**Table of Contents**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Introduction</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Celebrating The War We Lost</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stalked by a Cabbie</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>In Search of The Blue Mosque</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Entrance Is Free</td>
<td>45</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Introduction

This collection of stories begins what I hope will one day turn into a memoir. The included excerpts detail a few of my adventures in Egypt, and tells some of the growth that resulted from my experiences as a Westerner in Cairo.

The first story, “Celebrating the War We Lost” is a look at some of the misconceptions held by many Egyptians in their struggle for self identity. A struggle that has been worsened by government propaganda as an entire generation's view of his history is distorted beyond recognition. This can be witnessed first hand on the sixth of October when Egypt gathers to celebrate a war they believe they won. This flawed perception of reality was the result of a massive radio propaganda machine that had convinced the Egyptian citizenry of the might of the Egyptian army.

The second story, titled “Stalked by a Cabbie.” It describes my worst experience in a Cairo tax, and shows the lengths a person can go to when he feels insulted.

The third story, “In Search of The Blue Mosque,” contemplates an act of what seems initially to be genuine selflessness. But can it really be genuine? I leave that up to the reader to consider.

The last tale, “Entrance is Free,” narrates of a kidnapping with a Camel. This was a surreal experience, and one of the best swindles I have ever witnessed.
I believe these tales exemplify some of the challenges when communicating across the cultural, history, and language that divide and separate us.
Celebrate the War We Lost

It was 4 October, 1997 and I had just awakened for another day at school. It was Thursday and I was happy to see the weekend only a day away. Since Islam celebrates the sabbath on Friday, Sunday is actually Monday for Caireens. I quickly dressed in my gray wool slacks and white polo shirt with red lining. “Make sure you take a sweater!” commanded my mother from the kitchen.

I grabbed a dark blue sweater. It wasn't the uniform's standard gray, but I thought my sweater bore enough of a resemblance. I walked out of my room to grab something to eat before heading to school.

“That's not your school sweater,” observed my mother, “Shouldn't you be wearing that instead?”

“My school sweater is dirty. I'd asked you to wash it for me. I think I'll be fine like this anyway.” I responded.

I grabbed a couple of pancakes, gave my mother a hug, and walked down the street to the Port Said Middle School. Taha Hussein Street was a particularly green road with trees creating a canopy that provided some relief in the dead of summer. The elementary school my siblings attended was across the the street from my home. In fact, the four campuses were all within a 500 yard radius of our apartment in the touristic island of Zamalek.

Cairo's school system was a varied mixture of government-run public
schools and semi, and fully private schools that exercised their own curriculum. In all these systems, I would find out later, education was distilled into the one task of completing standardized tests. To various degrees teachers, often under-payed, would encourage students to participate in privately run education centers in order to shore up some extra income, while promising students improved grades. Many teachers made names of themselves for aiding students in passing their state-issued tests, often finding these private tutoring sessions more lucrative than their salary as teachers.

I was exempt from the social studies and what equated to eighth grade Arabic, and was allowed to roam the school during those periods of the day. Port Said School was an odd C shaped building with classrooms built out towards the far wall. All these rooms were connected by one long hallway on each floor that served as a balcony overlooking the main courtyard.

Every morning the entire school would assemble into three groups in the courtyard to salute the Egyptian flag, greet the head mistress, who would later blare through her megaphone any new announcements for the day. Every class would stand in rank, one row for boys, one for girls, all sporting the school uniform. The head mistress, Mrs. Abdel-Salam, was a short, heavyset woman with beady eyes. Her hair was brown, wiry, and frail as it fought feebly against fate for dominance over her scalp. She peered down upon her faculty and student
body, studying the children carefully as we recited the pledge of allegiance. It was then that I noticed her signaling for one of her aides. Gamal, an old man who looked to be well into his 80s and who had a bad hunch, shuffled over to his boss and leaned forward so his ear could be at level with her mouth.

As we sang the anthem, the head mistress spoke and pointed towards the group in which I was standing. I saw Gamal nod his head and retreat into the shadow cast by the balcony above. Her beady eyes continued to survey the mass of students gathered below her. The anthem ended in a dull roar of clashing cymbals, and Mrs. Abdel-Salam stretched her arms out onto the banister raising her chest to better project her voice over the courtyard.

“Good Morning children!”

“GOOD MOORING MRS.” was echoed by the mass of students in unison, followed by mumbles as the crowd finally joined their voices in unison to shout, “Salam.”

“I hope your studies are going well. I also hope you all have a wonderful weekend and enjoy the parade.”

It was then that Gamal tugged at my hoodie and I looked back to see him indicating that I should follow him upstairs. The head mistress continued to talk of the celebrations that weekend as I broke from the line and followed Gamal to the far end of the building where the stairs were located. I could hear my classmates
snicker as I was guided up the stairs to see the head mistress.

Once up the flight of stairs, Gamal pointed me at the wall beside Abdel-Salam's office. Two students were already waiting in line. Their uniforms were torn and dirty. One of them was sniffing but they both stared through the wall in front of them in a trance. I took my place in line, and faced out towards the courtyard with my back to the wall.

The head mistress concluded her speech by wishing “her children” a good day.

A chorus of voices rang out wishing her a good day as well. She then turned to face us. She was in a long, dark blue dress. Her hair reached to her shoulders and then curled back to her ear lobes.

“Have you no respect for yourselves? I hope you've had a chance to think why you are here now.”

Head Mistress Abdel-Salam then walked past us and entered her office with Gamal following, closing the door behind him. Shortly afterward, Gamal emerged from the office and the first student in line was ushered in. Gamal said something in Arabic to which the boy shuffled over towards the door. I followed to close the gap. Gamal let his head drop and walked into the teacher's lounge.

Immediately I could hear the head mistress scolding the boy. Although I could not
make out every word, I could tell she freely interleaved English and Arabic in her sentences. English was used for emphasis as she called the boy “stupid” and “ignorant.” When he finally emerged from the office he was wiping away tears as he walked up the stairs, most likely to his classroom.

The following boy entered and I could hear much the same berating monologue. This time, perhaps because I was closer to the door, I could hear my classmate inside crying “Ay!” When he finally walked out he too sniffled as he walked down the corridor into a classroom at the end of the hall. I waited patiently until Gamal waved for me to enter the office.

As I walked through the heavy wooden double-wide doors, I noticed the long rectangular room was brimming with furniture and ornaments on the wall. The walls were covered in different certificates of achievement; Van Gogh’s “Sun Flowers” hung on one side of the room and an elongated wooden mask stood approximately across from it. There was a couch and chairs lined with a wooden frame with a golden varnish. Their upholstery bulged towards the center and was affixed to the golden colored frame with similarly colored tacks.

A large wooden desk sat in front of three large windows that opened into a empty gravel lot. I focused on a man I saw through the window, the keeper of the lot outside the school. With his grey beard and blue robe, he patrolled the grounds collecting trash that had found its way in.
Mrs. Abdel-Salam was resting her arms on the back of her chair for support.

“Do you know why you are here?” she asked rising from her desk. She slowly made her way around the desk using her arm to pivot around the corner.

“Yes Misses Head Mistress,” I began to respond but was cut short. She was now in front of me with her head craned up to look into my eyes.

“It's disrespectful what you did. You bring shame to me, your fellow students, and your teachers. You can wear what you want with the people on the street, but if you wish to learn and not be a hoodlum you will wear our school uniform.”

As she gave this lecture, she made a fist and began punching me with her knuckles right below the shoulder. She missed, all her punching simply made it hard not to giggle. I continued to stand at attention until she paused awaiting a response.

I nodded saying, “Yes .”

“Do you under stand now?”

I resisted smiling, and simply nodded with my best attempt at a somber face.

She scowled and waved me away “Go to your class, I don't want to have this discussion with you again.”
I turned and headed out and to the right to get to my class on the same floor. My class would stay in the same room the entire day while teachers of different subjects came to visit us for their allotted periods during the day. As I entered, I noticed our teacher had not arrived yet. This was evidenced not only by the missing teacher, but my class mates dancing on the tables. Ahmed and Hamdy provided a beat as they drummed on their desks. Kids were wooting and accompanying the beat as they sang.

The class was colored a teal blue with a white skirt marred by desks and chairs scraping along the edge. It was adorned with one picture hung up above the clock and blackboard of president Mubarak looking up towards the sky. A classmate named Butros was belly dancing as others used their desks to create a beat that reverberated across the room.

Butros paused when he saw me enter but only for a second to then begin dancing toward me and ask, “Abdel-Salam ‘ted darreb?’”

“Huh?” I must have looked befuddled.

“Did she hit you?”

“She tried.” I stepped back as Butros continued to advance and snap his fingers to the beating of the desks. Butros yelled out in Arabic announcing that the Head Mistress had beat me. The entire class laughed in unison. Not certain who was the laughter directed at, I walked towards my assigned seating with the
biggest nerd, and consequently the best English speaker in class. I got along well with George.

He had very pale skin with faint freckles. His hair was dark and curly and he continually had to adjust his glasses on his nose. He was arranging his notebooks when I sat beside him.

“How's it going George?”

“I am well thank you. How are you?” He replied while intently stashing the books for the day into his desk.

“All right. Is the French teacher out sick today?” I enquired.

“She's here. Sammy says she is downstairs drinking tea and smoking cigarettes.”

“Ah.”

I lay my head on my arms that were crossed over the table to muffle the thuds on the nearby desks. A few minutes later the Butros yelled out to warn everyone that the French teacher was walking towards the class. The students continued to dance and whistle for a few seconds before quickly dispersing into their seats. Seconds later our French teacher entered with a stern look. She began to scream in Arabic, every now and then interjecting French for a sense of gravity. I could make out that she had heard us being raucous.

She set down her handbag on the teacher's desk, and walked towards the
podium at the front of the room. She explained how today we would be setting the syllabus aside and taking the time to create drawing for the sixth of October war. The drawings would be used to decorate the school, and the best drawings in each class would be entered in to an art competition. The winner would be featured in the another drawing for best creations from all three of the Port Said campuses. I had never heard of the war so I whispered to George, “What was this war about?”

“It was a war between Egypt and Israel when they attacked us and try to take the Sinai. We won them and took back the land we lost. Even the help of the Americans couldn't stop us from winning.”

“Who did the Americans help?”

“Israel.”

“Wow, that's impressive.” I wasn't sure how much I believed of George's story. It sounded a bit too simple.

The French teacher reached into the podium and called on students to help disperse the blank sheets of paper she had produced from within the stand. George had opened his the lid of this desk and pulled out a bag full of colored pencils and crayons. He placed the bag in between the desks, rightly assuming that I did not have any coloring tools on hand. I looked around to see the entire class hard at work drawing on their sheets of paper. Our French teacher hovered from desk to desk surveying our work. She spoke in Arabic as she poked her head over her
students while they were drawing. I could not understand her or what I was supposed to draw about.

I looked over at George's work I saw him coloring in what looked to be the desert. I continued to doodle until I noticed my drawing being masked by the shadow of what was distinctly a head. The French teacher leaned back as I swung my head to the side, feeling a bit uneasy under her gaze.

“Qu'êtes-vous peignant?” she asked.

“I don't.…”

“Au Français.” commanded the teacher.

“Je ne sais pas quoi dessiner.” I responded.

“Ah, George le expliquera,” she said directing her attention to George.

“George!”

“Yes, Madam.”

George stopped drawing, and sighed as he adjusted his glasses. He explained the story again, mentioning, for the first time, the length of the war and the peace treaty signed with Israel.

“But what should I draw?” I pushed.

“I'm drawing a soldier in the Sinai holding up the flag for Egypt. Paint what you want about Egypt winning the war.”

I finally began drawing soldiers running to the top of a sand dune with a
flag in hand. I drew at a snails pace especially when I found that none of our teachers for the day were intent on teaching. Each successive teacher just had us continue with our work. Everyone seemed concentrated on their work, and in the three months in the new school, my class had never been quieter. Some students sang their national anthem as they colored, but these songs would simply fade into mumbling the chorus before they became inaudible.

At the end of the school day I rushed home to question my father on this great parade for the sixth of October war. He worked for one of the few English language newspapers in the country and I was certain he would be able to explain the national holiday.

At home, my father was busy creating templates for the Middle East Times, an English language publication. I told him of my exciting day at school, omitting the reprimand for being out of uniform.

“I don't get how Egypt won a war that lasted only a week when it was up against Israel and the United States.”

Paul was amused, “They never won that war. In fact, the U.S. had prevent Israel from capturing any more land and destabilizing the region further.”

“So they are celebrating a war they lost and nobody has informed them?” I asked sarcastically.

“That sums it up nicely.” Paul responded, but diverted his attention back to
the templates.

“How can a whole country be so misinformed at this point?”

“I'm not sure.”

I could tell I no longer had my father's full interest in the matter. Little did he know that several years later he would aid in maintaining this conspiracy. After a less than amicable departure from the Middle East Times, and a few intermediary positions, my father found work as vice principal for an English language school.

One of his many duties was the editing school books for submission to the department of education's censorship committee. Changes would include reclaiming the south eastern border from Ethiopia, and replacing every instance of Israel with Palestine. This censorship was accomplished with the tearing of pages, gluing edited maps over the text books. These changes had to be made to every text book ordered by the school and none of these edits could “look censored.” It is as if Egypt were sitting in a room with an 800 pound gorilla (Israel), but is confident it will leave once sufficiently ignored.
We lived above a fertility clinic. My dad often joked that he should get a discount on the rent since the size of our large family walking in and out of the clinic all day made the doctors look successful at their jobs. Indeed, my five-year-old brother Jonathan, my six-year-old sister Caroline, my nine-year-old brother Daniel, my fifteen-year-old sister Juae, and my seventeen year old self made quiet the scene in any clinic, not to mention our white freckled faces screamed tourist to the olive skinned Egyptians. The Adam International Fertility Clinic was a family business in that it was run by doctors and their sons who too would some day become doctors themselves. Patriarchal lineage permeated every aspect of Egyptian society. Indeed, the harsh desert environment dictated such a strong family bond as a key to survival.

It was a cool day for the last day of May and Juae's birthday was the following morning. My mother was out until 9 p.m. tutoring to build up some extra cash for the summer. My father had convinced me to drop my videogames and give him a hand in producing my sister's birthday cake. However, we first would have to pick up ingredients.

We walked out of the side exit avoiding the clinic's front lobby. The side door let out into a long hallway that was wide enough for two Lottas. I got to the black gate to discover with little surprise that it was locked.
"God Dammit!" I heard my father yell as I tugged at the gate.

"They still haven't given you a key?" I questioned.

"Nah, I need to get Daniel down here with me one day so that he can translate" My younger siblings had picked up Egyptian colloquial Arabic with the ease afforded to young children. I climbed atop the lower crossbeam and pulled myself over the fence. No sooner had I done so, I noticed the clinic's doorman running from his kiosk towards me. I also noticed a glass of tea in the kiosk still steaming. Apparently I had interrupted his break.

"Ya basha!" he exclaimed, an expression that roughly translated to "Yo, dude!" “Enta taa-mel eh?” he asked as he motioned towards the gate. He was angry I had jumped the gate.

In my broken Arabic I explained to the doorman that my father was on the other side, and needed the gate opened. The doorman complied with my request, but not without ranting about the image I was portraying for the clinic by jumping over the fence.

"Nakh-nu ow-zeen al muftakh" I countered.

The doorman opened the door to let my father through and promptly locked it again.

"He says he has no authority to give us a key" I translated for my father.

We had been living at 11 Adams Rd for the last three months, but entering and
Exiting our home had become an almost daily struggle. It seemed impossible to get through the clinic's bureaucracy as it seemed nobody had the authority to give us a key. We bid the doorman a good night, and went on our excursion to collect ingredients for a cake.

We walked down the middle of the quiet street to the main road where we could hail a cab. The sidewalks in Cairo were like islands in a sea of parked Fiats, Peugeots, old VW Bugs, and the occasional pristine Mercedes S Class. The roads themselves were built with lanes to accommodate the girth of a tank, and since few Caireens owned tanks, nobody conceived that the lane markings applied to their four wheeled vehicle. In man's ever present need for order, each driver fancied himself his own lane on the road, and since everyone else was of course in each other's lanes, a cacophony of blaring cars was the norm for the streets of Egypt.

We walked beside the parked cars, many with their side view mirrors turned inward. But just as many bore shards of cracked plastic and wires in their place. Once we traversed the long block to the main road, my dad stuck his arm out to call for a cab.

Cabs in Cairo are all painted black with white stripes. The models are of all sorts and sizes. The beat up Fiats, Peugeots, and even the odd Mercedes have avoided rusting by the mercy of the dry desert environment. As I looked down the
road, I could see a red Toyota pickup and a donkey cart in the adjacent lane.

Suddenly a beat up Mercedes came up from behind the pickup, and cut in front of the donkey that barely flinched. I knew already that my dad would not stand for it, and would force the taxi to get back on the road. He was weary of any cab driver eager to have a tourist for a passenger. In his experience, they were often eager to please, but also quick to anger when the fare did not meet their high expectations. My father would often remind me of his extensive analysis of the psychology of the Caireen taxi driver. It was best to let the eager taxis go by.

And that he did as he waved the Mercedes on its way. The Mercedes had pulled over and rested on the side of the street. He honked his horn in an attempt to grab our attention in case we had missed him driving past us. The Mercedes then reversed, and pulled up next to me.

The driver greeted us, "Hallo! Welcome to Egypt!" My father kept looking down the road as he waved the cab away.

I leaned forward so I could see the driver, a skinny, balding man with a large rug burn on his forehead, supposedly from praying too hard.

"Lah! Mish ouwzeen, shokran." I explained to the cabbie since I knew my father wouldn't have anything to do with the taxi.

No sooner had the Mercedes driven away my father flagged down a Peugeot station wagon.
It was atypical of him to get in a wagon, or flying coffins as they were known in practically any tourist guide of Cairo. My father got in the front seat and I got in the rear. My father let out a long sigh and then greeted the driver. A rather large man who looked to be in his mid forties, he had a full head of sparkling silver hair. My father told him to get us to the ABC Supermarket about five miles away.

The interior of the cab was covered in faded "No Smoking" stickers of various designs. The perimeter of the ceiling was adorned with short red tassels held on with thumbtacks. The tassels drooped as they made their way across the front of the windshield, supported by the rear-view mirror. A recordable CD hung off the burdened rear-view and cast spots of diffracted rainbow colored light onto the dashboard rug. A top the rug lay a pack of Cleopatra Cigarettes and a miniature version of the Quran.

The driver pulled a cigarette out of the pack and lit it. As he puffed on his cigarette, he shifted the car into second gear. The car trudged forward letting out a billow of smoke to accompany the driver's cigarette smoke.

Searching for a seatbelt, my father pulled out a backpack strap from in between the door and passenger seat that was screwed into the side of the wall. After analyzing the curious safety strap he shook his head a few times and let his head come to rest cocked to his left staring back at the cab driver. "$\text{This, this}$
here," he then pulled the strap up to shoulder height and wiggled it, "is no kwayes. It's not good." The driver started laughing and nodded, agreeing my dad and simultaneously indicating with his right hand how the strap should drape around the shoulder. The cab driver then pulled back on a lever behind the wheel of the car to honk as he veered into the left lane.

My father sat back and drew the strap over his belly. Over the last few weeks cars had begun sporting home made seat belts. I had seen neckties, straps from a bag, and even a bicycle tube attached to the side of the car. This was done to avoid hefty fines for any vehicle owner who did not have a safety strap for the two front seats. Prices for legitimate seatbelts had skyrocketed as demand outstripped supply on the day the law took effect. The majority of cars on the road, and in particular taxi cabs, were constructed before such novelties had become common place. By the end of that week, it was cheaper to get five tickets for not having a seatbelt installed than to buy one shoddy Nigerian seatbelt, much less a pair of them.

Like most taxi drivers in Cairo this one made liberal use of his horn. Cairo has an entry in the Guinness World Records for the lowest average life cycle for a car horn. The average car sees three horn replacements before seeing a change of headlights. It is best not to speak of windshield wipers. This particular taxi had no wipers installed, although often the drivers chose to store them away rather than
This taxi had its horn installed on the right lever behind the wheel. Perhaps the lever was once intended to operate the windshield washer fluid and the vehicle's owner reasoned that there was little need for such things in the arid metropolis.

I noticed the driver's fingers constantly twitching for the horn. He leaned forward, squinting as he deftly yanked the wheel left and right to avoid traffic. The taxi cut across a four lane road to turn around and cut to the other side of the boulevard. The driver again deftly cut across another four large lanes of traffic and pulled into a two lane side road. My father motioned as if patting a dog on the head and said in the best Arabic he could muster, "Henna kwayes".

I could see the supermarket down the road about 100 yards. We stepped out of the vehicle and I started walking. My father dug inside his pockets and handed the driver a wad of bills through the passenger window. I turned to see whether transaction had gone smoothly, but I could tell from the wild arm flailing of the silhouette behind the windshield that it had not.

"So how much did you give him?" I asked as my father walked towards me.

"Three Pounds, it's enough", it was.

It was starting to get dark and the Imams in the nearby mosques turned on
the neon green fluorescent lights that adorned the exterior of the single spire of the
mosque.

We could hear a car accelerating behind us. My father turned around just in
time to hop out of the way of the taxi that was screeching to a halt. My dad was
furious.
“What the ...! You son of a bitch.”
I could see it was the taxi we had just exited. The driver shuffling to get out.
“You don't,” my father growled, “get back in that car.”

My father walked towards the car menacingly. I could see the driver side
door opening.

“Get back in there,” my father commanded. He was now standing by the
passenger side door. He gave the door a strong kick and his foot regretted it
immediately. In response to the rage, the driver quickly started up the car while
cursing my father in Arabic. The car peeled out onto the main road and out of
sight.
“Are you all right?” I asked.
“I'm fine.” he winced.

We continued towards the bright yellow sign denoting the location of the
ABC supermarket. My father managed to hobble, keeping weight off his injured
toe. Once inside I began to hurry down the aisles; I told my father, “I'll go get the
I methodically searched down the aisles of the store from right to left. I picked up some flowers at the stand and turned around the second aisle when I noticed a street kid dressed in a undershirt several sizes too large. It was torn and covered in dirt. The boy's shorts had once been blue, and he wore flip flops with one sandal bearing the evidence of multiple rolls of tape expended in the feeble attempt maintain its service.

He was strolling past the candy section, his fingers running along the ruffled end of the packaging. I continued to make my way down the aisle assuming the boy had come into a big tip while begging for money. I had found over the years that mothers would often send their children out to eek money from tourists because children were more likely to inspire sympathy. The mothers would dress them appropriately, and although these families certainly were not well-to-do, they were engaging in a modicum of deceit. I could never bring myself to be fooled.

I turned the aisle to find Betty Crocker Devil's Cake Mix. I grabbed it along with a bag of Toll house Semi-Sweet Chocolate chips. The store was littered with western merchandise at a cost. It was one of the few places to get a can of Dr. Pepper at six times the price of a Coca Cola manufactured in Egypt. I sometimes enjoyed the guilty pleasure of a Dr. Pepper. The cans manufactured in
Egypt angered me as they appeared to be produced in a similar process to those banned across the west in the 1970s. No doubt the working machines were simply repurposed for different markets where these concerns would be stifled voices in the greater noise of discontent.

I reached the end of the aisle to see my father arguing with our former cab driver. The man was angry as his face burned red under the bright overhead lights. He was waving a wad of cash and proceeded to reach for my father chest in order to place the wad of cash into his shirt pocket but inadvertently tore the pocket as my dad stepped back. He got angry.

“This is what I paid you.” He pulled the cash out of his torn pocket. “I am not paying you any more.” He took the money and flicked it into the cab driver's face. The driver got furious at this but before he could act, three men in black suits with black ties surrounded the two men and held the local back while coaching him to calm down. They quickly questioned the foreigner and two of the three men helped the taxi driver pick up the fallen bills and guided him out of the store, commiserating with the man about the tourist's flippant attitude. The driver, still boiling mad, followed his ushers outside and the remaining black-suit questioned my father. I stood waiting until my father turned and hobbled over towards me.

“Are you all right?” I asked.

“On a scale of five,” he winced, “four point six.”
“You probably shouldn't have thrown the money into that man's face.”

“Yeah, well he was asking for it.”

“It's really insulting to them. You should watch out when you do that.”

I slowed my pace as I accompanied my father through the remaining aisles.

“Put those flowers back. Sunny has a better variety.” Sunny Supermarket was an asian owned market across a large eight-lane boulevard.

“Ok.” I picked up my pace as I made my way to return the Lilies.

Having returned the flowers, I rushed to catch up with my father who was already at the cash register checking out the ingredients for the cake. I arrived in time to fill the grocery bags and we both walked out of the supermarket wary that the cab driver might be waiting for us to exit. There was no sign of our former cab driver. I assumed he had better things to do than quibble over what amounted to one dollar. We deftly crossed the large road that separated us from the Sunny Supermarket. The trick is to cross with conviction. If you hesitate while crossing a road in Cairo, you might as well give up. Crossing requires that you charge ahead while directing your gaze at the incoming vehicles. The pedestrian must move steadily with the only concern being the car in the lane you are about to enter. With enough practice, one can ostensibly cross any road blindfolded.

The Sunny Supermarket was located in the basement of a seven story
apartment building. To enter the store one had to walk down a short flight of stairs. My father hobbled down the stairs and I followed closely behind. We had navigated through two aisles when I noticed the boy in rags who had wistfully run his fingers over the candy in the ABC Supermarket. The boy was walking up the aisle and my father and I both hugged the left side to let the boy continue up the aisle. Once he passed by us, I tapped my father's shoulder. He grunted in response.

“That's the same kid from ABC.” I remarked.

“Yeah, I noticed that.” He turned back and we continued down the maze of aisles. The supermarket was set-up so that to reach the exit one had to navigate up and down through a minimum of three aisles before being able to make your way to the register. My father picked up some fresh vegetables, some Passion fruit, and a box of Toblerone chocolates, Juae's favorite.

We payed for our groceries, and walked out of the store. The sky was a dark shade of grey, illuminated by the many city lights. As my eyes adjusted to the change in light, I again noticed the boy in rags. This time he was walking towards a parked car and a man who stood leaning against a station wagon. I could tell the car was a taxi from the thick white stripe that ran across the side of the car.

“Dad?” I said warily, “Is that the same taxi driver?” pointing in the
direction of the man in front of the parked vehicle.

My father squinted to look down the road at the parked car. “That it is. Good eye.”

“What do you want to do?”

As I asked the question, the man in the distance could be seen handing the boy something before getting back in to start the car.

“It's best we walk home.”

“You think you'll be alright with your foot?”

“I'll be alright. Let's get going.” We walked with our heads craned to see what the driver would do. Before we got out of view, the driver had pulled out onto the road. To reach us he would have to turn around and that would require crossing over the boulevard. The nearest turn was at least a few hundred yards away so without a word we both picked up our pace down Lebanon St.

“We should not be on this road.”

“Good call. We can get home if we turn down this one way.” I concurred.

We turned down a side street. The only light was that coming from the apartments above. It took us 30 minutes to make our way back as my father hopped on his left foot every few steps. We arrived to find my mother home from tutoring German. We recounted our ordeal over a cup of coffee and my mother decided she should handle the baking herself. For the next week my siblings
would tease me whenever a taxi passed by the house, but we never encountered the driver again.
In Search of the Blue Mosque

"You've been living here now how long? Four years? That should make a good tour guide" my uncle assured me.

"I guess..."

"It's all right, we have a tour already picked out in our guide. You can just come along for the ride and make sure we don't lose our pants haggling."

I beamed and agreed to accompany my aunt and her husband along with my teenage sister Juae, and eight year old brother Daniel.

"We'll come meet up with you at your hotel in two hours."

I hung up the phone and informed my sister of our plans. This was the first visit to Egypt for any of my relatives and Diana and Chris had arrived here with the intention of seeing us but also doing some snorkeling in the once gorgeous reefs of Sharm El Sheik, a prime tourist location for exploring the depths of the Red Sea. All in all they were looking for the classic tourist experience of Egypt. Since we were going to be walking through Old Cairo, Juae opted to dress in long sleeves and pants to avoid the heckling of the locals.

"Why are you getting so dressed up? It's not that cold and you'll have two men accompanying you."

Juae glared at me and furrowed her brow. The glare said she simply was not looking to be hassled by me or anyone on the street. We bid the family a good
day and my sister and I walked out in order to catch a cab on the main road.

October is one of the nicer months of the year in Cairo. Today the temperature was tepid and the sky cloudy, ensuring that the sun would not beat down on us during our tour.

Once at the main road, we quickly found a taxi, a beat up Fiat sedan. I climbed in the front while my sister sat quietly in the rear. Our cab driver was amiable enough, but after the initial pleasantries I opted to don my headphones to avoid any unnecessary conversation. It seemed to me that they were invariably all the same conversation, and it went like this:

"Welcome to Egypt!" the cabbie would exclaim.

"Well thank you, although you may be a couple years too late." I'd remark sarcastically, knowing full well that my audience had understood little of what I had said.

"Enta min feen? Where you from?" would invariably follow. Although I later began picking countries at random, I would often reply with “New York.”

The driver would beam and inform me that, "My cousin Mohammed is in United States. Do you know him?"

"The US is a big place. Balaad Kibeer. Where in America is your cousin?"

"Missouri, do you know him?"

This is where I would give up on the conversation, and why I had taken to
claiming I was a native of Djibouti. The less my driver understood of what I was saying, the more pleasant the conversation. Not partaking in conversation at all, however, had its own toll. Since all installed taxi meters had last gauged a fair fare ten years ago, and had not been updated since, all fares were set through haggling. Sometimes taxi drivers would try to agree to a rate before getting in the cab, but more often than not these arrangements were finalized at the end of the trip. This meant that the fare from point A to point B could fluctuate as a result of the passenger's gender, religion, ethnicity or even the quality of conversation provided.

Once at our destination we all shuffled out of the vehicle, and I shut the door before paying our cab. He was content with his payment and shoved the money in a pouch in his driver-side visor. Only then did I notice Chris and Diana waiting for us by the entrance to the hotel. It was too late to try and hail the cab again.

“So you send our ride off and we're not even in it!” My uncle Chris exclaimed as he walked towards us.

“Well, I had not idea you'd be waiting for us at the door.” I replied while shaking my uncle's hand.

“Well we're all good to go. Vama-nos!” Diana announced.

“Our guide has a mosque sightseeing tour that begins at the base of the

-33-
Citadel. I figure we'll go see the Citadel and have nice stroll down the hill to the Blue Mosque.” Chris explained.

I gave my aunt Diana a hug once she had greeted Juae and Daniel.

“Yeah! Let's go to the Citadel!” Daniel chimed in.

Chris pulled out his video camera and began to tape his niece and nephews. “Here we are at our temporary domicile of the wonderful island of Zamalek in Cairo, Egypt.”

Daniel became attached to his uncle as the boy tried to narrate for the camera.

The doorman approached us in his red and gold uniform, “Can I get you a taxi?” he inquired.

“Lah, shokran.” I replied, thanking him. Instead, we hailed a cab driving on the road. You can never trust a standing taxi. They wait in hopes that the one fare will cover the day's wages.

I let Chris get in the front seat and he insisted on Daniel riding with him in order to give us more space in the back.

“Are you going to film our ride?” Daniel enquired.

Chris chuckled, “No, I am low on film and we will need some for our walking tour.”

“Ow-zeen al-Citadel.” I told our cab driver. He nodded but made no effort
to pull out onto the road.

“The Citadel, please.” Chris instructed from the front seat, and before he complete his sentence the cab driver had thrown the car into gear and pulled onto the road.

It was a long ride as our taxi made it's way from the touristy island of Zamalek to the hill tops of Old Cairo. Daniel did most of the talking with the cab driver, serving as an interpreter for my uncle and aunt. The cab driver stopped in front of the gates to the Citadel and we all piled out. Chris paid the driver but as soon as the taxi pulled out onto the road, Daniel began to chide his uncle.

“You paid him a lot. You could have paid him half that and it would have been enough.”

“Maybe so,” Chris replied as he grabbed onto the young boy's hand, “but I'm on vacation.”

We walked the grounds of the Citadel, an old fort that towered or towers above Cairo and seemed to have been built out of the mountain it rested on. We walked the perimeter of the fort looking out into the distance. The fort overlooks all of Old Cairo, and one could probably see clear across the entirety of Cairo were it not for the thick layer of smog that enclosed the marvelous vista. Marvelous, so long as one did not look down upon the roof tops below littered with a cornucopia of trash and satellites dishes struggling to remain above the
The center piece of the fort is the Muhammad Ali mosque. It is a towering square building composed of numerous spires and domes that sit atop three separate levels of the temple. The windows are adorned with shutters with intricate floral designs. Having been inside before, I knew the interior to be awe inspiring. The lighting is aided by hanging lanterns, and the subdued hues of brown, red, and gold create a solemn mood that cannot be broken. With the mosque closed, we decided our best course of action would be to take the 'Walking Tour of Old Cairo.' Diana had decided in advance to only walk a third of it giving us a chance to visit the rare Blue Mosque.

This mosque was built in the mid 14th century by king Aqsunqur. It was later decorated by an Ottoman officer named Ibrahim Mustahfizan who adorned the mosque with colored tiles brought in from Istanbul and Damascus. Only three mosques in the world contain blue tiling and the guide book assured us it was a sight to behold. What the guide book failed to mention was the multiple names ascribed to the mosque as a result of the many owners.

The directions were quite simple. We were to go down the road that led up to the Citadel across from an armory that looked like a miniature castle. Following this road, we should take our first right and walk approximately 500 yards before reaching the mosque. We followed these directions and walked a good mile on a
narrow road. We hugged the right wall as close as we could. Motorcycles and small trucks puttered down the road honking every few seconds to warn pedestrians of an incoming vehicle. No mosque was to be found and we returned to the armory.

“Oh God! What's that smell?” Daniel exclaimed as he covered his nose.

“That's awful. What could it be? I didn't smell it when we were here earlier.” Juae added.

Diana pulled out her guide book to confirm we had not misread the directions. I peered over her shoulder to read.

Diana turned, “Why didn't you say something there, kiddo?” Diana moved the book to her side so that I could read.

“It looks like we followed the guide to a tee” I said bewildered.

“That's what it looks like. Let's go up this hill and see if we can get our bearings.” Diana walked up the hill towards the Citadel.

Chris had pulled out his camera again to record our confusion. Juae walked up to the camera and announced, “Be glad you don't have smell-o-vision right now.”

“Hah, it's quite fragrant here.”

“Diana is assiduously trying to figure out where we are and where we need to go. Since the tour book has seemed to let us down, we are going back up to the
Citadel for some idea of where to go from here. And if you don't hear from us again we were unsuccessful in finding out where we are.”

A little boy (I thought it was Daniel at first) noticed the camera and approached with a beaming smile. He walked just out of view of the camera but would often tilt his head to get a better look into the lens. Meanwhile, Diana, Juæ and I continued to argue about the faulty directions and whether we were meant to take a left instead of a right.

“So you're saying we may have a left and right problem?”

Diana laughed, “Yes we may have a left and right faux pas.” She remarked, speculating that right and left may not work quite the same in her new environment.

“Great, now all we have to do is find 13\textsuperscript{th} Street and we'll be right there.” Chris turned off his camera as we all chuckled.

No sooner had Chris packed away his camera that a short, rotund man approached my uncle. The man was dressed in a yellow dress shirt, black slacks and dress shoes.

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“Hello, can I help you?” the man adjusted the round glasses over his beady eyes.

“Yes, actually, we're in search of the Blue Mosque.” Chris replied.

“Oh you are looking for the mosque of Aqsunqr!”
“Is that its real name?”

The man laughed, “It has many, many names. I can take you.”

“That's most generous of you.” Diana replied, jumping at the opportunity to figure out where we were in relation to our destination.

“My name is Chris,” Chris said, shaking the gracious man's hand, “and this is my wife, Diana, my niece Juae, and my nephews, Nam Sung and Daniel.”

“Hello, my name is Ahmed.”

Ahmed led us back down from the Citadel to the armory.

Diana and Chris conversed with our new guide but after a while Diana slowed down to walk in stride with me to whisper, “Do you think we can trust him?”

“Well, I don't see why not especially if we are just walking down a street.”

“Hrmmm, he seems a bit odd.”

“I agree, what with just coming out of nowhere and wanting to waste his time leading us around.”

“Ok, we're on the same page on this, good.”

“Yeah, I haven't experienced something like this before.”

Once at the bottom of the Citadel we continued to walk in the direction indicated by the tour book, but instead of taking our first right we continued five streets over before taking a right. This got us onto and even narrower road than we
had been on when we followed the tour book.

The apartments that lined the road were only painted on the first level and this was often in very poor condition. Little store fronts sat nested into rooms that were exposed to the street. These were hardly large enough to store a motorcycle.

“This is Old Cairo.” After a slight pause he reaffirmed his statement saying, “This is very old Cairo.”

“Yes,” Chris laughed, “it looks like old Cairo.”

“It is very, very, very old Cairo.”

“I guess not much stuff is new around here, eh?”

A stream of mud and water divided the road in two. After what was no more than 300 yards Ahmed stopped for us to catch up.

“Here is the mosque of Aqsunqur.” He pointed at a set of wooden doors on a dirty grey wall.

We crowded around the doors to avoid being splashed or hit by motorists navigating the narrow road. Ahmed knocked on the door and spoke to an old man in a white robe and turban. Within a minute the guard opened the gates for us and we walked into the mosque courtyard. I was decidedly unimpressed. I could not see any blue in this mosque at first glance. I was half expecting to be engulfed in beams of radiant blue light as it reflected off the sun. A humble courtyard greeted us with a floor of cracked marble that still gleamed brightly as the sun broke
through the clouds. The serenity of the mosque hit us the moment we stepped inside.

“It doesn't stink so bad in here.” Daniel noted.

“Shhh,” cautioned his sister.

Daniel, unhappy at being told to keep quiet, sought his aunt. Within seconds of vanishing behind a pillar, Daniel yelled, “Juae, get over here!” Juae, annoyed by her younger brother's impertinence, nonetheless went to see why he was calling. I, too, was curious, and our group of five came together under an arch that was covered in floor to ceiling in a blue and white tile. The white looked so bright it was hard to image these pieces of décor being over 200 years old and had been exposed to the elements through the open courtyard.

Ahmed found us as well and began to retell the story of the origins of the tile. He then guided us to the sole spire in the mosque. The stair case leading up to the top was tight with poor lighting, we powered on up the series of foot high stairs. With little lighting to guide our way, Chris pulled out his camera to cast some light.

“Hahah, this doesn't do much good.” Chris remarked.

“I'm scared of the dark.” Daniel announced, more for attention than out of fear.

We arrived at a door but as we reached it Ahmed told us we still had to go
“It's higher up still? Oh boy.” Diana asked.

“How are we gonna get back down?” Daniel asked.

“Shouldn't you have asked that question before you started climbing the tower?”

Finally we could see the beam of light raining down from the highest balcony.

“I can see. I can see. I can see again!” Daniel's voice echoed throughout the tower.

Having reached the top I noticed that we were on the highest point in Old Cairo barring the Citadel behind us. The view was impressive but marred once you looked down to see the rooftops filled with litter.

“How does the garbage get there?” Diana asked.

“I haven't the faintest.” I responded.

Meanwhile Daniel was proclaiming his fear of heights as he got up onto the bannister.

“You've got a strange way of showing your fear of heights, Dopey.” Diana remarked.

She grabbed the boy and set him back to stand on the ground.

“How are we gonna get back down?” Daniel asked.
We all seemed to agree with Daniel's sentiment. Slowly we navigated the dark stairway.

“Well that Blue Mosque couldn't hide from us,” Chris declared.

“Thank you very much, Ahmed.” Diana interjected.

“Yes, Ahmed, thank you.” Chris echoed.

“No 'broblem’” he smiled as he used a handkerchief to wipe the sweat off his brow. “Where do you live?”

“Dokki!” Daniel blurted out before any of us had a chance to consider whether we should tell him.

“Oh, Kwayes, you can catch taxi easier from down the road,” he advised.

Since the man appeared trustworthy and had given up his time to guide us, we figured the least we could do was accompany the man to our common destination. Chris took to speaking with Ahmed exclusively. Diana came to feel shunned as Ahmed would consistently defer to Chris with any details regarding Old Cairo. As we walked down the road, the stench increased and Daniel took to announcing this as often as he could muster to open his mouth. The stream of mud and water wax and wane, sometimes giving travelers no choice but to plop their shoes into the muck. This had to be done as the stream of vehicles never abated and the amount of pedestrian traffic seemed to increase exponentially every 100 meters. With the mass of people making their way up and down the
street, I was surprised to see Juae had come to be right next to me.

“That guide is weird. He asked me if I was uncle Chris’ sister, and where I worked and if I was married.”

“That's creepy.”

“Yeah it is.”

“I wouldn't talk to him any more if I were you. We should just get home as soon as possible.”

“Yeah. I'll talk about it with aunt Diana. Ahmed is talking uncle Chris's ear off.”

“Yeah, aunt Diana will agree with us,” I encouraged.

Juae disappeared back into the crowd behind me. I glanced behind me and immediately spotted my aunt's white sun hat. I waved, then turned my attention back to trudging through what had tuned into a massive flood of people. All the vehicles that demanding way by honking horns had been superseded by the sound of merchants hawking their wares. I knew instantly that we had now entered the famous Khan El Khalil. The market bustles at almost all hours of the day and is the place to go for tourists in search of trinkets, perfumes, and other souvenirs. Ahmed turned down an alley way and I looked back to find Diana, her face expressing shock that we were following this man down an alley. Ahmed knew the way though and led us to a major road without having to weather the market
crowds. We gathered at the end of the alley way expecting to bid farewell to our serendipitous tour guide.

Chris reached in his pocket only to swiftly extend it out into a handshake, “Thank you Ahmed, you were a gift from Allah. We would have never found our way through there without you.”

Ahmed extended his hand in exchange to discover he had been palmed a tip.

“Shokran. Come to my house for tea.”

“Now? ...Uh.” Chris scanned his spouse's face and declined the invitation.

We let Ahmed grab the first cab and we once again piled into a taxi and headed home for coffee and cake.
Entrance is Free

We all piled into a boxy Fiat. I took my sister Caroline on my lap, Juae followed with Daniel to fill out the back seat. My father got in the front and pulled the camera, strapped around his neck, out of harm's way, Jonathan climbed in to sit on his father's lap. Paul had just gotten the new digital camera and was keen to send out some pictures of his children to his parents living across the Pacific Ocean.

Jonathan reached to close the door, but bumped his head on the door frame.

“Ow!” Jonathan's hands sprung up to massage his throbbing forehead.

My father slung the camera around the back with the strap leaning against the neck rest. His left hand took care of consoling the boy as he shut the car's door with his right hand.

“Hello, Hosh al Kharam” he commanded.

“Tayeb.” Responded the cab driver as he drove out onto traffic.

The pyramids were ten minutes away down the long stretch appropriately named Pyramid Road or Sharia Al-Kharam. This was the road we took to school every morning. The road was separated by a boulevard, and each road could expand to up to four lanes depending on the flow of traffic. Congestion caused by donkey carts were frequent as the connecting roads often were home to day
merchants selling their produce from their carts.

The cramped cab puttered along at a steady clip across the empty strip. Palm trees lined the road and drew attention away from the dilapidated structures awaiting some sort of construction. These were accompanied by four story shopping malls and donkey carts loaded with vegetables for sale.

These half built buildings would of sit for years as owners awaited an influx of cash in order to start building. All the buildings were encrusted with a heavy layer of dust that permeates every crack and ledge. The rain is too feeble to wash away the sediment.

The pyramids sit atop a hill, with the Sphinx at the base looking out towards Greater Cairo. My father, wishing to avoid the tourist traps, steered the taxi away from the main entrance towards the Sphinx. The taxi turned off the boulevard down a road littered in pot holes. The cab driver repeatedly honked his horn as he avoided the many camels on the road, and even after passing the camels he continued as if to announce his presence. The road tapered off into the sand. Once the taxi stopped, we quickly piled out of the Fiat and took our turns stretching. Immediately a camel jockey came up asking if we were interested in riding a camel. Jonathan jumped into action.

“No thank you, we're not interested,” he said in fluent Arabic while waving him on down the road.
Down the road stood the Sphinx. With its infamously broken nose, it stood directly opposite a KFC. A Ray-Bans store sat next to the KFC and these two were sandwiched between half a dozen gift shops. To the right, the gift shops finally gave way to a horse and camel stable and then desert.

My father paid for the fare and I took hold of Jonathan's hand as we made our way towards the Sphinx. It is hard to imagine that this structure and the pyramids behind it were once covered in sand. It is however easy to spot the damage caused by their excavation. As we walked the 200 yards to the giant cat, I could still catch a glimpse of its radiance when fragments of the top layer of stone gleamed brightly in the sunlight. The majority of the Sphinx, however, looks much like a giant sand castle ready to be washed away. The side of the feline is marred with pot holes from the ceaseless pounding of the desert winds. These bastions of great human achievement seemed to be vanishing before our very eyes.

“'It looks like a giant cat,'” Caroline remarked.

“'Well duh, it's the Sphinx,'” Daniel retorted.

This annoyed Caroline and she tried to slap her brother, but missed Daniel as he dashed towards the statue.

We caught up to Daniel, and got within 50 yards but could not go further without paying the entrance fee. A small green kiosk marked the entrance. On the
walls hung a wooden board with prices in Arabic and English.

It always amused me that Arabic numerals are common in many societies except with the Arabs. Egypt forgoes use of arabic numerals in favor of the Hindu-Arabic numbering system. It is used to great effect to discern tourists from locals at the market, as if they did not stick out like sore thumbs to begin with.

The English scribbles on the board listed the entrance fee at $5 a person and $15 if you have a camera, the listing in Arabic was $1 with the camera. Unfortunately, to enter you also were required to present a passport and we had left them home. A long metal tube resting on a pivot stood as the lone gate in the vast desert. My father instructed his children to line up in front of the gate as he started up his camera.

“Why can't we go up closer?” Daniel yelled over to his father.

I poke Daniel in the neck, and he looked back at me annoyed.

“We don't have the money to get in, and besides we are just taking a few pictures to send to grandma Bunny.” My grandmother's birthday can fall on Easter Sunday.

“All right, say cheese.”

Daniel turned around and my father snapped a few shots, but was interrupted when guards carrying AK 47s approached us. They were dressed in their winter uniforms, black outfits with red lining on the vest and cuffs that
looked weathered from the battering of the desert winds. One approached my father and instantly began to smile as he gazed at the lot kids standing in row.

I expected them to tell us to leave since we are being misers. Instead we are directed to the far side of the green kiosk in order to get closer for better shots. We walked up to the Sphinx close enough for my father to get the iconic structure in the shot. On our way back out my father made certain to approach the guards and give them some “bak-sheesh,” a tip for their generosity.

As we made our way back we were passed a line of camels sitting on the side of the road. My father reached to pull me by the scruff of my neck and gave me a hug. I arched my back away from him to avoid the camera hanging off his neck.

“Go get Daniel and see about grabbing us some dinner from the Colonel.” he whispered as he slipped some cash into my shirt pocket. I nodded and sped up to catch up to Daniel.

“Hallo! Want to ride a camel?” greeted a man dressed in white from head to toe. His white turban hung off on one side and he fiddled with tucking it back into the folds of the head dress. His white robe was dirty with a light tinge of orange-yellow, a result of being out in the desert where the winds blew into the city.

“No pay! You can click click with camera,” the camel jockey mimed
taking photos, “Free!” The camel jockey had a long, disheveled gray beard and weathered eyes, but he smiled enthusiastically as he proposed for the kids to get on the camel.

Jonathan instinctively jumped to tell the man that we were not interested.

My father however, was intrigued. He questioned the camel jockey to confirm he was not seeking any payment. The camel jockey reassured him that no payment was needed. My father agreed, and the man walked as he waved the kids over to the camel kneeling on the ground. Then Paul told Juae, Jonathan, and Caroline to get atop the camel. The camel was adorned with with red tassels along the Dromedary saddle, able to comfortably carry two passengers. A red and brown rug was draped over the saddle and on top of the rug lay goat hide.

The kids listened to their father, and sat in between the humps of the camel. Jonathan in the front supported by Juae while Caroline sat in the back. My father took a few shots of the kids on the kneeling camel. It was then that the camel jockey proposed to let the camel get up so we could get better photographs.

I tugged at my father's shirt and he leaned over. “You know you'll probably have to pay him now,” I warned.

“I was planning on tipping him anyway, it's all right.” My father continued taking shots as the camel raised its rear legs and appeared to rock itself back and forth with each motion propelling itself into the sky much like a stationary
roller coaster. Jonathan screamed in glee as the camel made its ascent.

My father took a few more shots with his camera and then asked the camel jockey to bring his children back down by motioning with his hand and saying "Ke-feyah, Kwayes."

The camel jockey smiled back and walked over towards us holding the reins to the camel.

"Mister, you give me bak-sheesh."

"You said 'No pay'" my father insisted, visibly irritated, "Bring the camel down."

"Lah, yah mister! Give ten dollars then yes."

"You lied to me you piece of shit!"

The camel jockey continued to smile but said nothing.

"Should I go get the cops?" I whispered.

I didn't get an answer. I didn't ask again, however, because I could see my father start to fume.

"Nam Sung, I need the cash I gave you."

Without question I pulled the money out of my shirt pocket and presented it to my father. He took the money and parted it to hand the swindler what equaled to the sum of five dollars. The camel jockey quickly grabbed the ransom money and stashed it into his shirt pocket. Satisfied with his payment, he ran over
to his camel. He pulled on the reins and the camel's front knees buckled and it began its descent.

The camel dropped to its front knees before pulling in its hind legs and finally lowered itself to the ground. The three kids quickly dismounted.

“Hah, I was afraid we would never get off.” Caroline quibbed.

“Yeah, Caroline, he would have sent the camel out to the desert and we would never come back.” Juae teased. I could hear my father sighing as he turned around.

Just then, Jonathan ran up and grabbed onto my father's leg, hugging it tight. My father shook his encumbered leg and tried to walk with his son attached. Jonathan giggled but couldn't hold on and dropped to the dusty ground. We laughed as Jonathan got back up and wiped the dirt off his behind. We turned our back towards the pyramids and grabbed the first taxi home. Our trip to the pyramids had once again worn out its welcome.