



A Trip Down the Nile - an Egyptian Saga

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Chapter One - Youssef

It was still dark when Youssef stirred. The only sound was his wife Behati's gentle breathing. He lay still for a moment collecting his thoughts and then sat up. In the dim light he could see her face and he smiled.

Every day he blessed the moment when they met, fell in love and decided to marry. She had been a Godsend to him and he couldn't imagine his life without her.

Now thirty-three years old, he had lived all his life as a sculptor in the Worker's camp near the Pyramids. It was the only job he had ever wanted.

From as early as he could remember, he had accompanied his father and watched him working as a stone mason.

Sitting on a stool near him, he had followed enthralled, as his father meticulously carved

hieroglyphics on the stone walls, word images that would tell future generations, the story of the Pharaohs.

Twenty years earlier

Youssef, then aged thirteen, was in the workshop with his father. He had been given the task of carving a small stone figure. Time and again it would shatter and he would have to start again.

Angry and frustrated, he would stamp his foot and cry.

Reaching over and patting his shoulder, his father would say,

'Be patient my son, it takes time for the eye and hand to work together. In no time you will master it and be allowed to work on a real object.'

Behati was dreaming, a smile flickering on her face. Their two children, Dalila and Ammon were hidden in their sheets.

Youssef goes to work

Youssef slipped out of bed, shivering in the early morning breeze. Outside, he could hear his fellow workmen chattering as they rushed by, preparing for the work ahead.

It was going to be a busy day.

There was an air of excitement in the camp because Panayi, a master draughtsman was expected. Youssef had been selected to show him the recent carvings that they had completed, but

the older man had been delayed due to ill health. They had been waiting impatiently for him for some weeks.

Youssef lit the small fire to warm the room before going to wash and dress. As he returned, he heard his wife stirring.

'It's only me dear, I must get going.

'What about breakfast?' She murmured.

'I'll get something to eat in the workshop.'

'No Dear, If you give me five minutes I'll have some fresh food for you. I don't like you eating that rubbish.'

She had heard that they had only reheated food from the day before.'

'OK, I would enjoy that but I don't want to be late.

Within a few minutes, she had prepared his breakfast and then his packed lunch of fresh bread, local fruit, and a milk drink.

Kissing her,

'Now love, I must leave you, We have a big project in the new City being prepared for Pharaoh Akhenaten.

Chapter Two - Leaving Home

Gently closing the front door behind him, Youssef left their small house. Shielding his face from the clouds of blinding sand and bending low, he walked across the open space to the workshop, a distance of about 100 meters.

Built in front of a sheer stone wall, it would in time become part of the funeral home of the Pharaoh. It now housed the workman's carving tools, chisels, hammers, rasps and files.

Inside there was already a flurry of activity as the workmen busily checked their tools for sharpness. It wasn't every day that a Master draughtsman came to see their work.

From there, it was a short walk to the building site where the rough outlines of the City of Amarna, the palace that the Pharaoh Akanatum was building on the East bank of the Upper Nile, were beginning to appear;

On the way, Youssef greeted others, walking in the same direction.

'Good Morning, it's going to be an exciting day'

The Chief draughtsman, Mosiah Panayai was expected very soon. He would outline the new hieroglyphic designs on the bare stone walls before the sculptors started carving.

Later when the carvings were completed, he would review them and, using a black ink pen, mark where errors still remained, errors that needed to be corrected to ensure accuracy.

Elsewhere other men were preparing for building work.

Youssef was one of several privileged craftsmen who was waiting for the Master Draughtsman.

Panayai Arrives

It wasn't long before Panayai arrived, puffing and coughing, a serious man who said little once he began his work. Youssef had worked with him many years earlier and remembered him as robust, but now he was ailing; walking with a limp and using a cane.

'Good morning Sir, it is good to see you after so many years. How is life treating you?'

'Time is passing too quickly and my old joints are beginning to wear out. But less of me. Let's get on with the job.'

Standing in front of the recently carved figures, Panayi looked from side to side then shook his head. He immediately saw the many mistakes that the carvers had made; lines that shouldn't be there and lines that were missing; details that were needed to make the story much clearer.

Frustrated, he took out a thin brush, tipped it into a small bowl of black paint and after studying the rough wall carvings, meticulously, began to identify faults and add important details.

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Youssef watched for a while and then with several others began to follow the master draughtsman, correcting the errors.

He could now see the many mistakes that they had made; lines that shouldn't be there and those that should; details that were needed to make the story much clearer.

He carefully corrected and deepened the carvings, using the black markings as a guide. Gradually the full impact of the work was visible.

It was slow and tedious work but very rewarding. Occasionally stepping back, he would admire the quality of the result.

The day passed slowly as the sun rose into the sky burning the sand. Carafes of water were passed around to quench their parched lips.

Suddenly the lunch bell sounded and the workers stopped what they were doing and hurried to the little shelter that remained from the sun.

Joining others in a shady area, Youssef opened his lunch pack. His wife has packed some fresh bread with dates and figs, some cooked chicken, and a flask of milk.

Later the painters would begin to add colour to the carvings so that the required effect was created.

How could Youssef and his co-workers know that generations later, visitors would stand in awe at their workmanship? Now their only concern was that the work would pass the overseers' critical eye.

Chapter Three - The Sphinx is uncovered



Year by year, the desert wind blew and slowly the carved stone structures disappeared under a blanket of sand.

In time, even the Sphinx was hidden, leaving the land a desert with nothing visible but hills and valleys of sand.

By then a traveller passing by would be unaware of what was immediately beneath his feet.

Then in the early 1400s, the first attempts to reveal the sand-covered Great Sphinx were undertaken. During the reign of Thutmose (1401-1388 BC), workers began excavating its front paws.

It is thought that later, Ramesses II (1279-1213 BCE) may have undertaken a second excavation

Again In the 1st C AD, further work was undertaken, to clear the remainder of the sand and expose the whole structure to honour Emperor Nero and Tiberius Claudius Balbilus, Governor of Egypt.

Chapter Four - Leaving London

Two thousand years later, a newly married couple go on holiday to Egypt.

The sky was overcast and threatening by the time we arrived at London Airport. Despite all our planning to avoid a last-minute hold-up, we failed to consider the traffic.

'It will be OK, we won't be late,' I assured Diana as her face clouded with doubt.

Light rain was falling by the time our driver found the Parking area at the airport. Thanking him, and rushing to avoid getting wet, we pushed our heavily loaded trolleys across the tarmac into the brightly lit concourse.

For a moment, we were blinded and confused. Accommodating to the light and looking right and left, we found the notice board.

'I wonder where we go from here?' I hissed at Diana.

Patently reading down the list of destinations, we finally found details of our flight to Cairo with the check-in desk number.

From there, it was a short walk to the check-in. But that isn't to be the end. Ahead of us was a long line.

Diana glared at me and whispered.

'I told you, we should have left earlier.'

I said nothing. I knew she was correct but something came up at the last minute that I had to deal with.

I kissed her cheek but she pulled away. That wasn't going to work. There was nothing else to do but sit it out, stand actually.

At last, we reached the check-in desk, showed our documents, and were through.

Now to find the lounge and to relax. After several false attempts, we saw the sign and made for it. The room is overflowing. As we enter, we see lines of people queuing at the food counter. Voices are raised. Eventually with our plates full, we looked for somewhere to sit.

Diana whispered.

'I just need somewhere quiet to collect my thoughts.'

Luckily at that moment, a couple vacate their corner seats and we rush for them; at last some rest.

The Flight

It wasn't long before our flight was called and we made our way to the boarding gate. We are soon settled into our seats. We smile at each other and squeeze hands, a secret message that things are going OK. We relax.

I have a question nagging me that I want to answer before we get to Cairo. It had been discussed in one of my course lessons.

How were the Hieroglyphics, those confusing symbols found on so many ancient walls, deciphered?

I had a book which promised to unravel their mystery and I am excited to study it.

This is what I learnt. Hieroglyphics, also called *sacred writings*, began to be used at the beginning of the year three thousand BC. By the middle of the third millennium, they coexisted with Demotic writing, meaning '*from the people*'. This in turn was replaced by the Greek language for official documents.

I was looking forward to seeing their images, a mixture of sounds and ideas with few vowels, in real life and hoping to understand more about them,

Carved on temple walls, funerary enclosures, or stelae, they create a striking visual impact even to those who couldn't read them.

The Rosetta Stone



It was during a visit to the British Museum that I first saw the Rosetta Stone, an asymmetric slab of granodiorite, an igneous rock, measuring 3ft 9ins long and 2 feet 4 ½ inches wide. It was propped up on display. I walked up to it puzzled, uncertain what it was.

I read that it was named after the city, Rosetta, also called Rashid, in which it was found; a city located on a tributary of the Nile near the Mediterranean coast east of Alexandria.

Engraved with the same text in three scripts, Demotic, hieroglyphic and Greek, it was the first opportunity scholars had to reveal the mystery of reading Hieroglyphics.

Fortunately at the time it was found, its significance was recognised by Pierre Francois Xavier Bouchard (1772- 1832) the commanding officer of the French Army during the invasion of Egypt in 1799.

It subsequently fell into the hand of Lord Nelson's sailors and found its way back to England

Subsequently many similar Rosetta stones have been found distributed in all important Egyptian cities.

Chapter Five - Arriving in Cairo

Spontaneous clapping broke out from the several hundred passengers as the Boeing 737 landed with a bump at Cairo airport and taxied slowly to a halt.

No matter how many times people travelled there was always a sense of relief when their aeroplane landed safely.

Yawning and stretching, Diana and I collected our carry-on luggage and followed the other passengers as they filed out of the plane, our home for the last five hours.

What a pleasure it was to breathe fresh air again as we stepped down onto the runway now bathed in pink, as the last rays of sunshine disappeared below the horizon.

Cairo Airport

Entering the terminal, we were met by a mass of heaving humanity. People were rushing everywhere; neon signs were flashing; voices were raised. We looked at each other and shook our heads. Was this going to be a mistake?

Airports were not our favourite places with the confusion of signs; the screening of luggage and the hoards of nameless travellers crisscrossing as they make their way to their chosen destinations. Cairo was no exception.

Having claimed our luggage from the carousel, we pushed our loaded trolley to the agreed meeting

place. Standing waiting, we looked at each other, our faces drawn. Would the guide who was due to meet us, recognise us?

What would we do, if... we wondered, not wanting to entertain that fear?

Happily, our doubts were unfounded. Two smartly suited gentlemen soon arrived and greeted us.

'Mr and Mrs Nessel?' One asked in perfect English

'Yes.'

We introduced ourselves.

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Our guides immediately took our luggage while we followed, as they made their way out of the concourse to a waiting car.

It was now dark; a cool breeze was blowing and stars were twinkling in the skies.

Our hands touched as we walked. We exchanged glances and smiled at each other. It was going to be OK.

Soon we were being driven through the city, along wide roads jam-packed with vehicles of all sizes, and pedestrians, jay-walking as if their lives were protected by some personal Deity.

On the way, we saw a kaleidoscope of images from luxury hotels to an unexpected row of tombstones.



As we passed them, I turned to our guide, puzzled. He explained,

'It's called 'The City of the Dead'. It was the place of burial of generations of Egyptians and includes the tombs of Mamluk and other Ottoman nobles. It first came into use after the Muslim conquest of Egypt in the 700s.

Luminaries such as Imam Shafi, a renowned Islamic Scholar, are buried there.'

The next few minutes passed and then the car pulled up outside a gleaming white brightly lit hotel.

Time passed in a blur - showing our Passports,
- credit cards; - entering a lift,- following a porter along a darkened corridor to a bedroom - being dazzled by bright lights, - enjoying a relaxing shower, - brushing our teeth and then falling into bed and oblivion.

Chapter Six - Waking up in the hotel

Suddenly I was awake. Where was I? Confused, I looked up and squinted. The ceiling seemed different. Where was the chandelier? The one we were given as a wedding gift. It was hanging in our bedroom?

For a moment I was lost. Then I remembered the flight and the car ride.

I looked around. Light was streaming through the curtains. Then turning; there was Diana, still sleeping, her breath whistling through her open mouth.

I swung my legs out of the bed. Touching the floor, I walked unsteadily towards the window, drew back the curtains, and looked out.

For a moment, I was blinded by the bright light and then as my eyes grew accustomed to the glare, I saw it in the distance, the Great Pyramid, gleaming in the morning sun. It was such a shock. I was still not ready to believe that I could be in Egypt.

The Pyramids of Giza



It looked as if it had been built yesterday and not in the 26th Century BC. taking over twenty years to be completed.

Returning to our bed, I shook Diana lightly. She opened her eyes and yawned.

I waited.

'Hi, good morning dear; come and look at this.'

She staggered to the window and stopped.

The look on her face said it all. We hugged and laughed. It was a magical moment.

The Pyramids have an interesting history. Why were they built and how did the ancient Egyptians decide upon their shape?

Like many successful inventions, it came about by chance.

It was the custom for the Egyptians to bury their dead under small stone structures called Mastabas,(lit. bench).

Around 2780 BCE, (3rd Dynasty), Imhotep King Djoser's architect was experimenting and came up

with the idea of placing six different-sized mastabas together, the smaller ones on top of the larger.

What resulted was a structure rising in steps. It became the inspiration for the first Step Pyramid that now stands at Sakkara on the West bank of the Nile.

Later, in the reign of King Snefru (2680-2560 BCE) a transition to a true smooth-sided pyramid took place. Finally, rooms and passages were excavated within the pyramid.

Things didn't always go without a hitch and at Bahshur, the angle of the walls decreased from over 51° to 43° resulting in a bend in its side. Henceforth it was called the 'Bent' pyramid.

We read that the Great Pyramid commissioned by Khufu, Snefru's son, Cheops, occupies over 13 acres and stands at over 450 feet.

Not built alone, pyramids were usually accompanied by Temples, chapels, other tombs, and massive walls.

Chapter Seven

'Are you ready?' I asked Diana as we prepared to go to the Dining room for breakfast. We were both very hungry, having had our usual eating routine disturbed by the journey.

When travelling, we always try to have a good breakfast as it is the most important meal of the day, coming after the longest period without eating.

Diana smiled. I knew that smile. It was a mixture of excitement and fear. She was hesitant when confronted with unfamiliar food.

'Darling, it will be OK. You know what they will serve; it should not be too unfamiliar. We had tried out one or two Egyptian restaurants back home.

'I'll be fine,' she whispered, her face pinched.

The Dining room was heaving with people from all Nationalities. Voices were raised and loud peals of laughter punctuated the air.

At one side of the room was a Smorgasbord. Diana spied it and I saw her breathe, a sigh of relief. Now she could see and choose what she wanted to eat.

We settled for Falafel, eggs, cheese, and Pita bread; dishes with which we were familiar.

Time was passing and we needed to get ready to meet our guide who would take us to the banks of the Nile, where our boat was moored. It would be our home for the next seven days.

Returning to our room, we packed and waited. A phone call from the concierge and we made our way to reception to be met by our hosts.

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Some months early, in the depths of a northern winter, we had discussed our summer holiday. I had started an Egyptian sculpture course and was besotted with ancient Egyptian carvings and could speak of nothing else.

One day, over breakfast, after I had again bored Diana with a litany on the skill of those early Egyptian sculptors, she had said,

'I know where we should holiday. Let's go to Egypt and you can see them, at first hand.'

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I had forgotten about that conversation. Gradually winter gave way to spring and we were again thinking about a summer holiday when she announced,

'I have booked our trip to Egypt.'

'Egypt? That's a good idea,' I said automatically, my thoughts elsewhere. I didn't take it in at the time.

Boarding our Nile sailboat

Leaving the city, we travelled along dusty roads until the view opened up and the Nile came into sight, a broad slow-flowing body of water. It was named after the Greek *'Neilos'* meaning a river valley.

A short journey took us to where a sixty-foot single-masted Dhow was moored.



On boarding, we learned that we were the only passengers, as a second couple had cancelled at the last minute.

Our cabin was modern by Egyptian standards, with a shower and toilet. Curtains decorated with figures of mythical animals and birds draped the windows.

The following morning, I stepped out onto the deck leaving Diana still asleep in the double bed.

Not fully awake, I stood incredulous, disbelieving in what I was seeing. A cool breeze was blowing and the dow was sailing slowly, along the Nile, a broad stretch of water with hardly any other soul; the only sound was the gentle ripple beneath her keel.

In the East, the sun was just rising above the horizon, lighting up a panorama of scorched brown earth, with not a tree in sight.

There is something very special about the Nile, one of the world's greatest rivers and one of only a few that travels from South to North. Its very size and breadth is overwhelming when first seen.

'*Good morning,*' a voice called out. Standing by the tiller was the captain, a short stocky man with a face wizened by years of sunshine. He was wearing a small creased cap beneath which, wisps of white hair were visible. When he smiled, a row of tobacco-stained teeth was revealed.

'*How did you sleep?*' he asked in an English patois.

'*Like a lamb,*' I replied.

I heard a movement and Diana was by my side, yawning.

She smiled grasping my hand.

'*Well,*' she said. '*What do you think of this?*'

I leaned forward and kissed her.

'*You're a gem,*'

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Chapter Eight - Amarna



Akhenaten and Nefertiti

As our boat glided silently, down river, we passed labourers working in the fields. Many, seeing us stood up, looked and then waved as we passed by.

Standing in the bow watching the passing scene, the captain outlined the trip.

'We are about to pass the site of Amarna, pointing to the East Bank.'

'No original buildings now remain but during the reign of Pharaoh Akhenaten, 1353--1370 BCE., in the late eighteenth dynasty of the New Kingdom, Amarna was his capital, a flourishing city.'

'Today all the visitor can see is a mound called Tel el-Amarna. It is the only remains of his city. Part of it has since been covered by the building of successive habitations on the ruins of previous ones.'

'Akhenaten was notorious because during his brief reign (c.1353-1336), he, like all Pharaohs before him, was entrusted with Ma'at, the culture of the land.

Instead of honouring it, he chose to abolish the many ancient gods and replace them with Atenism, the worship of one, the Sun God.'

'But not for long as his son Tutankamun (c. 1336-1327) on becoming Pharaoh, returned Egypt to its tradition of many Gods.'

Chapter Nine - The Gods

Later, standing at the bow of our small sailing Dhow, hearing the water rippling under our hull, I imagined a time many centuries earlier, when the land was ruled by the Pharaohs and all the heavy work was done by slaves, men and women captured from the neighbouring countries of Sudan and Nubia.

Each Pharaoh commissioned gangs of elite carvers to record his story; his Gods, his victories over his enemies, his wives, and his offspring; in stone, on the walls of temples and other sacred buildings.

Thousands of years later, their journey would be re-lived by the generations of tourists that followed.

They would marvel at the images of lives that none could ever imagine, now fixed in stone forever, although their bodily remains had long gone.

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Suddenly I was alert. The dream was so real. The captain was speaking, *tomorrow we will visit Karnak*

The Karnak Complex



Located near the city of Thebes, the Karnak Complex consists of a large number of temples, chapels, towers, and other artifacts.

Over the years, it has undergone deterioration and some structures have collapsed.

In 2001-2003 the World Monument Fund in partnership with the University of Chicago and the American Research Center in Egypt, developed a long-term preservation program. Today, visitors can see it essentially as it was during the reign of Seti 1.

It was a dull morning when I woke up. Diana was still asleep. I crept to the window to see a grey sky. There was a slight drizzle as we sat down to eat breakfast.

The Dow slowly came to a stop at a small landing. Suitably dressed with long sleeves and hats, we stepped onto firm ground and steadied ourselves.

'Whoa!', exclaimed Diana claspng my arm. Together we stood supporting each other until the *mal de débarquement* - rocking movement slowly subsided.

Waiting for us was our guide, a slight figure of a man with wispy white hair and a broad grin under a baseball cap.

'Welcome to Karnak, My name is Mohammed. You are from America?'

'No no, we are British, from England.'

'Ah! The British, they are wonderful people.'

Then he turned and began walking towards the Ruins.

'Come follow me. I will show you everything. You have water?'

'Yes.'

'Good it will be very hot.'

After a short distance, we stopped in a shady area. He began,

'Karnak dates to around 3400 - 3100 BCE when a small residential settlement was founded. Today nothing remains of the houses.'

During the reign of Amenhotep III (1390-53 BCE), it was expanded with the building of the Temple Of Mont, the war God to the north, and a southern temple to the Goddess Mut, wife of Amon. Between

these two, is the Temple complex to the God Amun-Re.'

We continued walking as he explained in detail what each building and column represented. It was almost too much to take in.

Time rushed by and suddenly it was becoming dusk. Returning to the jetty, we thanked our guide, settled his account, and boarded the boat.

'That was amazing,' Diana said later as we lay back on the bed.

'What an extraordinary place?' I was still reeling from the sight of the wall carvings, Every possible surface was covered with intricate shapes of images and hieroglyphics.

Our guide was sometimes able to decipher them, They told stories of battles, slaves, and Gods. It was so exciting seeing the real thing after having studied them in books.

That evening we dressed for dinner and ate, seated at a table laid out on the deck with the full moon rising in the sky.

I looked at Diana, her face was beaming with happiness. It was a moment I wanted to capture forever. I leaned over and kissed her.

She smiled.

'What was that for?'

'Just to say, I love you and thank you for arranging this amazing trip.'

Later, settling into bed, I kissed Diana 'Good Night' and prepared to sleep but my mind was racing. So many images were flashing in my mind. Below, I could hear the gentle lapping of the waves.

Temple of Khnum at Esna

I woke up and for a moment was confused and then I remembered the captain speaking.

'Tomorrow we will visit the Temple of Khnum at Esna. It is of special interest because of its history, spanning thousands of years. It began in the reign of Ptolemy V1 during the 3rd Century BCE and spanned several periods including the Ptolemaic (332-30 BC) and the Imperial Roman period (31 BC- AD 476)

Esna previously called Latepolis was dedicated to the worship of the ram-headed God Khnum who was associated with creation, fertility and the 'Akhet'- the flooding of the Nile. A yearly event caused by the runoff of the heavy rain falling on the Ethiopian highlands whose peaks reach up to almost 15,000 feet.

Following the 'Akhet' comes the 'Peret' when the flood waters recede and planting is carried out. Finally the third season is 'Shemu' when the crops are harvested.

The temple had undergone several alterations including additions demanded by each ruler. For example, Ptolemy VII and Ptolemy XII oversaw expansions of the temple and the creation of vibrant reliefs and inscriptions.'

Chapter Ten -Temple of Kom Ombo



In the distance we could see the Temple of Kombo. It was Constructed during the Ptolemaic Dynasty 180-47 BC with some additions during the Roman Period.

It is unusual because it has a double design. The Southern half is dedicated to the Crocodile God Sobek and the Northern half to the falcon God Haroeris (Horus the Elder)

Valley of the Kings

After breakfast we were relaxing on the deck when the captain greeted us.

'Good Morning, I hope you slept well. Today we have a special treat. We are going to visit the Valley of the Kings.'

It was during the period of the New Kingdom (1539-1075 BCE) that the Kings, concerned about the safety of their burial sites selected a deserted valley in the Western Hills to be their new site.

Later to be called the 'Valley of the Kings', their tombs would be dug deep in the floor of the mountain and it would be their final burial place.

I had learned a bit about it on my course but was excited to hear more and to visit it.

The captain continued

It became well known in 1922 when Howard Carter found the undamaged burial chamber of Tutankhamun- the boy king. A number of his most striking artifacts were collected together as an exhibition and toured the main capitals of the West.

I had read how in November 1922, Howard Carter a British archeologist reportedly discovered the tomb of the 18th Dynasty Pharaoh Tutankhamun, the most completely preserved pharaonic tomb ever found. His find was acclaimed worldwide and he became famous overnight.

Chapter Eleven - Temple of Luxor



That night I dreamed of an earlier time. I was floating to the surface and suddenly I opened my eyes and for a moment I was confused. Gradually the ceiling came into focus and I felt the slight

rocking. I was on a boat on the Nile. I lay still and I could hear Diana gently snoring.

Later sitting under the huge triangular sail we sat in silence eating our breakfast.

Diana spoke first.

'Where are we going today?'

'Luxor, it is the southern half of the Ancient city of Thebes. At its centre is the Temple dedicated to Amon, king of the Gods. His consort was Mut.'

Our boat slowly came to a halt at a small landing. Armed with our hats and water bottles we stepped gingerly onto dry land and stood for a moment carefully maintaining our balance as the land seemed to tip and sway. I took Diana's hand

'Just move slowly. It will soon calm down.'

Standing waiting for us was an elderly man, dark-skinned with a white beard.

Smiling,

'I will be your guide for today, my name is Mohammed.'

We shook hands, his were rough and dry.

He spoke in an accent between American and Egyptian. Some words were difficult to understand but most were OK

Pointing to the buildings ahead of us, he said

'You have arrived at Luxor, originally the capital city of Upper Egypt.'

Diana turned to me, puzzled. We had heard the words Upper and Lower Egypt but didn't know what they meant.

Mohammed saw our confusion.

'Let me explain. As you know, the Nile flows from the higher land in the South to the lower land in the North and finally into the Mediterranean Sea.'

'During the Pharaonic period, this geographic fact was reflected in the country being divided into two halves, Upper (South) and Lower ((North) Egypt.'

'Each had its own Pharaoh until around 3150 BCE when the Upper Egyptian leader Menes (also called Narmer) defeated Lower Egypt and united the country ruling over all of it.'

We walked on.

'We are about to explore the city of Luxor, the capital of Upper Egypt. It includes the ruins of the Ancient city of Thebes.'

Ahead of us was an open area guarded by a row of Sphinxes.

Our guide was speaking.

'Here you see a row of statues. The ancient Egyptians believed that the Sphinx represented the solar Deity, the Sun God - Horus symbolising Royalty and Deity.'

I was curious to know what they were made of.

'Limestone quarried from nearby hills,' he said.

I was puzzled. Limestone is produced by marine animals - underwater.

I turned to Diana, confused.

'What is it dear?'

'I don't understand, Limestone is formed in water so this whole area must have once been a sea.'

Our guide interrupted,

'You are correct. It was known as the African Humid period when most of the Sahara

including Egypt was covered in lakes and grassland.'

I tried to imagine what it would have been like; this arid inhospitable landscape, a huge sea alive with living creatures.

But now it was thousands of years later and it had all changed.

We walked on between towering columns and high walls, I was amazed at the intricacy of the carvings.

Our guide was speaking.

Its construction was begun by Pharaoh Amenhotep III and dedicated to the Gods Mut, Khonsu, and Amun. It was completed by Pharaoh Tutankhamun.



Cartouche of Tutankhamun

Then turning to one of the walls, he pointed out a carving enclosed within an outline curved at both ends. It was different from the others.

'What is that,' I asked.

'It is called a cartouche and encloses the name of a Pharaoh. This one is of Amenhotep III.'

.....

The light was beginning to fall as the sun sank lower in the sky. I turned to Diana and could see she was beginning to wilt.

'Darling, I think we should return to the boat.'

We walked the short distance back to the landing, paid our guide, and clambered aboard our Dow.

'How was the visit?' A voice called beneath a pile of sails. Our captain was repairing a tear.

'Wonderfull, It was as if the wall carvings had been done yesterday.'

The Theban Necropolis

The following morning, over breakfast, the captain pointed to several buildings to our right on the West bank of the Nile.

'See those buildings,' he said. 'We will stop at them on the way back. They are called the Theban Necropolis



Chapter Twelve - The Temple of Queen Hatshepsut

We were sitting on the deck after another scrumptious breakfast when the captain approached.

Good Morning, I hope you slept well. Today we are going to visit one of the most impressive temples visible from the Nile, that of Queen Hatshepsut.



Cartouche of Queen Hatshepsut

It was just after Lunch when the captain called out
*'Look you can now see the iconic Temple of
Queen Hatshepsut in the distance. It is carved into
the Deir el-Bahari cliffs and can be seen from the
river Nile.*



Looking to our right we could see on the far shore
the outline of a temple carved in horizontal steps
from the face of the overlying cliffs of Deir el Bahri.

It presented a step like structure of flat platforms, and rows of pillars of carved figures

Hatshepsut was the eldest daughter of Thutmose I (1520-1492) by his wife Ahmose.

She reigned from 1479-73 BCE as coregent and as a reigning Queen from 1473-1458 adopting the full title and regalia of a Pharaoh.

She oversaw the building of tall obelisks, roads and statues in honour of Amun, king of Gods, but her crowning glory was the temple. Statues of her, depicted with a male body, a beard and head cloth.

She died in 1458 BCE and was buried in the Valley of the Kings.

But her identity remained unknown for many years because her successor Thutmose III and his son Amenhotep systematically had her cartouches removed or defaced by carving the name Thutmose to replace hers wherever it was found. Also many of her statues were torn down

But not everywhere. Many of her cartouches remained untouched in concealed shrines or tombs.

History now recognizes her as the first great woman in history but only after she had adopted the symbols of a male and gave her the title of a female king.

Chapter Thirteen - Esna- city of Egypt situated on the West Bank of the Nile some 55 Kms south of Luxor.

'Tomorrow we will visit the Temple of Khnum at Esna. It is of special interest because of its history, spanning thousands of years. It began in the reign of Ptolemy VI during the 3rd Century BCE and spanned several periods including the Ptolemaic (332-30 BC) and the Imperial Roman period (31 BC- AD 476)'

Esna previously called Lateopolis was dedicated to the worship of the ram-headed God Khnum who was associated with creation, fertility and the 'Akhet'- the flooding of the Nile. A yearly event caused by the runoff of the heavy rain falling on the Ethiopian highlands whose peaks reach up to almost 15,000 feet.

Following the 'Akhet' comes the 'Peret' when the flood waters recede and planting is carried out. Finally the third season is 'Shemu' when the crops are harvested.

The temple has undergone several alterations including additions demanded by each ruler. For example, Ptolemy VII and Ptolemy XII oversaw expansions of the temple and the creation of vibrant reliefs and inscriptions.'

That evening after dinner we sat on the deck in the fading light, in silence, each deep in our thoughts. Later in bed, I asked Diana,

'You were very quiet sitting on the deck this evening after dinner. What were you thinking about?'

She didn't answer immediately. Then a smile, I knew that smile, it always preceded something wise.

'I was thinking how transient our lives are. Everything seems so real and important to us and yet time goes so fast. Before we know it, we will also become like the Pharaoh, just an incident in time.'

Little did I know then how prophetic her words would be. She was to develop Cancer of the breast and die at the age of sixty.

The Temple of Edfu



Before us was the immense entrance to the temple. Our guide was talking.

'We are at one of the many temples built during the Ptolemaic period, that is between 237 BC and 57 BC. The one you see ahead of you was built on the site of an earlier temple smaller in size dedicated to Horus. It ceased to be used for religious purposes in 391 AD when the then-Roman empire banned non-Christian worship.

Like so many of the early buildings it had over time, been slowly submerged by drifting sand so that in the 1780's only the tops of the buildings could be seen.

In 1860, a French Egyptologist called Auguste Mariette headed an expedition to unearth it despite repeated attempts by locals to impede the work. Finally, he had a breakthrough when he unearthed a Sphinx and realized that it could be one of many.

Our Nile trip was coming to an end but there was one more surprise that completely took our breath away. It was a sound that would give us a clue. The sound of rushing water.

The Cataracts

We were nearing the beginning of the Egyptian Nile, the region that separates Egypt from its southern neighbour Sudan.

The captain was talking.

'Tomorrow, we will be approaching the cataracts. You will hear them long before we come near them.'

'Did you say Cataracts?' asked Diana. *'I had read about them but was puzzled by a name shared with the disease that clouds the lens in our eyes.'*

I looked it up. It comes from the Greek word καταρρέω ("to flow down"), -a waterfall, creating a hazy appearance.'

'Yes', the captain replied. 'The six cataracts of the Nile are shallow lengths of water between Khartoum and Aswan. The surface of the water is broken up by many small boulders and stones, leaving streams, some as rushing white water, others flowing calmly.'

'They are numbered one to six, from North to South.'

The first is at Aswan, the site of the Aswan Low Dam.

The Second or Great Cataract is in Nubia, the boundary between Egypt and Sudan, and is now submerged under Lake Nasser.

The Third is at Tombos, an archaeological site in Northern Sudan.

The Fourth is in the Manasir Desert submerged under the Merowe Dam reservoir at Karma, Napata, Merowe.

The Fifth is at the confluence of the Nile and the Atbarah rivers and

The Sixth is at Khartoum. where the Nile cuts through the Sabaluka pluton forming a natural barrier between Egypt and Sudan.

Tumbling Water



We heard them long before we saw them. A low rumbling sound gradually getting louder.

A sound like no other that we had heard, difficult to describe. Then we were upon them, shallow pools of rapidly moving water separated by boulders flowing north towards the Mediterranean, the water spraying into the air, wetting out faces, and moistening our lips.

We moored and watched them for a while. The view was tantalising, a constantly changing body of water, bubbling, gurgling, spraying, and sizzling.

The surface never remained the same from one moment to the next, constantly changing from calm to agitation.

Sadly our journey was coming to an end but there was one more thing we needed to do.

Chapter Fourteen - Returning to Cairo and the Cairo museum

It was a short journey up the River Nile before we docked in Cairo. After bidding farewell to our captain and thanking him for an amazing and memorable journey, we made our way to the Cairo museum.



It had acquired the reputation of being one of the most amazing Museums in the world and we were excited to visit it.

We were not disappointed. From the moment we stepped through the entrance, we were transported into that bygone era of Pharaohs and Gods.

In whatever direction we looked, we were confronted with amazing artifacts. We stood transfixed. Many of the items were familiar but some were new.

With the aid of a catalogue we followed its directions as it pointed out one unique item after another.

Hall of Mummies-the sanctity of death



Then we came upon the Hall of Mummies. A bridge took the visitor over the open coffins of the mummies allowing direct vision of their faces. .

There was something eerie about standing looking down into the mummified faces of Pharaohs of Egypt who had lived thousands of years before.

We looked at each other, both confused and surprised. We had a sense in which we were interlopers, entering a world to which we were not invited and in so doing, were violating the sanctity of death

Home

The journey home was uneventful. What remains are wonderful memories of a journey into the past, into an unimaginable world of Pharaohs, statues and buildings from a bygone era.

Hieroglyphic writing-



The word *Hieroglyphics* is from the Greek and literally means sacred writings.

Carved in stone and found on Temple walls and public monuments, they comprised pictures, and symbols for objects or for sounds. They can be distinguished from two other forms of Egyptian writing found on papyrus or other smooth surfaces, *hieratic* and *demotic*.

The earliest date from the end of the 4th millenium BCE and are found on pottery jars and ivory plaques assumed to identify the dead.

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