

Beth and the Nile

Chapter 7

It was the greatest procession ever seen anywhere south of the Nile Delta and anywhere north of somewhere slightly further south.

The great but tiny Pharaoh Aye led the way on the fanciest, sleekest camel ever. It had 'go faster' stripes and stereo musicians installed in the humps. Behind him came 180 top-notch camels, soon to be stuffed as garden ornaments. Behind them came 180 of the most rubbish camels in Egypt, led by a captain with scabby knees.

Behind them came ex-King Tutenkhamun, 'Scaredy' Scarab and Beth. And at the back was Bet'her Leyton-Nefer, the funeral director, busy trying to mummify his latest client.

Ex-King Tut was in a bit of trouble. If his Uncle Aye, the new pharaoh, didn't find him dead in his sarcophagus, he would be thrown to the crocodiles along with his friends, 180 soldiers, 179 camels and a cat. If he *was* dead in his sarcophagus, he'd be dead in a sarcophagus. Neither outcome seemed worth cheering about.

Fortunately, someone had a plan.

Unfortunately, it was Scarab.

"Let's all run away and live in the desert. Like gnomes."

"I think you mean nomads," said Beth. "And anyway, we wouldn't get very far. You're scared of sand."

"Oh yeah."

Captain Nefer'mind parked his rubbish camel beside them. "So any luck with this plan to get me 180 top-notch camels and some knee ointment? Let me remind you that I'll throw you to the crocodiles if you fail."

"We're already all getting thrown to the crocodiles," pointed out young King Tut.

"Then you shall be thrown in twice," said Captain Nefer'mind.

Beth and Scarab's dad caught up with them. "Did someone mention ointment? I was just going through dead Ned's clothes and came across a half-squeezed tube of 'Finest Knee Rub'."

"Hurray!" cried out Captain Nefer'mind, grabbing the ointment and rubbing some of it on his bad knee.

"Wait!" called Beth. The whole scene froze, which in Egypt in August is no mean feat. "I have a better plan than Scarab..."

Aye stood in the entrance to the last pyramid on the left and peered into the darkness. "Hello! Anybody home?" he called in. When no one answered, he bravely called the soldiers and told them to go in first, as it was a bit dark. Leyton-Nefer went in with them, carrying the remains of Ned, the ointment maker.



Captain Nefer'mind waited bravely in the light with Aye.

"Make sure King Tut is in there in his sarcophagus and that he is dead," Aye called into the darkness of the tomb. "If he's not, please throw these three children to the crocodiles, and then yourselves. I'll throw your captain in."

"That's very kind, Your Pharaohness. You are-oooh-four times more magnificent than me," said the captain, who really was a magnificent creep.

"xcuse me, four Aye," chipped in Scarab after a while. "Your troops seem to have disappeared in the tomb. Shall we go in and find them?"

Aye scowled at him. "You first."

Scarab lit a sesame/sunflower oil lamp and went inside the tomb with Beth and Tut. Aye and Captain Nefer'mind followed them nervously. The lamp cast flickering shadows over the recently inserted dead Ned, lying very peacefully in a new sarcophagus. Before Aye could get a proper look, a voice boomed from the corner of the chamber.

"Aye Aye!"

A creature arose, looking a lot like Beth in some hoops. It was dark, though, and a terrified Aye fell to his knees. It wasn't a long drop. He averted his eyes, which was lucky, because the creature really did look rubbish. The creature continued: "I am Horus, Lord of the Afterlife, and I don't like you very much because you tried to kill King Tutenkhamun."

"Yes. Sorry," answered Aye. He was terrified of arguing with a god.

"How sorry?" asked the creature.

"Very, very sorry," cried Aye.

"That'll do. But you have to do good things to make up for it. Like be generous with your camels. And give jewels to my dad... err, to Mr. Leyton-Nefer."

Captain Nefer'mind coughed, but it sounded a lot like "And a promotion for me."

"And a promotion for the captain."

"I'll do anything!" cried Aye.

"Soldiers, Captain and Leyton-Nefer, please leave!" commanded Beth.

The soldiers, the captain and Beth's dad quickly filed out.

"W... w... what will happen to me?" asked Aye.

"Close your eyes and count to 100," said Beth.

As Aye closed his eyes, Beth, Scarab and Tut zoomed out of the tomb and slammed the door shut, leaving Aye trapped inside with several sarcophagi.

By the time they got back outside into the sunshine, 180 soldiers were sitting on their newly reclaimed top-notch camels. And General Lord Sir Field Marshall Nefer'mind (as he'd just named himself) was sitting on the finest camel of them all. "No more rubbish camels for us!" he beamed.

"And no crocodile food made from us!" grinned Scarab.

"Help!" they heard a muffled voice calling from inside the tomb.

A week later, the three friends were sitting outside the funeral parlour.

Mr. Leyton-Nefer had gone on holiday to Brighton with Ned's widow, leaving Beth, Scarab and ex-King Tutenkhamun in charge of the parlour. Tut had been offered the chance to be king again, but he'd refused: he was too busy enjoying his new life. He'd kept several of the rubbish camels, and one was sitting on his lap.

"This is the life!" beamed Beth, looking out over the desert.

"Much better than death!" agreed Tut.

"Ahh!" moaned Scarab in terror, trying not to look at another tiny camel sidling towards him across the sand.

"Miaow," said the camel.