

CHAPTER TEN

“It was you,” a voice whispered. “You. You who led them to my tomb. You who showed them where it was.” Strange staring eyes gazed into mine. I’d seen those eyes before. In the tomb. It was him. Tutankhamun. But this was no statue. This was the King himself.

I shrank back in terror. Why was he here? What did he want with me?

“You brought them to my tomb,” he said again. He raised his staff and pointed it at me. “You showed them where it was.”

I got on to my knees and bowed my head to the floor. “I am sorry, highness,” I whispered. “What can I do?”

He was silent.



I raised my head slowly from the floor. The big eyes of the pharaoh still gazed into mine, his face growing larger and larger until it filled the chamber. In terror, I reached out one hand to the wall for my shabti. Maybe it would protect me from this fearsome thing. My fingers closed on bare rock. The shabti wasn't in its hiding place. Someone had taken it away. Then I saw it. It was standing next to me. It bowed to the pharaoh.

“Master!” it said. “Master!”

It would not help me.

I tried to scream but my mouth was dry.

I jerked awake, sweat pouring off me.

I opened my eyes. Moonlight filled the chamber and I could see everything clearly. Next to me, Hassan was curled on his side, asleep. I craned cautiously over my other shoulder. There was no one there. I felt behind the stone for my shabti. It was there, just where it should be. I clutched it gratefully.

It had just been a dream. A bad dream.

I lay down and tried to go back to sleep. But as soon as I shut my eyes, the pharaoh's face swam before me again, his huge eyes gazing sorrowfully into mine. I tossed from side to side. How could I sleep? I'd told everyone about the tomb. I'd boasted about what I'd seen! Even now people might be plotting to rob it. At night it would be easy for a party of men to surprise the guards and overpower them.

It wasn't only robbers that Tutankhamun needed protecting from, but men like Carter and Carnarvon too, men who would empty the tomb of its treasures and take them and Tutankhamun away.

There was only one thing for it. I had to try and put

right what I'd done, and there was only one way to do it. I had to go down to the tomb and watch over it. I had to protect Tutankhamun.

There was nothing I wanted to do less.

I got up and slipped out of the chamber, tiptoeing quietly through the courtyard. The moon beamed down on me like a torch, guiding me through the village and up on to the mountain. At the top I wished it was less bright. The guards knew about the tomb now and they'd be more watchful than ever. It would not be easy to slip round them tonight.

I inched cautiously forward, creeping from boulder to boulder till I knew I was safely past them. Then I ran softly down the path to the Valley. In the moonlight I could see the tombs clearly – gaping black holes that followed me like eyes as I edged slowly forwards. Among them, near the centre of the Valley, was Tutankhamun's tomb. In front of it, a thin wisp of smoke curled upwards. The guards had lit a fire and were sitting, cross-legged and watchful, in front of it.



Somehow I had to get to the tomb without them seeing me. But how was I to do that? The Valley was bathed in silver. They'd see me before I even got near.

A hyena howled from the desert. What was I doing in this terrible place? If only I was safe at home with my family. I was about to give up and creep

shamefully away when the moon slipped behind a cloud. I had to go on now. Taking a deep breath, I sprinted over to the tomb and crouched down on the opposite side of it from the guards. The moon swung out again. I nearly jumped out of my skin. Four hairy faces were gazing at me. A group of donkeys was tethered just a few feet away.

My mouth went dry. They didn't belong to the guards. So whose were they? Robbers – robbers, of course. Robbers were down there, in the tomb. The guards must have let them in. It was a plot concocted between them. My mind raced. The robbers had ridden here on their donkeys, the guards had unlocked the tomb for them, and now they were down there somewhere, knocking holes in walls, helping themselves to treasure. The guards would have been well paid for their silence. And all I could do was wait till they came out, then try to follow them. If I was lucky, I might discover where they hid the treasure and go for help... if they didn't find me first.

Even now they might be in the burial chamber, their nimble fingers breaking the seals on the great

coffin, prising open the lid, pulling aside the linen bandages, reaching in for the priceless jewels and amulets...

What had Grandfather told me? *The King's soul lives so long as his mummy is not harmed.* Had I got here in time? Or was I already too late?

I could hear the guards' voices. One gave a great yawn. "Don't fall asleep," another joked. "It's not morning yet." I clenched my fists. I wanted to jump up and shout out their crime. But I had to keep as still as I could. And wait.

Scared though I was, I hoped it wouldn't be for long. I was struggling to keep my eyes open, and I had to keep them open. I had to stay awake. I fixed them on the steps. I felt my head begin to nod.

A loud rattle woke me from the doze I'd dropped into. My eyes flew open. What was that? Next to me the donkeys stirred uneasily. I peered at the steps. There was something down there, near the grille. I strained my eyes to see. It wasn't the robbers returning. It wasn't a person at all. I licked my dry lips. It was a Thing – a huge winged Thing. It beat its

wings helplessly against the wooden bars of the grille. Then it swooped upwards across the pit. It was coming for me!

I flung up my arms to protect my head. My yell would have woken a whole regiment of guards.



"There's someone here!" a voice shouted. Heavy feet pounded towards me. I leapt to my feet to run but I was too late. My arms were seized and pinned behind my back. A torch was shone full in my face. I blinked,

screwing up my eyes.

“Why, it’s young Ali!” one of the guards exclaimed. “What are you doing here?”

“Come to rob the tomb I’ll be bound,” another guard growled. “Where’s the rest of your gang?” He gave my arms a yank. Fire shot up them to my shoulders. A gun was pointing at my chest. I fell to my knees in terror.

“Admit it! You’re not alone.”

They were pretending they didn’t know about the robbers! How clever they were!

“I have done nothing wrong. It is them – in there. I dreamt that someone would rob the tomb. That is why I came here. And I am right. They have! They are in the burial chamber. And they have harmed the mummy. I know – I saw his ka, his soul, just now – it flew past me.” What was I saying? Why had I mentioned the robbers? These men were part of the gang!

The guards stared at me as if I was mad.

“It was a bat you saw,” one of them said. “There are lots of them round here.”

“Never mind that!” another said. “What are we going to do with him?”

“Wait till they come out. Shouldn’t be long now. They’ve been in there long enough. They’ll know what to do.”

I shivered. They were going to hand me over to the robbers. What would happen to me now!

“Here they come!”

Four people were walking slowly up the steps. A torch flashed.

One of the guards ran over to them. I knew that he was telling them about me. A man left the party and hastened over to me. I looked up to see who it was. It was Mr Carter!

I don’t know which of us was more startled – him or me. At last he said quietly: “Why are you here, lad?”

I wanted to ask him the same question. Then I thought. I’d crept secretly into the tomb earlier that day. I was creeping around it again now, at night. He was bound to be as suspicious of me as I was of him.

It is always best to tell the truth. So I told him about my dream. “I came to protect Tutankhamun,” I said.

“I was afraid the tomb had been robbed.” I swallowed and stopped.

Please tell me it hasn’t been, my eyes begged him. Please tell me the truth.

Carter’s eyes had never left mine. “The King is lucky to have such a devoted servant to watch over him,” he said quietly when I’d finished. “But do not worry. There is nothing to fear. I want the world to know about Tutankhamun, and to learn more about your country’s glorious past. That is all.”

But why was he here now, in the middle of the night?

“I came to make sure the burial chamber had not been plundered,” he explained. “And it hasn’t. Tutankhamun is still there, and he is safe.” He smiled. “But it was important to keep our visit secret. As soon as it is known that he is here, everyone will want to see him. I cannot allow people to tramp in and out of the tomb. Think of the damage that could be caused to the tomb and its wonderful treasures. We must take great care of it.”

“But you will take him away,” I said. Grandfather

had cried the last time a pharaoh was taken away. I wanted to cry now, too.

Carter leant forward and gripped my hands. “That I will never do. Tutankhamun will remain here, where he belongs. You have my word. Now,” he said. “Will you promise me something?”

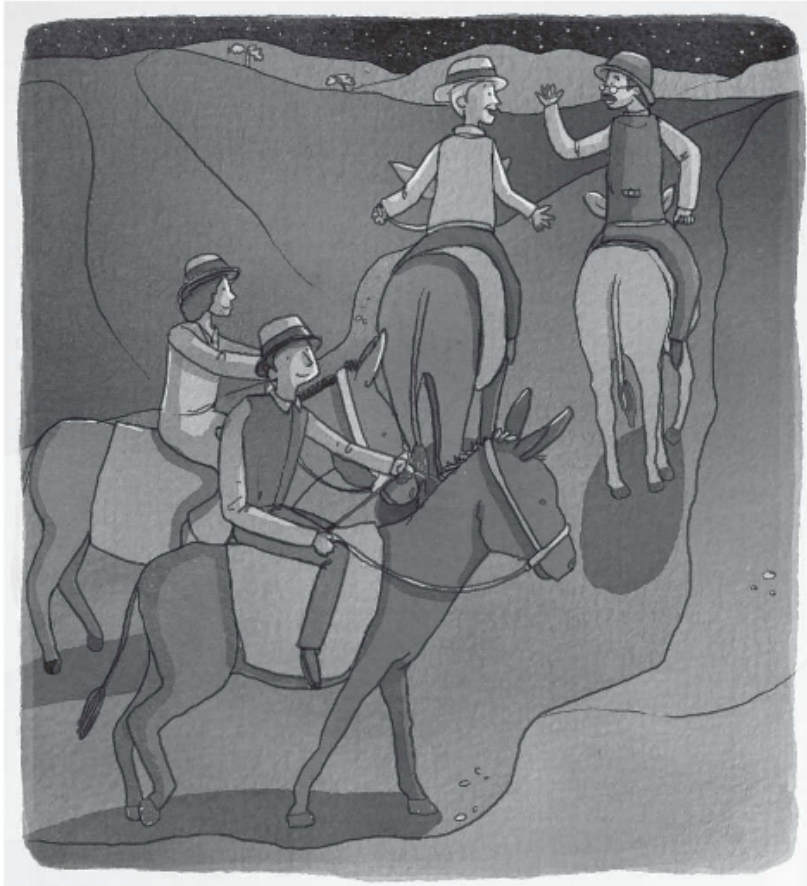
“If I can,” I choked. Ashamed of my tears, I wiped my wet eyes on my sleeve.

“Do not say a word of what you saw this night,” he said. “Will you promise me that?”

I nodded.

He smiled. Then he stood up. His hand rested on my head. “It will be a secret between us.” I watched him walk rapidly away and say something to the guards. One of them ran over to me.

“Come on, young Ali,” he said. He led me over to the fire. “Sit here with us and try to sleep if you can. It will soon be dawn. We will wake you then.” Behind me I heard the jangle of harnesses as the four mounted their donkeys. I watched them ride away across the Valley, then I curled up by the fire next to the guards. Already the dark was beginning to lift a little.



here. And mind you keep what you have seen to yourself now!" I got up slowly, rubbing my legs, which were stiff from sleeping on the hard ground. I looked down at the tomb. Then I began to run. As I reached the mountain I looked back one more time. "Farewell," I whispered. I didn't know when I'd be back. My stomach was rumbling. I was hungry. If I hurried I might be home in time for breakfast.

A gentle nudge woke me early. "Go home," the guards said. "We don't want to have to explain why you are