

LIBBY
AND THE
**EGYPTIAN
ESCAPADE**

JO CLARKE

ILLUSTRATED BY BECKA MOOR



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JC

For Becka Moor, it's been an absolute joy
to work with you on this series. Thank you
for making the books so special.



BM

For Jo Clarke, thank you for trusting me
with your stories.



MAP of EGYPT

1. GRAND EGYPTIAN MUSEUM

2. KHAN AL KHALILI

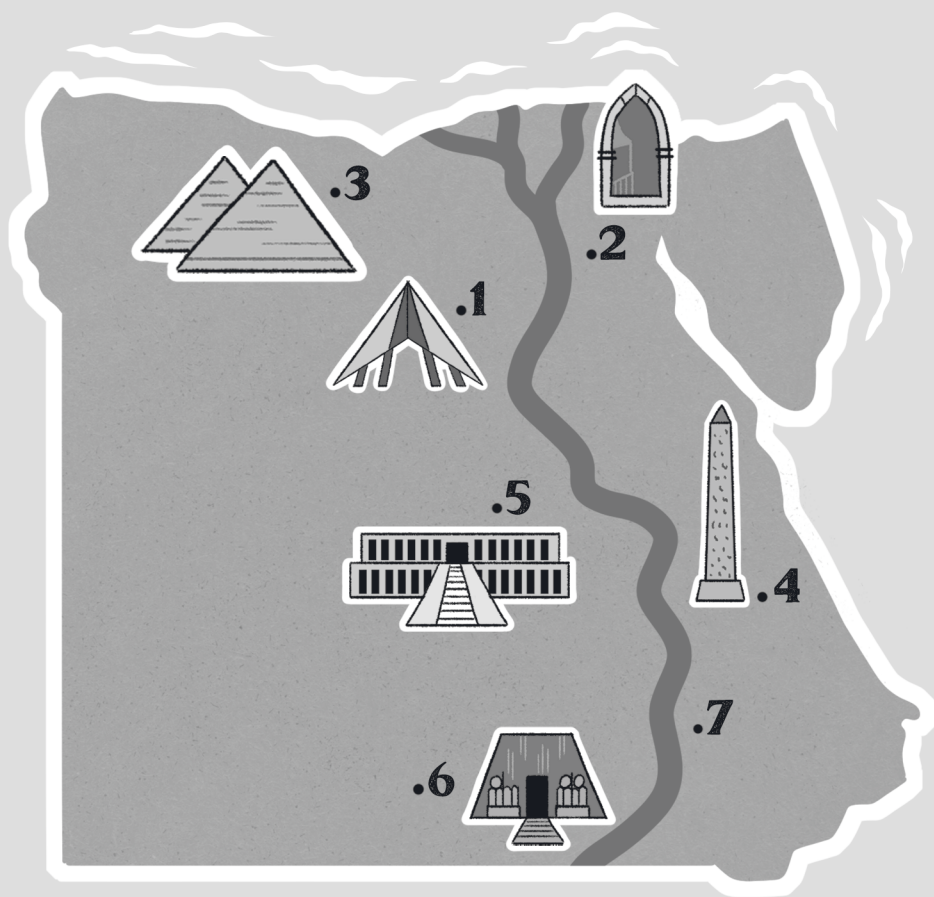
3. PYRAMIDS OF GIZA

4. LUXOR TEMPLE

5. VALLEY OF THE KINGS

6. ABU SIMBEL

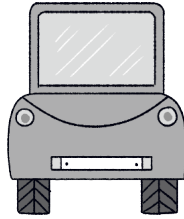
7. RIVER NILE



MEET THE CHARACTERS







CHAPTER 1

Chaos and Confusion

The heat was the first thing that Libby noticed as they exited the airport, followed by the noise. It was a different type of heat from what she'd experienced in the summer holidays. The rainforest had been damp and humid. Here it was fierce, despite it being almost winter in Egypt. She normally loved arriving in new places but this time it felt different. She'd been reluctant to leave her mum behind after they had made no progress looking for her dad.

'Are you okay?' asked Connie, squeezing her hand.

Libby forced a smile on her face. 'I'm fine, tired that's all.'

'It's been a long day,' said Connie. 'You'll feel better

when we get to school.'

She didn't want her best friend to know how she was truly feeling. Connie was the only person she'd confided in about her dad, but she still felt odd talking about it.

'I suppose so,' Libby said. Maybe it had been a mistake to come back to school. Her aunt, Miss Mousedale, who was their headteacher, had felt that it would be better for Libby to be with her friends.

'Where is our guide?' Miss Mousedale frowned. She shielded her eyes from the blinding sunlight and scoured the crowds. 'The school promised he would meet us at the airport.'

There were taxis all lined up with their owners shouting over each other trying to attract the tourists' attention.

'Don't worry, they'll be here soon.' Libby reassured her. 'They won't leave us stranded.' She could see her aunt was even more stressed than normal.

'Look, someone is waving.' Connie pointed to a tall, large man with black hair and a beard standing by a minibus. On the side, it read International School of Cairo. 'Is that him?'

Miss Mousedale sighed with relief. 'Thank goodness. Hurry up now girls. We must be at the school before anyone else arrives.'

Libby and Connie quickly followed Miss Mousedale towards the minibus. The driver bowed his head and smiled.

'*As-salamu alaykum*. My humble apologies for my lateness,' he said. 'I'm Hassan Faisel el-Kahir, at your service. Let me take your bags.'

He loaded them into the boot and ushered them on board.

'We must make haste,' he instructed. 'It will be rush hour soon.'

He swung the minibus out into the stream of traffic, narrowly avoiding another car going past. The driver beeped his horn and waved a fist at them but then drove off. Libby looked out of the window at the torrent of cars that surrounded them. The lanes of traffic seemed to merge into one. The bus in front was so full, there were people hanging on to the back of it. In all her years of travelling, she'd never seen anything quite like it. In the distance she could see a thin white ornate tower which rose up out of a domed building;

chanting sounds drifted on the air.

‘Welcome to my beautiful country,’ Hassan shouted, trying to make his voice heard over the sound of shouts and horns coming from around them. ‘I will be looking after you for your whole stay. Anything you need, just ask.’

‘That’s good to hear,’ Miss Mousedale replied. ‘I’ve never been to Egypt before, but the trustees of the school were keen for the children to come to Africa.’

‘You have chosen well,’ Hassan replied. ‘I will show you so many wonders. But first we must get you settled. You’ve had a long trip.’

‘I can’t wait,’ Connie said. ‘Do you think we’ll see the pyramids soon?’

Hassan nodded. ‘I have it all arranged. Now relax and enjoy the ride.’

Libby gripped the seat in front of her as the minibus zipped in and out of the traffic. Her mind was a blur. What if her mum managed to find her dad and she was thousands of miles away on the other side of the world? She tried to take in her surroundings to distract herself. In the distance ahead, she spotted a billboard with the familiar gold and blue mask of Tutankhamun

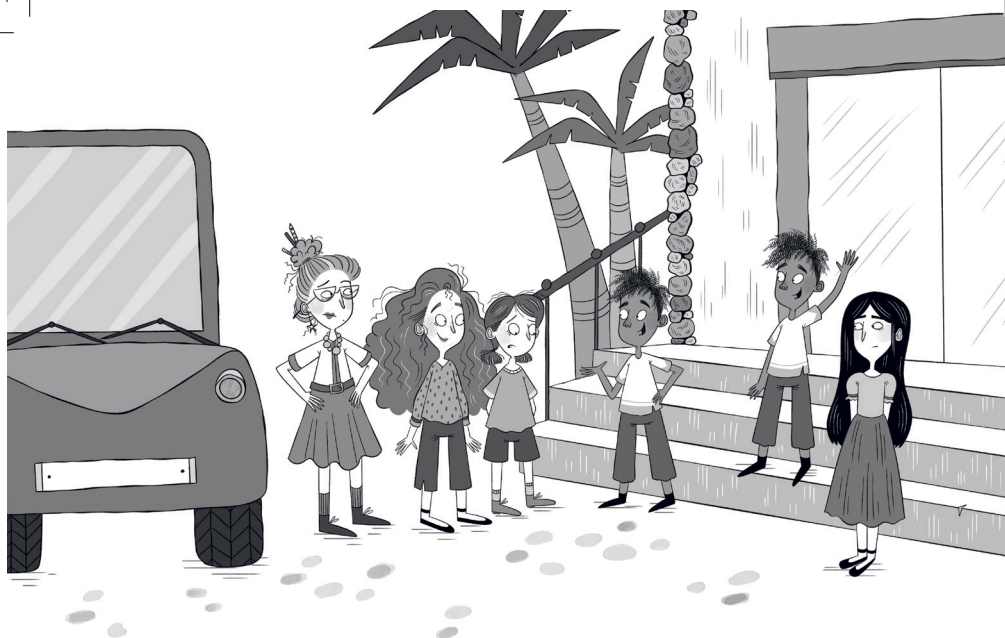
on it. It was advertising the newly opened Grand Egyptian Museum, where the Tutankhamun collection was now housed. She pointed it out to Connie, who grabbed Libby's arm and started chattering away. 'You'll never guess what happened in the holidays? We went to visit Highclere Castle, where Lord Carnarvon lived. He discovered Tutankhamun's tomb.'

'That's not strictly true,' Hassan interrupted. 'It was actually a local boy, but I will tell you more when we visit the tomb.'

Connie's eyes lit up. 'Egypt is going to be amazing! Don't you think?'

'Yes,' mumbled Libby. She didn't want to dampen Connie's enthusiasm, but she was too distracted. She listened while Connie talked non-stop. Her friend didn't seem to notice that Libby was quieter than normal.

The minibus pulled up outside an old stone building, reddish in colour. On the steps outside Libby spotted some familiar faces: Noah and Sebastian. Beside them stood Miss Khatun. The last time Libby had seen her was in New York; no one else had seen her hiding on



the street watching them while they had been in the diner, so Libby had convinced herself she'd imagined it. Miss Khatun already looked anxious and it was only the first day of school. What did she have to be so stressed about? Libby wondered.

Noah rushed down the steps and opened the door of the minibus. 'Good job you're here.' He rolled his eyes. 'We need a break from the eagle eyes of Miss Khatun.'

'Whatever do you mean by that, Noah?' Miss Mousedale frowned. 'I thought you'd come to help with the bags. I should have known it was too good to be true.'

'Sorry.' Noah grimaced. 'I'm just happy to see these two, that's all.'

‘Go, go,’ Hassan laughed. ‘I will bring the bags in. I have two girls a similar age. They just want to chat. Let’s leave them be.’

Libby and Connie clambered out. After the coolness of the air conditioning, the heat felt strange. Miss Khatun was watching them all carefully.

‘There are some refreshments inside,’ Miss Khatun said. ‘And, boys, remember what I said. No one will be leaving school without an adult under any circumstances. Don’t get any ideas.’

‘Yes, Miss Khatun,’ they mumbled in unison.

The girls followed Noah and Sebastian across an elaborately-patterned tiled floor towards a brightly-painted room. Some of the other students were already there. Libby smiled in their direction, but didn’t attempt to talk to them. They were so much older than her she wouldn’t know what to say to them. On the table there were jugs of juice and a large silver teapot. Dainty cups and saucers were laid out and trays of tiny multi-coloured sweets that looked like jewels.

‘What’s up with Miss Khatun?’ asked Libby. ‘She’s even more on edge than usual.’

Noah rolled his eyes. ‘It’s okay for you two. Seb and

I have had to put up with her all summer.'

'All summer?' Libby was confused.

Sebastian shook his head. 'Mum and Dad decided we both needed some extra tuition over the holidays.' He glared at Noah. 'Because someone wasn't paying attention last term and was behind. We both ended up doing extra work.'

'I've said sorry a million times already,' Noah moaned. 'It's been no fun for me either. That still doesn't explain why she had to go with us everywhere we went, though.'

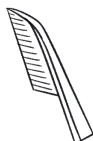
'You know Mum and Dad were busy,' Sebastian said. 'They probably just wanted us to have some company.'

Noah rolled his eyes. 'I'd rather be alone than stuck with Miss Khatun!'

Libby smiled for the first time that day. 'Well, hopefully you've learned your lesson and you'll try harder this year.'

'Are you kidding me?' laughed Noah. 'It was you who spent most of last term distracted by Count Alvarez or whatever his name was.'

Libby had to admit that Noah had a point. She'd spent far too much time thinking about mysteries



recently and the boys didn't even know about the latest one: the sightings of her dad.

'Well, we'll be far too busy this term to do anything other than enjoy the sights,' said Connie. 'I've got a list of places I want to visit.' She rooted around in her rucksack for her notebook. A book fell on to the floor and Libby picked it up.

'Why have you got a book about reading hieroglyphics?' Libby asked. 'You do know that's not how Egyptians write anymore?'

'I know,' Connie blushed. 'I thought it was interesting.'



Noah laughed. 'Interesting? Really?'

'Ignore him,' said Sebastian. 'He's just in a bad mood. Do you think we'll get a chance to go to the Valley of Kings? I want to see Tutankhamun's tomb.'

'Definitely,' Libby replied. 'Hassan said he was looking forward to showing it to us.'



'You do know it's cursed,' Connie whispered. 'Do you think it's safe?'

Before Sebastian could reply, Miss Mousedale walked into the room with

Miss Khatun close behind.

‘Here you all are,’ she said. ‘I was worried you might have wandered off.’

Libby could see her aunt was exhausted.

‘How about a tea for you both?’ she offered. ‘It’s been a long day.’

Libby could hear the others chatting about their holidays in the background as she poured hot water into two teacups. Her aunt and Miss Khatun were talking in low whispers, and she couldn’t make out what they were saying as the others were being so loud. As she carried the cups over to them, she heard Miss Khatun say the word ‘danger,’ but she changed the subject abruptly and started talking about the weather as she saw Libby approach.

Libby longed to ask Miss Khatun what she was talking about. What kind of danger was waiting for them in Egypt, and why was it being kept secret? She’d had enough of grown-ups hiding things from her, thinking it was for the best. She was determined to find out exactly what Miss Khatun was talking about.



CHAPTER 2

Tutankhamun Treasures

‘I can’t believe we’re stuck inside another dusty old museum,’ Noah groaned. ‘You said Egypt was going to be interesting.’ He glared at Connie.

‘It’s hardly dusty; it’s only just opened. And this isn’t just any museum,’ Connie snapped. ‘Don’t you know what’s here?’

‘You’ve got to admit it’s all a bit weird.’ Noah pulled a face. ‘Who wants to see a bunch of old dead people?’

Libby laughed. She had to agree with Noah. The thought of being stuck inside another museum filled her with dread. She thought they’d be out seeing the pyramids and the tombs. This wasn’t so different to the British Museum back home: that was filled with

mummies and Egyptian artefacts too.

It had taken her a few days but she'd settled back into school. Seeing her friends was helping her take her mind off things. There was no word from her mum so there mustn't be any news about her dad.

'You're such a philistine,' said Anastasia. 'Although, there is something about this place that gives me the creeps.'

Noah looked at Seb, confused. 'What did she just call me?'

Sebastian shook his head. 'No idea, but I don't think she was being nice. Now stop moaning.'

'I think it's this way.' Connie checked her map. 'We need to get there before it gets too busy.'

Noah rolled his eyes. 'Can't we just go to the gift shop?'

'We won't have anyone wandering off by themselves,' said Miss Khatun who suddenly appeared behind them. 'You five must stay together.'

They all followed Connie silently. Nobody wanted to get on the wrong side of Miss Khatun, who had been snappier than normal. Libby had tried to eavesdrop on her conversations with Miss Mousedale to see if

there was any mention of danger again, but she'd had no luck so far. She knew Miss Khatun was cautious but couldn't help being intrigued about what she'd overheard the other day.

The room was busier than the ones downstairs. Tutankhamun's mask was the one thing everyone came to see. Connie made her way through the crowds and stopped in front of a large glass case. Libby immediately recognised the iconic artefact on display. The turquoise and gold mask glistened in the sunlight. It was even more striking in real life and was richly studded with hundreds of gems.

'Tutankhamun's death mask.' Connie gasped. 'It's incredible.'

'I bet that's worth loads of money,' whispered Sebastian. 'No wonder it's in a glass case. Hope the security is better here than at the Chrysler Building.'

Libby flushed. She hadn't forgotten how all those jewels had been stolen from right under their noses in New York. At least they'd managed to get them back in the end.

Connie ignored Sebastian and began to read the inscription on the sign.

‘Can you see all those hieroglyphics around the shoulders?’ Connie pointed. ‘They’re from the “Book of the Dead”.’

‘Enough about all these dead people.’ Anastasia complained. ‘Noah’s right; it’s giving me the creeps.’

Libby could tell Connie was getting cross. ‘Why don’t we just sit here while Connie takes a look and then we can go to the gift shop?’

The others agreed and Connie gave Libby a grateful smile.

Libby sat down and looked around. The room was getting even more crowded as tourists clambered to get a glimpse of the young Pharaoh’s mask. It reminded her of when they were in Paris and everyone was desperate to take a photo of the *Mona Lisa*. She watched as Connie drew something in her sketchbook. Anastasia came to sit beside her on the bench.

‘I don’t know why Connie is so fascinated in all this ancient stuff,’ Anastasia said. ‘Don’t you think it’s odd they’ve dug up a load of graves and put them in a museum?’

Libby hadn’t really thought too much about it. ‘I suppose so.’

‘I think it’s best to leave the dead alone,’ Anastasia continued. ‘Not keep poking around and disturbing them when they want to be left in peace. No wonder Tut put a curse on those men who disturbed him.’

‘Anastasia,’ hissed Miss Khatun, who suddenly appeared behind them. ‘Can you lower your voice? You’re going to offend someone. The Egyptians are very proud of their culture.’

Anastasia flushed. ‘Sorry, it just makes me feel odd.’

‘I’m done,’ declared Connie. ‘Let’s go and find that gift shop before you lot get yourselves into any more trouble.’

They wandered around the gift shop for ages as Noah couldn’t decide what he wanted to buy. Libby was getting restless and her tummy was rumbling.

‘Hurry up, Noah. I’m starving,’ she moaned. ‘It’s been ages since breakfast.’

Noah held up a small jar with what looked like a strange dog’s head on top. ‘How about this?’

‘What’s that?’ Libby asked. ‘Seriously. That’s so random.’

‘It’s a canopic jar. Do you know they used to take

out the pharaoh's organs before they mummified them and put them in jars?'



'That's gross.' Libby's stomach felt queasy. 'Why would they do that?'

'It's true. Ask Connie!' Noah laughed. 'To get their brains out they shoved a hot poker up their nose and whizzed it around to scramble them and pulled them back out again.'

'For once he's right,' said Connie. 'I thought you weren't interested in ancient things.'

'I think it's cool,' said Noah ignoring them and heading towards the till.

They were just leaving the shop when a piercing noise filled the air. At first Libby thought it was the shop alarm going off, but as they stepped into the hallway, she could still hear it.

Miss Khatun's eyes filled with panic. She was gesturing wildly trying to get their attention. 'Stay calm, everyone. I'm sure it's just a false alarm.'

Libby scanned the room, looking for signs that anything was wrong. The noise stopped suddenly

and then there was an announcement. Libby didn't recognise what was being said in Arabic, but she saw Miss Khatun look relieved.

'Ladies and gentleman, that was a fire alarm test,' a voice echoed around the museum. 'There is nothing to worry about.'

Libby thought that was strange. Didn't they usually say they were going to do a test beforehand?

'I think we've had enough excitement for one day,' said Miss Khatun. 'Let's wait for Miss Mousedale in the lobby. When the rest of the students are finished, we'll head back to school.'

It wasn't long until Miss Mousedale appeared. She was clearly too hot, despite the air conditioning inside the museum, because she was fanning herself frantically.

'Hopefully you've all had an informative morning,' she said. 'Back to your studies this afternoon.'

They headed towards the door which was full of tourists heading home before the sun got too hot. Nearly everyone was clutching bags from the gift shop. Noah bumped into a lady who was rushing for the exit.

'Watch where you're going,' the woman snapped

in an American accent as they both tumbled to the ground. Both their bags went flying out of their hands and the woman's scarf slid to the floor.



‘I’m so sorry,’ mumbled Noah. ‘Can I help?’ He handed her the scarf and she snatched it off him.

‘They shouldn’t let kids in here,’ she snapped. Quickly she placed her scarf back on her head and wrapped it around her shoulders. She paused and looked at both bags before selecting the nearest one. Libby noticed a small tattoo on her wrist as she reached out for it. It reminded her of the Eye of Horus they’d seen earlier.

‘Are you okay, Noah?’ Libby asked. ‘No broken bones I hope.’

‘You’re never going to let me forget that are you?’ He laughed picking up the remaining bag. ‘I’m more concerned about my canopic jar; it cost a fortune.’

‘How much did you spend now?’ Sebastian raised his eyebrows. ‘You’re not borrowing any money off me this term.’

‘Twelve hundred pounds,’ said Noah sheepishly.

Libby gasped. ‘How did you have that much money?’

‘Don’t listen to him.’ Sebastian punched his brother playfully in the shoulder. ‘I bet he means Egyptian pounds.’

Noah grinned. ‘You fell for it though. He took the jar out of the bag, unwrapped the packaging and held it up to the light. ‘I don’t believe it. It’s got a crack in it.’

‘Will you three hurry up,’ boomed Miss Mousedale. ‘Mr el-Kahir is waiting outside for us.’

Noah muttered under his breath and shoved the jar back into his bag. Libby knew if they didn’t catch up, they’d have more to worry about than a broken souvenir.