

Excerpt from SIROCCO, Storm over Land and Sea by Inge H. Borg

Dr. Jabari El-Masri's Speech (Director of the Cairo Museum)

“During the war, the British imprisoned General Aziz El-Masri who was then Commander of the Egyptian Army. If better luck had been on his side, he would have liberated my country from its dictator, the Germans, as well as the British.”

“Any relation of yours?”

The answer was a shoulder shrug.

Jonathan pressed on. “Did the general survive the war?”

“Evidently,” El-Masri suddenly grinned. “I was born in forty-seven.”

Bill cleared his throat. “What are you planning to do, Jabari. You do realize that you have practically kidnapped us, which has the makings of an international incident, I might add. And I assume this plane is still the property of the Egyptian military, or at least of whoever claims to be the leader of your government these days. And once the existence of all these tablets becomes public knowledge, no doubt they will be classified as national treasures. So, it comes to mind—forgive me for pointing this out—that you are about to steal both.”

“Steal? Steal!” The Egyptian jumped to his full five-foot seven-inch height. As the Americans were seated, he towered over them, all indignation and spitting rage.

“You dare to call me a thief, when your woman absconded with my Saqqara tablets!”

“My woman did not steal anything,” Jonathan exploded trying to jump up as well but failed, being hemmed in by the table and by Bill.

“Let me correct you, my young interferer.”

“Now hold on.” Bill was turning red himself now.

“No! You hold on. The world has been stealing from Egypt forever. They all came supposedly to explore and study. And then went back home with loot from our ancestors crammed into their lorries. Shiploads of sacred mummies, carted off to Europe for fertilizer. Fertilizer!”

“Mummified cats, I think,” Jonathan dared. A jab from Bill, and a scornful look from The Pharaoh made him retreat deeper into the hard seat.

“You cannot really believe that the likes of your glorified Carters and Champollions did not take whatever they wanted before leaving us the pittance of their finds. The British, the Germans, the French and, oh, let us not forget the Americans. What they did not damage and destroy, they

grabbed with both hands. And now, that I have discovered the most incredible writings since the Rosetta Stone.”

Jonathan squirmed. This was not the time to point out Jean François Champollion’s ground-breaking contribution to Egyptology.

“But now, my own people aim to steal from me. They have stolen before. Yes, I admit, I was forced to make some deals. Negligible objects, of course. What was I to do? To go against those in power would have been suicidal. The secret buyers came in droves.

“The Japanese in their private jets. The South Americans, mooring their ostentatious yachts off Alexandria. Too much money, and no respect. All they wanted was to squirrel away our antiquities in their private collections.

“And now this! My own people ordering me to melt down these tablets to finance their corrupt campaigns. People who assume that they are the next president.

“Such blasphemy! I cannot let this happen. I will save these treasures for Egypt. They are my heritage. They are,” the Egyptologist paused, seemingly exhausted. “They are my nemesis. I will safeguard them to the death.”

Stunned silence followed Dr. Jabari El-Masri’s impassioned testimony to his almost fanatical belief in his country’s glorious heritage. The man before them was neither a thieving scoundrel nor an uncaring zealot. He was through and through Egyptian. He was a world-renowned Egyptologist. And he was willingly endangering his professional credibility. Most likely he had already made personal sacrifices preserving the legacy of this awesome land of his. His whole life, he had painstakingly labored to unravel the enigma of a great bygone civilization, unequalled anywhere. The man standing before them was an Egyptian patriot who, in their eyes, now lived up to his name. It translated into Brave Egyptian.