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THE CAIRO BRIEF

Written by **Fiona Veitch Smith**

Published By **Lion Hudson**

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THE CAIRO BRIEF

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THE CAIRO BRIEF

POPPY DENBY INVESTIGATES

BOOK 4

Fiona Veitch Smith



LION FICTION

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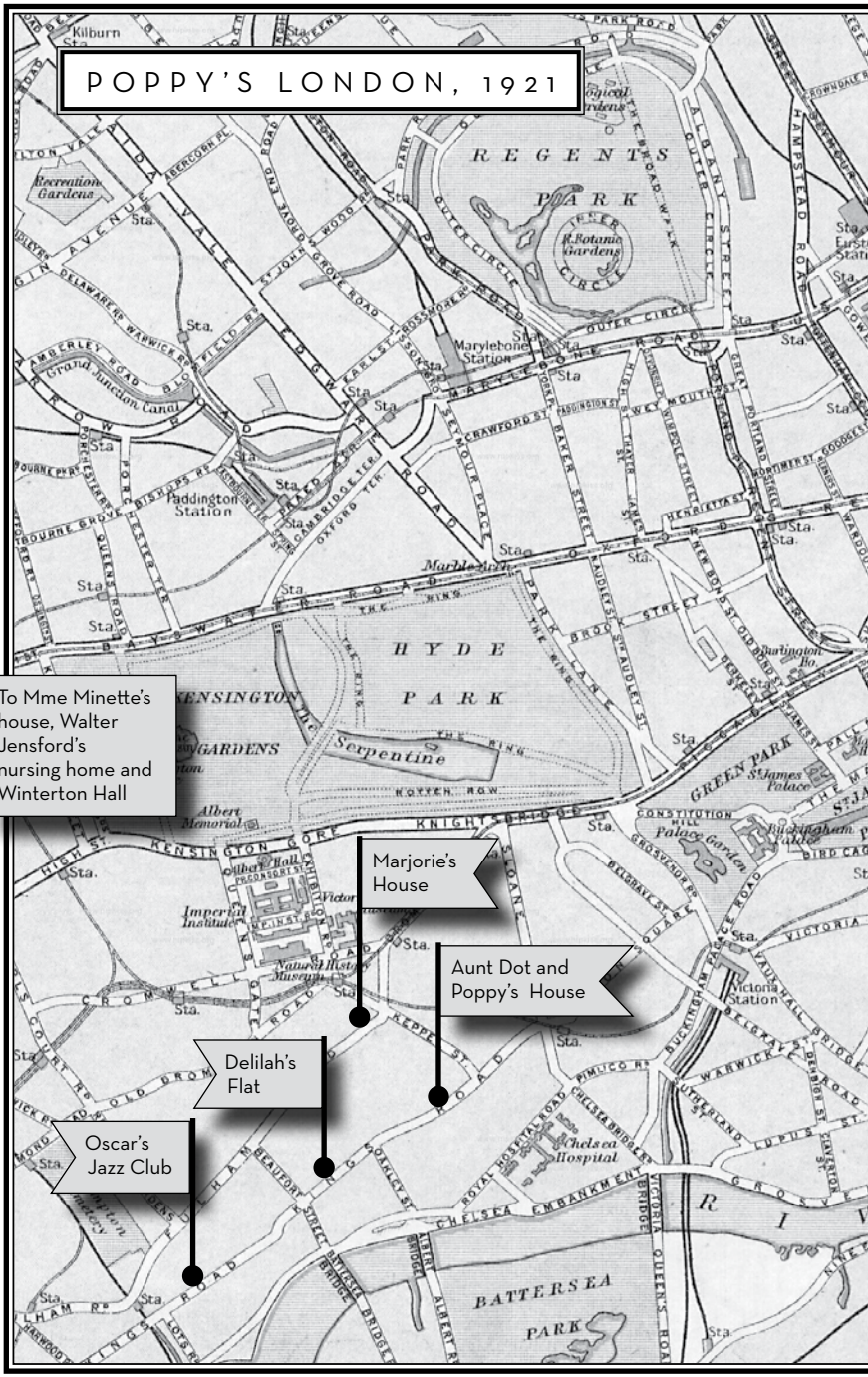
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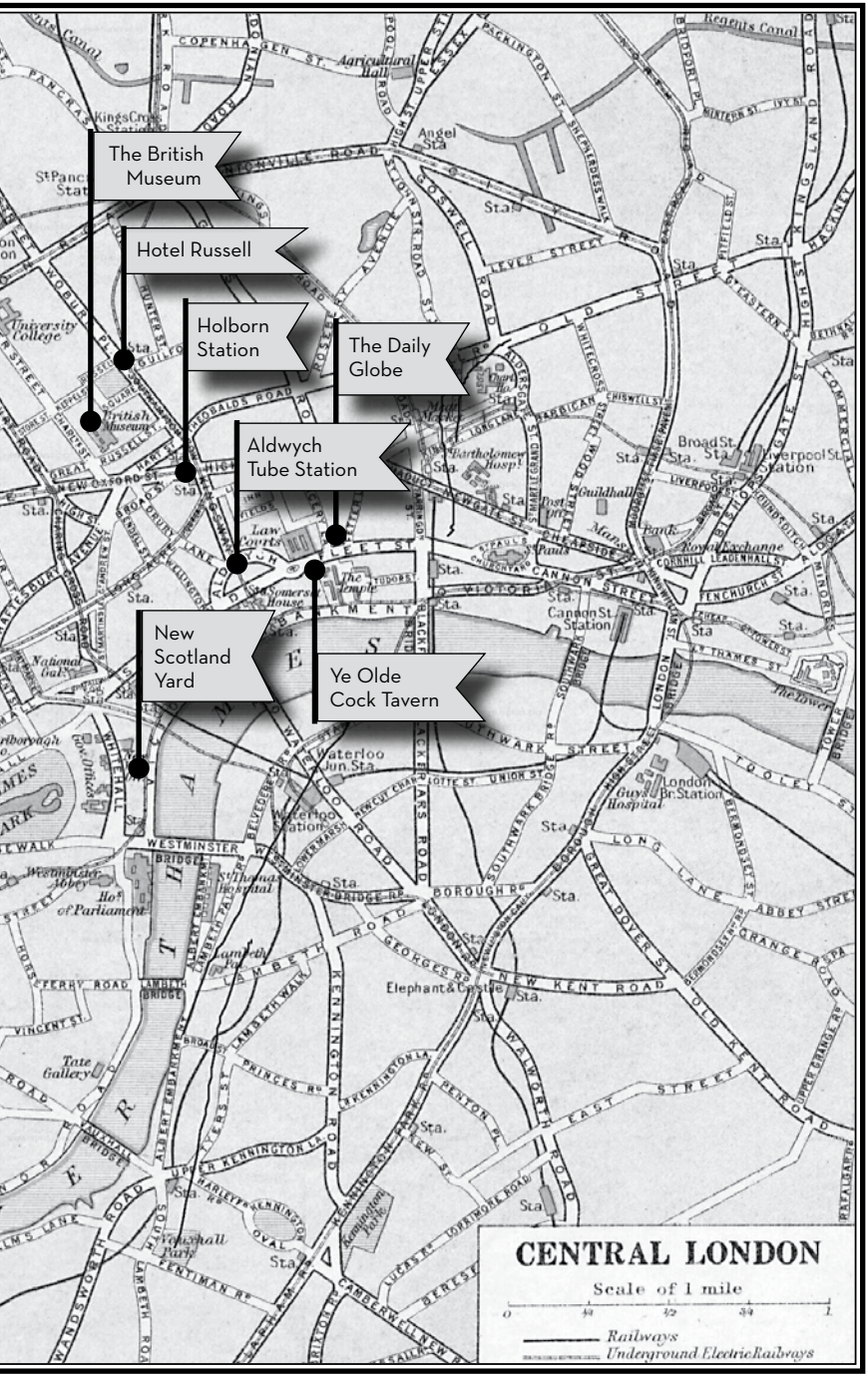
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For my granddad, Horace Hawkins,
who first gave me music,
and
my beautiful Ruby Tuesday, faithful friend and
furry companion during many writing hours.
I'll miss you curled up at my feet.


POPPY'S LONDON, 1921
To Mme Minette's house, Walter Jensford's nursing home and Winterton Hall
Marjorie's House
Aunt Dot and Poppy's House
Delilah's Flat
Oscar's Jazz Club
REGENTS PARK
HYDE PARK
Serpentine
BATTERSEA PARK
Paddington Station
Marylebone Station
Victoria Station
Chelsea Hospital
Natural History Museum
Imperial Institute
Albert Memorial
Marble Arch
Buckingham Palace
St James's Palace
Grand Junction Canal
Recreation Gardens
KENSINGTON GARDENS
KENSINGTON GORE
KNIGHTSBRIDGE
PARK ROAD
OXFORD STREET
EDGWARE ROAD
BAYSWATER ROAD
PICCADILLY
CONSTITUTION HILL
GREEN PARK
VICTORIA
CHELSEA EMBANKMENT
ALBERT BRIDGE
CHELSEA BRIDGE
VICTORIA BRIDGE
QUEEN'S ROAD
KING'S ROAD
SLOANE STREET
SLOANE SQUARE
BAKER STREET
REGENT'S CANAL
HAMPSTEAD ROAD
GOWER STREET
SEYMOUR PLACE
CRAWFORD ST
NEW BOND ST
OLD BOND ST
BROOK STREET
HENRIETTA ST
QUEENSWAY
PORCHESTER TER
BISHOPS RD
WESTBOURNE GROVE
WESTBOURNE PARK RD
LADBROKE GROVE
LADBROKE GROVE ROAD
ST JOHN'S WOOD ROAD
ABBEY ROAD
PARK ROAD
OUTER CIRCLE
INNER CIRCLE
ALBANY STREET
PARK CRESCENT
PARK SQUARE EAST
PARK SQUARE WEST
CLARENCE GATE
GLOUCESTER GATE
ALBANY ST
PRINCE ALBERT ROAD
HYDE PARK CORNER
PICCADILLY
DOVER ST
OLD BROMPTON ROAD
CROMWELL ROAD
EXHIBITION ROAD
QUEEN'S GATE
QUEEN'S GATE TER
PRINCE CONSORT RD
THURLOE PLACE
EBURY BRIDGE
GROSVENOR PLACE
GROSVENOR GARDENS
BELGRAVE SQUARE
BELGRAVE RD
PIMLICO RD
WARWICK SQUARE
WARWICK ROAD
LUPUS ST
CHURCH ST
ELVERTON ST
ROYAL HOSPITAL ROAD
BUCKINGHAM PALACE ROAD
VAUXHALL BRIDGE
VAUXHALL BRIDGE ROAD
GREAT PORTLAND ST
GOODGE ST
TOTTENHAM COURT RD
NEW OXFORD ST
HOLBORN
CHARING CROSS RD
SHAFTESBURY AVENUE
PICCADILLY CIRCUS
REGENT ST
OXFORD CIRCUS
ORCHARD ST
WIGMORE ST
DAVIES ST
BERKELEY ST
CURZON ST
HERTFORD ST
STRATFORD PLACE
GREEN PARK
ST JAMES'S PARK
THE MALL
THE KING'S ROAD
THE RING
ROTTEN ROW
BURLINGTON GARDENS
BURLINGTON HO
ALBERT HALL MANSIONS
PRINCE CONSORT ROAD
ALBERT HALL
Kilburn
Sta.


The British Museum
Hotel Russell
Holborn Station
The Daily Globe
Aldwych Tube Station
New Scotland Yard
Ye Olde Cock Tavern
CENTRAL LONDON
Scale of 1 mile
Railways
Underground Electric Railways

Acknowledgments

It's hard to believe the flapulous Poppy Denby is about to embark upon her fourth adventure in so many years. That girl has a far more exciting life than her author, who spends most of her time in slippers. However, I do occasionally get out and have a chance to put on some glad rags. Most recently that's been for the Newcastle Noir Crime Festival. I had a fantastic time meeting readers, listening to other authors, and having a chance to introduce Poppy and her friends to a whole new audience.

But it's the readers that have been with me and Poppy from the beginning whom I would like to thank now. I can't tell you how heartening it is to receive emails from readers desperate to know when the next Poppy Denby will be out. To know that the stories I imagine as I'm lying in bed, or walking the dog, or riding on the bus – and then type up in my slippers – actually make a difference in people's lives, is humbling.

I would also like to thank all the kind people I meet – in person, or virtually – during the course of my research. Firstly, to my Facebook friends who are a font of trivial but useful information: ta very muchly. Then, to the experts I've plagued at various museums and institutions. I would particularly like to thank the London Transport Museum who were able to tell me exactly what bus Poppy would have got, from where to where, on her trips around London.

My appreciation also goes to the very kind guide at the British Museum who helped me one day when I swooned – more

accurately it was shaking, sweating, and needing (very quickly) to find the nearest toilet. I didn't get the lady's name, but she was very supportive. Fortunately, that was the only bad experience I've ever had at the British Museum. In doing research for this book I have spent many an hour wandering through its halls, pretending I'm Poppy, and imagining what it would have been like back in 1921.

Thanks as always goes to my indefatigable editor Jessica Tinker, who has simultaneously trained for and run a triathlon(!) while preparing for her upcoming nuptials. I am delighted to hear that Poppy has inspired her to wear a 1920s themed gown. I wish Jess and Mr Jess a glorious wedded life. My thanks too to the ever-supportive and eagle-eyed Julie Frederick, as well as the rest of the team at Lion Hudson. In addition, I would like to thank Blackwell's Bookshop in Newcastle upon Tyne for hosting the last two Poppy Denby launches and look forward to our next shindig.

Finally, I would like to toss some bouquets towards my wonderful family. My husband Rod and daughter Megan are my rocks. They put up with so much from me while my mind is wrapped up in my writing. I love you both with all my heart. Thank you too to my dad Dougie and cousin Shirley who both, in their own ways, encourage me to keep on doing what I'm doing. In the words of Maisie the flapper from *The Boyfriend*, "I love you all!"

Character List

Fictional characters

Poppy Denby – arts and entertainment editor for *The Daily Globe*. Our heroine.
Rollo Rolandson – senior editor and owner of *The Daily Globe.*
Daniel Rokeby – photographer for *The Daily Globe.* Poppy's beau. Has sister, Maggie, and two children, Arthur and Amy.
Ike Garfield – senior journalist at *The Daily Globe.* Has wife, Doreen.
Ivan Molanov – archivist at *The Daily Globe.*
Delilah Marconi – actress and socialite. Poppy's best friend.
Yasmin Reece-Lansdale – barrister and former solicitor. Legal adviser to delegation from Cairo Museum. Rollo Rolandson's on-off sweetheart.
Marjorie Reynolds – MP and Minister to the Home Office. Has son, Oscar, who owns Oscar's Jazz Club.
Dot Denby – actress and former suffragette. Poppy's aunt.
Grace Wilson – bookkeeper and former suffragette. Dot Denby's companion.

*

Sir James Maddox – adventurer, antiquities collector, and amateur archaeologist. Baronet of Winterton Hall.

Lady Ursula – wife of Sir James.
Fox Flinton – actor and cousin of Lady Ursula.
Grimes – butler at Winterton Hall.
Wallace – footman at Winterton Hall.
Booker and son – the gamekeeper and his son.
Lionel Saunders – reporter, *The London Courier.*
Harry Gibson – photographer, *The London Courier.*
Dr Giles Mortimer – Head Curator, Department of Egyptian & Assyrian Antiquities, the British Museum.
Dr Faizal Osman – Director, Egyptian Antiquities Service, Cairo Museum. Brother of Yasmin Reece-Lansdale.
Kamela El Farouk – assistant to the Director, Egyptian Antiquities Service, Cairo Museum.
Herr Dr Heinrich Stein – Director of Antiquities, Museum of Berlin.
Herr Dr Rudolf Weiner – assistant to the Director of Antiquities, Museum of Berlin.
Dr Jonathan Davies – Director of Antiquities, Metropolitan Museum of New York.
Jennifer Philpott – assistant to Director of Antiquities, Metropolitan Museum of New York.
Albert Carnaby – auctioneer for Carnaby's Auction House.
Madame Minette / Minifred Hughes – spiritualist medium.
Walter Jensford – retired journalist for *The Times.*
Freddie Waltaub – former assistant to Dr Ludwig Borschardt at El-Amarna archaeological dig.
DCI Jasper Martin – chief detective for the murder squad of the Metropolitan Police.
Sergeant Barnes – desk sergeant at New Scotland Yard.
Constable Jones – police constable at Henley-on-Thames.

Historical characters

Sir Arthur Conan Doyle – author, physician, and metaphysicist.
Lady Jean Conan Doyle – second wife of Arthur Conan Doyle, spiritualist medium.
Emmeline Pankhurst – founder of the Women's Suffrage and Political Union. In this book she is a friend of Dot Denby, Grace Wilson, and Marjorie Reynolds.
Howard Carter – archaeologist, Egyptologist, and (in this book) special adviser to the British Museum. In February 1922, three months after the fictional events of this book, Howard Carter discovers the tomb of the boy king Tutankhamun, grandson of Nefertiti.
Dr Ludwig Borchardt – archaeologist and Egyptologist. In 1912 he discovered the famous bust of Nefertiti at El-Amarna. In this book he also discovers the (fictional) death mask of Nefertiti in 1914.

*

Nefertiti – wife of Pharaoh Akhenaten who ruled Egypt from 1353 to 1336 BC. Together they founded the city of Akhetaten (Horizon of Aten) whose ruins are at modern-day El-Amarna. They were considered heretics because they abandoned the pantheon of old gods and declared only one god was to be worshipped – the sun, Aten, who created the world. Nefertiti and Akhenaten had six daughters, one of whom he also married,

and with whom he incestuously fathered Tutankhamun. After Akhenaten died it is believed Nefertiti may have ruled as pharaoh queen, before abandoning the city and returning the capital to Thebes, where Tutankhamun became king and returned Egypt to the old religion. Akhenaten was buried in El-Amarna. Nefertiti's body has never been found.

Ozymandias

I met a traveller from an antique land
Who said: Two vast and trunkless legs of stone
Stand in the desert. Near them, on the sand,
Half sunk, a shatter'd visage lies, whose frown
And wrinkled lip and sneer of cold command
Tell that its sculptor well those passions read
Which yet survive, stamp'd on these lifeless things,
The hand that mock'd them and the heart that fed.
And on the pedestal these words appear:
"My name is Ozymandias, king of kings:
Look on my works, ye Mighty, and despair!"
Nothing beside remains: round the decay
Of that colossal wreck, boundless and bare,
The lone and level sands stretch far away.

Percy Bysshe Shelley, 1818

Chapter 1

10 April 1914, El-Amarna, Egypt

Two brown-cloaked figures picked their way through the half-filled trenches and incomplete excavations of the ancient city. Without its centuries-old shroud of desert sand, Akhetaten lay shivering and exposed in the shameful moonlight, filtering down from the carved cliffs to the east. From the cliff face, hacked and hewn, the likenesses of the heretic pharaohs Akhenaten and Nefertiti stood sentinel over the valley where, three and a half thousand years before, they had built a city to worship Aten, the golden sun.

But tonight it was Iah, the silver moon, that ruled the shadowlands below, where the city of the dead was being reclaimed by the living. To the west of what the foreigners called "The Dig", the Nile snaked through fields and farms, an artery of life to the villages dotted along the plain.

The cloaked, trespassing figures were a twin boy and girl of around seventeen who lived in one of the nearby villages: Et-Till Beni Amra. At least they used to. Now they were at boarding school in Cairo, far, far to the north, and only came home during the holidays. Their parents were the only people in the village able to afford to send their children away to school, an enormous expense and – so the villagers whispered as they

tilled their crops – a wasteful one, particularly on the girl. But the twins' illicit family business – secretly passed down from generation to generation – had been doing well in recent times, thanks to the Europeans swarming over the carcass of Akhenaten like pale flies. The children with whom the twins now shared dormitories in Cairo talked behind their backs and called them graverobbers. But their father preferred the title "antiquities dealer" and now, since he had been so well paid by the German professor, his children were able to write his profession in German, English, and French.

The girl had been reluctant to come on the moonlit adventure. It had been fun to dig around in the ruins when they were children, but now she understood the consequences of being found with reclaimed artefacts. She'd heard stories of locals being beaten and imprisoned for theft. The Egyptian Antiquities Service issued licences to excavators on a seasonal basis. For the last seven years the licence had gone to Professor Ludwig Borchardt and his team. No one else was allowed to dig there – no rival European archaeologists and most definitely not a pair of young Mohammedans. Never mind that the girl's family had been digging and selling the fruit of their labour for a hundred years before Borchardt came. Her father had been hired by the German as a consultant and had sworn to stop his own black-market business in return for a substantial salary. But her brother refused to adhere to the agreement. "It's our people's heritage," he had argued, "like the crops of the field and the fish of the Nile."

So, on this weekend which the Christians called Easter, when her father was in Cairo with his German employer, her brother had coaxed her to join him in a little subsistence looting. "For old time's sake," he had grinned. Reluctantly, she agreed. After she helped her mother wash up and read her younger

siblings a bedtime story, she donned her cloak, preparing to join her brother for an evening walk.

The mother assessed her twin children. The boy looked as cock-sure as always. But the girl… there was something bothering her. "You don't have to go," the woman said to her daughter. "Not if you don't want to."

"I – well – I –"

Her brother interrupted before she could finish, putting his arm around her and ushering her to the door. "Don't worry, mother, I'll look after her. She's just a bit out of practice, aren't you?"

The girl couldn't deny this. She nodded half-heartedly.

"Hmmm," said their mother, wiping her hands dry on her apron. "If I didn't know the Europeans were away I might be more worried."

"Worried about what?" asked her son, as he too pulled on his cloak. "We are just going for an evening stroll. And if we happen to walk past the old city… well…" he grinned and kissed his mother on her forehead.

"Watch out for Mohammed and his dog," said the mother. "He's usually asleep on the job, and he owes your father half a dozen favours, but you never know..."

"We will," said her son as he and his sister picked up their sacks – containing ropes and tools – and headed out into the night.

Half an hour later the twins were at their preselected destination: the remains of an ancient workshop that had belonged to a man called Thutmose, the personal sculptor of Pharaoh Akhenaten and his wife, Nefertiti. Two years ago the German team, guided by the twins' father, had unearthed the ruins of the sprawling facility and found a bust of the beautiful queen, with only one eye. The sculpture had now been sent

to Berlin. But it wasn't the only work of art retrieved. There were dozens of half-finished statues and bits of broken limbs in a series of storerooms and trash piles. And – so the twins knew – a secret underground chamber where the sculptor had kept his most precious work. Their father had declined, so far, to tell his new employers about the chamber. But rumour of its existence had been passed down in the family from generation to generation.

"I still don't understand why Papa hasn't told the Germans about it yet," said the girl.

"Perhaps they haven't paid him enough," observed the boy. He struck a match and lit a small hurricane lantern he'd taken from his sack, then ranged the lamp in a wide arc over the trenches and roped-off squares of earth. "But it's only a matter of time until someone finds it."

"And you think you know where it is?" asked the girl.

The boy nodded. "And so do you. Do you remember that rhyme Grandpa used to sing?"

The girl's face lit up in the light of the lamp. She smiled, remembering fondly the old man with skin like dried parchment. "One palm, two palm, between the trees, there's Old Tut's treasure, so please don't sneeze!" She giggled, just like she used to when she was a child.

The boy grinned. "The thing is, I don't think it was just a rhyme." He pointed to a small copse of palm trees about thirty paces west of the perimeter of the workshop dig. A pair of trees were set slightly apart from the rest. "What do you think?"

The girl's almond-shaped eyes opened wide. "That's a bit of a stretch."

The boy shrugged and walked towards the trees. "Worth a dig, though, don't you think?"

The girl scanned the horizon, looking for any sign of the old

watchman and his dog. It was all clear. She sighed, shifted her sack from one shoulder to another, and followed her brother. "Can't do any harm, I suppose..."

"Hey! Looks like someone's already been here," called the brother. The girl broke into a run and joined her sibling under the palms. He ranged his lantern over the area to reveal a hole in the ground, which had previously been hidden by rock and scree. The siblings both knew that this is how the entrance to Thutmose's workshop had been found: under a pile of rubble. But around this entrance were footprints in the sand – human and animal. The girl got down on her knees and peered into the hole, gesturing for her brother to shed light on it. He did and the girl could make out a steep tunnel, wide enough for a medium-sized man to squeeze into, angled down into the darkness. "Do you think someone's down there now?" she whispered.

"I doubt it," said the boy. "If the Europeans had found it already, they would have blocked the area off and put guards on it until they came back from their Easter break."

The girl nodded her assent and cocked her ear, trying to pick up any sounds that might be emanating from the underground chamber. "I agree about the Europeans. So that means it must be one of our people."

"Yes, but I doubt they're still there. Look, these footprints don't look fresh. He poked at the faded tracks with his sandal, then grinned. "The Europeans wouldn't be able to get a clear print from these," he said, reminding his sister of the graverobber who had been caught and convicted on another dig by the famous archaeologist Howard Carter, who photographed footprints leading from the scene of the crime and matched them to a suspect.

"What do you want to do then?" asked the girl.

The boy put down his lantern on a nearby rock and shuffled

his sack off his shoulder. "Go in, of course. Even if someone's been here before us, there'll still be lots to see. And good luck to them if they have! Better one of our people than a foreigner."

The girl couldn't disagree with that. So, with one more scan of the area above ground to prove they were most definitely alone, she helped her brother tie a rope securely to a palm tree and thread it down the hole. From experience, she knew that in all likelihood the entrance was not above a dead drop and was most likely a steep ramp. But also from experience – and family stories – she knew that the ramps could be treacherous. Great Uncle Kadiel had lost his footing at one of the tombs on the cliff face forty years ago and broke his back in the fall. So they tied a second rope and knotted it around her brother's waist – as their father had taught them – and made him lean back to see if it held his weight. It did and before long he slithered through the hole and made his way down, using the first rope as a guide.

The girl waited in the company of the twin palms, standing sentinel beneath a canopy of stars.

"It's too tight to stand," a muffled voice called after a few moments. "But I can crawl. I'll give three tugs when I reach the bottom. If there's anything to see, I'll give another three tugs; if there's nothing here, I'll only tug twice."

"All right!" called the girl as loudly as she dared. They appeared to be alone, but old Mohammed and his dog were still unaccounted for…

It must only have been five minutes, but it seemed like twice that before the rope between the tree and the hole jerked… three times. The girl let out the breath she hadn't realized she'd been holding. *There's something there… he wants me to come down…*

She looked around once more – still no sign of the watchman and his dog. She wasn't surprised; he was a known slacker. The heavens only knew how he managed to keep his job. Some said

he knew secrets the Europeans wouldn't want divulged – secrets about questionable practices on the dig that didn't quite align with the terms of licence granted by the Egyptian Department of Antiquities in Cairo.

She tugged the rope three times to indicate to her brother that she'd got the message, tied another rope around the tree, and securely fastened it around her waist before approaching the entrance to the underground chamber. On her haunches she pulled up the hood of her cloak and tucked the stray hair from her plait behind her ears. She'd only just washed her hair that morning and didn't want it full of muck from the tunnel. Then she sat on her bottom and worked her way, feet first, into the hole. There was no need to go head first; her brother had traversed the route before her and wouldn't have called her down if there was any obstacle in the way. And besides, she was more confident keeping her head up, rather than down, just in case she needed to pull herself back up the rope with no one above ground to help her.

She held her breath and shimmied into the hole, then down the tunnel, which had sufficient clearance that the ceiling only intermittently brushed the top of her head. She stopped a metre or two below the surface, braced her ankles against the sides, and felt around with her hands. Someone, a long time ago – Thutmose himself perhaps? – had lined the tunnel with timber and overlaid it with compacted clay. The clay lining had cracked and crumbled in places but remained largely intact. The girl mumbled a prayer of thanks for the ingenuity and industriousness of her ancestors.

"Are you coming down?" A call from below.

"Yes," she answered and continued her downwards shimmy, pushing herself up onto her hands and propelling her bottom forward to her knees in a caterpillar motion. "How far?"

"About twenty metres! Can you see my light?"

Yes, she could; there was a dim glow below her. Her brother had lit the lamp he had taken down with him. "Yes!" she affirmed, then: "What can you see?"

"Piles of loot!" Her brother's voice bubbled with excitement. "It's not a tomb –"

"Didn't expect it to be."

"No. But it looks like this was where old Tut stored his funerary artefacts. The ones that would be used for burial."

"Of Nefertiti and Akhenaten?"

"Possibly. We'll see when you get down. I haven't gone too far in… Ah, there you are. You're getting slow in your old age." The boy held out his hand and helped his sister upright at the bottom of the ramped tunnel. She took it then gave him a playful punch on the shoulder.

"You're fifteen minutes older than me!"

"And always fifteen minutes ahead of you too!"

She punched him again.

"Ow!" yelped the boy but didn't retaliate. Here, surrounded by vases, chests, sarcophagi and amphora – with who knew what kind of treasure inside – they put their sibling high jinks aside.

The girl took the lantern from him and traced a wide arc around the chamber. She let out a long whistle. "It looks like there are other chambers leading off from this one."

The boy agreed. "At least one; there's an entrance over there. I haven't been through yet. Thought we could start here."

The girl nodded her agreement, put down the lantern on top of a carved stele leaning against the wall, and started to investigate. The stele – possibly a grave marker – was inscribed with hieroglyphics. The twins were learning to read the ancient script in their Classical civilization classes at the academy. The girl traced her finger over the shapes, mouthing the words as

she went: "The sun and the moon, the day and the night, wed forever in celestial splendour. Akhenaten and Nefertiti shine on your people, divine ones, shine." The girl gasped and raised her face to her brother. "It is them! This will fetch a fine price on the black market!"

The boy grinned. "Of course we can't take too much… we'll never get away with it… but I don't see why we can't take a couple of small pieces and then let Borchardt know when he gets back with father… we'll have to leave the stele, too heavy… besides it identifies the find… but something smaller..."

He lifted the lid on one of the painted wooden chests. Inside, in a bed of straw, was a set of gold-plated amphora, perhaps intended to hold sacred oil. "Hang on," he said, his fingers raking through the straw, "this is fresh… it's fresh straw!" He reached for the next chest and it contained statuettes. These too were neatly packaged in fresh straw.

"Why's it fresh?" he asked.

The girl's stomach clenched. "Oh no..." She too opened a chest and came face to face with a burial mask of gold leaf, blue enamel, and black jet that looked very similar to the bust of Nefertiti, discovered elsewhere on the dig two years earlier. But what struck the twins more than the exquisite beauty of the pharaoh queen was the nest of fresh straw and modern linen wadding in which it lay. "Someone's been here before us," the girl whispered.

"Yes," agreed the boy, "and it looks like they're packed and ready to go."

"We need to report it," said the girl. "This doesn't look like a casual looter. It's organized. It's… pssst! Where are you going?"

The boy was picking his way through the treasure-filled chests heading to the back of the chamber. "I'm just going to stick my head in here."

The girl stood up and put her hands on her hips. "I don't think we've got time. What if they come back?"

"Just a few minutes more," said the boy and continued on his quest. As there was only one light the girl had a choice of staying there in the dark or following her brother. She sighed and, with a humph, joined her sibling. They had been right – there was another chamber, this too filled with chests, vases, statues, stele, and amphora. And in the middle was a stone sarcophagus. It was incomplete, with only the first layer of chiselling evident in what would eventually be an intricately carved design. The twins weren't surprised. Thutmose had abandoned his workshop when the city was evacuated after the death of Akhenaten. Much of the finds on the dig to date had been of unfinished or discarded pieces, though still of immense value to historians, antiquarians, and collectors of ancient art.

The boy took hold of the lid and heaved. It shifted slightly but didn't budge. "Give me a hand, will you?"

The girl snorted. "You won't find a mummy if that's what you're looking for."

"I know!" said the brother. "But I'd like to see where one might lie. I've never seen inside one, have you?"

The girl admitted she hadn't. There were a couple at the Cairo Museum, but she had never got around to visiting. When you lived a stone's throw from an archaeological treasure trove, seeing the artefacts in the musty confines of a museum wasn't quite so enticing. So she shrugged and leant her strength to her brother's effort. With a few heaves and pulls the heavy stone lid began to pivot. When they'd moved it about 45 degrees they stopped and the boy picked up the lamp from the floor. He held it aloft and gasped. There, staring through the opening, was the grimacing face of a dog, its teeth bared, its eyes wide and lifeless. The muzzle was matted with blood. The girl knew

that if she reached out and touched it, it would still be sticky to the touch – it looked that recent. "It's the watchman's dog! Who would do this?"

The siblings stepped back from the sarcophagus and drew closer together. The girl slipped her arm around her brother's waist. She was not a sentimental girl, but the thought of a poor animal being killed and hidden like this made her feel sick. Hidden… hidden… "And why would they hide it?"

"And where's Mohammed?" The boy's voice was hollow. He took a step towards the sarcophagus.

The girl knew immediately what he was going to do. "Don't! Let's call someone. The police at El-Hag Kandeel…"

But the boy was undeterred. He passed the lantern to his sister, then climbed up onto the edge of the stone coffin and positioned his backside on the rim. He pressed his heels against the edge of the lid and used the strength of his legs to push. The lid gave way and fell to the earth floor with a deathly thud. And there, as the siblings both feared, was the body of Mohammed the watchman under the corpse of his faithful dog.

The twins screamed, their voices merging as they had on the day they were born, and they ran from the chamber as fast as they could. The girl had the presence of mind to snatch up the lantern and was a step or two behind her brother as they fled towards the tunnel. But waiting for them, in the outer chamber, were two men, one an Egyptian police officer, the other a European.

"Mohammed! The watchman! His dog!" the boy cried in Arabic.

"Arrest them," said the European in English.

"But we haven't done anything!" cried the girl. Her protest was met with a blow to the head and the last thing she heard was her brother calling out her name.