

# Beth and the Nile



by TIM HIBBERD

Illustrations by BRETT GOWLETT

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## Chapter 1

Once upon a time, a long, long time ago-and when I say a long, long time ago, boy, do I mean more than a couple of months-there lived a young girl. Actually, there were lots of young girls back then, but I'm going to tell you about just one of them.

The girl I'm talking about was a bright, vivacious girl called Nefer-Bet'her, but all her friends called her Beth. She had a brother called Nefer-Saydie. His friends nicknamed him Scarab. They meant to call him Scared because he was a major scaredy-cat, but they couldn't spell Scared, so Scarab it was.

Beth and Scarab lived in a town called Memphis.

Kings lived nearby.

(There is a town in America called Memphis, and a king called Elvis once lived there. Ask the oldest teachers you can find if they know about Elvis, and I'll guarantee you that at least one of them will reply "uh-ha" and raise their upper lip. Teachers are funny old things, aren't they?)

But that's not the town or the king I'm talking about. This Memphis was in Ancient Egypt, and the kings they had were pharaohs. And the pharaohs, when they died, were buried in pyramids: great, sky-scraping piles of rock that today we think of as Wonders of the World but back then were just giant towers that got in the way of traffic.

Anyway, this vivacious girl called Beth worked for her dad.

And her dad was an undertaker.

Now, today's undertakers aren't well known for being fun or full of life. Normally they dress in black and practise being gloomy in front of the mirror. That's because if you go to a modern undertaker and tell him that your granny, neighbour or hamster has just died and he beams the biggest, friendliest smile right back at you, slaps you on the back and says, "Fantastic news! Let's break open the chocolates!" you'll probably want to:

- a) Cry
- b) Thump him
- c) Say, "You'll never work in this town again!"

Or possibly all three, because then you could have the chocolates all to yourself.

Back then, however, dying was one of the best bits of life. Everyone was crazy about it! Life for most people was nasty, hot, short and sandy, but they believed that the Afterlife would be BRILLIANT. It was said that when you were dead you could race across the sky with the sun god Ra in his chariot and cavort with unicorns in the Fields of Aaru. You didn't even have to come back in when your mum called you!



(PS: If you're reading this and you're an Ancient Egyptian, I made up the bit about the unicorns. I'm just trying to make it more exciting for a modern audience.)

So people loved dying, and that's where Beth, Scarab and their dad (who was quite posh and was called Bet'her Leyton-Nefer) came in. They designed and decorated fancy coffins, called sarcophagi, for rich folk.



Most people couldn't afford fancy coffins, however, so for them, Beth's dad wrote their name out in hieroglyphs on parchment, prepared their body for the Afterlife and then buried them and the parchment in the sand (after checking they really were dead, of course; some people would do anything to get to the Afterlife).

One day, amidst all this jollity, a small, strange man with a small, strange cloth over his face approached Bet'her Leyton-Nefer and made a strange request. He asked for the biggest, grandest sarcophagus ever created. It had to be made of gold, with jewels all over it. "I want it to be beyond spectacular!" said the man. Serial Mash © 2016

"Might I ask who it's for?" replied Mr. Leyton-Nefer.

The masked mini-man leaned in and whispered softly, "It's for my master, the Boy King Tutenkhamun."

"But Tutenkhamun isn't dead," said Mr. Leyton-Nefer.

"Ssh!" said the stranger. "He isn't dead *yet*. But he's, umm... very ill. Or he will be pretty soon. Let's just say he's *almost* dead. Anyway, stick the sarcophagus in the tomb of the last pyramid on the left on Monday at sunset, then send your children down there at midnight on Thursday and I will give them the money to pay for the sarcophagus."

And with that he was gone.

Well, not immediately gone, obviously, as he had to get a leg-up to get back on his camel.

Who was the small, masked stranger? Why would he hand the money to Leyton-Nefer's children only on Thursday at midnight? And, most importantly, was King Tutenkhamun really almost dead?