

HAGGAG ODDOUL

***My Uncle
is in Labor !***

(Novel)

**Al-Hadara Publishing
Cairo**

HAGGAG ODDOUL

oddoul77@gmail.com

MY UNCLE IS IN LABOR!

Novel

Translated from Arabic by: Ahmed Fathy

Editor: Afaf Abdel-Moaty, PhD

Cover design by: Emad Tawfik

Al-Hadara Publishing

7 Abou El-Seoud Street
Dokki 12311, Cairo, Egypt

Phone: (20-2) 3 761 94 39

Mobile: (20-122) 316 48 67

E-mail: ask@alhadara.com

E-mail: hadara@idsc.net.eg

www.alhadara.com

First English edition: November 2008

Second English edition: June 2012

Dar El-Kutub deposit number 20168 /2008

I.S.B.N. 977-5429-94-3

All rights reserved to the author

Dedication

**I dedicate this novel to all Arab,
Egyptian, and Nubian failures.**

obeikandi.com

I will recount and explain, in full detail, how an old mythological folktale told us the truth about our current bad days.

It's as if our sly ancestors had predicted that their descendants would deteriorate to such an extent that this progeny would be a source of shame before the non-Nubians, the worthy of them and the lower classes as well. As these predictions have come true, now, you see!

As it's a long story, and I don't have much time for you - although I am an aging man, who has no work to do, and you are unemployed as well - my grandson, since you've arrived from the Northern cities to pester and nag us with your inquiries about the South, I shall begin the story in medias res.

Listen attentively, boy!

A little laughing playful girl was scampering amidst the village houses. Her thin plaits were moving behind her back, and some white dust was covering her black forehead as she had fallen headlong while she was scampering, while some white dust was covering her calves, which made her appear like a young black donkey with white patches in the forehead and calves.

She was hastening to her home, which was located in the periphery of the village. The sun was rising slowly in the early morning, and the air was very hot, that even the Sun itself was bothered by its own heat, you see! The poor sun rises in tedium from its hell-like core, and sweat pours in boiling streams on its burning surface as well, and gushing like cascades from its hellish round disc to fall upon us to drown and burn us all. However, these cascades evaporate by the hellish heat of the sun before it moves away from the sun disc, within the distance of one day, which means a thousand million cubits! You see! Allah is to be thanked that these boiling cascades of heat rarely make its way to Earth, for if that happens, oh my goodness, these cascades might sweep our world like floods that lose their heat in mountainous heights, and sandy deserts, then demolish our villages as if they were a few dried low-quality dates, dear me! Anyway, back to the story.

The house gate was ajar; the girl pushed it with force and made her way into the spacious courtyard that has no roof and whose floor was covered with sand. The gate slammed against the wall with a great boom. Zarrag was panicked by the boom as he was sleeping; lying on his left side facing the wall under the canopy, beside the three big jars of water, two small-sized ones and between them the larger one. His daughter did not take notice of him, but she opened her mouth wide and burst out laughing in a continuous shrill voice, and her teeth shined amidst her black sweaty skin.

- Oh, come along, mother!

The girl called for her mother, Saffoura, who appeared in the far corner of the courtyard in front of the kitchen-room door, with remnants of dough on her arms.

- What is the matter with you, you daughter of the lazy man, your father? Is there a mountain wolf chasing you?

The girl's chest heaved up and down while she tried to stifle her laughter, and her eyes gleamed with sly yet cautious intelligence.

- Oh my goodness, Mother, my uncle, Ingila, is pregnant!

The mother's face showed irritation, and her irritation increased as she glanced at her husband who tossed and turned in his sleep until he was lying on his right side, facing the courtyard and the rooms of the house, to hear the account of his daughter. She glanced at him while he moved to his left side once more to stifle his laughter, but some of it managed to escape through his lips, which led to his wife becoming even more angry. Saffoura swiftly caught a wooden utensil that was hanging above her and threw it at her daughter, who managed to dodge it and burst out laughing. The girl scampered to the heart of the village where the scandal was mounting, the scandal of her uncle Ingila who was pregnant.

Saffoura caught the wooden utensil from the floor, as it was soiled with dough and sand, then made her way to the three big water jars, and removed the wooden lid from one of them while she cursed her daughter thus:

- May the flood take you, you daughter of the lying spendthrift!

Upon hearing this, Zarrag narrowed his pupils in protest and lowered his lower jaw, but he would not dare to protest verbally. He just moved to sit on his bottom, thus becoming the sitting spendthrift instead of the lying spendthrift. He glanced at his wife as she cursed and washed her hands and the utensil. She splashed some water on purpose on his legs, although he was her husband, ha ha! Once she returned to the kitchen, Zarrag bared his broken teeth in real manhood, tightened his trunk, and then cleared his throat that seemed always in need to be cleared. He talked in a hushed, nervous voice, despite the distance of the kitchen room and Saffoura's ears, directing his speech to the new big water jar, which was situated in the middle of the two smaller ones.

- Ahem, Ingila is her only brother, a fat and soft man all his life. He imitates women since his childhood. He is effeminate. They called him Ingila, which is a suitable name for him. Unfortunately, I got married to his sister Saffoura, thus I got my share of disgrace. Does this satisfy her? Never! She is sharp-tongued and does not spare me her impudence. An hour ago, we were alarmed by the screams of Nakhla, Ingila's wife, but my wife did not go out to see what happened, for she had enough of her brother's scandals. As for me, I preferred to sleep by your side. Saffoura calls me a spendthrift. Why should I be blamed? The sum of money we got as a compensation for our drowned lands was very small; it evaporated once we thought about spending it. This foolish, stupid woman does not realize that the money in

the hands of an original Nubian evaporates fast like alcohol. Listen, my friend, and judge for yourself....

Listen, boy, this was Zarrag's talk to the water jar, not mine to you, you leaning boy; you do not pay attention to my tale. You ask me why Zarrag talks to the water jar. I shall tell you. Because Saffoura did not like to spend the time chatting with him and leave her household work and field work, thus leaving Zarrag chatting to his friend, the big water jar.

- I did not spend the money on trivialities. God forbid! Unless you would say that white gowns and wool cloaks are trivial, or that big, lavish wedding parties are trivial, or that flasks of original arrack, hashish packets are trivial, or the soirees of eating, drinking and smoking are trivial. Those who say that these basics of life are trivial are empty-headed people. Is that right? Even the money did not pass from my pocket to a stranger; it was given to her brother Ingila who had huge amounts of hashish baskets. Thus, the money passed from her husband to her brother, and she had no right to be upset, yet she was! If our household is now poor, dear water jar, you should know that this is the case of most households in our poor village. Ahem, I do not know why Saffoura is pestering me with her impudence. What should I have to do, dear water jar? Shall I try to go for a treasure hunt? Should I join the group of the stubborn teacher Klooda? Oh, dear me! I am sick of her and them!

Then, Zarrag lifted his right hand, stretching three fingers and forming a circle with the forefinger and thumb, threatening the big water jar.

- I swear by God...

Then Zarrag forgot his threat, and even forgot what he was about to say! He let his arm fall by his side and drifted back to sleep!

If you did not know, you, my only listener who is lying down languorously, then you have to know that Ingila was married to a very tall, extremely thin woman. May God forgive me, but I have to say she has no prominent curves in her body at all. Her facial features were sharp, and one could say that without a beard and a moustache, she was the spitting image of her father who came to our village as a stranger with....., but let's focus on this woman, whose name is Nakhla. Her hair was coarse and unruly, akin to palm branches stripped of their leaves. The villagers did not call her by her original name and called her Nakhla (palm tree) for that reason! You see! They were right, as if she was a palm tree that was transformed or bewitched into a woman, or maybe vice versa. A few malicious people said that her body is covered with scales like real palm trees. In a carousal night, the man with the golden tooth said to the man with the silver tooth:

- I bet you, my comrade, that this woman is like men in every aspect. I swear by the shrine of the holy saint whose name I forgot that she has male genitals far bigger than my personal package!

The man with the silver tooth replied in a sly manner, for he was slyer than the fox:

- For this very reason, Ingila was married to her, and left us.

- Oh, what strange days!

- Oh, how extraordinary!

Early this morning, in another far house in the village periphery, Nakhla awoke to the loud lamentation of Ingila:

- Oh, dear me! What a pity! Poor Ingila!

She got up and moved towards his bed that was made of solid strong palm branches to bear the huge body of its owner, and she found him. But do you know in what state? He was lying on his back and was lifting his shirt up his chest, while his huge belly hung loosely on both sides. His underwear slip was sticking tightly to his flesh; his underwear slip was too short and flimsy like the underwear of your loose women in these days. Damn your loose generation! Ha ha! These blights of your days make me laugh in spite of myself. May God damn you, my grandson! You know, of course, you filthy-minded boy, that the waistband of such underwear slip is what you call rubber band! Ha ha! This soft man, Ingila, is the one who introduced such underwear to our village, and girls and young women imitated him, knowing that this kind of underwear is easier to remove! Why should they be eager to remove it? This is the question, for their intentions are as elastic as the rubber waistband. You see! Thank God, that most chaste women insist that this waistband should be made of palm fiber strong strings, like sail ropes, and their traditional underwear extends to cover their knees! Show some modesty and chastity, boy! You hear this and your eyes are goggling. Listen to me, boy! Have I said to you before that you are the slyest of my

grandchildren who deserve my curses? You say I told you that many times! Are not you ashamed of me while you say so? No! Back to the story.

Ingila was a strange fellow indeed, for he liked to be naked, to expose his body. He used to say that garments suffocated him! He used to say that nudity is the original state of Man, like Adam and Eve, who were expelled from Paradise when they wore these devilish clothes! Ha, ha! This cursed fellow went on with his claims, saying that, if we all go back to Mother Nature and go about in the village naked, we would regain Paradise! It is a mere point of view.

Back to our story of Nakhla.

Nakhla stood still for a while, arguing with the whispering devil, trying to push him away from her left ear, as the malicious devil knew that her right ear is deaf. She said to the devil:

- Move away from my ear, you malicious devil. Do not you know that his belly is swollen due to his gluttony? Do not you see that he dined yesterday eating two chickens and twenty eggs, fried with butter! Yes! Then he followed them up with large quantities of arrack! What? What do you say? His swelling belly has been growing bigger for months! That is because he is getting fatter every day, or rather every hour, you silly devil. If you look carefully at his rosy-colored flesh with your devilish eyes, you would see him getting fatter by the second! What? No, get away from me, you wicked son-of-a-bitch! No, no, no. You deserve the curse of

Almighty God. Your whisperings are unreasonable. No, no, no. You say that this is the claim of Khareeba the bonesetter, not your claims. Then Khareeba is more devilish than you are.

Nakhla was snapped back to reality as her argument with the devil was interrupted by the stringent screams of her weeping husband who lamented his scandal in a deep, soft voice:

- What a scandal! What a scandal!

She stood by him, for his flabby flesh did not leave any space for her to sit beside him. He said to her, while tears were running down his smooth cheeks:

- Nakhla, I do not trust you, nor your fellow villagers, but you are my wife, do not scandalize me, bitch! Come and put your hand on my belly, broad! Can you feel ant movement? Put both your hands on my belly to make sure. Are you astonished? Put your ear on my belly button. Oh! Move your coarse hair away from my flesh. You did not hear anything, that is because you are deaf, put your sound ear on my belly. So? You did not hear anything. It is a rumor spread by Khareeba the bonesetter, may God damn her. What? Your eyes make me afraid; do not stare at me like this as if I am a rarity. You say you did not hear anything, you heard. Howling or bellowing? You daughter of cats-eater, do not scandalize me, Nakhla.

Nakhla was a wicked, cunning broad, who was ashamed of nothing, and did not care for her husband or any one whomsoever, if you know. She went back a few steps, and then moved her arms in a parallel movement

opposite to the direction of her moving head, lamenting this calamity in silence while her eyes protruded, her mouth hung wide open, and her tongue moved silently. She was lamenting silently, you see! She sat on the floor that was covered with a thick woolen rug and pretended to lift invisible sand and put it on her coarse hair. Ingila descended to her level on the floor while he supported his weight on the bed, while still leaving his shirt rolled up to his upper chest. He lowered his fatty body slowly until he sat on his knees, then cleaned his nose on his sleeve and wiped his tears on his sleeve as well. He said pleadingly to his merciless wife:

- Nakhla, my wife, you should keep my secret, as I keep many of yours. I did not consider it a favor that I freed your father from slavery, when I inherited him from my late father, the Red Knight Mameluke (i.e. *slave-knight of the king*). Tell me, what should I do? When I suffered a stomachache a few months ago, I went to the old hag Khareeba the bonesetter, but that bitch told me laughing rudely that I was pregnant! You know her; she is fond of mocking and insulting jokes. Yet, she swore to me by her blissful nights with her husband, before he deserted her to wander and live alone in the mountains, that she was saying the truth. Since my meeting with her, I have been living with hellish, fearful thoughts and nightmares. Please tell me she was mocking me! It would be a disaster on your head with the coarse hair if she were saying the truth!

Nakhla was apparently pacified, but Ingila knew his wife and her pranks and tricks. She said to him:

- You never give me part of your profits from selling the hash; you are stingy with your dear wife, my dear husband Ingila the effeminate.

- What are you talking about now? You ought to think of my calamity!

- Give me half of your profits; only then would I keep your secret.

- This never happened and would never happen! However, if you...

- My word is said, and it has one plain meaning like any other word of an honorable woman; my condition is nonnegotiable.

- Half of my profits is too much, Nakhla!

She looked scornfully at him, and with exasperation groped his belly with her coarse hand, while saying threateningly:

- Who is the father of the child inside your belly?

- Shame on you, broad! If this were true, then it would be a spell cast upon me by my enviers and ill-wishers!

-How could I hide myself from the gloating of other women in the village? How would I be able to curse the ancestors of the new mayor and the bunch of scum of the earth from his entourage! What a scandal you would suffer, O Nakhla! You would be painfully scandalized, O daughter of Gimmiza! Tell me, Ingila, when was the last time you got your "period"?

- I am a man, you daughter of the humble slave!

- Then how come you got pregnant, you sissy man?

Both of them rose up slowly in anticipation, while the effeminate was still holding his gown rolled up to his upper chest, whereas Nakhla brandished her fists strongly in the air in circles, ready for fighting. Both snarled and growled face to face.

- (*groan*) Nakhla!

- (*groan*) Ingila!

It was a moment of flexing one's muscles, then suddenly Ingila weakened, and began to wail, cleaning his nose in his sleeve, then he weakly said to her:

- Please, help me.

- Then give me half of your profits from your hash selling.

- That is too much, lower the percentage, broad!

- My word is said, and it has one plain meaning. This is nonnegotiable.

- Have pity on me, you want to steal the fruit of my efforts, you thief!

- Then I have to disown your unborn child, for I am neither his father nor his mother.

- I will kill you, you daughter of the slave!

She did not take heed of his threat, for she was stronger than he was, and winning fights was her favorite hobby. Ingila looked around, searching for some tool to help him in this fight, while Nakhla retreated to the back, then went out of the room, out of the courtyard, and then out of the house, just to make the fight public, in the middle of the village, to increase her enjoyment.

It is a strange, funny matter, but you know it as well, my grandson, as you listen to me while you sit there, laughing in anticipation. This funny thing is that our village houses are prone to be robbed very easily, yet we made for these houses huge gates like the formidable ones of the Pharaonic temples, albeit these houses are made from mud brick, and on their centers lie huge solid wooden gates that are rarely shut. Despite the fact that our village had never been raided by thieves in the first place, people grew more cautious, and made for these forever-ajar gates strange-shaped crooked keys, each one half a cubit in length; its serrated end has different shapes from one key to another. These serrated ends are the special print by which a door could be opened. Why do not you listen respectfully to my tales, boy? You lie on your back and put one of your legs over the other as well! You are as insolent as your father was, but why should I be angry due to your insolence? You are just an ignorant, stupid grandson who was brought up partially in the Northern cities, and partially in our village, yet you were not properly brought up in either place! Oh, yes! Thus I have told you my frank opinion of your so-called "upbringing", without cursing your father whom I dislike and who dislikes me as well, back to our story...

This strange kind of key, beside its use for rarely closed doors, could be used as well as an excellent tool for fighting, if you do not know. It could be used as a weapon to hurt and not to kill. We use it in fights instead of the killing staves of the Upper-Egyptian people. Nubians could not withstand bloodshed and killing, unlike the Upper-Egyptian people, so why

should we imitate them, God forbid! Let us see what happened to the couple I told you about.

Ingila, armed with the long key I described, went after Nakhla. The chase began while the morning light was creeping from behind the mountain to the village. Nakhla screamed with her utmost strength to make the fight public and more scandalous. She screamed with her hoarse, gruff voice to wake people up.

- Oh my God! Help me, people! What a scandal! What calamity of Ingila! O people of the village! Listen to this scandal!

With a serious face, Nakhla screamed to tell all people about what Khareeba said about her husband! She was an impudent bitch indeed! You see! Ingila was not aware of his state, he was as usual without proper, decent clothes, he held the long key in his right hand, and he was lifting his light shirt with his left hand, up to his upper abdomen, thus revealing his light slip shorts with the thin, elastic waistband, barely covering his upper thighs! Oh, that man was never ashamed of anything! Despite his short, slow steps, his pudgy body was shaking up and down as he moved. He was breathless and sweat covered his body, to the extent that he appeared to the onlookers as if he was running. You see!

Nakhla was walking in front of him with ease, sending her cries at every side, as she was bent on waking up all the sleepy entourage of the new mayor. As for the rest of the villagers, they were still workaholics. They descended to the small green coast that was arable for two or three months after the end of each flood, which

made it suitable for cultivating a few crops to keep away hunger and poverty, at least for a while.

A few people gathered, children and a few girls and women, all of them laughing at the fighting couple. Girls saw that the lower half of Ingila's body was almost naked, apart from the light slip shorts, and they moved their faces away from him in shyness, but they stole a few glimpses of him every now and then. Girls envied him due to his shiny skin color, which was akin to the color of fresh alluvium or silt, with a tinge of shiny amber-yellow sand dunes at noon. Women were not shy because of him, but they struck their chests with the palm of their hands, pretending to be disgusted, saying in a pretentious well-rehearsed manner: "Oh, what a scandal!" Women, you boy, used laughter as some sort of addictive habit, like their husbands who were addicted to arrack, hash, and despair. Every one of them used to cover her mouth with her hand while laughing. It was just a habit. However, when they were roaring with laughter, they could not possibly cover their cavernous mouths with one hand, but they move their mouths to one shoulder. Such sight reminds me of some kind of bird that has long thin legs, and thin body, as it moves its long beak to bury it in the thick, dense feathers of its back.

Sleeping men did not show up, they preferred to continue in their sweet slumber until the hot forenoon, like their daily habit, then they wake up to curse the arid, harsh climate of their country as if they were newcomers from the Northern cities, or as if our hellish sun did not exist before. You see! Yet, Klooda the teacher with his short-trimmed beard and blue gown

went out of the house of an ill person whom he visited. Ingila was a few steps away from Klooda, while he was leaning on a wall. Due to the furious look on the face of the formidable teacher, Ingila recognized his semi-nakedness and let down his shirt to cover himself. The teacher as usual spat on him lightly, with full scorn, and went away muttering curses. He did not even ask the gathered people about the reason of the early morning fight. He made his way to the poor fields where diligent people worked.

Then suddenly, all children of the village and most of the women showed up, along with a few men. All of them were from the group of sleeping people, as the diligent people were busy working in the field. Nakhla stopped screaming for a few moments, moving her long hands to make people draw nearer, then she began recounting her tale once more:

- O people of the village! For months, I kept arguing with the whispering devil to defend my husband's honor, and when the Devil made an insolent gesture with his hand to me, telling me my husband was gay, I threw a shoe at the Devil. I did not talk to him for days and nights, I did not argue or even listen to his whispers, or even look at him. When the Devil tried to whisper to me in my left ear, I moved to give him my right deaf ear. Yet, the scandalized Ingila has shamed me before the wicked Devil, O people! Ingila's belly has become swollen, and when Khareeba our sage examined him, that wise woman told him he is pregnant! He is expecting to deliver at any hour! What a scandal! A man is pregnant, O respectable people! I felt the movement of the baby inside his belly with my own

hands, and listened to it with my left ear. May God spill His wrath and hell upon your heads if I were a liar! O people! Ingila is pregnant!

Ha, ha! As I told you before, boy, Nakhla was a cunning sly bitch!

Ingila stopped leaning on the walls and moved amidst people cursing the daughter of the cat-eating slave, chasing her while she was moving away amidst people, not for fear of him, but because she wanted to resume telling her story of him! Ingila cried and wailed while he was chasing her, not to catch her but to show people that he was chasing her to punish her! In this chase-game, a huge protruding potbelly stood before Ingila to stop him! It was a well-known potbelly to all people of the village, for it was the big potbelly of the small, short mayor. The mayor came looking drowsy, and his eyes were like frog's eyes, red and protruding under his forehead, and shaking nervously in his eye sockets. Ingila dropped the long key from his hands to the ground, and held the hands of the mayor, hoping he would help him. He kept saying "O Mayor!" many times, sounding like an unoiled waterwheel that creaks monotonously. Ingila sat on the ground and put handfuls of sand on his long, smooth hair, then he wailed and lamented in a sophisticated manner like the old hag Khareeba the bonesetter, and he said in his lamentations:

- Oh... What a scandal! How wretched I am! If what happened to me is true, then Klooda the teacher is to blame, O mayor! He always spits on me and curses me, invoking God to punish me! If this is untrue, then the

damned hag, Khareeba is to blame. Her practical joke is silly and her talk is utter filthy lies! Please do your job, O mayor, and defend me from both of them.

Let me tell you, my grandson, with your pendant ears: you were working as a waiter in Alexandria, and when you were fired, you came back to us arrogant and haughty as if you came from another planet! Ha, ha! Let me tell you about another man in the same village, an old, senile man who was a septuagenarian with a very bald head and a very infirm mind, yet his body was still graceful and full of vitality and vigor. The name of this old man was Tombila. He was surrounded, on a daily basis, by his two sons and his oldest grandson, whom threatened him to keep quiet and stop doting, for the senile man wanted to marry! What added salt to the injury was that he had an eye only for buxom young women! He used to stand on their way in attempt to convince one of them to marry him, but all of them used to run away from him, screaming playfully and laughing. His senility got worse as he used to rival his adolescent grandson in the amorous advances to the young coquette Sada, daughter of Zareefa, their next-door neighbor. You see! Sometimes this flirting, playful girl, Sada, used to arouse, intentionally and secretly, the old man, who because of being sexually excited used to run in the village in a state of arousal, knocking doors and screaming in agony:

- O people of the village, O people of the tribe, I want to marry Sada daughter of Zareefa, otherwise, I would die!

His adolescent grandson who was in love with Sada daughter of Zareefa, whose moustache began to grow for the first time in the last harvest season of dates, was so jealous of his childish grandfather, and was furious, as his peers laughed at his grandfather. He used to hold his grandfather forcefully by his clothes and shake him violently, invoking God to take his soul very soon to spare the family from disgrace and scandal.

Peasants of the village finished their work swiftly, as the field spared by the flood was not vast. They gathered, men with short blue gowns with short sleeves, soiled by sweat and mud, for it was the work gown; all of them were dressed alike, even old men, who did not care for the white fine gowns. On the other hand, women were dressed in black attire, tainted by sweat and mud, but to a lesser extent in comparison to the men. The whole lot moved from the north of the village, passing by the valley of "Baladah". In front of the group was Klooda the teacher, alongside with the peasant, the carpenter, the ironsmith, and the builder. Among the working group was the two brothers Tombila, Abdullah and Abdul-Jabbar, with their wives. Even Saffoura caught up with them after preparing a few loaves of bread for lunch. They all worked for months to dig a well to help in reclamation of the highlands. They were very busy, some were digging, others filled baskets with soil and earth resulting from digging. Some were bringing wood; others were planning the passage of water. Their determination did not falter due to the difficulty of working in the highlands, but what saddened them very much was their folks who let themselves fall as easy prey to stupor and despair, and left them to work alone.

Do you remember a strange occurrence from past seasons? Do not play the fool! Of course, you remember for you are not a child. Do you remember when a reed pavilion was erected to the left of the guesthouse, to be a stable for jackasses? These jackasses had a funny story indeed; let me recount it by the way. Before the Nubian Diaspora, jackasses were just a mere modest means of transportation for humble people. Now, after the Nubians received the measly compensations for their lost land, with its bounties above and under the ground, they behaved erroneously as if they had lost their minds. They tried to imitate the elite people, by squandering their newly acquired money as they competed with one another in buying and boasting of possession of different kinds of jackasses, brought from the wealthy Northern foreign villages. There were jackasses of every kind, from the pitch-black skinned ones to the milky white ones, including all colors in between, like the lead-colored, the grey, and the black and white ones. Other colors that were available were blue and green, via using colored dust brought from the mountaintop. As from the henna plant, it could be used to give jackasses a reddish bright hue. There were also strong asses that had two different colors for the body and the limbs. You see! Add to this the soft saddles to relieve the sitting bottoms. Every one bragged of his possession of jackasses, yet no one could secure the money needed for his household expenditure for the next month! Some men even shaved their white beards in a fashionable trendy way, never seen before. As if this cocky dandy used to have breakfast, that consisted of two bowls of starch! Ha, ha! Like the old fanatic sheikh who was called Al-Ramly, who used to pester us for

many seasons, until Death took him fast, by being spited by a young lad who knew how to stir his ire to the utmost. Yet, let us recount his long tale later. Let us return to the old man with the trendy beard, who was himself the owner of the thin jackass. This old man learned a few foreign words when he worked as a servant to a foreign expedition. He was haughty and arrogant, when people made fun of his jackass, this man with the trendy beard, with a cracked pipe in his mouth, which he picked from the ground as the leader of the expedition threw it when it fell on a stone and broke, said arrogantly:

- My jackass is a priceless rarity, more valuable than your old-fashioned ones.

I wish you were with us to hear him when he said the word "old-fashioned" in a foreign accent in English exactly like foreigners. As if he was educated in schools! I remembered that in this particular incident he inhaled a breath from the cracked pipe and let out the smoke from his mouth slowly upwards, with the smoke leaking from the crack of the pipe and its container, near his face and funny, trendy beard. Thus, his face appeared mysterious amidst smoke like the way he wanted. You see! He continued his defense talk about his thin jackass:

- My jackass is different from yours, for yours brays like this.

He lowered his forearm aside and looked upwards, and then inhaled a long breath. Then he said:

- Haaaa Haaaa.

Ha, ha, after he brayed like a jackass he continued his explanation:

- But my jackass when it brays, it omits the (h) sound and its modified braying is like this.

He lowered his forearm aside and looked upwards and then inhaled a long breath then said:

- Aaaa Aaaa.

Then he resumed his lengthy explanation, for he grew talkative if he condescended to sit among ignorant people of his village. He said:

- You know now why my jackass is the best and worth its price. All the money I got from the foreigners I paid to get this rarity, this modified jackass, in addition to this valuable gift... this pipe!

Simple-minded people believed him, of course, and they were ashamed of their old-fashioned jackasses. They were ashamed as well of their ignorance, in contrast to his knowledge acquired from the foreigners. He was just a big mouth. What is more important, you disgraceful grandson, that when this foreigners' servant filled his cracked pipe with tobacco that was mixed with tiny chips of hash, then burned it and inhaled a breath, and amidst the smoke surrounding his head like a veil, he said presumptuously to himself and to them:

- It is a big loss that I live here among the ignorant! They do not know the letter (h) in English! Ignorant people!

Listen to me, boy...

I will reveal a secret to you, but do not reveal it to anyone. I know that this man with the obsession with the letter (h) was a relative of your father's family side, not your mother's family side, thank God. I do not know why all our scandals and setbacks come from your father's family side. It is not your fault; it was your late grandmother's, my late wife. She was the one who opposed me when I refused to marry my daughter, your mother, to your father, on the pretext that my daughter, your mother, wanted to marry your cursed father. I wanted to marry my daughter to an honorable man suitable to our stature, unlike your despicable father. Let us leave this topic of my daughter's marriage aside, for it manages to provoke me to this day, despite the passage of tens of seasons, and despite the fact that my daughter gave birth to an infernal bunch of children, you being the worst of them. Oh, yes, I will not flatter you just because you like to lie down and listen to my tales. Each matter has no bearing whatsoever on the other. Anyway, the secret is that the man with the obsession with the letter (h) and the pipe, when he received the compensation money, I was behind him directly in the queue. Thus, I saw him with my own eyes, may God preserve my eyesight, putting his fingerprint on the receipt; he did not sign it, as he was illiterate. You see! I can write in Arabic and sign in English, for I was educated until I reached the old-system primary stage, and I was about to get the primary stage certificate, but this could not happen as I could not find a jackass to ride to school. You see! I do not respect this man, not because he is an imposter, nor even because he is a relative of your father, but for other reasons that I could not recount, as I will not live

much longer to tell them to you. Anyway, back to our story.

The guesthouse of the small mayor was small as well, unlike the spacious one of the big mayor that was submerged under the flood of the Aswan High Dam that damaged our original Nubian land. Yet, the mayor spent lavishly on his guesthouse, supported, of course, by Ingila's money. In the guesthouse, there were rectangular couches covering the four sides of the guesthouse, and they were covered with rugs, and there were soft cushions strewn on them. Strewn on the floor were patches of sheep fur. This guesthouse was a source of pride to the small mayor, who said it was a place for sessions of talking and harmony, not less in stature than any other free negotiations council in the original birthplace of our ancestors. For in it, discussion sessions of the elite were held, slogans were made, decisions were taken, all of which were based on the instructions and guidelines of the biggest, most slothful man of them all: the mayor himself. Frankly, I believe him. You see!

The mayor entered his guesthouse, followed by the elite of the village. I must confess to you, my dear jobless grandson, that all our present elite and mayors of our villages are worthless, or Afshatoush, in the Nubian language. You do not know the term, you worthless grandson! May your father be cursed! You are worthless as well as a descendant of a worthless father. What was funny, boy, was that all villagers who were from that tiresome group were considered elite, even the poor and the servile yes-men, for they meddled with those who still had some money left from the measly compensation, as every Nubian considers himself so

dignified and noble, just because he is a Nubian! Each one of this group was dressed in a spotless bright milky white gown, with a turban of soft cloth, not less than eight cubits in length, wrapped around their heads in many layers. Some of them let the turban fall like women's headscarf, while others made the turban like a nightcap dangling on their backs. Some imitated the modern look and just threw it sloppily on their heads, not caring for the guiding rules of wrapping turbans. Another group acted as if this is the attitude of modern men, or even ultra-modern, to remove the turban altogether and wear a colored hat. Some wore the Turkish red fez, with tassel strings attached above it like women's dangling silver necklaces. Some wore the fez without the tassel strings to avoid the mocking of children, as it reminded the children of the jackass tail! Some of these men were without headwear at all. So bad! However, all men wore red shoes and held in their hands an elegant cane. Despite all these manifestations of high stature, they were Afshatoush, or worthless! Ha, ha!

In the guesthouse, Zarrag was pouting his lips in disapproval to show to the rest of the group that he disapproved of the scandals of his wife's brother. Every once in a while, he stared in repugnance at two men sitting in two couches before him: the man with the golden tooth, and the other one with the silver tooth. The grand elite were still drowsy, let us excuse them, people. This was the first time since months that they'd had to wake up early in that silly morning. If it had not been for the mayor who had sent for them via his sleepy

messengers, they would not have ventured out of their homes, pretending to be energetic and lively. You see!

The guesthouse activities cannot take place without certain rituals; firstly, no talking without smiling, secondly, our cursed elite could not smile before having breakfast. They had breakfast in deep dishes full of milk, ghee, sugar, and fine thin bread.

The new mayor put on his reading spectacles, although I swear to God he was illiterate, but he did so to complete the dignified appearance. He used to open the discussion sessions with this gesture, and suspend them by lifting the spectacles from his face. He said:

- The mere spread of such scandal is scandal for all of us, O people.

- Every village upon this earth, mayor, has its due share of scandals.

- That is true, but this scandal is unprecedented in our village. A pregnant man! Oh my goodness! I ask God's forgiveness!

- The cursed woman, Khareeba, is the one to blame for spreading the news of this scandal.

- O people, it is just an old funny tale that used to be told by grandmothers, and Khareeba retold it while dragging Ingila's name into it.

- But we all know that Ingila is gay.

In the group there was a sly short teacher, who was backward, lazy, and did not care for others, he was just a mere parrot. He was antagonistic and jealous of Klooda the teacher, who was active, and who really

cared for the villagers. This sly short teacher was more cunning than the two men with the metallic teeth. He said:

- If this was true, then who is the father of Ingila's baby?

Silence reigned among them all for a few moments. Eyes were directed accusingly towards an old man who sat idly, but he sat upright in anger to face these dagger-like looks from all men. He lifted his turban, threw it on the ground in anger, and said:

- Have mercy on me, O people! I used to have sex with younger men when I was an idle, frivolous youth! I swear to God I have repented from this sinful, ridiculous act. I have two wives now, O people! One of them is too thin like a needle, the other is so plump like a fat pig, and both make me have wonderful satisfying sex until I have no energy left! I have nothing to do with the cursed Ingila!

He lowered himself to retrieve the turban and did not put it onto his white hair, to show to them that he was no longer a frivolous youth, and to make them pity him and forget his tainted history. He wore his shoes hastily, took his cane in disdain, and got out indignantly without saying goodbye. Oh, yes! He was so angry like a man whose pregnant cow gave birth to a mouse.

Looks of accusation were given to the two friends with the metallic teeth, the man with the golden one, the other with the silver one. Yet, because they were veterans in sin and moral corruption, their nerves were

so calm and solid like a rock. They rolled hash cigarettes indifferently. The sly short teacher said:

- This scandal is complicated, and needs more investigation and thinking. Thus, we need to prepare our heads totally to take a decision.

Having heard that, Zarrag sat up eagerly in anticipation and said:

- Ahem, you are right, Teacher, we are missing the second component leading to good thinking, O people. After eating, we should make a decision, and this would never happen unless we smoke hash.

The man with the silver tooth took the cue, saying:

- Give us, mayor, the necessary component.

The mayor gave his orders to bring the hash, for the quarter of his storage room was full of hash stored by Ingila in the mayor's house, on the condition that the mayor may take some of it for his personal use. Yet, Ingila did not know that the mayor was using it lavishly to drug the elite who had an innate inclination to be drugged! Colored boxes of cigarettes roll paper appeared from every pocket, as well as leather wallets that contained tobacco. A colored ornamented container with a similarly colored lid was brought, which contained the hash. Two or three men were busy preparing cigarettes that would help the entire group to think!

Blue smoke clouds reached the high ceiling of the guesthouse. You see, my sly, jobless grandson!

After smoking drugs in large quantities, the two immoral men went out while they were licking their moustaches to remove the remnants of the stench of drugs and food. They went toward the house of Ingila to verify the story, as the Devil whispered to them as well. They went there as well to drink a cup of arrack of pre-noon that was refreshing to the soul, especially after filling the belly with food and the head with drugs. Oh, if you just try this arrack, boy! It gives a man a very big high as well as powerful strength! Oh! However, you have become like dwellers of the North, the naïve people who get drunk from beer. Anyway, at Ingila's gate, both men shooed away the gathering children who were frolicking with mirth. Ingila saw them entering the house; he panicked and held forcefully to the clothes of Deheba the fat woman and screamed for aid from her and other women around him:

- I do not want to see them! I do not want to see any man whosoever! Keep them away! I have had enough! Kick them out! Kick them out now!

They kicked them away, but at the gate of the house, Deheba, unabashed, confirmed to them what Khareeba and Nakhla said, that Ingila was pregnant, and both drugged men were shocked! Deheba laughed loudly and watched the glimmer of their eyes, or rather the underside of their eyes, as their eyelids were half closed in the upper side. Deheba put her mouth between the ears of the two immoral men and said in a vicious voice:

- Who among you is the father of Ingila's child?

The sun was scorching and Klooda the teacher and his men were digging with primitive tools. Carpenters and

builders were designing the water well. Peasants were working on the land thoughtfully. Anger, tiredness, and fine sand were stuck with their heavy sweat pouring from their faces. They had months of hard work ahead of them. They all sat under the trellis to eat lunch. They talked while they ate, on the subject of the current scandal. Saffoura cried bitterly and the teacher tried to calm her down, and said:

- It is not your fault.
- He is my brother after all.

Saffoura's friend, the wife of Abdullah Tombila, intervened:

- He is your brother from your mother side only, Naffisa Touse, for you are not from the lineage of his father, he who came down to us to father this effeminate freak.
- Thank God, both the red-skinned Mameluke and his black slave were not Nubians.
- But they married from our women.
- Then their offspring are Nubian scandals, and that cannot be denied.

The old carpenter sighed heavily and said while he was looking at the high mountain:

- The red-skinned Mameluke came to us fleeing the governor of the north who was extremely angry with him, to the extent that he wanted to impale him on the pole. He fled with his black slave, named Dalma. We treated him hospitably and gave him shelter and married him to a virgin, and married his slave, Dalma,

to Gimmiza the widow. One flood passed, and the Mameluke who did not speak the Nubian language, and spoke little Arabic, became tyrannical and threatened us with his spear with the fearful spearhead and with his shiny polished sword. We were taken with worry, as we were peaceful people and had forgotten about warfare long ago. He tried to be our leader by force. We later discovered his sexual relationship with the tall slave Dalma, and that the Mameluke in his youth was the rent-boy of his master the Ottoman Pasha.

The old carpenter stopped talking, while looking at the wide, weak riverbanks. Other men continued the story of the Mameluke, as they had learned it by heart from their elders from the generation of the old carpenter.

- He got his well-deserved punishment when he assaulted our women.
- We tied up Dalma, and surrounded the Mameluke with our scourges and whips, not fearing his spear or his sword.
- We did not leave him until blood poured from every pore of his huge body.
- His dead body resembled a skinned cow drenched in sand.
- We made him red, not because of his white skin and the sunburns on it, but because red blood covered all his dead body.

Klooda the teacher stood up to resume working and said:

- This was the past, and now, Ingila, the son of this Mameluke, has made abominable action that has soiled our village. The gay Ingila, the son of the gay Mameluke, is said to be pregnant, and no one chastised him! We are responsible for this scandal. When our original lands drowned, we drowned as well in wine, hash, and spending lavishly on wedding parties. Day after day, we are drowned in despair and agony. Oh! Let us get back to work, O people, for work means hope. Many stages have passed, and more are yet to come.

In the guest room in one of their houses, both immoral men took off their gowns and lay with their underwear on two couches opposite to each other. They drank cups of arrack. The one with the golden tooth opened the speech with his immoral friend with the silver tooth, while raising his cup:

- To your health!
- What a terrible age that we live in; everything is topsy-turvy.
- Our days got old and drunk, and a man is pregnant!
- In the past, passive gay men did not get the period nor get pregnant.
- And did not demand money.
- Gone are the days of safety.
- Gone are the days of good, proper conduct.
- What strange days!
- How extraordinary!

Of course, you follow my story intently, my inquisitive grandson. Do you remember the story of old Tombila? He was thoroughly shocked by the news of Ingila, as told to him by Sada, daughter of Zareefa, this coquette who is now a shriveled, old woman, but who was then an adolescent with a sexy body. She told him the story of Ingila while she was speaking seductively and moving her lips and eyes in a flirty manner, until old Tombila's eyes gleamed and his mouth was wide open. And then she ran away from him while she laughed loudly. He was dismayed and his aroused sexual desire tormented him, which made him go out of his mind. Adults of his household had noticed his despicable state that caused them to worry and made him chase girls and talk to himself. They made his grandson watch him whenever he went out, the grandson who was his rival in courting Sada, daughter of Zareefa. Thus, they went to work with the group of Klooda the teacher to reclaim the high land. They told him several times to watch over his grandfather and his younger siblings. Yet, after he woke up late, he stayed in his room and began to daydream, and played with his legs, scratching it, and he let his younger sibling play in the courtyard. His daydreams were centered, as you know, on Sada, daughter of Zareefa. He used to think about her beauty and having sex with her when she would become his wife, or even his mistress. Nevertheless, she was neither, as she got married to another man; then he forgot her as if he had not fallen in love with her at all! He himself married another girl and did not live long enough to see his only daughter. What mattered now was that old Tombila managed to take advantage of his grandson's moment of inattention, and locked his grandson's room

door from the outside, and went out of the house, indifferent to the cries of younger siblings or even the curses and threats of the rival grandson who was to guard him. Old Tombila ran toward Ingila's house while he was semi-naked, bareheaded and barefooted. His head was hairless, and he was wearing a flimsy shirt, and flimsy underwear that was lowered, showing his erection. You see!

At the same time, Ingila was amidst women, after he washed his smooth hair, face, and neck with cold water from the large water-jar. He removed all traces of sand and sweat thoroughly, and felt refreshed. Yet he was terrified and women mocked him still and laughed more at him. He called them heifers, daughters of cows, but this made them laugh more like idiots. Deheba, who was born the same year as Ingila told him:

- You should thank God, Ingila, that you are older than 40 years old and have not reached the menopause yet!

Roaring laughter streamed out of wide-open mouths, and their bodies and shoulders shook with laughter. Poor Ingila could not stand it any longer, and sweat poured out of every pore of his thick skin. He stood up in pain, cursing and threatening that he would take the boat of Shilaly to get him to the village of the west bank of the river, and would not care for the scandal of the village that rejected him.

At the gate of his house, Deheba screamed at him:

- What scandal! You unrolled your shirt, showing your short flimsy, underwear, sister! Women would envy you because of your rosy colored skin!

He did not have the energy to respond to the teasing of women, so he left them mocking him as they wished, and kept steady in his slow walk by leaning on the shadowy walls with one hand, while he held and moved the cloth of his turban like a woman's headscarf. Before he left the alley, he was sweating profusely, and before passing two alleys, he was exhausted. He was surrounded by a group of mocking children that continued what the women had started.

Tombila was running towards Ingila's house. Both of them ran across one another. Both were panting and nervous, drenched in sweat. Tears rolled on Ingila's cheeks, while the old, bald man's face was dry, yet sweat rolled on his baldhead fast. Children surrounded both of them, and pointed laughingly at the lower half of Tombila, as his underwear was lowered, showing his package, my lustful grandson. Do you see, or you might be gay like Ingila, and I do not know! It would scandalize your mother if you were like Ingila. She would know that I, her father, was right to object to her marriage to your father, if she knew that you were like Ingila, whom she saw while she was still a kid and he an old man, before he died. Back to our story, children laughed loudly at the semi-naked Tombila. Women approached from faraway, expecting a funny story, but they were surprised by the lowered underwear of the old man! They were surprised by seeing his package, as it is a source of shame to us, men, whereas it is a source of joy to women. You see! Regardless of their slyness and feelings, let us go back to our story.

Ingila, of course, noticed the lowered underwear and he was not the type to miss something like that, but he

sensed double trouble coming. He tried to speak menacingly and angrily to Tombila to frighten him, but his feminine voice betrayed him and went out of wet lips, soft and womanish:

- What do you want from me now?
- You soft-bellied man, like a pregnant woman, I heard that you were pregnant, is that true?
- Move away from my path to the Nile bank; I want to get on board the boat of Shilaly!
- You are a woman, and have hidden this fact from me all your age!
- You senile Tombila, move away from me!
- Who is the father of your child?
- I have had enough trouble, move away from me!
- Is he the man with the metal tooth, or Haridi ,the Upper-Egyptian man?
- May a hairy black scorpion sting you! You insolent old imbecile!
- How come that I search for a wife while you are here! You are good enough for me!
- Tombila! Move your hands off me!
- Every time I flirt with you, you tell me with your soft voice: "Shame on you, Uncle Tombila". Oh, you are a sly, cunning one! Why do not you accept me as a lover? What fault do you find with me, you son of the red-skinned slain Mameluke? Now you've shown your true colors, and you got yourself pregnant! Oh, my

goodness! I swear by the tomb of your wicked, unfair, killed father that I would never leave you unless I have sex with you!

A combat ensued between both of them. Punching, jabbing, and nudging on the part of senile Tombila, while Ingila retreated and scratched him with his long fingernails. Tombila jumped at Ingila like a strong monkey causing Ingila to fall down, and Tombila fell on top of him. Yet, Tombila's hand was nudged between the heavy body of Ingila and the ground. The old man screamed, while he was asking Ingila politely and painfully to get his body off of his hand. Ingila did not understand the situation, but he noticed by feeling his lower half of his body that the underwear short of the old man had returned to its original place of modesty. He scratched the face of Tombila and spat on him, although Tombila was on top of him! Children cheered Ingila, who realized the pathetic conditions of Tombila, and that he could not hurt a fly, and decided to seize the opportunity to vent his anger. He kept lying on the crushed arm while he was smiling to the children who cheered him. When Tombila crawled on top of Ingila to ease the position of his arm, his weak chest was exposed to the head of his rival, who had bitten Tombila on his chest cage, bent on fracturing a rib or two.

The child who appointed himself as a spy came back after he told other men; he ran before them as they followed staggeringly due to the effect of the drugs. Men disentangled the two rivals, and transported the old man who fainted before Khareeba the bonesetter. Ingila responded angrily to the tirade of the mayor, and held his scarf-like turban cloth to wipe his sweat and tears.

He descended to the riverbank, where the boats were anchored. Children surrounded him, cheering him mockingly by chanting a song that they had written collectively:

Ingila is pregnant

O People!

A man is pregnant

O People!

Women could not hide their roaring laughter. Deheba unabashedly told the mayor explicitly how Tombila knew that Ingila is a woman and decided to marry him immediately and in public! She told him how Tombila came running semi-naked with lowered underwear shorts, you see!

Let us go back to the story.

The worthless mayor and the worthless elite were truly surprised at this state of affairs. The mayor said:

- Are you not ashamed, O women of the village, of too much laughter? You laugh loudly in the presence of your mayor without considering his dignified stature and prestige! Is this because I am young or an orphan? Women are neither ashamed, nor old Tombila, nor the effeminate Ingila, nor Deheba. Oh, what a shameless village!

Do you remember, boy, where I told you Nakhla went?

She moved to every corner of the small village, enjoying repeating the minutest details of the scandal. Before high noon, she returned to her home, as she was

extremely thin but used to having a siesta at that time on a daily basis. Deheba and some women were still near her home, Ingila's home, and told her of the combat between Ingila and Tombila. Nakhla grew madder and threatened to punish Tombila. She said:

- I swear by God, that if I lay my hands on Tombila, I would make him and his two sons eat sand. I do not allow anyone to beat Ingila except me. He is my husband and I, alone, have the legitimate right to beat him!

Women parted to have lunch with their families and to avoid the severe climate of noon and the merciless heat of the sun. Nakhla entered the courtyard and lay down under the canopy on the rugs to have her siesta. Later, the song of children about Ingila could be heard as they followed him like a shadow, and the children were indifferent to the heat of noon. Sweat poured profusely on their slim faces and necks, until it soaked their clothes. You know, my worthless grandson, this bunch of children were tougher and stronger than you are now, however the opinion of your mother about you! Back to the story, children chanted their song:

Ingila is pregnant

O People!

A man is pregnant

O People!

At that time, I was older than these children were and could not join them, yet younger than the adolescents, thus I did not know the facts of life or the sexual desire.

I say this to confirm to you, you who were raised in Alexandria, that I did not have an affair with Ingila, as your facial expressions and eye glances imply, you sly, cunning, mean grandson, who inherited meanness from his father. You see! Why do you interrupt me? Let me finish my story, to get some rest from telling stories and get rid of your damned presence.

At the gate of the house, Ingila stopped to curse the children and throw a stone at them, after threatening to do so before, thus they ran away from him and scattered for a while. He entered panting and wiping his sweat with the end of his gown. He found his tall wife asleep in the courtyard under the canopy and kicked her wooden body with his bare foot. She sat up on her shriveled bottom. Ingila sat on his knees. And due to his exhaustion and his huge, fat belly and chest, he put his forearms on the ground, which made him akin to a cow, his fat belly hanging down until it touched the rug. He looked at her angrily as she stood up on her knees, yet she was taller than he was, as her trunk was tallish. She looked at him menacingly in turn, but she wished he would retreat so she could resume her siesta. Yet, Ingila began cursing and abusing her. But due to his panting, words were vague and intermittent:

- You... are the cause... of this tragedy... Nakhla. This is all because of you... you half woman, half man!
- Ingila, you half man, half woman! Siesta of noontime has its sanctity, you infamous scum of the earth!
- You cat-eater, and mud-eater as well!
- I need an hour's sleep!

- You camphor snuffer and addict!
- Even the devils rest away at hellish noontime, Ingila!
- You smelly breather with a smelly mouth!

She raised her veiny hand and slapped him painfully on his fat cheek. He stood up with difficulty and screamed incessantly in an effeminate voice:

- Oh! Ouch! Oh! Ouch!

Children had slipped into the courtyard to spy on them in an unusual silence, untypical of them. They approached the big jars of water, and drank copious amounts of water handing the two jugs to one another in silence. They stood in a row beside the distant wall, waiting eagerly. Once the fight began between Nakhla and her effeminate husband, they imitated screams of Ingila in their shrill voices:

- Oh! Ouch! Oh! Ouch!

Nakhla stood with confidence, putting her hands on her undefined waist. The fight continued until women of the village came back, leaving their husbands and the lunch meal, unheeding the hellish heat of noon sun. Ingila went to them, crying and complaining. He said:

- The daughter of the cat-eater is beating me! The daughter of the humble slave is beating the son of the red proud Mameluke, who was the master of her father, the slave!

The mayor and his worthless elite and entourage entered the house. Some of them were very stupefied by the drugs, and some old-time addicts were still sober, like the mayor who shouted at all the gathered people:

- O People! Do the mayor and his men have nothing to do except to deal with Ingila and Nakhla? We had woken up at dawn to think of ways to conceal the scandal, while you are adding fuel to the fire! Do not you care about the reputation of our village among the nearby villages? What will other people say, you foolish people, if they heard that a man from amongst us is pregnant? They would satirize us in their poems, for most of them are poets who have nothing to do except compose poems! They will mock us for many seasons!

Nakhla moved toward him without fear, as this young, short mayor had lost the veneration and reverence of his late father who had been mayor as well. She said:

- Oh... my goodness! You are just worried about your reputation among your counterparts of stupefied, drugged mayors! You are afraid that they would make fun of you in their hash-smoking gatherings!

The mayor said in an empty threat:

- Nakhla, behave yourself, broad!

Nakhla moved toward him until she bumped her tall thin figure with his fat paunch whose diameter was half a cubit. She leaned forward with her upper body until she overshadowed him with her palm leaves-like hair. I told you she was very tall. She continued:

- Maybe you are afraid of being accused of being the father of Ingila's child!

Fury shone in the mayor's eyes, yet he watched languidly the movement of the Adam's apple in her

throat, up and down at full speed. He raised his head to see her face while he was talking to her:

- Behave yourself, broad, otherwise...

- What would you do to me, mayor? Are not you responsible for the state of stupor of all villagers?

The mayor retreated two steps, and turned his head to women whose roaring laughter and cavernous open mouths teased him! He was furious as these women did not respect him and laughed at him shamelessly without covering their mouths! He shouted at them and said wisely:

- Laughing without reason is impudence!

All women were indifferent to him, even his wives, and he was in a dilemma. Ingila smiled sadly and gloated over the mayor's predicament, and said:

- That served you well, mayor. You did not give our hash-trade its due, traitor. You urged Shilaly not to transport me to the West Riverbank. Now this is my revenge; Nakhla is humiliating you, mayor. You will have your rightful share of the impudence of Nakhla, daughter of Dalma, the half woman, half man!

Women burst out laughing. The mayor was furious, but the fury of Nakhla was stronger. She stepped forward toward the fat mayor and pushed him. He retreated two steps and she moved around herself while pointing with her fingers to all the gathering people, then suddenly she stepped toward the mayor and poked her fingers in his fat paunch. A sound went out of his paunch like this:

- Aawo!

Nakhla said:

- O people of the village, you are the witnesses of Ingila and his swearing, and that that mayor could not control the effeminate Ingila! It is my right then to scandalize both of them, and of all of you, in other villages. I would participate in all gatherings of other drugged mayors in spite of our mayor to tell them of our scandal, and I would say the mayor is the father of Ingila's child!

The situation got complicated as you see, my grandson, you half Nubian, half-Alexandrian, and I do not know which part of you is worse. That does not matter now; I have to finish my story. But for your own knowledge, you are a failure like your mother and a scoundrel like your father.

Let us get back to the story of the worthless mayor.

The mayor extracted his spectacles from the folds of his turban and put it on his nose. In addition to the fact that it was reading spectacles of an illiterate mayor, it made him unable to see anything as it blurred his vision, especially when he was in a state of half stupor as he was now. Spectacles made him imagine seeing things that did not exist. When he put it on, he imagined that Nakhla's face was not frightening to him. Spectacles blurred his vision and he could not see her moving Adam's apple in her reed-like throat. That was why his fears were allayed. Soon his fear increased and worsened as he remembered that Nakhla always put her words into action. His blurred vision did not benefit him. What was he to do in your opinion? You do not know. Then listen to me.

The mayor turned to Ingila to show his authority, and he confidently shouted at him:

- Ingila, behave yourself!

Ingila slapped both his own cheeks and said:

- Oh... my Goodness! You see, O people! Our mayor is afraid of Nakhla and he threatens me. He is afraid of the mannish woman. What a scandal!

The fury of Nakhla was unappeased. Did I tell you before, that she resembled a bottomless pit? She moved toward Ingila and stopped beside him, and she was thus like a solid, tall obelisk towering over a small dune of flesh and fat. Nakhla addressed the gathering of dysfunctional people to make an announcement:

- O people, be my witness, I irrevocably divorce my 'wife' Ingila.

Amidst commotion, Ingila retreated and ran to the large jars of water, which were silent in a state of positive neutrality, with their round lids on top of their openings. He took one lid of one jar without warning and ran a few steps in the opposite direction. Children that sneaked into the courtyard understood his intention and shouted in warning amidst their laughter. Yet, Ingila was faster than any reaction and threw the lid as if it was a Frisbee toward Nakhla before anyone could stop him. However, the missile hit an innocent drugged man's head. Although blood trickled down his face, the dreamy look on it remained the same, and he scratched his forehead and was not aware of his wound. The wife of the wounded man hurried from the group of gathered women to a corner in the courtyard, where

Nakhla made fire for cooking in summers, to get a handful of ash to press it to the bleeding wound of her husband. But she was laughing at the same time as she had found herself a role in this scene. She tore a piece of cloth from his turban to dress his wound and left the rest of the turban on his shoulder, then she went back to watch what would happen next. Her stupefied husband resumed his foolish stance with a sheepish look on his face, and, like his peers, watched events that he did not comprehend.

The mayor said in arrogance to restore his reverence, which was non-existent in the first place:

- Listen, Nakhla, this issue must be resolved at any cost, because I said so, and I am the mayor, although young and fatherless. All people whom you see and I cannot see support my view. Is that not true, O people?

Uproar broke out. Children and some still sober men talked nonsensically and women's talk mingled with laughter, which made their voices akin to sheep voices. Men were too drugged to hear anything, so they remained silent in a state of stupor. All the people gathered were like a group of mute people trying to speak to a group of deaf people, in the presence of a third group of jumping monkeys, i.e. the children. You see!

During the commotion, the blood of the wounded man trickled down from the dressed wound on his face. He faintly sensed pain and thought he had a headache! He intended to lift his right hand but he moved his left one. He traced the source of the bleeding, or what he thought was a headache, until he found it and sensed the

stickiness of blood and ash soaking his hand - thank God - and he put his hand on one ear, thus he did not see his hand. When his hand reached his eyes after a long time, he realized the reality of the matter without external help and said in surprise:

- Whose blood is this?

Ingila seized the opportunity of the increased commotion to have his revenge and vent his anger on Nakhla. He removed another round lid of the large water jar, despite the resentment of the jar of such impudence, as he knew that our jars insisted on neutrality, as if they were no less important in comparison to rivals around it who have brains. Women made a circle around Ingila to prevent him from aiming the second missile, whereas half-conscious men made a circle around Nakhla who was extremely offended by the bold action of Ingila who dared to assault her for the first time in his life. She felt that the insult had been doubled, as this was done before all people, and she made her second announcement:

- Oh, My God! The son of the skinned man has dared to assault me! In the morning, he threw the wooden house key at me, and now the lids of the water jars! No! Nakhla, daughter of Dalma the free man, cannot accept this insult. Ingila, I irrevocably divorce you, and you will never spend a night under the roof of this house again!

Oh, my grandson, recounting these disgraceful tragedies makes the heart sick. Let us see the other group in the village.

Klooda the teacher sensed that things were on the verge of collapse. Saffoura did not stop crying. Klooda ordered the group to stop working and they left their tools where they were, as they would return to it tomorrow. They were soaked in sweat, which had dried, mixed with sand and sadness. They went to the holy River Nile in two separate groups of men and women, to wash up and perform ablution in the shaded area under the dense palm trees whose roots are under the river. They prayed to God and invoked Him to give them strength and help their drugged villagers to reach the righteous path. They gathered once more. Women cried and men kept their ire hidden in their minds. They returned to their respective home in what resembled a funerary march, except for Klooda the teacher who went straight to the mayor's house.

Our mayor knew how to deal with matters of meetings. He sent messengers to all the mayors and elite of nearby villages, to discuss the problem of the flooded land, the measly compensations, the big defeat and the lost dignity. His intention was to distract them with these matters, so they would forget the idea of the pregnant man, and also to prevent the poets from mocking them. All mayors came, as they knew, like all people, that it was a matter of just talk, as well as eating and drinking, and smoking. They came in groups, mounting horses and colored jackasses. The manger was filled with many different wonderful types of riding animals. There were donkeys that were a joy to the eyes to see, but extremely stupid and noisy in their braying, donkeys with two saddles, camels with two humps, jackasses with huge backs. Some of these animals were perfumed, some

were colored, some were armored, and some were huge. Oh my! You know, my grandson, some of these riding animals in the manger were more valuable than the mayors and elite people that gathered in the guesthouse of the mayor, and did nothing but talk and talk endlessly. You see!

The elite of the village were receiving their guests, and early comers received those came after them. This is tradition, which your generation does not know. I do not remember the suitable lines of poetry that convey the same meaning, but this shows the importance of the years of education I had, my backward grandson! I swear by God, I had only two tests left to get the primary education certificate, but I did not, because I did not have a riding animal to go to school. If you'd had enough education like me, you would have learned great poems of wisdom. If you had listened like me to the big, wooden radio that resembled the huge wooden safe and that had programs in Arabic although it came from the foreigners' land, you would have learned a lot! The radio used to reveal the lies and pretensions of your folks! Moreover, you would have become half-aware of the world around you, you half human being!

I do not remember except the second half of the line of poetry that I wanted to say. It ran like this:

...They ordered their mother to urinate on the fire.

I forget the first half of the line due to my old age and the passage of many flood seasons. It was a shame of our poet to say a line like this. How a woman could possibly urinate on the flaming fire? Can you imagine this scene, my sly grandson? The fire could burn

her...her abdomen. What? You do not understand the meaning of this line of poetry. I will explain it to you. These people were in pitch-darkness in the vast desert and they were very poor, and they were lighting a fire. A hungry vagabond saw the fire and moved toward them to eat and stay for the night. Their doe was trained to bark to warn them of a nearby-unexpected company. These people hated to shelter vagabonds, and so ordered their mother to urinate on the fire to mislead the vagabond in the darkness of the vast desert, as he could have reached them by following the light of this fire. Ha, ha! This poet wanted to satirize them for their stinginess. Can you imagine this scene, with the woman urinating on the fire? How could this be? I do not understand. Would she urinate while standing so as not to be burned by the fire? Ha, ha! Why the poet did not say they ordered their father to urinate on the fire? That would have been more effective and believable. Maybe he said the mother to insult them more. Let us get back to our story.

All the guests that the young mayor with the huge paunch had sent for were all from nearby villages. Some of them were white-skinned, some were black-skinned, and others were in the middle between the two extremes. Some were filthily rich, some were in abject poverty that used to be rich, and others were in the middle between the two extremes. Some were intelligent enough to understand, some were too stupid to understand, and others were in the middle between the two extremes. Some were indifferent to the topic of discussion, some were ignorant of this topic, and others were in the middle between the two extremes. They

came from the wide salty valley, in the east where the village of Ras Hermz is situated, and from the west village of "White Walls", which is situated at the foot of Tarig Mountain, where the flood began for the first time, and we knew that it would not be for the last time. Some guests came from the far north, where they worship cows and oxen. Some came from the far south where the sources of the River Nile exist. These groups received one another, with hugs and kisses, like the homosexuals, people of the prophet Lot. Peace be upon the prophet Lot, and may his people burn eternally in Hell. Most of these guests had the role model of the Jannarra. You laugh loudly, although it is a saddening fact. You do not know what Jannarra means? Then why you are laughing, you Alexandrian by upbringing? I have to explain to you, may God forgive me and punish you. You are as sly as your father whom I refused to marry to my daughter for many times. You are a liar, you love to hear taboo words and want me to explain bad words. I am old now and do not like to say bad words, yet you have to know that this word means "a whore". Of course, you have been to their houses of ill repute during and after your adolescence to respond to the call of your sexual urges. These whores are everywhere in great numbers in the Northern cities. What do you say, insolent boy? You say there are whores in our villages! I assure you with my ancient honor that you cannot know the number of whores here, as they do not exist... at least publicly! You see! May God curse you! You are a grandson who takes special pleasure in such shameful topics. Why don't you let me finish this story so that I can get rid of your

damned presence? Let us get back to the story of the huge gathering of worthless people, guests of the mayor.

I told you they represent all the nearby villages. Their attires were very different, some wore traditional Nubian clothes and some wore foreigners' clothes. Listen to me! Do not forget that I was close to getting the primary education certificate, and I knew a good number of English words by heart. If it had not been for the cursed riding animal, which I lacked, I would have been from the elite of the village, and I would have been one of the guests who came for no purpose at all. They would have received me with due respect and kissed me a hundred times, although they would not have liked me. You see! All of them gathered, anyway, some were showing off their beard for a purpose, and some were showing off their pubis, for another purpose! Their headwear was very different and came in every color and shape. Some wore a scarf, some wore other headwear and some none at all, and some wore clothes that barely covered them. Why do you move restlessly? I have recounted the story of headwear before?! Ok, I forget! I am an old man who forgets a lot! I despised most of these guests, and respected a small number of them. Most of them became the mayor by hereditary succession. Any man whose father was a mayor was appointed a mayor upon his father's death. People did not approve of this hereditary authority. Some of these mayors were just night-guards who had succeeded - and probably killed - the former mayor, and their only qualification was having a gun! People did not approve of this hereditary authority, as I told you. It was on very rare occasions that mayors were elected by the people,

and those were real respectable mayors. That's why I despised most of them, my jobless grandson. Let us get back to our story.

The guestroom was overcrowded. Many mutual hugs, kisses, and laughter were exchanged. Then they settled down to begin the meeting. The two men with the metal teeth had entered the overcrowded guestroom early to catch the lunch meal that was late due to the events involving Ingila and Nakhla I told you about. This action was not out of gluttony; they wanted to be with the worthless elite and guests in any meeting and important talks and negotiations, especially that the store of hash had not been used up yet. Another reason for their diligence and punctuality was that they did not want other people to think they joined the workaholic workers, followers of Klooda the teacher, the farmers, the ironsmiths, the builders, and the carpenters, who wore blue muddy gowns.

Colored palm leaves and on top of them food dishes and other trays that served as lids were held by the women. Women, and older children like me, ate outside the guestroom. Most trays were presented to the general dignified assembly whose word was law, as told to us by the man with the funny beard and the (h) sound, and Khareeba the bonesetter! The elite took off their shoes and sat in two opposite rows and between them dishes of Molokhiyya, Wika, and stew with meat cubes, and fresh oven-hot bread in half circles that resembled crescents, and which surrounded round dishes that resembled round suns or planets. Once the mayor began to eat, and said grace before eating, hands started to assault dishes to finish the delicacies. Klooda the

teacher was standing close to them, and fury and sadness were apparent in his facial expressions. He said to them:

- No peace upon you!

All of them lifted their heads in embarrassing silence. The mayor tried to play it cool to appease the anger of the teacher, and he said to him:

- Of course, you are right, our dear enlightened, learned sheikh, and no salutation necessary in the presence of food. Come along, man, and eat with us. Be seated beside me, please.

The mayor pushed whom was beside him, who in turn lowered his trunk on the one beside him, and all the rows were lowered on one another by the trunk like domino pieces. They did not fall totally, as their huge paunches were so heavy. They remained in this weird position until the end of this meeting as they were drugged. Klooda the teacher did not respond to the sweet talk of the mayor and said:

- On the Day of Judgment, God will ask you on which matters you have wasted your lives and money. What would be your response?

Embarrassing silence ensued.

- Ahem, God would ask us after we'd eaten lunch, of course. Ha, ha!

- Shut up, gluttonous Zarrag! The mayor will answer.

- I told you a thousand of times, teacher, that our remaining land supports us well, and we still have some money from the compensation. The saying goes as such

"spend all the money you have in your pocket to know what lies in store for you in the future".

- This saying has become your motto in life, and it will lead to our destruction. Remember the word of God, God ordered us to work, and He will see our work with His holy prophet and the faithful people.

- Ahem, but we are already working, Klooda. We came from various places from the four corners to assemble here to discuss matters and make decisions concerning our troubles. That is sort of working, is it not?

- I told you to shut up, you idiot Zarrag! Answer me, mayor. Why are we in such a despicable state? Why have you become low-spirited and desperate to the extent that you let yourselves go with any current, however weak? Why have you stopped working?

The mayor stood up confidently, in anger, waved his hands, and addressed Klooda as if they were on equal footing:

- You know our state, yet you argue with us! How dare you accuse us of being slothful? We are people whose land was drowned, and our hopes drowned with it. Let us live in peace, Klooda, the way we wish, for the rest of our days. Let us get drugged to forget our pain. May God be with you!

The mayor sat down and wiped his tears, and Klooda was confused and did not know how to respond, and wondered if these were real or fake tears, whether the mayor was putting on an act or not. He said:

- O mayor, do not sink into the abyss of despair. The real drowning is not that of land, O people, it is the drowning of the will to live.

Debate continued and they were restless. Klooda was an old man, was extremely exhausted and in bad need of rest. Whereas the mayor and the gathering were longing to return to their discussions in the assembly to smoke hash and drugs. Most of them cooed in tedium:

-Oh!

Saffoura was confused, and then she got angry because of the shrill voices of the children who chanted their song, and she heard it for the first time near her house:

Ingila is pregnant

O People!

A man is pregnant

O People!

Saffoura cried, then wiped her tears, as she was extremely exhausted herself due to working all day long. Once she was in the courtyard, she saw Ingila approaching, without wearing a gown, only a flimsy shirt that was soaked in sweat, and his scarf-like turban. He was cursing and chasing children to keep them away from him.

- O sister, I have no refuge but in your house. Nakhla the tyrant had driven me out of the house. Deheba and Khareeba are spreading bad rumors about me. Shilaly refused to transport me to the village of the west bank of the Nile. Help me, sister! No one will help me now but you!

Saffoura lowered herself to the ground and put sand on her head, as a sign of feeling disgraced. Ingila retreated and said:

- Are you mad, Saffoura? Is this the way a sister helps her only brother?

- Get out off my house, you cursed idiot! You have disgraced me!

- Have mercy upon me. We share one Nubian mother! Remember that! Our mother was Naffisa Touse, is not that right? Have mercy upon your only brother. Nakhla has sworn to divorce me if I stayed the night at my house.

- Get out of my house!

- You forsake me, Saffoura, while I am in this horrible state. Shame on you! What a scandal! How wretched I am! Oh! Oh! Oh! Oh!

Children who spied on them, among them the daughter of Saffoura, mocked him by imitating his moans:

- Oh! Oh! Oh! Oh!

Saffoura got angrier, and threw sand at Ingila and screamed at him:

- Get out of my house, you impure soul! Get away from me! You are the source of my disgrace! Get out of my house, you son of the red-skinned Mameluke who was killed by being skinned alive!

Ingila retreated and said:

- Yes. This is the reason for not helping me! You are jealous of me because my skin-color is like coffee beans,

as I am the son of the red Mameluke, whereas you are the daughter of Othman, the black peasant!

- Get out of my house, you rent-boy!

She hurried to the life long friends of her husband, the big water jars, whose neutrality was smashed already, and took the round wooden lid of one of them to hit Ingila with. However, her brother, son of Naffisa Tousa, hurried in time out of the courtyard, while cursing the water jars and their lids, which were blind missiles, at one time with him against women, and now with women against him!

He hurried and his huge paunch and bottom trembled and encumbered his running. Children ran after him to greet him with their new song:

Ingila is pregnant

O People!

A man is pregnant

O People!

Oh, I get sick of telling the story of Ingila and the elite of the village; let us get back to the funny, old, senile Tombila. I told you he was a descendent of the family of... What? You dare to interrupt me with Northern coolness and Southern foolishness! You say you do not care about family trees and divisions. May God damn you; you are a freak, a mix of Northern and Southern faults, with no identity! Let us focus on our story.

Tombila was lying on his back, wearing only his underwear shorts. He was bare-chested and the wound was sealed by dressings and coffee powder. His hand

was dressed in strips of an old garment. His two sons were around him, and they got his rival grandson out of the room as he grew more angry and jealous of his grandfather. This grandson and his mother and the wife of his uncle eavesdropped by the closed door. Tombila thought his two sons were about to scold him, so he feigned weakness, and pointed to his chest and said:

- He bit my chest to break my chest bone!

He lifted his wounded hand in feigned difficulty and feigned crying, and said:

- My wrist bone did not stand his heavy weight of flesh and fat, it was crushed under this huge weight. I have severe pains, my two good sons. Of course, you love and honor your father. Thank God, I am not seriously injured, thanks to your prayers for me, yet I have severe pains. Ouch!

His acting did not deceive his two sons, who scolded him severely:

- Father, shame on you for disgracing us with your scandals!

- Father, you scandalize us instead of helping us to reclaim the new land!

- And instead of buying land on the bank of the Nile in Upper Egypt.

Tombila looked at them in disgust and said:

- What Upper Egypt land! I have spent my whole life in my village beside the River Nile here. I will hear none of that! You can go to Upper Egypt with your wives and

children as you wish, as for me, just leave me here to die where I was born.

Embarrassing and worrying silence ensued for a few minutes. Abdul-Jabar Tombila stood up and said:

- And the last of your scandals was assaulting Ingila!

His brother Abdullah Tombila imitated him, stood up, and screamed at his father:

- Why did you sink to this disgraceful level, father?

- Our patience is running thin, father!

The old man whispered to himself and said:

- You are too harsh on you father.

- I swear to God that if you did not stop your foolish actions, we will keep you a prisoner in your room, and will not allow you to leave it until you die!

- You want me to come to my senses, and not to scandalize you, then...

He sprang from his bed like a coiled spring that was set loose, and stood before them, and the three of them exchanged glances of suppressed rage. Tombila said to them:

- I want you to marry me off to Sada daughter of Zareefa, with the compensation money, which is mine. And you have hidden it from me.

The adolescent grandson pushed the door open and dashed forward. His father was holding him to prevent him from fighting his grandfather, while the uncle held the grandfather to prevent him from punching his

grandson despite his injured hand. The grandson was cursing the madness of his grandfather, and the grandfather was cursing his two sons and all his grandsons. Abdullah slapped his son hard to keep him quiet, and gestured to him to leave the room, which his son did, with a heavy heart. Once the grandson was outside, with his mother and the wife of his uncle, he made his announcement:

- I swear to God, that if grandfather marries Sada daughter of Zareefa, I will travel south the river to Halfa Valley, and immigrate to the unknown countries of Africa, and you will not hear from me ever again!

Oh, my story grows long, but you listen! That is because you like to satisfy your curiosity and you love tattling, however hard you deny the fact, even if this tattling was about your tribes. You are jobless and useless! You see! Listen to the rest of the story that was handed to us by our ancestors, and has become history now.

The afternoon passed, and we were glad to be relieved of the hellish sun. We waited for sunset, and waited for the call for sunset prayer from the wooden minaret of the small mosque. The few groups of believers, whose hearts were engulfed with hope and sadness due to the despicable conditions of the villages and its dwellers, answered the call for prayer.

In the guesthouse, the mayor stood from the couch in a dignified manner as if he was a popular hero! Ha, ha! He said:

- O people, we've overlooked the dawn prayer, the noon prayer, and the afternoon prayer. Yet God would

forgive these sins, for we were deeply engrossed in thinking. Moreover, we should now pray the sunset prayer to avoid the blame of Sheikh El-Ramly's Family, the backward fanatics, and the blame of Klooda and his followers, may God forgive them and forgive us. Do not worry, the sunset prayer is short, we will perform it hastily and resume our assembly, to avoid God's wrath when we overlook the night prayer.

The elite of the villages shouted in admiration, moving their headwear, the non-turbaned ones touching their hair on their heads, but all of them pulled their gowns from behind in the middle as it got tucked inside their underwear due to sitting for a long time, unlike the neutrality of the water jars. They shouted:

- Of course, sure, may God bless you, our wise guest!

Let us get back to the situation of women and Nakhla and Ingila. Women were not fat in the past. They are nowadays. Deheba and other carefree women who had no responsibilities of work gathered around Nakhla to appease her anger toward Ingila. They said to her that she could break her oath and let Ingila enter his house and not divorce him, and this would not require any fasting, especially that her husband was effeminate. They lowered her camel-like neck to kiss her frond-like hair until she accepted to break her oath and let him enter the house, out of pity. Then, they supported him, starting from the shrubs of colocynth under which he lied, to his house, as he could not walk alone. They feigned having pity on him and he was about to believe them. The usual bunch of children did not leave him, and they chanted:

Ingila is pregnant

O People!

A man is pregnant

O People!

Inside his house, Ingila took a shower and got dressed in a new pair of underwear shorts and a new shirt, and then he lay in his bed. He did not feel totally at ease, especially after his long, tiring day, which had not yet ended. He removed his underwear shorts to feel more at ease. He lay once more in his solid bed, which was made of strong fronds. He was lying on his back, and in front of him his big paunch. Women made sure he was at rest, and that Nakhla went to a women's assembly in a far village to sniff and eat powder and chatter. Women held their metal containers to get water from the Nile in the late afternoon when the sun was about to set, and they would not fear its hellish heat anymore. The Muezzin called for the sunset prayer. Women made haste for two reasons: to return before the darkness of the night, and, more importantly, to get back as soon as possible to Ingila to watch the last episode of his scandal, as they wouldn't have missed it, not for the whole world. Metal containers were steady on their heads while they clapped their hands and walked in a fast pace, and they chanted the song composed by the children, which would become later the most popular song in our folklore:

Ingila is pregnant

O People!

A man is pregnant

O People!

You still remember Tombila, the old senile man whose sexual desire was overwhelming him. He was hyperactive, and with his naked skinny body except for the underwear shorts, and with his bandaged wounds, he eavesdropped on the discussion of his two sons and their wives on his state of affairs. The discussion was held in a separate, remote room in the courtyard. When he discerned that their opinion contradicted his desire, he barged into the room as if he were a strong thug from Halfa city and its suburbs. He shouted:

- Women have control of Tombila's sons! Shame on both of you!

All of them surrounded him and said:

- You should marry a spinster or a widow suitable to your age, father.

- No! I want a big-breasted girl, or no one! I want to marry by means of my land compensation money. I want to marry Sada daughter of Zareefa, or no one!

- Shame on you, Father.

Suppressed ire inside the old man made him jump and brandish his hands, both the good one and the injured one, and he screamed at his family:

- Oh! Shame! You know the meaning of shame! Shame on you for not being considerate to your father, as you sleep every night with your wives and I hear every night the sound of creaking beds and the high orgasmic moans of your two wives! Whereas I sleep in a lonely

bed, feeling deprived! You deny me the right to get married! Shame on you thrice, sons of a bitch!

Semi-naked, he ran past them like an arrow shot from its bow. They let him do as he wish, as they presumed that he would do what he did every time; he would run for a while and curse them in front of some people and end up sleeping in his bed. The two brothers went to the mosque.

Women had filled their metal containers with water from the River Nile. Despite the dusk, before the full darkness of the night, they saw the faint shadow of Tombila who ran fast toward the river, while he was cursing loudly and brandishing his hands. May heaven have mercy on him, the mad one wanted to drown himself! They left the metal containers to drop on the ground and water flowed and infiltrated the sandy ground. Women moved very fast toward Tombila, crying all the while. He reached the shore before them and mounted a muddy mound, which was directly on the bank of the river. His underwear shorts were about to fall, as it was in the normal position on his body. He turned his head toward the village, which was situated at the foot of the mountain, turning his back toward the Nile, which was filled with too much water due to the erection of the Aswan Dam. The current of the River Nile was flowing toward the north, indifferent to the village and its people, and, of course, to the senile old man, who was shouting as if his fellow villagers were before him and hearing him, although there was no audience before him except the women who hastened toward him. He shouted:

- O people of the village! My sons are preventing me from marriage! I want to marry with my compensation money! O people of the village! My sons are saving my money to buy a land in Upper Egypt! I want to marry, O people! I would die deprived of sex and God would punish you for this sin! I want to marry Sada daughter of Zareefa, or else I would die!

Before the women had reached him, he fell into the River Nile backward, and the water of the river gurgled with a small splash as he fell into the river that was indifferent to him.

- Splash!

Women, who reached his place seconds after his jump, stood in the same place and screamed. Deheba, the fat woman, jumped with her heavy body into the river, and the water was perturbed by her presence and made a big splashing sound.

- SPLASH!

Tombila found himself drowning in a wet darkness with a murmuring sound, with an indifferent current that moved toward the north, and moved his thin body toward the same direction in huge waves. He felt Death surrounding him in the liquid form of the sweat of the Angel of Death. He panicked and regretted his fatal jump. He tried to move his limbs to get to the water surface. Although the current was not as strong as in the past after the Aswan Dam made it akin to an enclosed lake, Tombila's youth had been lost as well, which made him deprived of effective resistance. He tried to escape death. He made it to the surface and he

waved his hands but could not utter a cry for help. He could not utter but a few suppressed moans. Then his shoulders, neck, and baldhead sunk under the water surface, and his two thin arms rose high in the air, waving helplessly like two branches of a dead tree moving with the current. Despite of himself, he gulped water through his mouth and nose.

Deheba swam swiftly and confidently toward him like a huge Nile crocodile. She took hold of him as if he were a long piece of straw. He caught her floating, huge, steady body and he scratched her clothes until he tore her clothes in the upper breast area. She pushed him ashore. Women on the mound took him from her while they were laughing. They held him while the lower half of his body was underwater, and his underwear shorts were heavy with water, barely covering half of his bottom. Smiling, Deheba moved out of the water and took him from them and she held him like a stretched child, as if he were elastic like the rubber of the underwear shorts of the coquettes of our days, and those shorts of men and women of your generation who are said to be 'modernized'.

The sexually excited old man was relieved to be safe and away from the fatal water. He sensed the flesh of Deheba and soon returned to his senile dreams. He embraced her fat waist and put his cheek on her huge breasts, while he moaned languorously. Deheba moved him away from her body, and held him upside down from his knees, and thus he was dangling like a thin carcass. His upside down trunk ended in a long venous neck, which in turn ended in a baldhead, which had a sparse white beard. His eyes popped out and his facial

muscles contracted. His body shook violently, and then his wide-open mouth oozed out, in a hard fit of vomiting, the water he had gulped while drowning. He held still for a while, then began the vomiting fit once more. His underwear shorts were now in a position to cover his thin bottom modestly. Deheba made him lie on his back. His breathing returned to its normal pace, and he watched Deheba while she moved her hair plaits backwards, and he focused his vision on her upper breast area where her clothes were torn and her flesh was heaving up and down while she panted. Do you think, my grandson, that Deheba would burn eternally in Hell? I think she deserved such a destiny, but God might have mercy upon her. She imitated Ingila on purpose by rolling up her gown as if she was about to squeeze water out of it, but her real purpose was to excite old Tombila. He had had enough madness! He left her upper breast area to look attentively at her fat lower body. He was so engrossed in this to the extent that he did not hear the laughter and mocking statements of women around him. He suddenly stood up and stuck his face to her belly. She laughed loudly and said:

- Oh, yes, now you are back to your old insanity!
- Will you marry me, broad?
- Ha, ha! I am already married, you empty-headed bald man!

Darkness was thickening and Tombila ran through the narrow fields. He hastened to declare his new love! From the high periphery of the village, shadows of people ran toward him after they were disturbed by

women's screams, who shouted for fear of losing the miserable old man again. The old man continued running after he was saved, and his underwear shorts were lowered as they were heavy with water and their waistband torn. Eventually, with the movement of his legs, the lowered underwear shorts reached below his knees, showing his genitals protruding from his bony, thin legs, but he did not notice due to the sexual desire ignited inside him and his fast running. His underwear shorts reached his ankles, which made him stop running and he fell headlong. While he lay on the ground, he removed his underwear shorts and hoisted them high like a banner of an army legion. He shouted at the villagers. Yet, beware, my grandson! Do not play the fool to an old Nubian like me, you half-Alexandrian, and say that it was like the banner of an Arab army legion when you translate my story from Nubian language into Arabic! You see! Tombila kept shouting at the villagers who approached him, while waving his shorts. He shouted:

- O people of the village! I want to marry Deheba daughter of Kerkira!

In the guestroom, which was lit at night by lanterns, the worthless elite returned after being angered by Kllooda the teacher, who was worried about the future of the villages and refused to join the meeting with them. The worthless other teacher, the short sly one, got up off the couch, feeling proud of his small figure. He said to them:

- I swear to God, Klooda has exceeded his limits! He spent one hour scolding and cursing us! He made us lose the 'high' that has cost us a huge amount of hash!

The mayor stood on the couch in the middle of the room and said:

- I swear to God, my fellows, that if it had not been for the fact that we were in the mosque, I would have punished him severely! Yet I decided to pardon him.

Zarrag said:

- Ahem, we all have noticed that, mayor.

Although Zarrag had said to the man next to him a few seconds earlier:

- Ahem, if the funny bearded man did not like seclusion, I would have said that he deserved to be the mayor. He would have stood against the pious teacher Klooda, as he knows two or three foreign languages! I mean the man with the thin jackass and broken pipe, he would confuse Klooda with the mysterious letter (h).

The man with the golden tooth said:

- Klooda, the teacher, is neither a real sheikh nor a religious scholar in the proper sense of the word. He cannot match Sheikh El-Ramly, may his soul rest in peace, who made us memorize all instructions of going to the bathroom, and his fatwa against singing and dancing, and his cursing of our immodest mothers, may God forgive him. Even if Sheik El-Ramly was repulsive and made us never to enter the mosque, Klooda is not even a sheikh at all. He is such a lousy troublesome teacher. The real teacher is the short sly one, here, who

takes drugs and drinks wine in our meetings until he loses consciousness with us. He would discuss matters with us, support our views in his school, in our meetings, and like the man with the letter (h) and our sister, Khareeba, he would help us justify our decisions. It is a shame on us to leave the lousy Klooda as the imam of our mosque.

A spy boy reached them and said that Klooda is wandering and shouting:

- O God, I have warned them, be my witness!

They said:

- What does he mean?

- He thinks himself a prophet!

- He thinks of us as infidels!

Murmurs of ire ensued. The man with the silver tooth said:

- How are we going to discuss matters now? Oh, he is indeed a lousy fellow!

The call for night prayer nearly deafened their ears.

Zarrag said:

- Ahem, let us spite Klooda the teacher by not praying the night prayer, and instead we will have dinner and then...

The sly short man stood on the couch to finish the sentence:

- ... And continue thinking and discussing.

The mayor shifted his position on the couch and raised his right hand, and with his left hand he took his spectacles to scratch his fat paunch with, and said:

- We will not leave this guestroom until we reach a conclusive decision. People with the blue gowns will not oppose us, as you know, for our sister Khareeba and our man of the sound (h), and our sly short teacher have many times confirmed that ...

The rest of the audience finished the sentence hastily in utmost joy:

- ... The assembly has the supreme power of taking decisions!

The mayor smiled and continued:

- We are not playing a role here, O people. We do not lie or deceive anyone. Our mission is to save the reputation and honor of our villages and people. May God forgive us and absolve us from our sins, in spite of Klooda the lousy!

- Oh, we long for the good, old days of Sheikh El-Ramly!

The mayor ordered to bring the hash from the storage room, where there was some remaining from the amount of Ingila's hash. The mayor leaned on a soft cushion and put on his spectacles as a serious signal to begin the last session of these free, drug-filled discussions.

What? You ask me to tell you the story of Sheikh El-Ramly. His story was strange. In brief, he traveled eastward to the island of Abdul-Wahhab, and then

returned with an unruly, long, ugly beard that reached his lower chest, and he had lots of money in his pocket. He invaded the mosque and collected a group of illiterate adolescents to be his servants. He declared a fatwa that our singing and dancing was *haram* (religiously illegal) and that our mothers and daughters were adulterous, as they did not cover their faces and hands! Everything in his view was *haram*, even what was known to be *halal* (religiously legal)! He was married to three women, and the third was a young girl. This man tormented us with fatwas and debates, with his group of adolescents. He was cursing us and he made our life bitter. He used to frighten us of anything; especially that he knew that we were already almost afraid of everything, even peaks and talons of birds! Kloda the teacher, and the mosque's old sheikh, may his soul rest in peace, who mastered agriculture and reconciling people, tried to oppose and refute his views, but in vain. You want to know how stern-faced Sheikh El-Ramly was vanquished. This feat was achieved by a young boy. The story of his downfall began with the fact that Sheikh El-Ramly wanted to marry the young sister of that boy. She, along with her parents, refused him. He accused the girl of being an infidel as she liked singing and dancing and liked to wear beautiful clothes. She was a very beautiful girl indeed. One day, Sheikh El-Ramly approached her; he was a voyeur who spied on her secretly while she was bending down to scatter dates on a rug outside her house to make them ripen in the sunrays. His eyes wandered between her breasts and bottom. Frankly, he was a sheikh that combined two characteristics: lewdness and stupidity. He used to curse women, and to deny their rationality, their freedom,

and their rights of participation and living full lives. Yet, he did not like anything, second only to his money, more than their bodies! The boy saw Sheikh El-Ramly spying on his sister. He saw that when his sister moved upward from her bent position, Sheikh El-Ramly slapped her face to chastise her. The boy was shocked to see his sister slapped! Matters escalated very quickly and the people of the village knew how mean this phony stupid sheikh was. The assembly convened to discuss the matter publicly. The session took a long time and Sheikh El-Ramly was the master of equivocation. He kept blabbering and defending himself with sayings that he attributed to the prophet Muhammad, but in fact, it was his illogical, faulty sayings. The boy whom I told you about decided to take revenge on Sheikh El-Ramly. He stood before the assembled people and said to him in his loudest voice:

- Your mother was a whorish cunt!

The boy kept chanting this statement as if it were a slogan and boys of his age joined him! All the assembled people roared with laughter! They gloated over Sheikh El-Ramly's predicament! Sheikh El-Ramly retreated angrily, cursing our village and its entire people, dead and alive. From this point on, whenever he tried to prohibit anything that was *halal* according to the religious law, the adults arranged and bribed kids to chant the same slogans as before, in his presence:

- Your mother was a whorish cunt!

Soon, Sheikh El-Ramly was defeated and died of too much suppressed emotions of grief and ire! This was the first time we had made use of the swear words of the

Northern people, and we learned that impoliteness might be useful when it came to dealing with immoral people like Sheikh El-Ramly, as no decent dialogue would be of use when dealing with such people. Thus, we learn sometimes from our youngsters and the Northern people.

Let us go back to the fat women whose bodies shake before they even move. You see! You listen attentively when I talk of women, especially Deheba, you sly, insolent boy! Anyway, let us continue with our story.

Deheba and the rest of the women went back to Ingila, whose cries were so high:

- Oh! Oh! Oh! Some body help me! O Deheba, O Khareeba! How disgraced I am!

So he cried in his effeminate voice! His swelling belly was paining him so, although it was normal for anyone to have a mild stomachache. Yet, Ingila was different, and this was typical of him. He deserved the title "effeminate" for many reasons, for he was a wimp and womanish in mannerism and appearance. He used to imitate pampered women in their dalliance and movements, to the extent that serious women and girls were disgusted by his masculine femininity! In funerals, Ingila used to leave the group of men to join the group of women in their funeral dances. He used to wail and lament for the dead expertly like women, and some women used to accept him sharing a dance with them, shoulder by shoulder, and lowering their trunks then raising their heads and lamenting the dead one. Women waved their scarves in funerals and he waved his turban cloth! Women who were disgusted by him used to refuse

to let him participate in their dances. When the dead one was an old man or the dance of lamentation was not that tragic or not done in an excited manner, women like Deheba and Khareeba used to share a dance with him in a mocking manner. He seized such opportunities to satisfy his inner desire to let go and express his feminine side that controlled him. Ingila was not ugly looking, but handsome, or rather femininely beautiful. Some women used to envy him because of his coffee-colored skin, which was the result of the mating between his Nubian black mother and his non-Nubian white father. In summers, they used to envy him more as his color would turn red due to the heat of the sun, which made him more appealing and glamorous. Since his childhood and adolescence, before the major flood that drowned our land, people used to say that he was a passive partner in homosexual practices. That is why I say he was such a devilish effeminate! He deserved that title. However, I did not hate him. Why do you wear that vicious smile on your face that tells a lot? I assure you he was an effeminate as people used to say things about him and I had seen some of his actions and mannerisms, not because I had sex with him, you cunning boy! Does that satisfy your curiosity and remove that silly smile from your face? I had not reached puberty yet when he was about to die. I did not have sex with him, and I swear it upon my honor. You see!

Our story is about to end, so do not interrupt me, boy!

Night had fallen upon the village. The fat Deheba and the old Khareeba were bitches, just like Nakhla! You see! Both women decided to supervise the operation of

childbirth! They forced Ingila to lie on his back in his bed, which was made of palm tree leaves, and they did not heed the fact that he was totally naked under his flimsy transparent shirt! He wore no underwear, if you remember! They ordered some women to boil some water in the cauldron and to prevent any man from entry, including Nakhla. Children insisted on staying nearby to witness the event, and chanting their song, which had become part of the folklore of our village:

Ingila is pregnant

O People!

A man is pregnant

O People!

You remember the guestroom that contained all the worthless elite of all the nearby villages. Every one of them thought he were a monarch or a prince or a president! Ha, ha! Anyway, an hour or two passed and they were still in the guestroom. No one cared about the value of time. They ate until their bellies were full, and filled their empty heads with drugs and hash. They were sleepy, as they had not had their siesta that cursed day. Fast, free discussions began to slow down, as they were intoxicated with drugs. However, due to their insistence not to leave without taking a conclusive decision, they endured the deliberations of this session until, eventually, a decision was made. The mayor said proudly:

- We have shown to all people that when facing problems and dilemmas, we do not remain silent or succumb to anything.

He removed his spectacles, as a sign to end this session of deliberations, and signaled to the sly, short teacher to announce the decision. He stood up proudly, like a turkey, and said:

- Under the auspices of our sage mayor, and according to his wise directions, we've managed to reach a decision! The decision is: considering these surprising events and disgraceful, insulting issues, we should take a decision!

Thus, another session of the assemblies of our elite ended! Ha, ha!

Zarrag was annoyed to return home to his room so soon, as Saffoura would scold him and spoil the "high" caused by the drugs, as Klooda had done that day. He said to himself:

- Winter has not come yet. I will sleep safe and sound under the canopy beside the neutral, big water jars, my friends!

Screams of Ingila were growing more sharp and painful. He moved back and forth inside his room, supported on both sides by Deheba and Khareeba's shoulders. He was not wearing his underwear shorts. He walked like a woman in labor. He stared suddenly at the horizon or at nowhere, and let go of their shoulders to take hold of his belly. They lifted him to bed.

Laughing women moved in circles, away from Ingila and his room, as he was about to give birth; they were laughing and analyzing the situation.

The little naughty girl, daughter of Saffoura, slipped in secretly, taking advantage of the pitch-black darkness of the night. She heard the shameless comments of shameless Deheba. She ran barefooted while she was laughing amidst houses in the darkness. She was panting and very tired, but she continued running. She reached the other periphery of the village, to her house. She pushed the gate open, making it collide with the wall. Her sleeping father stirred, as he was lying beside the big water jars. He sat on his bottom. His daughter did not take notice of him. She advanced into the courtyard, with the starry night sky above her. She stood at a distance, away from her mother's room, then she went out to see what was going on. She saw her daughter's teeth gleaming in the night. The girl was panting and laughing slyly. Her mother said to her cautiously and in anticipation:

- Why you are opening your mouth so wide, like a jackass who is about to bray? What news do you bring, daughter of Zarrag?

- My uncle is in labor!

The girl escaped her mother before she could manage to hit her with anything. She vanished into the darkness of the village. Her mother could not catch up with her. So there was nothing she could but curse the girl:

- Damn you, you daughter of the drugged glutton!

Saffoura returned to her room to wipe her tears. Zarrag made sure his wife had entered her room and lain on her bed. He lay on his left side to face his friend, the biggest water jar, and said to it:

**- Ahem, I am tired of my wife and I am sick of poverty!
Oh!**

He moved the fingers of his right hand, as his left one was under the weight of his body, and made a circle with the thumb and forefinger, leaving the other three fingers pointing upwards. He had decided to threaten his people and explain the matter to his friend, the neutral, big water jar:

- Oh! I swear to God, my dear friend....

Yet, he did not finish his statement or threat, as drugs got the better of him, and his right hand was lowered to his right side, as he was lying on his left side, and he fell asleep.

END

The translator

Name: Ahmed Fathy Korany

E-mail: thelinguist3000@hotmail.com

Education: A graduate of the faculty of Arts, Cairo University, English Department. Linguistics Diploma from the faculty of Arts, Cairo University, English Department.

Experience and Translation Fields:

Translation of more than 100 books plus translation of various texts in many fields of translation, and translation of 20 novels. Texts in the fields of linguistics, politics, social studies, history, humanities, philosophy, religion, literature, psychology, and journalist articles, from English into Arabic and from Arabic into English.

The editor

Name: Afaf Abdelmoaty Ahmed

Profession: Critic, researcher and a translator.

Email: afaf_000@hotmail.com

afaf_68@yahoo.com

Director General of HAVEN Company for publishing, translation, and programming.

Other works by Haggag Oddoul:

- 1) Layaly al-Misk al-‘Ateeqa. "*Old Nights of Musk*" - short stories (1989) - Al-Hadara Publishing, (State Encouragement Prize, 1990). English translation as "*Nights of Musk*" - AUC Press, Cairo (2005).
- 2) Bakkat al-Damm. "*Spots of Blood*" - short stories - Literary Voices Series- edition no. 22. (1991).
- 3) Al-Koshar. "*The House Key*" - a novel (part one) - El-Aseel Publications-Alexandria (1992).
- 4) Naasal-Nahr. "*People of The River*" - a play - GEBO- Egyptian Theatre Series- edition no.72 (1993).
- 5) "*Trilaya*" - a play - GEBO- Ishraqat series edition no. 141 (1993).
- 6) "*Nubia is Breathes under Water*" - opinions and dialogues on Nubia (1994).
- 7) Ghazaleyet al-Qamar. "*Love Poem of the Moon*" - short stories - Al-Hadara Publishing (1996).
- 8) Eghraaq ‘Ankh. "*Drowning of Ankh*" - a play of dramatic expression by movement, choreography, and music, without dialogue- El-Khamaseen Newspaper, and "Tafkat" the Arabic language newspaper in Germany (1996).
- 9) Khali Ga’ahu al-Makhaad. "*My Uncle is in Labour*" - a novel (1999)- Sandaliyya Editions. Second Edition, Al-Hadara Publishing (2007).
- 10) "*Embraces of Hedgehog*" - a comedy play - Sandaliyya Editions, with Al-Sadikan Publishing (1999).

- 11) **"Take Away"**- short stories collection - the Egyptian Union of Writers, with Dar Zoweil Publishing (1999).
- 12) **Al-Koshar. "The House Key"**- a novel in two parts (1999) - Literary Voices Series- edition no. 267. Third edition, Al-Hadara Publishing (2006).
- 13) **al-Shaai al-Murr. "The Bitter Tea"**- short stories that tackle the Egyptian-Israeli war (2002) – Merit Publishing House.
- 14) **"Ma'touk El-Khair"**- a novel in two volumes (2002) The Higher Council of Culture, Professional Editions, Prize of Sawiris Organization for Literature (2005).
- 15) **"Women and Sex in Nubian Literature"**- a social and critical study- Dar El-Mahrousa Publishing House (2003).
- 16) **"Nile Litany"**- a play with a screenplay, it is a text that combines dramatic writing and a cinematic script (2000).
- 17) **"The Irrational in the Country of Itr and Beans"**- a collection of articles on the Nubian Tragedy Dar El-Mahrousa Publishing House (2006).
- 18) **Khond Hamra. "The Red Khond"**- a novel - Al-Hadara Publishing (2006).
- 19) **Thalaath Bortoqalaat Mamlukeyya. "Three Memlouk Oranges"** – a novel, Dar Al Ein Publishing House, Cairo (2012).