

“The temperature in Cairo today is thirty eight degrees centigrade, with a north westerly wind. We will be landing at fourteen hundred hours local time, and ask that you refrain from using your mobile phones until the seatbelt sign has been switched off ... ” The captain’s voice droned on for a few minutes, asking for our patience and reminding us to take care when opening the overhead lockers.

I tapped my foot impatiently and strained past the snoring man next to me to peer out the window. My aunt slowly flicked through images of dusty looking bricks on her iPad, and scribbled notes down on a spiral bound notepad. I shifted in my seat and balanced several books on my knees. For most of the flight I had been brushing up on my ancient history; I wondered if I could put my new found knowledge to good use ...

“So, are those the pillars that Crantor was supposed to have seen in Egypt?” I asked.

My Aunt Beth looked up and blinked at me as if only just remembering that I was there.

“Oh these? No, no, the pillars we found, the ones that Crantor saw, are made of gold. Here, look.” She passed me the iPad, and my jaw slowly dropped. As I looked at the photographs, each one seemed even more fantastic than the last. The pillars were huge. A man stood next to one to indicate scale, looking dwarf-like in comparison. They lay like long limbs of a tired giant in the dusty pit of the archeology dig hole, glistening even in the shadows.

Some of the photos were close ups of the hieroglyphics, faded and rubbed away by the destructive hands of time. Small chunks were missing, and whole sections had been obliterated by some accident or explosion, but what was left was still stunning in its majesty.

“Oh, oh wow,” I breathed out quietly. Aunt Beth smiled in a dreamlike way, eyes drifting off to a time when those pillars stood proud and strong in a temple - and then snapped back.

“Yes, they are, aren’t they.” She swiftly took the iPad back and looked around to see if anyone was looking. She lowered her voice. “The translations have gone very well; it’s taken a while, but they think that they’ve got enough to pinpoint the exact location.”

As I looked back out the window, I squirmed with excitement: I wanted to giggle, to jump up and shout! Just as I was about to turn back to my aunt

and ask her about the rest of the dig, I saw something odd out of the corner of my eye - I was sure I saw a camera being whipped away under a blanket on the lap of the woman opposite. I looked hard at her face, and she pointedly looked away. She looked familiar, and so did the man she was with. But not together ... where had I seen them?

The duty free queue! I'd lined up to buy Aunt Claire a key ring, when the woman had pushed into the back of me! I'd apologised, but she'd behaved as if she hadn't heard me ... but the man ... when had I seen the man? Aunt Beth caught me staring over.

"I can't believe they're on this flight," she muttered quietly. "After he rammed my case with his trolley he was lucky I didn't ram him straight back!"

Of course! At the checking in desk Aunt Beth's suitcase had shot across the floor when a man had lost control of his suitcase trolley. This was that man! Fortunately, the three padlocks on the suitcase meant it was still in one piece, but instead of waiting to see if it was ok, the man had hurried off, without even a glance over his shoulder.

My eyes returned to the couple, who had both turned suspicious shades of red. The man had a young face, obscured by large glasses and a bristling grey beard, but distinctly wrinkle free skin, and bright blue eyes that seemed out of place with his dark complexion. He was dressed in a suit which was a clear three inches too short in the leg, with dark socks pulled up high.

The woman was equally odd, in a very ordinary way. In fact, she was odd through her lack of oddness. It was as if she wore fancy dress as a tourist. She wore: plain beige sandals, with large easy buckles; a plain beige linen skirt that was exactly on the knee, not an inch above or below; a light cream shirt buttoned not too high or too low, and her blonde hair was tied back with a cream headscarf neatly knotted at the base of her neck. The overall effect was that of a vanilla ice cream cone melting in the sun. I pursed my lips. I did not like this, not one bit. Judging by the expression on Aunt Beth's face, neither did she.

Getting off the plane and into a cab happened without a hitch. As we arrived at the hotel, my aunt hailed another cab, put our suitcases straight into the back and leaned in to speak to the taxi driver in Arabic. I tilted my head and looked at her quizzically as she walked back towards the hotel steps where I stood waiting. She gave her head a little shake, her dark bob swished around her chin and I knew to not say anything more.

As we walked up the steps, I saw another taxi draw up, and the couple from the plane step out. My aunt and I checked in and then, instead of taking the lift up to the room, Aunt Beth ushered me towards the stairs. Striding up two at a time, I followed my aunt up the stairs in silence. I sensed something was wrong. She opened the door to our room and quickly swept round the room, checking under the tables and even poked her head out the window, leaving it open so the sound of the city waved in.

She lifted the phone on the bedside table and listened; then replaced the receiver. "Right, I'm not using that line. I'm going to go back down to reception to use their phone. Do NOT answer the door, do NOT leave this room, do you understand?" Her cold blue eyes looked into mine. Her voice was totally controlled, but I felt nothing but fear.

I nodded, my mind racing. She locked the door behind her, and I sat tentatively on the bed, the clock on the wall ticking loudly and out of sync with the clock on the bedside table. Blood pounded in my ears like I was underwater. I squeezed my eyes shut.

Footsteps. I wanted to pretend I couldn't hear them, but I could. Loud footsteps. I wanted to cover my ears, pretend it wasn't true. Two pairs of loud footsteps, getting closer and closer. They stopped outside the door. I knew it wasn't my aunt: too loud, too heavy. The doorknob rattled, then a pause.

Then a terrifying thud and a shudder as someone threw their whole weight behind the door. Someone was trying to break in! It had to be the couple from earlier, I knew it, I just knew it.

Did I stay put and try and hide, or climb out onto the balcony and hide out there?

There wasn't much in the room to hide behind or under, but I had no idea what was outside.

What do I do?