

Monday

CHAPTER TWO

The sun was sinking behind the mountain when I got home. I slunk into the courtyard. I knew I'd be in trouble. All the way home I'd been trying to think what I'd say. Mother was the first person I saw. She was crouching in front of the oven, feeding maize stalks into the furnace below. She jumped as if she'd seen a ghost.

"Ali," she cried, "where have you been? We were worried about you." Her eyelids looked red as if she'd been crying. "And look at the state of you!" she exclaimed. "What have you been doing?"

"Rolling down hills by the look of him!" Father growled behind me. He seized me by the collar of my robe and swung me round to face him. He gave me a shake. "The truth, now!"

Uncle had already been to Ahmed's house to look

for me, he said. "Your little friend told him you had a job fetching water for Mr Carter." He snorted. "A likely tale."

Ahmed had left the Valley hours ago. Empty-handed. Unlike me.

"It's true, Father," I said. I held out my hand. In it were the coins the foreman had given me – earnings for my day's work. Father would have to believe me now. Maybe he'd even be proud of me.

"What is that?" Father said, releasing me and peering at the coins.

"It's my pay," I said. And there'd be more tomorrow, too!

"Hmm," said Father. "You expect me to believe that? How did you carry the water?"

"On Mr Carter's donkey. But tomorrow I'll take ours."

"You will, will you? How will we manage without it?"

I felt my face grow hot. Father had to let me go. They were expecting me. "But I gave them my word!" I protested. Besides, I'd earn money – money we

Tuesday

needed now that Father could not make beautiful things any more. The pots my brother Hassan made were no better than anyone else's. Neither of us had inherited Father's talent.

"Don't speak to your father like that," Mother said, turning round from the oven. A delicious smell wafted from it. My mouth watered. It was a long time since I'd eaten. One of the men had shared his food with me – half a loaf of bread and a mouthful of wilted onion. "You brought us water, and so I give you food," he'd said. While we ate he'd told me about the golden bird Mr Carter had brought with him from Cairo to keep him company at night. "It will bring us luck," he had said. "This year we will find a tomb full of gold."

"Surely we can manage without the donkey for a few days." I turned to see Grandfather hobble out of his sleeping chamber. Grandfather spent most of the day asleep now, but the smell of a good meal always woke him up! He winked at me. "Maybe he will bring us luck. And he has brought us money today. And there will be more tomorrow, eh, Ali?"

Father looked at him. Then at Mother. She was

nodding. Mother was the true boss of the house.

"Very well," he said at last. "You may go and take the donkey."

I gave him a grin. "Thank you, Father!"

"But only for a few days. I will need it back to take the pots to market."

A few days! Mr Carter had been searching the Valley for years. It could be many days before he knew if he was digging in the right place.

"If they haven't found the tomb by then, they never will," Father said firmly, as if he knew what I was thinking. I knew Father thought that Mr Carter was wasting his time. That he would never find Tutankhamun's tomb. Mr Carter wasn't the first man to have come searching for it. Even us, the mountain folk who knew more about the Valley and its secrets than anyone else, didn't know where it was. That secret was buried with the boy-king.

Grandfather sniffed. "That smells good. Are you as hungry as I am?" I took his arm to help him sit down, then helped myself to bread that Mother had piled high with beans for me. When we'd finished,

Wednesday

Grandfather turned to me and smiled. "So, little goat, you want to find the tomb of the boy-king." He put his head near mine, and said in a whisper that only I could hear. "And you will. Do not believe what others say."

"But when, Grandfather? I will only have the donkey for a few days!"

"You will find him," he said. He kissed the top of my head and I curled up close to him. I loved Grandfather dearly. I couldn't think how he knew, but I felt sure he did.

"Will you tell me about Tutankhamun, Grandfather?" I asked.

Grandfather chuckled. "What more can I tell you? He was only a lad like you when he became pharaoh. That was thousands of years ago...." He sighed. "Soon he will be taken from us. As they all are."

Grandfather always talked about Tutankhamun as if he were still alive. He tried to explain about the sacred *ka*.

"Is it like my *karin*?" I said.

"A little," he said.

Grandfather had told me that all Egyptians were born with something he called the *karin*. "You can't see it," he'd said. "It's invisible to human eyes. Think of it as your double – exactly like you in every way."

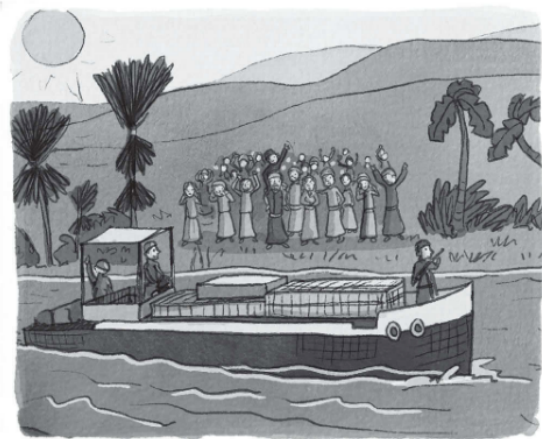
I looked up at Grandfather's face as he continued. "But unlike the *karin*, which dies when you do, the *ka* lives on after death. By day it leaves the tomb, but at night it must return there. If anything should happen to harm the mummy, then the *ka* has no home to go to, and the soul will die."

I felt myself shiver.

"Soon there will be nothing living left in the Valley – save vultures, bats and snakes." There were tears in Grandfather's eyes. I put my hand on his.

He began to tell me about the day the mummies of several pharaohs were taken away to the Egyptian Museum in Cairo. It was a story he'd told me many times before but I liked hearing it as much as he liked telling it.

Thursday



"We ran down to the river to watch. Oh how the women wailed to see them go! I cried, too. The men fired their rifles, saluting the pharaohs as the barge bearing their mummies passed by. My father picked me up and sat me on his shoulders so that I could see. I was a child like you then. It was on that day that I first became fascinated by our wonderful past."

I felt my head droop on Grandfather's shoulder.

Grandfather put his arm round me and gave me a squeeze. "It is time for bed, little goat. You need to wake early. You have a great day ahead of you!"

I crawled into the chamber I shared with my brother and curled up on my sleeping mat. On one side, a mud brick wall separated us from the pen where our donkey and other animals were kept. The other wall was solid rock. Behind me the tomb stretched deep into the hillside. I reached out my hand and took out my shabti from its hiding place, behind a loose stone. "I am your master now," I said to it. "Don't you forget. In the morning you will guide me to the Pharaoh's tomb."

"What on earth are you saying?" In the moonlight I saw my brother Hassan duck down to enter the chamber. He grinned.

"Nothing. Let me sleep!" I hid my shabti under the blanket till I was sure Hassan was asleep, then slipped it back into its hiding place. Grandfather was the only person who knew about it. If Hassan found it, he'd make me sell it.

I didn't hear Father or Grandfather slip past us into

their chamber. I heard and saw nothing more till morning when the light woke me. Excitement twisted inside me. I was going back to the Valley!