

July 8

I think I'm on to something big. Really big. This is the chance I've been waiting for, the chance to prove to everyone that I'm not just someone's errand boy.

After the way Craige treated me on that ridiculous safari, I developed a distaste for him. Everyone jumped when he spoke — the great white hunter, puffed up and dressed the part. I knew everything he knew about running a safari and he still treated me like dirt. Even his client, Joshua Rankin, thought Craige was someone really special, someone who had seen everything, been everywhere, was always in control of every situation.

The way he always barked orders got to me after a while. "Help the bearers strike the tents," he'd say, or, "Check the supplies." God, how I learned to despise him. I played it smart though. I knew better than to confront him, to let him know I saw right through him. I bided my time, waited till we were back in the States, then formulated a simple plan. It was risky, and I had no idea what Craige would do if he caught me at it, but I was just as good as him, and all I needed was the break to prove it.

Well that break came this morning, when a Miss Ellingsworth called. Craige was out of the office, so I answered the phone. I told a little lie

When I told her who I was. She wanted someone with a lot of experience to find something out in the desert, and I told her I was Craige's partner, and I had all the experience for the job. When she asked for Craige, who was out checking on some new equipment, I told her he was on safari, and it was me or no one.

She bit! She gave me her address and I went over to talk to her. She was a gray-haired spinster type, about 65 or so, living in an old, pretty run-down place. This is the story she told me:

Her father was an archaeologist in the early part of the century. Somehow he got his hands on an ancient artifact, a pottery shard more than 5000 years old inscribed with strange hieroglyphs. From what he deciphered, the shard pointed to the general location of a pyramid, a pyramid which no one had ever heard of before. He kept as quiet about his discovery as possible and, after four years of bowing, scraping, and petitioning foundations and universities, managed to fund a small expedition in 1920. He took his wife and newborn daughter along for the trip. After a few months of disheartening searching, he came across something which proved he was on the right track — a small block of limestone inscribed with those same odd hieroglyphs. When he decoded it he discovered it referred to vast riches and a queen.

That's as far as he got, though. The desert heat and the local water got to him and he died there.

Miss Ellingworth has no money — all she really wants out of this is to make her Dad into someone famous — so it's all up to me.

I packed my bags and got my visa today. Tomorrow I take off for Egypt. I won't bother giving Craige notice.

JULY 13

We leave for the pyramid site tomorrow at daybreak. I'm in El Menhir, a muddy little village on the Nile. I've managed to keep my purpose here a secret — I told the locals I was a scientist, interested in making sonar soundings in the desert. But I did confide in Abdul, the top guide in the area. He'll be the go-between for me and the locals he lined up to do the work. He also rounded up all the supplies we need — tents, K-rations, cooking utensils, and the like.

July 22

It's been one disaster after another, but none of it is really my fault! First, we hardly get into the real desert area when the navigation box falls off the back of the jeep. Great! I had to radio back to Cairo for a replacement and they said they'd get it to me, air-drop it into the encampment, in a few days — another expense in an already tight expedition \$\$.

Then the dates Abdul bought turned out to be insect infested and spoiled. The locals started grumbling and muttering, and one of them had the nerve to demand more money.

His widow and child returned to the States and, when Tut's tomb was discovered a few years later, Miss Ellingsworth's mother figured they'd dug up her dead husband's pyramid. She stowed all his records and belongings in a steamer chest and forgot about the whole thing.

And there it rested for sixty years until the mother died. Miss Ellingsworth went through the stuff in the attic and found the limestone cube, a map, a partial hieroglyphic dictionary, and a rubbing of the cube. From what she could tell, the pyramid was nowhere near Tut's, so she called Craige to see what could be done.

"Just think of the historical significance of such a discovery," Miss Ellingsworth said to me, handing over her father's things. Sure, it was a cinch. I looked the pieces over. With the map, the task seemed easy. I could practically see the pyramid in my mind. All the glory would be mine—not Craige's! This was a chance to show the world what a fool Craige was, a chance to prove that I was better than him. There would be enough gold and treasures in the pyramid to set me up for life but, more importantly, it would give me the reputation I deserved but had been denied by the glory-grabbing Craige.

I've been preparing for something like this to come along. I've saved money, sold the condo and just about everything I had that was worth anything, waiting patiently for the right opportunity. Now it's here and I realize I'm under-capitalized.

I promised everyone a big bonus if all went well.

They looked at me as if I were lying. I don't think they trust me, and I don't know how much longer I can keep them digging, and still stay in control. I don't remember Craig ever having these problems. And this kind of thing sure never happened to the heroes in "True Tales of Adventure."

AUGUST 6

We've been at the site for three weeks and the new navigation box still hasn't arrived. I figured it would be best to keep the men busy — "idle hands" and all that — digging in the general area indicated on the map. Without that box, though, it's like looking for a needle in a haystack.

Worse, the crew suspects I'm trying to pull a fast one on them. Abdul came to me and said I had better do something or there'd be trouble. I laughed at Abdul, telling him that I was in control, that nothing was going to happen that I didn't want to happen. Abdul said "What about the box? Did you want it to break?"

I guess I got a little too angry when he said that. I slapped him across the face! Abdul said nothing, but he glared at me. I think I might have handled him better.

AUGUST 8 THE BOX STILL ISN'T HERE! Without it, I don't think I'll be able to hold things together much longer. Our food stores are pretty low. The men are grumbling more and more. They stop working unless I stand over them and watch. One of them simply refuses to work at all, and Abdul is no real help. He seems to take their side.

August 12

No box!! Radioed Cairo yesterday and the day before. They assure me it's on the way. If it is, then where is it?

Abdul led the men into the desert to perform some religious ceremony, but I didn't believe it was a holy day. All I could think was that the whole thing was getting out of control. That I was losing the only real chance I ever had. That if I didn't get them back to digging, it would be all over.

I marched out into the desert to confront Abdul. I asked him to stop this foolishness and get back to work. Abdul looked very offended! I pushed him, demanding he order the men to work. He didn't push me back, but he did say, "You shall regret that, sacrilegious dog!"

Terrific! Looks like I blew it. How was I to know it really was a holiday? They moved off further into the desert to conduct their ceremony out of my sight.

A little later, while I was lying on my cot, trying to figure out what to say to them that wouldn't sound too much like an apology, one of the men came into my tent. He seemed real friendly, and asked for the Calfskin of kumiss. I figured they'd gotten over my little flareup and all was forgiven.

He brought the Calfskin back a few minutes ago. I'm going to write to Miss Ellingsworth back in the States to assure her everything's going okay. One thing I don't need is for her to hire someone else for this job, especially after what I've been through. A few swigs of kumiss should get me through the letter OK.

August 12

Dear Rose,


Here we are at the site, the same site that your father's expedition occupied almost 65 years ago, and things could hardly be any better. The weather is about average for the season - it'd be about 105° in the shade, if there were any shade - and aside from the occasional sandstorms, our camp has remained a merry one. Abdul and the boys are having a wonderful time, and we're all hitting it off just fine.

I guess it's true what they say about us all being brothers under the skin. Notwithstanding the archaeological importance of the find and the profits it may accrue, the greatest treasure I'll bring back from this journey is the wealth of understanding I've gained through our brisk cultural exchange of customs and ideas. The other night, for instance, I treated the fellows to their first omelettes, and you should have heard the exclamations with which they greeted this new culinary experience. For my part, I'm rapidly acquiring a taste for kumiss, a refreshing native beverage made from fermented

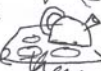
Camel's milk. At first the flavor seemed strange to my western palate, but of late I've grown exceedingly familiar with it. In fact, I'm enjoying a stoup of kumiss right now. I shall be sure to bring you a bottle or two of this resty concoction upon my return.

Of course everything can't be perfect. We've had a slight delay while we wait for the new navigation box to arrive. (I may have forgotten to mention in my previous letter that the old box became damaged just as we were setting out.) Nevertheless, such is the spirit of camaraderie and good fellowship here in camp that the boys voluntarily continued digging on the off chance that we might locate the pyramid without the aid of scientific instrumentation. This steadfastness in the face of adversity is truly heartwarming and I've rewarded the crew by giving them today off.

This has given me a chance to get off by myself and relax. The strain of command must be telling on me — just now, as I was sipping some kumiss, I began to feel lightheaded, and my knees buckled slightly. Or perhaps I'm just intoxicated with the awe-inspiring vastness of this solitude that surrounds me. In any case, I shall have to lay this letter aside for the time being, until this numbness leaves my hands and the landscape stops writhing around so violently... Hello I ~~had~~ have been staring at the same grain of sand for last hour and have you ever heard it said

that if you move one grain of sand you
 change the course of history? well here goes nothing—
 There, I done it, hope I've made the world a better
 place to live in..... My my ^{don't} ~~didn't~~ I feel strange
 tonight I wonder what's come over me but wait!!!!
 there was something very important I meant to
 tell you about this wasteland Oh yes. now I remember
 Did you ever stop to think that T.S. Eliot's name
 is an anagram for "toilets"? I think I now
 understand what he was trying to tell us all,
 Rosetta ————— must be the desert suns played
 mischief with my eyes for now as I gaze across
 the moonlit dunes who are in no way related
 to Lorna dune. I see they've turned into crashing
 curling waves in an endless sea to shining
 see how they cast strange shadow shapes of wild
 arabian demons  who are coming for me
 with my final summons in the kitchen with dinosaurs
 possibly its the kumiss that's causing these tiny
 little spots to dance and swirl before my
 eyes like grains of sand through an hourglass
 so are the days of our life savings blown
 on a hopeless expedition that's gonna get
 you trully killed just so I can watch these
 spots as they grow and grow and get funnier and ^{funnier} ~~funnier~~

until they've changed into grayed blue men
about two foot tall with evil grins behind their
twisting bristly green whiskers that hang all the way
to their shiny shinshins as the three little pigs
used to say in piglatin eeway eeway eeway all the
way home home on the range

where there's no place like home  there's no
place like home is where the headbush of psoriasis
is that a shadow i see moving or cood
it be abdul returning cood it be mack the
knife cood it be desert sickness what cood it be
this cotton mouthed icy sweating brain feverish
rubber arms and legs and head for the hills
are alive with the sound of music her and
Sicker may be it's something i ate guess
i should've left that last deviled ham meatball alone