

Beth and the Nile

Chapter 5

Beth, 'Scaredy' Scarab and ex-King Tutenkhamun stood on the banks of the Nile, waiting to be thrown to the crocodiles. They'd been dragged all the way there from the pyramid by the captain and his sword-wielding soldiers. It was now early morning. The sun was boiling hot and the sky was a clear light blue.

The Nile is a very long river that mostly flows through Egypt, but sometimes it stops and waves and gives a friendly home to crocodiles. Crocodiles aren't friendly, mostly, and tend not to wave, what with them being ferocious carnivores and having no hands. They are also very hungry before breakfast.

"We will now throw you into the mighty river and you will be torn to pieces by ravenous crocodiles!" announced the captain, gleefully.

The young King Tut, not used to being roughed up except by his elder sister, Tottenham Khamun, replied, in time-honoured fashion, "You and whose army?"

This seemed to confuse the captain, a simple man whom the pleasures of throwing prisoners to crocodiles helped to forget his unhappy childhood and the itchy rash on his knee.

"Be quiet, foolish prisoner! I don't have to answer any of your questions!" He leaned down and began to scratch his knee. "But if you must know, we were King Tutenkhamun's number-one camel brigade. Only the king is now sadly dead..." He began to snivel, and his assistant reached out and put his hand on the captain's shoulder. "It's alright, Captain Nefer'mind."



The assistant turned to the child prisoners. "The captain is snivelling because now we've been relegated to being the new Pharaoh Aye's 126th Camel Brigade. Aye is a real meanie. He took all of our best camels and gave us these puny ones."

The three children looked a bit more closely at the camels and saw that they were indeed rather rubbish. Some had three legs; some had three humps. A few of them appeared to be rocking camels from a toyshop. One soldier was even riding a cat.

"Don't you recognise me? I'm King Tut!" declared the Boy King.

"Don't talk nonsense!" wailed Captain Nefer'mind. "He's dead! It was announced in every souk and market square. And now we have to work for the meanest, smallest pharaoh ever! It's not fair!" His knee was really beginning to itch now. He began to cry like a sad hippo. And once their captain cried, all the other soldiers, and some of the camels, began to cry as well. Even a few of the crocodiles shed some tears, but they didn't look like they really meant it.

The three children looked at the floor in embarrassment. "Shall we just jump into the Nile to cheer them up?" whispered Tut.

Scarab leaned in. "I can't swim. Not without inflatable camel bladders."

"No," said Beth, firmly. "We'll not be swimming with the crocodiles today; I shall save us all!"

"Impressive words," nodded Scarab.

"Captain Camel Leader, Sir. I have a plan," said Beth boldly.

Captain Nefer'mind of the 126th Camel Brigade stopped snivelling and looked at this young girl closely. "A plan? What sort of plan?"

"A plan that will get you back your good camels and stop these crocs having a human breakfast."

"But I want you to be eaten by the crocodiles. That's the best part of my day," protested the captain.

"Ah," said Beth. "But I have a hunch that you have a sore knee and I just happen to know the wisest ointment maker in all the land. He makes a wonderful knee ointment that stops soreness and itching. If I get thrown to the crocodiles, you'll never know where this ointment maker lives."

Captain Nefer'mind scratched his knee. "An ointment maker, you say? Mm. Very well. I shall set you free and you shall get me some ointment. Not the pink stuff that smells, though; the nice stuff-and you shall find us our 180 top-notch camels. Deal?"

"Deal!" said Beth, proudly.

She had saved the day!

Her wealthy new friend, ex-King Tut, would probably buy her a funeral parlour of her own, and she and her brother would retire rich and happy.

"Let's go with the girl!" said Nefer'mind. "Throw the other two to the crocodiles!"

"Oops," said Beth. "That wasn't quite what I..."

But the camel captain and his troops were already leading Beth away.

Later, the three old chums would look back and laugh at Beth's small tactical error, leaving Tut and Scarab to be chomped to death by angry crocodiles. But it would be much later; much, much later.

"Don't worry: I'll get you both a very cheap funeral," Beth shouted back to the boys as she was taken away.

And with ne'er so much as a look back, she disappeared over the sand dunes with the captain and his puny camel army.