

SCREENPLAY

LOOKING FOR FATHER

FADE IN:

EXT. FIONA'S REAR DECK OVERLOOKING THE BRISBANE RIVER – DAY

Aerial view of the Brisbane River on a sunny afternoon then to the rear deck of an old Queenslander house where FIONA settles into a cane chair.

She looks along the river through her eyes to see it is still but for a cross-river ferry leaving the far bank with barely a ripple. The peace of the river is captured as her eyes close.

LATER.

Fiona awakes to see the river is lively – ebbing east forming bow waves on the marker posts. The light is fading. She blinks into consciousness as SOUNDS. (O.S) of food preparation and the heavy landing of a pot on the stove come from the kitchen. She smiles at the call for attention.

INT. HALLWAY BETWEEN DECK AND KITCHEN - DAY

Through the doorway Fiona sees MEIRA busy – cutting and chopping, the countertop cluttered with spice pots, vegetables, bowls, smoke drifting from the wok . . .

Fiona assesses her daughter's appearance noting an increase in weight, the determination revealed in her clothes, her face, her body language.

SOUND: The phone on the table beside Fiona rings – breaking her reverie.

FIONA
(into phone)
Hello
(pause)
(into phone)
Can I call you back?

She lowers the phone. Steps into the kitchen

FIONA
Can I help?

MEIRA
(Without looking up)
You could lay the table, open the wine,
polish the glasses.

INT. DININGROOM - NIGHT

Dinner is nearly finished – the final moves of a lengthy ritual coming to the surface.

MEIRA

I still cannot get over your indifference
Mother. How can you be so unconcerned?

(pause)

I know you care. I know you loved him, but
you never seem concerned at being
deserted. I can't get over that.

FIONA

(quietly resigned)

If you have to go, you have to go. There's
nothing further I can do or say, except to be
mindful of your business. Your father would
not want you to neglect that.

MEIRA

(turning - emerald eyes blazing)

You speak as if he is still with us. You
speak as if he is just around the corner –
that he will be home at any minute.

(full force of her anger focussed on
Fiona)

He deserted us mother. He walked out of
this house nine years ago and you behave
as if it were only yesterday. As if it never
happened.

FIONA

Do you have to go tonight?

MEIRA

No, I do not have to go tonight. I might
never have to go at all if you would open
up. If you would give me some clue as to
why my father, your husband of twenty-two
years, suddenly, and without hint or
warning, disappeared from our lives - I
would not have to go, but that is not the
case. Is it mother? You tell me nothing of
your early life together. I have to guess.
You have always behaved as if you knew
why he had gone, and when he would

return, but he never came back, and he never called or wrote. Did he? Did he?

(pause- anger spent)

So I will go tonight. I will take the night flight to Bangkok and connect with the morning flight to Cairo and, if he's still alive, I will find my father and wring his bloody neck for the pain he caused us. If my business, his bloody business, in Hong Kong suffers while I am doing it, then to hell with it. I don't like the damn jewellery business anyhow.

EXT. BACK DECK – NIGHT

A cigarette for Fiona; a second glass of wine for Meira; the Brisbane alive with the commuter catamarans loaded with evening revellers slipping back into the city.

FIONA

It's not so long to Bangkok, less than nine hours. You might want to stay there a few days, see the temples, the floating market. Chinatown is really something in Bangkok. No need to hurry to Cairo, or anywhere for that matter.

EXT. THE STREET OUTSIDE THE HOUSE – NIGHT

Warm, cloudless, evening SOUND: diesel taxi idling

Meira hugs her mother hard. Fiona holds her child - gives her all she can

Eyes moist they separate.

MEIRA
I may not be long.
(sniff)
I might find him quickly. I'll call you from
Cairo.

Taxi leaves – stoplights glow as it brakes at the end of the street

INT. HALL WAY – NIGHT

FIONA
(into the phone)
There is no stopping her. She's as ready as
she'll ever be. It's up to you now.
(hangs up)

CAIRO

EXT. CAIRO CITY SQUARE – DAY

Noisy morning traffic from multiple directions – honking and beeping exchanges between pedestrian, handcarts, cars and buses.

ACROSS THE SQUARE. A chauffeured Mercedes stops before the entrance to the Egyptian Ministry of Interior and Cultural Affairs. Rear door opens and the immaculate, blood red, shoe over a new tan sock descends below razor sharp trouser cuffs of Assistant Minister DOUMANI.

INT. EGYPTIAN MINISTRY OF THE INTERIOR – DAY

Busy entrance lobby with high ambient noise of voices, footfalls, doors closing. DOUMANI enters, his assistant, AB'DUL AZIZ bows in greeting, then follows as Doumani walks to, and easily ascends, the magnificent staircase.

In the polished silence of the second floor corridor the dust of Cairo hangs latent about the high brown walls. Figures moved silently between vast double doors closing with barely audible clicks in the soft haze of morning sunlight.

At the far end, on a long wooden bench, NADAR BIN-USEF waits. As Doumani approaches he stands. Aziz moves to protect Doumani – Doumani waves him back, then waves again to dismiss him. The two men sit - their bodies half turned toward each other - their knees almost touching.

NADAR BIN-USEF
(sweating)

He went to the airport yesterday. He seemed to be waiting for someone, but no one came. He went home alone. It is nothing.

DOUMANI
How did he travel?

NADAR BIN-USEF
By taxi.

DOUMANI
Both ways?

NADAR BIN-USEF

Yes. He kept the taxi running at the airport,
then took it back to El-Taufqiya.

DOUMANI

Where in El-Taufqiya?

NADAR BIN-USEF

We lost him in the traffic.

(shrug – the shoulders of his
cheap suit move independent of
his body)

He is probably just going for dinner.

DOUMANI

(in carefully measured tones)

Why would a man who lives in Misr El-
Qadima take a taxi to the airport to meet
someone when he could comfortably drive
his car up the Salah Salem?

(pause)

How many times in the last year has he
taken a taxi to the airport, kept the taxi
running and then taken it to El-Taufqiya for
dinner?

(pause as Nadar sinks lower – his
collar dipping below his suit)

When he left - was he quick? Did he seem
in a hurry? Did he linger anywhere? Did he
look back?

NADAR BIN-USEF

He went quickly. No he did not look back.

DOUMANI

Why not, do you think?

(pause for reply – nothing)

If you were giving up waiting for someone
would you not be concerned that you had
missed them, or that if you left you might be
leaving too early? Would you not be looking
around, searching the crowd in case you
had missed something?

(beat)

Did it not occur to you that he had seen what he wanted to see? That he had achieved his objective?

(beat)

Why would he have kept the taxi running when he could have caught another within five minutes? Did it not occur to you that he is following someone?

Nadar straightens his jacket – smartening himself before his master Doumani stands, ending the interrogation.

DOUMANI (CONT'D)

Start with the hotels where you lost him. Check the birth dates of everyone arriving yesterday. We are looking for someone twenty-five to thirty, probably female, probably of Arab extraction.

The weight of the task is clear in Nadar's demeanour as he watches his master walk away.

EXT. ENTRANCE TO THE CAIRO HILTON HOTEL -DAY

SIR WILLIAM SAINT THOMAS HOUGHTON, BILL, strides up the steps and into the lobby.

INT. LOBBY OF THE CAIRO HILTON HOTEL- DAY

Bill enters, looks around the crowded lobby and is pleasantly surprised to see HESSNIE MAZOU, HM, lurking by a large palm and watching Meira at the reception desk. Bill steps back, takes up a position out of sight of HM.

RECEPTION

MEIRA

I have a reservation - McMahon.

RECEPTIONIST

(after checking)

Yes, river view double?

(looks up for approval)

(Meira smiles assent)

Would you like to charge the room to your

Visa card Miz McMahon?

(Meira smiles again)

LOBBY

Meira turns, looks around. HM turns a fraction. Bill remains still - his eyes on HM.

RECEPTIONIST

(handing her a key card package
for room 730)

Seventh floor Mizz.

(smile)

Would you like a second key?

MEIRA

No thank you.

The receptionist waves the porter over.

MEIRA

Thank you, I'll take care of my bag myself.

The porter walks her to the elevators - presses the button.

MEIRA

Thank you.

HM waits for the elevator doors to close then crosses the lobby to the street.

Bill watches the elevator stop at the fifth floor then follows HM to the street.

EXT. STREET OUTSIDE THE CAIRO HILTON - NIGHT

Bill sees HM turning smartly left at the end of the block. Bill, pauses, smiles and crosses the street to linger in a shop front until HM can be seen returning at the other end of the block. Again Bill smiles, waits as HM walks the length of the block and turns again.

(Beat)

(Beat)

HM reappears and continues around the block a second time. On the third occasion HM takes a cab. Bill, waiting in a cab, follows.

EXT. SMART CAIRO SUBURAN STREET - NIGHT

HD's cab stops. HD gets out, crosses the street, walks to the next junction then turns. A further short walk until he reaches his house and goes in.

FUTHER BACK.

Bill watches.

INT. SEVENTH FLOOR CORRIDOR OF THE CAIRO HILTON -
DAY

Bill walks briskly, pauses at 730, bends to remove a small wooden peg that leans against the door, then proceeds to the elevator.

INT. TOURBUS – DAY

Meira seated in a tour-bus stuck in the Cairo traffic. She looks out across the mass of beeping vehicles, almost static under the dusty haze, to a Mercedes taxi where the driver is busy unloading his nose. Abstractly she watches.

Before the taxi driver completes his excavations she turns back to her fellow passengers focussing on LUCA MARELLO, a smart young man of Mediterranean complexion who appears to be preoccupied with a polished steel tool about the size of a fountain pen. Again she watches.

Turning her gaze she surveys the other passengers – a young Asian couple, an obviously American group of four, two women together, three other couples and, at the back, Bill. All, except the last, are festooned with cameras and bags for their adventure.

EXT. ENTRANCE TO CHEOPS – DAY

The passengers disembark and are herded by a FEMALE TOUR GUIDE, FTG, to join the phalanx filing into Cheops. Meira joins

behind Luca who seems agitated. Bill walks away to a makeshift cafe under dusty umbrellas that have seen better times.

INT. CHEOPS – DAY

Meira, stooped, is in the line going further into the pyramid. A similar line is returning beside them creating a sense of claustrophobia: Sweat and anxiety on the returning faces.

INNER CHAMBER

Relief as the group reach a high roof inner chamber. FTG counts her flock. Meira sees Luca slip away as she moves from the group to gaze up the walls to ceiling and an exit to a gentle, winding, stairway. She start to climb.

UPPER INNER CHAMBER

Meira emerges into an empty space poorly lit by one flickering fluorescent hanging on its wire. Looking down she sees the floor dusty but perfectly flat – the stone blocks meeting without visible cracks. She looks to the walls to see the same precision in the building blocks. Scanning walls and ceiling she's enraptured in the quality of the engineering.

She stops, emerald eyes in alarm, as she sees a man's legs protruding from the wall. Curiosity overcomes fear as she edges closer. A foot moves. Closer.

MEIRA

Hello.

(beat)

Hello. Are you okay?

The legs move, Luca moves partially out. His feet reach the floor.

MEIRA

Are you alright? Can I help you?

Luca raises his head to brush against the dusty roof. He looks back to her

LUCA

(huge white smile)

Un momento, un momento signora

(turning back into the hole -
struggling)

Bah.

He pulls his upper torso from the square hole leaving his arms inside.

LUCA

(in Italian)

Please excuse me signora. Might I ask you
a favour?

Meira struggles to remember her Italian.

LUCA (CONT'D)

Scusi. Do you speak English?

MEIRA

Yes. Yes I speak English.

LUCA

You must come closer. Kneel here by me.

Meira kneels beside him.

LUCA (CONT'D)

See, see, look in 'ere. You can see?

She peers into the hole.

LUCA (CONT'D)

You see past my arms. My instrument. If I let go it will be gone. Is expensive.

She pushes in, the better to see.

LUCA (CONT'D)

I'm sorry, excusi mi. You cannot.

MEIRA

No, no, don't let go. I can get it.

She squirms in along side him. Her breasts pressed against the bottom of the hole she stretches in regardless of his proximity.

MEIRA (CONT'D)

I think I can.

She pulls herself further in. Her bottom pushes past his face until he is staring at it – his nose inches from her buttocks.

MEIRA (CONT'D)

I have it. I have it. Let go. Let me take it.

Luca withdraws his arms, raises his head.

MEIRA (CONT'D)

Now I can't get out. Can you pull me out?

He stands to pull her by the waist until he can move up to her arms and help her stand. She grins mightily as she offers the shiny steel object to him – her face and blouse black with ancient dust.

LUCA

Grazie signorina. Molte grazie. I am in your debt.

She followed his eyes to her blouse and started brushing away the dirt.

LUCA (CONT'D)

You must let me pay for your cleaning. And for lunch. I insist on returning your kindness. You have saved me from a great loss. My instruments are expensive, and mean much to me.

MEIRA

So I can see. But what were you doing in there? I am not used to finding men hanging out of holes in the walls of ancient buildings. Do you do this sort of thing often?

LUCA

Si, si, signorina I do. I am a strange person. Always I am hanging out of tunnels, or laying around the floor of ancient buildings with my head down a hole. It is what I do.

MEIRA

As a hobby, or as a job?

LUCA

It's my job. I am an engineer. I is measuring the hole.

MEIRA

Oh, well - that explains everything.

LUCA

Si, si, I will explain everything. There is no secret. But not here. Over lunch I insist. I am Luca, Luca Morello.

(he offers his hand - silly after the intimate contact.)
Please, I insist, let me take you to lunch and all will be made clear.

She followed him out into the bright Egyptian Sun.

EXT. BESIDE THE NILE – NIGHT

Meira and Luca step from a taxi stopped beside the Nile, just below El Manial Bridge, and take a short walk to a floating restaurant.

LUCA

I hope you do not mind the smell - boats with food always create strong smells, don't you think?

As they step aboard Meira sees only the lights reflected by the glass and silverware in the mirror behind the bar and the moonlight, on the water and on the El Manial Palace.

FURTHER UP RIVER is the glittering tower block of the Gezira Sheraton Hotel. She looks at the candle-lit boats hovering nearby with couples dining at private tables, and at the tour boats sliding by all a-glitter with pearl strings of multi-coloured bulbs

ON THE BOAT she notices row upon row of baskets of orchids hanging over the safety rails.

MEIRA

It is beautiful. Absolutely beautiful. You must know Cairo well.

Luca smile graciously and indicates to the hovering maître d' that he wants a table on the river side of the restaurant.

AT THE TABLE

LUCA

What is it about airplanes that makes you so tired. I cannot decide – is it the airport, the jet engines, the air inside? Why are we always so tired when we arrived.

I am only arrived today. Are you arrived today? No, I think yesterday for you. Yes, yes, you have a sleep – not a good one, but you 'ave 'add one. Yes?

He paused to sip, looks at her toying with her glass and looking at him.

LUCA (CONT'D)

But you want to know why I had my head in a hole in the wall of the Cheops upper chamber?

She smiles encouragingly.

LUCA (CONT'D)

Si, I will tell you. But first you must tell me something.

He pauses to watch her face, She smiles - concedes.

LUCA (CONT'D)

Are you unhappy?

MEIRA

No.

LUCA (CONT'D)

Sad perhaps.

MEIRA

Not really. No, I would not say I is sad. Why would you think I is?

LUCA

You are young, some years from thirty I think, vibrant, alive and curious.
(pause, measures her expression)
and on a mission, a lone mission in Cairo.

She does not turn from his gaze. She holds his eyes: his soft brown eyes.

LUCA (CONT'D)

I see more sadness in you than I feel in my own heart. Perhaps I should be asking you such questions.

He brakes the gaze with a blink, dismissing the moment with a smile that lights his whole face.

LUCA (CONT'D)

Si, priego. Did you notice anything special about the hole?

MEIRA

(beat)

Oh, in the pyramid? Well, it looked long.

LUCA

Yes, very deep. I don't know how deep, more important though, it is perfect.

MEIRA

Perfect?

LUCA

Si. It is perfectly straight. The walls are perfectly flat, and it is perfectly horizontal. Straight. That hole is dead straight.

MEIRA

Is that what you were measuring. How straight it is - is?

LUCA

Yes. And the floor of the upper chamber, that is also straight, perfectly flat. The hole runs perfectly square to the wall, and the wall perfectly square to the floor. Perpendicular I think in English.

MEIRA

Yes, at ninety degrees.

LUCA

Si, si, at ninety degrees to the vertical as far as my laser could see. Maybe more than one hundred feet.

MEIRA

You could see a hundred feet?

LUCA

No. It is a small laser. It cannot see anymore than seventy, maybe eighty.

MEIRA

Is it a new hole?

LUCA

No, no. It is as old as the pyramid. It is built that way.

MEIRA

(sardonic)

Oh, the Egyptians had instruments as good as your laser?

He leans forward, his elbows on the table, one hand grasping his drink.

LUCA

(undisguised enthusiasm)

It does mean that. It means that the Egyptians could measure to within hundredths of millimetres. It means that all the traditional theories that they used hammers, string soaked in acids, or wedging to cut their building blocks is stupid. Nonsense I think.

They each sit back, she to think, he to pause.

LUCA (CONT'D)

How do you think they made that beautiful hole? How do you think these people, who were supposed to be limited to bronze and brass, could make tools to cut perfectly straight holes through granite and basalt? How could that be?

(beat)

These people had Sun technology. These people could control light beams - like lasers.

Meira now has her arms crossed on the table, giving Luca a quizzical, 'you've-got-to-be-kidding-me,' look.

LUCA (CONT'D)

Si, si, they could. I am not crazy, they could. They did, you only have to look at the hole, they did it. And if they did not have high-speed diamond tipped cutters and grinders guided by laser beams, how did they do it? With wedges and ice fissures? I do not think so.

MEIRA

I suppose they could have melted the stone
You can melt stone with laser light.
Jewellers do it. People who synthesize
stones use laser beams.

LUCA

Ah, you know these things. Good. Si, you can cut stone with a light bulb if you have the right mirror. They do that. They did that at the Bureau of Mines, in the Twin Cities Research Centre in America. A scientist, David Lindroth, I think, he showed that a 100 watts of light energy focused to a tiny circle, about 2 millimetre, can cut any rock. The harder the rock the easier I think, because quartzite spalls very easily, while a rock, basalt, does not spall - it melts.

(pause to wipe his mouth)

In Machu Picchu they have the same. The blocks are cut so exactly you could not put paper between them. And they had a golden mirror there, two man across they say, but the Conquistadores cut it up and melted it - of course - they could not allow anything to threaten the church.

MEIRA

(smiling at this bubbling
enthusiasm)

I think we are going to need more wine for this. Please let me buy a bottle?

LUCA

(signalling the waiter)

“Of course I will let you, provided you let me pay for it.

I hope you are hungry. Excitement makes you hungry, yes? And this is exciting, yes?

MEIRA

Yes, I guess it is. If you're saying that all the historians up until now have been talking nonsense, then it definitely is.

LUCA

Ancient people had a much higher technology than you would believe possible, much higher than we have been led to believe. That is what I think.

The bottle arrives.

INT. ROOM 730 – DAY

Meira sits at the table over the remains of breakfast. She is sipping coffee and reading the paper.

OS SOUND of the shower running.

Something disturbs her concentration. She looks up to see Nadar opening cupboards and drawers and moving about the room as if it were his own. Stunned, she pauses to consider.

MEIRA

What the fuck are you doing?

Nadar turns, he is calm, his eyes steady, driving her to panic.

MEIRA (CONT'D)
(Huge, long, scream)

Luca appeared from the bathroom wet, hairy, and entirely naked. He takes one look at Nadar and crashes into him, knocking him over in a rugby tackle that makes him fall backwards over a low table and pinning him down as his knee goes into his neck.

NADAR
(deep, agonizing, scream)

INT. HOTEL MANAGER'S OFFICE – DAY

In a large, corner, room with daylight filtering through huge drapes AB'DUL AZIZ, HABIB, and COLONEL ZADOK are waiting.

Meira enters; the three men rise; Zadok moves away; Ab'dul Aziz advances to greet her.

AB'DUL AZIZ
Miz. McMahon, so good of you to come. I am Ab'dul Aziz from the ministry of tourism – so sorry to learn of your experience.
(gestures to a more comfortable, lower, chair)
Please sit.
(he sits directly opposite)
I is distressed to hear of your experience, and is so glad someone is at hand to defend you. It really is not the kind of thing we wish upon tourists, or anyone for that matter, but tourists in particular because

tourism is our life-blood. We are no longer a nation of traders and shopkeepers, as once described by a famous Englishman, and we are not blessed with a wealth of minerals for which to dig. We are simple museum keepers, guardians of the ancients, and wish only peace and enlightenment for our visitors. If I could be of assistance during you stay - how long would that be? My office is at your disposal. If there is anything in particular you want to see, somewhere special you want to go, someone you wish to consult, visit, I, and my staff, were at your command.

MEIRA

You are most kind and considerate – thank you.

(beat)

(beat)

Finally Habib moves behind his desk: establishing his authority by taking his time. In response Meira stands, strolls to the window to gaze out on the Cairo streets, then turns so Habib is forced to talk to her against the glare of the midday Sun. He falteres from his controlled stare, blinks, then gathered himself again in fresh concentration.

HABIB

How did the intruder get into your room, Miss McMahan?"

(taking up pen and paper)

Did you hear him enter?

MEIRA

No, I didn't.

HABIB

Would you have heard the door open do you think? Is it so quiet that you would hear the door open if it is done quietly - say with a key?

MEIRA

I that is unlikely, what with the noise from the street and with curtains to deaden anything coming from the room. Certainly I could not hear my friend in the bathroom.

HABIB

Ah, yes, your friend
(pause to check the name on the sheet before him)
Mr. Mareello, he attacked the man?

MEIRA

Well he knocked him over and pinned him down.

HABIB

Why? Is the man about to attack you?

MEIRA

No.

HABIB

Perhaps he is about to attack Mr. Mareello?

MEIRA

I think not.

HABIB

He tried to escape? He had something of yours of value?

MEIRA

No.

HABIB

Why, then, did Mr. Marelo attack the man do you think?

MEIRA

He is in my room.
He broke in and is going through my things.
He should consider himself lucky he is not seriously hurt. People have been killed for being where they have no right to be.

HABIB

He is hurt, Miss McMahon. He has a quite serious back injury, and his throat is so badly bruised and swollen he cannot eat.
Why do you think Mr. Marelo is so forceful?

MEIRA

I imagine he is scared. I is scared. He might have had a knife, or a gun. He might have been a karate expert, a trained killer. When someone breaks into your room you are scared. Wouldn't you be scared if someone broke into your room like that?

HABIB

But he did not break into your room. There is no sign of a forced entry. He did not have a key, and he did not have anything in his pockets that he could have used to open the lock. Either your door is open, or someone let him in.

MEIRA stares at the manager, at the gold nameplate, MR. HANAR BEN HABIB, on his huge desk.

She looks at the other men – their eyes steady, passive, as if in judgement. Barely able to control herself she stands.

MEIRA

I will check out of your hotel immediately. One is not only robbed in this hotel, one is insulted - this management is hostile to women. You can be sure I will speak to the tourist agencies about it. Goodbye Mr. Habib.

Habib glances quickly at Aziz, and then Zadok

HABIB

Please,

(rising and coming around the desk to intercept her)

Please forgive me. I is carried away by my own line of questioning. There is no intention to offend you. Please, please, do not leave. There will be no charge for your room. Please stay for the rest of your time in Cairo with the compliments of the hotel. It has been a most unfortunate incident. We are all a little upset.

Meira pauses, catching her breath, the blood slowing in her neck and cheeks. Habib looks extremely contrite, holding his hands before her and looking up because she is the taller; she has power over him.

HABIB (CONT'D)

(eyes beseeching)

Please, charge your meals to the room, it is the least we can do

EXT. LONDON – DAY

A grey morning over the Thames and Central London.

INT. BOARDROOM OF THE FEDERATION OF FOSSIL FUEL SUPPLIERS - DAY

LORD, NIGEL, HARPER heads the table of the full board of The Federation of Fossil Fuel Suppliers, FFFS.

DARRELL MCCORKINDALE.

I don't understand you guys, If they step out of line, cut them off from the market. Better still, cut them off from the refineries. There ain't nothing simpler.

NIGEL HARPER

The great advantage, Darrel, of possessing a big stick, is lost if ever you take course to use it. Our friends in Peru know full well the powers available to us, in fact, in a sense, it is the reason they are flexing their muscles at this time.

Allow them their few moments of autonomy. It is the smallest kindness, and it produces the most wonderful results.

Around the table heads nods in ascent; Darrel shakes his in disbelief.

The meeting breaks up. As the members file out SIR MALCOM FRAZER, MF, MARTIN GIBBS, MG, GEORGE PEMBROOKE-JONES, GPJ, COMMANDER JOHN CONWAY, CC.

EXT. ENTRANCE TO WHITES – DAY

INT. MEETING ROOM – DAY

Nigel Harper is holding another meeting. In attendance are ME, MG, GPJ, & CC.

NIGEL

It would appear that there has been some movement on the sunshine front, Could be significant. You should all be informed.

(to CC)

John.

CC

Best sources indicate great interest in Absalom McMahon, currently Hessnie Mazou, who has been maintaining a low profile in and around Cairo for more than nine years. We thought he was off the active list, and have really only been checking on his whereabouts periodically. It seems his daughter has arrived, and is keeping company with an Italian engineer with no history of field activities.

MG

Great interest?

CC

Local fella caught in her room, possibly an attempted burglary - anyhow shouldn't have aroused much interest, but it brought some heavyweights out of the woodwork.

MG

Do we know the burglar?

CC

Lightweight detective agency. Local businesses and government use them sometimes.

MG

And in this case?

CC

Can't be sure, but it brought Colonel Zadok out into the daylight, and the dear old Ministry of the Interior.

NIGEL

A display of nerves, do you think Commander?

CC

Not my bag sir, as you know. I'm merely the messenger in this case, but Cairo is on the alert, and we, as ever, are watching them watching.

NIGEL

Important thing is to keep the lid on - don't you agree gentlemen? Can't have Mr. Mazou muddying the waters at this stage.

(to CC)

So that is your brief Commander. Keep the lid firmly in place. We don't want to lose anyone.

INT. LOBBY CAFE OF THE CAIRO HILTON – DAY

Meira, alone at a table, is so totally immersed in the menu that fails to notice Bill's approach.

BILL

Please excuse my rudeness, but I believe I can be of assistance.

She looks up, quickly taking in the image before her.

MEIRA

Thank you, but I think I can order my lunch - even at this hour.

BILL

(smiling, nodding graciously)

I know something of matters of security - especially in hotels, and more especially here in Cairo.

(beat)

BILL (CONT'D)

My name is Bill Houghton. I consult to businesses on matters of security sometimes, and I could not help hearing of your burglar.

He places a hand on the back of a chair inviting her, to invite him, to sit. She doesn't respond.

BILL (CONT'D)

(pulling out the chair across from her)

Burglaries are rarely conducted randomly. There is usually a purpose - some planning at least.

(reaching into his jacket he pulls out a white card - presents it smiling)

She takes the card smiling similarly - to say she is enjoying the game. Reading slowly her grin deepens at the pretentious name, but is brought up by the KG after it, and the British Government portcullis in the corner.

MEIRA

Are you a knight? I should call you Sir William?

BILL

Bill will be fine. I is hoping I could be of assistance.

MEIRA

You were on the bus to Cheops. But you did not go inside.

BILL

You are observant.

MEIRA

Hardly. There were only eleven of us on the bus, and most of them were couples of some sort.

(beat)

So why would you go, and not go, as it were, or have you seen all you need to see of the inside of Cheops?

BILL

Indeed I have seen the inside of Cheops many times. Only now am I learning of the outside. Did you know it reportedly had three white sides?

MEIRA

“As a matter of fact I did. And that the white sides were finished in highly reflective marble and granite, and that the black side is probably obsidian.

BILL

Well, well, I’m clearly before an expert. Can I move onto safer ground, like the menu?

MEIRA

(to hovering WAITER)

A banana shake and a club sandwich please.

BII

(to waiter)

Tea.

WAITER

Tea for one Sir?

BILL

For one.

MEIRA

I'm not an expert. In fact only learned those things about the pyramids yesterday. My father is very keen – but I found it dull stuff.

BILL

Until yesterday.

MEIRA

Not entirely. My father wanted me to share his interest in all things Arabic – in old Mesopotamia in particular. He is meticulous about my education and, to be fair, I did share his interest in old gems.

BILL

How did it go with old Aziz?

MEIRA

(beat)

Aziz is oily, and that old bastard Habib wanted to lay it on me. I thought I is going to report on the incident – give evidence as it were – but no - it is a reception committee. Aziz from the ministry of something, and what looked like a high ranking policeman. If they were there to intimidate me, they succeeded. They looked like heavy hitters.

BILL

Tell me about the policeman.

MEIRA

He is tall - well built, dark moustache and enough pips and bars on his uniform to sink a ship.

(pause)

He didn't say anything though. Just sat in the background. Apart from the ministry man's opening speech, Habib did all the talking.

BILL

Sounds like Colonel Zadok. You have stirred them up.

MEIRA

A knight, and now a police colonel. What have I done to deserve such attention? Would you like some more tea? Perhaps something to eat? It's on me, or rather it's on the hotel. I am to charge everything, including the room.

BILL

My, my, what did you say to them?

INT. ROOM 730 CAIRO HILTON – DAY

LUCA

(pacing)

No, no. I cannot let you go alone Meira. It is crazy. You do not even know who this man is.

This is Cairo. Things happen in Cairo. This is not Brisbane or Napoli. This is a dangerous place.

MEIRA

Hold on a minute, Luca. You think that I don't know that. I'm not stupid.

LUCA

You are stupid. A man calls you up, and you go rushing to meet him.

MEIRA

It's not just any man, it's my father.

LUCA

How do you know it's your father?

MEIRA

Now who's stupid? It's him. You think I don't know my father's voice?

(Softening)

Luca, it is my father

(smiling)

You are right though. This is not Australia. I'd feel better if you'd be willing to help me, come with me to the house. You could wait in the taxi - keep a lookout.

LUCA

"A lookout? And for what, am I looking?"

MEIRA

I've no idea, but it'd feel better if you were there.

INT. HOME OF HESSNIE MAZOU – DAY

Modest living room. No pictures, memorabilia, or other personal items. Hessnie is waiting.

O.S. Door bell.

Beaming smile as Hessnie moves to open the door. Bolts draw as he opens the door.

HESSNIE

Oh.

A huge hand reaches in to take Hessnie by the throat. His legs shudder as his feet leave the ground. Several more shudders as the life is squeezed from him.

EXT. STREET OF HESSNIE'S HOUSE – DAY

THOR leaves Hessnie's house, stops at the waiting cab, reaches in and squeezes the life out of the driver. He smiles at his success, walks to the corner, and turns just before the cab containing Meira and Luca enters from the other end.

INT. ROOM 730 – DAY

Meira awakes: her eyelids heavy from sedatives holding her down. She struggled to surface, focusing on the immediate reality of the white pillows soft beneath her right cheek. Her face is turned towards the bedside table where a brass lamp stands between her and the green and yellow curtains of the hotel room. She lets her eyes close again, her head drifting back into the comfort of the pillows, cushioned, dreamy, warm . . .

INT. HOUSE OF HESSNIE MAZOU – DAY – FLASHBACK

Stark images, overpoweringly real, behind her closed eyelids as the lifeless body, the purple face. The face she had longed to see, the face she remembered in dreams, lay hard against the cold tiled floor just inside the door of her father's little house.

INT. ROOM 730 – DAY

Meira sits up in startled terror.

BILL (O.S.)
Easy does it Meira. Take it slowly.
Just lay back. Take your time. You've had a
terrible shock.

She feels, and sees, his hand on hers. She slumps back on the bed. Her eyes close.

LATER

She awakes again. Reality firmer this time: the hand no longer there. Slowly she rotates her eyes about the room: the same pillows; bedside lamp; a clock radio; water in a bottle; in a glass; the smell of flowers; the pulse of an air conditioner in the background. Gently she turns, raises herself onto her elbows, and catches sight of a man's shoes and trousers with turn-ups. She opened her mouth to speak but all that comes out is a weak groan. Her throat and mouth are so dry that is impossible to say anything.

BILL

It's okay. It's only your friend Bill. You remember me.?

(She did.)

You've had a nasty experience. Take your time. Breathe slowly. I'll be here.

He hands her the glass of water. She takes it in her right hand as she eases herself up off her elbows - a few sips, then a long gulp before she can find her voice.

MEIRA

Why are you here? Why are you in my room?

Reaching over she tries to put the glass on the bedside table but almost misses. Bill gently takes it from her as she scans the room. Fierce sunlight edges around the window shades making bright despite drawn curtains.

She turns back to face Bill.

MEIRA (CONT'D)

Where is Luca? What happened?

INT. HOUSE OF HESSNIE MAZOU – DAY - FLASHBACK

Even as she spoke she could see and hear the answers in her own mind. Her father laying dead, as dead as a man could be with his neck mottled black and his face purple and bulging. His eyes were wider than ever they should go and his tongue a revolting mass of bloated tissue protruding fat and shiny from his mouth.

INT. ROOM 730 – DAY

MEIRA (CONT'D)

My God, my father. My father is dead. He is horribly dead.

Bill, moving closer, sits tentatively on the edge of the bed.

BILL

I'm afraid so, my dear. That is tough, a very severe shock. It'll be some time before you adjust to that I'm afraid.

He lays a hand on the covers, within easy reach, and watches her carefully. He gives her a few seconds.

BILL (CONT'D)

As for Luca, he will be here as soon as he can. The police you know. They want to know everything.

MEIRA

The police, with Luca, what do the police want with Luca?

Slowly she lowers herself back to the soft white pillows, and, yielding to a big blank void, she descends to where there is no pain, and no terror.

INT. CAIRO POLICE CELLS – DAY

Luca sits naked and shaking on the floor of his cell. The door opens, he watches heavy, highly polished, military shoes clatter toward him then stop. Slowly Luca raises his head to scan vertically the immaculate, black, uniform, the chrome pips, the belt, sidearm, moist lips beneath a pristine moustache . . .

ZADOK

I am Colonel Zadok, I command the police forces in here in Cairo, and I have absolute authority in all other provinces of Egypt. If you wish to leave here, you must tell me everything you know about the murder of Hessnie Mazou. If you do not, I can keep you here indefinitely, and in nowhere near the comfort you are currently enjoying.

LUCA

(through split, swollen, lips)

I have no idea who Hessnie Mazou is.

ZADOK

Why did you kill him?

LUCA

I didn't kill anyone. You have this completely wrong. I demand to see the Italian Consul. You have no right to detain me this way. I am not an Egyptian citizen. You have no authority over me.

Zadok stares at him for a few seconds, then turns and ducks out through the door.

LATER - NIGHT

His cell door opened again. Two officers wrench Luca from the floor and throw him, head first against the opposite wall. He turns enough to avoid having his skull cracked, but not enough to prevent his ear being torn on the rough cement wall. As he hits the floor the first kick goes hard into his rib cage, the second into his crotch. A series of body blows follow - crushing and breaking him until he loses consciousness completely.

EXT. HOUSE OF HESSNIE MAZOU – NIGHT

A POLICEMAN lounges in his car outside the house – his eyes close.

Bill slips past, enters the house.

INT. HOUSE OF HESSNIE MAZOU – NIGHT

Bill opens the fridge, finds a key. In the living room he moves a small table, the rug underneath, and lifts two short floorboards.

Underneath is safe. He uses the key, feels inside and removes what appears to be a discus wrapped in course cloth.

He replaces boards, rug and table before sliding out of the rear entrance.

EXT. LONDON HEATHROW AIRPORT – DAY

British Airways 777 touches down.

EXT. CENTRAL LONDON STREET – DAY

A taxi pulls up before an Antique shop. Bill steps out and enters the shop.

INT. WORKSHOP OF HEIREM MUELLER –DAY

HEIREM MUELLER is examining a hard, black, obsidian disc with glyphs and letters and drawings cut into both surfaces with great precision.

HEIRUM

Where did you find it?

BILL

In a safe.

HEIRUM

For that you will be killed. If you were followed, I will be killed.

(pause)

It's a Rosetta Stone only much more. It's obsidian. The glyphs and letters and symbols are burned in – melted into the stone with fine precision. I cannot guess as to it's age because it isn't worn. It's hard glazed – unalterable.

BILL

An important find?

HEIRUM

It's not a find – you stole it. This, in the right hands, will take away all the speculation about ancient cultures. It removes doubt. It will destroy all the old religions. You will be killed.

INT. ROOM 730 –DAY

Bill awakens Meira.

BILL

Wakeup time young lady.
(shakes her gently)

Time for action Meira. On your feet. We have to go.

Meira opens her eyes. She sits up in surprise, looks about the room to see Luca wrapped in a blanket and slumped in a chair.

MEIRA

Luca

(leaping from her bed)

Luca. What happened.

(rushing to attend him)

What happened to you?

(turning to Bill)

What happened to him?

Is it the police? Is that fucking awful policeman?

BILL

Explanations later – we have to get out of here, and we have to do it now.

MEIRA

What's going on? Who did this? Why are you here?

BILL

(raising a hand to silence her)

Later. Explanations later. Right now we have to leave. Get dressed. Clean him up. You have minutes.

(he sees doubt and confusion in her eyes)

No time for explanations. You are in grave danger.

MEIRA

From whom? Who would endanger me?

BILL

Have you spoken to your mother?

MEIRA
No she doesn't . . .

BILL
(interrupting)
Do you want to end up like him?
(indicating Luca)

Meira looks at Luca sitting broken and bruised and sees the fear in his eyes. She looks back at Bill.

BILL (CONT'D)
Get dressed. Clean him up. I'll be back in five.

Bill leaves. Meira tends to Luca.

INT. OFFICE OF COLONEL ZADOK

Colonel Zadok flips, once more, through the pile of reports on his desk, puts them down, fiddles with the brass paperknife, stands, walks to the window, cusses, then paced back to the door. He returns to his desk and presses the intercom.

ZADOK
Bring my car round to the front, and two uniformed men.

He pulls his tunic from the hanger, brushes it front and rear, hangs the brush back on the hanger, straightens himself in the full length mirror, and strides out.

INT. LOBBY OF THE CAIRO HILTON

The area is busy with human traffic. Through the street entrance a police car can be seen. A policeman stands by the elevators and another near the street exit.

Two elevators arrive at the same time disgorging twenty or more people into the lobby.

Under a wide brimmed hat, baggy, cargo pants, and an off white linen jacket, complete with AMANA EXCAVATIONS ID BADGE clipped to his top pocket, Luca busied himself in conversation with a somewhat surprised, angular, man in his mid-fifties as they crossed the hotel lobby.

Meira has the same ID on her man's, loose fitting, khaki, safari suit. Her hair tucked under a flowerpot hat, and sporting pilot sunglasses with square lenses, she stays close to the group as it passes before the policemen stationed about the lobby.

Outside a Toyota mini-bus pulls up, the driver gets out to stand by the large passenger door.

Meira and Luca enter the bus quickly, taking the forward bench seat to be near the door, followed by the rest of the party. They all sit in silence, the engine running but the air conditioner is barely coping with the Cairo heat and the nine bodies in the limited, static, space while baggage chaos reigns outside.

An eon passes while bags and equipment are loaded into the rear stowage, upon the roof, next to the driver, and finally, in a heart stopping flurry of confused activity that involved one of the policemen, onto the seat beside the fugitives.

As the bus begins to lumber away it is stopped by arrival of Zadok's car. He emerges quickly, paces into the lobby where is intercepted by Bill.

BILL
(tipping his hat)
Good afternoon Colonel. Come to check on
my charges?

Zadok stares at the Englishman

ZADOK
I was surprised to see your name on the
release Sir William. I thought you had long
since retired from her Britannic Majesty's
service.

BILL
Once a catholic, always a catholic.
Besides, one cannot do enough for a good
boss.

ZADOK
If you are here, who is looking after the
children?

BILL
Your chaps seem to have the place sealed
up tight as a drum. Two on each floor, and
the lobby positively dripping in guns and
uniforms. More than adequate to contain a
couple of harmless tourists I would
suggest.

ZADOK
So what do you and the minister hope to
gain by leaving them alone? Statements to
each other are hardly helpful to any of us.

BILL
I thought I'd let the girl work on the hot
headed Italian. Calm him down a bit. See
what he's really all about. I'm sure you'll
agree when I say I don't think he is
dangerous in any way, so I thought I'd let

them work out a little plan - see what it's intended to achieve. What do you think?

ZADOK

I think, Sir William, that you have, as always, completely misjudged the suspects, and I think, Sir William, you should never have left them alone.

Zadok waves to the two policemen and strides into the lift.

EXT. STREET OUTSIDE THE CAIRO HILTON – DAY

Zadok's driver makes room for the minibus to leave, turns onto the Corniche, then heads south beside the river. Luca steals a glance at Meira; she has her head back: a trace of a smile upon her face.

EXT. A CLOSED AND SHUTTERED SQUARE – DAY

The minibus stops, Meira and Luca emerge and cross the small cafe offering the only shelter from the afternoon sun.

INT. ACROSS THE SQUARE A SMALL CAFE -DAY

Luca and Meira sit uncertainly sipping coffee.

LUCA

What do we do now?

MEIRA

I imagine we wait. There is little else to do, and I have a feeling Bill would not have just cast us to the wind like this.

LUCA

Not if he had a choice. He might have been caught. I thought we had been caught. When the bus stopped, and the driver threw us out – I thought we were caught.

MEIRA

You think he might have been caught? That he might never have found the key?

LUCA

I don't know. We neither of us know. All we know is that we are here now with no contact numbers, no contacts, and no idea where we are.

MEIRA

Perhaps we should eat while we can.

LUCA

Yes, perhaps we should.

MEIRA

First law of survival, find shelter, find water, find food, eat when you can.

LUCA

Beer and tabouleh then?

MEIRA

Chin, chin.

LUCA

Chin, chin? What's that?

MEIRA

Nineteen thirties stiff upper lip stuff. We Australians are more British than the British sometimes.

EXT. LARGE PLAZA, CAIRO - DAY

Meira walks carefully across the Midan Ahmed Maher, timing her way through the dusty traffic. At the entrance to THE MUSEUM OF ISLAMIC ARTS and THE ISLAMIC LIBRARY she pauses only fractionally to locate the stone staircase and begin her steady ascent.

INT. STONE STAIRCASE OF ISLAMIC LIBRARY – DAY

It's a long climb up the cool, curved, stone, stairs to the upper reading rooms stark in contrast to the noisy Sun-drenched streets. She enters the fourth room without knocking.

INT. ROOM UPPER FLOOR OF ISLAMIC LIBRARY – DAY

Relieved that no one is inside Meira sits on one of the hard chairs at the long table dominating the otherwise barren room. Her racing pulse slows in the still silence - her mind dropping a gear in the isolation of the dusty neglect.

HER EMERALD EYES

As she sits there awaiting her fate in that dirty, soul-less, place she is suddenly overtaken by a dreadful loneliness. She cries, hopelessly, and helplessly - sobbing away her grief. Arms on the table she rests her head.

LATER

Sitting up she blinks into recovery. Retrieving wipes and cosmetics from her bag she cleans up, adds make up, her emerald eyes staring back from her compact less troubled, then startled as she sees the door handle slowly turn.

The door eases open and Luca's smiling face peeps around at her.

LUCA

Chin, chin.

MEIRA

(breathing out)

Chin, chin. All clear.

LUCA

No sign of Bill?

MEIRA

Not yet. After that journey, and all those silly notes, I keep expecting him to appear from behind the curtain, or come flying through an open window.

LUCA

How many notes did you get?

MEIRA

Three, all of them in shops, telling me to go to the next shop. How about you?

LUCA

Four. I wonder if they were the same shops. Did you go to the Oriental Rug Emporium?

MEIRA

No.

LUCA
The Habbash Boutique?

MEIRA
I don't think so.

Bill breezes in carry a large, bulky envelope.

BILL
All present and correct. Everyone having fun?

LUCA
The thought of returning to Zadok's jail puts the stakes to high for me to have fun.

BILL
(patting Luca's arm)
Yes, I'm sure. Still we've kept you out this long. The rest should be easier.
(to Meira)
And you? How are you holding up?
(pause)
"I hope you still have your Amarna Excavation IDs, because that is where we are going.

MEIRA
If we are going to Amarna why did we get off the minibus?

BILL
Because, dear lady, the minibus is stopped, and searched, and the occupants interrogated at length twenty minutes after you stepped off. The police are not expecting you in Amarna now. They expect you to lie low, or go to Luxor, or Alexandria. Which seems as good a reason as any for going to Amarna. Besides, I have found something rather interesting.
(placing the envelope on the table)
This is in your father's safe.

(holds up a hand against
interruption)

So it's yours. You inherited it. It may prove extremely valuable but before we find out give me a moment, please, to explain all that has happened. The simple truth is,

(pause)

is that you both find yourselves caught up in much larger issues than you ever anticipated.

(to Luca)

I'm sorry you have become involved, and I feel sure you had no intention of complicating your life in this way, but it is the undeniable reality.

(to Meira)

The reason you have not been able to contact your mother is because she is now untraceable as Fiona McMahon.

(raises hand)

That will be hard for you to accept, I understand. Please also try to understand that it is not so unusual in the business for which I is trained.

Luca you probably realize by now that Colonel Zadok and his people can have you for breakfast and the world would not see a trace of saliva on their lips. The issues however, are bigger than Zadok and the Cairo police. The issues are bigger than your father Meira.

(to Meira)

This is the greatest loss your young life has experienced, and you have my deepest sympathy, but it means little, either to the people who killed him, or to other people with an interest in his activities.

I only know a little of what this is all about, but my old diplomat's nose tells me there is much at stake here so I went to your father's house Meira and found this envelope.

Understand now, both of you, that Hessnie Mazou, Absalom McMahon, your father Meira, is trying to tell you something.

MEIRA

You are implying that he knew he is going to be killed.

BILL

Yes. I think he knew his death is imminent.

MEIRA

(crying)

Why?

BILL

He is living under a false identity. He is wanted by the Cairo police, the Lebanese police, and the French. The American CIA, and the Australian Secret Service, also have a file on him. He associated with known criminals and some small time terrorist groups. A man living in such a world would constantly anticipate his demise. He had no contact with you for nine years, yet the moment you arrive in Cairo he pops up. There has to be a reason.

Meira sits wide eyed, the information about her father is steaming through her mind like a locomotive through a wheat field.

She draws the envelope across the table, carefully opens it, and judiciously pulls two thick plastic bags from within. Inside each are bundles of papers: in one about half a ream, around two hundred or so pages, and what looks like a similar amount in the other, only

it is old, thick, material making it difficult to assess how much is there. She undoes it, and starts to spread the pages on the table.

LUCA

It's in Greek, and old, very old, be careful. Please, please, open the other packet. It looks more new, I think. We should be very careful. The new one might tell us about this old one.

Meira gently puts the Greek papers back together, and lays them back in the plastic. She opens the newer packet.

MEIRA

This is English. This is my father's writing, and those are his drawings - the gift and the key.

DRAWING OF SOTHIC TRIANGLE AND ANK

LUCA

That is the Sothic Triangle, and the Ank, I think."

She smiled knowingly. They both pored over the pages. Bill leaves the room.

LATER

Bill returned with three large books written in Arabic.

BILL

Thought we better look as if we are using the library. What have you found?

Meira sits upright, as if to distance herself from the papers, scepticism all over her face. Luca hunches closer, totally absorbed. He's turns the pages rapidly, then stops, comes back to the beginning.

LUCA

This is one man's treatise On Burning Mirrors. Archimedes did one, and Diocles, and several others. None of them actually made sense because large pieces are missing. Did your father experiment with mirrors and sunlight?

MEIRA

All the time. He had little mirrors and reflectors in his workshop. He made a coke can gun. We used to see who could fire the can the furthest.

LUCA

How did that work?

MEIRA

Just take a full coke can, jam it on the spike so it pierces the bottom, then turn the mirror on it. On a bright day it used to take about forty seconds for the coke to boil, and for the can to shoot off the spike in a jet of steaming cola. Bit dangerous, but good fun.

LUCA

But it isn't just a toy. It did real work?

MEIRA

Yes. He used the mirrors to melt the metals, and the stones. 'To get the perfect weld,' he used to say. 'No gases; no carbon; no oxidisation. Perfect welds and

perfect stones.' But what is all this about mirrors? Every so often you get into this mirror thing. What's the big deal?

LUCA

You remember what you said about the perfect hole in the pyramid?

MEIRA

Yes, I remember what you said.

LUCA

No, no. Do you remember what you said? Over dinner. You said they could have cut the stones with laser light.

MEIRA

So I said it. So what?

LUCA

How do you power lasers without electricity?

LUCA

Luca, I don't know. And Luca, I don't fucking care. Alright? I just want to get out of this shit hole. Alright?

LUCA

Scusimi. I am sorry. Of course we must leave here.

BILL

Actually you are not leaving here - at least not tonight. Depending on the activities of police we can have you on the road sometime tomorrow, certainly by the next day. But tonight, I'm afraid, is very much a lie low night.

EXT. PAVED HIGHWAY SOUTHERN EGYPT – DAY

A Mercedes station wagon travelling south passes a SIGN: in English and Arabic

MALLAWI

Three miles further the Mercedes turns off the main road to travel a short distance to a SIGN: in English and Arabic

AMARNA EXCAVATION SITE
ALL VISITORS PLEASE REPORT TO SIT
OFFICE

INT. INSIDE THE MERCEDES – DAY

Bill is at the wheel, Meira is beside him, Luca in the back. Meira sees the office block thirty metres away. Bill stops the car.

BILL

The coordinator is a Doctor John Johnstone, a Scot, holding a chair at Edinburgh I believe. I'm going to leave you here as I think I can do more to help if I am not directly associated with you at this stage.

Luca turns quickly in surprise, and is about to protest when he catches Meira's eye. The calm acceptance on her face stops him.

MEIRA

(to Bill)

Thank you for all you have done. It'll be a comfort to know you are not far away, and that we can always call you if we run into trouble.

Luca, amazed at her calm manner, looks over to the offices, to the dig site, the desert all around and back to these two people apparently unconcerned at their situation.

BILL

Happily I is able to rescue your luggage from the Hilton. It will be in Mallawi City Hotel under the name of Martin I will leave your description with the porter so there would be no need for identification. If you need me in hurry call this number and ask for Martin. You won't reach me of course - Just say you are calling for Martin, and keep it short.

Luca nods dumbly as Bill drives away. Words failed him.

INT. AMARNA DIG CENTRE – DAY

Luca and Meira explore a spacious reception area lined with temporary bookshelves and a central model of the dig site. Along the walls are photographs of artefacts both in discovery situ and cleaned up and documented. There is a rest area and what appears to be a hairdresser and convenience shop. DOCTOR JOHN JOHNSTONE enters from an adjacent corridor.

JOHNSTONE

You must be Meira and Luca?

(offers his hand)

I'm Johnny Johnstone – please, this way.

They follow him down the corridor to his office.

INT. JOHNSTONES OFFICE – DAY

Meira sees it's humble, but remarkably clean, with a too plain, too old, too clean light oak desk of simple design that cried out for an ink stain, a cup ring, a scribbled note . . . an undisciplined pencil.

JOHNSTONE (CONT'D)

You have an extremely influential friend in Sir William.

He waves them to four, low, plastic covered chairs, freshly wiped, and an equally low, ornate, balsa table complete with engraved brass coasters the edges of which were raised to contain any spillage.

JOHNSTONE (CONT'D)

He has helped us over a few hurdles here I can tell you. Tea?

Meira sees him wave a skeletal hand, the back covered in long, dark, hairs, toward the waiting BEARER. As he sits she notices his knees produce sharp kinks in his khaki trousers and reveal thin, white, ankles and further evidence of his long, dark, body hair.

JOHNSTONE

This site, you are probably not aware, is first commissioned in 1976 by The Museum of Scotland under the auspices of Professor Enwin Johnson – no relation. The theory prevalent at the time is that the pyramids were tombs for royalty. Some, would you believe, still think that they are, but in late '76 tombs were found here – subterranean you understand. Since that time there have been nine other institutions complicit in this site all of which have

contributed to greater and lesser degrees
but it is in Dundee, the very heart of
Scotland, that the first seeds of the real
purpose of the pyramids and the
subsequent development of that, and other
hypothesis, were developed.

Meira's attention wanes under the boring onslaught but is brought
back into focus as the Bearer, in a spotless, white, dishdaha
arrives with the tea. He places an ornate, lacquered, tray of fine,
white, china before them and meticulously sets out cups, saucers,
spoons, sugar, milk . . . his precision matches that of Johnstone's
diction.

JOHNSTONE (O.S)

(as background noise)

A student of Professor Weber, the third I
believe, of the resident chairs, once had the
temerity to question the 'Tomb of Kings'
theory before the Board of The Natural
History Museum in London only to be told
that until she, it is a she, poor child, could
find an alternate location for the sarcophagi
they would, in due deference to her
maturity, leave their conclusion intact.

Tea is poured, the Bearer stands back, checks Johnstone for
instruction then leaves. Meira and Luca sip their tea, Johnstone
waits.

(Beat)

MEIRA

I have some ancient documents. They were
my father's. He died three days ago. I want
to know what they are about before the
Egyptian authorities can get hold of them.

Perhaps there is someone here who could help.

JOHNSTONE

Do the police know about the documents?

MEIRA

Nobody knows but us and Bill.

JOHNSTONE

Bill?

MEIRA

Sir William – he helped us avoid the police.

JOHNSTONE

If Sir William thinks these papers are of value we must investigate and, if the police are interested in you you'd best stay here, on site. We have to keep you and the documents hidden away until we can study them.

Any objections to staying at the site? We have some rooms, facilities – most of us live here. One or two stay in Mallawi, but most of the faculty are here.

INT. RECEPTION AREA OF THE ARMANA SITE – NIGHT

The members of the site are collected to hear of CELIA

ROBINSON'S finding in regard to Meira's documents. Celia is sorting through her carefully prepared notes one more time before standing, and patiently waiting until she has everyone's attention.

CELIA

I'd put it around 260 BC and, even though I initially I leaned heavily toward it being an original Archimedes document, as it is

consistent in style, and content, of copies of the only other work thought to be his, but I've changed my mind. I think it is the work of Conon of Samos, who, many of you will recall, is Archimedes' teacher, and long time mentor.

She pauses to see some heads nod in agreement, others were looking down, as if waiting for something more interesting to happen.

CELIA (CONT'D)

Conon, I believe, is more of a pure mathematician and linguist than Archimedes, and the more likely to have produced such a detailed document. The first part centres around his fascination with basic trigonometry, particularly with parabolas and various conical sections, which Archimedes later developed. The Greeks were afraid, I think, of the Egyptians, who appeared to be that much more advanced, especially with regard to the construction of reflective surfaces. Herodotus, our man at large in the sixth century BCE, comes across more as a Greek spy in this document, which might, to some extent at least, account for the big holes in his writings. His reports on what he saw and heard in Egypt are full of hints in regard to things of which he cannot speak – religious, and, or, military secrets of the time. Same stuff as today. There is nothing like holy mumbo jumbo, or the official secrets act, to keep people in the dark. What I am looking for in particular are plans, or instructions, on how they constructed their parabolic mirrors. That seems to have been the great secret of the time. There are plenty of references to the use of mirrors, in shields and helmets, to

blind the enemy, in the smelting of iron, copper, and zinc, and the production of alloys to make weapons. Bear in mind these folks had no combustible fuel other than a little palm oil, dried reeds, and some wood. Certainly not enough to make steel, or synthesise stones such as those you have been examining. My guess is that they could manufacture damn good parabolic mirrors and use them to melt metals.

LUCA

Could they melt stone, do you think?

CELIA

Almost certainly. It may explain how they cut the blocks for the pyramids. How did any of the ancient civilizations cut those stones so accurately? What we don't know is how they made the tools with which to cut. More precisely, we don't know how they constructed practical parabolic mirrors. Archimedes doesn't tell us, Herodotus won't tell us, Diocles keeps us in the dark. Perhaps Conon will tell us.

MEIRA

Maybe it is the authorities through the ages that kept us in the dark. Maybe they still are keeping us in the dark. Maybe it is why my father is killed.

Meira searches the faces for a hint as to their reactions. Their eyes were lowered; she had struck a familiar chord. For a few seconds everyone is quiet before Celia brakes the silence.

CELIA

I am hoping that your documents will tell us more than anything we have found so far,

Meira, but I need time. We have to keep this to ourselves until I can get all the way through.

JOHNSTONE

Do you need help.

CELIA

No. No, Meira is all the help I need. Her Greek is excellent for this work.

(to Meira)

If your father taught you, he prepared you well for this, but I do need time - a couple of weeks at least.

MEIRA

I think some practical testing might be useful. If Luca could have access to the workshop, we might speed up the results.

Johnstone nods in agreement.

INT. JOHNSTONE'S OFFICE – DAY

Johnstone settles at his desk, carefully centres a notepad and writes. He reviews his notes then picks up the phone – dials.

INT. RECEPTION AREA OF THE MINISTRY OF THE INTERIOR - DAY

Colonel Zadok ignores the stern receptionist - without a glance in the man's direction he strides purposefully past his high podium, straight up the great stone stairway to the first floor, and turns smartly left. Before he had gone half way down the polished corridor a door flew open, and Aziz hurriedly steps out.

AZIZ

So good of you to come Colonel. I would have come to you of course, but Assistant Minister Doumani Bashir asked that we attend to him in his office.

Zadok hardly brakes his stride as he continued to the end of the corridor, and through the twelve foot, double, doors to the Assistant Minister's outer office.

INT. DOUMANI'S OUTER OFFICE – DAY

A startled SECRETARY stands, straightens his tie at the sight of the Colonel, then scurries into the assistant minister's inner office. Doumani appeared almost immediately: his suit buttoned; his tie in an immaculate knot; his shoes bright against the rich colours of the carpet.

DOUMANI

Colonel,

(bows – offers hand)

Good of you to come so soon. A delicate matter, it requires our personal attention.

(to Aziz)

Thank you Aziz.

INNER OFFICE

Initial courtesies exchanged, coffee served Zadok sits on the long sofa sipping from a tiny cup. Doumani sits in a deep armchair at right angles to the sofa.

DOUMANI

There have, I believe, been two brutal murders in the last twenty-four hours.

Zadok nodded in assent.

DOUMANI (CONT'D)

And you are currently hunting down two young foreigners, neither of which you believe to have committed either crime, but who are, nevertheless, fugitives from your custody.

ZADOK

You are well informed assistant minister.

DOUMANI

The minister is well informed Colonel, I am merely his instrument.

(bow to each other)

Perhaps you would be kind enough to update me on the state of your enquiries, and what the minister may expect from your office in the immediate future.

ZADOK

What appeared as nothing more than a hotel room burglary is now a double murder enquiry. The connection between the two events has yet to be established but the young woman, Meira McMahon, is at the scene of all three crimes so you can be sure we are monitoring road, sea, and air transport as well as cafes and hotels.

DOUMANI

Tourism, and the facilities we afford academics from around the world, contribute much to the nation's economy. In order to preserve that situation there are, as I am sure you are aware, policies in force that closely guard and control the information available to other nations in regard to our Egyptian heritage.

(pause)

It is here, in the Ministry of the Interior, that those policies are upheld Colonel, and it

falls to me to ensure that remains the case. The brutal murder of Hessnie Mazou will go unnoticed outside of Egypt Colonel, indeed it is hardly noticed inside the country, as is the death of the taxi driver. However news of similar murders of foreign nationals would have drawn unwelcome, bad for tourism, attention.

(pause)

Do you have any personal ideas as to who, or what, is behind the murders, Colonel?

ZADOK

Professional murders, both of them, a trained operative. Hessnie Mazou had a police file in five countries, but no convictions – not even an arrest. A number of organizations were interested in him. I is hoping to learn more from his daughter about his recent activities.

DOUMANI

And the taxi driver?

ZADOK

He may have seen something, or it may have been a message between organizations, or both. A thorough interrogation of the daughter and the Italian will certainly help in establishing who is involved.

DOUMANI

Who do you think is involved?

ZADOK

She is under the guardianship of the British Government.

DOUMANI

Well they are suitably embarrassed now. So I think we will hear little from them should anything unfortunate happen to those particular citizens in the near future.

Indeed it strikes me that the British can be counted on to help fend off enquiries from both the Australians, and the Italians, should the need arise.

ZZADOK

Can I take it that the minister would prefer the fugitives to be in custody as soon as possible?

DOUMANI

You may take it Colonel, that the minister would prefer that the two people concerned be prevented from making enquiries into either deaths, anything related to Egyptian antiquities, or the activities of Hessnie Mazou. The minister would prefer never to hear of them again, but if he does, he would prefer to hear that they are no longer a problem.

OUTER OFFICE

Aziz is on the phone and writing notes.

AZIZ

(into phone)

Yes Professor, that is most helpful. You can be sure the Minister will be kept informed.

EXT. AMARNA SITE – DAY

Meira and Celia Robinson are walking the perimeter of the dig site.

CELIA

I'm here on university funding Meira, so I feel obliged to justify our isolation to some extent. Do you have any objections.

MEIRA

A verbal report at this stage would be good I think. It might raise questions we have not asked ourselves. Besides we are in danger of becoming dusty old spinsters if we don't socialise a little. Perhaps we should have dinner with the rest of the gang tonight.

CELIA

Better, I think, to announce our intention to prepare dinner and a presentation for tomorrow night. That'll give us time to think through what we have so far, and work up a presentation. Can you cook? Could you come up with something more interesting than the café food?

MEIRA

I would love to cook and it would give us reason to dress up, shake off the dust.

INT. RECEPTION AREA OF ARMANA DIG SITE – NIGHT

Celia stands and looks around the long, makeshift, table - a primitive construction of saw horses and planks removed from the dig and covered with a white cotton sheets. Either side of Professor Johnstone and DOCTOR MCGOWAN is DR. JEAN PIONTIER from the University of Nice, and a PROFESSOR MERRILL JAMESON from the Massachusetts Institute of Technology. Each of them have their own RESEARCHERS.

Rice grains, sauce and wine stains tell the tale of a meal totally demolished by the diners. Not a scrap remains.

CELIA

I am sure you would all join me in thanking Meira for orchestrating the wonderful dinner we have just unashamedly scoffed - look at the mess you have made of our beautiful table cloths.

Cheers and a spontaneous applause as Meira rises - hold her hands before her in prayer fashion and bobbs a curtsey. Professor Johnstone rises

JOHNSTONE

Yes, a hearty thank you Meira. It is a wonderful meal, and let me say thank you for being among us in our dull and dusty work. You not only add additional beauty and grace to our humble offices you add spectacle and light.

More applause, more cheers, happy faces.

Johnstone sits. All eyes on Celia as she fusses with the cloth and napkin – gathering herself

CELIA

I think I have to sit down for this.

More nervous laughter as she arranges herself in her seat, smooth's the cloth again

CELIA (CONT'D)

I think we have a ringer. I think we have a tenth, or eleventh, century monk who is a maverick. I think we might have found an honest man, one who told it as it really is.

(pause)

I think we might have an account of 'On Burning Mirrors' that actually deals with the construction of practical parabolic mirrors. I think we might soon be able to answer

some of the tougher questions we have been wrestling with for as long as I have been involved in this kind of research, and

(pause)

and, I think we might have an account from Herodotus' Histories that escaped the censorship of the medieval churches.

Johnstone is gnawing on a knuckle, as if transfixed. McGowan is staring, his eyes narrowed. Others are blank, attentive, but betraying no emotion. Luca's eyes are darting about the room, his excitement barely contained.

LUCA

Mi scusi Professore. Se non le dispiace.

(gulp)

My English, I'm sorry. I forget when I am excited. I think not everyone here understands the importance of historic documents that have not been copied in the approved manner of the medieval church. Perhaps we need to explain.

CELIA

Okay, just a quick review.

The Church of Rome, is just that. A Christian church created in a pagan city to accommodate the Christians, a still increasingly popular movement 300 years after the death of Jesus. It is Emperor Constantine's way of controlling a rapidly popularising faith.

Why would a pagan create a Christian church?

To maintain control: he wanted to write the history books; he wanted the Bible written just as he wanted it.

(pause – check reactions)

Look at what happened in Mecca, the central city of the Arabs, when the

administration failed to contain Mohammed. He went to Medin, found himself a huge support group - for pretty much the same philosophy as the Jews and Christians in that there is only one true God, and that thou shalt not worship any other for fear of being cast in the fires of hell. He also wrote his own manual, the Koran, or, as he was illiterate, had someone write it for him, and then he waged a war that swept across the three continents creating what was the largest empire to date - all in less than a hundred years. How did they do that? How did a small group of Arabs, admittedly fired into unity by religious fervour, come to dominate the known world from India, to Spain.”?

(pause for reactions)

Could it be that Moslems knew some things the Christians, Pagans, and Jews had forgotten? Were they using burning mirrors to destroy Mediterranean fleets? Could they vanquish a massed army using reflective shields and swords made from the finest steel solar furnaces could produce?

MCGOWAN

Speculation. There is no evidence to suggest the Moslem Arabs used solar weapons, or even used the Sun to satisfy their domestic needs.

CELIA

You're right. Sorry I get carried away on this subject at the drop of a hat. We only know what we are told, and what we see. As far as we can see the ancients never had practical solar weapons, or furnaces, but they did have steel, and they did cut large stones extremely accurately. Which leaves us short a few answers, and I'll tell you this - I can't wait to get back to Meira's

documents because I think at least some of those answers are in there.

(pause drink)

To return to the Christian movement. Constantine is thorough. He created a Christ born not of man, but of God. The advantage of such a man is that he would have no royal lineage; he could not be traced back to a powerful family. He had no wife. He had Mary Magdalene and her followers, who Constantine carefully implied were whores so she could have no honourable family behind her, and he created the manual to perfectly suit a central administration, which in this case is based in Rome. Bear in mind that the Christian movement had more than thirty gospels at the time, but only thirteen made it to the bible according to the Church of Rome, and only in the Church of Rome could you find sanctification, or at least enforceable sanctification. So for Christians it is a case of join us and flourish, or remain outside and wither. The Jews did not buy into it, and in consequence withered – not for the first, or last time.

(pause)

The pagans were strong in and around the Roman Empire, weaker and scattered outside of it. Consequently the outer reaches were quickly overrun when Mohammed's followers broke out of lower Arabia in the seventh century, the rest falling as Rome fell. From then on we were more or less constantly at war. When cities and kings stopped squabbling, there is always the crusades, and what better way to rape and pillage than in the religious fervour of the crusades? Talk about burning books, these Christian zealots gathered both the Pagan and Moslem tracts of all kinds, and then re-wrote world history according to the church of the time.

(pause)

So you see there is very little in recorded history that is devoid of administrative doctoring. Everything from the Gilgamesh to the Saint James Bible is a product of man's ambitions of the time.

JOHNSTONE

There is always the Koran.

CELIA

There is, but that, as any good Moslem with tell you, was written by God.

MEIRA

So - If I understand you, my father found some relatively un-doctored tracts, Conon's in this case, and learned some of the secrets obliterated by the church.

JOHNSTONE

Secrets indeed. Those with the knowledge to make superior weapons could win wars, so solar technology had to be kept secret.

MEIRA

Had to be?

Surely once everyone understood the technology it is no longer limited to making weapons. It could be used to sustain communities. Like nuclear power?

LUCA

A good example. Look how many countries are moving away from nuclear power because of the dangers of a leak, or a meltdown. Too many. Too many made scared by people who do not tell the full story. Nuclear power is pretty good now. There are plenty of nuclear weapons out there. There is strong evidence that the Americans used them in Afghanistan, but little countries that use nuclear power are

threatened by the Americans because, they say, they might make bombs. Huh - look who is making bombs, and using them. Huh, secrets. Secrets and lies, it is how priests and politicians have always kept control. We seem to have learned nothing.

JOHNSTONE

And continue to do it - and will always do it while there is money to be made and power to be brokered.

MEIRA

What of Histories, the Herodotus stuff? Would the church have changed his text?

CELIA

They might, or it might have been the Greek military leaders. Bear in mind anything that came back to Greece is subject to military, or religious, censorship. War is the major industry, and the Egyptians were the leaders in scientific, as well as cultural affairs at the time. Travellers such as Herodotus would be closely vetted, and interrogated on return. You can bet your buns ordinary folks in the street were not going to hear of his adventures before the military had extracted every little detail.

She pours the last of the wine into hers and Meira's glasses.

CELIA

It's likely of course that the Egyptians at that time were aware of the danger of the Greeks and Phoenicians, both of whom had powerful military machines, and would have kept Herodotus from technically sensitive areas. Chances are it was a little of each, we will probably never know, but the few sections of Herodotus I have

translated here, are different from those of Aubrey de Sélincourt and George Rawlinson, two respected translators, even allowing for the introductions, and the so called 'comments' of modern advocates. So I am hopeful of something new, and I want to get on with it.

JOHNSTONE

So you shall Celia, and please, call on any of us to help where we can. Clearly these papers could be of great significance.

(standing)

I know I have no need to impress on all of you here the need for absolute secrecy at this stage. Please keep in mind that should the local authorities get wind of any historically significant material found in Egypt, they would impound them without compunction. It takes little imagination to realize that as our knowledge grows, we too could be impounded. Incarceration, even on only a temporary basis, could be most uncomfortable.

MEIRA

A temporary basis Doctor Johnstone?
My father was brutally murdered for this information. That's hardly temporary.

EXT. MALAWI CITY HOTEL – NIGHT

Bill is carrying an overnight bag and a briefcase as he enters the hotel.

INT. HOTEL THIRD FLOOR CORRIDOR – NIGHT

Bill pauses by the emergency exit. He opens the door to allow a black cat to exit but the door flies inward and Thor's huge hand reaches his neck pulling him in and down. He crashes headlong down the concrete steps.

INT. ARMANA, LUCA'S ROOM – NIGHT

Meira enters, climbs into bed, on top of him: They silently get the action under way.

LATER

Meira laying back on her pillow – eyes wide.

MEIRA

Tell me about the excavations here, Luca.
Tell me what you see out there, what you
think you can learn from this place to help
you in your researches.

LUCA

(beat)

(beat)

This city was built relatively quickly, in less than four years. Many of the buildings were without roofs to allow the Sun god in, which had the advantage of lighter construction all around. Instead of the traditional large stone blocks they used smaller blocks, manageable by one or two men. The buildings went up easily, and of course were taken down just as easily. Most of it was removed, used for new buildings in Thebes when Akhenaten's time was over, but plenty remains – there are over 350

letters of a diplomatic nature beautifully engraved on precision cut tablets still in good condition.

MEIRA

Is it an important site do you think? What do like about it the most?

LUCA

It is just one more marker, one more indelible marker along the trail that is the real history of mankind. I was excited when I first saw it, it has special – unique, I think – features, and it seems it was a set back for the bad boys – only a momentary one, only a second or so in the great scheme of things, for the leaders, or deceivers, of the times - because it leaned towards women as the controlling force, as, I think, they were in the pre-dynastic times.

(beat)

Always we are seeing this suppression of the female: in the creation of the Catholic Church; in Islam; in the Church of England – but not with the Hebrews, no, no, you cannot suppress a Jewish mother.

He grins enormously and kisses her on the forehead as if he thought of her as a Jewish mother.

MEIRA

It's almost as if women have been seen as a threat to our developments since six thousand BCE. I would love to know of earlier times, of the Celts, or the people who built things like Stonehenge: the Sun worshipers.

He sits, turns to look at her, his eyes busy.

LUCA

Ah the Celts, true Sun people. Hieroglyphs and inscriptions are full of solar symbols, discs mostly. They are everywhere – here in Amarna, on the head of Aken, in Luxor on the head of Isis. She has two images, one with a disc, the other a disc with what looks like a water jar in front of it. Is that a symbol of water purification? Did they use discs, mirrors for water purification? And in Peru, at Cusco, where the remains of The Temple of the Sun can be seen in the church and monastery of Santa Domingo - is that another example of the Catholics attempting to obliterate the evidence of a superior technology? The Great Sun Disc of Mu, which used to be on top of the granite walls is supposed to be in the Lake now, and in India, where, in the Vedic period, the Sun was the ancient ancestor of the human race. On a stele there the Sun god images are shown with solar discs on either side of their heads. Even the Persians, in their pictures of Cyrus the Great, have solar discs in his headdress. They are everywhere, these solar discs. They are mirrors I think. Everyone knew about the power of the Sun in ancient times, and mirrors were their fuel. Everyone but the Hebrews.

INT. BASEMENT OF MALAWI CITY HOTEL – DAY

Bill, knees bent, lies on the dirty floor in the dim light filtering through the upper casement windows. He's bruised, dirty, and trusted with rope around his ankles that extends to his throat. He blinks several times, his eyes flickering as he assesses his predicament. He tries to straighten his legs but nearly chokes as

the action tightens the rope around his neck. He blinks again, his eyes still as he thinks.

He draws his legs closer to ease the rope – his eyes pop under the strain. He shuffles under extreme discomfort eventually stopping, easing the rope, his eyes close in submission.