Clarion Review

General

Eunuch: A Novel
Len Lustgarten
iUniverse
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Four Stars (out of Five)

While the word “eunuch” may conjure up images of sultans and harems Len Lustgarten’s mesmerising book is about much much more. Lustgarten a New York physician with a passion for evolutionary biology transforms the story of an Eritrean boy who is kidnapped sadistically castrated and confined to a Saudi oil prince’s harem into a saga involving war death by sexual misadventure homosexuality and human cloning that is as captivating as it is controversial.

The author’s aptitude for writing and historical and medical research serves him well and helps authenticate the story of Mohammed Nasser’s rise from a castrated eunuch to a hormone-injected sexually active but infertile husband. His wife Nicole a harem runaway gives birth to a daughter through artificial insemination. He in turn produces a son through a DNA cloning process with help from scientists at the covert Marseilles-based Biodynamique laboratories and a surrogate mother. Jealousies and suspicions arise between the couple and an amicable divorce follows. Nicole raises her daughter and sets up an “exotic massage” business before finding a wealthy husband in Paris; Mohammed raises his cloned son Osama and pursues a career in the Eritrean delegation at the UN. This comes after a visit to his homeland where his brother Abdullah has become commander of the rebel army. And while Mohammed rises in the diplomatic ranks his son benefits from his father’s zealous attention and his own attendance at Harvard. Meanwhile however he acknowledges his homosexuality a further complication for both father and son in their pursuit of the continuation of their lineage.

Interspersed with background information about Eritrean history Dolly the cloned sheep and the philosophical and religious arguments over both human cloning and homosexuality the story clips along at a good pace. In one riveting episode Osama is kidnapped and later released by rogue rebels. In another Abdullah orchestrates a coup with the aid of international oil interests. Exciting too is Osama’s substitution for his father when his dad is assassinated in

Eritrea. The interactions between the characters are also well done. Several scenes are sexually graphic including the one where a death is deliberately induced.

Unfortunately the book ends with more of a whimper than a bang. This is a disappointing ending to an otherwise quality novel.