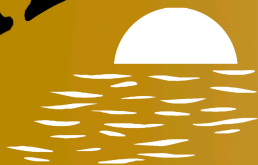




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## 2

I suppose it all began during the autumn term at Deepdean. Daisy and I were fifth formers now, which sounds dreadfully grown-up and shiny with promise – only the reality was as misty and confusing as the English autumn weather.

Our fellow Detective Society members were out of sorts, and it was not hard to see why. Our friend Beanie's mother was still sickening by the day, and there was nothing anyone could do about it. We realized, once the initial shocking discovery in the summer term had passed, that there really are no words in the English language to explain how sorry you feel, and that grief, outside books, is far less dramatic and far more exhausting than you are led to expect.

'I don't want you to pity me,' said Beanie fiercely. 'Don't LOOK at me like that!' And so we all had to pretend that we did not see her becoming thinner and

thinner until her big eyes stared out of her face like carriage lamps.

We all had to be very careful where mothers were concerned. Kitty had to bite off her complaining about her mother expecting a baby ('It'll be as dreadful as Binny! Worse, I expect!') whenever Beanie came into the dorm, and Lavinia threw away the thoughtful notes accompanying the beautifully wrapped packets of sweets and cakes from her stepmother, Patricia, so that Beanie would not see them.

Daisy, of course, was utterly Daisy about it all. She was the only one of us who really did forget most of the time that Beanie even had a mother. She threw herself back into lacrosse, and riding, and working creative mistakes into her essays – and she threw herself, with a vengeance, back into our quarrel with the other dorm, especially Amina El Maghrabi.

At first I was surprised at this. I had thought that, after the events of the summer term, we had agreed to be friends with Amina – and Amina was certainly being friendly to us. She waved at us in the corridors, she chattered to us at dinner and she waited so we could walk up to House together. Oddly, this meant that we spent far more time with Clementine Delacroix than we ever had before and, to my astonishment, I discovered that she was not as bad as I had always assumed. And I liked Amina very much – she was funny and clever and

bold. I was determined to treat her kindly, for I knew how hard it was for anyone who did not look like the perfect English miss at Deepdean.

So I could not understand why Daisy met every one of her kind overtures with a snub. I was cross with Daisy over it, and rather embarrassed – and one morning, during the third week of term, I apologized to Amina at the breakfast table, while Daisy glared at us over a slice of toast.

‘Oh, I don’t mind,’ said Amina. ‘She doesn’t mean it, do you, Daisy?’ and she winked at Daisy as she licked jam off her thumb.

‘HARDLY!’ said Daisy nonsensically, and spots of colour appeared high up on her cheeks.

And I ought to have seen it then; only I did not.

I didn’t see it when Amina passed Daisy notes in lessons, and Daisy tore them up and crushed them beneath the heel of her shoe. I didn’t see it when Amina asked Daisy what she thought of her Sunday dress and Daisy told her, with a furious flush on her face, that she looked like an utter horror.

I didn’t see it until I woke in the middle of one night during the fifth week of term to a tiny rustling, barely even a noise. A year ago, I would have slept through it, but my detective senses have been honed, and now I was alert at once. I kept my eyes carefully half-lidded, my breathing slow, and peered through my lashes to see



Daisy sitting up in bed. As I watched, she swung her feet down, cat-light, to press them gently against the dorm-room floor. There had been no Detective Society meeting scheduled – there was no case at all: the term had been quite crime free – so I could not think what she was up to. I made sure I did not move until she had slipped away to the window, and only sat up myself when I heard the squeak of the sash rising, then the gentle patter of feet and hands moving up the drainpipe.

I got up and crept across the dorm – although Daisy might not admit it, I have learned to move as quietly as her, and none of the others woke up – to stand by the window. I waited, peering after her, until she rolled over the lip of the roof high above me, and then I reached out my hands and climbed carefully upwards. These days I am good at that as well.

At last I pulled myself onto the slope of the roof. There was Daisy, crouched in the shadow of the eaves, the gold of her hair covered with a dark scarf. She was staring round a corniced chimney pot, as fierce as an owl, at something on the other side. I crept up behind her, holding my breath, putting one foot in front of the other as soft as silk.

‘Hazel,’ said Daisy, not turning round. ‘How dare you?’

‘How did you know it was me?’ I hissed, startled. ‘And – what are you doing? Why did you creep off without me? Are you on a case?’

‘*Shush!*’ said Daisy. ‘I always know when it’s you. You’d always know it was me, wouldn’t you?’

I was level with her now. I peeped over her shoulder to see what she was looking at, and—

‘Daisy,’ I said, ‘why are you watching Amina?’

For there Amina was, leaning on a roof peak twenty paces away, with her legs tucked under her, reading a book by torchlight. She had not noticed us – she seemed in a world of her own.

‘She’s behaving suspiciously,’ whispered Daisy. ‘She’s a possible danger! Hazel, I—’

I saw it, then, the thing I should have all along. I knew, though, that I could not confront Daisy about it. Not yet.

‘No, she isn’t,’ I said. ‘She’s not a danger at all! You – you’re just looking for a mystery to solve this term, and you know there isn’t one.’

It wasn’t the truth, of course.

‘Humph!’ said Daisy crossly. ‘There *might* be, Hazel! Constant vigilance.’

‘I think you might be *too* vigilant in this case,’ I said. I marvelled at my boldness. I was teasing Daisy Wells!

‘Hazel, you are *not amusing*. But – oh, I grant you, there’s nothing doing here. I just want a distraction! Everyone is being so mopey.’

‘Because of Beanie’s mother!’ I said. ‘Not everything is a fascinating mystery, Daisy. Some things are just sad.’

Now can we go back to bed before we freeze?’ It was almost November, and the night was flinchingly cold. Amina had a blanket, and Daisy her scarf, but I was in nothing but my regulation pyjamas.

‘All right,’ said Daisy. ‘But – oh, if only something interesting would happen!’

So it felt like an answer to all of our problems when Amina came up to us after Latin a few days later and said, ‘I’ve just had a letter from my parents. How would you feel about Christmas in Egypt?’

### 3

Daisy, of course, pretended to be quite uninterested.

‘We shall have to see,’ she said coolly to Amina.

‘Thank you!’ I added over my shoulder, as Daisy rushed me away back to the dorm.

‘You shouldn’t be thanking her!’ Daisy hissed at me, her cheeks suddenly pink with excitement. ‘We may be too busy to go, after all.’

‘No, we won’t!’ I said. ‘It’s Egypt, Daisy! You’ve always wanted to see it!’

‘Humph!’ said Daisy, the crinkle appearing at the top of her nose. ‘I – well—’

‘Mummies,’ I said. ‘Pyramids. *Tutankhamun*. There are plenty of mysteries in Egypt!’

I saw Daisy’s eyes sparkle despite herself. ‘I shall have to ask Uncle Felix,’ she said. ‘He might say no.’

‘Of course he won’t!’ I said. It is true that Uncle Felix is careful where Daisy is concerned – she is his only

niece, and he is fierce about protecting her – but it was also a fact that Daisy and I had helped Uncle Felix and his wife, Aunt Lucy, by solving a problem during the summer holidays. He owed us.

‘We shall have to get new clothes,’ said Daisy. ‘Our ones from Hong Kong will be too small. And what about your father?’

Truly, I was most worried about my father’s reaction – but, when I telephoned him the next day, his voice sounded enthusiastic underneath the hiss of the line.

‘What an opportunity!’ he said. ‘Hazel, I know I promised to come and visit you in England this Christmas, but what if we all met in Egypt instead? The history, the culture – it would be wonderfully improving for you all.’

I heard other-side-of-the-world shrieks at that and I imagined my father in his study, my little sisters dancing round him as their maids, Pik An and Ah Kwan, tried to pull them away.

‘Really?’ I asked, hardly able to believe it. ‘Really – I can go?’

‘Of course, my Hazel. We can all go.’

Daisy too came away from her telephone call beaming. ‘Uncle Felix said yes,’ she told me. ‘He – oh, Hazel, I think we’re going to Egypt!’

We clung to each other in the shabby House hallway, fizzing with delight – and, after that, Daisy gave up the pretence.

She bubbled over with Egypt, pharaohs and curses and floods. She did her prep in double-quick time so she could gaze at fat, cloth-bound books about Nile exploration parties and the Carter expedition to unearth Tutankhamun. ‘There were *female* pharaohs, you know,’ she told me, eyes gleaming. ‘*Women* ruled all of Egypt! Hatshepsut reigned for fifteen years and she wore a false beard so men would accept her. Just imagine! D’you think I’d look good in a beard?’

‘No,’ I said, sticking out my tongue at her, even though I knew very well that, if anyone could look good in a false beard, it would be the Honourable Daisy Wells.

‘Yes,’ said Amina from the row in front of us, turning back to grin at Daisy, who went red and ducked her head back down to her book.

‘Of course, it *is* the pharaohs you’re most interested in seeing,’ I said to Daisy later.

‘Of course,’ said Daisy, straight-faced. ‘Why else would we be going?’

That gave me an idea of my own. During our English lesson a few days later, I folded a piece of paper inside my English composition book, swapped my usual pencil for a rather less usual one that I kept in the bottom

of my school bag, and began to scribble something that certainly was not the essay on Spenser that Miss Dodgson had asked for.

*Dear Alexander,* I wrote, my heart beating and the letters fading to nothing almost as soon as they left my pen.

*How are things at Weston? Did you and George solve your problem with the dog? Things here are dull, mostly. No cases. We're all at a bit of a loose end without one.*

*Better news: we've been invited to Egypt for the Christmas hols. Daisy's terribly excited, though she pretends she isn't, and I am too. We've got special dispensation to leave school early since the trip will be educational. We're going to Amina El Maghrabi's family in Cairo first, and then Father's going to come and meet us with my sisters, May and Rose (remember I told you about them?), and take us to Luxor for a real Nile cruise on the thirteenth of December. Are you going back to your parents in Boston? Funny that we won't see each other at all until next year now.*

*Give my love to George – and you,  
Hazel*

I finished it before I could stop to think what I was doing. Those last two words – *and you* – had felt wildly

daring in my head, but on paper they only looked vaguely embarrassing, like something an overeager shrimp would write. But, all the same, I turned the letter over as quickly as I could, swapped back to my usual pencil and wrote,

*Dear Alexander,*

*Sago pudding twice this week! Disgusting. And Latin prep too, utterly dull. Hope you're having a better time of it.*

*In haste to chapel,*

*Henry*

I folded the letter up and addressed it to Alexander Arcady, Weston School. It was a way of writing to each other that Alexander and I had made up years ago, after our first case together on the Orient Express, and had been using ever since.

I slipped it into the nearest postbox on our way up to House from school that evening, while Daisy was studiously ignoring Amina and Clementine as they giggled together, and then it was too late to worry about it.

A week later, I got a postcard of the front of the British Museum.

*Georgina loves mummies. So do I. Alexandra x*



That  $x$  lifted me like a kite through endless rainy Games lessons, through Kitty and Beanie falling out with each other, and Lavinia with everyone, through Prayers and French and Deportment. I tried very hard not to think of it too much, and then could not think of anything else.

We really were going to Egypt. I suddenly found I was almost too excited to breathe.