

# “A Map to History”

*A short-story by Mary Margaret Park*

Tolliver's been digging for two days, his hair and eyebrows are crusted with sand.

Amadi, Tolliver's African guide, smokes a cigarette nearby. Tolliver leans on his shovel, his eyes barely slits in the glare.

“I don't think it's here.”

Amadi surveys the sun bleached horizon, “Storm's coming; better quit soon.”

Tolliver thinks about the package he received a few weeks back. Enclosed were a pirate-style eye-patch and a scarcely legible note. There was no contact information but his Grandfather knew who it was from. Tolliver edges carefully around the hole, grabbing his canteen. He takes several greedy gulps. The water's sweet taste soothes his dry throat.

Amadi grabs his arm, vice-like.

“Water's low.”

“Take it easy, one more day and we'll head back to Tripoli.”

Amadi motions to the north, “Sand storms coming; time to go friend.”

Tolliver pulls an old parchment map from his pocket. The ink is faded and old, smeared in places.

“The map says it's buried right here, we'll have to dig deeper.”

Tolliver's hands are wrapped in cotton. Fields of blisters line his fingers and palms.

While he digs, Amadi loads their jeep with most of their belongings. The boiling sun glares into late afternoon.

Amadi watches him dig.

*I won't stay past tomorrow morning, Crazy American* he thinks.

Heat shimmer's the air, making Tolliver's figure appear oddly disjointed; like a genie spiriting from a lamp. The sun burns across the sky into early evening. Amadi builds a fire and prepares the evening meal. Tolliver continues digging, but his movements grow slower. He crawls down into the hole, his disembodied voice rising upward.

“I think I've found something.”

Crab-like, his sand coated arms wave from the hole. Amadi towers above. Tolliver brushes the sand off of a tattered piece of material. Its faded tan, crusted with sand. He gingerly pulls the fabric free revealing a metal object.

“An Iron-Cross...”

He holds it up like a prize.

“Fascist sentiments of the past...” Amadi shrugs.

Tolliver crawls out from the hole, heading for camp, “My Uncle Till served in the Afrika Korps. I'm sure this is where the map points. I've just got to dig a little more.”

Amadi nods, the dark skin around his eyes creases with amusement, “So you say.....I'm leaving in the morning friend.”

Tolliver pauses thoughtfully, “I'm close, just a few more feet, you'll see.”

Tolliver rises before dawn; he's eating breakfast while it's still dark. He watches the sun sear over the horizon; it burns into the sand and the temperature starts to climb. He grabs a shovel and starts digging, his pace quick, like a film in fast motion.

Amadi joins him, pointing to the sunrise.

“See the haze? The storm is almost upon us. Are you coming?”

Tolliver shakes his head, “Come on, I’ve struck something hard, just a few more scoops and we’ll be able to hoist it up.”

“No time friend. We should go,”

Amadi turns to leave.

Tolliver follows his guide to the jeep, “I’m not coming with you.”

Amadi’s eyes widen.

“Then you’ll die.”

“I’ll take my chances. You come back and get me tomorrow, okay?”

Amadi jumps into the jeep, “Treasure is no use to a dead man, but sure, I’ll be back tomorrow.”

The jeep disappears into the sun bleached haze.

The wind’s picked up; it whips along the desert’s floor, slinging sand into the air.

It’s July 2<sup>nd</sup>, 1942 – Rommel’s ordered a resumption of offensives, preparing the Afrika Korps to head through the Ruweisat Ridge.

Before heading out, Rommel calls for Staff Officer Till Wulf.

“Herr Wulf, we’ll bury the bars here” he says, pointing to a sandy area between two outcroppings.

“Right away Sir.” he replies.

He and Officer Kai unload a trunk from a canvass covered military vehicle. The wind kicks more sand into the air. Till scouts the horizon then turns to Kai, “Storms coming, dig faster.”

He takes notes, pacing along the outcroppings. He draws a crude map, placing several notations in the margins, then folds the parchment and places it in his pocket, “Once the trunk is buried, verify the post-masters fetch-date.”

Sand scatters as a nearby Stuka powers on. The pilot waves to Till as he passes, “Hey Wulf, looks like we’ll get out just in time.”

Till smiles, removing his eye-patch...

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