

Beth and the Nile

Chapter 6

Two soldiers had been chosen to stay behind and hurl Tutenkhamun and Scarab to the crocodiles. They were about to divide up the boys' belongings between them.

"Turn out your pockets!" they ordered.

"I haven't got anything except this lucky hippo foot!" wailed Scarab. "And you can't have that or else who knows what scrapes I might get into."

"Fair enough," said the first guard, who was quite kind, really.

"No, it isn't," said the second guard, who wasn't.

"What about you, you well-dressed lad?" asked the first guard. "What have you got in the pockets of that rich, golden robe of yours?"

Tut obediently turned out his pockets, as he'd always been brought up to respect men with swords.

"Ooh, that's nice," said the first guard, picking up a golden jackal head. "What is it?"

"That old thing? Why, it's the hereditary symbol of my royal dynasty. Been in the family for generations."

"Poo!" said the second guard. "I bet you stole it from that tomb."

"Now, now, let's give the lad a break," said the first guard. "After all, he is about to be thrown to a hideous death."

"So did you steal it?" asked the second guard.

"No."

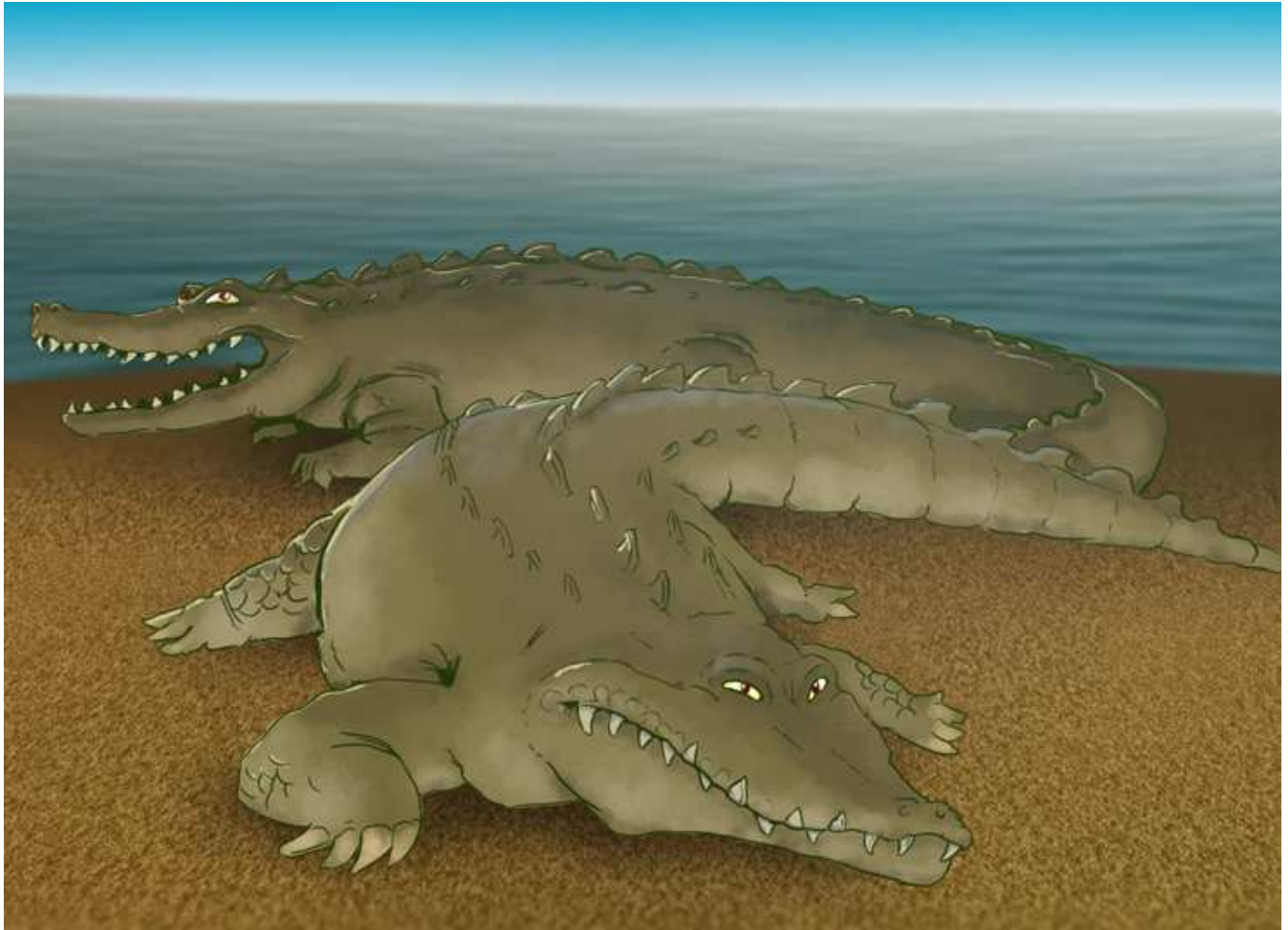
"Alright. So that would make you a€?"

"Tutenkhamun."

"Aha. But he's dead."

"Yes, so everyone has been told. Only I'm not really. It was a trick."

"Aha." The first guard turned to the second guard. Even though he was nice, he did want his own breakfast and time was ticking by. "Shall we throw them in now?"



Tut had a sudden thought. "Wait! Have you got a coin on you?"

"Yes," nodded the first guard.

"Have a look at it. Whose picture is on it?"

"A camel's."

"No, on the front."

"Oh... Tutenkhamun's."

The guards looked at the figure on the coin, then at the figure standing beside them. Then at each other. "Oops," said the first guard.

"Poo," said the second, and they hurled themselves down at King Tut's feet.

"We're really, really sorry about the throwing you to the crocodiles thing!" said the first guard. "We won't ever threaten to do it again, oh Royal One, even if the crocs are really, really hungry."

"We are nothing before Your Magnificence!" said the second guard, who was a bit of a creep. "You're, like, two times better than us."

"Three times," said the first guard, who was even more of a creep.

"That would make you Tut Tut Tut," said Scarab.

Ignoring him, the guards offered Tut their camels. Unfortunately, one was a stuffed toy and one was a cat.

"Not to worry. You shall be our camels!" King Tut climbed onto the nice guard and Scarab clambered onto the one that said "poo" a lot, and off they staggered to find Beth and let her know that they weren't very pleased with her for leaving them to die.

A short time later, Beth was outside her dad's funeral parlour with Captain Nefer'mind and the rest of the 126th Camel Brigade. Her dad dropped everything he was doing, making a big mess on the floor, and ran over to her. "Beth! My darling daughter! Where have you been? And who are these men and their mangy camels?"

"They're soldiers, Dad, so be nice."

"The camels are soldiers?" asked Beth's dad.

Beth said, "I need Ned the ointment maker, and I need you to race over to the Nile and save my brother and my new friend, ex-King Tutenkhamun. I also need the 180 top-notch camels that Aye stole from this lot."

"Mm," said Beth's dad. "Where have I seen 180 top-notch camels recently? Let me think. Oh, by the way, Ned the ointment maker's dead. It was him that I dropped when you arrived. And your brother and his friend are just behind you."

Which indeed they were, riding on the two soldiers.

"And I," said Aye, "am right in front of you."

Beth looked down and saw the small man with a scarf over his face.

"Ooh, where did you come from?" she asked.

"Oh, that's right," remembered her dad. "He arrived just before you with 180 gorgeous camels. He wants me to have them stuffed as garden ornaments."

"You can't do that to my camels!" wailed Captain Nefer'mind.

"And I see you have a familiar playmate with you," said Aye, staring at Tut with hatred in his eyes.

"Who? Him?" said Beth. "Scaredy Scarab?"

"Not him. *Him*." Aye pointed at Tut.

"Oh, him?" Beth had to think fast. "No, you've got it wrong. He's not the real Tutenkhamun. He's... a Tutenkhamun impersonator. He's in a Tutenkhamun tribute band. Rootin' Tootin' Khamun. He's very good, isn't he?"

"Very lifelike," agreed Aye, not agreeing at all. "In fact, a bit too lifelike. I paid good money to have him put in a sarcophagus."

"Actually, you haven't paid yet," said Beth's dad.

Aye ignored him.

"If I go to the last pyramid on the left now and find King Tutenkhamun isn't where I left him," screamed Aye, "I shall have you *all* thrown to the crocodiles!"

"All of us?" wailed the captain.

"All of you!" jeered Aye.