

Esam Abou-El Magd

Roman

DAS ENDE DER TRÄUME IST ALLER ANFANG

Ein impressionistisches Märchen

Königshausen & Neumann



Esam Abou-El Magd

—

The End of Dreams
is the beginning of everything

An Impressionistic Fairy Tale

Impressum

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You wake up in the middle of the night, startled by noises. But it's probably just the sound of the sea. You get up, gather your things, and set off again. You trudge slowly through the sand in the moonlight and see a strange man sleeping up by the dunes. As you walk on, a large, very beautiful hare comes toward you. The tips of its ears are black, stretched out like sails. It looks at you, then hops past you on its strong hind legs and continues toward the man. And you're alone again; you lay your things down in the sand, lie down on the mat, and fall asleep.

Suddenly, you feel something large and heavy settle down beside you—a body nestling against you. A warm hand touches your face, cupping your cheek. Carefully, you turn around and open your eyes.

Long blonde curls fall lightly onto a gentle face. She lies very close beside you, propping her head with one hand, her elbow in the sand, the other resting on your skin. Then a gust of wind catches the hem of her yellow shirt, revealing her waist above her gathered multicolored floral pants. You gaze at that light brown strip, her stomach, which moves slowly up and down there, before your gaze wanders back to her face, her curls, her face. Her eyes are a deep, deep blue. And even when yours

linger in hers, she doesn't close them. How self-assured she is.

A phone rings in the sand next to you. Christiane answers; you hear her voice. She flatters you, telling you how in love she is with you... You try to convince her that she's mistaken, that she only feels this way because you're now far, far away, that she never felt anything like this before—that *she* didn't want *you*. Does she understand you?

The conversation goes on and on; sometimes you talk, mostly you listen. But, thankfully, you can still feel the Swedish girl snuggled up against you. Eventually, you tell Christiane that you have feelings for her, too. And she hangs up. Just a little while later, you hear the sound of a helicopter in the darkness. It emerges from behind the dune and lands right on the beach. Christiane steps out, smiling. She's brought all her friends along. You realize that she must have planned everything, just waiting for you to say something like that.

Christiane, you and the others are sitting around a large white table. Whenever you address them, the first syllables of other names keep slipping out—names of women you were once interested in. You find this embarrassing, and you say that beauty can't be forced or planned, just as she planned her visit to you. And you whisper that you had to burn her name out of your memory; that was the only way. You see how happy that makes her; at the same time, though, you believe you've

given the Swedish woman, who's strolling off to the side, a clear signal.

Alone, you walk along the beach with Christiane, and you come to a pier decorated with garlands of tiny lights. Soon you feel its rough planks beneath your bare feet—they're warmer than the sand. As your hand strokes the pier railing in the moonlight, you venture farther and farther out onto the sea, when a bright face appears in the distance. It's her. And she's coming toward you, getting closer and closer. Her curls glow, framing her shoulders and face. A few more steps, then the Swedish woman stops, so close that you think you can hear her pants fluttering in the wind.

"Remember me!" she says.

"Yes," you reply.

Happy, you stroll back with Christiane along the path you came, until you can make out the white table below the dune again, where her friends are still sitting. Cigarettes are glowing. And suddenly you start running, doing a backflip.

"Not bad, not bad... But can you do a somersault too?" someone calls out to you.

You didn't do it for them at all! Then who was it for? You take a running start again, picking up speed, and jump

off... high... far... At least, that's how it felt. Christiane comes over and measures: "Five meters sixty." That's not much. Still, you jumped uphill... But:

"That was nothing!" the crowd exclaims.

Christiane puts her arm around your waist, flutters her heavily made-up eyelashes, and whispers, "I like my chocolate man even when he can't jump far. But he always plays the piano sooo beautifully for me."

You open your eyes. It's still night. Inside your sleeping bag, your hand finds the zipper and unzips it. You loosen the drawstring on your hood, sit up, and turn your face into the wind. It's blowing strongly from the sea. You know immediately where you are—you remember the late drive to the village and on from there to the beach, to spend your very first night right by the ocean. You also remember that you were dreaming.

You look out across the shimmering sand toward the waves breaking into white foam. The nightlight now gives them a gentle, cozy quality, like a soft bed you'd want to sink into. Even their roar seems more subdued. The moon still hangs calmly above, and a vast multitude of bright stars has gathered around it. An unusual balance, a rare harmony—that's what they've found here. But the dream...? No sooner have you asked yourself this than you spot something down on the shore, quite a distance away from you. Small, moving points of light that

suddenly disappear, only to reappear elsewhere a moment later.

Even though after a while you get the impression that the overall picture of these little lights hardly changes, the individual, sluggish movements of their usually brief existence still seem, time and again, irritatingly random. Puzzled, you peer intently, trying to convince yourself it's an optical illusion—but you're just as unsuccessful at that as you are at finding a reassuring explanation for the whole thing. At least you feel s —right where you are, at a safe distance—as something shoots past you out of nowhere.

“Wow!” Goosebumps spread across your head. The wind cools them. “What was that!? An animal? A bird?”

Your hands are buried deep in the sand. And this beach begins to feel eerie to you. Then you notice the gentle fluttering the wind is playing with your shirt, and you calm down again. Maybe the lights are just from oyster gatherers taking advantage of the night tide? No, impossible. Because now individual points are moving directly into the surf, drifting quite leisurely across it, then hovering in place. Yes, hovering above the water.

You can't shake your unease. And the fact that you're starting to think about the incoming tide—which might catch you by surprise here before morning—doesn't make things any better. That's when you realize you're far enough away from the sea. For a few more moments,

you watch the glowing dots before pulling your backpack closer, grabbing a pen and calendar, and writing down your dream in the dim light of an old flashlight.

When you wake up shortly after sunrise, the sky and the sea beam at you in shades of blue, white, and orange. A few fishermen in rubber-boot suits are packing up their gear. And you slip out of your sleeping bag when you notice walkers behind you, eyeing you from the boardwalk with surprised “good morning” looks.

Warmed by sleep, you reach for your jeans, lying in the sand next to your sleeping pad, pull them on, and smile across at the early beachgoers, who no longer seem to want to disturb you and continue on their way. You, too, set off to get something for breakfast from the car.

Spread out on a blanket, you enjoy milk, soft toast with cheese, and a few grapes. The remnants of the wind brush warmly over your arms—the experiences of the night tingling beneath your skin. But with the sweet grapes in your mouth, the world this morning is soon little more to you than the familiar sound of the ocean’s surf.

When you’ve finished eating, you pack up your things to go have a coffee somewhere in the village.

You’ve parked your car in the village square and get out. Next to a small supermarket is a bistro, and you walk inside. It’s not exactly pretty, but that doesn’t matter much to you as long as the latte tastes good.

A cup of creamy foam with a white-and-brown swirl in the middle is slid across the counter to you. Along with

it, a pack of cigarettes. With both in your hands, you walk through the sparse, bright room and sit down at one of the white plastic tables. You happily hear a bird chirping, and you even get the feeling that it's only just now—since you've been sitting here with it—that it's begun to tell its stories.

In his cage high up on the wall, he has a mirror that he tirelessly pecks at with his beak. As he does so, he sings to the mirror with ever-increasing intensity, as if the being he sees reflected in it were the most important thing in the world to him. And you're tempted to believe that this singing canary before you is the happiest creature in the world, since it never loses sight of its reflection—it answers him whenever he calls out to it, and comes toward him whenever he, too, reaches out to it. Until... yes, until the moment when the bird strikes the mirror with its beak closed—hard, harder... and finally with such force that the mirror spins on its string around its own axis, and the fellow bird in its cage vanishes like an illusion. But just a little later, he has his reflection before him again. And he begins cautiously to chirp at it again, to kiss it, to caress it, and... to reconcile with it, without ever once having heard a voice other than his own. For in his cage—no matter how unrestrained and futile his efforts may be—this creature remains his only companion.

Calypso? Calypso?

Ah, there you are.

Binjamin feels so good with you. And he wants things to always stay just the way they are.

Yeah, yeah, yeah.