer later on. Tomorrow you may have a dinner in Hilton. You come to the boutique at seven o’clock’ she said and left.

Salwa opened the door of Nagwa’s flat and went directly to the bedroom. She did not notice that her sister was in the reception in the dark. She changed her cloths, returned to the reception, and switched on the lights. She was taken aback by her sister’s presence and position. Nagwa was flexing all joints and lying on her side on the big sofa with silent tears flowing from her open eyes.

‘What is wrong?’ Salwa asked.

Nagwa stood and turned her head right and left as if seeking for the words. She threw herself in Salwa's extended arms and embraced her. She cried vigorously that her body was shaking. 'It is Ibrahiem. This son of a bitch will fly to London next week. This asshole knew about the mission three months ago. It is no secret as he told his parents. I knew from this bitch Samira. She was very happy because he did not tell me.'

'I think you have to talk to him. I'm sure there is a misunderstanding. I don't trust Samira,' Salwa said.

'No, I don't want to see any of him,' Nagwa said.

Salwa calmed her sister. She argued that they should contact Ibrahiem. Nagwa refused the idea. But Salwa knew that her bigger sister wanted her to do that favor.

'If you don't phone him right now, I'll do,' Salwa said.

'Hello Salwa,' Ibrahiem received the call.

She told him what his mother had told Nagwa.

While he was listening to Salwa, he looked at his mother angrily. 'No, I did not know three months ago that they would send me. Another officer was nominated and I was just a substitute. This officer had an appendix operation yesterday and they gave me instruction to be ready after a week. They told me at three pm just before I left the office. I tried to phone Nagwa but you know how bad the lines are. I told mom that I know about the mission three months ago. All of a sudden, they chose me to study there. This is the whole story. Tell Nagwa that I'll pass at you after half an hour to have dinner together. I know a good place in Garden City. It is a disco more than a restaurant.'

Samira excused herself to sleep.

Tamer went to Thurya's boutiques at quarter to seven. She was busy and she did not stop working.

'Have a sit,' she said to him without looking at him.

'Well when we'll go to Hilton?' he asked.

'We won't go. You will have a dinner with a lady. She is a friend of mine and she needs a manager for her boutique. She is a partner in our work in Port Said. She knows about you and it is time that you meet her. I think you can manage her shop,' she said.

A beggar extended a hand to Zizi, 'God bless your son.'

‘He is not my son,’ she angrily shouted at the man. She did not give him anything. She was in her forties. Quickly, she bypassed the embarrassment and gave Tamer her keys’ chain. ‘Do you drive?’

‘No,’ he said.

‘It is better you know how to drive. I’ll arrange for that,’ she said. She looked at the car mirror to check her make up before moving the car.

‘You’re so beautiful,’ he said to her.

She laughed and turned her face to him, ‘it’s clear you did not know women before.’

His shyness overcame him and he did not say anything until she barked the car.

‘Aren’t we going to Hilton?’ he asked.

‘No, this restaurant is quiet. Can you dance? You tell me the truth because my toes are so fine and they cannot bear your weight,’ she said.

‘I danced two or three times before,’ he said as if giving his testimony in a court.

With a serious face, she asked sharply, ‘two or three?’

‘Two,’ he said in a confessing voice.

She burst in laugh, ‘I’ll teach you how to dance and much more. I adore innocence,’ She touched his neck and let her hand went slightly down to his chest. She felt his fine trembling body.

Ibrahiem, Nagwa and Salwa took a table at the far corner of the restaurant. On their way to the restaurant, he cleared the misunderstanding. Nagwa hardly controlled herself not to say anything about his mother. She told him about Jasmine and he promised to help her. After all, he felt that it was Ali’s right that everybody should know about him.

The music stopped.

‘Oh, my God, she’s Zizi?’ Salwa said.

Ibrahiem and Nagwa looked at what astonished Salwa. Tamer’s arm was around Zizi’s waist and they were taking the direction of their table. While they were sitting around the table a rapid kiss from Zizi on Tamer’s cheek told them much about the story.

‘Who’s this Zizi?’ Nagwa asked Salwa.

‘She has a boutique but God only knows what she does,’ Salwa said.

Ibrahiem caught Nagwa’s arm firmly when she stood up. ‘No need for scandals please, I’ll talk to him.’

‘Let me see what they’re doing?’ Nagwa said.

Ibrahiem did not let her arm free. ‘Please Nagwa, I told you I’ll talk to him and I think I’m the oldest cousin in the family.’

Nagwa did not leave Ibrahiem until the last call for the plane flying to London. Neither Samira nor Thurya came to the airport. After the plane took off, she felt contradictory feelings. She felt that her presence was the cause behind the absence of both women. This made her happy. However, the absence of Ibrahiem made her anxious. The last row between Ibrahiem and her was about Tamer. Ibrahiem talked to him about Zizi but the young man did not listen to his cousin. She blamed Ibrahiem of being weak because he did not beat the young man. They stayed two days not talking to each other but when he phoned her from his office telling her, about the date he would fly to London and telling her that she was the first person who knew the information she forgot the argument.

She used her key to enter the flat. Amal was in the kitchen.

‘Where’s Tamer?’ Nagwa rushed her way to the kitchen and asked Amal.

‘Good morning!’ Amal responded. ‘I see you are nervous. Were you in the airport?’

‘Oh, sorry, good morning, the plane took off. Where is Tamer?’

‘He’s in his bed room. Why are you asking about him?’ Amal became anxious that a quarrel was about to start.

‘This guy knows a woman about my age or more. He goes out with her and they dance together. God only knows about them,’ Nagwa’s voice was loud.

Tamer came to kitchen. He fixed his eyes on his sister’s eyes. With a masked face and monotonous voice he said, ‘I sleep with her. The same thing Hussein did to you.’

‘Fuck you, I was forced to do to protect you and Emad,’ she moved an arm toward his face.

He caught her arm and said, ‘never do it again. From now on, I will do what I like. Do not interfere in my business or my life. It is too enough that I have a sister who is a slut.’ He left the kitchen.

Amal’s extended arms received Nagwa. ‘Keep quiet. You calm down and I’ll talk to him.’

‘You don’t. He chose what to do. Nothing will change him,’ Nagwa said.

Tamer spent most of his time in Zizi's house. Thurya came several times to the house but when they talked about business, he had to leave the room. His role in the business was just carrying the dollars. He did not ask about anything. This was the rule.

'I'll collect you at seven o'clock in the morning tomorrow,' Thurya said to him before leaving.

Tamer found that both he and Thurya had tickets to Athens. He understood that plans had changed again because she told him that they would travel to different destinations.

'We are not going to Switzerland,' she said.

From Cairo airport to Athens he did not ask any question. They went to a hotel and Thurya ordered him to wear a swimming dress and to meet her at the hotel's pool. She wore hot bikini and immersed herself in water. He came and her body sent exciting waves to his.

'Zizi says that you are a good lover,' she said while drying up her body.

He picked a towel to dry up his body and to hide his blush.

'But you still need to learn how to talk to women,' she laughed.

'Stop making jokes of me. Yes, I'm a good lover. Do you want to try?' he felt humiliated. He caught her arms and kissed her on mouth.

'Still you need to learn how to be a gentleman,' she said.

'Let's go up,' his husky voice told much about his excitement.

'I am a virgin,' she said.

'I do not believe,' he said.

She went towards the building and he followed her. At the door of her room, she gave him the key. When he entered the room, he found Zizi sitting on a chair. He was taken by the surprise.

'I will transfer the dollars to Switzerland,' Zizi said.

'Go and bring the black bag from your room,' Thurya said.

Zizi was in a hurry to catch the plane for Geneva. She left them in Thurya's room.

'I don't like surprises,' he said angrily.

'I did not mean it but plans changed several times and this is your first operation. I promise I will let you know next time,' she said. 'What about having dinner together. I know a good place here. They make homemade wine that is very good. We will have a lot of fun,' she said.

He tried to kiss her.

'After we have dinner,' she said.

'You promise,' he said.

‘I do,’ she said.

He drank much at the dinner and he woke up next day in Thurya’s bed. He found that he was wearing his cloths. She was in the bathroom. She laughed when she saw him.

‘I kept my promise. You did not keep your word. Next time you have to know how much you can drink safely,’ she laughed much.

In London Ibrahiem was having dinner with Shahinaze. She asked about Nagwa. She felt his passion when he talked about Nagwa.

‘I don’t know why you did marry her until now?’ she asked him.

‘I hope I know one day why she refuses to marry me,’ he said.

‘I think she feels that one day you may regret it,’ she said.

‘I’ll never do,’ he said.

‘Who knows?’ she said. ‘Sometimes our wishes bring sorrow more than happiness.’

‘But I feel always happy with Nagwa,’ he said.

‘But you always have quarrels,’ she explained her point of view.

‘That’s because she refuses me as a husband,’ he said.

‘Do you think that you know everything about her? Are you ready to forgive anything she did,’ she asked.

‘Yes,’ his answer was decisive.

‘Then you should not stop convincing her to marry you. I am sure she will not be happy until she marries you. The good news is that she will be here after few weeks. I’ll vote for you,’ she said.

‘She did not tell me that she would come to London,’ he said angrily.

‘That’s because she does not know that. I knew today that the BBC would invite her for a seminar about the new writers. She’s one of whom they call writers of the seventies who have a different style of those of the sixties in Egypt. I sent a letter to be the first to tell her,’ she said.

When Salwa knew what Tamer said to Nagwa she insisted that she would talk to him.

‘It is my fault that I let Thurya use him,’ she said.

‘You should not consider everything a fault of yours. Tamer is your fault. Your divorce happened because your bad choice. They fucked me in the prison because they took me instead of you. They fucked mom because they should have taken you and me instead of

taking her,' Nagwa said. 'Stop that thinking that will destroy you.' Nagwa fell crying.

'Sorry, I did not want to angry you. I thought confessing my faults may help you,' she said.

'The faults are not yours. Believe me. It is our fate that they did that for mom and me and nothing would prevent repercussions to affect the whole family. This does not mean that I will not revenge. I will not quit until I die. Nevertheless, you should live. You did nothing wrong. I am the sinner. I was a victim but later on, I became a whore. You are not a whore. We are not equal. There is no need to blame yourself because they did not have the chance to rape you instead of anybody. After all nobody forced me to have a homosexual relation. I did that because I felt that she suffered from the same person,' Nagwa cried.

Salwa did not talk but she thought things would be much better if they took her instead of her mom. What if her mother was out and she was at home. That would make things better for her. They came to take Saber's daughters. That was her fixed belief that made her suffer too much. She did not give her psychiatrist the chance to discuss that with her because she stopped going after she had improved.

It was early in the morning when the telephone rang in Nagwa's apartment. Salwa received the call. Nagwa woke up on Salwa's screaming.

'Aunt Samira died. Thurya has just told me,' Salwa said.

'I don't think this needs all this screaming. I doubt that Thurya her daughter did that,' Nagwa said.

'I know that I'm overreacting,' Salwa said. She went to her bedroom to weep silently so that her sister would not blame her.

'I did not mean it,' Nagwa said. 'Have you got an extra black blouse for me? I think my black blouse is too tight after I got some extra kilos.'

'You can try anyone. You may go to the boutique and choose what you like. I think I'll do that. Don't forget that Thurya will examine us and she likes to criticize us for any trivial thing,' Salwa said.

'May I ask you as question?' Nagwa smiled. 'Why did you scream when you knew about the death of this bloody lady Samira?'

'I know you don't like her. Neither do I like her. But she is an aunt,' Salwa said.

'A good cause,' Nagwa said sarcastically.

Salwa waited for a second then suddenly she burst in a hysterical laughing.

Jasmine planed to visit Abd-Allah's house to take shots where Ali had grown up. It was two weeks after Samira's death. Nagwa did the arrangements for Jasmine with Thurya. Thurya told Nagwa that this film might help her with the taxes and welcomed the idea of producing a documentary about her brother, the martyr.

'The bitch will be waiting for you tomorrow,' Nagwa said to Jasmine.

Next day Thurya talked much with Jasmine and asked the director to tell the story of her brother herself. She changed and wore simple black cloths and cried much when the cameras were filming her.

'You are a good actor. If one day I directed a drama I would give you the main role,' Jasmine said.

'Does Jermyn still trade in cloths?' Thurya asked Jasmine about her sister.

'She lives in Rome now. She works in the export and import business,' Jasmine said.

'Would give me her address? We may make business together,' Thurya said.

'With pleasure,' Jasmine said.

'Nagwa may help us to broadcast the film on the Egyptian TV. I'll pay any bribes they want to broadcast it. After all, it is about my brother. I don't say a secret when I tell you that being a sister of a martyr will help much to have governmental services in this country,' Thurya said.

Jasmine excused herself to leave.

It was evening when Jasmine pushed on the ring bell of Nagwa's door.

'Your cousin is really a bitch. She wants to trade in her brother death. She will sell him cheep. I'm not going to complete this film,' Jasmine cried.

'Tell me the whole story,' Salwa said.

Nagwa came to find the two women crying. When she knew the story, she smiled.

‘In montage you can remove all this bitch’s shots. It is as simple as that. I find out what to do to broadcast the film several times for Ali’s cause,’ Nagwa said.

As if something switched her off, Salwa laughed and asked them to dine out.

It was midnight when Nagwa received Amal's phone telling her that Elham had labor pain. For the first time Nagwa felt that, her cousin Elham became a woman. She smiled and assured Amal that everything would be fine. Amal was anxious because Colonel Dr. Tawfik Reda her son in law was on the front.

'I don't know what to do?' Amal shouted.

'Listen to me. You take her right now to the hospital that her gynecologist advised her to go when she has labor pain. I'll come at once. I'll tell Salwa,' Nagwa said.

Salwa who was listening to the conversation took off her cloths on her way to the bedroom and within seconds, she was dressed. She went to Nagwa's bedroom. She was on her panties and picking pieces of cloths to wear.

'Hurry up. We have to be there right now,' Salwa said while helping Nagwa to wear her cloths.

'Keep quite. Amal is with her,' Nagwa tried to calm down her hysterical sister.

'She is in Operation Theater. I want you to call Dr. Tawfik. He gave this number to contact him if there would be an emergency,' Amal said to Nagwa.

Salwa picked the small piece of paper from Amal's hand and rushed her way to the reception.

'I think it is wiser to wait until Elham gives birth. If we called him now he would be anxious while he could not do anything,' Nagwa said.

She ran after Salwa to calm her down again. Few moments later, the gynecologist came out of the operation theater.

'He is a boy,' he said.

'Oh my God, we became aunts,' Salwa shouted and embraced Nagwa. Then she threw herself into the arms of her aunt Amal and cried, 'I'm so happy.' She panted and lost consciousness. It took few minutes then she brought back.

Later, Amal asked Nagwa about Salwa's condition.

'She goes from bad to worse. She takes her medicines but she is always anxious. She cries all time. She wishes they would rape her like what they did to me and to mom, to be equal in misery. She has false belief that mom sacrificed herself for her safety. I argued with her

much. She refuses to tell her doctor about mom. I don't think it will be easy to take her to visit her doctor. She thinks she is normal and her reactions are normal,' Nagwa said.

'I'll talk to her,' Amal said.

'But take care. Salwa has changed. She is not the decent cute woman anymore. Anyway you're used to bad words when you talk to me,' Nagwa said.

Tamer came to congratulate his aunt and his cousin. He avoided greeting Nagwa.

'Tamer,' Salwa shouted. 'You have one family. Nagwa is our sister.'

Nagwa stood up to leave the room. Salwa stood at the room door blocking her sister's way to outside the small hospital room. Tamer took a step toward his big sister and looked at her eyes. He saw tears in Nagwa's eyes. He embraced her.

'I don't deserve your tears. None of us deserves them. After all you are the real victim,' he whispered.

Nagwa cried and cried.

'Promise me that you will not work with Thurya anymore. You can work with Salwa. I know it will be a smaller business but I think it is not risky. Thurya's work is illegal. Salwa will never use us to make deals with old women,' Nagwa said.

'I planed to have my own business. It will be a good one. The revenues will be better than Thurya's one. I shall build homes,' he said.

'This business needs lot of money,' Nagwa said.

'Not at all,' he said. 'I'll tell you what I do when you visit me in my office.' He gave her a personal card to pay a visit to his new place.

Thurya flied to Rome. She knew that Jermyn would not let her down. They worked together and fared well together. It was a sunny day when she went to meet Jermyn in a small but elegant restaurant in Rome.

The women were dressing very elegantly that waters started to give them a special attention hoping they would have a special gift.

'I think they are Arabic Princesses,' a waiter said to his assistant.

'It will take long time until we can return to Lebanon again,' Jermyn said referring to the Lebanese civil war.

'I don't understand why people kill each other there. I think your people have the best businessmen and businesswomen in the world. Business needs peace,' Thurya said.

‘Because some businessmen gain much from selling weapons,’ Jermyn said indifferently.

‘Do you work in this type of business?’ Thurya asked.

‘You started to ask question,’ Jermyn laughed. ‘I don’t think you can smuggle weapons to Egypt easily. So let’s talk about the type of business you want to do. What can I do for you?’ Jermyn said.

‘Any business that its profits are more than hundred percent,’ Thurya said.

‘How much do you have?’ Jermyn asked.

‘The enough money to start a big a business,’ Thurya said.

‘I can help you to be an agent for some Italian goods but it costs much. I’m not going to be a partner but I’ll have ten percent of any contract you sign,’ Jermyn said.

‘What types of goods you are talking about,’ Thurya asked.

‘After wars there is a social change. What they call novo rich is the new class. They have money and they want to buy anything and everything. When you are the first who provide them these new things you sell much. Do you understand me?’ Jermyn said.

‘I do,’ Thurya said.

It was one of Nagwa’s best surprises when she received the invitation letter to fly to London. Salwa returned home this night to find Nagwa singing.

‘Don’t change. Choose the best place to dine and let’s go,’ Nagwa said. She jumped and danced and when she reached near Salwa she gave her sister a hug and added, ‘the BBC invited me to attend a seminar about writers of the seventies in London. I’ll see Ibrahiem.’

‘Honey, congratulation, I’m happy for you,’ Salwa said.

‘They will give me a ticket to London and two hundred sterling pounds as a pocket money. This will be more than enough as Shahinaze invited me to stay in her flat. My friends who went to London before said it would be somewhat difficult if I would live on my own for two weeks on this money,’ Nagwa laughed and added, ‘when I went to Moscow, the fucken Hussein gave me one thousand dollars and booked a room for me in the best hotel. Sometimes being a whore is beneficial.’ Nagwa laughed much then she threw herself on the sofa and said while she was laughing hysterically, ‘do you think that I tell Ibrahiem this point of view when I see him? He would kill me.’ She stopped laughing. ‘Or do you think he will be indifferent? Do think he still loves me? Sometimes I feel that he doesn’t love me anymore but he does not marry

another woman because he cannot trust women anymore. I ruined his life.'

'No you don't. He loves you. Don't forget that you refuse marrying him. He proposed several times. I think the best thing you do both is to marry in London,' Salwa said. She sat beside her sister and added, 'could you do me a favor?'

'Of course,' Nagwa responded. 'I'm all ears,'

'The money they will give you is nothing. You will starve there or you will live on fish and chips. It will be difficult to go anywhere. It is London and you have to go to every inch in the city. I think Ibrahiem receives a monthly wage that makes him starving as well,' Salwa said.

'Yes, I know,' Nagwa said. She felt embarrassed and voiced her words in a lower tone, 'could you lend me. The publisher will take two months until my new novel appears. The film producer still studies the last script. I think if I tell Ibrahiem that the BBC gave me a lot of money, he might come with me to have many tours.'

'Could you do me a favor? When you need money, you just come to the boutique and take what you need,' Salwa said. She stood and faced Nagwa and added, 'you will take five thousand dollars. You will buy two pieces of fur for my costumers. They asked me to bring them fur. They gave me the money in advance. You know that I deal in imported goods and stewardesses bring me what I need. But in fact, the pocket money they give them is too little to think about buying something like that. Two pieces will cost about four thousand dollars and your profit will be one thousand.'

'Thank you Salwa. It is a good idea to give me the money that I don't know how and when I can return it to you. But I'm not a merchant. It is better for you if you go yourself and buy the fur. The profit will be yours. Or you can ask one of the stewardesses to bring you the fur,' Nagwa said.

'Believe me. I don't trust them for this huge money. If I flew to London, I would pay a lot for the fur as costume duty. They know us in the airport. Last time when I was in Paris I paid for every perfume bottle in Cairo airport. You're a famous writer and they will not search your bags. You come through the green line and say that you have fur. Don't tell them how many you have. They will consider this an essential item for you as you attend parties and meet important people,' Salwa said. She smiled and said, 'tomorrow you will have the dollars.'

'What if I don't find the fur you like,' Nagwa said.

‘Then you did the job and the one thousand is yours. Risk is acceptable in my business,’ Salwa said.

‘Very convincing,’ Nagwa said.

‘Yes, I’m.’

Next day Salwa went early to the boutique. She phoned a dealer to bring her five thousand dollars then she started to phone several customers. All calls were similar.

‘Hello, I shall bring few pieces of fur from London. They are so precious that I tell the nearest customers,’ Salwa said.

‘Oh, I’ll think about that,’ the woman said.

‘It is mink. It costs four thousand dollars for the piece,’ Salwa tested the response of the customer.

At noon, she bought the two pieces in advance. She asked the dealer to cancel the dollars deal because her customers sent her the dollars.

At the evening, she gave Nagwa six thousand dollars.

‘Oh, you said you would give me five thousands only,’ Nagwa said.

‘But it was very profitable that your share is two thousands. You buy two pieces with four thousands and you take two thousands,’ Salwa said.

‘Salwa, if I know you, then you sold them in advance but you give me the whole profit. You can’t lie. You take one thousand,’ Nagwa said.

‘Please let me feel that I can do something to you. I make many troubles. I need to feel that. It will help me much,’ Salwa said.

‘I agree if you promise me that you go to your doctor and discuss with him what you really feel,’ Nagwa said.

‘I promise,’ Salwa said.

Nagwa had mixed feeling when she was in the plane to London. She was smiling. She thought about many ideas. She had a suitable idea for a new story but she could not arrange her thoughts to be written. She wrote in the notebook that she always carried some free thoughts like thoughts about her life, about Ibrahiem, about her brothers and sisters. The last were painful. ‘How much sufferings Emad and Tamer felt when her story with Hussein was known,’ she thought. ‘Ibrahiem suffered also. She victimized herself to protect her brother but the result was that everybody accused her of being a whore,’ the flight of thoughts continued. ‘But she gained much. She would not be a big name in

journalism and the movie industry without his help. All time when she was in a relation with Hussein she did not try to force him to abandon her. But dared she to angry him?' A throbbing headache attached her. She tried to sleep but she could not. She took a sleeping pill. After her story had been known, she could not sleep without them. She did not go to a doctor to prescribe them to her. It was an advice from a friend. Now she had to take two or three of them to have few hours sleep. Headache attacked her frequently. She observed that Analgesics alone did not relieve her headache. She had to take them with sleeping pills to make the painkillers work. A flash of memory of the last verse of Nagy's poem that the legendary singer Om Kolthom had sung, Al-Atlal in Arabic or the Ruins, alerted her suddenly after few seconds of semi-sleep.

*Oh my Love,
Everything is a fate
It isn't our will,
That we are sad
Perhaps time gathers us
After we lost hope
If we meet like strangers
And each one goes his way
Don't say we wanted that
The fate wanted that*

She dried up her tears. She failed to control herself.

'Did you leave a dear in Cairo?' the stewardess said. She gave Nagwa a tissue.

'No, I'm afraid I'll meet him in London,' Nagwa said.

Shahinaze was happy. She asked her brother Kamal to be ready to go with her to Heathrow airport to receive Nagwa.

‘I’m ready, although I think it would be much easier if your friend took a taxi to your flat,’ he said.

‘Don’t forget we are Egyptians. I should be waiting for her when she comes. This makes her feel that I really welcome her,’ Shahinaze said.

‘It would be too enough if she told the taxi-driver the address,’ he said.

‘Kamal, we must go or lend me your car,’ she was decisive. ‘Joan became more Egyptian than you. She helped me to cook the dinner for us. She knew that Nagwa is one of my best friends if she is not the best. Sometimes I feel you were born there to come here. I live and die an Egyptian anywhere in the world,’ she said seriously.

‘It is not like that. But living here made me more practical. After enough time you will think like me,’ he said.

‘I don’t think so,’ he said.

Nagwa embraced Shahinaze. Both women cried during long embrace. They did not stop talking from the airport to Shahinaze’s flat. Shahinaze introduced Nagwa to Joan.

‘Ibrahiem promised to receive me at the airport with you. Don’t you know why he didn’t come?’ Nagwa asked.

‘He told me that today he has to be in the embassy because there a reception party for an Egyptian high rank officer visiting London and he should attend it. They phoned him yesterday to tell him about it,’ Shahinaze said.

‘Does he live near?’ Nagwa asked.

‘Yes, about ten minutes walking,’ she said.

After the dinner, Joan and Kamal left because he was used to sleep early.

The bell rang. They looked at each other.

‘Do you think he is?’ Nagwa was excited.

‘Yes I do,’ Shahinaze said.

His voice came through the intercom.

‘Ibrahiem,’ Nagwa screamed victoriously.

‘Come in,’ Shahinaze pushed the button to open the gate for him.

‘I won’t forgive you if you don’t come today,’ she embraced him.

‘Did you talk to her?’ Ibrahiem asked Shahinaze.

‘No,’ Shahinaze responded.

‘What is the matter?’ Nagwa stared at Shahinaze’s eyes. She expected what Shahinaze would say.

Shahinaze smiled while staring in Nagwa’s eyes. Ibrahiem felt anxious like the pupil who was waiting to know an exam’s result.

‘You must marry,’ Shahinaze said. ‘Will you hit me? I know your nails scratch cleverly.’

Nagwa smiled and whispered, ‘I agree.’

‘Congratulation,’ Shahinaze kissed Nagwa.

‘I can’t believe it,’ Ibrahiem said. Involuntarily he extended his arms and embraced them both. ‘Thank you Shahinaze. You are marvelous. I had to ask you to meddle long time ago. Tomorrow we’ll go to the embassy to marry.’

‘As I should act as if I were your mother in law then let it be after few days. I’ll buy a white dress for the bride,’ Shahinaze said.

‘Then it’ll be after tomorrow,’ Ibrahiem said.

‘Okay,’ Shahinaze said.

‘Tomorrow I’ll go to the embassy to ask them to make the arrangements. One o’clock at noon after tomorrow, does it suits you?’ he looked at Nagwa.

‘Yes,’ she said.

‘Tomorrow we’ll have lunch together,’ he said to them.

‘And I invite you to dine together tomorrow. And after tomorrow, we shall go to Ali Baba nightclub to party. There is a belly-dancer and she’ll dance for you,’ Shahinaze said.

In Egypt Thurya was having lunch with Salwa. Salwa felt anxious since she had received Thurya’s invitation because she knew that her cousin usually brought bad news.

‘But I think you had to tell Ibrahiem first before selling your deceased mother’s boutiques. Running it does not mean your right to dissolve the business,’ Salwa said.

‘I need money to start a new project. I shall sell the boutiques. After father dies, I’ll sell my share in the closed print-house. Will you buy the boutiques? In fact, I take two thirds of the profits because I run them. When mother died father and Ibrahiem signed a registered consent that I run everything related to the boutiques including having bank loans and selling them. Therefore, they had given me an

agreement to do anything. After all, I'll give them their money and I'll have mine. If I wanted to cheat on them, I would have a bank loan and then I would not pay back and the bank would sell the boutiques. I'm convinced that I do the right thing,' Thurya said.

'What if I buy your share only and I run the two boutiques like you and I'll give them their share of the profits,' Salwa proposed.

'We cannot do that. This needs consent for you to run the boutique because I own one quarter, father has a quarter and Ibrahiem has a half. Legally I can run and sell because I have consent. You will need a new one to run the boutiques like me. Ibrahiem can sign his consent in the embassy there and send it to you. Buying the whole thing is another story,' Thurya said.

'Did you tell my uncle?' Salwa asked.

'No, he will say ask Ibrahiem and he'll do what his son likes. Ibrahiem is in London. Letters take about two weeks. Sometimes he phones but I cannot wait,' Thurya said.

'Let's ask uncle Abd-Allah. If he agrees, I'll buy your share. I'll run it and when Ibrahiem returns he can sign his consent or I can buy their shares if they wanted that,' Salwa said.

'You tell my father. Moreover, another thing, dad may die within few years. Then I'll have one third of his quarter. You will take this part now and you tell father that,' Thurya said.

'What rubbish are you saying? Shall I ask my uncle to let us inherit him now? Shame on you,' Salwa said.

'I can sell them to a stranger and they will give the cash. I need the money. Salwa, the first lesson in business is that you have to maximize your profits. We do the right thing. You save Ibrahiem's property. Father will die soon. He is about seventy five year old now. After all he does not need money,' Thurya said.

'I can buy your share only. The lawyer deals with the consents. I think he will find a method that allows me to run the boutiques until Ibrahiem comes. He will find a method to cancel the consents you have until Ibrahiem comes also,' Salwa said.

'Okay, you buy my one third and I'll register the canceling of the papers I have. But be ready to buy my share when father dies. After few years, prices will go up. I don't think that Ibrahiem will have the enough money because the expenses of my father will be his sole responsibility from now on. Dad does not work. Servants cost much. I forget to tell you that I'll marry. I can't say to my husband that I pay for my father while I have a brother who is a colonel. It will be

embarrassing to father, Ibrahiem and me. Anyhow, they're used not to ask about their profits because you know that I pay for everyday life. Ibrahiem has his monthly wage. Now his and father's profits will be just enough for father's servants and medicines,' Thurya said.

'I want to ask you a question. Why do hate Ibrahiem?' Salwa said.

'I don't hate him, but I love myself more,' Thurya said.

'What about the marriage? I know that you refuse to marry,' Salwa said.

'You can call it business marriage,' Thurya said seriously. 'He is Khairy Al-Gorany.'

'No, I can't believe it. I know he's one of the richest in the country. But he is married and has children,' Salwa said.

'Yes, but he needs to hide some of his money in mine. It will be a non-official or Orfi marriage and we'll keep it secret,' Thurya said.

'You arranged everything,' Salwa said.

'I told you it is a big project,' Thurya said. She stood up and added, 'let's go to the lawyer before the office is crowded with many clients,' Thurya said.

Salwa waited for about three hours in Cairo Central in Ramsis Street to talk to Nagwa at Shahinaze flat. She told her the news that Thurya insisted on selling her share in the boutiques. The news of Thurya marriage made Nagwa anxious. She knew Ibrahiem would go mad for that. Nagwa told her about her last news with Ibrahiem.

'I forget to tell you that my customers cancelled the fur sale. You take the six thousands and buy what you like for your home,' Salwa said.

'Thank you, Shahinaze offered to buy me a white dress for the wedding day. I don't need anything. Thurya will leave our uncle's flat, but we'll never leave the old man alone. Most probably, we'll live there. I'll buy the fur pieces. If your customers cancelled the sale it would not be difficult for you to sell them,' Nagwa said.

'But,' Salwa started.

'No buts. I told you before that I know when you lie,' Nagwa said.

'Okay, congratulation again,' Salwa finished the phone call.

Next day on the morning, Ibrahiem welcomed Salwa's deal with his sister about the boutiques. However, he knew that nothing would

change his sister's decision to marry the businessman whom many rumors of his corruption were known.

'Why is Thurya different from you?' Nagwa asked while they were having lunch.

'Really, I think mom spoilt her. She considered Thurya her property. Always she argued with dad about her and blocked his role as a father. Her will was a first priority even if that meant postponing things that were more important. Day after day, she became very selfish. Mom always found excuses for her,' he said.

After lunch, he went to London University and she went to meet Shahinaze to buy the white dress.

Shahinaze arranged everything as if it was a parade. She invited her Egyptian friends to bring their cars. She hired a luxury car for the bride and the groom. They reached the Egyptian Embassy at half past one. Ibrahiem's friends were waiting there to receive him. One of his friends took a step towards the door.

'It is closed now,' the guard said.

'I think working hours from nine to six,' Ibrahiem said.

'It is the orders,' the guard said.

'May I talk to anyone inside the embassy? I'm an Egyptian officer,' Ibrahiem said.

'The Ambassador gave orders to close the doors,' the guard said.

'Why?' Ibrahiem asked.

'I don't know,' the guard said.

'Could I speak to the Military Attaché?' Ibrahiem said. He was about to lose his temper.

'You can use the public phone. I don't think he will take your call,' the guard said.

One of Ibrahiem's friends went to a public phone. He returned after a minute.

'The Military Attaché apologizes that he can do nothing for you. He will phone you when the embassy is ready to receive citizens,' the friend said. He came closer to Ibrahiem and Nagwa and said something in a low voice.

'Oh, my God, the son of bitches killed Sadat,' Nagwa screamed. On their way back to Shahinaze's place, Nagwa wept.

'It is a matter of few days and we'll marry,' Ibrahiem said.

'No, I'll never return to Egypt. Nasserists will rule us again or fundamentalists who are worse than the first category. If we marry and

we return, they will fuck me in front of you. You don't know them,' she said.

'You must be crazy,' he said. He caught her arm tightly and said angrily, 'I can protect you.'

'No, you cannot. They will defame you for marrying me or they will kill you,' she said. She screamed at the driver, 'stop the car. I want to be out.'

All cars parked. Shahinaze ran towards Nagwa. Ibrahiem and Shahinaze's friends surrounded them.

'We'll marry after few days,' Ibrahiem shouted at Nagwa.

'No, either we stay here forever, or we won't marry. Hussein Yousry will be our president in few days,' she said hysterically. 'All of you know who Hussein Yousry is, the man who lives in Libya now that had forced me to be his mistress. Ibrahiem thinks that he could protect me when this man becomes a president after I had defamed this fucken monster in courts. You could be a hero in war fronts but not with these men. They will kill you. They will fuck you,' she screamed hysterically.

Ibrahiem took her between his arms until she calmed down then he left.

Shahinaze supported Nagwa to have a site in her Mini car.

Next morning Nagwa woke up dizzy in Shahinaze's bedroom. The sleeping pills did wonders to her. All of a sudden not only her crying but also her orientation to persons, time and places had gradually faded and she went into a deep sleep phase. It was ten o'clock. She extended her arms and legs. It was clear to her that she woke up on the same position that she took when she fell asleep. Slowly, she moved her limbs. She had a sever headache. She coughed when she was turning herself to half sitting position on the bed. She looked at the full ashtray. At least she filled half of the ashtray the night before when she had cried while Shahinaze had been doing her best to comfort her. She did not remember when she had changed her white dress to wear a nightgown. She saw it thrown on the floor. One look at it and her fine face muscles started to contract and her eyes poured tears. She tried to leave the bed. The slight movements she did were enough to draw Shahinaze's attention that Nagwa woke up. Shahinaze entered the room when Nagwa was falling on the bed after she had forced her legs to bear her body.

'Yesterday, we cried much. Today we have to restart laughing or we won't continue,' Shahinaze said. However, her tears fell when she took Nagwa's head on her chest to comfort her.

'I'll have a hot shower. I need this,' Nagwa said. 'Then I want to phone Salwa in Cairo. I should ask her to come here. I think she has the enough money and she has an account in a European Bank. She can start a trade here. I'll see if I can work as a journalist or a writer in this country. I think there are some Arabic newspapers and it is not a problem to work in an English Journal. But I need a work permit. I think they give work permits to political refugees,' Nagwa said.

Shahinaze realized that the panic that had haunted her friend the day before still overwhelming her brain. 'Of course you and Salwa are welcome. At least I feel lonely. There is work for you in this country. Go and have your shower first then we'll see what we can do,' Shahinaze said.

When Nagwa left the room to have a shower, Shahinaze looked at the white dress. Her tears fell and she discovered how it was stupid from her not hide it after she gave Nagwa the sleeping pills. Quickly, she controlled herself not to give Nagwa a booster dose of sadness, despair and regret.

'Breakfast is ready,' Shahinaze said. She was in the small kitchen. When she did not hear a response, she added, 'this is an opportunity to be served by a Pasha's daughter.' She heard Nagwa's laughs. She knew that she would succeed to help her friend to overcome this phase.

'Do think it is wise to phone Salwa to tell her to flee the country now?' Shahinaze asked.

'You mean spying on phone calls,' Nagwa took a bite from a sandwich and pantomimed herself waiting for Shahinaze to talk.

'They must have started to record everything until the government discovers the plotters,' Shahinaze said

'The last news yesterday told about fundamentalists,' Nagwa said. 'Oh, my God they will be worse than Nasserists. When you are an opponent in a leftist regime, they call you a traitor. When you live in a fundamentalist regime it would be easy to label you blasphemous, infidel, unbeliever, sinful or wrong doer and nobody would ever sympathize with you.'

'I don't think Egypt will be a fundamentalist country,' Shahinaze said. 'Its people are moderate. Fundamentalism is against its nature. After all it is a Mediterranean country. In Egypt people love life and enjoy it.'

'Did you read the newspapers?' Nagwa asked.

'Yes, news analysts say it is an assassination trial not a coup. They predict Mubarak will be the next president. The army is loyal to him. It is a matter of days and everything will return to normal,' Shahinaze said.

'I hope so,' Nagwa said.

Ibrahiem entered the small restaurant near the Egyptian Embassy. It was the first time he came to this restaurant. He found the Military Attaché Assistant sitting in a far corner. The man waited until the waiter brought plates of their lunch then started talking while eating to make the conversation as informal as he could. Both were in civilian dress.

'Sorry for what happened yesterday,' the high rank officer said.

'I expected that your invitation to have lunch together is planed to talk about that,' Ibrahiem said.

'I know the bride is your cousin. But do you think that it is right to marry her especially after what she said yesterday. I know she was in hysteria but there are rumors around this girl,' the man said.

'She was a victim,' Ibrahiem said without any facial expression.

‘I know she was a victim. Don’t take my words as an instruction. It is an advice. That’s why I preferred not to call you to the office. In fact you are a colonel. Officers should properly choose their wives. This is a rule. Family troubles may affect their carrier and their future in the army,’ the man said.

‘Are you asking me to resign?’ Ibrahiem said. He took a folded sheet of paper from his jacket’s pocket and gave it to the man. ‘I told you sir that I expected what you would talk about. I wrote my resignation and please submit to the Military Attache for me.’

The man tore the paper while laughing. ‘The information I have about you is that you are a good officer. They usually send best officers to study here. Part of my duty is to protect these best officers not make them leave the army. I told you it is an advice not an instruction. Let’s have a walk. Walking relieves tension,’ the man said.

‘I’m not tense,’ Ibrahiem said.

‘I’m tense,’ the man said.

They talked about politics in general. The man asked Ibrahiem about his prediction for the future of the country after Sadat. They reached Hyde Park.

‘This is the speakers’ corner,’ the man said. ‘After our talk I’m convinced that you are one of the best officers. I think I should do my best to keep you in the army. So I insist that you should think seriously about my advice.’

‘But as I told you she is a victim. Why do we blame victims? It is our duty to support them,’ Ibrahiem said.

‘I totally agree that we should support them. However there are some restrictions imposed on some persons,’ the man said.

‘What if I chose her?’ Ibrahiem said.

‘If she really loved you she would refuse because she knew what she had said in front of other officers,’ the man said.

‘What if I marry her Orfi – unofficial marriage?’ Ibrahiem asked.

‘It is the least harmful option. Of course the army will know but as it is unofficial they will give you a blind eye because they want you in the service. And consider me not knowing about your intentions,’ the man said.

‘Thank you,’ Ibrahiem said.

In the evening Ibrahiem passed at Shahinaze’s house.

‘Just a minute until I dress,’ Nagwa’s voice came through the intercom.

The flat door was open for him.

‘Come in,’ Nagwa said.

She came from the bedroom wearing a bathroom robe made of towel textile. She had a site. In the middle there was a small table on which a whiskey bottle and two glasses.

‘Hello. Glad to see you. That means you became convinced that we should be cousins only. I know I caused some embarrassment to you yesterday but you can tell your friends that you will leave me. Also, tell them that I’m on anti-depression drugs and I’m a psychiatric patient. What if we become secret lovers? Excuse me for a minute,’ she took a glass, went to the bathroom, and said in audible voice, ‘Shahinaze I brought you your glass. Ibrahiem is here. Take your time. Sorry for not sharing you the bath,’ she untied the robe’s binder and returned to the reception where he was still standing. ‘Have a sit. Have you whiskey?’ The robe was open and she was naked.

‘No,’ Ibrahiem said.

‘Have a seat,’ she said. She invited him to come beside her while exposing her breasts.

‘I think I should not have come now. Excuse me,’ he said. He went directly to the door.

She closed the door and started to cry.

On the stairs, he found Shahinaze ascending.

‘Weren’t you in the flat?’ he said.

‘Of course, I was at Kamal,’ she said. ‘What is the matter?’

‘Please, use your key and don’t knock the door,’ he said.

‘I don’t understand. Did anything wrong happen to Nagwa? I left her in a good condition. I shouldn’t have left her today but Kamal and Joan had a family row and asked me to go there,’ she said.

‘Nothing happened. But enter the flat and I’ll enter after you,’ he said.

Shahinaze opened the door to find Nagwa crying on the ground.

‘What is the matter?’ Nagwa was apprehensive.

‘Sorry Shahinaze. Ibrahiem was here and I gave him an impression that we were engaged in intimate relation.’

‘Why did you do that?’ Ibrahiem said.

‘Because you must hate me,’ Nagwa said. She looked at Shahinaze, ‘why did you bring him after he told you?’

‘He did not tell me anything,’ Shahinaze said. ‘Nagwa, stop ruining your life,’

Ibrahiem supported Nagwa to the sofa.

‘Nagwa what is so ever happened I won’t hate you. Remember this,’ he said and left.

It took few days and everything returned to normal in Egypt. Nagwa fled to Egypt and she returned to her everyday life. She noticed that Salwa nearly returned to her normal state. Later on, she knew that her younger sister went to a psychiatrist who started psychoanalysis on weekly basis.

It was late night when Salwa returned to the flat to find Nagwa writing on a new novel. She picked some pages to read.

‘Well, it seems to be interesting. Can I read the chapters after you write them directly?’ Salwa said.

‘Of course, however, sometimes I make changes. But I think it is a good idea to know your opinions and to discuss them,’ Nagwa said.

‘I have news,’ Salwa said.

‘Good or bad?’ Nagwa asked.

‘It depends on you care or not about Thurya?’ Salwa said.

‘Fill me in,’ Nagwa said.

‘Tomorrow, she will marry this man, Khairy Al-Gorany. It will be an Orfi marriage. She invites us and she asked Tamer to be at her apartment in Dokki,’ Salwa said.

‘Did she tell uncle Abd-Allah?’ Nagwa asked.

‘No, she said he cannot walk now and she thinks that the idea of marrying Orfi will anger him,’ Salwa said.

‘This bitch wants to marry and not to tell her father,’ Nagwa said.

‘She depends on you to tell Ibrahiem. She knows he has an idea about her plans and he has objections. She said that it would be better if Ibrahiem knew that she married from somebody else to save herself the headache of unnecessary discussion. The marriage will be a secret one because Khairy’s wife does not know. He has sons from his wife in the university now. He gave her money to buy the flat. One more thing, she says that we have to come so he understands that her family knows. I’m sure Tamer will go,’ Salwa finished. She panted and started to unzip her jeep and unbutton her blouse.

‘And you? Are you going to this bitch’s party?’ Nagwa asked.

‘Well, if you go, I’ll do,’ Salwa said.

‘You decide for yourself, and then I’ll tell you my decision. It is very abnormal that you manage a very successful business but you don’t decide anything when it comes to family matters,’ Nagwa said.

‘Okay, no need to have a fight. I’ll tell the doctor next time about this observation,’ Salwa laughed.

‘I can’t believe it. It’s supposed that you go to the doctor to depend on yourself not to be dependant on him,’ Nagwa said.

‘He says that,’ Salwa said.

‘Then why don’t you follow his instructions?’ Nagwa said.

‘Because I don’t want to anger anybody,’ Salwa said.

‘What do you do when you go to the doctor?’ Nagwa asked.

‘I lie on the coach and I say problems and then I listen to his advices. Most of the time I close my eyes,’ Salwa said.

‘Why do you close your eyes?’ Nagwa asked.

‘To tell the truth,’ Salwa said. ‘I want him to kiss me. I dream that he rapes me.’ Salwa looked excited.

‘Did you tell him about mom and me?’ Nagwa asked seriously.

‘Of course not,’ Salwa said angrily.

‘Then I’ll go next time with you and I’ll tell him myself,’ Nagwa said.

‘No, Nagwa. Please don’t tell him about mom and you,’ Salwa was scared and started to tremble. ‘Nobody should ever know that.’

‘All the country knows about me. Mom died. Nothing will hurt her. She might be sad because of you. Please Salwa let’s take the hard step. I know it is painful but he should know. He is a doctor and he keeps secrets,’

‘I cannot do that,’ Salwa said. ‘I’ll kill Hussein when he returns. Then I can tell the doctor. Our honor will be restored.’

‘One day you will tell everybody if you don’t tell the doctor now. What happened has nothing with the honor. Mom was a victim,’

‘Do you think so?’ Salwa asked Nagwa in a surrendering voice tone.

‘Yes,’ Nagwa said.

‘Would you make me a favor?’ Salwa said.

‘Of course.’

‘You phone him. Tell him everything before next visit,’ Salwa said.

‘A good suggestion,’ Nagwa said.

‘Well I’ll go to Thurya’s party,’ Salwa said. She stared at Nagwa to see the reaction. Seconds passed as ages.

‘I’ll go with you,’ Nagwa said.

‘I know you will never leave a family member marry without being surrounded by relatives,’ Salwa said victoriously.

Later on Nagwa regretted her decision that she took, just to encourage her sister to say her opinion.

Elham knocked at the door. Her mother Amal opened the door for her and took Walid the six months baby from her. Wael the eight years old boy ran to the living room to show the football match that he had been following when Elham decided to visit her mother.

‘You should kiss me before doing anything,’ Amal kissed the boy who was ignoring anything and concentrating on the TV screen.

‘Mom, I’m about to go mad. Walid cries day and night. I was at the pediatrician. He smiled coldly and said all babies cry. Tawfik doesn’t care when I complain. Life is like hell mom,’ she wept.

‘All babies cry,’ Amal said.

‘You say it mum too,’ Elham shouted. She needed to explode. ‘Have I to stay day and night carrying him? This man who is outside day and night should give his family time.’

Nagwa used her key to open the door for Salwa and her.

‘Elham is crying. It must be Tawfik. He thinks that we have no men in the family. Ibrahiem is abroad and uncle Abd-Allah is paraplegic. Tamer does not care about anything. But he forgot that Salwa is equal to one hundred men. I’ll go to tell him that his wife is just another sister to us. Either he treats her good or I’ll tell him the bad consequences of his misbehavior,’ Salwa shouted while she was walking her way to the living room.

Elham laughed while she was drying up her tears. ‘I wished Tawfik was here,’ she said. ‘Tawfik’s son is the problem. He cries day and night.’

‘All babies cry,’ Salwa said and carried the baby to kiss him. ‘His face is like yours but his eyes are like those of his father. I know his father is a good person. You are crazy, Elham. His father works day and night. You have to make your home a paradise for him. He works for you and your kids. It isn’t the end of the world when a child cries. He didn’t cry since we’ve been here.’ She looked at Amal, ‘aunt Amal, your daughter is spoiled. Her husband is a good guy. Don’t listen to her.’

The other three women laughed much before anyone could say a word.

Tamer returned late. He grew his beard and he had been wearing galabya (a white dress or gown usually the Saudis wear), since a month.

Amal was waiting to talk to him. Every time she decided to tell Nagwa and Salwa about him, something would happen and they leave the house not knowing about their brother's personality changes.

'Hello, aunt Amal,' he said.

'I wished you'd be here early. Your sisters and Elham were here. They asked about you,' she said. She noticed that he carried a small bag. He usually hated carrying anything.

'I don't like them anymore. My sisters and your daughter,' he said.

'What's this?' she asked him about the small bag.

'It is full of money. Tomorrow, I'll go to give them to a brother then I'll go to the office.' He said.

'What office are you talking about?' she said.

'I forget to tell you that I opened an office for tenders, construction and trade. I'm building now flats and deluxe apartments. Those who want to book pay ten thousand pounds and they will have their apartment in two years. They pay twenty thousands during five years, a good proposal. I nearly sold all units. We usually collect people's money and invest them in better projects than infidels' banks do. We give them higher revenues. Congratulate me,' he said.

'I see that you've changed,' she said.

'Yes, I have changed for better. Now I pray five times and I fast Mondays and Thursdays. Next pilgrimage we, you and me will go to Saudi Arabia Kingdom. But I beg you again to wear the headscarf,' he said.

'You go. I don't have enough money to go,' she said.

'Money is not a problem. But you have to wear the headscarf not to spoil your pilgrimage when you return. You're my aunt and I feel that you are my mother. Even if you are a sinful, I've to treat you good.' he said.

'I would like to know why you wear a galabya and you don't shave your beard,' she enquired.

'Prophet Mohamed wore galabya and he did not shave his beard. We have to do the same as what he did,' Tamer said.

'Non believer men like Abu Gahl and Abu Lahab wore the same dress also. They were used not to shave their beards,' she said.

'Oh, these are the government's words and those devil secular journalists who follow the Americans and Zionists. Zionists want us to be infidel and blasphemous,' he said angrily.

‘Emad and Ali are martyrs and they wore like everybody else. They fought without growing their beards,’ she said.

‘It is because this army of the secularists prohibits soldiers from having beards. They are a brother and a cousin but to say the truth, it is doubtful that they are martyrs. They fought under the leadership of a secularist regime and, Sadat who commanded them, later on made peace with God’s enemies. For me, both Emad and Ali are infidels and I believe they are in hell,’ he said.

‘You stop it,’ she screamed. ‘They’re martyrs. They were better persons than you are. You are a hypocrite. You have no mercy. Yesterday you had an argument with the porter. Today some bearded men flogged him in the street,’ she said.

‘I asked him to tell the boys of the district that I wanted them in the mosque after the evening prayer. I discovered that he did not tell anyone. He has to obey me,’ he said.

‘Why has he to obey you?’ she asked.

‘Because I’m the Emir of this district?’ he said.

‘Who appointed you?’ she asked.

‘A higher rank Emir,’ he said.

‘No, I can’t believe it. I’ll leave the house. I’ll go to live with Nagwa,’ she said.

‘The sinful sister,’ he said. Then he added, ‘no, you won’t leave. After all, I want to forget all about her and that she had lived here sometime in the past. I’ll leave. Tomorrow I’ll go to my flat. Of course, you don’t like me saying the truth about Nagwa because she sacrificed herself to save Emad. But Emad died when God finished his days in this world. She defended us using her ass, breasts, thighs and vagina.’

She screamed and hit him. She sat down on a sofa fatigued.

An hour later, he came from his bedroom carrying the moneybag and another small bag full of papers.

‘Tomorrow I’ll send someone to take my belongings. I packed them. Please when he comes, you cover your head. I know you refused to wear the headscarf but no need for brothers who are good believers to know that I have a sinful aunt after they all had known about my slut sister,’ he said.

‘Get out,’ she screamed.

Few days later, Nagwa published an article in the journal cast doubts about the companies that proclaim that they were Islamic. She said that these companies pay revenues for some governmental

employees who facilitated their work illegally. She asked the government to follow up these companies because something fishy might have done.

A Nasserist journalist rushed into her office. He threw the newspaper at her.

‘You deceive people. Don’t you think that you can continue telling lies and you will succeed to convince everybody that you are honest,’ he shouted.

‘Who allowed you in? And what you are talking about?’ Nagwa shouted back.

Journalists gathered in her office and outside near the door.

‘One of these companies is your brother’s. Tamer Mazloom is one of the new Islamists who are corrupt and pay a lot to corrupted governmental employees. I’ll write about that in the party’s journal. Of course the Editor of Chief cannot side with me against Princess Nagwa the big name in journalism and media,’ he shouted.

‘You write about this and I’ll publish your article tomorrow,’ the Chief Editor whose office was the nearest to Nagwa’s said.

‘And I’ll write about his company,’ Nagwa said.

‘You think that anybody may believe you anymore,’ the Nasserist journalist laughed.

‘Believe me. I don’t know anything about him since years. He boycotted me and if you go to him, he will say bad words about me. Believe me, this is the truth,’ she cried. When she became alone in her office, she phoned Salwa and told her. They agreed to meet in a restaurant near Salwa’s boutique.

Tamer’s office was in a flat in the central town area. An impression of an Islamic environment was what one felt after entering the office. A face covered veiled girl worked as receptionist. She thought that she knew the classic Arabic language because she was stressing on certain letters. Her grammar knowledge was worse than her pronunciation of the words. She was stiff in general with the café boy and the office cleaner. All her stiffness disappeared when she would speak to two persons, Tamer her fiancé and his partner Ahmed El-Dory her uncle and Salwa’s ex-husband.

‘Is Tamer here?’ Ahmed asked the girl on his way to his office room.

‘Yes,’ the girl said.

‘Tell him that I’m here and I want to talk to him,’ he said.

Tamer slowly moved to go to Ahmed's room when the secretary told him. He wanted to prove that he did not fear his partner who was usually treating him bad in front of employees.

'Why didn't he come to my office?' he said.

'I don't know. I think he is angry,' she said.

'Why?' he was anxious.

'Because of what your sister wrote in the journal,' she said.

'What did she write?' he asked. He became pale and very anxious.

Tamer closed the door after him. Ahmed left his desk carrying the newspaper and showed it to Tamer.

'What's this?' Ahmed said.

'She's crazy. She attacked us and the government for leaving us work,' Tamer said.

'This is not important. She writes in a governmental journal. If she wrote this in one of the opposition journals, I would not care much because the government would deny what she had written. Now she had to withdraw or the governmental clerks that facilitate our work will not help us anymore. She is your sister and this gives her words a high credibility. I asked some journalists to come here for a press conference. You say that you boycott her because of her shameful past and that's why she wrote against Islamic companies,' Ahmed said.

'When will the press conference take place?' Tamer asked.

'Tomorrow morning,' Ahmed said.

'I'll resolve the problem this evening,' Tamer said. He left the room. He did not go to his office room and left the company.

It was about seven pm. Tamer knocked at Nagwa's door.

'Oh, my God, I sent Salwa to your office to see if the news is true,' Nagwa said.

He stood at the door waiting for her to invite him to enter. He noticed that she was about to go out.

'Come in. We won't talk outside the flat,' she said.

'Still you wear bad cloths,' he said.

'A bad start, however, this flat witnessed most of my sins. I confess them and I hope God forgives me. When will you ask him to forgive you? We are brother and sister and we understand each other. What a foul play do you plan for now? Is Thurya still your partner?' she said.

‘No, Thurya works alone. Still I see her to make deals but she works alone. My partner is Ahmed El-Dory, the ex-husband of your mad sister. He is a good believer. Now I understand why she left him. Anyhow, I don’t stay for long. Don’t write again about Islamic companies. Second, you have to say that you meant some few companies but most of these companies serve people and the county. I’d like to read this in tomorrow’s journal,’ he stood.

She opened the door for him, ‘don’t ever come here again or I’ll call the police for you. Fuck you,’ she shouted.

When she left the building, she found people at the street corner around her car trying to extinguish it.

At the same time, Salwa asked Tamer’s secretary to meet him.

‘Hello, could I meet Mr. Tamer please,’ Salwa said.

‘What do you want from him? I don’t think he has anything to do with women like you?’ the girl said rudely.

‘I want him,’ Salwa was taken by the way the girl spoke to her.

‘He is not in now. Brother Ahmed is present. He is our other boss. Would like to meet him?’ The secretary was nearly shouting.

‘When will Tamer be here?’ Salwa said. The few moments were enough to her to control her rage.

‘Brother Tamer is expected to be here after half an hour. You can wait for him but not here but in the women’s waiting room,’ the secretary said.

‘I’m Tamer’s sister and I’ll wait your boss the owner of this company here,’ Salwa lit cigarette. She sat down, crossed her legs, and opened her handbag. She took a small mirror and picked a lipstick to redo her lips. She succeeded to make the young girl mad at her.

‘Please go into the women’s waiting room and there sit down covering your flesh. This is brother Tamer’s instructions. I’m his secretary and I’m his fiancée. Tamer told me that he does not see his sisters anymore because of the way they live. He told me that one is a sinner and the other is mad I think he’s right,’ the girl said.

‘I’m the mad one,’ Salwa laughed. ‘Make me a coffee without sugar?’ Salwa used her index to order and humiliate the girl who met her rudely.

The girl picked the phone mouthpiece and shouted, ‘brother Ahmed, would you come here? There is a woman who is *safera* – without headscarf - and *motabaregah* – wears make up - makes trouble here. She says that she is Tamer’s sister.’

Salwa's shoe was flying and targeting the head of the girl while she was speaking in a sudden surprise that made the girl screamed.

'Well, I'll show you how mad I'm you bitch,' Salwa was shouting while throwing anything her hand could reach on the girl.

'Stop it, Salwa,' Ahmed El-Dory said.

'Oh, my God, you're Ahmed,' Salwa was taken by the bad surprise.

'Would you come in please?' he said.

'No, I know everything now. We lost Tamer forever,' she said.

She left the apartment. Her tears ruined her make up when she reached the building gate. She saw Tamer parking his car.

'You are a devil,' she said to him.

'Oh, Salwa, you are crying,' he said.

'Ask your fiancée. She had a lesson from your mad sister,' Salwa said and went towards her car

Hussein Yousry, his wife Nesreen and his father in law Noor Sultan were working in the same newspaper. Noor lived with his son Magid in a separate flat. In fact, Nesreen was writing most of Hussein's articles. He did not find himself in journalism. He applied for several jobs but he did not find them suitable. Since the day, he had wept on Nesreen chest and telling her about the suffering and the torture he had had on his father's hands, she became more understanding. She did her best to keep his daughters Dalal and Maysa safe when sadistic episodes hunted him. Dalal worked at the same department with her mother in law. Maysa was studying in the university. The family was having lunch when he told them that he would fly to London.

'What are you going to do in London,' she asked.

'A secret mission,' he said proudly.

'If you are going to divorce me, then tell me. I don't like surprises,' she said.

'No, please aunt Nesreen, don't leave us,' Maysa said involuntarily. She appreciated the effort her stepmother had been doing to protect the girls from the sadistic father.

'I think you spoil these girls,' Hussein shouted at Nesreen. 'If I want to divorce you, you will be the first to know.' He laughed and left the table.

In the bedroom, after a sadistic sexual act, Nesreen asked him about his trip to London and its date.

'Tomorrow morning, I'll fly to London. I said to the Chief Editor that I'll contact some Nasserists there to invite them to come here,' he said.

'But you have other plans,' she said.

'Yes. If my plans went on to the right direction, I would send you to come with the girls to London secretly. We'll be very rich,' he said. After seconds of silence, he looked at Nesreen and asked in regret, 'do you think that the girls hate me? I love them. Tell them please that I love them. If I hadn't loved them more than life, I would have left them in Egypt. Tell them Nesreen.'

'You do. You tell them. I'm sure they will be very happy if you tell them,' she said.

‘I don’t hate my father,’ he said. ‘They will understand.’

‘No Hussein. They suffer. I want you to kiss them, to hug them. I’m sure they love you and they’ll be happy if you do that,’ she said.

‘Dalal, Maysa,’ he shouted as if he was calling slaves.

They came and stood at the door of the bedroom according to his instructions. Both were scared.

‘Aunt Nesreen wants to tell you something,’ he said.

‘Is there something wrong,’ Dalal asked while trembling.

‘You tell them,’ Nesreen cried.

‘After Aunt Nesreen calms down, she’ll tell you. You can go now,’ he said.

‘No, you don’t go. Not before your father tells you that, he loves you. I know you believe me. I consider myself your third sister not your stepmother. I swear in God that he loves you,’ Nesreen was crying.

The girls hurried to Nesreen ignoring their father’s instruction of not entering his bedroom to comfort her.

‘We do love you dad,’ Maysa said.

‘We do love you dad,’ Dalal said.

‘Thank you. I wanted to know,’ he said coldly.

After about two weeks, Hussein succeeded to have his own office for export and import with the help of an Arabic businessman in London. The real job of Hussein was sending arms to Lebanon. The civil war needed persons like him to continue. He sold weapons to all rivals. The Iraqi-Iranian war needed persons like him also. When Nesreen and his daughters came to live with him, they thought he became a billionaire.

Nagwa knocked at Shahinaze door in London. She decided to surprise her friend.

‘Oh, my God,’ Shahinaze cried. ‘Why didn’t you send me a letter or a telegram? Now phones are much better than before. You had to phone so I would receive you in the airport.’

‘I’m a big girl now. I know how to go in London’s streets,’ Nagwa said.

‘Hungry?’ Shahinaze asked her.

‘Still, you are very Egyptian Shahinaze,’ Nagwa said. ‘I ate in the plane.’

‘Have you a drink?’ Shahinaze said.

‘Black coffee please,’ Nagwa said.

‘He’s good and he asks always about you,’ Shahinaze gave Nagwa a mug full of coffee.

‘Who’s he?’ Nagwa knew that Shahinaze meant Ibrahiem.

‘You know two men in London. My brother Kamal is too busy that if I did not phone him he would forget that he had a sister here. The other guy is an Egyptian officer in a scholarship here,’ Shahinaze said sarcastically. ‘Go and have a hot bath. This will help you after the five-hour-flying.’

‘For your knowledge, I know a third man here,’ Nagwa said.

‘Who’s he?’ Shahinaze asked.

‘An Egyptian ex-officer, he’s your ex-Husband, the fucken Hussein Yousry,’ Nagwa said.

‘Oh my God, What damn thing does he do here?’ Shahinaze was too anxious.

‘I don’t know. But his wife Nesreen writes in an Arabic newspaper in London. I’ll meet her after tomorrow in a meeting about women writers in the Mideast. I’m ready for the fight,’ Nagwa said.

‘I think it is better that you ignore her,’ Shahinaze said. ‘Ibrahiem will fly home next week. We’ll have dinner together at Kamal’s home. It will be a good surprise for Ibrahiem.’

‘I’m not sure it will be good or bad,’ Nagwa said. ‘After what I had said he would have wished that I’m dead,’ Nagwa said. Suddenly she cried.

‘Oh, baby. Don’t cry. I’m sure that he is dying to see you. I think he will blame you that you did not go to his flat first,’ Shahinaze said.

‘I think he hates me now. He did not send me any letter,’ Nagwa said.

‘Didn’t you ask yourself a simple question? Why didn’t he marry until now?’ Shahinaze said.

‘Please Shahinaze, I can’t go. Fate is against us,’ she cried and went to have a shower.

Nagwa put a cassette in the recorder to listen to the legendary Om Kolthom while she was revising her speech of the meeting. She stopped working and concentrated in the song words.

Oh, my heart,

Love is after it,

With passion and pain,

And I regret and repent,

But it is useless to regret your fate,

*And if I could choose,
I would not live,
Between paradise and hell
How did it happen?
That is what happened.
And I don't know.*

Suddenly the door opened. It was Ibrahiem. He gave her a tissue.

'No need for tears. It is time to live and to love Nagwa. Shahinaze gave me her key because we knew that you may refuse to open the door for me,' he said.

'How come you think that?' she said. 'It would be better if I refused the meeting,' she said.

'If you did that I would kill you,' he said.

They kissed. He did not do anything more. They went to Kamal's dinner.

Next day in the seminar, Nesreen interrupted Nagwa's speech and showed the audience a newspaper.

'This proves that the regime in Egypt depends on the most corrupted businessmen. One of these businessmen's sisters is Nagwa the journalist that writes in the governmental newspapers. The celebrate woman writer whom the regime in Egypt sends anywhere to represent it, is a sister of this thief. I'll read what yesterday Egyptian newspapers said is. 'Tamer Mazloom and Ahmed El-Dory, the Egyptian Islamist businessmen collected twelve million pounds from people and fled the country. Their company that proclaimed that it was against bank profits and convinced many that its Islamic operations yield better than banks proved to have no assets.'" This proves the rumors that these companies paid bribes to officials to facilitate its operations. How much did your brother give you?' Nesreen shouted.

'I attacked these companies. I attacked them. I cut my relations with my brother,' Nagwa shouted. She discovered that no one listened to her.

Nagwa was hesitant to push the intercom button. She was not sure about what she wanted really. She stood few seconds before pushing on the button and when she did, it was a long buzz.

‘Hello,’ Ibrahiem said from his small flat.

It took few seconds before she could say a word in a faint voice, ‘I’m Nagwa.’ If he does not open the door I’ll never see him again – she thought.

Few seconds passed as ages while she was waiting for him to respond. The buzz sound came to her as a *risqué*. She pushed the door and while ascending the stairs, she quickly took a hand mirror from her bag and put fine touches to her make up.

‘I though you would not open the door for me. It would be the end,’ she said.

‘You are in a black mood,’ he said.

‘Why do you say that?’ she asked.

‘I say that because I know you. What happened in the meeting? Let’s have a cold drink,’ he went to the small mini-bar fridge.

‘This bitch Nesreen, she interrupted me and talked about Tamer. Nobody listened to me after that. I left the meeting,’ she said.

‘You had had to think about her reaction before you went to attend the meeting,’ he said indifferently.

His manner irritated her much. ‘I see that it made no difference,’ she said.

‘Of course I’m sad and angry but I want to know what you are up to,’ he said.

‘I don’t know. That is why I am here,’ she cried.

‘It was wrong that you left. You had to stay until someone would talk to you. Others would follow. Now you have to confront her tomorrow. She thinks that she won. I’m sure your presence tomorrow will disturb her especially if you planed for it. Today afternoon and in the evening you may contact some of your colleagues. Even three of four persons will count,’ he put a soft drink on the table. He approached her and kissed her passionately. She started to undress. He unbuttoned his shirt and said, ‘will you marry me?’

‘I’m afraid you will be ashamed of me. I cannot go to the embassy again,’ she said.

'I insist on marrying you,' he said.

'Let's make it Orfi marriage,' she said. 'It is better not to tell the army. I'm sure they will not be happy and I don't want to ruin your carrier,' she said.

He wanted her to be his wife. He knew if lost that opportunity it would be difficult to have another one. He brought two paper sheets and wrote the marriage consent. 'We'll take them to Dr. Kamal to sign as a witness and I'll bring a friend of mine to do the same,' he said while signing.

She signed.

It was very different for her to have sex with him. She felt that it was her first time.

'I love you Ibrahiem. I love you so much that I don't want anything but staying beside you for the rest of my life,' she said.

'I love you to. I feel relaxed at last,' he said.

'I'm not a bad woman, Ibrahiem. I've wanted this day since adulthood.' Her tears fell on his chest.

'Let's talk about future. About our kids,' he said.

'I'm above forty now. Do you think there is a chance for kids?' she said.

'Many had problems. Then they had their kids after forty,' he said.

'Let's hope,' she said.

'I'm not going to the meeting tomorrow. I want to stay here,' she said.

'I think it is too important to win tomorrow or you'll remember that day forever,' he said.

'You think so,' she said.

'I know you.'

In the evening Nagwa and Shahinaze went to several colleagues and discussed what had happened in the meeting. Both women stayed all the night writing panels exposing what Hussein Yousry and Noor Sultan had done to the Egyptians in the dictatorship era. Some panels showed the familial relationship to Nesreen. Some journalists and thinkers who fled the country during the dictatorship era promised that they would support Nagwa.

In the early morning, Nagwa was there ready for the confrontation. Many friends stood and were ready to support her.

Nesreen withdrew and stood away silent when she saw the gathering. What annoyed her was a panel written against the British government for allowing Hussein to live free in England. Some journalists promised that they would go to the court in a trial to prosecute him. Nagwa went to where Nesreen was sitting with a small group of her friends.

‘I think it is better you call your fucken husband,’ Nagwa said.

‘Take care. Laws here do not permit verbal humiliation. You are protected in Egypt because you are a follower of the regime. You serve it like a slave,’ Nesreen responded. Her tone showed that she was annoyed.

‘Do laws here permit criminals to live free? Are rapists eligible for political refugee visa in this country? You call your sadistic, fucken husband and let’s go to the police now,’ Nagwa said.

‘If you came from a respectable family they would kill you for your sexual scandals,’ Nesreen shouted.

‘Then tell me why your father did not do that when they arrested you naked like whores in brothels,’ Nagwa shouted. ‘They took her wrapped in bed sheets. She was naked. Did he sodomize you? Her husband likes beating women’s asses then sodomizing them.’

Nesreen rushed to the gates and disappeared.

In Athens Tamer and Ahmed El-Dory were in a cheap hotel. In their room, they decided to divide the money that they brought in cash from Egypt. They decided not to meet for a while. Each had a forged passport with another name.

‘What are your planes?’ Tamer asked Ahmed.

‘I know persons here who will help me to establish a company to export food stuff to Egypt. I’ll specialize in chicken and caned meat after extending the expired date. Later I’ll go to Switzerland with my real name and passport and establish another clean job there,’ Ahmed said.

‘I’ll buy a restaurant using my real passport because I had the Greek visa on it as I applied for it before. I used it to enter this country. I used the forged passport to fled from Egypt only. In the plane I tore it into small pieces in the toilet and flushed it away,’ Tamer said.

‘You are a devil Tamer. Why did not you tell me this idea when we decided to fly to Greece?’ Ahmed said.

‘I expected you to do that.’ Tamer carried his belongings and left.

Nagwa and Ibrahiem took their seats on the plane flying to Cairo. She looked younger and happier. Ibrahiem noticed that she became a smiling woman like what she had been twenty years ago when she was innocent girl. Even her talkative nature returned after years of aggressive and nervous sentences before cursing. She chose a white dress decorated with small red and pink roses. Her make up was simple. Her accessories were silver bracelet, chain and earrings leaving the gold for the traditional plain ring that they bought after they wrote their Orfi marriage. They wanted to surprise the family with their long waited happy marriage. Time passed quickly and they heard the pilot's announcement that the plane would land in Cairo. When they left the airport, they discovered that they did not agree on where they would live.

'I think we live now at father's home,' he said.

'You know that your sister Thurya does not like me. She will stir troubles for us. She is my cousin but she changed to worse than she had been before. She is a very selfish and she's no less bad than Tamer. Believe me,' she said.

'I like aunt Amal but I think it will not be appropriate to live at her home. Sometimes Elham visits her and stays all the night. I think it will be embarrassing,' he said.

'You don't know Elham well. She will be too happy and she will visit her mom more,' she said.

'Her husband may be angry about that,' he said.

'Don't complicate the situation. After all our stay will be temporary until we find an apartment,' she said.

'It is not easy to find an apartment. I've to make some arrangements with father to collect the money needed,' he said.

'Then I think we live in Garden City with Salwa. You know she will be happy,' she suggested.

'I can't do that. I can't live in the apartment that witnessed your past,' he said. He regretted it. 'I'm sorry but your words in the plane that you wished you could meet Hussein to expose him as well as Nesreen made me nervous.'

'Stop it,' she said and turned her face, 'I know you will not forget the past. I'm to blame. I should not have agreed to marry you.'

'Sorry,' he gave her a tissue.

‘Even your sorry insults me.’ She did not take the tissue. ‘You take a taxi to Abbassia and I’ll go to Garden City. Enough is enough. My past is a part of me.’

Abd-Allah hugged Ibrahiem and wept. The son was annoyed by the tears of his father.

‘Thurya was married to a businessman. It is an Orfi marriage. She did not ask for my permission. I don’t know anything about our accounts. Salwa and Nagwa are kind and they visit me every week when they come to Abbassia to see Amal. I had influenza last week. I phoned Thurya. Her servant took the call and I heard her say to him, if it were my father you would tell him that I’m out. I phoned Salwa and she came at once and took me to the doctor and stayed three days with me,’ the father said. It was the first time he cried like a child in front of his son.

‘I’ll kill her,’ Ibrahiem was enraged. ‘Where does she live?’

‘No Ibrahiem. I want you to advise her and to take care of herself. Save her my son,’ the father said.

‘I married Nagwa in London but unfortunately we had a row when we reached Cairo,’ Ibrahiem said.

‘Good news that you married. She is the only person who can make you happy,’ the father said.

Ibrahiem told him about the fight. Abd-Allah blamed Ibrahiem that he had to mind his words.

‘I’m afraid that she may ask for a divorce again,’ Ibrahiem said.

‘She won’t because she loves you and that what she has wished since years,’ Abd-Allah said.

Salwa returned from the boutique to find Nagwa in the flat.

‘Oh, my God,’ Salwa screamed. She threw herself on Nagwa who was sitting on the sofa. She kissed her sister on every inch of her face. Nagwa’s tears wetted Salwa’s lips. ‘Why are you crying?’

‘I married Ibrahiem,’ Nagwa said.

Salwa jumped and gave out a zaghroota (a joyful sound comes from women’s mouths by moving their tongues rapidly from side to side). ‘At last it happened. You will live here. Don’t worry about me. I can live with aunt Amal if Ibrahiem likes that. I’ll arrange a honeymoon trip for you in Alexandria. No, they say Sharm is the best coast in Egypt now. There you can dive. No, I think it will be better if you spend few days in Athens then Rome. This trip is my present. Where is Ibrahiem?’

Excuse me I know he is your husband but he is my cousin and he is like a brother. I'll surprise him in the bedroom and I'll kiss him on cheeks. He will think it is you. I'll listen to what he will say. I'll wake him up then we go to have dinner outside. Oh my God, I'm happy for you.' She took one-step toward the bedroom then shouted with a very loud voice, **'Ibrahiem. Wake up. Put on your cloths or I don't care if you are naked.'**

'Stop it1' Nagwa screamed to silence her sister. **'We had a fight and he went to Abbassia and I came here.'** She rushed to the bedroom. She stood looking at mirror. **'I should not have talked about this flat. It was a stupid suggestion. I ruin everything,'** she whispered. **'Oh, oh.'** She screamed. She threw a perfume bottle at the mirror the minute Salwa reached the bedroom.

'It is okay. Everything will be okay. He loves you. I'm sure he does,' Salwa supported her to the bed. She gave her a sleeping pill.

Nagwa visited Amal frequently. Every time she went there, she hoped that Elham would be there with her two sons, Wael the fourteen years old teenager and Walid the seven years old. That day Elham came angry with her elder boy. She discovered that sometimes he went to the cinema instead of going to the school.

‘Mom, Nagwa, I want to talk to you,’ Elham said seriously. She went to her mother’s bedroom and the two women followed her. She closed the door. She sat at the bed and said, ‘I’m not crazy. But I want a divorce. I can’t be a mother and a father. Tawfik gets up early and returns from the hospital at lunch. His siesta is important to be alert in the evening. He comes home at one or two o’clock after midnight. He knows nothing about his kids. Now I have a teenager who needs his father. I can’t continue. I phoned Tawfik to come here but he said that he would come after his private clinic.’

‘Doctors work day and night,’ Amal said. ‘Don’t forget that you and your kids spend much.’

‘You have a teenager who needs his father. After divorce this guy will need both his father and his mother,’ Nagwa said.

‘Do you know what happened today? He did not go to school. He went to the cinema,’ suddenly she jumped and rushed out of the room and when she reached her son, she pulled his hair then with her both hands she started beating him. ‘I’ll kill you.’

Amal took the boy to another room. ‘Calm her down, Nagwa.’

‘You complicate the problem. Let me talk to Wael,’ Nagwa said.

‘His father should do that. His father should give him a good beat for what he did. The man who thinks that he uses the house as a hotel and he does not know anything about his neighbors,’ Elham said.

‘I insist on talking to him. He is a good boy,’ Nagwa said.

‘He is a good boy. His father is a good doctor. And his mother is a crazy woman,’ she said sarcastically.

The dialogue continued for about an hour then Nagwa went out and called Wael.

‘Have a seat Wael. I want to have a word with you,’ she said. When he sat down she looked at him and tried to hide her smile. She thought that the boy had grown up and his mother had to expect such actions. ‘I can’t believe it. How come you did that?’

‘Why not?’ she did not expect his question.

‘Because it was time for study. It wasn’t your day off,’ she tried to control her voice not to be loud.

‘Aunt Nagwa, you don’t know the background. It’s all about mom. She treats me as a kid. I’m not a kid anymore. Last Thursday I was about to go to a cinema with some of the friends. She forced me to stay home because I got eighty five percent in last month’s test. She said that my father wants me to be a doctor so I should get ninety five percent and keep this level until I finish my secondary school study to have a chance to study medicine,’ he said.

‘And you don’t want to be a doctor,’ she enquired.

‘I want to be a businessman. It is the fastest way to be rich in this country. Anyhow I think about immigration,’ he said.

‘Well you can’t achieve goals without studying. I think cinemas aren’t the proper place to study,’ she tried to control herself.

‘Being a businessman doesn’t need study. My friend’s father is a businessman and he did not have any university degree. He is a contractor and he builds high buildings. His son told me that his father pays the first installment of a land piece. Then he sells the flats before building them. How much will the government give me when I’ll have a bachelor degree? Few pounds,’ he said.

‘Have you any hobby?’ she asked.

‘I play football,’ he said. ‘When I asked mum to play in the club’s team after the trainer had great expectation that I could be a clever player she refused. She said that I should finish my study first. When I finish my study it will be too late.’ He cried.

‘Oh my son,’ Nagwa took his hand then embraced him. ‘Now I know the problem. I promise you will play in the club’s team. But you have to be studious as well.’

When Nagwa discussed the boy’s request with Elham, she found the mother very stubborn.

‘Nagwa, you think that playing football is as important as study. I think he deserves a good beat from his father for what he did. I know you love him, but you aren’t a mother to be as anxious as I am about his future. Moreover, your social circles think that football players are important persons. For me they are nothing. This boy should be a university graduate. Sporting will badly affect his future.’

‘I understand,’ Nagwa said. ‘Anyway I have to go now. Say hello to Tawfik.’

'You would have dinner with us,' Amal said.

'Plans changed,' Nagwa said.

She walked in the street without a definite direction. She left her car barked. She thought about her life. It was too late to be a mother at forty-three years old – she thought. However she knew women who had children at her age. She looked younger than her age. Always she wanted to have a child. She dreamed much about a small picture with Ibrahiem and a baby. She found herself at the Abd-Allah's flat door. She pushed on the button. Ibrahiem opened the door for her. They both looked at each other's eyes for few seconds of silence. Abd-Allah's voice broke in the silence asking about the comer.

'It is me, Nagwa,' she said. She went to her uncle's bedroom. Ibrahiem did not follow her. She stayed for about one hour.

'Be at home. You may go and make tea for us,' Abd-Allah said.

'Thank you. I don't want to drink anything. I may make you a good tea,' she said.

She went to the kitchen and waited for sometime waiting for Ibrahiem to come to her. She made a cup of tea for her uncle.

'I hope you will like it,' she gave the cup to her uncle.

'Thank you,' he said. He looked at her and said, 'do you want to say something?'

'No, nothing, I just came to see you,' she knew what her uncle meant. 'Excuse me I'll go to toilet.'

On her way she decided to talk to Ibrahiem. She opened his bedroom door without knocking at the door. The room was dark. She switched on the light before her eyes being accommodated to the darkness. There was nobody in the room. She stood for a second before she could recognize that Ibrahiem left the house to avoid talking to her. She dried up her tears and said good-bye to her uncle.

In Garden City, Nagwa finished her third strait before Salwa came that night.

'Why are sitting in the darkness?' Salwa asked.

'Tomorrow, call Ibrahiem and say to him that he has to divorce me and tear the Orfi marriage paper,' Nagwa said.

'Oh, my God, What's the problem?' Salwa said.

'Just tell him,' Nagwa said.

Salwa knew that her sister was not in a good mood. Next day both women did not talk about that.

Thurya visited her father and brother to say good-bye before going to Europe with Khairy her husband. Ibrahiem noticed that his sister used to talk much about her wealth and her plans of the future.

‘Most probably we’ll buy a house in London. I wanted to buy a flat in Paris or Rome but Khairy likes London. He promised me to buy these flats after few months,’ she said.

The phone ringing interrupted her conversation.

‘Hello, yes I’m Thurya,’ she said then she listened anxiously and then she responded, ‘I’ll come at once.’ She sat down silent for few minutes. She thought about what to say then she stared, ‘plans changed. I won’t fly to Europe. Khairy’s first wife knew about us. My neighbor told me that Khairy found her waiting for him at the apartment’s door. They had a row then they entered my apartment together. I don’t know what will happen but I think I’ve to go right now.’

‘May I go with you Thurya?’ Ibrahiem proposed.

She laughed and said, ‘don’t worry. All businessmen now have bodyguards. I have three men waiting for me in a car that always accompanies my car. I don’t care if Khairy divorces me. It was a good business and I got a lot from him. But my bodyguards will prevent him from taking what he had given to me.’

‘I thought that only Mafia men do that,’ Ibrahiem said.

She did not comment.

When Khairy divorced Thurya in front of his first wife and tore the Orfi contract, she did not feel sorry. When she was alone she started to calculate the wealth she had gained. She phoned Salwa to tell her the story and to ask her to think about a new business with Jermyn in Rome.

‘Enough is enough Thurya. We lost Tamer because of dirty games,’ Salwa said.

‘Tamer lost his way when he left Zizi and when he cooperated with your ex-husband,’ Thurya said.

‘Fuck you,’ Salwa said.

Ibrahiem was sitting beside Abd-Allah's bed in the hospital reading verses from the Quran. The old man was breathing rapidly and he was semiconscious. Nagwa and Salwa came to see their uncle.

'Aunt Amal is on the way,' Nagwa said.

Ibrahiem nodded his head and did not say a word. Nagwa noticed that he was doing a big effort not to cry. She used her right hand's finger to wipe his tears with her left hand's ones to wipe her own.

'He asked about Thurya. Did you phone her?' Ibrahiem said.

'I phoned her and she is on the way,' Salwa said.

But it was too late and the man died. When Thurya came after an hour, she was wearing full make up.

'I wish I could see him,' Thurya cried.

Ibrahiem did not comment. He went to the far end of the hospital corridor to cry alone after he failed to control himself anymore. Nagwa went to him and hugged him. It had been long time since she did. They cried together.

'He asked me to tell you that he wanted you not to ask for a divorce,' he whispered in Nagwa's ears.

'I'll never ask such a thing. If I did you would not agree. You knows then that it is one of my madness episodes,' she said.

They returned to Abbassia together and she insisted on staying the night with her husband in her uncle's house. They spent the first night trying to comfort each other. She avoided talking about any bad memory. In the morning, she prepared light breakfast.

'When are you going to bring your belongings from Garden City?' he asked while taking a sip from his tea cup.

'I don't want to go there anymore. I'll ask Salwa to collect them for me and she will bring them,' she smiled.

He smiled and went to prepare for the funeral service.

Months later Ibrahiem was in his office when he received a phone call.

'Brigadier Ibrahiem?'

'Yes, I'm.'

'Would you please come at 9 o'clock tomorrow morning to the Ministry of Defence for an important meeting?'

Next morning he met one of the army commanders.

‘Congratulation, you are promoted to the rank of General. However, you will be transferred to the civilian service as an Ambassador in the Foreign Ministry,’ the commander said.

Thurya used to read the newspapers while having her breakfast. She knew that her brother became an Ambassador in the Foreign Ministry. She decided to congratulate him. She left her office early.

‘I’m going to Abbassia,’ she said to the driver.

When nobody responded to her knocking at the door, she used her old key and entered the flat. After an hour, Nagwa entered the flat to find Thurya waiting for her in the reception.

‘I did not touch anything. I know the house has a new queen now,’ Thurya said.

‘Hello, Thurya,’ Nagwa did not want to comment on the irritating sarcasm.

‘Do you think this flat is suitable for an Ambassador?’ Thurya asked. ‘I think Ibrahiem should move and he should buy a new car and hire a driver.’

‘They send a car to take him every morning and when he has evening meetings,’ Nagwa said.

‘But he drives his own car. He has to hire a private driver,’ Thurya said.

‘You may tell him. I’m sure that this idea never crossed his mind,’ Nagwa said.

‘You have to tell him. You know that men do not care much about their prestige. And you are now an Ambassador’s wife. You should not drive anymore. You should have a cooker as well,’ Thurya said.

‘What are you talking about Thurya? We understand each other,’ Nagwa said.

‘I came to congratulate Ibrahiem. After all he is my brother,’ Thurya said.

Nagwa changed and went to the kitchen to prepare lunch. Thurya stood in the kitchen, but she did not provide any help. Ibrahiem came and went directly to the kitchen to say hello to his wife as usual.

‘Congratulation,’ Thurya kissed him on the cheeks and embraced him showing extra emotions. Nagwa remembered Jasmine’s words about how talented Thurya in acting. Ibrahiem changed and went to the kitchen and started making the salad as he used to do everyday. After lunch, Nagwa went to prepare tea.

‘Good, she went to make tea. I’d like to have a word with you,’ Thurya said to Ibrahiem.

‘I’m all ears,’ he said.

‘I think this flat is not suitable for an Ambassador,’ she said. She waited for a while and looked at him to observe his reaction. When she noticed the indifference and his sarcastic smile she added, ‘ambassadors live good life. They inhabit best flats in affluent districts and ride big salon cars. They have servants, cooks and drivers. I think you cannot afford that. Moreover, Nagwa should have diamond jewels. I’m ready to support you now but I have plans for the future.’

‘I’m satisfied with this apartment, my car and my life. I know what is suitable for me,’ he said.

‘But you didn’t ask me about my plans,’ she said.

‘I don’t think that your plans concern me,’ he said.

‘They do. What if we sell the building? I can negotiate with the inhabitants to leave their apartments. Then we can sell the whole building for a fortune. Leave the inhabitants to me because if one refused to leave I would use other means,’ she said.

‘Bullies?’ he asked.

‘Yes,’ she laughed.

‘But if I don’t want to leave. I like this place,’ he said.

‘Ibrahiem, I need money for a big project. You need money for your expenses. I know that the government gives nothing. Ambassadors are only paid good money if they serve abroad. Until they send you abroad, you have to live as an ambassador on your own. And don’t say that Nagwa supports you. I know she is a famous author and scriptwriter. I know she might have saved some money from the old days when she had been doing some other things,’ she laughed sarcastically.

‘You are rubbish,’ he hit her on face.

‘You beat me. You will regret it. I need my third in the house, the publishing house that is closed. Let this slut spend from her prostitution money,’ she stood to leave.

Involuntarily, Ibrahiem extended a hand, pulled her hair, and started to hit her. Nagwa came and saved her.

Nagwa stayed weeping silently in the bedroom. Ibrahiem tried to calm her down but he failed. She started to collect her belongings.

‘What are you doing?’ he asked anxiously.

‘You have to divorce me and forget me forever. What Thurya your sister and my cousin said was expected. I knew it would happen one day. I should not harm you more,’ she said.

‘Nagwa, you are my wife. I’m proud of you and I won’t let go. I’m serious. Don’t push me to use force to prevent you from leaving. I won’t divorce you. You will stay in this house,’ he said decisively.

After about an hour, the doorbell rang. A police soldier was at the door.

‘Mr. Ibrahiem Mazloom is here?’ the soldier said.

‘Yes, I’m.’

‘The inspector wants to see you in the police station,’ the soldier said.

‘Why?’

‘Mrs. Thurya Mazloom reported that you beat her,’ the soldier said.

Nagwa insisted on going with Ibrahiem to the police station.

A copy of her report was sent to the Ministry of Foreign affairs. There they told Ibrahiem that he had to finish this problem as soon as he could.

Nagwa finished her make-up. Ibrahiem was waiting for her in the car. They were to pick Salwa from the boutique then they would have a dinner together. As soon as the car left, a man phoned Thurya.

‘They left madam,’ he said. He listened for a second then said, ‘yes of course. No one is in the flat now. The men are ready but I prefer they start when you come. After all, we are going to break an Ambassador’s flat. Don’t forget their bonus and mine of course.’

The bullies waited for Thurya and when she came, it took less than five minutes to break into the apartment and one of the bullies used a scissor to scratch his face then she called the police.

Nagwa and Salwa talked much about everything while Ibrahiem was thinking on how to re-conciliate with his sister. Suddenly he was alerted by Salwa’s sudden face turn and sharp voice.

‘You don’t talk,’ she said.

‘Oh yes, I’m thinking,’ he said.

‘I know. It’s Thurya that made you sad,’ she said.

‘Of course, the problem is that I don’t know why she behaves like that,’ his low tone voice and masked face made her feel pity for him.

But, she was also angry. She said, ‘she behaves like that because she’s a bitch.’ She felt that she went far, so she added, ‘sorry, I know she’s your sister but she is not one in this family anymore. Sorry Ibrahiem, I think it is better that I stop. Next time when I go to my psychiatrist I’ll ask him to make something so that I can control my words.’

Ibrahiem and Nagwa laughed.

Ibrahiem and Nagwa returned to find Thurya in the flat. She changed the locker of the door. She screamed and threatened that she would call the police. Suddenly one of the bullies opened the door and the others threw the belongings of Nagwa and Ibrahiem, cloths, books, accessories and everything in four big traveling bags. Nagwa screamed. The police came. Ibrahiem discovered that one of the bullies accused Ibrahiem of beating him and cutting his face with a scissor. The Ambassador had to present himself next morning at the prosecutor general office.

On the same bed in the same room where Nagwa had collected her shattered soul after being raped first time, they sat on silent. Nagwa felt that Ibrahiem was silent not because he was thinking but because he had a blocked mind.

Amal approached him in a motherly manner and said, ‘nothing to worry about. This is in fact your wife’s home and I’m a guest.’

‘You’re my mother. This house is mine because it’s yours,’ Nagwa responded without thinking. She turned her face and saw imprisoned tears in Ibrahiem’s eyes. She cried, embraced him and said, ‘please don’t cry. Not you. If you cried once I would die.’

‘I think it is better that we go to a hotel until the problem is resolved. Elham comes here and spends some nights. She has to be here at ease,’

‘She is your sister. And I’m your mother,’ Amal said.

‘I know but I think this is the best option now,’ he said.

Next morning Thurya was in her office when Salwa rushed in and while she was standing, she said, ‘you are just a slut and a bitch.’

‘Have a seat,’ Thurya responded coldly. ‘I thought you would understand me. I told Ibrahiem that I need money. He insisted on keeping everything. Tell him that I’m ready to sell my share in the house, the publishing house and the library.’

‘He agrees,’ Salwa said.

‘Did he authorize you to have a deal?’ Thurya said.

‘I pay for the deal then it will be between him and me,’ Salwa said.

‘You don’t have enough cash to strike such a deal,’ Thurya said smiling.

‘I’ll have a bank loan to cover the deal. My boutique worth millions,’ Salwa had a seat and lit a cigarette.

‘You are a good sister,’ Thurya said.

They negotiated and shouted then they reached a deal.

Salwa rushed to the hotel and went up to Nagwa and Ibrahiem’s room. She jumped in the air and said.

‘Let’s go to Abbassia. She picked a key from her handbag and said proudly, ‘I had a deal with Thurya.’

‘Why did you do that? We have just come from the lawyer and he assured us,’ Nagwa said.

‘This will take a long time. You know courts in this country. Thurya left the house, the publishing house and the library for Ibrahiem. Tomorrow Ibrahiem goes to the registration office,’ Salwa said.

‘Who paid for that?’ Ibrahiem asked.

‘We had a deal,’ Salwa said.

‘I understand that you paid. I don’t think you have enough in your bank account to strike such a deal,’ Ibrahiem said.

‘I asked for a bank loan to cover everything. I gave her checks until I receive the bank loan,’ Salwa said.

‘I cannot accept that you go bankrupt because you want to solve my problems,’ he said.

‘Salwa is a sister. I shall manage the publishing house and the library so you can pay her back,’ Nagwa said.

‘I can pay back the loan. Trading in cloths is a good business in this country,’ Salwa said.

‘No, I write checks for you Salwa or I won’t accept the deal,’ he said. ‘This is final.’ He was too decisive.

The Iraqi-Iranian war ended after several years. Iraq celebrated the victory and Hussein was considered a hero for his role in smuggling weapons for the Iraqi army. He got the Iraqi nationality and his daughter Dalal married an Iraqi intelligence officer whose job made him near to the beast's heart. Hussein used to spend several nights at his daughter and son in law's home. While Dalal was preparing the dinner, Hussein was listening to his son in law. Maysa married an army officer.

'I think there will be a great decision in the near future. This decision will change everything and it will make Iraq a real superpower,' the officer said.

'Will Iraq resume war against Iran until Tehran falls?' Hussein said.

'No, Iran understood the lesson. It will take ages for Iran to be a country again. The regime there has to write its will,' the officer said. Suddenly he changed the subject, 'do you have contacts with the Egyptian intelligence?'

'Of course no, you know that I am an Iraqi now. I should not contact them or any other intelligence. I just manage my business in export and import. Of course you know that some sales are secret and I do some contacts with different sources but after I tell the Iraqi intelligence,' Hussein thought that his son in law tried to play a dirty game with him.

'In fact we want to improve our relations with Egypt more. You know that Iraq, Egypt, Jordan and Yemen are members in a cooperation council. But we want an Egyptian support for our next step. If you could contact them, you would serve this country much. Of course others do but you know that many channels are better than one,' the officer said.

'I'll see what I can do,' Hussein said.

'Don't forget that any big operation means big arms' sales,' the officer laughed.

When Hussein left his daughter's house, she was enthusiastic.

Nesreen and Magid were writing for the Iraqi newspapers. They tried to live as safe as they could, but their father Noor Sultan had an old dream of ruling Egypt. When Iraq invaded the tiny Kuwait, he

thought it was his chance. He stayed in the study room for long hours. His daughter was anxious about him. Then came a day when Noor invited Hussein to the study room.

‘Read this file,’ Noor said in a quiet tone while holding a cigar. Hussein read a handwritten sheet. ‘What’s this?’ Hussein asked sarcastically.

‘This is the declaration of an Egyptian government in exile. Now Egypt is a country in the alliance against Iraq,’ Noor said. ‘This step will make the Iraqi government recognize us after the rulers in Egypt sided against Iraq and sent their army to defend the Saudis.’

‘You’re just a crazy old man who should find his way soon to a grave,’ Hussein said. He threw the file and went out of the study room. He went to the bedroom. Nesreen was on the bed reading a novel.

‘Tell your crazy father to stop playing politics. I don’t damn care about who rules Egypt now. I’m here to look after my business and he has to remember that we are Iraqis now,’ Hussein was threatening.

‘Could you please talk more decently especially when you talk about my father? You are very rude,’ she shouted back at him. She went to the door to close it so that her father would not hear their argument.

‘He is just a son of a bitch,’ he pulled her hair.

‘Oh,’ she screamed then shouted again, ‘you are just a fucken sadist. You are an animal. Even animals are better than you are. They have brains.’ She bit him.

He slapped her on face and her nose bled. He pushed her on the bed and sodomized her as usual. Then he left the house.

The news of the Iraqi invasion of Kuwait shocked the Egyptian people and they sympathized with the weak Kuwait. Ibrahiem and Nagwa spent long hours discussing the situation.

‘It is a very crazy step,’ Ibrahiem said.

‘Is this a fact or conclusion?’ Nagwa said sarcastically. ‘Saddam may do anything just to see crowds hailing him and chanting, “By blood and soul, we sacrifice you”. He is just another catastrophic dictator.’

Few months later Iraq was forced out of Kuwait, but the dictator claimed victory.

In a five star hotel, Thurya signed the contracts of the new company with a group of businessmen. She left management for them.

‘Of course, I’ll bring equipments and material through my export and import company, so please transfer the money needed as soon as possible,’ she said before leaving the place.

‘Just a moment please,’ one of her partners stopped her. ‘You told us that you have contacts in banks so we can get loans for that.’

‘Tomorrow morning I’ll send the catalogues of the machines that we’ll bring. You add them to the bank file and ask the bank to transfer the money directly. These besides the assets we provide give more credibility,’ she said.

After a week, the money was in her companies account abroad. She exported some machines and asked her partners to make them assets for another loan from another bank so that money would be present for future expansion. The propaganda that Thurya and her partners campaigned made everybody thought that a big economic body was created. This gave her credibility in any bank. She paid bribes for some corrupted bank mangers to have more loans. One day Thurya disappeared. Her partners who were responsible for managing the multimillions company found nothing but few unworthy machines and they stopped paying back the several bank loans. Newspapers knew and published the story. Her partners and the bank managers were arrested.

After the Iraqi defeat and the retreat from Kuwait, the economic sanctions made life difficult there. Saddam declared victory and celebrated it. Hussein predicted that conditions would deteriorate. He wanted to continue his arms trade but not in Iraq anymore. He thought about fleeing the country. It was risky because he and his family were officially Iraqis. He had his secret contacts with outlaws like any weapons’ smuggler. He decided to take his daughters with him. He did not want to have Nesreen or her father and brother. He started to contact a forged passports specialist. However, he had a bad surprise. One day his son in law came to him carrying three passports. He understood that the intelligence officer knew.

‘What do want to keep it secret?’ Hussein asked his son in law after he closed the door of the study room.

‘I love Dalal. It will be too difficult to live without her,’ the intelligent officer said.

Hussein knew that his son in law treated his wife well. However, he was not so naive that he would believe that that was the only drive. ‘And?’ Hussein wanted his son of law to tell him more.

‘Well, I want to accompany you. I know that there is no future here. Conditions deteriorate. As long as Saddam is in power nothing good happens. You know that I haven’t money abroad. What if you secure my future? After all, I’m your son in law. I made a passport for myself to accompany you. I planed for a truck that will take us to Turkey and from there we shall go anywhere. Don’t forget that my mother is a Kurd and I have relatives in the north that will help us. I think this is a good deal,’ the son in law said.

It took two hours of discussions until they agreed about the money that Hussein would write in a check for his son in law. Then they kissed each other. Both men thought about killing each other after crossing the Turkish-Iraqi borders.

In Athens, Thurya was waiting for Tamer in Café. She knew he would offer her the best place until she could manage to start her own business. A man approached her and asked her in Arabic to follow him to Tamer’s car. In the back seat, Tamer was smiling and told the driver in English to go to the villa that was on the coast near Piraeus.

‘What do you do in life?’ Thurya asked.

‘I have a nice restaurant and night club. I meet my customers after midnight. They like to spend most of their nights at my place after the exhausting working days,’ he said.

The car barked in the villa and she noticed the high walls around the garden and the presence of many armed men.

‘I think your work is dangerous,’ she said when they were alone in the big reception.

‘A good observation,’ he said coldly. He used his index to point to the stairs in a sign that she did not like, ‘the bedrooms are up there. Choose any one.’

‘Do you live here?’ she asked.

‘Of course, but don’t ask too many questions. I’m the boss here. We are cousins but you taught me that business needs a stiff boss. Excuse me now. I’ll come to accompany you for dinner in the restaurant.’ he said as if giving orders.

She filled the tub with hot water and relaxed to think about her plans. She knew that she would follow Tamer’s instructions for a while. She decided to be his partner. However, she also decided to control him and she knew how to do the job. When he came to pick her for the dinner, she wore the sexiest dress she had.

‘You look beautiful,’ he said.

‘But I did my hair because I don’t know how to find a hair dresser in this remote area,’ she said.

‘But it is beautiful,’ he touched her hair. He stood behind her and kissed her shoulder.

‘I think we shall go now,’ she said.

In the nightclub, she danced with him. When they were alone in his office, he tried to touch her sensitive parts. She let him but when his advances went deep and his emotions were hot, she retreated and said, ‘why did you leave the galabya?’

‘Here, business needs another style. In this place, it will be strange to wear such a dress. But this does not mean that I abandoned my beliefs,’ he said.

She laughed and responded, ‘isn’t sinful to live together without marriage?’

‘Both of us know that our interest is money. Dollars, that’s why we are here,’ he said.

‘A good start, I have a fortune. When can I start business? I know you dream of sleeping with me. I chose your bedroom. Tomorrow morning we shall talk about business. Very practical, isn’t it?’ she said.

‘Very. Now business icons in this country will appear. Let me introduce you to them. I planed for it since you have contacted me. After all we are cousins,’ he said.

‘As if you knew that we would have a deal,’ she said.

‘Of course,’ he said.

Hussein put a plan to escape from Iraq. He married an Iraqi woman whose brother was a high rank official to give a false impression that he would stay forever in the country. He told Nesreen and spent at least three days per week at his new wife. He did not practice any sadistic acts with his new woman not to anger her. Nesreen as a woman felt humiliation despite the fact that their relations were disturbed. She was used to the way they had been living since they had left Egypt. She did not hate him and she did not think about leaving him. In fact she enjoyed being sodomized. That was her secret that she did not tell Hussein about it. She even enjoyed being beaten before sodomy. And more his presence somewhat secured her father’s life and she did not want more troubles for the old man. Hussein’s bad behavior and his bad treatment for his daughters made her convinced that there was no reason for her to have a special good treatment. However having a second wife was too much. Woman’s instinct made her believe that he

was up to something. She searched his papers and belongings when he was not at home.

In the early morning, Nesreen went to the Iraqi Intelligence Headquarters. She was known as she went frequently to write reports about the newspaper in which she worked and to receive her monthly payment.

‘I’d like to report about a conspiracy against the state,’ she said calmly.

‘Tell me the whole story,’ the officer said.

‘My husband wants to flee the country with his daughters and sons of law. You know that we are Iraqis now and it is treason to leave the country without permission. He transferred a fortune and prepared forged passports. All documents are in this envelop,’ she said.

One hour later Hussein and his daughters and sons of law were in jail. Nesreen was promoted to a high post in media circles. She and her brother became permanent visitors in TV shows.

The telephone rang at Ibrahiem’s office in the morning.

‘Hello, how are you Ibrahiem?’ Salwa said. ‘Don’t forget Nagwa’s birthday. I know you will never forget it. I know it may be difficult for you to decide what to buy for her as a present. I suggest you pass at my boutique to choose something for her. Don’t buy anything alone. You haven’t a good idea about fashion. I’m waiting for you,’ she said.

‘Okay,’ he knew that if he tried to discuss anything with her then they would have a long discussion. He had many things to do.

When Ibrahiem returned home and he was carrying a plastic bag. Nagwa was at the kitchen to prepare a rapid meal for them.

‘Hello,’ she said. She saw the plastic bag and read “Oh Lala” at the bag. ‘Put the blouse at the bedroom with the fifty pounds. I told you this morning that Salwa would phone you to make sure that you remember my birthday and she would force you to buy the white blouse. She knew that I admired this one when I saw her wearing it. What place did she choose to have dinner together?’

‘Yes, you know Salwa’s thinking. But how come she thinks that I may forget your birthday?’ He laughed.

‘Many husbands do this mistake. After all many men, end their lives being cut into pieces in plastic bags. I’m a mad woman and I received psychiatric treatment years ago. I warn you,’ she kissed him.

‘Salwa is scared when we’ve a husband-wife argument. She knew how much we suffered until we became together. She just wants to be sure that we are happy.’

At the evening Nagwa wore the blouse and the necklace that Ibrahiem bought her as her birthday present the day before. She was very happy when she saw admiration in Ibrahiem’s eyes.

‘I’ll go first to bring the car. When I came in the afternoon I did not find a parking place in front of the building,’ he said.

‘Let’s walk to it,’ she said.

‘No, today you are a queen,’ he said.

‘And tomorrow?’ she smiled.

‘I’m not an advocate of coups. You will be always my queen in this house,’ he said.

She saw him parking just in front of the building gate. She made her final touch and saw herself on the mirror that was hung on the wall beside the flat’s door. She took the first step outside gate of the building. Ibrahiem saw the man and the pistol after the terrorist shot his first bullet. While the criminal was shooting, three more times a motorcycle was approaching and the killer jumped behind the driver and they ran fast. Ibrahiem left the car and ran towards Nagwa who were bleeding heavily. He carried her to the nearest hospital shocked.

Ibrahiem and Salwa were in the corridor in the hospital. Surgeons were too busy inside the operation theatre to stop bleeding and to extract the bullets from Nagwa's body. Ibrahiem was angry and he felt pity for his wife. He was afraid of losing her, he was not sure about the future, and if she could live with handicapped provided that God saved her life. Death would end her suffering but both he and Salwa would miss her much. He thought that after marriage, she could live safe but days proved that her destiny was to live in danger. He felt defeated because he could not predict the accident and could not protect her. Salwa whispered Quran verses and talked to God to save her sister. Astonishingly, she remembered fine details of their life and she was afraid that the death angel might be their third in the corridor or might be ready in the theatre to defeat surgeons. Suddenly Ibrahiem cried. It was the first time Salwa saw his tears. She never thought he might cry. But, he cried like a scared child waiting to be separated from his beloved. She embraced him and dried up his tears.

'She'll be okay. She is a survivor,' Salwa said. She was not sure and burst into crying.

'I can't imagine life without her,' he said.

'I'd die if she died,' she responded.

A doctor came out of the operation theatre. The few steps he took toward them passed as ages. 'God saved her. You may see her after a while in the care unit, but only for few minutes,' he said.

'She is not in danger now, isn't she?' Salwa said.

'Let's hope she will be okay,' he said.

Hussein was exposed to sever torture in Iraqi prisons to tell about who helped him to have the forged passports. He knew that the process would not have an end until they knew everything. He told all but some numbers of his secret bank accounts abroad hoping that one day he might flee. For his sons in law the situation and conditions were different. The intelligence officer told his investigators that he had just known that his father in law would flee the country. Then he had planed to flee the country as well. They did not believe him. They asked him to tell about their relations with foreign countries and if he had spied on Iraq. He denied. The other son in law, the army officer did not know

anything but they did not believe that also. Both were severely tortured. The daughters cursed their father. Kept in two isolated cells they knew nothing and tried to tell their whole story since their father had kidnapped them from Egypt. After beating both women, they were taken to where their husbands were kept to see them raped. Torture in Saddam prisons became their daily lives.

In Greece, Tamer was living like Mafia Barons. He felt secure and thought that he was untouched. He used to wear all in black. Even the black eyeglasses were on his eyes day and night. Cigars never were far from his fingers and mouth. He returned to his villa on the Mediterranean coast to find Thurya too nervous. He ignored her bad mood.

‘You know that you’re the only person who see my eyes now,’ he said smiling.

‘Is it a favor? I should have thanked God for that,’ she said.

‘No, but I’ve just noticed that,’ he made two drinks for them.

‘It is not only your eyes but also your ass provided that you don’t cheat on me,’ she said.

He put a hand on her hair and tried to kiss her. She let him do but showed no reaction at all.

‘Do you think that I’m a naïve girl who’ll take off her cloths after your give her one touch,’ she said sarcastically then shouted, ‘fuck, you do that to your secretary, the bitch who goes around without knickers and bra.’

‘Are you jealous of this girl? Tomorrow I’ll change her,’ he said.

‘And when you are going to change me?’ she said.

‘What’s the problem Thurya?’ he asked.

She lit a cigarette and puffed it while starring at his eyes silently. She knew that that look always scared him.

‘What’s a problem Thurya?’ his tone was sharper now.

‘When I lived with you we had an agreement. Do you remember it?’ she said.

‘I think I left the restaurant for you. It is a good business. I told you if you have an idea about business, just let me know and I’ll help you,’ he said.

‘What about money laundry?’ she asked.

Her question silenced him. His pale face proved to her that she targeted right her aim. ‘Yes, I work in this business. But it is too difficult to have you with me,’ he said.

‘Too difficult does not mean impossible. If we marry we can be partners,’ she said.

‘Unfortunately marriage is not a pass for this Mafia,’ he said sarcastically.

‘No, it could be. Bank accounts will be between you and me. We can use them more effectively. It is better that we are partners or I’ll destroy everything. I swear it,’ she said.

‘Okay, let me arrange for it,’ he said.

‘Another thing please, the right to divorce should be mine as yours. We are Moslems and we have divorce,’ he said.

‘We cannot go to the Egyptian Embassy to get married. We’ll never leave and they will send us to Egypt to spend many years in jails. We are going to have an Orfi (non- registered) marriage,’ he said.

‘Then it should be written in English and Greek. We’ll ask a lawyer to register it as a contract in the registration office here,’ she said.

‘Agreed,’ he said.

‘Your secretary should leave tomorrow. It is not about jealousy. But my prestige will be tarnished if she stays. After all everybody knows about you and her,’ she said.

‘Agreed,’ he said.

‘Good boy. Now take off your cloths. I’m all yours. I know what you like on bed better than any other woman does. After all, your teacher was my friend and she told much,’ she said.

Nagwa’s health improved and she left the hospital. She had to stay in home. The family used to spend afternoons and evenings around her. Amal was present when the doorbell rang repeatedly.

‘It is Salwa,’ Nagwa said.

‘I gave her a key to come at anytime so that you don’t bother leaving the bed to open the door,’ Ibrahiem said.

‘She never uses it except when I shout that no one is here,’ Nagwa said.

Ibrahiem opened the door for his cousin.

‘Why don’t you use the key?’ he asked.

‘I know you’re here. What if I opened the door and you were in an intimate moment?’ she said involuntarily as usual. He blushed. She realized that she embarrassed him. ‘Sorry I’m stupid. Really, how come I say that? After all she is still ill.’

‘Stop it Salwa. I got your point,’ he said smiling.

‘Taxes want a million,’ she shouted while walking towards the bedroom where her sister was on bed there. When she reached the bedroom, she burst in crying, ‘it is my fault that I told them the truth about my income. They thought that I lied and they multiplied the income several times.’

‘I think you have to go to a lawyer or to an accountant to resolve the problem,’ Amal said.

‘Of course, But I don’t know what will happen. Most probably I’ll pay more than the proper taxes,’ Salwa said.

‘Oh no, it can’t be. Oh my God,’ Nagwa suddenly cried. She went into a hysterical episode of crying and weeping.

‘The problem is not that serious,’ Salwa said. ‘You know me. Sometimes I like to exaggerate and dramatize trivial problems.’

‘I told you not to do that,’ Amal said. ‘Nagwa is not in a good condition. We have not to tell her problems.’

Both Ibrahiem and the two women tried to calm Nagwa down.

‘Jasmine,’ she said and pointed to the TV.

Everybody listened to the presenter who announced that the young Lebanese women who worked recently in one of the satellite channels as a presenter was shot dead after she had presented programs about terrorism. She made an episode about Nagwa and recorded it two days ago.

Next day Nagwa insisted that she go to the funeral of Jasmine. She was supported by Ibrahiem and Salwa. Suddenly Salwa cried and shouted, ‘Dad, Mum, Nagwa, Emad, Ali and now Jasmine. Who will be the next victim?’

Ibrahiem was appointed to a post in the Arab League. Furthermore, he became a member in the committee that followed up what was called “oil for food” deal between Iraq and the UN. One day Nagwa returned home to find him revising some papers because he would fly to Baghdad next day.

‘Will you stay long?’ she asked.

It was not the first time that she felt scared when he was away. But this time her panic was overwhelming. He understood what she meant.

‘I think it will be three days only,’ he said.

‘I’ll ask Salwa to stay with me when you are in Iraq,’ she said. Tears came to her eyes and she turned her face not to let him be depressed by her fears. He held her shoulders, turned her to face him, and said, ‘I understand that you have fears since the trial on your life.’

‘It is not that only,’ she cried. ‘I feel that I may die at any moment and I want to see a lot of you before that. I miss you more than before when you are away.’

‘I understand Nagwa. But I like you to face the problem. You are a survivor. Don’t ever let your enemies break you. One day you told me that if I cried you would die. Today I say to you the same if you let others break you I would not find a meaning for our life. I’m proud of your brave soul. I know you will pass this period and you will become stronger,’ he took her between his arms. She felt secure and wanted the world to stand still.

In Iraq, after a meeting, an Iraqi diplomat approached him and asked for a private word. They went to the hotel’s lobby and the Iraqi diplomat cut short.

‘We have a present for you,’ the diplomat said.

‘I think I’m here for a certain mission not for receiving presents,’ Ibrahiem said smiling coldly. ‘Our mission is to help your people by ensuring enough food and medicines for them,’ he continued.

‘We thank God for saving the life of the big writer Nagwa. I think she is your cousin and wife,’ the diplomat said.

‘Yes,’ Ibrahiem understood that the Iraqi diplomat was talking about their Orfi non-registered marriage. This meant that the diplomat wanted to play dirty. After all, this type of marriage was not welcomed

by social conservative circles in the Middle East. He wanted to blackmail him. Ibrahiem's decision was prompt. He decided to marry Nagwa officially when he would return to Egypt.

'Thank you,' Ibrahiem said coldly. 'Excuse me, I have to sleep early because we'll fly to Cairo tomorrow at dawn,' he added.

'Hussein Yousry,' the diplomat walked after Ibrahiem and whispered near his ear. The name of the monster was enough to stop Ibrahiem and he turned to face the diplomat who added, 'If you like to shoot him, we give him to you as a gift.'

Ibrahiem observed that the Iraqi delegate tried hard to make the committee members agree to what the Iraqi government wanted. He looked at the Iraqi diplomat and said in a monotonous voice, 'I'm not a killer. If he did anything illegal, you can try him. I don't care about him.'

When Ibrahiem was back to Cairo, he went directly to his home. He waited for Nagwa and decided to talk to her about their marriage officially. When she returned from the journal, he was waiting for her and she found that he cooked a meal for them to dine. After dinner, he told her what happened in Iraq and asked her to register their marriage.

'This time you don't have excuses. Whatsoever the consequences may be, I'll marry you officially. If it was not late I would call the Maazoon – the man who registers marriage – now,' he finished his words.

'Why didn't you shoot him? It was a good chance to have our revenge, yours, mine, your uncle's and your mother in law's.' she said angrily. 'Why? Why?' she screamed and cried.

'I'm not a killer. He is now in one of the Iraqi detention site. I know the bad treatment he receives now. They torture him. And God will punish him more,' he said.

'It was an excellent chance to kill him. I'll never calm down until I or you kill him. Salwa is a woman, but she went crazy when she failed to kill him,' she shouted. Then she screamed and added, 'do you know what people call the man who does not kill the rapist of his wife. They call him a pimp.'

'Why don't you want to forget the past?' he shouted at her.

'Divorce me. You are not a man anymore,' she cried.

He slapped her on face and shouted back, 'no man kills a powerless prisoner.'

**‘He’s a criminal not an innocent prisoner. We know that. He fled the country. I hate you. I despise you,’ she spat at him.
He slapped her repeatedly.**

Nagwa drove her way to Garden City and used her sleeves to wipe her continuous tears. She parked the car and ran to the building. When she opened the door, she threw herself in Salwa’s arms and cried hysterically.

‘Ibrahiem has beaten me,’ she said between involuntarily weeping sounds.

Salwa calmed her down and listened to the story.

‘Of course, he should not kill him. He was in an official mission. What price would the Iraqis ask him for that? We are the Sei’dis (people from Upper Egypt) may have our revenge but we don’t kill a helpless prisoner. If Hussein came to Egypt it would be different,’ Salwa said. She wiped Nagwa’s tears with a tissue then took her between her arms and added with unexpected wisdom that was against her normal, ‘you have to forget. God will revenge.’

‘I did not expect this cruelty from Ibrahiem. I had enough all my life. Tomorrow you go to Abbassia and ask him to divorce me,’ Nagwa said and cried.

Next day Salwa went early to Ibrahiem. He was about to leave for work. He was very angry.

‘It is too difficult for anyone to forget the past. It is simply part of us. But she hated this past. I think this enough. You cannot just ask a victim after all sufferings to simply forgive and forget the gladiator. Torture and humiliation leave permanent psychological scars. Time does not heal them. Justice does,’ Salwa said.

‘I suffered also. You say time does not heal. I know that justice heals but when it comes from authorities or God. I told her what happened in Iraq to make sure that she forgot her past as I hoped,’ he said.

‘Did you forget?’ she asked him and stared in his eyes. She noticed that his eyes started to pour tears.

‘No,’ he said it and turned his face not to let her see his tears.

She hugged him and helped him to sit down.

‘Ibrahiem, you are a strong man. Nagwa and I are weak if not fragile. Either you accept Nagwa’s weakness or you have to divorce her,’ she said.

‘I’ll never do that. Divorce is out of question.’

When Salwa returned to Garden City Nagwa was in deep sleep due to the effect of the tranquilizers she swallowed. It was evening when Nagwa woke up.

‘Did he divorce me?’ Nagwa asked. She was still drowsy.

‘No,’ Salwa helped her not to fall.

‘Then tell him I’ll live here,’ Nagwa said.

In the prison in Baghdad, torture was so severe that Hussein’s son of law confessed that he had planed with Hussein to flee the country. He had nothing to add. The other son of law knew nothing about the plans of Hussein and had nothing to tell. Both officers were killed. The Iraqi intelligence tortured Hussein to tell them about who had given him the forged passports and the numbers of secret accounts. He told them everything. They had doubts that he did not tell other accounts numbers. They brought his two girls and raped them in front of him. He begged them not to do, but they were mercifulness. When they were sure that he had nothing more to tell, they returned him to his cell.

Nagwa was invited to a seminar to discuss her new novel that told about terrorism. As soon as the novel was on the stages in bookstores, a film producer bought it. Critics admired the novel. She returned late to Garden City. Salwa was out. She remembered that Salwa would pass at the lawyer who had dealt successfully with the taxes department to close her taxes’ file. She took off her cloths. The telephone ringing broke in silence. The sudden ringing made her tense.

‘You will be killed because you are an atheist, infedel, corrupt, whore and blasphemous’ a strange voice said.

‘Who’re you?’ she shouted but there was no response. She picked her cellular phone. She told Salwa who suggested that she had to tell Ibrahiem. Both Ibrahiem and Salwa reached nearly at the same time. Without a word, she was between Ibrahiem’s arms. He insisted that she return home to Abbassia. On the road she smiled at him and said, ‘happy birthday.’

‘Tomorrow I’ll be sixty years old. I’ll retire. Do you celebrate retirement?’ he said sarcastically.

‘You should not stay in house all day. You will be a troublemaker. You have to find work,’ she said laughingly but she meant it.

‘I’m thinking about developing the print-house and to start a big publishing business,’ he suggested.

‘You are stubborn. We should publish some popular books that tell about scandals to finance serious books that sell fewer numbers,’ she said.

‘We’ll discuss that later on,’ he responded reluctantly.

The boat reached the Greek island where Tamer had a meeting with his boss. As soon as he entered the hotel where the meeting was held, one of them looked sharply at him.

‘You should not have told your wife about business without my permission. Anyhow, she knew everything now. Do you think your business needs a partner?’ the boss said.

‘Yes, she is excellent in planning. She will add to the business,’ he said anxiously.

‘I know that. However, more partners mean higher risks. Either you or she, as you said she is better in planning then we chose her,’ the boss said.

As soon as he finished his words, a man strangulated Tamer from the back.

Thurya was in the restaurant when a man asked the waiter to talk to the manager.

‘Mrs. Thurya. I have news for you. Your husband was killed and his body is a meal for sharks now. From now on, you will be our partner. Congratulation,’ he said.

‘I have an idea about that,’ she said.

‘Would you please contact this man?’ he gave her a phone number.

She used her cellular phone and said smilingly, ‘thank you.’

Nagwa worked a presenter of a talk show in a satellite channel. She knew the five figures salary every month. She proposed that some of her salary go to the publishing house to support the books, which Ibrahiem liked to publish. He refused her offer. After a while, she told him about another project. All her life wanted to have her independent newspaper. She would use the publishing house after developing it to distribute the journal. He agreed. The license was the main problem. She suggested that they would do like others. She would have a license from a foreign country. Shahinaze would help. She flew to London. Shahinaze was happy. When both women were having dinner together, Nagwa started the subject that Shahinaze was avoiding.

‘Don’t you think about returning to Egypt again?’ Nagwa said.

‘Yes, but the only family person I have now lives here. I have nothing there. Do you believe that until now I can use the palace but I cannot sell it?’ Shahinaze said.

‘Why?’ Nagwa asked.

‘First because it was confiscated, and now they consider it a heritage. Everybody offers buying it if and only if we could have a license to demolish it so that the buyer could build a big skyscraper,’ Shahinaze said. She waited for a moment, ‘I live on my work here. My brother is an English citizen but I’m Egyptian. God only knows if I became ill, how I could manage treatment cost. I’m covered by the national insurance system but sometimes it takes a long time to be examined by a specialist or a consultant. I pay installments now for a retirement program but treatment in this country costs a lot,’ Shahinaze said.

‘What if I find a job for you in one of the satellite channels in Egypt? They pay well for talented presenters like you,’ Nagwa said. After a second of thinking she added, ‘did not Dr. Kamal aid you financial wise?’

‘I never asked him to do,’ Shahinaze said.

‘Think about working in Egypt. After all these years I think we are a family,’ Nagwa said.

‘I’ll do. I promise,’ Shahinaze said.

Ten days later Nagwa had a license for a newspaper. She took the first flight and directly started to hire staff for the new newspaper. When the first issue was on the stand, Ibrahiem was angry because she

put pictures of some divas with swimming suits. The crime page and the arts page were too saucy and spicy. She argued that she put these stuffs to compete others. She did not convince him but she promised to be more conservative. It was an independent journal but many of its writers criticized the governmental policies and some wrote about big scandals. After few weeks, the journal gained the public opinion's trust and had readers who waited for its new issues.

It was morning when Elham phoned Salwa.

'I'd like to meet you. Are you going to the boutique?' Elham asked.

'No, come at once. Are you crying?' Salwa was anxious about her cousin.

It was rare that Elham visited Salwa at Garden City. The two women chatted about Elham's sons and there were familial troubles.

'What if I tell Nagwa? They love her and I'm sure she will be of help,' Salwa suggested.

'I think she may succeed with Walid. Wael is lost,' Elham said then she burst in tears.

In the evening both boys came. They were two different brothers not only in shape but also in thinking. Wael refused to kiss his both aunts Nagwa and Salwa. He wore a white galabya and he had a thick beard.

'I don't know why you asked me to come. I'm not ready to discuss personal matters with Mrs. Nagwa. I don't like her thinking and her life style. She is liberal. I do my best to obey God and his Prophet,' he said in classic Arabic Language. He was looking at the ground not to see his aunts because they did not cover their hair.

'You are rude. I'll hit you if you talk about your aunt rudely again,' Elham shouted.

'You can do that. You are my mother and God asked us to treat parents well. However we should not obey them if they asked us to anger God and his prophet,' he said indifferently. He stood up and added, 'I think we'll never agree about anything. I'll go.'

'Please listen to me,' Nagwa said. 'Emad and Ali were martyrs for God's sake. They never did harm to any Egyptian. Tamer did much harm to his people and fled the country. We don't know anything about him.'

He left.

Elham cried and said, 'he is lost. He believes that his father and me live and prefer non-believers' life style. I think he considers us infidel.'

'I'll keep on phoning him until he meets me and I'll talk to him again and again,' Nagwa said quietly.

'Until you seduce him,' Salwa said then laughed. 'He has reservations about you Nagwa.'

Nagwa looked at Walid and said, 'what's your story? I feel pity for your mother. Your dad is always busy and she cannot manage two crazy boys. One thinks that he is the only believer in this world and the other is a womanizer. What is the problem? Is it another girl whom you want to marry?'

'No,' Elham cried. 'He wants to work as a waiter in a café.'

'Damn you,' Salwa jumped towards Walid. 'Your father is a General Medicine in the army and your family is so good and you want to be a waiter.'

'Walid crossed his arms in front of his face to avoid any sudden hit from hysterical Salwa. He said smilingly, 'Aunt Salwa, I intend to work in many sectors. I'll work a waiter for while, in a fuel station, a worker in construction of buildings, like ceramic work, bartender in a hotel and so on.'

'And a pimp and a bully?' Salwa interrupted him.

'No,' he smiled and added, 'I want to have experience about life then I'll choose my carrier after graduation.'

'I think he is right,' Nagwa said.

'I don't believe my ears,' Elham shouted in astonishment. 'Do you want me and his father to leave him does what he likes? What about his study?'

'As long as he passes his exams, it is okay,' Nagwa said. She looked at him and added, 'what if you give a hand to Salwa in her boutique?'

'Salwa jumped of joy and cried, 'an excellent idea.'

'At the same time, think about helping me in the journal,' Nagwa continued.

He nodded with his head in agreement.

'Business is business,' Salwa smiled at him. She left the chair and sat down beside him. Her hands moved much when she enthusiastically added, 'in the shop I'm not your aunt. You will be like any worker. However, you will be a special one of course. At noon, we'll have lunch together and I'll teach you all secrets of the business. Of course, you are

my son. You will be my assistant and you could do anything you like but don't approach the girls there. I know you are a womanizer. All men are. I have many stories about that and my friends told me much about their husbands and managers.' She looked at Elham and asked while laughing, 'Do you think Dr. Tawfik flirts sometimes?'

'Oh my God,' Elham laughed. 'I don't think. If I knew I'd kill him.'

'Salwa, stop it,' Nagwa said. 'You are crazy and she is mad.'

'And you?' Salwa asked laughingly.

'Both. Plus a past history of deviations,' Nagwa said. The three women laughed.

'Oh, my God, Don't say that in front of the boy,' Elham said.

'He must have known. There are no secrets in this country. He is blushed and he does his best not to laugh,' Nagwa said.

'Ibrahiem would be too angry if he knew this conversation,' Salwa said seriously.

'Oh, yes. He always asks me not to talk about past. Nevertheless, it is part of me. Let's forget that now.' Nagwa said then she looked at Walid and added seriously, 'in the journal the work is too serious. I'll try to give you an idea about what we do and if you liked the job, you can continue. If you didn't, you would be free to leave.'

Walid worked with Salwa in the boutique and he used to work as a reporter for Nagwa telling the news about the university. In summer, he worked in some hotels in Sharm and he was used to send news to Nagwa from there. He also tried to take goods from Salwa for the shops there. He passed his exam with high grades. Elham and Tawfik's problem was their other son, Wael. Day after day, he isolated himself more. He became too introvert and the few words he exchanged with his family became scarce then he silenced himself. One day Tawfik decided to talk to his son again.

'You're infidel,' Wael shouted after they argued for about an hour.

'You aren't my son. I don't know the person to whom I talk,' Tawfik slapped Wael. He sat down panting.

Wael packed his belongings and left home.

He went to one of his comrades in the fundamentalist extremist group. He lived with them and never contacted his family. One day the

Emir asked him to have a word with him. They used to call the boss Emir or prince. They had to obey him without arguments.

‘How are you? I heard that you enjoy your religious lessons. I think you’ll be a thinker,’ the Emir said.

‘Thank you,’ Wael said in a low voice without looking at the Emir but kept his head steady and his eyes staring at his crossed knees while he was sitting on the ground in front of the Emir.

‘What do you think about Nagwa Mazloom, the infidel writer and prostitute. I know she was a relative to you when you lived with the infidels. Of course she does not belong to you anymore after you left their world to the believers’ one,’ the Emir said.

‘She is just a prostitute as you said,’ Wael said.

‘The problem is that her books invite other women and girls to be prostitutes like her. She did not respond to our repeated warnings. She hurts true believers like us. She deserves death penalty,’ the Emir said.

Wael kept silent.

‘I chose you to kill her because you know her place and where she usually goes. Plans are ready and a brother will meet you here tomorrow to tell you about them. Let’s pray the evening’s one now and then I’ll give you a special lesson about the punishment of those who ruin the community,’ the Emir said and stood up.

Wael never thought about killing. He was scared. In fact, he loved Nagwa since he had been a child. He spent the night silent and thinking. At last, he reached a decision. Before dawn, he left, leaving his belongings and walked his way until he left the neighborhood.

There were knocking at door. Tawfik woke up and opened the door to find his son.

‘Sorry,’ Wael said and threw himself to embrace his father. He kissed his hand several times while Tawfik was pulling his hand away and kissing his son.

‘Thanks to God that he responded to our prayers and you returned,’ Tawfik said.

Ah hour later Ibrahiem and Nagwa were having breakfast with Tawfik and Elham and the two boys.

‘You must return to your university,’ Nagwa said.

‘I think we must report to the security to protect him. These guys may try to hurt him because he left them,’ Ibrahiem suggested.

‘I’ll manage,’ Tawfik said.

‘No need for that dad,’ Wael said. ‘I don’t think they will ever give a damn about me.’ He did not tell them about the mission he had refused.

Two days later Wael left the entrance gate of the building to go to the university. Three men encircled him and knifed him to death.

It was a sad day. Baghdad fell and it was another catastrophe of the dictatorship.

‘This is the expected consequence of dictatorship. Saddam was stubborn and he enjoyed people’s applauds and slogans of sacrificing themselves for his sake with blood and soul,’ Nagwa said.

‘But people are victims. They had nothing to do. Opponents there went to jail where they would receive the most brutal tortures. God may save Iraq,’ Ibrahiem said.

‘They will see more atrocities under the occupation and there might be a civil war,’ she said.

‘Today is worse than 5 June 1967,’ he added.

‘Because they did not learn anything from June defeat. We learned much. We knew when to fight and how to plan for wars. Unfortunately, others just boycotted us when we had a peace deal. They followed us after fifteen years. The stubborn dictators did disasters,’ she said.

‘This is the result of any dictatorship that serves a person forgetting people and the higher interests of the country,’ he said.

Walid worked with Salwa and Nagwa for two years while he was a university student. After graduation he decided to open an IT office and his father financed his project. He fell in love with a pretty girl.

‘Dad, I want to marry. I earn good money now,’ Walid said.

‘Well, are you in love with a certain girl or you want us to choose for you,’ Tawfik said.

‘Choose for me!’ he laughed. ‘I cannot imagine myself going to a family and asking them to let me see their daughter to decide if I would marry her. Dad we are in 2005 now.’

‘What are going to do to have an apartment?’ Tawfik asked.

‘I can rent one until I have some more money to buy one,’ Walid said.

‘Did you tell your mother?’ Tawfik asked.

‘Yes, but she is angry because I’ll marry while my brother died less than few years ago. In fact, I don’t see a connection between my marriage and the memory of my brother. I don’t know the time that I should be waiting for to have her agreement. Aunt Nagwa supports my

point of view but aunt Salwa was about to beat me. What is your opinion?’ Walid said.

‘Then you want me to discuss the matter with Elham. I think Nagwa will be of help if we arrange for her to be present when we discuss the subject,’ Tawfik said. ‘I’ll arrange for a dinner out with Nagwa, Ibrahiem and Salwa.’

‘Please dad, don’t tell aunt Salwa about the dinner. I know her and if she lost temper then mom would have a staunch supporter. My marriage plans will be postponed,’ Walid said.

‘And if we did not tell her she might talk to your mother later on and everything will be ruined. In addition, it is too important to convince your mother not to have her approval without being happy. I’ll manage,’ Tawfik promised.

When Walid and his parents, and aunts and Ibrahiem went to his fiancée’s family to propose for her, Elham was happy. Salwa was kissing Walid continuously in the car. She insisted that Walid sit in the back seat of the car of his father between Elham and her.

‘We’ are going to be grandmothers,’ she said happily. ‘But we are pretty grandmothers.’

They admired the girl and all loved her.

‘It is a very good step,’ Ibrahiem said. He was commenting about the news of changing the constitution so that there would be a presidential election and choice between different candidates instead of referendum about only one.

‘Do you believe they will do that?’ Salwa said.

‘Yes, reform started and nothing would stop it,’ Nagwa said.

‘Do you have a voting card?’ Ibrahiem asked Walid and his fiancée.

‘No,’ they answered.

‘You have to have one if you want true changes,’ Ibrahiem said.

‘How do they obtain one?’ the girl asked.

Ibrahiem and Nagwa told her. Walid was not interested.

On their way, home Nagwa and Ibrahiem were discussing the change. Salwa was in the back seat.

‘I’ve never gone to elections. I don’t think that my vote will make a change,’ Salwa said.

‘This is the problem. We talk much about change while we don’t go to elections,’ Nagwa said.

‘Be away from politics. This golden rule that you have taught us,’ Salwa said.

‘Time has changed,’ Nagwa said.

‘Do you know what the most important thing is?’ Ibrahiem asked.

‘This may open the road for other changes,’ Nagwa said.

‘More freedom, you mean?’ Salwa asked.

‘No, the most important thing about this news is that Walid and his fiancée knew that they should choose their president themselves and not to let others choose for them. More important is that youth ask how to have a voting card. I hope they go and vote. If they did then we would be on the right path,’ Ibrahiem said.

THE END