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Booklover -- Dreams

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Booklover — Dreams
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on orders from a blind Egyptian cleric Omar Abd al-Rahman, stabbed Naguib Mahfouz twice in the neck with a switchblade as he sat in a car outside his Nile side home in Greater Cairo.” Wow. How fast can I drive home in order to continue?

Once home, I continued with the Introduction: “The young man who attacked the then 82-year-old author, the first Arab to be awarded the Nobel Prize in Literature, clearly intended to silence him forever. Though the assault, which damaged the nerve that controls his right arm and hand, did prevent him from writing for over four years, the fanatic’s mission failed. Not only did Mahfouz survive this nightmarish crime — he lived to tell us his dreams.” Twenty-five dreams later, I forced myself to momentarily set the book down to absorb what I was reading in this incredible gem of a book.

Just as we learn cause and effect in science, Mahfouz’s literature provides the same illustration. “Children of the Alley,” the serialized fiction that provoked the attack, is set in Ghamaliya and follows mankind’s corrupt ascent from the days of Adam and Eve to the era of modern science. “The Dreams” is the result. Each dream is short, yet some how busy. You awake with him in the middle of a scenario carrying some meaning, defining a feeling of his about the world and its conflicts. He is on the street, at his house in Abbasiya, praising God, looking for love, bathing naked in the shadow of a crescent moon, hungry — “faint with starvation yet enticed by hope.”

As I read the dreams I found myself marking Dreams 5, 20, 30, 55, 57, 77, 84, and 85 with bright orange post-it notes. I re-read these marked Dreams several times while writing this column as I wanted to include one dream in the text. I narrowed the mental debate to Dreams 5 and 57. Unable to choose I finally decided to leave you with both Dreams.

“Dream 5. — I am walking aimlessly without anywhere in particular to go when suddenly I encounter a surprising event that had never before entered my mind — every step I take turns the street upside-down into a circus. The walls and buildings and cars and passersby all disappear, and in their place a big top arises with its tiered seats and long, hanging ropes, filled with trapezes and animal cages, with actors and acrobats and musclemen and even a clown. At first I am so happy that I could soar with joy. But as I move from street to street where the miracle is repeated over and over, my pleasure subsides and my irritation grows until I tire from the walking and the looking around, and I long in my soul to go back to my home. But just as I delight once again to see the familiar face of the world, and trust that soon my relief will arrive, I open the door and find the clown there to greet me, giggling.”

“Dream 57. — I walked around the fort twice — a citadel of stone whose windows were like tiny holes. From each window appeared a face that I not only knew, but adored. Some had been traveling a long while; others had departed our world at different times. I stared with passion and grief — and imagined that each one was begging from its depths for me to set them free. After looking hopelessly at the stone fort’s gate, I went to the authorities to ask for help.

I left them feeling satisfied, clutching a pole made of steel, and returned to the fort. I brandished the pole, and the faces peered out as I struck a mighty blow at the door, which split apart and collapsed. The faces banished from the windows as shouts of joy and pleasure rose up, and I stopped, my heart beating hard — waiting to meet the dear ones with longing and desire.”

If you want to read the other 102, PASCAL is very user-friendly.