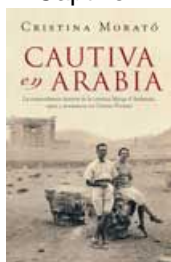


Cautiva en Arabia

Captive in Arabia



UK panel's choice AUTUMN 2009

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Marga d'Andurain was born in Bayonne, France into a middle-class Basque family. Rebellious and transgressive, she married a distant cousin, Pierre d'Andurain, at the age of 17 and together they set off for Argentina to seek their fortune. In 1925 they settled in Cairo where the Countess d'Andurain opened a beauty salon. Actually Marga—who had invented her title in order to move freely in the upper echelons—had been recruited by the British Intelligence Service to work as a spy in the Middle East.

In 1933 she decided to set off on her craziest adventure: to be the first Western woman to travel to the forbidden city of Mecca. In order to achieve this goal, the Countess d'Andurain married a Bedouin, Soleiman Abdelaziz, and converted to Islam. But her trip to Mecca turned into a real nightmare: when she disembarked in Jeddah she was discovered and imprisoned in the governor's harem. Later she was accused of killing her husband Soleiman—whom she poisoned in order to be able to return to her family- and after an arduous stint in the sordid jail cells of the Jeddah police, she was set free for lack of evidence.

During World War II, Marga and her son Jacques lived in Nazi-occupied Paris. While the countess earned a living smuggling opium, her son worked for the French Resistance. After the murder in Paris of her nephew Raymond Clérissé -whom Marga poisoned for unknown reasons- she took up residence on the Côte d'Azur.

On November 5, 1948, Countess d'Andurain was murdered on her sailboat, the Djeilan, in Tangiers where she was preparing to participate in a lucrative business buying and selling gold.

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