

IN AND OUT OF EGYPT

THREE STORIES

by George Loukas

email: gloukait@gmail.com

THE SUITOR

IRRATIONAL EQUATIONS AND CHARADES IN JUNE

RHEA AND COUSIN HARRY

THE SUITOR

I met him many years after the great disappointment, not to say heartbreak, he caused me. He is now an old man and, anyway, I too, am getting along in years. He is a widower and I have been divorced for some time. I live alone just like he does because my children are studying in Canada where we have some money and property. After the children left, I moved to an apartment close to his and, quite by chance, we met on the street, *mon petit* Paul and I, and our old peculiar and conscience-stricken erotic friendship resumed with the same intensity minus the sexual factor, which he claimed he still does not understand. He did not understand what a blooming flower like me found in a wilting one like him. He got it half right. He too was a flower.

In our days, it is commonplace to find beautiful youth. Beautiful old people are a rarity and are so wonderful to contemplate. Paul was a handsome young man but for me he was outright beautiful in middle age. The hair graying but intact, the sculpted face, the white strong teeth, the wondrous smile. I saw women lose themselves in that face. But it was not only that. It was much, much more. It is the reason we are back together, inseparable friends. Wonderful friends hooked on each other's company. There is simplicity, modesty and tenderness in that man that is out of the ordinary. He is cultured and well read and there is no way one can get bored in his company. Oh, we talk for delightful hours now that my own amorous life is in steep decline. But there is another reason why, some ten years ago, I was crazy about him. It shall come out partly in the story and more explicitly in the epilogue.

For I have undertaken the task of recording an ordinary and passionate love story that, on the way, became extraordinary with a sequel that was not to be. Thwarted by guilt and the last-minute doubts of a Narcissus. For he must have been a Narcissus, *mon petit* Paul, to have left me high and dry the way he did. More than anything else, I had lost a friend. The sex would have been an added intimacy and I never expected from him the performance of a twenty year old. I had tasted some of that and though orgasms are heavenly releases, they are not always enough. My husband was an accomplished lover and difficult as it is to leave a man who satisfies you sexually, I finally left him to escape his constant bad moods and insufferable behaviour. Two children tied me to him longer than I would have otherwise tolerated.

It is hard to believe that the depression that gripped me after Paul disappeared from my life lasted many months, almost a year. Nevertheless, I recovered a stronger person. One usually does, if one recovers. I often wondered if Paul left me from strength or from weakness. Probably, a little of both. In any case, one corrective action I took as soon as I was normal again was to send my husband packing. I was bitter at Paul and thought he acted selfishly, succumbing to the petty scruples of a generation ago. I did not see why I should be generous with Tony who was, if anything, many more times as selfish.

My father died a few months later of a heart attack. A lot of grief, of course, because he was a wonderful father to the whole family including my self-indulgent mother and I loved him dearly. A lot of grief but with it a little inadvertent recompense because he left me a reasonably rich woman. Rich enough, at any rate,

not to need to work, giving me the opportunity to try my hand at something I always dreamed of doing - to write. I started off with a novel and published it at my own expense as no publisher would accept it and gave the copies away to friends and acquaintances. I then started writing short stories in French and English and many were accepted and published in magazines and literary journals. I was, step by step, making a name for myself.

Years later when I met Paul again, it felt as if I had won a lottery. I would write his autobiography in the form of a fictitious story. He resisted the idea telling me he was a nonentity, that in his last professional post he was a minor employee, that he did nothing worthwhile in his life and so on. I told him I was not certain but suspected he had a long-term passionate love affair and he said he could not bare his soul to me. I told him his reticence showed he did not love me. He said he did, as much as his sons. Perhaps more. I was the daughter he almost committed incest with. He loved me more than I could ever imagine. I told him to stop lying and he consented.

We spent hours talking and taking notes and I condensed this mountain of words to a hillock of sentences, reminiscences and emotions. I am in it, of course, a minor, incidental player, almost an accident, though Paul denies it. I do, it is true, start and end the story. I could also write a larger part for myself but I would feel less than honest even if this is supposed to be a work of fiction. I asked Paul what the story's title should be and he characteristically suggested "The Pathetic Suitor". Perhaps the reader shall figure out why. But I did not think "Pathetic" is an apt adjective for a man who, despite his weaknesses, loved so much and was so much loved.

Finally, I should like to introduce myself. I am "Amy" in the story. May the reader forgive me for talking of myself in the third person, like royalty, but I do so for the continuity of the story. I am peripheral in it and not always present and when I pop in, I want to be Amy and not use the intimate, all-knowing "I" for there are still so many things "I" do not know.

The Story.

It was at a reception in her house that Sonia gave him the transcript of Marquez's e-mail. She was busy and beautiful, vivacious and gracious, flitting here and there like an exquisite butterfly to entertain her guests. She came up to him, held his hand in a way that multiplied his heartbeats and told him,

"I have something for you."

They both smiled. That phrase had a past in their lives.

"I have been waiting so long," he said.

She gave him a peck on the cheek.

"It's not what you think, Paulie," she said. "I shall get them."

She left for a moment and came back with a few folded sheets. She gave them to him smiling quizzically.

"Do you still read a lot?" she asked.

"Not as much," he said. "Do you?"

"It's my job... Excuse me, Paulie. I'll be back."

She left to join a noisy group that was calling her and he only talked to her again as he left, to thank her, kiss her and say good-bye.

He read the transcript at home before going to bed and wondered if Sonia was trying to tell him something. However, she said, 'It's not what you think.' She

annulled his hopes right off. Then why did she give him that particular e-mail, which was bound to trouble him? He would not debase himself and call her in the hope of something concrete only to get inconsequential small talk and reveal to her his anguish. All he could do was wait. He had been waiting a long time.

Ever since he read them, they kept haunting his mind this last written legacy that Gabriel Garcia Marquez e-mailed his friends. Regrets about his life and how it should have been lived. He advised them to be open, impulsive and not only to give but also to express often and explicitly all the love they could muster to their dear ones and people in general. Fall in love again and again, he urged, even in old age, for when you feel you can no longer do so then you are surely dying. Impossible, unrealistic counsel of a dying man. Idealistic, beautiful and dangerous. They planted a seed in Paul's vulnerable mind, at his vulnerable age.

He was sixty and as one of his vulgar friends said, caressing his wife's backside was as thrilling as caressing his own. He loved his wife but the passion was gone. He was discreetly flirty with the women he met in the business circles he moved in, in the hope that something dreamy and sensual might flesh out but nothing concrete had ever come of it. Something always seemed to go haywire just when things seemed promising. A married man who does not want to jeopardize his marriage needs a special set of conditions that are never easy to find or arrange. The liberality of American suburbia where couples seemed to coexist with lovers on the side to relieve sexual boredom was not compatible with his and his family's moral makeup and traditional upbringing. With his wife, they had moved to Paris some ten years ago carrying the ethical baggage of the Middle East.

He loved his wife and his family and felt uneasy about the seed that Marquez had wedged in his psyche and was flowering and making his heart leap whenever a pretty woman was close by. And they were so many of them. So unbearably plentiful and available. But not for him. They were too young and free and in need of companionship, a good time and even an eventual marriage, to enter a furtive love affair. An affair with secret rendezvous and afternoon love sessions in second-class hotel rooms with a sixty year-old man. Sex was too free and easy to settle just for that. In any case, sex was a complicated issue where a woman was concerned. It was never as purely sensual as it was for a man. A woman had other unfathomable needs tied to it. It was hardly ever a simple case of physical gratification.

Beauty, like intelligence, is a gift of nature but unlike intelligence it is not always useful or an advantage on its own. Paul was exceptionally good-looking. Despite ongoing health problems that needed constant medication and surveillance, he looked ten years younger than his age and unfailingly attracted interested glances and inviting half smiles from women of all ages. It is often affirmed that it is irrelevant if a man is handsome or ugly. What matters is whether he is charming and seductive or not. Paul did not possess these two qualities in particular profusion but he was reserved and polite and always seemed to attract women's interest even if this evaporated little by little by his subsequent inaction and failure to follow up. It was not easy to be a Casanova with limited resources and a loving family. Yet his good looks kept temptation on the forefront and his need for emotional and especially sexual renewal was hounding him more and more. As time flew by, and it flew by so fast, Marquez' advice assumed an urgency he could not ignore. He felt he would be as good as dead if he did not fall in love again. He often thought that marriages should have a universally accepted expiry date as far as sexual fidelity is concerned. It was just a general idea. Its impracticality and details, its emotional dimension did not worry him and he never seriously considered them.

He entered his room at the Frankfurt Hilton at five in the afternoon after completing the assignments for his job. It was July and the day was unusually warm for that time of the year. Not very pleasant to move about with suit and tie despite the almost ubiquitous air conditioning in the city. He unpacked his small suitcase, showered and lay in bed. Nice room, nice bed, nice, useless satellite TV he never watched, nice, glib newsmagazines he could not read. He was tense, unsure of himself. Had he, finally, found her? It was madness. But it worked out almost on its own. As inexorably as ancient tragedy. Only it was not tragedy. It was not comedy either, nor farce. Was it perversion, was it kinkiness? Can love ever be put in a straightjacket? Love is thoughtless and strikes at will. It is often perverse and always enslaving.

For the past year he had been trying, almost desperately, to find a lover. With a thousand precautions he secretly dated a few women. Dinner and talk of unhappy, boring marriages and a few erotic kisses in the car on the way home. Plans to see each other again, stumbling on inquisitive, suspicious, grasping husbands or feminine queasiness about sleeping with two men at the same time. The one divorcee, who invited him upstairs to her flat for a drink, at the last moment, revolted him. He was hardly able to kiss her. They just talked for a while and then he left claiming a headache, feeling a fool.

And now he had the smile he could not resist. The youth he never contemplated, the adoration he could not quite conceive. He had known her all her life. He had never, ever considered her. Fate threw her at him a few months earlier, in this same city, in this very hotel. Flung them together with insidious stealth, with a thousand misgivings in his mind. He had just finished some negotiations for his firm. It was nearing midnight and he went up to the hotel's nightclub for a drink to ease the tensions of endless talk and meticulous readings of a minor contract. As he was drinking at the bar he saw her dancing energetically to the loud and heady music that made, even him, twitch his legs and move his body. He had not seen her for a couple of years. He had been told by her father that she had become a successful executive in a firm that bought wholesale, unsold merchandise from large department stores and resold it to third-world countries and small budget-shops that were proliferating at that particular moment in Paris. He drank a second whisky and then a third and she was still at it. In this vivacious prancing one is not visibly tied down to a partner but she seemed to be with a young man because they were constantly exchanging smiles. She looked gorgeous. She had slimmed down and even her large breasts seemed to have reduced to the right size. Her blond hair was short and naturally curly, her large eyes as beautiful as ever and her smile, well, there were not many like it. She must have been nearing forty and looked like a young girl.

Paul hardly ever danced but on an impulse got up and on the dance floor started a subdued quickstep trying to keep the rhythm. At first, he felt faintly ridiculous but the music and the whisky helped and was soon enjoying himself and started edging towards her. She was once again smiling at the man when he moved between them and continued dancing pretending not to look at her. Suddenly she jumped at him.

"Est-ce possible, mon petit Paul?" she cried.

Petit? Well, hardly. But she always called him *mon petit* Paul and he loved the tenderness in her smile as she said it. She slipped in his arms and he nearly squeezed her to death. They kissed warmly many times and then Paul turned to the young man and told him with a smile,

"J'ai license, elle est ma nièce."

She was not his niece. It would have been strange if she were for when they resumed dancing her smiles and impulsive kisses were exclusively for Paul. Joyful smiles and guileless collisions of hugs and kisses on the cheeks. She was not his niece though he always called her that. She was almost a daughter. The daughter of a sweetheart in his past. One whose lingering memory never left his being.

He left them after a while. He felt the annoyance of the young man and returned to the bar. Ordered another drink and kept his eye on the dance floor. The music was pounding and invigorating. The strobe lighting swiveling, colorful and hallucinatory. Even the elderly in elaborate evening attire had taken to the packed dance floor. Had lost their inhibitions and their hands and thick bodies were moving in vain imitation of supple youth. Arms rising above heads in modern tribal supplications for instant ecstasy. Facial expressions contrived and quaint. Without the music, they would have looked absurd and paranoid.

Amy was weaving in and out of the crowd. He caught glimpses of her. She was dancing alone, lost in a dream world of the senses, of captivating sound and throbbing rhythm. Her smile was gone. The young man stood motionless at the edge of the dance floor. Paul wondered who he was. He was slim and tall with an impeccable hairstyle and horn-rimmed glasses. His regular features might have been enhanced with contact lenses but they would have spoiled the aura of the successful junior executive that he conveyed, the air of assurance. Probably earning more than I am, thought Paul. He was finishing his fourth drink when he saw them leave the nightclub. He felt dizzy. I must call her, he thought vaguely. He did not know why. Their sudden, overwhelming, mutual affection caught him unawares. Was he imagining things?

Moments later he left the nightclub. He took the elevator down to the sixth floor and ambled towards his room. He heard Amy's voice travel down the corridor beyond the bend, loud and shrill, rapidly talking, explaining or protesting, he could not tell which. Then the young man's voice, quiet and impatient. Paul stopped. He did not want to intrude on a personal moment. He waited and heard Amy start again in very rapid French and then the quiet, insistent male voice. Suddenly, her voice rose in exasperation.

"Mais, non. Mais je te dis, non !"

A slap. Her cry. Another slap.

Paul broke into a run. It was not just for Amy. He hated bullies and their lording of women. They touched a raw nerve. As he reached the corner he saw the young man towering over her, his arm raised for another slap. With a further two strides he reached him and with all his pent up nerves yanked him by his collar and suit from behind. The young man, surprised, staggered backwards and nearly fell over. When he regained balance he stared in blank astonishment at Paul.

"Listen you *espèce de maquereau*, you do that once again and you will find your nose broken and your front teeth missing," hissed Paul.

Before the young man could recover, Paul took Amy by the arm and led her to his room which was a few steps away. He led her to an armchair and she sat down. Her face was flushed and she smiled uneasily at Paul.

"Quel con," she said.

Paul was still trembling with anger and agitation. He was hardly ever violent. He was usually patient and unflappable and was surprised at his own aggressive reaction. He sat on the bed facing her. He was still dizzy from the drinks at the bar. Amy looked at him and smiled taking the two slaps and a red face in her stride.

"Ouf," she said, *"quelle histoire! Merci mon petit Paul."*

“What was that all about?” asked Paul.

“Stupid ass. He was annoyed at our friendliness. He said I kept looking at you erotically.”

“Oh dear, I ruined your evening.”

“Ruined my evening and opened my eyes,” she said smiling.

“Who is he anyway? Are you having an affair with him?”

“He is a colleague from work and I travel with him sometimes for business. I slept with him a few times lately and he thinks he owns me. It is amazing that the male frame of mind is still anchored in the past. As if the feminist emancipation and equality never happened and the male is still lord and master.”

“Why, Amy?”

She understood the question.

“Because things are not working at home. Because Tony is acting strange. He is sulking all the time. Perhaps he cannot cope with the fact that I am earning the money and keeping our household going while he is in and out of work. He takes no interest in our home or the children and comes and goes without bothering to tell me anything. We don’t even make love any more. I think he has other women. So, I look around a little, too. Is that wrong? I know you probably disapprove but I was not made to be a nun.”

“Oh, my little Amy, I cannot pass judgement. Life is too complicated for that. I am just sorry that your family life is in crisis. I am sure it will pass. Especially if Tony finds a steady job. And I must come and see the children. Your dad and mom tell me they are both very beautiful.”

A knock at the door. Paul stood up from the bed where he was sitting and opened it. The young man was standing there, expressionless.

“I want Amy,” he said.

Paul pictured him once again towering over Amy, his arm raised menacingly. Without the slightest warning, almost despite his will, his hand flew instinctively and landed a resounding slap on the young man’s face. The glasses went flying. The dazed young man tried to keep his balance and a backhanded follow-up landed on his other cheek. With a loud gasp he staggered again but did not try to defend himself. Without his horn-rimmed glasses he looked young and vulnerable. Not the type to slap a woman around. He looked at Paul again in astonishment and seemed unable to utter a word. Two doors opposite opened slightly and worried faces over pajamas peered at the commotion. Paul was almost as shocked as the young man. He pulled himself together and told him quietly,

“That was a small repayment gift from Amy. Keep away from her or else I shall keep my promise. Your nose and teeth shall be next.”

Paul slammed the door in his face. He was shaky once again and was already feeling sorry for the young man. His passivity and surprise, the myopic search for his glasses on the floor softened his anger. The phone rang. The hotel reception desk inquired if anything was the matter.

“Nothing at all,” answered Paul.

Amy laughed.

“Why did he slap you?” Paul asked.

“After you left us on the dance floor, he stopped dancing, started sulking and wanted to leave. I already have one person sulking at home. I did not need another when I was having such a good time dancing. And you, my little Paul, what a surprise! I was in a wonderful mood. You dance pretty well, you know. You have a sense of rhythm.”

“The rhythm and agility of an elephant.”

“No, no,” she said and laughed. “Truly, you dance very well.”

“Beauty, they say, is in the eye of the beholder. So is your estimation of my dancing. Graded with lenience and affection. But go on with your story.”

“Yes, well, anyway, I told him to leave if he felt like it. I wanted to stay on and dance but he pulled me away practically by force and we left the nightclub. As we came here he wanted me to go to his room. I refused and he kept on insisting as if I were his odalisque. Of course we had an argument. What a silly ass! He was charm personified and turned out to be just another male chauvinist pig. The world, it seems, is full of them. The funny thing is, he gave no indication of his true character before. Well, that’s the end of him for sure.”

They talked for a while and he accompanied her to her room. A kiss, a smile, a lingering look, a reluctant goodbye. Next day they left for Paris on separate flights.

A strange, unequal, perplexing relationship was born that night. A friendship, an intimacy, a need to talk, to see each other. To touch and caress and hug affectionately, not yet erotically. The daily telephone call, the midday lunch break, a rare outing to a cinema, the holding of hands and the warmth it engendered, the need to keep it all secret. And then, one evening, as he was driving her home, Amy kissed Paul on the mouth and told him she loved him. A new page was turned. A new page filled with tenderness and love, passionate kissing and petting. A late adolescence. A love stultified by Paul’s past history and present misgivings that prevented its consummation. A love that, despite Amy’s eagerness and insouciance, needed time to build up the audacity to complete itself. To find a way out of labyrinthine relationships and constraints. Or just the formidable excuse that Marquez seemed to provide.

Thankfully, the day was over. All day he muddled through the business with intrusions of Amy. Prices and delivery schedules with flashes of her smile. Conclusions of deals with the conclusion of their love. They had coordinated their trip to Frankfurt. It was his escape from Egypt. Of conventional morality. The parting of the waters. The severing of inhibitions. Perhaps, the wandering in a wilderness like Sinai. He lay in bed and tried to rest. His brain was whirring at hypersonic torques. Thoughts and daydreams alternating with incubi. Fantasies with reality. Voluptuousness with shame. Hedonism with scandal. A naked Amy next to him offering her adoration and her sex. A looming collapse of his world. A young body to resuscitate an old. An old body unable to cope. He was entering his sunset years. The sundown of his virility. But that was it! He did not want to feel dead before he died. And he, too, was in love. Disastrously, perversely, idiotically in love.

Memories were flooding in, feeding his inhibitions. He thought of Sonia. Sonia was still so beautiful. Age and maturity seemed to make her more alluring. Paul’s heart always ached when he saw her. There was this secret intimacy between them that was never explicitly apparent. It sometimes surfaced in their glances. Their handshakes and public embraces had that extra squeeze and lingering seconds of special meaning. She was never exclusively his but a sort of magnetic field bound them throughout their life. A tug of physical attraction kept active and binding by the lifetime crossing and weaving of their paths. They led and lived their separate lives, mostly in different countries and always seemed to bump into each other. The ups and downs of their existence constantly brought them together. Fate seemed to ensure that at such moments they were in close enough proximity to provide succour, relief and, always, happiness to each other.

Paul lay in bed and thought that he ought to sleep. Amy would be arriving later in the evening. She had work in Frankfurt the following day and the next. They would spend two nights together. Like a reluctant virgin he had finally decided to take the big jump. The big risk that might unravel his well-ordered life in so many ways. But was that not better than feeling that his life was sinking in a quagmire? A slow, boring trudge to the grave? That he would not ever again taste the naked body of a woman? The thrill and magic of love and sex? He had arranged for dinner at the nightclub. She would dance to her heart's content. She would smile her heavenly smile at him and, later, still throbbing with the pulse of the music, offer the body that both induced and tortured his daydreams. The body he longed for so desperately and found so hard to take.

Memories were flooding in. Second thoughts and doubts following in their wake. Paul wanted to rest and sleep but a final accounting forced itself in the gears of his whirring brain and racing thoughts. In a sense they calmed him down. Memories are the past. They are non-threatening and always fancied to be better than the actual fact. If they are bad, the distance of time has cooled emotions and one views them dispassionately. If they are at all happy, they bring on a nostalgia flavored with the sweet sorrow of their loss and the bitter happiness of having lived them. Paul Panopoulos was steeped in them. A Greek, born in Egypt when Egypt was a blessed country. That was how Paul thought of it. The Egypt of his youth. A poor but peaceful, tolerant, cosmopolitan and sensibly populated country. Before the abrupt awakening of Arab nationalism and the Moslem renaissance. He conceded the drawbacks of those days but the ills of modern Egypt seemed much more intractable. Overpopulation, dictatorship and religious fundamentalism were a mixture that had changed its face and blighted its future. For all the love he felt for the country of his birth, for all his happy childhood and adolescence there, Egypt had become as foreign to him as Timbuktu.

Flashes of memory.

Their house, downtown, on the main avenue. A huge apartment block. A spacious, old-style flat with high ceiling. Grandmother still alive. Sitting all day on a chair near the window. Grumbling at Paul's and his sister Ismini's slightest unruliness. Instructing the servants non-stop. Sparse traffic on the street below, much more pronounced in the sky. Crows and hawks still, precariously, sharing the city with the people before their eventual dislodgment. Poverty pronounced. Many people walking barefoot. Working class women covered with a black shawl, the milaya, their faces covered with a black veil. The tarboush almost universal. A bright red angular fez, like an upturned flowerpot, with a black tassel hanging on the side. Worn by effendis, beys, high-ranking army and police officers and even by the king in his official portrait and on Egyptian coins. Tramcars clanging by. The street often cleared for the king. Policemen placed every few meters all along the way. Moderate crowds. Excitement. A long wait for His Majesty. Eventually a motorcade. Limousines and motorcycles in bright red and black. The royal colours. Cheers and clapping. King Farouk marries a commoner, Narriman. Fouad, the heir to the throne, born. Democracy in Egypt. Political parties. Pashas and Beys. Instability. Premiers and governments popping up and down. Corruption, political squabbles and noisy street demonstrations. 1948, Creation of the Jewish state. First war with Israel. Sirens and blackouts. Shafts of light searching the skies for enemy planes. A couple of bombs land near the palace of Abdin, the king's official residence. Defeat. Defective-arms

scandal. The seed that rallied a bunch of disgruntled army officers; formed the secret core organization and precipitated the Revolution a few years later. Demonstrations and riots. Stone throwing and charges of policemen with shields and batons. The family balcony, a panoramic observation post of political developments. British garrison in the Canal Zone. January 1952, Cairo in flames. Anti-British riots. The famous Shepherds Hotel and others burned to the ground together with cinemas and shops. Looting and anarchy. Paul and family abandoning the flat as the conflagration of the shops below began spreading to the flats above. Half the flat gutted by fire. Revolution on the 26th of July 1952. The king deposed. Egypt, a republic. Revolution leader, General Mohamed Naguib, passing below. The crowds, immense and delirious. Mohamed Naguib deposed. Gamal Abdel Nasser passing below. The crowds, immense and delirious. Saddled with “Jimmy” for an eternity. Egypt improving and deteriorating at the same time. Nationalizations, sequestrations, the public sector, socialism, cooperatives, the decimation of the rich industrialists and landowners, banning of political parties, concentration camps, the emergence of army officers as the new elite, corruption ever-present, repeated defeats in wars with Israel. In 1956 and the 6-day war of 1967. Abdel Nasser resigns. The masses cannot part with the leader that emancipated them, changed the face of their country and shamed them. He has been too long at the helm. He is the father figure, the Prophet of the underprivileged and of Arab Nationalism. They feel lost without him. They bring him back.

Memories of school.

The Gezira Preparatory in Zamalek. A coeducational junior school with all-female English staff. Stocky Mrs. Wilson, the headmistress. Kind but stern. Mrs. Swinburn, second-in-command. A busybody. Tears, the first day. Bewilderment. Not a word of English. Mrs. Lee, a dynamic, short and skinny teacher terrified Paul. Punched the naughty children on the shoulders. Asked him at lunch if he would like some more of the inedible custard pudding. He did not understand and used the only word he knew, Yes. Nearly vomited with the effort to swallow the second helping. Learnt to say, No, thank you. Sent them to the toilet two-by-two. Streams of piss forming a cross. Peeking at his partner’s penis. Still friends. Boys who piss together, stay friends forever. Paul, good at sports, a fast runner. Good at boxing and hockey. Learnt the manners of an English gentleman. To be a good sportsman, a modest winner and a good loser. A lesson on the hockey field: he took the ball, dribbled it on his own, past the defense, across the entire field, and scored a goal. Mrs. Porch called him. He expected to be congratulated. Instead, his ear was pulled rather violently and was told that in team games he has to be part of the team and not play on his own. What he did, she said, was a pretty awful exhibition. Some memories he shall take to the grave. A lovely English girl called Margaret Glover who looked at him in adoration. At the Gezira Prep, he had no time for trifles. Half a century later he still thinks of her. And another memory that makes him smile. Because Zamalek was close to town, his father would take him and Ismini to school in the morning and send any car available from the car pool of the business to bring them back in the early afternoon. Paul liked nothing better than when no car was available and one or the other of the two trucks was sent to fetch them. He would not change them for the finest limousine. The flowers the pupils had to bring, in turn, every day in class. The boxing matches with other schools. Prize Giving Day and the disappointment of his father when he came home empty-handed.

Thank You for previewing this eBook

You can read the full version of this eBook in different formats:

- HTML (Free /Available to everyone)
- PDF / TXT (Available to V.I.P. members. Free Standard members can access up to 5 PDF/TXT eBooks per month each month)
- Epub & Mobipocket (Exclusive to V.I.P. members)

To download this full book, simply select the format you desire below

