



Women of Karantina: A Novel

Nael Eltoukhy

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Back in the dog days of the early twenty-first century a pair of lovebirds fleeing a murder charge in Cairo pull in to Alexandria's main train station. Fugitives, friendless, their young lives blighted at the root, Ali and Injy set about rebuilding, and from the coastal city's arid soil forge a legend, a kingdom of crime, a revolution: Karantina.

Through three generations of Grand Guignol insanity, Nael Eltoukhy's sly psychopomp of a narrator is our guide not only to the teeming cast of pimps, dealers, psychotics, and half-wits and the increasingly baroque chronicles of their exploits, but also to the moral of his tale. Defiant, revolutionary, and patriotic, are the rapists and thieves of Alexandria's crime families deluded maniacs or is their myth of Karantina-their Alexandria reimagined as the once and future capital-what they believe it to be: the revolutionary dream made brick and mortar, flesh and bone?

Subversive and hilarious, deft and scalpel-sharp, Eltoukhy's sprawling epic is a masterpiece of modern Egyptian literature. Mahfouz shaken by the tail, a lunatic dream, a future history that is the sanest thing yet written on Egypt's current woes.

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