

“Mischief in Mesopotamia”

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I sat across from a row of decapitated kings, gods, and heroes waiting for them to speak to me. I didn't know a word of their language, and they'd been dead—their monuments erected, sanctified, and decaying—long before anyone speaking my language was born. Still, I waited, if not as patiently as they did.

In the end, it wasn't the statues but my husband Brian who spoke first:

“Half sunk, a shattered visage lies, whose frown / And wrinkled lip and sneer of cold command / . . . and then something, something, something, then My name is Ozymandias, King of Kings: / Look on my works, ye Mighty, and despair!”

Brian was standing on the stone platform next to me, in what I assumed was meant to be a dramatic, declamatory posture, feet apart, arms raised. Several of the other members of our tour started clapping, and he bowed, then sat down, carefully holding his new, heavy, and very expensive camera to his chest as he did so.

“Moved to poetry?” I said, a little surprised.

“Nah.” He shrugged, looking away, pretending disdain. “My tenth-grade English teacher always said memorizing poetry would be useful in later life. Now I can finally check it off the list.” He turned back, smiling, and nudged my shoulder with his. “Worth the climb, huh?”

“Amazing.”

We'd hiked the half-mile from the parking lot up to near the summit of Mount Nemrut. Two thousand meters above sea level is a lot when you live about a mile from the ocean, and the heat, exertion, and altitude had made the trek surprisingly tiring, given all the time we'd spent training at the dojo together. But when we reached the top, and saw the line of stone statues, their massive heads removed and placed in a row in front of them in an act of genuine iconoclasm, it was worth it. In fact, I realized the effort of climbing was probably something intended by the original builders, to leave the viewer of the tomb site breathless and stunned on arrival. After thirty minutes of huffing and puffing with your head down, trying not to slip on loose, sharp stones or the weeds growing around smoothed stone steps, sweating in the hundred-degree heat and avoiding evil-minded donkeys with no objection to kicking, the first view of the Eastern Terrace was an incredible moment. Positively sublime.

“Who's that, Ozymandias?” Randy Ashmore asked. His pink face was almost beet-colored from the hike; his khaki hat was so large, it made him look like a mushroom with a bulbous nose and small eyes. “Was Ozymandias the king who built this?”

Lale Mehmet, our Turkish guide, had just finished explaining that the tomb and statues had been erected by Antiochus I in 62 BCE. I bit my tongue, refusing to take the bait Randy had proffered. The didactic habits of a professor were not easily put aside, but sometimes I learned faster than others.

Randy pushed past to get a better look. He stepped on Jack Boyle's foot.

“Oww!” Jack limped a few steps. “No, it's another name for Ramses II, Nineteenth Dynasty in Egypt. A whole other time and place, my friend.”

“My friend” sounded more like “you jerk.”

“Well, you'd think whoever it was would have put a toilet up here too. I'm on the run with the Tehran trots.”

Once, I had, out of that professorial habit, pointed out that Tehran was in Iran, while we were in southeast Turkey. Undismayed by mere fact, Randy had made a series of attempts to find an alliterative expression that combined the local place and his illness. Now I just kept as far away from him as I could.

The transcendent moment was now officially over. “There's one down at the base, Randy,” Lale, our guide, said hurriedly. “We'll be stopping there on our way back, or you're welcome to start down now—”

We all held our breath, hoping Randy would leave us to enjoy the rest of the site.

Remarkably, he nodded, and having borrowed a lira, which he would not pay back, he left, calling loudly for his wife Rose to follow.

“Best money I ever spent,” Jack said, putting his wallet away. He wiped the sweat from his face and ran his hand through his dark hair before he replaced his baseball cap. He was a Mets fan, so I, a member of Red Sox Nation, had no beef with him. “But Igrateful to Randy.”

We were a very polite group. It was only now, on the tenth day of the tour, that we had started tentatively expressing our true opinions about each other, to selected comrades, very cautiously.

“Why on earth?” I whispered to Jack. “Grateful to Randy?”

“Because of the old saying—if you’re in a group and you look around and can’t find the dickhead, you must be it. Randy reassures me.”

I couldn’t smother a laugh, but when I caught Lale’s eye, I clammed up. Despite years of habit, I’d tried very hard not to answer questions asked by the other tourists, and tried to be respectful of the tour leader when she lectured. She smiled and continued her talk. No harm done.

As we carefully picked our way down the steep, scree-covered slope, the sun burning and glaring so the buff stone was nearly white, I asked, “How is Steve Osborne feeling? Has anyone seen him today?”

Randy hadn’t been the only one suffering from a change in water and diet.

Jack shrugged. “I heard he was definitely happier after he decided to stay at the hotel today. I think he’ll be okay by tomorrow. Shame he’s missing all this.” He held out a hand to indicate the vista, the brightly caparisoned donkeys, the sheer scale of it all.

“But he’s been on this tour before? I seem to recall he said so.”

“No, but he’d been on another tour with Lale, and they visited this region too. That’s why he wanted to come back. She was a good guide, he fell in love with the country.” He shrugged. “The country’s pretty enough, and the sites too, but the food!” He raised his fingers to his lips and kissed them. “That’s what brought me: cuisine.”

We walked over to the Western Terrace and viewed the rest of the statues, which seemed like a jumbled afterthought. When you’ve already carved a tomb out of a mountain, then covered it with a fifty-meter-high mound of buff-colored stone chips from sculpting a row of thirty-foot-tall sculptures, a collection of heads and reliefs lying around had to seem a bit of a letdown.

It was hotter than body temperature. I was covered in sweat and a brand of ancient dust I’d never encountered in New England. I pretended all I could smell was sunblock, baking rock chips, and camel and donkey dung, instead of me.

“So what do you think those big stone heads would go for?” Eugene Tollund asked me as we began our descent. “I mean, on the open market?” Eugene was the oldest member of our group, and I’d been impressed by his energy and enthusiasm. Eventually, however, I realized he seemed only to care about the monetary value of things, instead of their intellectual or artistic importance.

“I honestly have no idea. Probably a lot, because it would have to be on the black market. You couldn’t sell something like that legally.”

“I thought you said you were an archaeologist?” he said.

“I am.” I ignored the derisive tone of his words. “Doesn’t mean I know how much everything I dig up is worth. Mostly it’s small fragments of pottery and bone. I don’t do a lot of work studying the antiquities trade, so—”

But Eugene was already on to his next victim, posing questions no one knew the answers to, so he could prove his astuteness in asking.

An hour later, we were visiting the caves and inscriptions at a nearby site. It was on our way back down yet another steep slope that I saw Rose Ashmore, Randy’s wife, moving off the trail.

I held my breath. It wasn’t for me to say anything. I wasn’t her teacher, I wasn’t her mommy. But when she bent over, moved a rock aside, and picked something up, something that shone in the sunlight, I couldn’t *not* speak up.

“Um, Rose?”

She waved at me as she clambered up the hill. A few dark, fly-away curls blew in the warm wind, and she brushed them from her face. If her husband was like a short, stubby mushroom, she was more like a stalk of asparagus, thin, tall, awkward. “I’m fine.”

I tried to find a nice way to put it, then finally didn’t bother. “You found something? Picked it up?”

“No.” She shook her head, her brown eyes wide. She licked her lips.

She was lying.

“Well, I’m sure you know you should leave anything you see on the ground. These are protected sites.”

“Uh-huh.”

It was all I could do. I didn’t have any authority, just the obligation—and that self-imposed—of speaking up.

But maybe my seeing her had nudged her conscience, or she was afraid I'd tell on her, because I saw Rose huddled with our guide Lale at the next rest stop. I sidled up, quite unabashedly, to observe while sipping my tea. Eugene and Jack were nearby too; Eugene's bald head was like a speckled brown egg and both he and Jack feigned inattention. But nothing goes with tea like scandal.

Harold Campbell was smoking one of his innumerable cigars, though politely away from the main part of the group. A perennial loner, for once he was interacting with someone else on the tour: I was surprised to notice he made two of the younger tour members, Nicole Powell and Tiffany More, laugh. He'd made his lighter disappear with a practiced and elegant flourish.

I turned back to the real drama. Lale's lips were compressed almost to invisibility as she asked precisely where Rose had found the object. I knew Lale's job could be endangered by something like this, and Rose might be in a great deal of trouble if the situation wasn't handled exactly correctly.

It started to drizzle, and we all huddled under the rest stop's shelter.

"The Storm God is upset now," Eugene announced. We'd been learning the Storm God or Weather God was the chief god among the Hittites, a powerful king and warrior in control of the elements.

I winced. It was exactly the wrong thing to say, especially since we were all able to hear Lale rebuking Rose, however politely.

"It's a good thing we are seeing Dr. Boran Saatchi today," she said. "We'll give it to him, with all the information you have about where you . . . found it. I don't need to tell you this is very serious. I'm glad you spoke to me, though."

She held out her hand, waiting.

Lale had been friendly and informative, all smiles the whole trip. Now her face was grave, and she was clearly angry, though suppressing it. Rose had the decency to look abashed as she handed over the object, which I could now see was a small white clay disc, the size of a quarter, with concentric ridges. It might have been a gaming piece. Whatever it was, it was culturally meaningful.

I got it, I really did. I understood that urge to want to hold onto the past, and I almost felt sympathy for Rose. But I was on vacation from solving problems, archaeological or criminal. I liked being done with work at the historical archaeology conference in Istanbul, I liked being away from my part-time consulting for the Massachusetts State Police. I liked *not* being an expert. Now Rose had reminded me of all that, and I couldn't forgive her. As we scurried through the raindrops onto the bus, I was glad the situation was dealt with and out of my hands, but I was annoyed all the same.

"Okay, go ahead," Brian whispered, as he sat down next to me. The bus was abuzz with what Rose had done. "I can see you're about to burst."

"On Mount Nemrut, there were signs in Turkish, English, French, and German, telling us not to climb on the mound behind the statues," I whispered. "At every stop, Lale reminded us not to go off the paths or move away from the group. Hell, Brian, there were signs in the *airport* saying not to mess with the antiquities. Rose knew what she was doing."

I looked away. "Why do people go on these tours, if they're not going to respect the culture? I'm not even talking about the past. Randy only complains about the toilets, Rose is practically a kleptomaniac. Eugene is asleep when he's not asking how expensive something is. Jack seems to think it's just a moving buffet, and Harold, Harold never says anything to anyone, just stalks around like a great tall stick insect, puffing on his cigars and watching us like we're acting in a play for him. What's the point?"

"Lots of things. People travel for all sorts of reasons. It's allowed."

"Well—no. It shouldn't be." I felt better for having let off steam, but was still pouting.

"So only highly trained professionals and their spouses—who've been beaten into submission with interminable lectures—should be allowed to travel and see sights, maybe learn something? Even if it's only that they like home more?"

The corners of my mouth twitched. "Yes. I've decided. Make it so."

"How about if I buy you an ice cream at the next stop, instead?" We'd become addicted to the many varieties of gas-station freezer goodies we'd encountered during our long drives across the country.

"Fine. I may jam it up Rose's butt, though."

"Your call. Waste of a good ice cream, you ask me."

A short drive took us out of the rain and back into the bright sun. The weather was just as variable as the landscape in Turkey, which could change two or three times a day, shifting from vast brown plains in the morning to rolling green hills with red soil in the afternoon. I found myself thinking one moment, "That plain looks like fields in the Midwest," and the next, "Those cliffs remind me of Hawaii." Every once in a while, we'd go through a small city that was a blend of modern shops, rows of tiny specialty stores, and covered-over marketplaces selling everything from pots and pans to prayer beads to cell phones. The clothing on the women changed too, as we headed north and west, and while I always saw plenty of them dressed in traditional baggy trousers, overshirts, and head scarves, as we neared the outskirts of Ankara, the capital, I saw fashions I couldn't distinguish from home in New England.

We arrived at what I imagined would be the highlight of the day, on a par with the view at Mount Nemrut. If there's anything in the world I love more than exploring sites, it's going behind the scenes in a museum. Seeing things in their cases can be a treat, but getting to see them up close, with no Plexiglas separating you, is an extraordinary event.

We would be coming back to the museum tomorrow for a formal tour of the public collections, but Lale had studied with Dr. Saatchi and wanted to show off the prizes of the museum to us.

"Hey, Em. Calm down," Brian said. "You look like you gotta pee."

I realized I was bouncing around a little, and tried to chill out. My good mood lessened when I saw Lale take Dr. Saatchi aside and hand him the small object Rose had taken. He frowned and asked her several questions. He glanced at Rose, and then, after Lale said something else, glanced at me. I nodded. He continued with Lale in Turkish.

With a gesture that said the matter was over, he pocketed the clay disc. I was surprised when Lale led him over to me.

"Dr. Fielding, I am pleased to meet you. I used your paper on trade goods on early American sites to do something similar with trading centers in Asia Minor."

A little shocked, I shook his hand. "I'm delighted it was useful to you."

"Well, we have so many cultures, so much history in Turkey, we are happy to use whatever tools best give us a clear picture of the past."

Brian nudged me; I raised one eyebrow and gave him a mock-serious frown. Yes, I was totally awesome; he shouldn't ruin it by acting like this didn't happen all the time. This was one situation where I didn't mind bringing my profession into my vacation.

Lale explained that Dr. Saatchi would be showing us important artifacts from sites from all over Turkey, including finds from the Roman, Greek, Persian, and Hittite cultures. We'd be seeing things from as far back as the Assyrian and Babylonian cultures; southeastern Turkey, with the headwaters of the Tigris and Euphrates, had been part of Mesopotamia two millennia BCE.

He unveiled a tray of tiny treasures in glass and stone and clay. Their colors ranged from shiny black to bone white, including pale pink, brown tiger-stripes, deep blue, spotted green, and blood red.

First was a group of cylinder and stamp seals; with their tiny images and symbols, they looked like beads no longer than my fingertip. Alongside them were the impressions made by them on soft clay, showing how the marks would have appeared on wax.

"I saw on the news that a lot of those kinds of things were stolen from the museum in Baghdad during the war," Eugene said. "They were worth thousands and thousands of dollars."

Leave it to Eugene, I thought. He was right, though; there would be a small fortune in just a handful of the objects before us.

Some of the other pieces were similar to the one Rose had just handed over, simple discs that could be used in any number of games. Another object was a reconstructed bracelet, the beads restrung into a rainbow interspersed with gold.

"It looks like yours, Tiff!" Nicole exclaimed.

Tiffany held out her necklace, purchased from one of the many vendors we encountered at all of the sites. Although she might have found a similar souvenir anywhere in the world—little glass beads were, after all, just little glass beads—she was pleased.

Even more spectacular were the metallic objects on the next tray: coins and jewelry in silver, gold, and bronze. And one very small piece was possibly the most valuable on the whole table. A tiny bronze figure of a stylized horse, possibly a votive offering to one of the many gods in Anatolia, which made up most of what is modern Turkey.

"Every object, no matter its monetary value," Dr. Saatchi said, "has a story to tell us, about the

people who owned it, where it came from, and how it got here. That history—”

A klaxon sounded at near-deafening levels. Randy started; his flailing hand knocked into Brian, who had been taking a close-up of one of the coins.

Artifacts scattered from the velvet-covered table. Everyone automatically bent to gather them.

“Fire alarm!” Lale called out. “Please do not touch anything! Follow me out of the room. Be careful not to step on anything!”

A few people set the artifacts on the tray and we filed out and hurried down the hall to the main entrance. Constitutionally unable to pass a vendor or shop without stopping, Randy paused at the displays of the museum store. He began to pick through the piles of loose beads.

“Please, we must leave the building, Randy.” Lale was remarkably polite, considering. “We will return shortly, and the shop will still be open.”

Another group of tourists, presumably doing a walking tour of the city, paused nearby us outside the museum, while their guide explained the history and importance of the artifacts inside. The fire-alarm racket made the guide have to speak up, and she apparently made a joke: The group looked around and laughed. I certainly hoped they’d be going in tomorrow, as it seemed rather silly for them only to view the outside of the building.

Lale, ever alert to maximize the good in any situation, saw a woman cooking in the front of a tiny storefront restaurant. After introducing herself, she spoke rapidly to her in Turkish, then gestured for us all to gather round as waiters handed us all glass cups of tea on saucers with tiny spoons and two pieces of lump sugar.

“Mrs. Kaya has offered to do a demonstration of Turkish cooking for us while we wait to return to the museum.”

The tour group outside the museum had apparently seen our tea and were pressing in. I frowned when someone pushed a little too hard.

Get your own Mrs. Kaya, I thought. *She’s ours*.

“Jack, Harold, if you would like to gather round?” Lale said.

I stepped over to let Jack in, as Mrs. Kaya spoke rapid-fire Turkish to Lale, who translated for us. The older woman nipped off small pieces of dough with her fingertips, stretching them out flat, then she made a well with a deft gesture of her thumb. She filled the dough with a small pinch of what looked like ground beef and herbs, pinching the sides closed at the top, making a dumpling no larger than my thumbnail.

“This is *manti*,” Lale explained. “Although Mrs. Kaya uses lamb, you can use ground beef, and after they’re boiled, you top them with fresh yogurt and browned butter and chili powder. It is one of my favorite dishes from childhood.”

She spoke again to Mrs. Kaya, who dusted off her hand and brushed Lale’s cheek in an affectionate, grandmotherly gesture. Mrs. Kaya continued working, but called to one of her assistants. Soon we were all given spoons and were sampling the finished project.

Across the little knot of our group, I saw Brian jotting down notes without taking his eyes off Mrs. Kaya’s movements. She’d moved on to rolling up seasoned rice in grape leaves, with a series of motions that were so fluid they could only have been acquired after years of practice. The finished product was thinner than I expected, no thicker than a pen or a marker, and perfectly wrapped.

Mrs. Kaya spoke. “If any of you would like to try to do this yourselves, you may now,” Lale translated. “This is an excellent opportunity to learn from a real home-style cook at work.”

Immediately, Brian, Tiffany, and Jack stepped forward. “This is what I’m talking about,” Jack said enthusiastically. “Never mind the old stuff, point me towards lunch.”

Each was given a pickled grape leaf and shown how to fold it around the rice. Brian got better with each try, and soon, about a half-dozen slender tubes were arranged by his plate. Mrs. Kaya pursed her lips and nodded once.

Tiffany kept giggling, posing for Nicole to take her picture. “Look, I’m doing something cultural!”

Jack’s efforts were more labored, but he proceeded gamely. He grabbed one of the misshapen rolls and popped it into his mouth, chewing exaggeratedly to general laughs.

“Well, traditionally we wait until they are steamed,” Lale said diplomatically.

At that moment, a guard from the museum came over and whispered something to Lale. Her smile vanished, and she inquired about something. I cursed my lack of Turkish beyond “hello,” “thank you,” and other tourist necessities.

“We must return to the museum.” She spoke to Mrs. Kaya, gave her a small gift of money for

the demonstration, then guided us back.

The alarm was off now, but the staff was buzzing like bees in a kicked hive. We were still the only tourists around, and it was after official hours. Surely we wouldn't be continuing now, when it was so late?

Lale waited for Harold to join us, and when Randy beat a path for the shop, she spoke sharply. "I'm afraid we must stay close together, Randy. I have some very disturbing news. There are some artifacts missing."

"From the ones we were looking at? But none of us even touched them."

But some of us had. I remembered the instinct to retrieve them myself. Several people had replaced the small, elusive objects on the cloth after we were told to leave.

"No, of course not. Dr. Saatchi is concerned that perhaps they might have accidentally gotten snagged on a sock or in a cuff, when the tray went flying. We would like to put your bags through the X-ray machine again, as we did when we came in. Just to be sure. And, if you wouldn't mind turning out your pockets? I'm sure no one would take anything on purpose, but when everything went flying, it is possible . . ."

She ended lamely, and I knew she was only doing her job, which had just become a hundred times more difficult. Both her professional and personal reputation were at stake.

"Well, I'm not going to—" Rose said, gathering herself up for a long-winded refusal.

"I'll go first," I said quickly. If I could cut her protests off, maybe everyone else would fall into line, and we could get this sorted out. Or at least, remove ourselves from the equation.

I handed Lale my bag, which she handed to the guard, and it went through the X-ray. Then the guard went through the bag by hand, after I nodded permission. I emptied out my pockets onto the table, then pulled them out to show they were empty. To finish the point, I checked the bottoms of my hiking shoes, to make sure there was nothing caught in the treads. Nothing.

It took me an embarrassingly long time to sort the large pile of tissues, Purell bottles, Swiss Army knife, lira coins, sunglasses, phrase book, and camera back into the pockets of my shirt and trousers.

"Jeez," someone muttered. "I've seen pool halls with fewer pockets." There were a few nervous giggles. Good; anything to break up the tension.

Brian stepped up next, and I could have kissed him.

Jack went after him, shrugging. "I don't like this," he said. "But I've got nothing to hide."

Although Eugene Tollund didn't rebel, he followed, with poor grace. "Not what I paid so much money for," he mumbled.

Rose was still talking up and down about police and rights and citizenship, when Randy finally said, "Rosie, just do it."

She did, eventually, but still invoking the embassy and her cousin, the alderman, at home. Nicole and Tiffany followed, but reluctantly, exchanging meaningful glances.

No one had any of the missing artifacts.

"The Storm God's gonna be totally pissed now," Nicole whispered.

We went to our hotel that night tired, dusty, and bewildered. None of the missing artifacts—including the votive horse—had been recovered, and Lale had been on her cell phone almost nonstop. I was curious as to how she would handle the situation. I found myself going over to offer my help, when I felt an arm on my shoulder.

"It's not your problem to solve," Brian said. "And if there has been a theft, I'm sorry to say you're as much a suspect as anyone here."

"More," Harold added suddenly. "You're one of the few people who knows anything about this stuff."

For his first time talking directly to me, it was a hell of a thing to say. I gave Harold a sour look. He shrugged. "I'm just calling it like I see it."

I nodded to Brian. "You're right; this isn't my problem to solve. Say, this is an American chain hotel, right? With an American-style bar? I could use an American-style whiskey."

Brian and I sat up late, with a couple of drinks, which were hugely refreshing. We'd been careful to avoid the local water, and cold drinks, besides beer and the licorice-flavored raki, were rare. We were alone; Harold was on the other side of the bar, having refused our invitation to sit with us. He was handling his lighter like he was jonesing for a cigar, and eventually, he removed a metal tube from his pocket, unscrewed the cap, and shook the cigar out. Nodding to us, he said goodnight.

Harold didn't go to the elevators, though. He went outside. A brief flare of the lighter, and he vanished.

"Randy kept wandering over to the gift shop," Brian said, when he noticed I couldn't seem to focus on anything else with real attention. "I know he's got this magpie-like compulsion, but it really was excessive today. If he did it, I wondered if he had stashed something over there."

"Hiding the real thing among the souvenir beads and the imitation coins and seals?" I tilted my head. "It would make sense. If he took it."

"He bumped up against my camera when the alarm went off," Brian reminded me. "Maybe he was making a distraction, so his wife could snag a few things. We know she has a taste for unsupervised antiquities. Or perhaps she picked up that gaming disc intentionally, as a distraction? A way for their eyes to be on Lale and her talking to Dr. Saatchi while her husband did the work?"

I shrugged. "Seems too elaborate. And she couldn't count on finding something at the sites we visited. There was nothing on her when they searched her. Of course, that doesn't mean she or Randy *couldn't* have done it."

Brian thought a minute. "We all went outside. Maybe the thief stashed it somewhere outside the museum?"

That was a glum thought. "Okay, with objects so small, they could be hidden anywhere. Let's rule that out for a minute. Was anyone missing during the food demonstration?"

"No. Well, Steve was at the hotel, sick, but the rest of us, we were all there." Brian counted off on his fingers. "Lale had to round us all up. Jack, Harold, and I were there in the middle, trying to roll the grape leaves into tubes and get the *manti* to stay stuck together. Everyone else was there, because I remember Lale was very careful to keep a head count. I don't envy her; it's like herding cats, keeping track of everyone. Tiffany and Nicole were there too—remember, they were taking all those pictures? Since they're always scampering off, I remember looking around for them."

"They seem awful young to be on such an expensive trip," I said. "And usually twenty-somethings are, I don't know, going to more popular destinations, don't you think? Rome or the Greek islands?"

"Or Ibiza," Brian agreed. The young ladies in question were now in the lobby, chatting up our young—and very dishy—van driver, Emin. More blushes, more giggles, more photos.

That reminded me: As we headed to the end of the trip, I wanted to organize some tips from all of us for Emin and for Lale. They were well paid, but had done such a good job—

Something Harold had just said reminded me: I wasn't the only one who knew what the objects might be valued at. Lale certainly did, and she knew ahead of time we'd be seeing them as well. But there was no way she would have taken the artifacts. Was there?

I shook my head; this speculation was hopeless. "Such small objects—some no bigger around than a pencil—and worth so much. You could hide dozens of them anywhere, and have a small fortune."

Brian opened his mouth, then hesitated. "This is crazy, but—"

"Go for it," I said.

"What if Jack or Tiffany rolled them into the grape leaves?"

"Or the *manti*?" I thought about it, then shook my head. "Even if they were expert, they couldn't stuff a whole handful of coins and seals into one grape leaf. And it's too obvious, too public. You'd have to be a magician to pull it off."

Suddenly, I was thinking of Harold and the trick he did with his lighter. And of the supply of empty cigar tubes he might have accumulated over the course of the trip. Still too complicated. "I'm beat, Brian. Let's go upstairs."

"Remember, we have to put the suitcases out before we go down to breakfast tomorrow, to be loaded in the van."

I slumped. I really didn't want to do more organizing so late; it had been a long, tiring, eventful day. But I resigned myself as I worked; it was a small price to pay for seeing the world.

After I got into bed, I thought I'd be asleep in an instant. But I stared into the dark, listening to Brian snore softly. The noises of the air conditioner, and farther away, barely audible, the elevator and ice machine.

It had been such a wonderful trip, I thought. It's people, really, who can spoil tourism—

I sat up and switched on the light, took out my tablet computer to check something. I spent another couple of hours thinking, then shook Brian.

"Mup," he said. He squinted against the light. "Time 'zit?"

"It's not time to get up, yet," I said. "What do you know about 'Ozymandias'?"

When he realized it really was the middle of the night, and there was no emergency, he sighed and rubbed his eyes. "Are you kidding me?"

"Nope."

"Emma, what are you talking about?"

"The theft. I don't want to be a suspect. I've been there, I don't like the feeling. I don't want Lale to get into trouble, she's been too good to us. And I don't want the museum to lose its excellent artifacts and good reputation. What do you know about 'Ozymandias'?"

"He didn't build the tomb on Mount Nemrut," Brian said, rubbing his eyes.

"No, I mean the poem. You had to memorize it, right?"

"Yeah, but it was like six hundred years ago. I don't know anything about it." He looked around. "Is there any bottled water left?"

"It's warm." I handed him a bottle. "Try to remember about the poem."

"It was written by Coleridge—"

"No, it wasn't. It was written by Shelley."

"How do you know—?"

"I briefly flirted with the Romantics as a response to Grandpa's obsession with Shakespeare. But I won't ask you to take my word for it." I held up the tablet computer I'd brought with me. There was an encyclopedia article, with the poem and its origins.

"Okay, so what does that prove?"

"It means people can know a poem, and not know anything about it," I said with satisfaction.

He stared at me.

I told him who I thought might be responsible for the theft.

Brian shook his head. "It's kind of a long shot, Emma. Really circumstantial."

"Sure, and like you've said, it's not my job to solve this case." I looked at my watch, then pulled my shorts and the rest of my clothes from the back of the chair. "So I don't need to prove anything. But it won't hurt to ask what Lale knows about the members of the tour. She's usually up hideously early, making calls in the lobby. I'll just go have a quick word."

I padded down the hall to the elevator. I always think it's strange, being alone in such a public place, knowing people were asleep in their rooms all around me. It was a little creepy, and I was grateful for the social pretense that let us ignore the fact that we were so close to each other.

Now that was a very Western idea, I reminded myself. A very American idea; other cultures would be made comfortable by so much human proximity.

Or maybe it was just me being paranoid.

I turned the corner. Somewhere, close behind me, a door had clicked shut. The noise, even the very slight vibration, made me jump a mile. I turned around.

Jack Boyle was setting down a suitcase outside the doorway. It was the large blue wheelie bag with the flower decal on it for identification. And the monogrammed initials "S.O."

The one that belonged to Steve Osborne.

Jack knew I recognized the bag.

"Steve still feeling unwell?" I managed to say.

"Yeah. I think he's gonna try to see a doctor today. Get some antibiotics, or something, before we head to the airport. I told him I'd put his bag out for him, poor guy."

The sleeve to Jack's hiking shirt was rolled up. It was damp, and there was a faint pink tinge coloring the white technical cloth.

I forced myself to breathe normally, but my heart was in overdrive. I'd seen a lot of bloodstains in my time.

"Nice of you. Well, see you." I waved a little wave, and forced myself to turn back down the corridor, my pulse still racing.

"Emma."

I turned around, knowing what I'd see. Jack had a pistol trained on me.

I've had guns pointed at me before. Familiarity didn't make it any easier.

"You were staring at my shirt just a little too long. I can't let you go."

"Huh? Shirt?" I shook my head, but my heart was sinking. He knew, or at least suspected, I knew.

"Don't scream; I'll shoot you and be away before anyone hears you. The only way to live is to do exactly what I say." He gestured to the room. "Get in."

I couldn't go in there; it would be all over for sure. I had no doubt that Steve was either dead or dying, and if I went in, I'd soon join him. But I also knew that staying out here, hesitating too long, would end in a similar result.

A movement out of the corner of my eye sent a thrill through me. Things were going to happen very quickly. I had to be ready.

I decided the best thing to do was panic. It seemed like the easiest, most obvious thing to do.

I stepped forward, wobbling, my breath rapid and uneven. "Wha—? I can't . . ."

He reached into his pocket for the key card, never taking his eyes off me. "Shut up. Get in, now." He slid it into the door, shoved the handle down with his elbow, stuck his foot in to keep it opened.

"I can't . . ." One hand flew to my chest, the other steadied me against the wall. I staggered forward a few more reluctant steps, hyperventilating. "I can't breathe. . . ."

Jack grew impatient. He grabbed my left arm and pulled me toward him.

I rushed in, much faster than he anticipated; he stumbled backward. I grabbed his right wrist, jamming his hand—and the pistol—down, against the door jamb. I held on with all my strength, pointing the gun away from us.

Brian ran the last few steps to us and clocked Jack with the empty ice bucket. It wasn't enough to drop Jack, but it was enough to make him turn his head. Brian stepped out, got the angle, and punched him in the head.

Jack went down then. I stood on his wrist and took the pistol. I carefully removed the magazine. Only when I confirmed there was no round in the chamber did I feel like it was safe to exhale.

That's when the shaking started in earnest.

The ruckus drew the attention of all the people who had been asleep nearby. Someone finally called the manager; even if I hadn't the Turkish to explain, the sight of me holding the gun and Brian sitting on Jack Boyle's back was enough to bring help. The manager called the police and Lale, who eventually called the museum.

In the room, we confirmed Steve was really dead. I recognized the red and purple blotches on Steve's face and neck as evidence of suffocation. I told Lale, who conveyed this to the police, explaining I worked with the police at home sometimes.

Confronted with this evidence, Jack broke down and confessed. He and Steve had fallen out when Steve announced that he was getting cold feet. Jack panicked and smothered him with the pillow, which left the telltale hemorrhages—and the bleeding scratch on Jack's arm.

My professional skills and habits had been helpful on this vacation after all.

"How did you guess it was Jack?" Lale asked, afterward. She had dealt very efficiently with the police and the museum representative, and was very glad to have restored the artifacts—and her reputation.

"He kept saying he was only interested in the food on the trip," I explained. "That he was only peripherally interested in the history. Someone who's that historically disengaged doesn't just know that the character of Ozymandias was based on Ramses, or even if he does remember it from studying the poem—" Here I glanced at Brian. "You don't drop terms like 'Nineteenth Dynasty' casually. I might have been able to put Ramses before or after Tut, but I wouldn't have remembered the dynasty easily, and I'm a professional. He knew more about the history than he was letting on."

"So, they decided to steal the artifacts," Brian said, "because Steve knew from having been on this stop on another tour that they'd bring out the objects for display?"

I nodded. "The plan was for them to travel as if they were strangers. Using the excuse of his illness, Steve snuck out of the hotel and triggered the alarm at Jack's signal, sent by text. Steve, in disguise, took the objects from Jack when we were being crowded by the other group at the cooking demonstration. They had intended to smuggle them out incorporated into a cheap beaded souvenir necklace."

With all the official procedure, we were fortunate to make it to the airport in time to catch our flights home later the next day.

I helped Eugene with his bag, and while waiting for Brian to go to the men's room, saw Harold Campbell waiting for his flight to New York.

"Good trip," he said, jiggling his lighter.

"Yeah." I shrugged. "Up until the end, anyway."

"Oh, no. No, no," he said, looking surprised. "I mean, it was really sad that someone died, but

really, all the excitement was just an extension of the trip. I figure you teach the stuff, seeing the sites for you is already in your blood. But for me, it's the people. I tell people I want to see other places to see how people live. But you learn just as much from the crowd you go around with. We're not going to the circus, we are the circus.

"You can go anywhere in the world you like." He found a cigar and stuck it in his mouth, unlit. "But people are still the best show in town." ●