

BEYOND THE GRAVE



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SCHOLASTIC INC.

NEW YORK TORONTO LONDON AUCKLAND SYDNEY
MEXICO CITY NEW DELHI HONG KONG BUENOS AIRES

CHAPTER 1

If Amy Cahill had to list what was wrong with eleven-year-old brothers, their habit of disappearing would be *numero uno*.

Or maybe the fact that they existed in the first place.

And then there was the whole burping the alphabet thing. . . .

Amy stood in the middle of the Khan el-Khalili market in Cairo, her head swiveling frantically, trying to find her brother, Dan. The blur of jet lag was interfering with normal brain function. Dan had just been at her side a moment ago. Then she turned for *two seconds* to buy a Nefertiti pencil, and when she turned back, Dan was gone.

The air was thick with heat and music and the calls of shopkeepers. Bright banners waved overhead. Tourists weaved through the streets wearing their backpacks on their chests to safeguard against pickpockets and stopping to take pictures every few minutes. A woman in a head scarf dodged a row of turquoise chairs to

follow after her two boys. A man with a crate full of oranges balanced them on his head with one hand. A tourist in a baseball cap and a T-shirt proclaiming I WANT MY MUMMY strolled past Amy, her camera held up in front of her face.

Amy felt the heat like waves against her skin. She hoped she wouldn't faint. Colors swarmed, faces dissolved, unfamiliar noises pounded against her ears. She had never liked crowds, and Cairo seemed like the city that had invented them.

She turned, her hand on her waist pack. Their au pair, Nellie Gomez, was just down the alley, bargaining over spices. Amy could just catch a glimpse of her crazy half-blond, half-black hair.

Less than an hour ago, they'd been in a taxi, riding into Cairo from the airport. Then when the cabdriver had casually pointed out the window and said, "The Khan market starts here, very good place," Nellie had suddenly yelled, "Stop!" Before they knew what was happening, they'd landed in the market with luggage and cat carrier. Saladin had meowed furiously when Nellie promised, "Just ten minutes, that's all I need, and then we'll go straight to the hotel. . . . Cool! Cardamom pods!" For Nellie, every new city was just another opportunity for weird food.

Finally, Amy spotted Dan through the crowd. He was pressed against a shop window crowded with souvenirs. She had a feeling he was captivated by the King Tutankhamen pencil sharpener, but it could

have been the flashlight in the shape of a mummy.

As she crossed the alley, Dan kept appearing and disappearing through the meandering crowd. The hot sun was blinding. She hoped that air-conditioning was in her future.

The tourist in the I WANT MY MUMMY T-shirt drifted closer to Dan. She pushed her white sunglasses down her nose. Some small alarm chimed inside Amy. A man in a straw hat blocked her view, and she dodged to one side.

The tourist bent her index finger back at the first joint, as if she had a cramp. The hot sun glinted on something protruding from her nail.

“Dan!” Amy screamed. The music and the calls of the shopkeepers — *Five dollars, five dollars!* — drowned her out. She darted past a man balancing a dozen neon-colored soccer balls in a net.

The hypodermic needle protruded out of the tourist’s clawlike finger. Dan leaned closer to the window. . . .

“Dan!” She screamed the name. In her head. But it came out like a strangled croak.

Amy threw herself forward. At the very last second, she flung out her hand. The needle jammed into the Nefertiti pencil and stuck.

For one swift second, all Amy could do was stare down at the glint of sunlight on metal. In slow motion, a drop of something lethal fell from the tip and hit the dust.

Amy looked into the face of Irina Spasky. Former KGB agent. Spy. Cousin.

Irina's left eye twitched. "*Blin!*" She twisted her hand, but the needle remained stuck in the pencil.

The shopkeeper hurried over. "Beautiful lady, it is stuck on you. Here, I have more pencils for you!"

Irina turned on him fiercely. "I don't want your fancy pencils, shopkeeper of things!"

Amy and Dan didn't wait another second. Dan moved like a midfielder through the crowd, and Amy followed in his wake.

Legs pumping, they ran until their lungs burned, dashing through the maze of twisting alleys. Finally they stopped, bent over at the waist, and tried to catch their breath. When they looked up, Amy realized they were lost. Badly, stupidly, irredeemably lost.

"Nellie will be looking for us," Amy said. She flipped open her cell phone. "No signal. We'll have to find our way back."

"And hope we don't bump into Comrade Irina," Dan said. "I can skip the family reunion."

By now they were used to meeting family members with mayhem on their minds. Just weeks ago they'd had a hard time coping with the fact of their grandmother's death. After their parents died, Grace had been the most important person in Amy and Dan's life. Even though they didn't live with her, they spent weekends at her mansion outside of Boston, and she always took them for trips during the school year and

in the summers. Grace's death from cancer knocked them off their feet.

But that had been only the first of many shocks to come.

Grace had invited the four branches of the Cahill family to the reading of her will. Appearing on a video, she'd offered them a choice. Take a million dollars and walk away or join in a chase for 39 Clues and become the most powerful person in the world. Even though the million had seemed like one sweet deal, Amy and Dan hadn't really hesitated. They knew Grace would want them to accept the challenge. For Grace, there was no such thing as the easy way out.

The decision had been easy. It was the living up to it that was hard. In her old life, Amy had thought *playing to win* was Courtney Catowski spiking a volleyball on her head. Now she knew what competition was really about. Relatives like Irina played for keeps. She'd drug them, kidnap them, even kill them if she had to.

They started to walk. Amy felt as though they were going in circles. Like in a dream, where you run and run and get nowhere. Yesterday she'd been in Seoul, Korea. Before that, Tokyo and Venice. Vienna and Salzburg, Austria. Paris. Philadelphia. She'd even touched down on a private airfield in Russia.

She'd never had so many secrets before.

She'd never imagined she could be so afraid.

She'd never imagined she could be so brave.

Just a few days ago in Seoul they'd nearly been bur-

ied alive. Left for dead by people she trusted. Natalie and Ian Kabra . . . she wouldn't think about him. Wouldn't think about how he held her hand and told her that together they could form a great alliance. The alliance lasted a couple of hours, until he saw the opportunity to leave her for dead.

Wouldn't. Think. About. Ian.

Then they discovered that the only family member they almost-trusted, their uncle Alistair Oh, had double-crossed them as well. Pretended to be dead when he was clearly very much alive.

What had sent them hurtling through international air space to Cairo was a hint, no more than that. But they were used to grabbing on to hints and riding them for all they were worth. A pyramid shape and a word. Sakhet. The Egyptian goddess with the lion's head. Amy had bought several books before they left Korea and researched the goddess, but she still didn't know why they were sent here . . . or what, exactly, they were looking for.

Amy felt sweat trickle in rivers underneath her T-shirt. The temperature was over ninety. Her hair was sticking to the back of her neck. She thought of Ian, who no matter what the circumstances always looked so cool.

Wouldn't. Think. About. Ian.

The noise pressed against her ears, an exotic, whirling cacophony of horns honking, vendors shouting, cell phones ringing, and someone yelling over it all, "Move it, lame-o!"

Oh. That voice was not so exotic. It was Dan.

“Russian spy at two o’clock and gaining!” he hissed.

Irina hadn’t seen them yet. She was too busy looking for them. She prowled along the opposite side, peering into shop windows.

Amy pulled Dan into a café. Men sat at tables, drinking tea and having murmured conversations or reading newspapers. Tourists sat with their guidebooks over glasses of juice. As Amy squeezed past, her bulging backpack slammed against a burly gentleman sitting with a glass of mint tea. The tea spilled on his white suit.

Every eye in the café turned to Amy. The *clackety-clack* of a backgammon game stopped. She felt her face turn bright red. She hated being the center of attention at any time, and especially when she’d done something clumsy.

“S-s-sorry!” Amy stammered. Her stutter came out when she was nervous, and she hated it. She tried to mop up the mess.

“It’s fine, young lady, do not worry.” The man smiled kindly at her and waved to the waiter. “It is just tea.”

On the walls, heavy antique mirrors reflected the scene. Amy saw her own red face, her fluttering hands, the eyes of the patrons . . . and the door opening. Even the tourist attire and white plastic sunglasses couldn’t disguise the way Irina soldier-marched into the café, as if she were inspecting everyone in it for demerits.

And in exactly three seconds, her gaze would land on them.