



The Man in the White Sharkskin Suit: My Family's Exodus from Old Cairo to the Ne

Lucette Lagnado

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The Man in the White Sharkskin Suit, Lucette Lagnado's memoir, is at once an elegy to Cairo and an elegy to her father. Cairo in the 1940's was hailed as the Paris of Africa, where wealthy multicultural citizens mingled in dance halls and French cafes, Jews and Arabs lived in harmony, where "no self-respecting belly-dancer would ever think of making an appearance until the stroke of midnight," and even Farouk, the spoiled boy king of Egypt, was known to make appearances skirting off the prettiest women. Leon, Lagnado's father, was as much an embodiment of the nightlife as anything else, suave, charismatic, a forty-year old bachelor known as "The Captain" with a flair for expensive white sharkskin suits. His single life comes to an abrupt end when he proposes to Lagnado's mother at their first meeting and a rocky marriage ensues. The situation deteriorates further when revolution takes Egypt, and the family is forced to flee, first to Paris and then to America. There, in America, in a reverse of the immigrant dream, Leon truly fails, becoming a religious recluse, spending ten to twelve hours in the synagogue praying into a tattered red prayer book. Despite the heartbreak, what emerges from this haunting memoir is a single scene of a dashing figure dressed in white, scented with citrus flavored aftershave, stepping out into the bustling Cairo night. Like *The Lost* before it, *The Man in the White Sharkskin Suit* is a haunting portrait of a forgotten people, a forgotten place, and a forgotten time.

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