

Selling 'Watergate' on the Nile

By Tom Donnelly

I only know one Egyptian, Kouraf Mudamas, and he is fit to be tied. When I visited him the other day in his sumptuous Georgetown apartment he was in such a rage he almost forgot to offer me my choice of the 37 soft drink varieties he imports from his native land. (His cellar is absolutely tops in town, if you happen to like Egyptian soft drinks.

Kouraf apologized profusely for his near-breach of manners and explained it was the overwhelming success of President Nixon's tour of Egypt that had him in such a state. Or, to put it more precisely, he was crosser than a belly dancer with lumbago because he felt that the one person who had insured Nixon's triumph wasn't getting the proper credit for it.

Deciding on a Fig Fizz with a honey and nougat float (though the Date Delight with kumquats marinated in cola really looked like something else in the drink line) I remarked that Henry Kissinger couldn't expect to be on the covers of Time and Newsweek twice in one month. It was only to be expected that Nixon would take over for his stunt of following in Kissinger's footsteps.

Kouraf Mudamas explained impatiently that he wasn't talking about Kissinger, he was talking about his own son, Narouz. It was Narouz who sold Nixon to the Egyptians, Kouraf said, and sold him with a bang that made history. I was skeptical. Narouz is only 24, and the last I heard, after gaining experience in various U.S. public relations firm (like Foyle, Frankfort and Folly, M.O. and O., and Louella Leatherbee Associates) he had gone back to Egypt to look for work in the p.r. line.

Kouraf said Narouz had indeed connected with an Egyptian p.r. firm, and what's more it was the firm that had been officially employed by the Egyptian government to Nixonize the masses. "You mean a public relations outfit engineered all that hoopla?" I said.

Kouraf said surely it must have struck me that there was something slightly weird about the spectacle of a crowd of more than 2 million Egyptians going ape for Nixon as if he were some sort of household god of theirs. Was it logical that this man, situated as he is at a low Watergate ebb, should get a welcome a dozen times more enthusiastic than receptions accorded Bruno Samartino, Sly and the Family Stone, the stripper from Brooklyn known as Henrietta Kissinger, or, for that matter, Kissinger himself?

I admitted that there was something peculiarly excessive about the way those Egyptians had behaved, hanging from lampposts, yelling their throats dry, waving flags madly, throwing flowers by the bushel, hopping up and down in frenzies of joy, and so on and so forth. For Dick Nixon?

"My boy Narouz planned it all," Kouraf said proudly. "His employers reasoned that he must have absorbed a lot of that native Yankee cunning at Foyle, Frankfort, and Folly, to say nothing of Harvard. And they were right. He had."

Now about those ever more vociferous cheers that were heard as the Sadat-Nixon motorcade made its way from the airport to Cairo. Some of those cheers were for Sadat, Kouraf said, and a few may even have been for Nixon, but the vastly greater number of them were for the belly dancers Narouz had hired to perform at strategically located balconies on apartment buildings all along the route.

Just as the motorized President Nixon was passing a given point, Kouraf explained, a succulent belly dancer would appear and demonstrate her art. Bumping and grinding had never been carried to such heights, he said. Is it any wonder the Egyptians lost their minds?

That would explain why those hundreds of thousands of Egyptian males raved and writhed, but what was turning on the Egyptian women? Kouraf said that his wily son had hired the services of a horde of urchins. They ran beside the motorcade handing to the ladies free passes to "Son of the Sphinx," a new film starring Egypt's foremost matinee idol, Nessim Neguib, with each and every lady to receive an autographed picture of Neguib in the semi-nude. (A closeup taken from the

movie, and a first for this short, swarthy, barrel-chested veteran of countless spear and sandal epics.)

Kouraf said he was particularly proud of the skill his son had displayed in drawing up a battle plan whereby all the belly dancers—150 of them—got from one balcony to another in Cairo with very few hitches along the way, and then moved on en masse and by truck to Alexandria, in order to repeat their performances on the balconies there. "Each belly dancer did her stuff on at least a dozen balconies and only one was lost during the whole complicated maneuver," Kouraf said. "Even Darryl F. Zanuck in his prime couldn't have managed the thing more proficiently."

I said, "But what about those mobs who lined the tracks to wave and scream while Nixon made his whistlestop train ride from Cairo to Alexandria? There weren't any belly dancers in the parlor car, were there?"

Kouraf said smugly, "My boy Narouz's most brilliant stroke. He sent runners to promise the Egyptian man in the street that Nixon would give Egypt its very own Watergate."

My jaw hit the floor at this. Amused at my consternation, Kouraf said, "The man in the Egyptian street has heard about Watergate, but does he really know what it is?"

Well, probably not.

So Watergate could be anything Narouz said it was. He said it was really wild, a vast amusement park, much wilder than Disney World, with great stone buildings lined with teeth and with all sorts of fun rooms: bugging rooms, and erasing rooms, and oval rooms that made you dizzier than hashish ever could, if you listened to what went on in them. And everywhere, Narouz said there were life-sized mechanical men (and one mechanical woman) up to all manner of strange and dirty tricks. Tricks that you wouldn't believe even if you saw them. And so, when the Egyptians were told they were going to get a Watergate of their own, naturally they were beside themselves!

But why was Kouraf Mudamas in such a rage about the whole deal? Because, he said, when the boss summoned Narouz and told him the reward for his brilliant stunts would be great, he was naturally thinking in terms of a bonus. "But they didn't give him so much as a case of Coca-Cola," Kouraf said. "They told him Egypt was getting a 600-megawatt nuclear reactor from Nixon and what greater reward could any Egyptian citizen ask for?" Narouz spat in his boss's eye and got out of there, his father said. And what is Narouz doing now? Floating a loan to build a chain of Watergates, what else?