



The Photographer's Wife

By Robert Sole

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The Photographer's Wife By Robert Sole Bibliography

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Editorial Review

From Publishers Weekly

Cairo-born French writer Solé's first work to be translated into English takes place in the Syrian community of turn-of-the-century Egypt. In a dramatic setting, the story opens when headstrong painter Dora Sawaya meets and soon marries Milo Touta, a confident fledgling photographer from a distinguished Syrian-Greek family. At first skeptical of photography as an art form, Dora becomes fascinated with her husband's profession. Soon she, too, is taking photographs, but she reaches beyond Milo's conventional approach, eschewing formal poses, tinting photos with a painter's expertise and experimenting with light and movement. Her skill as a portraitist brings wealthy clients to her husband's studio, but his family is scandalized, and Milo grows increasingly jealous of her success. Dora wants to be a good, obedient wife, but fame alters her existence. She comes into contact with political figures in the Egyptian government and with the staffs of the Italian and British consulates; a British soldier falls madly in love with her. With Egypt's ruler, the Khedive, in danger from nationalists, and the British advancing on Khartoum, Dora finds herself in a dangerous, transformative moment in history and in her personal life as she leaves Cairo to accept a newspaper job documenting the tumultuous events. Solé allows Dora to narrate at times, energetically musing on art, her marriage and her place in both, and he also incorporates a third-person viewpoint in order to speculate on Egyptian politics, the British occupation, the war in the Sudan and the daily details of Cairo society. Translator Brownjohn has chosen to imbue the English version with idiosyncratic hints of French grammar, which is a mixed blessing: the prose retains the lilt of the original language, yet sometimes rambles. Falling gracefully between a family saga, a history lesson and a love story, the book is a meditation, centering on Dora's colorful life and wrenching dilemmas, on how political change affects domestic relations, and how art can encompass and reinvent both realms.

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From Kirkus Reviews

This graceful, astute, fin-de-siècle tale, first published in France in 1996, of a boisterous Egyptian photographer and the young artist he marries who becomes, before his eyes, the most famous photographer of her day marks an auspicious US debut for journalist Sol. It's 1891 when Milo Touta on a beach near Alexandria for his summer vacation catches a glimpse of lovely Dora as she's painting, her feet daringly bare in the sand, and he falls in love. Captivated by his giddy mix of exuberance and gentleness, Dora falls for him too, although she cares little for his profession. Marriage brings them both happiness, and Dora, by watching Milo at work in his Cairo studio, gains an insider's view of photography that quickly causes her to rethink her dismissal of it. She patiently learns the craft, both behind the camera and in the darkroom. Working side by side, conceiving and raising three daughters, the couple's blissful state continues even as Dora starts being widely known in her own right as a portrait photographer. Amid swirling currents of Egyptian nationalism and British empire-building, they prosper enormously through the combination of Dora's unerring ability to find the essence of any visage presenting itself in her viewfinder and Milo's charm and good business sense. Only when Dora is called to photograph the Egyptian head of state, and later his British "handler," and Milo realizes that his wife has truly replaced him as photographer, does he lash out in despair. Overnight, Dora leaves him and their daughters, going on an assignment to faraway Khartoum, which the British have recently retaken in a bloody assault. There, she continues to enhance her reputation as an artist and as a woman ahead of her time, even though her joy is back in Cairo with the man who won her heart. Packed with period detail and fine touches of emotion, a strikingly smooth and heartwarming story from first to last. -- *Copyright ©1999, Kirkus Associates, LP. All rights reserved.*

Review

"An original, evocative novel of unromanticised nostalgia, it explains, explores and illuminates" -- *Michael Pollard, Guardian*

"This novel is like a vast, multicolored canvas...Sol directs the drama lovingly, alternately entertaining and moving his readers as he reveals to them an age, a land, a way of life." -- *Pierre-Robert Leclercq, Magazine littéraire*

...a charming love story set in the most exotic of locales... -- *The New York Times Book Review, Dana Kennedy*

Users Review

From reader reviews:

Emile Guzman:

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Rita Merritt:

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