

ALESSI: Um . . . Mexico?

ADRIANNA: I wish—love tacos.

ALESSI: Antarctica?

ADRIANNA: LOL no. Sri Lanka!

ALESSI: Wow! Far away!

I was about to text back when I suddenly heard my brother say, “Earth to Adrianna!” My head snapped up and I saw that the whole family was out of the car, Feye looking at me impatiently.

“Come on, Sis! We’re waiting for you!” he said.

Even for it being so late in the day, the airport was crowded, with friends and family exchanging big hugs as they said goodbye or hello for the first time in a while. I always love people watching, and airports are one of the places you can see the best in people.

Once on the plane, I sat down next to the window and let my mind wander back to Alessi’s text. “Stay safe,” she had said. Our last filming trip was

in Cuba, where I got bitten by a crocodile. When Feye and I had saved an injured crocodile's eggs, we came across some dangerous poachers. It had been months since that trip, and my leg had finally healed, with only bright purple scars reminding me of my brush with death. I couldn't stand on my tiptoes for long because it made my leg hurt, but otherwise I was good as new! Well, almost . . .

We hadn't gone on another TV trip since we released the female crocodile mother and half the baby crocodiles back to the wild. The other half of the baby crocodiles went to zoos around the world, to create more babies and help American crocodiles get off the International Union for Conservation of Nature's Vulnerable list. It broke my heart to know they got the label of Vulnerable because humans were wrecking their homes and illegally hunting them and their eggs.

Some turbulence brought my attention back to

the booklet about Sri Lanka opened up on my lap. The country was officially known as the Democratic Socialist Republic of Sri Lanka, and we were traveling to its largest city, Colombo. Sri Lanka was in South Asia, and I realized I knew very little about it. Geography wasn't my strong point. But I knew someone who loved geography—he just happened to be related to me.

“What do you know about where we are going?” I asked my big brother. When he didn't answer, I nudged him with my elbow and realized he had earphones in. He took one out and looked at me.

“Yes?” he asked. I asked my question again.

He shrugged. “Not much. A little bit about the Silk Road, the Buddhist writings about it, and how it was ruled by Britain and known as Ceylon,” Feye answered, grabbing a bag of chips from his backpack and taking a few out to eat. He motioned for me to take a few, and I stuck my hand into the salty

chips. They were my favorite. I turned back to my booklet and pointed out the title to my mother, who was sitting in the aisle seat in front of me, and asked, “Do they speak English in Sri Lanka, Mom?”

“The official languages are Sinhala and Tamil, but they do speak some English,” she answered.

Dad also had turned around from his seat in front of us. “Sri Lanka is home to many cultures, languages, and ethnicities, kids,” he chimed in. “The Sinhalese make up most of the population. The Tamils speak Tamil and come from southern India and north-east Sri Lanka. Other religious and ethnic groups in Sri Lanka include Muslims, Burghers, Parsis, and Veddas.”

“You’ve been there before, right, guys?” Feye asked our parents. They nodded.

“You’re going to love the food, kids—they are addicted to spices and live to drink tea,” Dad said.

I made a show of licking my lips. “I can’t wait to

get there.” I loved flavorful food full of spices like paprika and cumin and . . . well, I could go on. And tea! I love tea! Peppermint is my absolute favorite tea, but a close second is Ceylon tea, which comes from Sri Lanka.

“It’s a beautiful place.” Our mother sighed. “Your father got me these *azul* sapphire earrings the last time we were there.” Our parents kissed, and Feye and I stuck out our tongues.

“Yuck!” I turned away from my kissing parents and focused on my booklet, jotting down some facts in my trusty field notebook.

Sri Lanka

- *Home to many cultures, languages, religions, and ethnic groups*
- *Spices and teas are popular*
- *Fave sport: cricket*
- *Over 20 species of different whales and dolphins*

I hoped to catch a glimpse of a blue whale while on this trip, as it would be my first time seeing one. Well, one that was alive. We had been to a few museums before where I had gotten to see their bones or pieces of their body, like their heart.

I don't remember when I stopped reading my booklet, let alone fell asleep, but I woke up to light from the open window pouring on my face, my favorite blanket wrapped around my body. It had my favorite animal on it—an echidna! Echidnas sort of look like a mash-up of a ton of animals. They have spines like a porcupine, a snout that looks like a bird's beak, a pouch like a kangaroo's or koala's, and they lay eggs like a lizard. Some people call them spiny anteaters, but I think "echidna" is the perfect name for this little mammal from Australia. My mom had found this blanket when she and Dad were traveling in Australia before they had me.

I sat up to look out the window and saw waters