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Excerpt from the novel *I Wanna Get Married*

The Beginning of the Story

Say your bismillahs and stick with me step by step. First off, let's just agree that this whole marriage, and suitors, and marrying late business is really sensitive. It's hard to find anyone who talks about it honestly, too. Especially girls. Because girls who talk about this honestly are either seen as crass and badly raised, or as obsessed with getting married. Either that or as old maids who can't find anyone to marry them. That's why you find so many girls saying things like:

- "Marriage schmarrriage! What did married people ever get that was so great?!"
- "I live like a princess in my parents' house – what would make me go tough it out with someone I don't know? I'm not thinking about marriage at all these days. Not till I'm done building my future"

And that one line used to death in all Arabic movies: "Not till I achieve self-realization"... I have no idea what this "self" deal is and how anyone's supposed to go about realizing it.

There may be a lot of girls out there who are ambitious about what they study and about their jobs, but I bet you that there isn't a single one of them whose first ambition isn't to be a wife, at the very least because it's the only way to be a mother.

Now we need to agree on another key point: There are more women in Egypt than men.

That's an indisputable fact. Never you mind the government statistics that tell you the figures are the same, because those statistics are just like the weather reports on the news every night. Everyone could be swearing on their mothers' lives that the temperature has to be higher than 48°C and they'll never report anything higher than 38°C. My dad's friend says they're not allowed to announce anything higher than a 42°C.

So that the tourism industry doesn't suffer a blow and the tourists don't run away.

The female-male ratio thing has been messed around with, too. Why are there more girls?

I'll tell you.

The problem is that women keep having kids until they have a boy. You'll find a ton of families out there who are like that... four girls and a boy... five girls and a boy... six girls and a boy, etc... A woman will keep popping kids out so that her moron husband can have a son. What's he going to do with that son that's so important? No

idea. So at the end of the day, the kid becomes a good-for-nothing loser who's spoiled rotten and who'll blow through everything his parents own... anyway, that's a whole other issue. But anyone who's studying or has studied at any Egyptian university will have noticed that there are more girls on campuses than boys. At my university, for instance, two-thirds of the students were girls and a third were boys – double the amount.

And another thing – men have become full of themselves and act like they're too good for all of womankind (May their eyes and health be stricken, amen!), and so you'll find men sitting around with their mothers, laying their ground rules:

“She has to be fair skinned, with brown hair, and hazel eyes, and she has to look like Nelly Karim.” Damn you all, I say! Maybe you should take a look at yourself in the mirror first, buddy! Or, you know what? Never mind looks – they say the only thing that could shame a man is his pocket. Well, go ahead and splurge, then, Mr., and bring along a teeny box of candy when you visit. But, no... the idiot and his mommy will go check out a poor bride whose parents have spent a ton on, and who've lavishly financed the "getting-to-know-you" meeting, and he'll walk in empty-handed. The girl could have absolutely nothing wrong with her and they'll say, “No she doesn't really look like Nelly Karim... she's more of a Naglaa Fathy,¹ who's really not my type.” You'd think it was Hussein Fahmy² trying to find a bride, I swear to God.

Oh man, and weddings – they're a JOKE. A long time ago you'd see a girl in an Arabic movie walking into a wedding, dressed all chic-like, and a bunch of guys would gather around her, looking like they wanted to eat her all up, and there would be no way she'd leave that wedding without a man to marry. Now it's the same gatherings but the tables are turned – every mother sits around with her daughters watching the young men, and woe be to he who passes by them! “Tarek, how *are* you, boy?! Aren't you going to come say hello to your cousins and see how pretty they've gotten?!” “I'm not Tarek, Tante, and I'm pretty sure you're not my aunt.” “Oh, really? You have to forgive me sweetheart, my vision isn't what it used to be. But why don't you come introduce yourself anyway? Maybe God will smile down on you and your luck will change with us!”

So of course, either the guy bolts out of there, or one of his friends notices the trap he's fallen in to and saves him by pretending someone needs him.

Obviously, this is all in addition to how girls twirl around a bride on the dance floor so that they can be on display to everyone in the ballroom from all angles. And when the twirling's done, they'll shove each other or pretend to adjust the bride's gown or veil so that they get on camera. And they'll try to show up in as many pictures as possible because, that way, maybe they'll catch someone's eye and he'll swoop in and pluck them out of the single girls' world.

You're not supposed to laugh at all this, by the way. Those girls are poor souls, I swear. A long time ago, all a girl had to do was have self-respect and sit around in

¹ Egyptian actresses

² Egyptian actor

her parents' house waiting for The One, who, more often than not, would be someone her parents chose anyway.

Now the ball's in the girls' court, which means they have to get out there and work at it and go to weddings and visit friends because the responsibility of finding a mate has been hurled solely on their shoulders. I know lots of families who'll raise hell with their daughters so that they go out and work at it because otherwise they may never get married. And on the flipside, a lot of the time society – especially outside of Cairo and Alexandria – will be merciless toward girls who go out with men so that they can get to know them and then maybe decide to make a commitment. Not to mention the fact that men themselves will turn the women down, saying they want to marry someone “pure” who's never gone out with another guy or spoken to one.

So, seriously now, what's a girl supposed to do?! All of this is in addition to the stopwatch that starts counting down as soon as girls graduate from college. So they can consider themselves old maids if they're not engaged two or three years after they graduate.

Personally, I started feeling like a spinster as soon as I hit 23. So what do we do?

Honestly, the damn society we live in that rates girls according to the marriages they land, and that values women who get married super quick and that thinks there must be something wrong with the ones who don't and that says, on the other hand, that it's a man's right to choose and be picky and that players are open-minded men of the world, and that sees nothing wrong with men getting married anytime after forty, even if it's to an eighteen-year-old... that society is just UNFAIR and cruel!

So that's why I, “Bride” (I'm using English here so people think I'm classy), have decided to write about this and to explain the situation from all possible angles so that people who don't understand can get it, and so that people who don't know can find out – that girls are poor little things, that the pressure they're under gets bigger every day, and that people judge them for something in which they have no hand.

So stick with me and I'll tell you about each of the many losers who's proposed to me. So you can see just how much we have to put up with...

The Seventh

The worst part of my day, actually, ONE of the worst parts of my day (because it's such a heated competition, I can't decide which part is worse than the next)... in any case, the part that has a tiny lead on the rest of the bad ones: the walk from my apartment to the door of the building, and vice versa. Because on this back and forth, I run into nearly every single one of my dear neighbors. Generally speaking, neighbors can either make up a big part of your life or mean nothing to you at all. MY neighbors,

on the other hand, are friendly. Caring. Concerned. Comforting. Completely unbearable people, in other words.

They love nothing better than to find out about every little thing in my life and butt into my business. Really, they help me achieve some balance in life (who turned on the self-help TV show?!) because no normal person can go around in a constant state of optimism and happiness (what?! Yeah, I'm an optimist... You got a problem?!). There has to be some depression mixed in, sprinkled with some infuriation to boot. Every cup has to have an empty half to balance out the full half. Or else the cup might spill on you and drench your clothes and then people may think that you've wet... nevermind... back to our story:

The walk from my apartment to the door of the building is supposed to take a minute but it can take up to a quarter of an hour some days. Each minute passes by slowly, and I always feel like there's something heavy weighing on my chest and that I can't breathe, just like when I'm about to watch Moataz El-Demerdash on TV or that Tamer Amin³... The women will always stop me as I'm walking by and shower me with hugs and lips pursed in sympathy.

"I hope things work out for you, daahhling!"

"Don't you be upset! Nice girls finish last."

"Are you still...?!"

"Still?"

"No news?"

"Still?"

"Still?"

Naturally, you'll understand why the letters that I hate the most (and I can't remember how many letters there are in the alphabet right now) are s and t and i and l.

The men always insist on stopping me too, and they praaaaay and pray for me. And I aaaameeen in response. And they praaaaay, and I aaaameeen.

"May God bless you with a good husband!"

"Aaaaameeeen!"

"May God bring good news to you and your family!"

"Aaaaameen!"

"May you find a couple of boxes of baby formula in your pharmacy for my kid!"

"Whooo's paaayiiing?!"

The worst days are when I run into Amani, who is three years younger than me, and who has Hind, who is now six years old. Yep, yep. She got married when she was 19. Back then, I was laughing hysterically and calling her an idiot. What could she possibly know about marriage or responsibility at that age?! How could she even figure out how to pick the right man?!...And the days passed and confirmed the wisdom of the saying: If it weren't for you, my tongue, my back would get no beatings. I heard Amani's mother say that once when I was walking past their

³ Television presenters, known for their support of Mubarak's regime and the NDP.

apartment. She was trying to rub it in because I wouldn't get with Amani's brother-in-law, and was yapping some nonsense about "choosing right" and "getting married at the right age" and a bunch of garbage like that. Anyway the days, the months, and the years passed and proved, irrefutability, that all the opinions I had about marriage might as well be classified as science fiction. Just look at Amani, who has Hind and another one expected to make an appearance any minute now that she's planning to call Mo'men.

So that things are even clearer, you guys have to understand that Amani and her husband, Mr. FouFou—I think his name's Abdel Fattah or something—are two peas in a pod. If compatibility were measured on a 10-point scale, they'd score a 12.5. The only problem they have to deal with is their fights over money. Money for groceries, money for the girl's school, money for makeup (his and hers). And it's pretty clear that, as far as their personalities go, she's like the 25-piastre coin with the hole in the middle: all shiny on the outside and empty on the inside. And he's like the 10 piastre note: around but completely useless, and totally ignored by everyone.

One day I was tiptoeing down the stairs so that nobody would hear me walk by and—wham—their apartment door opened and I thought to myself: Girl, just jump onto the railing and ski your way down. But, no, no, no. I'm a respected pharmacist and if someone sees me, what exactly am I supposed to do then?! Anyway, what I was afraid would happen happened, and I saw Amani drag Hind out, her belly sticking out in front of her with Mo'men in it. It was obvious that he sleeping in there with one of his legs crossed over the other, because the shape of her tummy was borderline creepy.

"Get moving, girl; you're driving me crazy! I don't know who drives me crazy more, you or your brother... Oh, hey! Bride... how are you, sweetie?!"

"Hi, Amani... how's it going?"

"The girl's driving me up the wall and the boy's stuck inside of me and won't come out... Hey, speaking of being 'stuck'... no news?!"

I chose to ignore the jab. I didn't have time to get into a thing with her:

"Let's hope it all works out!... Excuse me."

"Wait, wait!... You know, if you hadn't gotten all conceited and if you'd just gotten with FouFou's brother, wouldn't your life have turned out just like mine?!"

"It's all fate, Amani. What can we do?"

"Yeah, I suppose you're right. Second time's the charm! FouFou was just talking to me about this one guy... EXACTLY your type!"

"I doubt it."

"Woman, will you be optimistic about this already?! This guy... he's polite, and he's religious, and he never misses a prayer! FouFou didn't like him at first because of something that happened a long time ago, but I pressed him into setting this thing up."

I looked at her belly:

"You pressed him?! And he's still alive?!"

“Hehehehe. Oh, Bride, you’re funny, you crazy thing! Does next Thursday work for you? Good. I’ll bring him and his family over. And you put something nice on and don’t wear any makeup... Remember, I said he’s religious.”

“Yeah, well, if you and Mr. FouFou are going to be bringing him over, you two better pay attention to the makeup thing, too.”

“Huh? Yeah, yeah, okay. But, listen, you gotta work it, sweetie, okay? We don’t want any more people laughing at you.”

“Any more what?”

“Never you mind... hehehe... people are just cruel.”

“Speaking of cruel people... how’s your mother?”

“Huh? Oh, good, good. She says hello.”

“Hello right back at her. May she be rewarded according to her intentions...”

“Amen. And may God have the best in store for you. Hey, tell you what... carry my girl down the stairs, will ya?”

(Aha! And so begins the tit-for-tat.)

“Fiiiine, Amani. Don’t forget to give my best to Mr. FouFou, and tell his brother I hope he’s not still upset.”

“LouLou?! LouLou’s a doll! He’s a total sweetheart and he never holds grudges. If you’d married him, you would be living in total bliss right now!”

“Oh, hey, what did he end up doing about those bounced checks?”

“Oh, that’ll work itself out.”

“And the public drunkenness charge?”

“It’ll be fine.”

“And the sexual harassment suit?”

“God’ll help him.”

“And the khul⁴ case his wife’s filed?”

“May he come out of it victorious! You know, if they get that divorce, there’s still a chance you two could get together. Maybe God has destined you for each other.”

“You think?”

“Yeah, it’s totally possible! Why not?!”

Excellent question! Generally speaking, my extensive life experience has taught me not to judge grooms based on the matchmakers. I mean, I’ve met some complete bums through some perfectly great people--Auntie-Body and Uncle Disco among others. I thought: Don’t diss this, girl. What’re you going to lose, Bride? Maybe this new groom she was talking about was the One, after all?

“When our land is thiiiiirstyyyy, we water it with our bloooooood, something-something-something hard wooooooork, our land’s blessing grooooooows.”⁵ I found myself, on the fateful day, singing that perfectly romantic ditty to myself. It’s incredibly romantic and touching, but I was upset because I couldn’t remember all the words, and that made me feel like the day was jinxed. I racked my brain trying to

⁴ Divorce proceedings initiated by the wife

⁵ [Lyrics from the 1969 Egyptian film, The Land. A story of the oppression of peasants by landowners, the film is both notoriously depressing and completely out of place in the context of happy marriages.](#)

find another romantic ditty by the beloved, the magical, the ever-classy Shafiq, but my memory failed me. Anyway, in the end, the song that settled into my gray cerebral cell matter was this delicate little number:

“The butcher’s kniiife... the butcher’s kniiife... the butcher’s kniiife.”

The smooth beat relaxed me, and I started getting ready for the fateful day. I pulled all my clothes out from the closet and started looking for something to wear. I’m not a hypocrite... there’s NO WAY I’d change my lifestyle for anyone... that would be cheating! Duplicity! Hypocrisy! Lies! Buuuut... it wouldn’t hurt any if we stood on some neutral ground. I pulled out a red outfit. Tsk, tsk, tsk, red?! God forbid! No, no, no. Besides, he might turn out to be a Zamalek fan like Mr. Precious, since Zamalek types are popping up all over the country these days. Hmm, how about the fuchsia outfit?...No, no, what am I talking about, fuchsia?! The name of the color alone is enough to have him dole out a fatwa! Well, let’s go with the yellow... No, no, no! Yellow is a skanky color... never mind. And I kept pulling out color after color, and outfit after outfit, and I wasn’t comfortable with any of them.

And finally... I found this white puffy thing on the door of the closet. Ahhh. It was either my grandma’s mosquito net or the parachute my uncle used in the October War⁶... Who says there weren’t any parachutes in the October War?! You think you know more than my uncle?! He personally confirmed that he jumped down into Sinai with a parachute on October 6, ’74. And if he says it’s true, then I believe him. I mean, why would he mess with me?! I had my little moment of pride, thinking of my uncle and his acts of heroism, one of which inspired the creation of a video game my dad and Uncle Disco play each week. I decided that, with a bunch of pins and a little bit of hemming, this would be the perfect outfit for me to make my entrance in front of the groom, all in white from head to toe... neutral-ground color. Besides, there was a big chance this would work because the parachute, like my uncle had told me, was lucky, and there was no way anything bad could happen to anyone who wore it: like that one time he was parachuting down and four Israelis opened fire and he danced around the bullets and danced around the bullets, and landed, safe and sound, on the roof of their house.

I reached my hand out for my makeup kit and then snatched it back quicker than I snatch my salary out of Mr. Rizk’s hand at the beginning of every month. I decided to follow Amani’s advice and not wear any makeup. This was an incredibly difficult decision for someone like me who never leaves her room without the daily fixins’. Like I said: there’s NO WAY I’d change my lifestyle... buuuut, one day without makeup would give my skin a bit of a rest, at least.

I left my room to get started on the cleaning song and dance routine that we do every time, and I found Baba sitting in the middle of the living room floor, with a cup of tea and the paper.

“Good morning.”

“Morning.”

“Anything new in the paper?”

⁶ 1973 war Egyptian-Israeli war over Sinai

“Well, naturally... Are you waiting for someone?”

“No, not really.”

“Then where are you going?”

“I’m going to clean with Mama.”

“What’s this? Is your mother here too?”

“Well, where else would she be?”

“And you plan to stick around for a while?”

“Baba... what’s going on?! This isn’t the onset of Alzheimer’s, is it?”

“Baba? Who’s Baba?”

He walked up to me and peered closely at my face:

“Who are you?”

“Baba... it’s Bride... don’t you recognize me?!”

“Bride?...Bride?...Ahhhh, yes, Bride! What have you done to yourself?! Do you have makeup on, or something? You look really strange.”

“Oh. Yeah... I’m just trying out a new brand.”

Thank God the groom had never seen me before. And hopefully Amani and FouFou would keep their mouths shut.

After the rounds of cleaning and after I had adjusted the heroic parachute to fit me while maintaining its basic shape and looseness, the doorbell rang. Baba opened the door and saw a couple of people he didn’t know.

After some resistance and denial and attempts at persuasion, Baba finally accepted that the people at the door were Amani and FouFou. He shook his head and said:

“I don’t know why people look so different! I need to get my glasses changed.”

I walked into the living room with the usual tray of gateaux and I looked around at the people who were seated. Were those two over there Amani and FouFou?!...Probably, yes... I recognized them from their clothes. They were surprised at what I was wearing, but not as surprised as I was at the way they looked. Especially FouFou. Would you look at that?! He *could* look like a man after all! He even had the beginnings of a moustache that was striving really hard to prove itself! Too bad it was the right moustache at the wrong place. In between Amani and FouFou, I spied little Hind moving her eyes from her mom to her dad with an expression that looked like one a penguin would have if it fell asleep at the North Pole and woke up to find itself in Banha. Poor thing. She was probably in the middle of a nervous breakdown and must’ve thought she’d been kidnapped. I felt bad for the crazy little thing. But it wasn’t the time to feel bad! We had to focus on what was important. I bent my head and looked at the floor... the move I’d spent three hours practicing. I’d never bent my head down in front of anyone. Firstly, because I’d never been arrested, and secondly, because I like to look into the eyes of the person in front of me when I’m talking to them. I wouldn’t change my lifestyle... buuuut, I’d always wanted to pay closer attention to the color of our rug. What d’ya know?! It really is a very nice rug, people! It had some blue in it, and some red, and some... B S 48. No, that wasn’t part of a zip code written on our carpet. That was what the groom was

wearing on his feet: Brown Sandals, size 48. Arrrrrrrgggghhh. I got an off-putting in my being, located in the depth of my emotions. Sandals, Bride?! It's come to this?! You're going to marry a man who wears SANDALS?! But no, I wasn't going to be fussy. At that point, I was ready to marry any multi-celled organism that was alive, as long as it was willing to snatch me out of the storefront that is singledom. The sandals were *not* a problem. I thought: You can get him to change them. So, yes, it's true that people say you can tell a man by his shoes. But that's all backward thinking and there was no way I'd pay any special attention to it during this delicate period of transition. I pulled my gaze up, up, up. Good, he was wearing a suit and a tie... But where was his head?! Where was it?! I *can* look past a lot of things but, my God, marry a headless groom?! I sat there, peering closely, peering really closely, and I saw something moving around all of a sudden. Look at thaaaat... it was a pair of human eyes! Yes, siree, someone's eyes were moving about. But where were the other parts? I couldn't see a nose or a mouth. The groom's face was basically a big ball of hair that had sprouted some eyes. His hair, his eyebrows, his beard, and his moustache were all basically one thick strand of hair miraculously woven around his head. He'd have reminded you of those cavemen they told us about in history class. I actually imagined him getting up and dragging me by my hair to a cave. Buuuuut, Bride, I thought, calm down and shut up. Are you going to let a beard and a moustache ruin a marriage for you?! Wise up and be calm about this! Besides, what's so bad about thick hair?! Isn't it better than the alternative? Sssh, sshh, don't be stupid. You have Amani right in front of you, a great example of what it's like to settle for the sake of establishing a child-generating partnership! The height of sacrifice for the sake of future generations!

On either side of the groom, I saw that he'd brought his sisters along, and one of them was much bubblier than the other. Two rows of teeth that had grown a woman, basically. It was obvious the other one had been forced to come. She was glaring at me like I'd just handed her the electric bill. Ahhh, yes. I know the type. Either she was still single and thought that every marriage that took place amongst humankind was a personal insult to her (she reminds me of someone, but I can't quite put my finger on it...) or she was in a miserable marriage and thought it was a waste for her brother to make any woman happy. None of my business, anyway. To each their own. There was NO WAY I was going to let anyone ruin this. Anyway, that's enough of that because the groom started talking from a place located in the bottom half of his face.

The groom: "Listen, Uncle... we're the kind of people who like going about things the right away. And we've heard a lot of good things about you from Mr. Abdel Fattah."

Baba: "From who?"

The groom: "Mr. Abdel Fattah."

Baba: "Who's Mr. Abdel Fattah?!"

The groom: "This guy."

And he pointed toward FouFou, who turned to see who he meant.

FouFou: "Who? Oh, right, right. Me."

The groom: “Obviously, we don’t know you directly, but Brother Emad’s friend is my cousin and he says great things about you. And as far as I’m concerned, I’m prepared to meet all your requests, God willing.”

Mama intervened: “That quick?! Don’t you want to talk to her and get to know her first?”

“Whaaaaat?!”

(That would be the two musketeers he’d brought along, shouting in unison and banging against their rib cages, which were about ready to break).

Mama: “I... uh... I just mean that they should talk so they can get to know each other.”

The groom: “We don’t do stuff like that, Hagga. All we care about is a person’s upbringing.”

His little speech made me happy. No sitting around and no useless small talk and some more staring at the floor until my neck was ready to crack. Sigh-unseen-style... maybe that was what was going to work after all.

Mama: “Right, but we should get to know more about what you’re like first... I mean, we don’t like to get too conservative.”

The groom: “And who does?”

Mama: “Well, as far as her job...”

The groom: “It’s a very honorable calling, and I don’t have a problem with it.”
(I had no idea it was honorable.)

Mama: “Visiting her family...”

The groom: “Of course. You have to be good to your family!”

Mama: “Going out and having fun...”

The groom: “Of course. I like going out myself, as long as it’s to respectable places.”

Mama: “Television and the internet...”

The groom: “As long as I trust in her intelligence, which I’ve heard a lot about, then I’m confident in the decisions she makes.”

(How great is this?! This was a full option groom, people!)

Mama: “Well, as far as finances go...”

The groom: “I’m thankful to God that I have a big, four-room apartment with a large living room area and it’s fully furnished.”

Mama: “That’s great... I mean, if all goes well, there’ll be a few things we need to buy.”

The groom: “No, no, things WILL go well, God willing.” (Look at you, Mr. Confidence!) “And, God willing, there won’t be anything we need to buy.”

Mama: “Yes, but what about furniture and things for around the house?”

The groom: “Oh, no, no. Not even those. The apartment has everything.”

Baba: “That’s enough then, Umm Bride; it’s obvious that he’s bought everything already, and it’s all spanking new. What more could we ask for?! After everything goes well...”

The groom: “Oh, everything is GUARANTEED to go well, God willing.”

(Unshakeable confidence!) “But, I mean, the furniture isn’t really all that new.”

My mom started zooming in on him.

Baba: “Oh... right. I mean, a bachelor living alone and all. I’m sure he’s used the stuff a little bit.”

The groom: “No... To be honest, that’s not really the case.”

Baba: “Then what is the case?”

That was when we heard a car alarm go off on the street.

The groom: “I think that’s my car. Is it all right if I go out onto the balcony to turn the alarm off?”

Baba: “Of course. Go ahead.”

Out went the groom, with my father on his heels, and FouFou and Amani took off running with Hind behind them because they wanted to nose around and figure out the make of his car. Mama got up to get us some drinks, and I was left alone with the darling sisters in the living room.

All of a sudden, in the blink of an eye, the smile on the bubbly sister’s face disappeared, and she gave me the same glare the other sister had given me. I shrank in my seat and my extremities went a-quiver (I’m not too sure what extremities are but all that’s important is that they were a-quivering.) The two of them got up and walked toward me... MOMMY!...and sat next to me like the Kasr El-Nil lions,⁷ one on the right and one on the left. And each one zoomed in on one of my ears and leaned over, ready to bite them off. No, no... they didn’t bite me, but they did whisper reaaaaally quietly into my ears:

The first: “Don’t go through with the marriage, if you know what’s good for you.”

The second: “You won’t be happy. We want what’s best for you.”

The first: “He’s cut from a different cloth than you and you won’t get along.”

The second: “That’s beside the fact that there is no way we’ll allow him to marry a pharmacist.”

The first: “You want to come around and act like you’re the bee’s knees?!”

Me: “But I’m not a bee.”

The first: “Sssshh... lower your voice.”

The second: “You’ve got a brain. Use it.”

Right then, the others walked in and the whispering turned into hugs and kisses.

The first: “DAHLING, I’ve really grown to love you!”

The second: “I swear, you’re going to be such a stunning bride!”

The first: “We’re going to treat you like a princess!”

My mom didn’t like that last comment, and she could see that I was begging for her to save me via ethereal extra-sensory communication.

Mama: “Wait... what?...Is your apartment in the family building?”

⁷ Large statues located in downtown Cairo

The groom: "Oh, no, no. My apartment's far away from the family house. I know it's a touchy issue for a lot of people."

Baba: "Well, even if it's in the family building, Umm Bride, so what? The man looks like he comes from a respectable family, from good people; it even shows in the Misses here."

The groom: "Misses?! What Misses?! They have three kids each!"

Baba: "Oh, I apologize! The two Mrs. then! I'm sure we'll get to know them more over time?"

The first: "Well of course we have to get to know each other. Aren't we going to be living with your daughter in the same apartment?"

Mama: "Whaaaat?! What does that mean?! Didn't you say your apartment's far away from where your family lives? How is it your sisters are going to be living with you, then?"

The groom: "You guys think these two are my sisters?"

All of us: "Then what?"

The groom: "No, no! This is Tahani, my first wife. And this is Amal, my second wife. I'm doing things the orthodox way. There's no way I'd marry another woman without getting my other wives' approval. I mean, naturally. All orthodox.

You know how the Titanic felt when it hit the iceberg? No, of course you don't. Did the Titanic even have feelings? Anyway, just picture something like that... We couldn't even find it in ourselves to yell or to object or to trip anyone down the stairs.

Baba: "Go home, son. Go home. Get on your way now. We don't have any girls here who want to get married."

The first: "So they're not getting married?!"

Baba: "No!"

The second: "You swear?!"

Baba: "I said there'll be no marriage!"

The two of them at the same time:

"YAAAHOOO!"

And that was the first time cries of joy filled our humble living room.

[...]

Translated from the Arabic by Nora Eltahawy

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