

A TRUE STORY OF EGYPT

To begin, I have a confession as the narrator of this story. I take no pride in the many liberties I've taken, the interpretations, my outright interference in the lives of the characters you are about to meet. But having made this full disclosure, we can begin with an understanding of sincerity. I will agree to keep my godlike powers of influence to a low roar, as we meet our first people.

The morning was hot already, as the pallbearers trudged down the winding, dirt path with Set's father entombed within. They arrived at the ceremonial altar, set the coffin upon it, and each stood beside it solemnly, amid a bounty of gifts, bronze artwork, plaster and ceramic statuary, and a veritable jungle of floral creations. The assembled were brought to attention by the high priest with his regalia before the display, and in unison the group bowed their heads in reverence for the departed. The air outside was sticky and sweet with the smell of incense, fragrant flowers, and the not-unpleasant human odors of the esteemed attendees. As the priest spoke his words of affection for the departed, conjuring images of gods and the afterlife that awaited the pharaoh, Set's attention wandered to the sky, the other children in the gathering, the coffin, and the priest's headdress with its reptilian theme, golden filigree and gemstones. The costume was not worn lightly, reserved only for such occasions, when the highest of the city's beloved had transcended into the afterlife, or so the priest said.

Pardon my intrusion, as the narrator again. I must abuse my position again to tinker with time a bit, since the story between the funeral and our next point of interest is a bit unremarkable and not entirely relevant. The young Set who is now grown, after a lifetime of work, Egyptian politics, and great favor of his people, has fallen ill. Let us peek in at his situation.

The apothecary who examined this man of royalty, would have been nervous for any accidental breach of etiquette, if he hadn't examined him dozens of times already. As a trusted practitioner, he had dutifully applied leeches, dispelled demons, and even had painstakingly crafted a prosthetic big toe for the ruler, and enjoyed his work as a man of medicine. But this time he feared his skills and resources may be too little to save the dying man before him. Set was not elderly, but had gotten a very bad infection after a snakebite, which was common. The asps were everywhere, and many bites could not be healed. The medical priest did his best to make Set comfortable, but it was all he could do. It was time to communicate with the family and make necessary arrangements for embalmment.

In the following weeks, Set indeed perished and a glorious ceremony not-unlike his own father's took place. Set was embalmed in preparation for his great revival in the next life, which had been foretold in ancient texts brought to this plane by ancestral travelers from the sky. Set's body was finally entombed near his father in the family sarcophagus, with elaborate incantations inscribed, etched in stone for future people to understand the vitality and sanctity of these holy beings, who would live again to restore the future world.

My final and most sincere apology, dear reader. I am obliged to play with time yet again, so as to bring the story to its next checkpoint, a steamship in the middle of the Atlantic Ocean, bound for America in the early 20th century. She is a large, sturdy vessel with a crew of 50. But a storm has besieged her and her cargo, delaying her arrival until navigation and forward progress may be resumed. Her crew are miserable, cold, hungry, and sleep deprived with terrible work at hand. The ship's hold is full of exports from her port of departure: an assortment of products, international correspondences, research equipment, and anthropological artifacts from Egypt.

Among the items in the hold a running joke about the mummies has lightened the crews' spirits, with humorous tales of "noises" being heard in the cargo hold, and in the midst of the storm, some crew have decided to stoke the fires with a few of the dusty old cadavers. The billows expel the combusted remains, as irrevocably destroyed smoke and soot, with the crew warming their clammy hands at the engine gate.

Upon their arrival in the bustling port of Atlantic City, no one complained about the missing remains. No one cited the crew for its role in an act of unspeakable atrocity that doomed the planet Earth in fact. None of the crew, scientists waiting, or anthropologists who exhumed the mummified kings, queens, and Earthly gods of ancient times, ever realized the irreplaceability of these genetic samples. The protection as described by sacred hieroglyphs were not for the dead, but for the living and these old pharaohs knew their genes would be needed, as they had always been on other worlds, if not destroyed in furnaces with sarcastic laughter by the crimes of insensitive primates.

The end