The Curse of the Mummy

For thousands of years the dead body of the young king Tutankhamun sleeps under the sands of Egypt. Then, in the autumn of 1922, Howard Carter and his friends find and open his tomb door. These are exciting times, and Carter's young helper Tariq tells the story in his diary.

But soon people begin to die. Who or what is the killer? Is Tutankhamun angry with them for opening his tomb? And who is the beautiful French girl with the face of Tutankhamun's long-dead wife?

Illustrated by Jocelyn Gicquel
Cover image courtesy of Corbis (Tutankhamun/Hans Klaus Tacht)
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Chapter 1

Where are Tutankhamun's treasures?

August 4th 1922: The Valley of the Kings

Here I am at last in the Valley of the Kings! It's a valley in the desert with lots of sand and the tombs of dead Egyptian kings in it. It took us a long time to get here, and we all felt very hot when we arrived, but that doesn't matter now. It's good to be here.

I'm happy to be working with Mr Carter. Lots of young men wanted to work with him in the Valley of the Kings, but he took me because of my father. My father and Mr Carter are good friends. They often meet at the museum in Cairo. My father works there. Also, I'm a good artist. And I know a lot about Tutankhamun, too. Did you know he was a king when he was only nine years old? But he wasn't king for very long. He died when he was eighteen. That's only one year older than me! Why did he die then? Perhaps we can find the answer when we find his tomb. Mr Carter thinks it's in the Valley of the Kings. He began looking for it five years ago, and he doesn't want to
stop. Some people think he’s **crazy**, but I don’t. Nearly all the other old Egyptian kings have a tomb here, so why not Tutankhamun?

There are about twenty of us, men and boys, working here in the valley. Perhaps I can make friends later, but for now I’m going to write this **diary** and my diary can be my friend. There aren’t any shops or cinemas here, so I need something to do in the evenings. And perhaps one day people are going to want to read my diary. Why? Well, perhaps we’re going to find Tutankhamun’s tomb, or a different king’s tomb, or some new **treasures**. Egyptian tombs have lots of treasures in them, you know – **gold** and **jewels**. But **thieves** took treasures from many of the tombs in the past. And there are tomb thieves in Egypt today, too. People come from all over the world to look for gold and jewels. When they find a tomb, they take all the treasure home to their countries. I think that’s very bad. I’m happy to say Mr Carter is not a thief. He says Egyptian treasures must stay in Egypt. I think he’s right.

But our work’s not going to be easy. Mr Carter has only one year now to find Tutankhamun’s tomb. He’s got a rich friend, **Lord Carnarvon**, and he gives Mr Carter money to help with our work. Lord Carnarvon likes Egypt a lot and he loves old Egyptian treasures. He’s got lots of them in his home in England. But after giving Mr Carter money for five years he must be careful. Not long ago he called Mr Carter to England and told him, ‘Only one more year looking for Tutankhamun, Howard.’ Mr Carter came back to Egypt at once. He brought a little yellow **bird** with him.

‘That bird is going to help us find Tutankhamun’s tomb,’ said Karim. He’s one of the boys working in the valley with me. How can a little bird help us? I don’t know. But it’s true we need some help – from something or someone.

Perhaps you think a year’s a long time? It’s not when you’re looking for a little tomb in a very big valley. Where are all of Tutankhamun’s treasures? Mr Carter thinks he knows – and I think he’s right, but let’s wait and see!

Well, good night, diary – from me, Tariq.

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**August 25th 1922**

Today I’m going to tell you something about our days in the desert. We begin work very early every morning when the sun comes up. We **dig** for six hours with not much water to drink. At twelve o’clock, it is very, very hot. So we stop to eat, to drink, and to sleep. After two hours we begin digging again. We stop when it gets dark. My back and my arms always feel bad in the evenings. We’re very hungry when the sun goes down and the nights in the desert are very cold. Everyone is tired, so we don’t talk much when we’re eating dinner.

I don’t know what other people think about all day, but I think about Tutankhamun. Mr Carter says he lived with his brothers and sisters when he was a little boy. Later he **married** the beautiful Ankhesenamun. Some people say he has no tomb because he died suddenly when he was very young. But tombs were very important in old Egypt and Mr Carter thinks Tutankhamun has his tomb somewhere in this valley. But where?
It's late now and the sky is dark. Suddenly I feel cold. Is Tutankhamun's body in a tomb somewhere near us now? Are we going to find it soon? Is Mr Carter's little yellow bird going to help us or not? Who knows?

**September 12th 1922**

Some visitors came to the Valley of the Kings today. People often come here to look at the open tombs. They look at the pictures in the tombs and the bodies of the dead kings – we call them mummies, you know. Today's visitors were artists from France. They said everyone in Europe is interested in Egypt now. They are building new 'Egyptian' cinemas and hotels in the big cities. And shops are selling 'Egyptian' beds, tables, chairs, and pictures too. Artists can make a lot of money with Egyptian things. A young girl with dark hair and a beautiful, strong face walked along the valley behind the other artists. For a minute, she looked at me. Then suddenly she dropped something in the sand and began to look for it. I went to help her. After a minute, I found it – a gold bracelet with an Egyptian eye on it. I gave it to her and she smiled.

'Thank you,' she said. 'My teacher, Mr Ayrton, gave it to me for my birthday. Isn't it nice? I didn't want to lose it.'

She had beautiful dark eyes. I wanted to speak to her, but what could I say? 'Excuse me, Anne, you have a beautiful face.' Of course not!

I know her name is Anne because an older man called to her 'Come on, Anne!'

'Coming, Mr Ayrton,' she said, and she ran after him.

In the evening, the French artists left and went back to their hotel in Luxor. Anne smiled at me when she left, but then her teacher, Mr Ayrton, called her and the smile left her face and she ran after him again.

Am I going to see Anne again? I like her a lot, but I don't like her teacher, Mr Ayrton. He's a lot older than her. Perhaps he's a very good artist, but why must she run to him every time he calls her? She needs to be with young people, not old Mr Ayrton!

It's another beautiful night tonight. Desert nights are wonderful. But again I feel very cold. I think the dead kings come near us and watch us at night. I can feel their dead eyes looking at us coldly. Some people think they're angry with us for digging here. They say bad things happen to people when they go into Egyptian tombs looking for treasure. But Mr Carter is OK, and he began digging in Egypt years ago. So perhaps they're wrong!
READING CHECK

Are these sentences true or false? Tick the boxes.

a. Howard Carter is telling the story.  
   True False  

b. Tariq is helping Mr Carter look for Tutankhamun’s tomb.  
   False False False  

c. Lord Carnarvon is giving money to Mr Carter.  
   False False False  

d. Tutankhamun died when he was very old.  
   False False False  

e. Some Italian artists came to visit on September 12th 1922.  
   False False False  

f. One of the artists, Anne, has an older teacher, Mr Ayrton.  
   True False  

g. Tariq likes Mr Ayrton.  
   True False  

WORD WORK

1. Match the words with the pictures.

a. mummy  b. diary  c. glove  d. spot  e. dig  
   1. valley  2. marry  3. gold  4. diary  5. jewel  
   6. desert  7. king  8. thief  9. bracelet

GUESS WHAT

What happens in the next chapter? Tick four boxes.

a. Mr Carter’s men find the door to a tomb in the sand.  
   False  False  False  False  

b. Mr Carter wants to tell everyone all about his work.  
   False  False  False  False  

c. Mr Carter’s yellow bird dies.  
   False  False  False  False  

d. A mummy begins to kill people.  
   False  False  False  False  

e. Lord Carnarvon comes to Egypt with his daughter.  
   False  False  False  False  

f. Carnarvon and Carter are excited when they look at the tomb door.  
   False  False  False  False
Chapter 2
There's something here!

November 4th 1922
Something wonderful happened today! We found a step in the sand. It was about 4 p.m. when someone suddenly cried out behind me. It was my friend Karim.

'Tariq, quick, there's something here!' I ran to him and we dug fast. We soon found a step in the sand and under the first step we could see a second one.

I said 'Stop! We must get Mr Carter.' Someone found Mr Carter and he ran over to us. When he saw the step, he was very excited and he couldn't speak. We all waited. Then he found his voice. 'Dig' he cried. 'Dig I say!' So we all dug very quickly and we found five more steps before the sun went down. Then we stopped.

Now we are all very tired, but very excited. At dinner there were many questions in all our heads: 'What are we going to find next?' 'Is there a tomb here?' 'Is it going to be open or closed?'

November 6th 1922
Tonight I can tell my diary everything. But only my diary. Mr Carter says we can't tell people about the steps in the sand. He says they're very important.

Today we found sixteen steps in the sand. Then we found a door. And the most important thing - the door wasn't open, but had old Egyptian seals on it. Mr Carter went down the steps and looked at the seals very carefully for a long time. We all waited in the sand under the hot sun. Down in the dark, looking at that old Egyptian door, Mr Carter began to laugh.

'They're his seals,' he called up to us. 'Tutankhamun's seals! I think it's his tomb at last! Well done everybody!'

We all laughed and cried. It was very exciting! But after a time, Mr Carter said we must all be quiet. He doesn't want newspaper men to hear about this and to come to the Valley of the Kings bringing lots of visitors.

'First, I must tell Lord Carnarvon,' said Mr Carter. 'We can't open the door without him. Put all the sand back and say nothing about this.'

So we covered the door and all the steps under the sand again. And now we must wait for Lord Carnarvon. It's going to take two weeks or more for him to come to Egypt by ship from England. How can we keep quiet for two weeks? It's a good thing I'm far from my family. And that beautiful French artist Anne is far away now. I think she would like to hear all about this, too. Without them here, there's nobody to talk to - nobody but you, my diary.
November 12th 1922

Something very strange happened today. A snake killed Mr Carter’s yellow bird and ate it. Karim was ill, and his face went white, when he heard about it.

‘The yellow bird helped us to find Tutankhamun’s tomb,’ he said, ‘but now Tutankhamun sends this snake to kill the bird because he is angry with us. We must stop digging at once and never, never open the boy-king’s tomb.’

Mr Carter told Karim to be quiet and not to say all those crazy things in front of the younger boys. ‘Listen to me, Karim,’ he said, ‘Tutankhamun died thousands of years ago. He can’t be angry with us, do you hear?’

Who is right about Tutankhamun? Mr Carter, or Karim? I don’t know. But I’m beginning to feel afraid.

November 23rd 1922

Today at last Lord Carnarvon and his daughter, Evelyn, arrived. Lord Carnarvon doesn’t look well. His face is very white and tired.

When they arrived, we took the sand off the steps and the door again. Lord Carnarvon and Mr Carter went down the steps to look at the seals on the door. They were very excited. Lord Carnarvon’s daughter stood next to me on the first step and I heard her say: ‘I hope there’s something there this time. Oh, Father, you’re very tired and ill! I hope this visit doesn’t make you feel worse.’

She spoke very quietly, but I heard her.

Lord Carnarvon and Mr Carter stayed down looking at the door for a long time. They were very quiet. We went away to have something to eat and drink. When we came back an hour later, they came up the steps to meet us.

‘Some of the seals on the door are broken,’ said Lord Carnarvon. ‘So we’re not the first people to find the door. Perhaps the tomb behind the door has nothing in it.’

Nobody spoke. Everybody thought of all the gold and treasures we hoped to find there.

‘But,’ Lord Carnarvon continued, ‘it’s a wonderful thing to find a new tomb. We may find pictures on the walls or mummies or other beautiful things. Our work is very important. There are stones behind the door, and we must now move away the stones.’

So we worked all afternoon. The stones are big and heavy and I don’t know when we’re going to finish — perhaps tomorrow.

It is cold again tonight. Are we going to find treasure in Tutankhamun’s tomb? Is his angry spirit near us, watching us? I am too tired to think or to write any more now. Good night, diary.