

GABE: Seeing Ahmed's eyes on me in the rearview mirror, I fiddled with the seat belt, pretending to fasten it. As I did this, I leaned close to Sari and whispered in her ear...

"Next time he stops."

At first she didn't get my meaning. But then I saw that she understood. We both sat tensely, eyes on the door handles, waiting in silence.

AHMED: "Your father is a very smart man."

SARI: "I know." (**SOFTLY**)

GABE: The traffic slowed, then stopped.

"Now!"

We both grabbed for the door handles.

I pushed my door open and flung myself out of the car.

Horns were honking in front of me and behind me. I could hear Ahmed's surprised shout. Leaving the car door open, I turned to see that Sari had made it to the street, too. She turned to me as she slammed her door shut, her eyes wide with fear.

Without a word, we started to run. The car horns seemed to grow louder as we headed into a narrow side street. We were running side by side, following the narrow brick street as it curved between two rows of tall, white stucco buildings.

The street grew even narrower. Then it emptied into a wide circle filled with a small market of fruit and vegetable stands.

I'd never been so scared in my life. Please, please, I begged silently, don't let him be following us. Don't let him catch us!

Turning a corner, we found ourselves on a wide, busy avenue. A truck bounced past, pulling a trailer filled with horses. The sidewalk was crowded with people. Sari and I pushed our way through them, trying to lose ourselves in the crowd.

Finally, we came to a stop right across the street from the hotel. Breathing hard, I rested my hands on my knees, leaned forward, and tried to catch my breath.

SARI: "We've lost him." (**BREATHLESS**)

GABE: "Yeah. We're okay!" (**BREATHLESS**)

SARI: "Come on!" "We have to tell Daddy about Ahmed!"

GABE: But to our surprise, our hotel room was empty. My note was still on the table where I had left it. Nothing had been moved or touched. Sari picked up my note and crumpled it into a ball in her hand.

SARI: "He hasn't been back here." "Ahmed lied – about everything!"

GABE: "I wonder what's going on." "I just don't get it."

Sari and I both screamed as the door to the room suddenly flew open...

SARI: "Daddy!"

GABE: Sari ran to hug him. I was sure glad it was Uncle Ben, and not Ahmed.

SARI: "Daddy, the strangest thing–"

Uncle Ben had his arm around her shoulder. I could see that he had a really dazed expression on his face.

UNCLE BEN: (MUTTERING) "Yes, it's strange." "Both of my workers..."

SARI: "Huh? Are they okay?"

UNCLE BEN: "No. Not really." "They're both... in a state of shock. I guess that's how to describe it."

GABE: "They were in an accident? In the pyramid?"

UNCLE BEN: "I don't really know. They can't talk. I think something – or someone – frightened them. Scared them speechless. The doctors are completely confused. They said that–"

SARI: "Daddy, Ahmed tried to kidnap us!"

UNCLE BEN: (SURPRISED) "What? Ahmed?" "What do you mean?"

SARI: "Ahmed. The guy at the pyramid. The one who wears the white suits with the red bandanna and always carries the clipboard."

GABE: "He told us you sent him to get us." "He came to the museum—"

UNCLE BEN: "Museum?" "What were you doing at the museum? I thought I told you—"

SARI: "We had to get out of here!" "Gabe wanted to see mummies, so we went to the museum. But Ahmed came and took us to his car. He said he was taking us to you at the hotel..."

GABE: "But he was driving the wrong way." "So we jumped out and ran away."

UNCLE BEN: "Ahmed?" "But... he came to me with such excellent credentials and references." "He's a cryptographer. He studies ancient Egyptian. He's mainly interested in the wall writings and symbols we uncover."

GABE: "So why did he come for us?"

SARI: "Where was he going to take us?"

UNCLE BEN: "I don't know." "But I certainly intend to find out."

GABE: He hugged Sari.

UNCLE BEN: "What a mystery." "You're both okay?"

GABE: "Yeah. We're okay."

UNCLE BEN: "I've got to get to the pyramid." "I gave my workers the day off. But I've got to get to the bottom of this."

GABE: He let go of Sari and walked to the window. Clouds rolled over the sun. The room suddenly grew darker.

UNCLE BEN: "I'll order up some room service for you." "Will you two be okay here till I get back tonight?"

SARI: "No!" "You can't leave us here!"

GABE: "Why can't we come with you?"

UNCLE BEN: "It's too dangerous." "Until I can find out what happened to my two workers in there—"

SARI: (FRIGHTENED) "But, Daddy, what if Ahmed comes back?" "What if he comes here?"

GABE: Uncle Ben stared out the window at the darkening sky.

UNCLE BEN: "I guess you're right." "I guess I have to take you with me."

GABE + SARI: "Yes!"

UNCLE BEN: (STERN) "But you have to promise to stick close." "I mean it. No wandering off. No more practical jokes."

GABE: I could see that Uncle Ben was worried. Seriously worried. No more jokes until the frightening mystery was cleared up...

We had sandwiches downstairs in the hotel restaurant, then drove through the desert to the pyramid.

Heavy clouds rolled across the sun as we drove, casting shadows over the sand, coloring the desert darkly in shimmering shades of blue and gray.

Before long, the enormous pyramid loomed on the horizon, appearing to grow larger as we approached on the nearly empty highway.

I remembered the first time I had seen it, just a few days before. Such an amazing sight. But now, watching it through the car windshield, I felt only dread.

Uncle Ben parked the car near the low entrance he had discovered behind the pyramid. As we stepped out, the wind whipped at the ground, tossing the sand up, whirling it around our legs.

Uncle Ben raised a hand to stop us at the tunnel entrance.

UNCLE BEN: "Here." "Clip this on."

GABE: He reached into his supply pack and pulled out equipment for Sari and me. He handed each of us a beeper.

UNCLE BEN: "Just push the button, and it will beep me." "It's like a homing device. If you push the button, it sends electronic signals to the unit I'm wearing. Then I can track you down by following the sound levels. Of course, I don't expect you to use it because I expect you to stay close to me."

GABE: He handed us flashlights.

UNCLE BEN: "Watch your step..."

SARI: "We know, Daddy." "We've done this before, remember?"

UNCLE BEN: **(SHARPLY)** "Just follow instructions."

GABE: Then he turned into the darkness of the pyramid opening. I stopped at the entrance and pulled out my little mummy hand, just to make sure I had it.

SARI: "What are you doing with that?"

GABE: "My good luck charm."

I slipped it back into my pocket. She groaned and gave me a shove into the pyramid entrance.

A few minutes later, we were once again making our way carefully down the long rope ladder and into the first narrow tunnel.

Uncle Ben led the way, the wide circle of light from his flashlight sweeping back and forth across the tunnel ahead of him. Sari was a few steps behind him, and I walked a few steps behind her.

The tunnel seemed narrower and lower this time. Gripping the flashlight tightly, keeping the light aimed down, I dipped my head to keep from hitting the low, curved ceiling.

The tunnel bent to the left, then sloped downhill where it split into two paths. We followed the one to the right. The only sound was that of our shoes scraping against the sandy, dry floor.

I had stopped to shine my light on a bunch of spiders on the ceiling, and the two of them had walked several yards ahead of me. Following my light as it moved over the floor, I saw that my sneaker had come untied once again.

"Oh, man – not again!"

I stooped to tie it, setting the flashlight on the ground beside me.

"Hey – wait up!"

But they had started to argue about something, and I don't think they heard me. I could hear their voices echoing loudly down the long, twisting tunnel, but I couldn't make out their words. I hurriedly double-knotted the shoe lace, grabbed up the flashlight, and climbed to my feet.

"Hey, wait up!" **(ANXIOUS)**

Where had they gone?

I realized that I couldn't hear their voices anymore.

This can't be happening to me *again*! I thought.

"Hey!"

My voice echoed down the tunnel. But no voices called back. They were so involved in their argument, they forgot all about me! I realized that I was more angry than frightened. Uncle Ben had made such a big deal about us sticking close together. And then he walked off and left me alone in the tunnel!

"Hey, where are you?"

No reply.

Beaming the light ahead of me on the floor, I ducked my head and began jogging, following the tunnel as it curved sharply to the right. The floor began to slope upwards. The air became hot and musty smelling. I found myself gasping for breath.

"Uncle Ben!" "Sari!"

They must be around the next curve in the tunnel, I told myself. It hadn't taken me that long to tie my shoelace. They couldn't have gotten that far ahead.

My heart thumped in my chest. Despite the heat of the ancient tunnel, I felt cold all over. As I jogged, my hand brushed against the beeper at my waist. Should I push it?

No, I decided. That would only give Sari a good laugh. She'd be eager to tell everyone how I'd started beeping for help after being in the pyramid for two minutes!

I turned the corner. The tunnel walls seemed to close in on me as the tunnel narrowed.

"Sari? Uncle Ben?"

No echo. Maybe the tunnel was too narrow for an echo. The floor grew harder, less sandy. In the dim yellow light, I could see that the granite walls were lined with jagged cracks.

"Hey – where are you guys?"

I stopped when the tunnel branched in two directions. I suddenly realized how scared I was. Where had they disappeared to? They had to have realized by now that I wasn't with them. I stared at the two openings, shining my light first into one tunnel, then the other. Which one had they entered? My heart pounding, I ran into the tunnel on the left and shouted their names.

But still no reply.

I backed out quickly, my light darting wildly over the floor, and

stepped into the tunnel to the right. This tunnel was wider and higher. It curved gently to the right.

A maze of tunnels. That's how Uncle Ben had described the pyramid. Maybe thousands of tunnels, he had told me. *Thousands*. Keep moving, I urged myself. Keep moving, Gabe. They're right up ahead. They've got to be!

I took a few steps and then called out to them. I heard something. Voices?

I stopped. It was so quiet now. So quiet, I could hear my heart pounding in my chest.

The sound again. I listened hard, holding my breath.

It was a chattering sound. A soft cluttering. Not a human voice. An insect, maybe. Or a rat.

"Uncle Ben? Sari?"

Silence.

I took a few more steps into the tunnel. Then a few more.

I decided I'd better forget my pride and beep them.

So what if Sari teased me about it? I was too frightened to care.

If I beeped them, they'd be right there to get me in a few seconds.

But as I reached to my waist for the beeper, I was startled by a loud noise.

The insect chittering became a soft cracking sound. I stopped to listen, the fear rising up to my throat.

The soft cracking grew louder. Louder. Louder. Right under my feet. I turned my eyes to the floor. I shined the light at my shoes.

It took me so long to realize what was happening. The ancient tunnel floor was cracking apart beneath me!

By the time I realized this, it was too late.

I felt as if I were being pulled down, sucked down by a powerful force. The floor crumbled away beneath me, and I was falling.

Falling down, down, down an endless black hole. I opened my mouth to scream, but no sound came out.

I closed my eyes and fell. Down, down into the swirling blackness. I heard the flashlight clang against the floor.

Then I hit. Hard. I landed on my side. Pain shot through my body, and I saw red. A flash of bright red that grew brighter and brighter until I had to close my eyes. I think the force of the blow knocked me out for a short while.

When I opened my eyes, everything was a gray-yellow blur. My side

ached. My right elbow throbbed with pain.

I sat up. The haze slowly began to lift, like a curtain slowly rising.

Where was I?

A sour smell invaded my nostrils. The smell of decay. Of ancient dust. Of death.

The flashlight had landed beside me on the concrete floor. I followed its beam of light toward the wall...

And gasped. The light stopped on a hand. A *human* hand. Or was it?

The hand was attached to an arm. The arm hung stiffly from an erect body.

My hand trembling, I grabbed up the flashlight and tried to steady the light on the figure.

It was a mummy, I realized. Standing on its feet near the far wall. Eyeless, mouthless, the bandaged face seemed to stare back at me, tense and ready, as if waiting for me to make the first move. The light darted over its featureless face. I couldn't steady my hand. My whole body was shaking.

Frozen in place, not able to move off the hard floor, I gaped at the frightening figure. The mummy stood stiffly, its arms hanging at its sides. Why is it standing there like that? I wondered, taking another deep breath. The ancient Egyptians didn't leave their mummies standing at attention.

I coughed. The air was so foul. So *old*.

Groaning from the pain in my side, I began rapidly shining the light back and forth beyond the silent, faceless mummy. I was in an enormous, high-ceilinged chamber. Much bigger than the chamber Uncle Ben's workers had been digging in. And much more cluttered.

"Wow!"

I uttered a low cry as the pale light of the flashlight revealed an hideous scene. Dark, bandaged figures hovered all around me. The vast chamber was crammed with mummies!

In the unsteady light, their shadows seemed to reach toward me. Shuddering, I took a step back. The light burned through the shadows, revealing bandaged arms, torsos, legs, covered faces. There were so many of them! There were mummies leaning against the wall. Mummies lying on stone slabs, arms crossed over their chests. Mummies leaning at odd angles, crouched low or standing tall, their arms straight out in front of them.

Against one wall stood a row of mummy cases, their lids propped open. I turned, following the arc of my light. I realized that my fall had dropped me into the center of the room.

Behind me, I could make out an amazing array of equipment. Strange, pronglike tools I had never seen before. Tall stacks of cloth. Gigantic clay pots and jars.

I took a few reluctant steps closer, trying to hold the flashlight steady. I walked up to one of the tall stacks of cloth. Linen, most likely. The material used for making mummies. Gathering my courage, I examined some of the tools. Not touching anything. Just staring at them in the wavering light of the flashlight. Mummy-making tools. *Ancient* mummy-making tools... I stepped away. Turned back toward the crowd of unmoving figures.

My light traveled across the room and came to rest on a dark square area on the floor. Curious, I moved closer, stepping around twin mummies, lying on their backs, their arms crossed over their chests.

My sneakers scraped noisily along the floor as I made my way hesitantly across the vast chamber. The dark square on the floor was nearly the size of a swimming pool. I bent down at its edge to examine it more closely. The surface was soft and sticky. Like tar. Was this an ancient tar pit? Was this tar used in the making of the mummies that hovered so menacingly around the room?

I had a sudden chill that froze me to the spot. How could this tar pit be soft after four thousand years? Why was everything in

this chamber – the tools, the mummies, the linen – preserved so well? And why were these mummies – at least two dozen of them – left out like this, scattered about the room in such strange positions?

I realized that I had made an incredible discovery here. By falling through the floor, I had found a hidden chamber, a chamber where mummies had been made. I had found all of the tools and all of the materials used to make mummies four thousand years ago!

Once again, the sour smell invaded my nose. It was the smell of four-thousand-year-old bodies, I realized. A smell that had been bottled up in this ancient, hidden chamber – until now.

Staring at the twisted, shadowy figures gazing back at me in faceless horror, I reached for the beeper.

Uncle Ben, you must come quickly, I thought. I don't want to be alone down here any longer. You must come here now!

I pulled the beeper off my belt and brought it up close to the light. Gripping it tightly in my hand, I moved my hand to the button – and cried out in alarm.

The beeper was ruined. Wrecked. Smashed. The button wouldn't even push. I must have landed on it when I fell. It was useless. I was all alone down here. Alone with these ancient mummies, staring facelessly, silently, at me through the deep, dark shadows.

The sour odor seemed to grow stronger, thicker. I held my breath, but the smell was in my nostrils, in my mouth. I could taste it, taste the decay, taste the four-thousand-year-old aroma of death.

I tossed the worthless beeper on the floor and took another step back, keeping my eyes on the hovering mummies.

What was I going to do?

"Help!"

I tried to shout, but my voice sounded weak, muffled by the heavy, foul air.

"Help! Can anybody hear me?"

I listened, desperate for a reply.
Silence.

"Help! Somebody – please help!"

I screamed as loud as I could, tilting my head up to the hole in the ceiling, the hole I had fallen through.

"Can't anybody hear me?"

I could feel the panic grip my chest, freeze my legs. The panic swept over me, wave after paralyzing wave.

"Help me! Somebody – please!"

I took another step back...

And something crunched under my sneaker.

I uttered a high-pitched yelp and stumbled forward.

Then I felt something brush against my ankle. I cried out, and the flashlight dropped from under my arm. It clattered noisily to the floor. The light went out. I heard soft, scrabbling sounds down on the floor. Something snapped at my ankle, and I kicked wildly.

"Ohh, help!"

There were creatures down here. A lot of them. But what were they? Frantically, I bent down, grabbing for the flashlight in the darkness.

Finally, I found the flashlight. I grabbed it up in my trembling hand, climbed to my feet, and struggled to turn it back on.

As I stepped backward, something slid against my leg. It felt hard. And prickly.

I heard clicking sounds. Snapping. Panting loudly, my chest heaving, my entire body gripped with terror, I jumped up, tried to dance away as I fiddled with the flashlight.

Something crunched loudly beneath my sneaker. I danced away, hopping over something that scuttled through my legs.

Finally, the light flickered on. My heart thudding, I lowered the yellow beam of light to the floor. And saw the scrabbling, snapping creatures...

Scorpions! I had stumbled into a disgusting nest of them.

"Ohh – help!"

The light darted over the slithering creatures, their tails raised as if ready to attack, their claws snapping silently as they moved. Crawling over each other. Slithering past my ankles.

"Somebody – help ! "

I leapt backwards as a pair of claws grabbed at the leg of my jeans – into another of the creatures whose tail snapped against the back of my sneaker. Struggling to escape from the poisonous creatures, I tripped.

"No! Please – no!"

I uttered a frantic cry as I toppled forward.
And felt two hands grab me by the shoulders from behind.
A mummy! I thought.
The strong hands gripped my shoulders, pulled me hard. The ancient, bandaged hands. I couldn't breathe. I couldn't think. Finally, I managed to spin around.

"Sari!"

She gave me one more tug. We both stumbled backwards, claws snapping up at us.

"Sari – how–?"

We moved together now, making our way toward the center of the vast chamber. Safe. Safe from the disgusting nest of snapping scorpions.

SARI: "Saved your life." "Yuck. Those are so gross!"

GABE: "Tell me about it."

I could still feel the hideous creatures sliding along my ankles, still feel them slithering between my legs, crunching under my sneakers. I don't think I'll ever forget that crunching sound!

SARI: "What are you doing down here?" "Daddy and I have been looking everywhere for you!"

GABE: "How did you get down here?"

I struggled to calm my breathing, to stop the pounding in my chest. She pointed with her flashlight to a tunnel in the corner that I hadn't seen.

SARI: "I was searching for you. Daddy and I got separated. Do you believe it? He stopped to talk to a worker, and I didn't realize it. By the time I turned back, he was gone. Then I saw the light moving around in here. I thought it was Daddy."

GABE: "You got lost, too?"

SARI: "I'm not lost. You're lost." "How could you do that, Gabe? Daddy and I were totally freaked."

GABE: **(ANGRY)** "Why didn't you wait up for me?" "I called to you. You just disappeared."

SARI: "We didn't hear you."

GABE: I was really glad to see her. But I hated the way she was looking at me, like I was some kind of hopeless idiot.

SARI: "I guess we got too involved in our argument. We thought you were right behind us. Then when we turned around, you were gone." "Oh – Gabe, why did you do that?" "You know we were supposed to stay close together!"

GABE: **(ANGRY)** "Hey – it wasn't *my* fault."

SARI: "Daddy is so mad."

GABE: "Well, he won't be mad when he sees what I've discovered. Look..."

I shined my light onto a mummy crouching near the tar pit, then moved it to another mummy, this one lying down, then to the row of mummy cases against the wall.

SARI: "Wow..."

GABE: "Yeah. Wow." "The chamber is filled with mummies. And there are all kinds of tools and cloth and everything you need to make a mummy. It's all in perfect shape, like it hasn't been touched in thousands of years." "And I discovered it all!"

SARI: "This must be where they prepared the mummies for burial." "But why are some of them standing up like that?"

GABE: I shrugged.

"Beats me."

SARI: "Wow. This is amazing, Gabe."

GABE: "*Outstanding!*" "And if I hadn't stopped to tie my sneaker, I never would have discovered it."

SARI: "You're going to be famous." "Thanks to me saving your life."

GABE: "Sari—"

SARI: "Wait till Daddy sees all this!" **(EXCITED)**

GABE: "We have to call him!" "Sari, use your beeper."
(IMPATIENT)

SARI: "Yuck. There are bugs crawling in this one's face."
"Gross!"

GABE: "Come on. Use your beeper. Call Uncle Ben."

SARI: "Okay, okay. Why didn't you use yours?"

GABE: "Mine broke when I fell into this place."

She made a face and pulled the beeper off her belt loop. I shined my light on it as she pushed the button. She pressed it twice, just to make sure, then clipped it back onto her jeans. We stood with our arms crossed, waiting for Uncle Ben to follow the radio signals and find us.

SARI: "It shouldn't take him long." "He wasn't far behind me."

GABE: Sure enough, a few seconds later, we heard the sounds of someone approaching in the tunnel.

"Uncle Ben!" "Look what I've found!" **(EXCITED)**

Sari and I both started to run to the tunnel, our lights zigzagging over the low entrance.

SARI: "Daddy, you won't believe—"

She stopped when the stooped figure leaned out of the darkness and straightened up.

We both gaped in horror, our flashlights making his mustached face glow eerily.

SARI: "Ahmed!"

GABE: I swallowed hard. Sari and I stared at each other. Ahmed. He had tried to kidnap us. And now he had us all alone down here. He stepped forward, a flaming torch held high in one hand. His black hair glowed in the flickering flames. His eyes narrowed at us in menace.

SARI: "Ahmed, what are you doing here?"

AHMED: "What are you doing here?" (**SOFTLY**)

GABE: Holding the torch in front of him, he stepped into the chamber. His eyes went around the room, as if inspecting it, making sure that nothing had been moved.

SARI: (**WARNING**) "My dad will be here in a second." "I just beeped him."

AHMED: "I tried to warn your father."

SARI: "Warn him?"

AHMED: "About the curse." (**SERIOUS**)

GABE: (**NERVOUS**) "Uncle Ben mentioned some kind of curse to me." "I don't think he takes that kind of thing seriously."

AHMED: "He should!"

GABE: Ahmed's eyes glowed with anger in the torch light. Sari and I stared back at him in silence. Where is Uncle Ben? I wondered. What's keeping him? Hurry, I urged silently. Please — hurry!

AHMED: (SOFTLY) "The curse must be carried out." "I have no choice. You have violated the priestess' chamber."

GABE: "Priestess?" (FRIGHTENED)

AHMED: "This is the sacred Preparation Chamber of the Priestess Khala, and you have violated it."

SARI: "Well, we didn't know." "I really don't see what's the big deal, Ahmed."

GABE: "She's right." "We didn't touch anything. We didn't move anything. I don't think—"

AHMED: "Shut up, you fools!"

SARI: "Ahmed, my dad will be here any second." (TREMBLING)

GABE: We both turned our eyes to the tunnel. It was dark and silent. No sign of Uncle Ben.

AHMED: "Your father is a smart man." "It is too bad he wasn't smart enough to heed my warnings."

SARI: "Warnings?"

AHMED: "I frightened the two workers." "I frightened them to show your father that the curse was alive, that I was prepared to carry out Khala's wishes."

SARI: "How did you frighten them?"

GABE: Ahmed smiled. He turned his eyes to the tar pit.

AHMED: "I gave them a little demonstration. I showed them what it might feel like to be boiled alive." "They didn't much like it."

SARI: "But, Ahmed—"

AHMED: "Your father should have known better than to return here. He should have believed me. He should have believed in the Priestess' curse. The Priestess cursed all who would violate her chamber."

GABE: "But, come on, you don't really believe—"

AHMED: "It was decreed by Khala more than four thousand years ago that this sacred chamber would not be violated." "Since that time, from generation to generation, descendants of Khala have made sure that the Priestess' command was obeyed."

SARI: "But, Ahmed—"

AHMED: "It has come to me." "It has come to me as a descendant of Khala to make sure the curse is carried out."

GABE: I stared past Ahmed to the tunnel. Still no sign of Uncle Ben. Was he coming? Had Sari's beeper worked?

AHMED: "I volunteered to work for your father to make sure that Khala's sacred sanctuary was not violated." "When he would not heed my warnings, I had to take action. I frightened the two workers. Then I planned to take you away, to hide you until he agreed to stop his work." **(SAD)** "Now, I have no choice. I must carry out my sacred duties. I must keep the ancient promise to Khala."

SARI: "But what does that mean?"

AHMED: "What does it mean?" "Look around you."

GABE: We both turned and glanced quickly around the chamber. But we didn't understand.

AHMED: "The mummies."

GABE: "Wh—what about the mummies?"

AHMED: "They were all violators of the Priestess' chamber."

SARI: "You mean — they're not from ancient Egypt?"

AHMED: "A few of them." "A few of them were ancient intruders. Some are quite recent. But they all became victims of the curse. And they all were mummified *alive*!"

GABE: "No!"

AHMED: "I did that one myself."

GABE: He pointed to a mummy standing stiffly at attention at the edge of the tar pit.

SARI: "Oh, how awful!" **(TREMBLING)**

AHMED: "Today, I must go to work again." "Today there will be new mummies. New trophies for Khala."

SARI: "You can't do that!"

GABE: I grabbed her hand.

To my horror, I understood perfectly now. I understood why some of the mummies were in such good condition. They were *new*.

All of the tools, the tar, the linen – they had been used by descendants of Khala, descendants like Ahmed. Since the time of Khala, anyone who had entered the chamber – the chamber we were now standing in – had been mummified. *Alive*.

And now Sari and I were about to become mummies, too.

SARI: "Ahmed, you can't!"

AHMED: "It is the will of Khala."

GABE: Then, I saw a long-bladed dagger appear in his free hand. The blade caught the light from the torch. Sari and I both took a step back as Ahmed began moving toward us with quick, determined strides.

As Ahmed approached, Sari and I shrank back to the center of the chamber. Run, I thought. We can run away from him.

My eyes searched frantically for a place we could escape through. But there was no way out.

The tunnel in the corner appeared to be the only opening. And we'd have to run right past Ahmed to get to it.

Sari, I saw, was frantically pressing the beeper at her waist. She glanced at me, her features tight with fear.

"Let's make a run for the tunnel." "He can't get both of us."
(WHISPERING)

AHMED: (SOFTLY) "There is no escape." "There is no escape from Khala's curse."

SARI: "He – he's going to kill us!"

AHMED: "You have violated her sacred chamber." "I saw you yesterday climb into the sacred sarcophagus. I saw you two *playing* in Khala's holy chamber. It was then that I knew I had to carry out my sacred duties. I–"

GABE: Sari and I both cried out as something dropped from the chamber ceiling.
All three of us looked up to see a rope ladder dangling from the hole I had fallen through. It swung back and forth as it was lowered, nearly to the floor.

UNCLE BEN: "Are you down there? I'm coming down!"

GABE: "Uncle Ben – no!"

But he was already moving down the ladder, making his way quickly, the ladder steadying under his weight.
Halfway down, he stopped and peered into the chamber.

UNCLE BEN: "What on earth–?" "Ahmed, what are you doing here?"

GABE: Uncle Ben cried out in surprise. He quickly lowered himself to the floor, jumping down the last three rungs.

AHMED: "Merely carrying out Khala's wishes."

UNCLE BEN: "Khala? The Priestess?"

SARI: "He's going to kill us!" "Daddy – he's going to kill us! And then turn us into mummies!"

GABE: Sari rushed up to her dad, throwing her arms around his waist. Uncle Ben held Sari and looked over her shoulder accusingly at Ahmed.

UNCLE BEN: "Is this true?"

AHMED: "The chamber has been violated. It has fallen to me, Doctor, to carry out the curse."

GABE: Uncle Ben put his hands on Sari's trembling shoulders and gently moved her aside. Then he began to make his way slowly, steadily, toward Ahmed.

UNCLE BEN: "Ahmed, let us go out of here and discuss this."

AHMED: "The Priestess' will must not be ignored."

UNCLE BEN: "Ahmed, you are a scientist, and so am I." "Now, put down the torch." "The dagger, too. Please. Let's discuss this, scientist to scientist."

AHMED: "What is there to discuss?" "The will of Khala must be carried out, as it has been for four thousand years. That cannot be discussed."

UNCLE BEN: "The curse is ancient. Khala has had her way for many centuries. Perhaps it is time to let it rest. Lower your weapons, Ahmed. Let's talk about this."

GABE: It's going to be okay, I thought, breathing a long sigh of relief. It's all going to be okay. We're going to get out of here!

But then Ahmed moved with startling quickness. Without warning, without a word, he pulled back his arms and, gripping the torch handle with both hands, swung it as hard as he could at Uncle Ben's head.

The torch made a loud *thunk* as it connected with the side of Uncle Ben's face. The orange flames danced up. A swirl of bright color. And then shadows.

Uncle Ben groaned. His eyes bulged wide with surprise. With pain.

The blow knocked him out. He slumped to his knees. Then his eyes closed, and he dropped limply to the floor.

Ahmed raised the torch high, his eyes gleaming with triumph. And I knew we were doomed.

SARI: "Daddy!"

GABE: Sari rushed to her father and knelt at his side.

But Ahmed moved quickly, thrusting the torch toward her, holding the dagger ready, forcing her to back away.

A thin trickle of blood, glowing darkly in the light of the fire, rolled down the side of Uncle Ben's face.

I thought of leaping at Ahmed, trying to knock him over. I imagined grabbing the torch, swinging it at him, forcing him against the wall. Forcing him to let us escape. But the blade of the dagger glowed, as if warning me to stay back. I'm just a kid, I thought. Thinking I could beat a grown man with a knife and a torch was just crazy. Crazy! I suddenly felt sick. My stomach tightened, and a wave of nausea swept over me.

SARI: "Let us go – now!"

GABE: To my surprise, Ahmed reacted by swinging back the torch and heaving it across the room. It landed with a soft plop in the center of the tar pit. Instantly, the surface of the tar burst into flames. The flames spread, leaping up toward the chamber ceiling, until the entire square was aflame. As I stared in amazement, the tar popped and bubbled beneath the orange and red covering of flames.

AHMED: (CALMLY) "We must wait for it to boil."

GABE: The chamber grew thick with smoke. Sari and I both started to cough. Ahmed bent down and put his hands under Uncle Ben's shoulders. He began to drag him across the floor.

SARI: "Leave him alone!"

GABE: Sari started running frantically toward Ahmed. I saw that she was going to try to fight him. I grabbed her shoulders and held her back. We were no match for Ahmed. He had already knocked Uncle Ben unconscious. There was no telling what he would do to us. Holding onto Sari, I stared at him. With surprising strength, he pulled Uncle Ben across the floor to one of the open mummy cases against the wall. Then he hoisted him over the side and shoved him into the case. Not even the slightest bit out of breath, Ahmed slid the lid closed over my unconscious uncle. Then he turned to us.

AHMED: "You two – into that one."

GABE: He pointed to an enormous mummy case on a tall pedestal next to Uncle Ben's. It was nearly as tall as I was, and at

least ten feet long. It must have been built to hold a mummified person – and all of his or her possessions.

SARI: "Let us go!" "Let us out of here. We won't tell anyone what happened. Really!"

AHMED: "Please climb into the case." "We must wait for the tar to be ready."

GABE: "We're not going in there!" (**FRIGHTENED**)

AHMED: "Into the coffin, to await your fate. Khala will not be kept waiting. The ancient curse will be carried out in her name."

GABE: "No!" (**ANGRY**)

I stood on tiptoe and peered into the enormous mummy case. It smelled so sour in there, I nearly hurled. The case was made of wood. It was warped and stained and peeling inside. In the flickering light, I was sure I saw dozens of insects crawling around in there.

AHMED: "Get into the case now!"

GABE: Sari climbed up over the side and lowered herself into the ancient mummy case.

I hesitated, resting my hand on the rotting wood on the side of the case. I glanced at the case next to it, the case with Uncle Ben inside. It was carved of stone, and the heavy stone lid was closed, sealing it up tight.

Did Uncle Ben have any air in there? I wondered, gripped with fear. Was he able to breathe?

And, then, I thought glumly, what difference does it make? All three of us are going to be dead soon. All three of us are going to be mummies, locked away in this hidden chamber *forever*.

AHMED: "Get in – now!"

GABE: "I–I'm just a kid!"

I don't know where the words came from. I was so scared, I really didn't know what I was saying.

AHMED: "Many of the pharaohs were your age at death." "Now — Get in."

GABE: Feeling totally defeated, I slid one leg over the side of the rotting coffin, raised myself up, and then dropped down beside Sari. The coffin lid began to slide over us. The last thing I saw were the red flames leaping up over the pit of tar. Then the lid closed us into complete blackness...

(PAUSE)

SARI: "Gabe..." "I'm frightened." **(WHISPERING)**

GABE: "I'm too frightened to be frightened." **(WHISPERING)**

She grabbed my hand and squeezed it. Her hand was even colder and clammier than mine.

SARI: "He's crazy."

GABE: "Yeah. I know."

SARI: "I think there are bugs in here." "I can feel them crawling on me."

GABE: "Me, too."

SARI: "Poor Daddy."

The air in the coffin was already beginning to feel stuffy and hot. I tried to ignore the disgusting sour smell, but it had crept into my nostrils, and I could even taste it. I held my breath to keep from gagging.

"We're going to suffocate in here."

SARI: "He's going to kill us before we can suffocate!" "All I keep thinking about is how he's going to reach in and pull my brain out through my nose." "Why did you have to tell me that, Gabe?"

GABE: "Sorry."

I began to picture the same, and another wave of nausea swept over me.

"We can't just sit here." "We have to escape."

SARI: "Huh? How?"

GABE: "Let's try to push up the lid." "Maybe if we both push together..."

I counted to three in a low whisper, and we both flattened our hands against the coffin top and pushed up as hard as we could. No. The lid wouldn't budge.

SARI: "Maybe he's locked it or put something heavy on top of it." **(SIGHING)**

GABE: "Maybe..."

We sat in silence for a while. I could hear Sari breathing. She was sort of sobbing as she breathed. My heart was racing. I could feel my temples throbbing. And then...

(SFX: SHUFFLING)

I was the first to hear the scrabbling sound. Like something climbing quickly around inside the mummy case. At first I thought it was Sari. But she grabbed my hand with her icy hand, and I realized she hadn't moved from in front of me. We both listened hard. Something near us, something right next to us, bumped the side of the case. A mummy? Was there a mummy in the case with us? Moving? I heard a soft groan. Sari squeezed my hand so tightly, it hurt, and I uttered a sharp cry. Another sound. Closer.

SARI: "Gabe – there's something in here with us!" **(WHISPERING)**

GABE: It's not a mummy, I told myself. It can't be. It's a bug. A very large bug. Moving across the coffin floor. I didn't have too long to think about it. Whatever it was crept closer...

UNCLE BEN: **(WHISPERING)** "Hey!" "Where are you two?"

GABE: "Uncle Ben!"

SARI: "Daddy!"

GABE: "But... how?" "How did you get in here?"

UNCLE BEN: "There's an escape hatch." "A small opening with a doorway. The Egyptians built hidden doorways and escape hatches into many of their mummy cases. For the corpse's soul to be able to leave."

GABE: "Wow."

UNCLE BEN: "Ahmed is so caught up in his ancient curse mumbo jumbo, he's forgotten about this little detail." "Come on, you two. Follow me."

GABE: "But he's out there—"

UNCLE BEN: "No." "He's slipped away. When I climbed out of my case, I looked for him. I didn't see him anywhere. Maybe he went somewhere else while he's waiting for the tar to get hot enough. Or maybe he decided to just leave us in the mummy cases to suffocate." "Now — out we go."

GABE: I heard him groan as he turned in the enormous coffin. Then I could hear him crawling to the back. I saw a small rectangle of light as he pushed open the hidden door in the back of the case. It was a very small escape hatch, just big enough for us to squeeze through. I followed Uncle Ben and Sari out of the case, flattening myself to crawl out the small opening, then dropping onto all fours on the chamber floor. It took a while for my eyes to adjust to the brightness. The red flames still danced over the pit of bubbling tar, casting eerie blue shadows on all four chamber walls. The mummies stood as before, frozen in place around the room, shadows flickering over their faceless forms. As my eyes began to focus, I saw that Uncle Ben had an enormous, dark bruise on the side of his head. A wide ribbon of dried blood streaked down his cheek.

UNCLE BEN: "Let's get out of here before Ahmed comes back."

GABE: He stood between us, one hand on each of our shoulders. Sari looked pale and trembly. Uncle Ben started toward the rope ladder in the center of the chamber, but then stopped.

UNCLE BEN: "No – it'll take too long." "Come on. To the tunnel. Hurry."

GABE: All three of us started jogging toward the tunnel in the corner. We were about to get out of there!
A few seconds before, I had given up all hope. But now, here we were out of the mummy case and heading to freedom.
We were just a few yards in front of the tunnel entrance when the tunnel suddenly filled with orange light. Then, from out of the tunnel, Ahmed emerged, holding a new torch in front of him, the flames revealing a startled look on his face.

GABE + SARI: "No!"

AHMED: "You cannot escape!" "You will not escape!"

GABE: He thrust the torch toward Uncle Ben, who was forced to fall backwards, out of reach of the hissing flames. He landed hard on his elbows and cried out in pain.

AHMED: "You have made Khala angry." "You will not join the other violators of this chamber..." "The three of you will die in the tar pit."

Sari and I exchanged horrified glances. Uncle Ben had climbed back to his feet and put his arms around us.

UNCLE BEN: "Ahmed, can't we talk about this calmly and rationally?"

AHMED: "To the tar pit." (**ANGRY**)

UNCLE BEN: "Ahmed – please!" (**FRIGHTENED**)

Ahmed ignored Uncle Ben's desperate pleas. Pushing the torch at our backs and gesturing with the dagger, he forced us to make our way to the edge of the pit. The tar was bubbling noisily now, making ugly popping and sucking sounds. The flames across the top were low and red.

I tried to pull back. It smelled so bad. And the steam coming off it was so hot, it made my face burn.

AHMED: "One by one, you will jump." "If you don't jump, I will be forced to push you."

UNCLE BEN: "Ahmed—"

AHMED: (SOLEMN) "It has come to me." "The honor of carrying out Khala's wishes."

GABE: The tar fumes were so overwhelming, I thought I was going to faint. The pit started to tilt in front of me. I felt very dizzy.

I shoved my hands into my jeans pockets, to steady myself, I guess. And my hand closed around something I had forgotten about.

The Summoner. The mummy hand that I carry around everywhere. I'm not sure why — I wasn't thinking clearly, if at all — but I pulled out the little mummy hand.

I spun around quickly. And I held the mummy hand up high.

I can't really explain what was going through my mind. I was so terrified, so overwhelmed with fear, that I was thinking a hundred things at once. Maybe I thought the mummy hand would distract Ahmed somehow. Maybe I was just stalling for time. Or maybe I was unconsciously remembering the legend behind the hand that the kid at the garage sale had told me. The legend of why it was called The Summoner. How it was used to call up ancient souls and spirits.

I spun around and, gripping it by its slender wrist, held the mummy hand up high. And waited. Ahmed stared at it. Lowering the torch a few inches, he squinted at the mummy hand. Then his eyes grew wider, and his mouth dropped open in surprise.

He cried out. I couldn't understand what he was saying. The words

were in a language I'd never heard. Ancient Egyptian, maybe.

He took a step back, his surprised expression quickly replaced by a wide-eyed look of fear.

AHMED: "The hand of the Priestess!"

GABE: I was suddenly distracted by what I saw behind him. Sari uttered a low cry. All three of us stared over Ahmed's shoulder in disbelief.

A mummy propped against the wall appeared to lean forward. Another mummy, lying on its back, slowly sat up, creaking as it raised itself.

"No!"

Sari and Uncle Ben were gaping wide-eyed as the vast chamber filled with motion. As the mummies creaked and groaned to life. The air filled with the odor of ancient dust, of decay. In the shadowy light, I saw one mummy, then another, straighten up, stand tall. They stretched their bandaged arms above their featureless heads. Slowly. Painfully.

Staggering, moving stiffly, the mummies lumbered forward. I watched, frozen in amazement, as they climbed out of mummy cases, raised themselves from the floor, leaned forward, took their first slow, heavy steps, their muscles groaning, dust rising up from their dry, dead bodies.

They're dead, I thought. All of them. Dead for so many years. But now they were rising up, climbing from their ancient coffins, struggling toward us on their heavy, dead legs.

Their bandaged feet scraped across the chamber floor as they gathered in a group.

The faceless army approached. Bandaged arms outstretched, they lumbered toward us, creaking and groaning. Moaning softly with ancient pain.

Ahmed cried out again in that strange language as he saw the mummies advancing on us, scraping so softly, so deliberately, across the chamber floor.

And, then, with a furious scream, Ahmed heaved the torch at the mummy in the lead. The torch hit the mummy in the chest and bounced to the floor. Flames burst from the mummy's chest, immediately spreading over the arms and down the legs.

But the mummy kept advancing, didn't slow, didn't react at all to the fire that was quickly consuming it.

Gaping in open-mouthed horror, babbling an endless stream of words in that mysterious language, Ahmed tried to run.

But he was too late. The burning mummy lunged at him. The ancient figure caught Ahmed by the throat, lifted him high above its flaming shoulders.

Ahmed uttered a high-pitched shriek of terror as the other mummies lumbered forward, moaning and wailing through their yellowed bandages.

They raised Ahmed high above their moaning heads. And then held him over the burning tar pit. Squirming and kicking, Ahmed

uttered a piercing scream as they held him over the boiling, bubbling, steaming tar.

I closed my eyes. The heat and tar fumes swirled around me. I felt as if I were being swallowed up, pulled down into the steaming blackness.

When I opened my eyes, I saw Ahmed fleeing to the tunnel, staggering clumsily, shrieking in open-mouthed terror as he ran. I realized I was still holding the mummy hand over my head. I lowered it slowly, and gazed at Sari and Uncle Ben. They were standing beside me, their faces filled with confusion. And relief.

"The mummies--"

SARI: "Look!"

GABE: I followed the direction of her gaze. The mummies were all back in place. Some were leaning, some propped at odd angles, some lying down. They were exactly as they had been when I entered the chamber.

"Huh?"

UNCLE BEN: "We're okay." "We're okay!"

SARI: "We can go now!"

GABE: Uncle Ben threw his arms around Sari and me. Sari cried out happily, hugging her dad. Then she turned to me.

SARI: "You saved our lives."

GABE: She had to choke out the words. But she said them. Then Uncle Ben turned his gaze on me and the object I still gripped tightly in front of me.

UNCLE BEN: "Thanks for the helping hand..."

GABE: We had an enormous dinner at a restaurant back in Cairo. We were all talking at once, chattering excitedly, reliving our adventure, trying to make sense of it all. I was spinning The Summoner around on the table.

UNCLE BEN: "I had no idea how special that mummy hand was!"

GABE: He took it from me and examined it closely.

UNCLE BEN: "Better not play with it." "We must treat it carefully." "Some great scientist I am, huh? When I saw it, I thought it was just a toy, some kind of reproduction. But this hand may be my biggest discovery of all!"

GABE: "It's my good luck charm."

I handled it gently as I took it back.

SARI: "You can say that again!"

GABE: Back at the hotel, I surprised myself by falling asleep instantly. I thought I'd be up for hours, thinking about all that had happened. But I guess all the excitement had exhausted me...

The next morning, Sari, Uncle Ben, and I had a big breakfast in the room. I had a plate of scrambled eggs and a bowl of Frosted Flakes. As I ate, I fiddled with the little mummy hand. All three of us were feeling good, happy that our frightening adventure was over... After I finished my cereal, I raised the little mummy hand high.

(IN DEEP VOICE) "O, Summoner." "I summon the ancient spirits. Come alive. Come alive again!"

SARI: "Stop it, Gabe." "That isn't funny." "You shouldn't fool around with it like that."

I could see that she was really frightened, which made me enjoy my little joke even more. Keeping it away from her, I raised the hand high.

(IN DEEP VOICE) "I summon thee, ancient spirits of the dead." "Come to me. Come to me now!"

And then there was a loud knock on the door. All three of us gasped. I froze with the little hand in the air. Another loud knock. We heard scrabbling at the door. The sound of ancient, bandaged fingers struggling with the lock. Sari and I exchanged horrified glances.

I slowly lowered the hand as the door swung open.
And two shadowy figures lumbered into the room...

"Mom and Dad!"

I'll bet they were surprised at how glad I was to see them!

END.