

7. THE MUMMY'S CURSE

The plane ride is simply interminable. Estelle flies into Barcelona and then she has a connecting flight to Cairo. On the first leg of the journey, serious turbulence makes it difficult to sleep. Her stomach is a little upset. She passes into Barcelona in the early morning. She is still groggy. As she walks, she notices that she is wobbling a little. Then she has to put up with the long lines at immigration. She is making a connecting flight. For almost an hour she has to wait for her luggage. There is this harshness to the experience that is only compounded by the stark light that fills the airport.

When she finally gets on the flight to Cairo, she tries to relax. She closes her eyes and imagines that she is lying down in gentle field of clover. For the time being, she wonders why she didn't remain in her native Georgia. This trip seems like sheer madness. When the plane touches down smoothly, she prays that the worst is behind her.

Estelle is hardly prepared for the sprawling metropolis that is Cairo. She has one goal and one goal only, to find Dan. But for the time being, even that lofty purpose has been superseded by her desire to get to her hotel bed and just sleep. As fortune would have it, her cab driver gets lost. This seems incredible. She has plotted the ride from the airport to the hotel. She doesn't even know Cairo, and she feels that she could have driven the distance herself. But now she is lost in no man's land. Kids are begging in the streets. Ramshackle tenements are everywhere. She imagines rats nesting throughout in all the rooms. She is only thankful that they are not passing through at night.

Estelle has heard rumors about passengers in third class trains hanging from the luggage racks. Now she is getting a glimpse of that same reality. They can tell that she is an American, and they seem to be beckoning to her for something, anything to offer rescue from their lot. She feels helpless. She is already drained from the train ride. She is ready to scream.

Her driver is almost as disoriented as she is. This only makes her predicament worse. She imagines the locals dismantling her taxi while she is still inside. She holds on to her clothes as the sole hope of protecting her against the throng. Her fears are somewhat exaggerated. But that doesn't stop them from escalating. She imagines strange hands running up and down her body. With the teeming masses around her, she can barely see the road. Somehow the drive is able to keep pushing ahead, but for her, the passage seems interminable. The afternoon light passes into a pitch black darkness. The unusual music and the roar of the crowd add to her horror.

Somehow the driver maneuvers through the narrow street. By wits alone, he is able to weave a path to the main thoroughfare. There, she is in a more familiar world. Lines of luxury condos are interspersed with financial institutions. She even recognizes company names that are familiar to her in the States. Once she sees the giant logo of her hotel, she feels that she is in heaven. At this point, she might as well be in downtown Washington DC, rather than in the heart of Cairo.

The hotel staff are the ultimate in politeness. She's visited Las Vegas before and been subject to the assembly line treatment that guests are afforded there. But in Cairo, there is none of that. She is an American princess accepted into their midst. For the moment the journey in the poverty of Cairo is only a vague memory. She works to accommodate herself to the apparent

luxury that now surrounds her.

It is a warm day in Cairo, but the air conditioner in her room keep the environment perfect. She pretends that she is back in the safely-protected world of her apartment. She does everything that she can to make the room her own. She hangs up her clothes. She spreads her toiletries on the dresser. After undressing and turning down the covers, she sprawls in the bed. Sleep is almost immediate.

While awake her cab ride had faded into the distance. But in dreams, it now assumes a more ominous form. The hands reaching out for the cab are now replaced by snakes. They are running all over her body. As they slither along her skin, Estelle cringes. She wants to scream out, but she feels that something is gripping her throat. Her whole body rocks on the bed. She can feel something shaking her. The assassin's knife runs it path along her neck. She is ready for it to plunge in her. Then she jumps. It is nighttime. She is awake.

From outside her window, there is the flashing of neon. It takes her a few minutes to realize where she is. Estelle turns on a light. She checks the time. It's 3 in the morning. She can hardly leave the hotel at this time. She checks the TV to no satisfaction. Then she pulls out a book and reads for a while.

Her reading only reminds her that she is still tired. Even with her long nap, she has hardly tapped the fatigue that has drained her body for the last couple of days. She wants to be well rested for tomorrow. When she settles back on her pillow, she hope the disquiet of earlier has finally subsided.

After a long shower, Estelle is now ready for life. She dresses in something light and practical. Then she heads for breakfast in the dining. A wonderful buffet awaits her. It is a mix of local and European cuisine. She gets the first boost of the day with some strong coffee. She feels as if she is prepared ready to take on the world.

Dan's first letters had come from the corporate office in Cairo. He gave her the impression that he was working in the city. She plans to head over there to see if he is still there. He will be surprised when she shows up unannounced. She thinks about everything that she's gone through just to be with him. At this moment, it all seems worth it.

The taxi ride seems uneventful. There is not even any of the haggling about price that she has heard about. She passes some of the same businesses that she saw yesterday. Now, her inquisitiveness seems to be inspiring her. Still she is afraid to venture off the beaten path.

When she gets to the office complex, the door man asks her where she is going. Consolidated Mining and Construction is on the third floor. She is a little apprehensive walking to the elevator. She had been so clear about her purpose while at the hotel room. Even during the taxi ride, she had no misgivings. But now this wave of fear hits her like a brick wall. She works to brace herself. It isn't as if she asked him if this was OK. She is just showing up. This could be on of the biggest mistakes of her life.

She looks at herself in the elevator mirror. She is looking pale. Even with her time to recover, the trip has taken a lot out of her. When she gets out of the elevator, she sees the company name stenciled on glass. But she is afraid to go in right away. She turns to her left in the hope of finding a washroom.

She has eaten a good breakfast. Everything seemed perfect at the breakfast table. But now her jitters are giving her butterflies. Her stomach feels light. She can almost feel the room

spinning. She concentrates by staring at herself in the bathroom mirror. Then she splashes some cold water on her face. She wonders if she is now ready to face him.

If yesterday she was walking shakily, she has again adopted that uncertain pose. She finds that she is holding herself up by the walls. She can't faint here.

Estelle opens her purse and takes a sip from the bottled water that she brought with her. It can't be all that bad. She pushes open the door and is met by a blast of sunlight. She shields her eyes. She again runs her fingers through her blonde locks.

As she pulls on the wood handle of the glass door, she feels that she is accepting her fate whatever it might be. She has come half-way around the world to be with her man.

Estelle tells the receptionist, "I'm here to see Dan Reese."

The receptionist takes one look at her. Then she tells her that she will be back in moment. Estelle finds this unusual. Why didn't she just call Dan on the phone?

After a few minutes, she comes back. "Who should say is her to see Mr. Reese?"

"I'm Estelle Parker. I'm his fiancée."

The receptionist disappears again. Estelle wonders if Dan is hiding from her. Or maybe the firm has spirited him off somewhere. Worse, he may be dead. Estelle has this hollow feeling. Finally the receptionist comes back.

"I'm sorry that I took so long," she tells Estelle. "The problem is that Dan is supposed to be on site. But he also has some time off. So they were going to drive down there and take in some of the sights along the way. It's a long way down there. Usually people fly."

"How far?"

"Over 900 kilometers away." She tries to calculate that back to miles, about 500 miles. The receptionist continues, "He should be on site in a week. You could try meeting him along the way."

"You said they?" Estelle wonders.

"He went with two of the other engineers from the office. They were trying to reach him on his cell. He'll be unavailable until Friday."

Estelle breathes easier. She had suspicions that he may have headed there with a woman.

The receptionist adds, "I can give you the number and address of the office in Aswan."

Estelle thanks the woman. At this point, she has no point but to go back to the hotel. She is starting to believe that she did a really stupid thing. She used her savings and borrowed money to come here. Now she has no idea where Dan is.

She considers her options. She could wait until later in the week and fly out to Aswan. But then she feels stuck in the hotel room. Life is going on outside her window, and she is only seeing it behind glass. She could be really foolish and venture off in the hope of catching up with Dan. She hardly knows where to start. All her fears of personal injury are again coming to life. She glances at her golden hair as the sunlight plays upon it in the mirror. Just looking at herself, she is convinced that she's the perfect candidate for some kind of harassment. Wouldn't a cute naive blonde pay big bucks on the black market? She can just imagine the leash around her neck as they haul her off to a dungeon somewhere.

She feels as if she is being stupid. After all, Estelle is a modern woman. She is independent. She can make decisions for herself. A man leading her around is the last thing that she needs. If she wants to go to Aswan on her own, then that is just what she needs to do.

When she shares her dilemma with the concierge, he recognizes her confusion. Many a trip has been ruined by a disreputable travel guide. He knows someone who can take her down the Nile without taking her down the river.

After the concierge tells Estelle that he can help, she smiles. Maybe it won't be that bad after all. He tells her to wait in her room, and he'll make all the arrangements.

He says, "I have to make a few phone calls. I want to make sure this is a good time for the trip. But I think that I can promise you the whole package of sightseeing. And it will be in a totally casual situation."

It sounds too good to be true. In about an hour, he calls her room. His friend runs a service independently. Estelle will be sharing a Range Rover with the driver and three other travelers. They'll also be arrangements for hotel stays and everything. Estelle is more than a little excited. Even if she doesn't find Dan, this will be the experience of a lifetime.

The concierge tells her, "There will be stops at the Great Pyramids in Gheza and also at the older pyramid Saraqqa in Memphis. The open museum in Memphis is definitely a highlight."

The concierge details the price and the overall itinerary. She makes notes on it all. She is supposed to meet the driver early the next day.

The concierge repeats, "It is important to get to the Great Pyramids early. They only let in about 200 people. You want to guarantee that you are one of the first. Omar will be here at 6 AM. Be down ready to go. I'll make sure that the kitchen boxes a breakfast for you to go."

The concierge is taking such good care of her. She hopes that she won't have to face any problems. He want to offer her some peace of mind so that she doesn't have to bargain with a tour guide on the best price

Estelle is full of a crazy excitement. She is unsure of what to expect. She realizes that there is great mystery ahead. At first, sleep comes slowly. She tosses and turns. What if Dan doesn't want her to show up? What if she gets sick along the way? Her questions only multiply her insecurities. But at this point, it is too late to turn back. It is early, and she eventually settle in to restful night. She awakens at 5 for a quick shower and time to back. She is unsure what is next.

She makes it to the lobby around ten to 6. The concierge has her breakfast ready for her. Omar is to arrive shortly.

She imagines Omar to be an older man, perhaps hunched over trying to lead her down the path of destruction. In fact, he has the rugged charm of a tennis pro or a motorcycle racer. He wears sunglasses and a tight shirt that hugs his muscular frame. He is conversant in American and European ways. But his first allegiance is to his Islamic heritage and his ancient Egyptian mysticism. Although his mannerisms are friendly, he makes no secret about basic suspicions about all visitors to his native land.

She is overcome by his politeness. At the same time, she is prepared for whatever might follow. Rex and Yvonne are from England. They have never been to Egypt before. But they have dreams of trying to do it all. Libby is an older American woman. Her husband died a couple of years ago. Since then, she has officially dubbed herself a world traveler.

The ride to the Great Pyramids is fairly uneventful. Omar has made sure that the windows are closed and the air conditioner is blasting. Since the doors are locked, none of the street guides can hop in and try to deal for the most exotic tour available. They are in good hands

with Omar.

Omar is knowledgeable. But he also like to let his clients browse on their own. He offers nuggets of information. His fundamental intent is to set the mood.

By the time that they can see the Sphinx, Estelle is starting to lose it. She originally had not come to Egypt to sight see. Suddenly she has been thrust into a place that has such a mystical resonance. This goes way beyond things that she's seen in geography books. The sheer immensity of the sights is breathtaking. She can feel her whole being awoken to the experience. She feels that she is on the verge of some kind of change in her life. Everything around her is coming to life.

It is early. But they have been riding in the air conditioned SUV. No one has noticed the heat. It is slowly starting to penetrate the air. For Estelle, it is that impression at the back of her mind that is haunting her.

When she walks around the grounds, she feels dwarfed by the immensity of these structures. She feel that she in the presence of a force so much greater than herself. For the moment she embraces it.

The line starts slowly. But before she knows it, it has already filled up. Estelle and her crew are one of the first ready to go. She is eager to file into the pyramid of Cheops. She has no second thoughts about jumping into the experience. It is almost as if she feels herself being carried along the necessary path of destiny.

The day has been so bright. Reflecting off the sand, the sun has been blinding. Even so early in the day, she can feel the power of a furnace starting up. Once she is admitted in the pyramid, she is struck by the darkness. She feels as if it takes forever for her to accustom herself to the faint indoor light.

As she passes through the ascending passage, Estelle feels enclosed by narrow walls. She is just trying to brace herself for the walk. She has never known the feelings of intense emptiness and longing that she experiences in the King's Chamber. This is so much deeper than her desire for Dan. She can sense a force pulling on her with such intensity that it tears at her being. She looks for her party. There are people around her, but she feels so alone.

At the empty coffer she is struck by something even more awe-inspiring. Already the closed-in space made her feel in the presence of some ancient power. Now, she experiences this force as a total absence. It is as if all her life she has never been worthy for this perfect moment of salvation. She is taken aback by the honesty of the experience. It makes no sense to her.

When she passes back to the Queen's Chamber, the very grandness of the scale is crushing. It is no longer something that she can even grasp with her mind. Something is happening to her that is so upsetting to her psyche. She can almost feel this quaking from inside.

From the moment that she enters pyramid, she feels light-heads. She is overcome by a penetrating vapor that she can only attribute to the permanent smell of death. In a weaker form, she has noticed that same odor from the moment that she disembarked in Cairo. The airport and the European hotels have done everything that they can to disinfect that smell. But that pungent aroma fills the air throughout the country. It is almost distilled in the perfumes that adorn the women.

Omar find her separated from her party. He catches up to her just as she seems to lose consciousness. He does what he can to revive her. In her confusing way, she tries to explain

herself. A ghost has passed through her.

“You have these strange ideas about us from silly movies. They are the farthest thing from the truth.”

She looks up at him. She mumbles something incomprehensible.

Omar hardly seems understanding about the matter, “Even after all this time in Egypt, you have never really worked to overcome your prejudices”.

Estelle feels insulted that he would question her judgment. She sneers at him. After his admonition, he doesn't want to draw attention to her rudeness. He understands that he cannot reason with her. Only time and experience might influence her to change her mind.

Omar gathers the rest of the party and rushes to the car. It is very hot outside. But he feels that the air-conditioning of the car might be sufficient to make her feel better. For the time being, his prescription seems to work. They open up the seat so that she can recline as he drives away. He is a little afraid that the movement of the car might disrupt her. But she hardly notices the shaking after they are underway. Prone and under the affects of the cooling air, she can feel herself come around.

Libby also admits, “The air in there was getting to me too.”

After a little while she tries to sit up. She again reflects on the feeling that she had in the pyramid. She can feel the walls closing in on her. It is this feeling that she will never escape from this place. Eventually, the pyramid will seal her within its catacomb, and she will permanently become its prisoner.

For her there is something that remains unexplained for her about her journey. It is as if there is time missing. She is convinced that something bizarre happened to her while she was unconscious. Omar continues to maintain that she was out for a few minutes at the most. But she suspects that it has been for a longer period. She does everything that she can to try to reconstruct her experience.

When she tries to piece together the event, she senses a strange remoteness like shadow puppets being projected on the wall. The shadows whirl around until everything becomes entangled. She is watching it while all the time being part of it at the same time. As the action becomes more frenzied, she can feel personal peril to herself. With each replaying of the scene, she embellishes it with more and more detail; she is coloring an extravagant relief.

Even while her psyche remains clouded, her hand remains sure in constructing the mural. She feels part of an ancient history. At the same time, the events seem close to her and immediately affecting.

Originally the group had plans to do some sight-seeing in Memphis and drive on to Al Fayyum. Due to Estelle's discomfort, they postpone their excursion. They decide to stay in Memphis until the next morning. They go immediately to a hotel. This may be an added expense, but they have the time to rest, and it seems best under the circumstances.

For Estelle, the chance to lie down in a bed is a welcome experience. Her head is still swirling. If they had been in for a long drive, she would have passed out.

Their hotel is quite different from the European hotel where she stayed in Cairo. It is cooled through a series of fans. It is comfortable. But there is the same heaviness to the air that she has felt since she left Cairo. As she starts to sleep, she almost feels as if she is back in the pyramid. Now there is a strangeness to her experience. It is almost as if this is how things were

meant to be. She is returning to her rightful home. There is no way to revive herself from this dream. It is so bizarre how real it all seems.

When she fades into this dream, there is something more and more unnatural about what is happening. It is almost part of a ritual. She imagines that lies with a lover. She is sure that she is being kissed. She gives in to the phantom-like passion. As the night passes over her, the feeling becomes concentrated. The rhythms roll over her as waves in the night breezes.

Estelle wants to get up. She wants to separate herself from whatever is occurring around her. She finds it impossible to move. She surrenders herself to these feeling. She has felt this magic before when she was with Dan. But this is fiercer and all the more appealing. She is also sickened by it. She wishes that she could erase all of it from her mind. It is just so much part of her being.

When she wakes up the next day, she is convinced that something has actually gone on in her room while she was asleep. She even suspects that Omar had been wandering around her room. She looks around for some sign to confirm her suspicions.

When she sees Omar at breakfast, she claims, "The lock was broken on my door."

"There was a reasonable explanation for that. The maid said that she has to get in and she had left her keys in the room by mistake."

She believes that the maid conveniently came up the explanation to cover Omar's tracks."

Omar tells her, "You just don't trust anyone who's different than you are. I don't even know why you wanted to come here." Tears are starting to fill her eyes.

Omar is rejecting her version of events in a way that doesn't even allow her a comeback. She feels hurt. She has come here to find her true love. Now she is embroiled in this mystery that is challenging the heart of her soul.

Even though her night was restless, Estelle slept for a long time. On the other hand, Rex and Yvonne seem animated this morning. And Libby is very quiet, even though she has had a relaxing night. Once Omar gathers everyone together, they drive over to the Saqqara.

There is a feeling of awe that surrounds their visit to Saqqara. It is very different than the experience at Gheza. At Gheza, Estelle had felt this presence that seemed to come from without. Now there is something that seems to echo from within. There is more a feeling of acceptance. She walks around the Step Pyramid of Djoser. She is struck by its rudimentary form. There was a conflict that affected her at Gheza. This place seems to explain the origins of her resistance. She almost feels that she has returned to her rightful home. In a way, this realization is even more frightening. It suggests that her life up to this point has only been a distraction from her real origins.

Last night, she had felt violated by the strange ritual. Here she seems to be joyfully involved in the experience. This feeling becomes more enhanced once they move to Serapeum. As they walk through the underground corridors, she can sense a life-force emerging from within. There are no second thoughts about her experience. She finds it completely glorious.

Estelle is starting to question all her experiences before this awakening. How did she live without this power flowing through her veins. It seems so much more exhilarating than a workout could ever be. She starts to recognize her guilt from the night before as rooted in her denial of her true nature. Once she embraces this power, she no longer feels the resistance.

It is still early when they finish their excursion at the site. They start the drive to Al

Fayyum. As the day wears on there is a sudden transformation of Estelle. In the morning, she had welcomed the experience at Saqqara. In the heat of the day, she again feels the unease of the previous night. She is withdrawing into herself. As she does, all her frustrations of the day before reappear.

When they reach the hotel, she retires to her room. She comes down briefly for dinner. Then she retreats back to the room. She is able to sleep soundly.

The next morning, she is a little more friendly. But she is still reserved. In the car she thinks back to the open museum of Memphis. She recalls the massive sculpture of Ramses II that is lying down flat. It is as if she is seeking an explanation to all her recent troubles. There is an intent in the museums to classify and give order to the surrounding phenomenon. But when she actually experiences the sites of magnificence, she is touched by a knowledge that cannot be communicated by the archeologist. Her knowledge seems first hand. She does not simply walk where the ancients have walked and see the traces of their lives. She becomes part of their experience.

She can feel the conflict within in her. This is greater than any of the turmoil that she first felt about Dan. Even when she resolved that split, she still felt in control of the feeling. But is something so much more immense. It is like the feeling that she had when she first looked up at the Great Pyramids. It is massive, but it is so simple in its clarity. She welcomes this architecture.

The next stop is Asyut. They make it to the hotel in time to take in the beautiful sunset from the hotel courtyard. Estelle is sitting at a table with Omar For once her icy exterior seems to be melting. She feels a little giddy. They are sitting together watching the sunset over the Nile. The sun is a red fireball that reflects off the waters. Everywhere the waters are a crimson red. A sail boat comes into view. One kiss and she would melt.

“It is beautiful so placid, so serene”

He remarks, “It’s terrible when you watch something so inspiring for romance and you don’t have someone to share it with.”

It has been a hot day. As the sun goes down, they are cooled by gentle breezes.

Omar smiles to himself. He drinks his gin and tonic.

She has not had a more peaceful night since she has arrived in Egypt. Her resistance is fading. She is finally giving in to the power within. She only feels an affection for Omar as sleep takes over.

From the time that they leave Asyut, Omar assumes that it will be smooth sailing between him and Estelle. She seems to have let down her guard while they were at the bar. He thinks about her honey smile as he prepares the car for the journey to Qena. Qena is meant as a relaxing stopover on the way to Luxor. The bustling commercial center reminds her of her intent to find Dan.

Once they are at the hotel, she looks at Omar with that same intense sternness that had characterized her demeanor before Asyut. He notices that her fears have again taken over. More than anything, she wants to hold on to her love for Dan. Her journey has been offering her new insights about herself and about her world. This only frightens her.

When she was at the construction office, they told her about Qena. Dan was supposed to go there to secure some equipment being shipped via the Red Sea. Estelle had hoped that she

might catch up with him. This knowledge has caused the old Estelle to resurface. She is doing everything that she can to repress her ancient spirit.

Later that day Dan checks in to the same hotel where Estelle is staying. As he passes through the lobby, he smells White Clover. It is Estelle's perfume. He has this uncanny feeling that she is present. But he dismisses his impression.

He says to Amira, "I'm feeling faint. Let's go up to the room."

Only a few minutes later, Estelle comes out of the other elevator. She plans to send some postcards home. She also has some other errands.

By the time they reach Luxor, she feels that she is coming out of her head. She has spent the past few days possessed by a phantom from within. Her former modesty has given way to pulling her blouses up and tying them so that they expose her midriff.

At some moments she will seem to abhor the very nature of their adventures, "If I don't see another ruin as long as I live, I'll thank the Good Lord." At other moments, these journey are her lifeblood. Today, they are going off to the Valley of the Kings.

The group is waiting in the lobby for Estelle to come down for the day of sight-seeing. Omar is looking through the door at the hotel across the street. He sees an attractive Egyptian woman with an American. The woman seems very European in her style and dress. The man reminds Omar of Estelle. He wants to ask her about him. As soon as Estelle makes it down on the elevator, Omar tries to point out the couple in the street. But they have gone.

All that Omar can say is, "We've got a long day ahead of us. We better get going."

As they pass through King Tut's tomb, Estelle can feel the same queasiness coming upon her. But this discomfort quickly subsides. She is giving in. She reads the inscriptions on the other tombs as some kind of welcome. The valley offers its strange invitation.

The language of the ancients harmonizes with the winds that whistle through these massive rock formations. She sees the serpentine hills meander around this holy place. The site has permitted the burial of kings because it had already accommodated a mammoth shrine to more primeval forces. And the winds still echo these ancient forces. She wants to let herself be completely ravished by these spirits of old.

Back at the hotel, Estelle seems more pliant to her desires. She watches Omar emerge from the shadows. By his stealth, he has blended in with the night. She is another person when she accepts his deep kisses. He runs his hands up her hips as he pins her against a wall in the courtyard. She wants to take him up to her room. The passion is taking her somewhere unknown. His shirt is open. She wants to bury her face in his chest. She pushes him away and rushes up to her room.

The daytime journey has only intoxicated her. She has become a victim of the cruel winds. Even the nighttime breeze reminds her of the Valley of the Kings. She turns her back on this new self even as she has paid it tribute.

Back in her room, she begins to wonder why she has even made this trip. It seemed like the thing to do when she left in Atlanta. But even if she finds Dan, she will only feel guilty about what has happened.

As she falls asleep, her thoughts turn back to Omar. He knows what is happening to her. It is almost as if he has unleashed the curse against her. She can't contain this feeling. The only way that she can sleep is by imagining Omar sleeping next to her.

When she wakes up in the morning, she is all business. She attributes her desire for Omar as only a freaky after-effect of too much sun. She again opts for a more modest style of dress. It is too warm to cover herself completely. But there is none of that abandon that characterized the past few days. She has come here on a mission. They are fast approaching their destination. All the passion that she has saved needs to be finally delivered to its rightful owner. She will finally be able to see Dan.

When they reach Awan, she expects Dan to be on site. In fact, he is at the office in the city. Estelle decides to go straight there without calling. She doesn't even consider it a surprise since she assumes that he is not there.

As Estelle enters the lobby, Dan is coming down with Amira. Dan sees Estelle before she sees him. He turns white. He has seen a ghost.

Amira notices how Dan has changed. She recedes to the background. When Estelle catches sight of both of them, everything is clear. She wonders why she even came all this way.

Dan gives her a perfunctory hug, "Honey, what a surprise."

She is more than surprised. She is aghast. But she doesn't want to let on.

"I missed you, Dan. I realized that I was wrong. I had to come."

Dan doesn't know what to do. He almost feels like packing her off on the next plane. But he doesn't want to end their love once and for all. Amira's presence makes it even more uncomfortable.

"Estelle, this is Amira. She works with me."

Amira puts out her hand, "Glad to meet you. Dan has talked to me about you."

Estelle is even more taken aback by Amira's charm.

Estelle maintains, "I hope that he has said good things about me."

They all put up a scene of false politeness. Since Estelle has come all this way, Dan can hardly ignore her. Since he is at work, he had an advantage. He claims that he is busy.

"We have to go on site in a while. I'd love to have you come along. But there just won't be a chance to spend any time together. I'll meet you at the hotel later this evening."

She tells him where she is staying. There is little else that she can do.

At the hotel, she sees Omar one last time. She will fly back to Cairo.

"You've been a great guide. Sorry if I've been a bitch. I've just had so much on my mind."

She doesn't want to say anything about Dan to him.

Omar tells her, "If you ever come back to Egypt, I will be glad to take you around again."

She gives him a big hug. Then he watches him get in his SUV and head off. She waves.

When she is back in her room, she feels like a person without an identity. Sure it says Estelle Adams on her passport. But that is not who she is anymore. She came here for a reason. But even that reason seems to mean nothing since Dan has been with another woman. Estelle feels like she is again the helpless girl from Atlanta.

Dan is cordial at dinner. He knows that Estelle is going to return to the States while he will be here another couple of months. He is trying to cover up his involvement with Amira. They eat more conventional European fare than she has eaten the past few days.

"Estelle, I really wish that you could stay longer."

Estelle makes an excuse, "I never meant to be here that much longer. I thought that you'd

be in Aswan when I arrived. But they told me in Cairo that you were taking some time off.”

He tells her, “I combined business and pleasure. I needed to go to Qena. But they gave me time to explore.” He tell her how he journey to the Valley of the Kings.

She says, “I’m surprised that we didn’t run in to each other.” She realizes that it might have been more awkward to have seen Amira out of the office. But she hardly wants to think about that.

“You know that you could stay here if you wanted. I could make arrangements. They keep reminding me over and over again.”

Estelle wonders why he is telling her any of this. He knows that she won’t accept his offer. That is why he feels so comfortable making it. He can have his exotic lover. She’ll just go back to the States. She wonders why she saved herself for him. She should have been with Omar when she had the chance.

Dan wants to stay the night with her. As the dinner progresses, he gives her those suggestive glances. He is remembering old times together. She is even more sickened by his advances. She knows that he is trying to cover all his bases. And now she has shown him to be the scoundrel that he really is.

He walks her up to her room. At the door, he reaches over to kiss her. She can’t bear the thought of passion with him. She lets the kiss glance off her cheek.

As she closes the door, Estelle thinks about how severe she has been with Dan. Due to her embarrassment over Amira, she could hardly have acted any differently. If she had just given in to Dan, she would have been condoning his behavior. She is not going to show up and allow him to get in her good graces just so he can return to Amira when Estelle is gone. Now way, no time!