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Left Behind

by Lesley Dawson

There it was sitting on the edge of the baggage carousel, waiting to be discovered. I held my breath and waited for the storm to come. Everybody else collected their cases and strolled off to the “Nothing to Declare” exit.

Then it happened. Bustling across came a porter with a walkie-talkie. He looked around and asked a few people if the box belonged to them. All shook their heads and hurried out, worried what might be in the box. My porter friend spoke urgently into his receiver and within seconds the area was flooded with security men and women, all of whom had unholstered their weapons. This crowd of young fit, hard, unsmiling people gathered round the box at a safe distance and seemed unsure of what to do next. Not knowing what to do didn't impair their voices and the level of noise rose as they became more and more agitated, in very loud explosive Hebrew.

By now all arriving passengers had been cleared away from the potential bomb and the carousel had been stopped with half a plane load of luggage stuck on top of the carousel lift and the other half stuck in the bowels of the baggage tunnel.

By now the sirens were going and there was the sound of passengers being rushed out of the building. Enter Mr. Big. Big in size and obviously big in influence. He brought with him a bomb disposal team all clothed in heavy clothes and wearing helmets with masks. They certainly looked the part.

A very long pair of tong-like metal pieces were waved in the direction of the box until they caught hold of the flaps on the top of the box and it began to open.

There was now no sound as we waited for the explosion and expected the bomb disposal people to blow it up. When nothing happened, one of the more adventurous guys was prodded by Mr. Big to move closer. When he looked into the box, he laughed outloud and beckoned his colleagues to join him. Eventually we all saw the contents - a huge chocolate birthday cake.

As one of the girls in the security squad picked up the box to carry it away to lost property there was a commotion just this side of the exit gates. A nerdy young Hasidic Jewish guy was trying to reach the luggage area and was being prevented by a horde of security men.

“Please, you must let me through!” he was yelling at the security contingent.

“I must get back into the baggage hall.” On being told he could not do this, he almost wept with frustration. “But I must, I left the birthday cake my mother made for my wife. I can’t go home without it.”

Realising that this was the owner of the cardboard box and breathing a sigh of relief that they had not blown it up, Mr Big gestured to the young man to come forward. Holding on to his kipar with one hand while keeping his specs on his nose with the other the young man grabbed the box and tried to close the lid. His agitation was such that his payot ringlets danced around his head and his black coat came open at the waist to show his prayer vest. He was making such a mess of closing the box that one of the security personnel went over to help him and presented him with a properly complete box.

“Thanks be to God,” he enthused, “blessed be His name. I have been rescued,” he gurgled as he shuffled out to the entry hall of the airport with his box under his arm.

I also thanked God under my breath that it had not been an Arab youth who had left the box behind. That would have triggered a terrorist reaction and he and his box would have been detained in the security area and neither he, nor his wife would have been able to enjoy the cake.