

# *The Feast of the Lotus*

Caroline Smith

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# *Books By Caroline Smith*

## Fiction

*Under a Blanket of Blue*

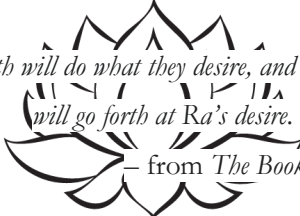
*The Feast of the Lotus*

*The Oracle of Magnolia Place* (coming fall 2025)

## Nonfiction

*Writing as Meditation*

*Perspective Parenting*

A decorative floral ornament with a central flower-like shape and radiating lines, framing the text.

*The souls on earth will do what they desire, and the soul of [the deceased]  
will go forth at Ra's desire.*  
— from *The Book of the Dead*, spell 29B

## Author's Note

Dear reader. Thank you for considering this book. I've wanted to write a book about Egypt since my grandparents returned from a trip there in the nineties. I was completely captivated by the culture and stories of their travels. If you've picked this book up, that may mean that you have some knowledge of or interest in ancient Egypt or maybe none. Or, maybe one of your favorite movies, like mine, is the 1999 classic, *The Mummy* with Brendan Frazier and Rachel Weisz. Either way, ancient Egyptian mythology is as wild and varied as it's many centuries of dynasties. Most of the history in this book is on the 18<sup>th</sup> dynasty of the New Kingdom (1550-1069 BCE). I have taken a few liberties, this is a paranormal romance, after all, but I've tried to stay as close to the research and history as I could.

Below, I've included some helpful terms and a brief description of some of the Gods and Goddesses of the Egyptian pantheon that are included in this story, as well as a few of their relevant mythologies.

As far as a content warning, you should know that our MMC is a slightly possessive dead guy. There is also grief over the loss of parents. Death features prominently in this story, as it's hard to tell a story of ancient Egypt without reverence for the world they believed existed as an afterlife. Should any of those topics be problematic, please feel free to skip this book. Otherwise, I hope you enjoy Elisa's and Neferamun's story as much as I've enjoyed writing it.

### USEFUL TERMS AND PEOPLE:

**Shabti figures** (also known as *shawbti* and *ushabti*) – Small, carved funerary figurines that are found in tombs, often made of stone, wood, or faience and inscribed with spells or the deceased's name.

**Ka** – the first part of what was believed to be the soul. This was a person's life force or double that exited the body at death.

**Ba** – The second part of the soul, which could travel between worlds at death.

**Akh** – The Third part of the soul, often meaning spirit.

**Book of the Dead** – A manual for the afterworld. Contains spells that were thought to be said by priests during the mummification process to help the deceased enter and navigate the afterworld.

**Bastet** – The goddess of beauty and love. Often depicted as a cat.

**Sekhmet** – The second aspect and chaotic side of Bastet in warrior and protector form. Often depicted as a lioness.

**Maat** – The goddess of truth and justice. Often takes the form of an ostrich feather. She is what the deceased's heart was weighed against to enter the afterworld.

**Isis** – The main female deity of the Egyptian pantheon. Wife and sister to Osiris and mother to Horus and Bastet. She is the goddess of kinship, protection of the kingdom, magic, and wisdom. She is said to have more magical powers than any other deity.

**Osiris** – The god of the afterlife, resurrection, fertility, agriculture, and vegetation. The first to be associated with mummification. His brother, Set, cut him up and hid pieces of him all over Egypt; Isis retrieved these pieces, then wrapped him in linen, resurrecting him and enabling him to return to life. Presides over the judgment of the dead in the afterworld.

**Horus** – God of kings, the sky, healing, and protection. Often depicted with the head of a falcon.

**Ammit** – “The Devourer” or “Devourer of the Dead.” A female deity, often depicted with the head of a crocodile, the forelegs of a lion, and the hindquarters of a hippopotamus. If the deceased's heart was heavier than Maat (the feather of truth), Ammit would eat the heart and the deceased would not be able to have a peaceful eternity.

**Apep** – God of darkness, disorder, and chaos. The opposition of Maat and the enemy of Ra. Often depicted as a serpent. The myth of Ra and Apep says that because Apep hates the light and the sun (Ra) he chases Ra each day but cannot ever catch him.

**Ra** – The Lightbringer; god of the sun. God of the sky, the earth, and the afterlife. Also the god of order and kings. Often depicted with the head of a falcon. In the New Kingdom, he was merged with the god Amun and became Amun-Ra.

# Chapter One

“Ah, Dr. Kent. So nice to see you.” Atef took Elisa Kent’s hand and in the custom she’d started growing used to and kissed her on both cheeks. “I hope I haven’t kept you waiting.”

“No, not at all,” she swiped her sweaty palm on her pant leg. “I was just admiring your Tut,” she gestured with the same hand in a movement that took in the fifty-foot-tall statue of King Tut in the massive foyer.

Dr. Atef Tawfik smiled kindly at her, the creases of his eyes wrinkling behind his frameless glasses. “Well, now, he’s yours, too. Please, follow me.”

They walked in step to the very rear of the building and into an elevator that took them several floors down. They chatted about her flight and how she was settling in.

“You’ve been to Cairo before, yes? With your parents, I think.”

Her smile was a little sad. “I have, yes, when I was a little girl before they passed. I’ve also done a few seasons at Saqqara and Thebes.”

“I was sorry to hear of their accident,” Atef mentioned the accident as if it had happened yesterday and not sixteen years ago. He paused awkwardly and fumbled for something else to change the subject. “I, uh, remember your experience from your resume. I quite enjoyed your lecture on identification of unknown mummies. Even I learned something.” He held his arm in front of the elevator door for her to go before him.

“Just down the hall to your left.”

The “hall” was a massively wide white corridor with steel doors and keypads. Obviously, the Grand Egyptian Museum, GEM for short, took their security protocols seriously.

He stopped at a door and swiped a key card followed by a four-digit code. The latch clicked and the room before her was a mass of white walls and filing cabinets and shelves organized within an inch of their life. It was cavernous with tall ceilings, four large tables, and lab equipment set up along the walls. Seeing it all made Elisa tingle with anticipation.

She breathed it in. It smelled like history. Resins, oils, disinfectant, and old linen. Some might have called it musty, but it was a heady perfume to her.

“Welcome home.” Atef walked beside her to the nearest table. “Everything you need is in here. We have a laptop and cell phone for you, access cards and codes, and a team at your disposal to help with any moving of heavy objects you might need. There are paper copies of the protocols in that notebook and digital versions on the laptop. You have an office upstairs if you need it, but as you’ll be cataloging, I thought you might want to start down here.”

“It’s perfect.”

Atef wasn’t kidding when he’d mentioned the state-of-the-art labs in the offer letter he’d sent to her. The labs she had worked in during her internship had been cramped in forgotten basements. As a funerary archeologist and Egyptologist, she preferred to work in the field, but this was the next best thing—history and modern technology working seamlessly together.

“We have a café upstairs. The coffee is delicious. If you’re ready, I can take you upstairs to your office.”

“Actually, I’d rather go ahead and get started if that’s all right.”

If Atef was surprised by this, he didn’t show it. “Certainly. There are lab coats and gloves in the cabinet. We do dual documentation in the notebooks and then in the database, so we have duplicates of everything.” He hesitated, seeming unsure what to say. “You will have an assistant if you’d like one, but we’ve had a hard time keeping any one on this particular project.”

“I know the translations from this dynasty can be a little tricky, so I’m not surprised.”

“No, it’s not that. They’ve...well...the four Egyptologists we had before...they went a little...mad a few days in. Three of them quit.”

Elisa looked at him, startled. “You didn’t mention that in your email. What happened to the fourth?”

“He died. Heart attack.”



Her mouth gaped and she closed it abruptly, then cleared her throat. "I see."

"Some of the workers think there may be a curse on this particular sarcophagus."

Elisa smiled. "Well, Atef. I don't believe in curses."

He looked at her blandly when he replied. "Perhaps you should."

With that, he turned toward the door. "I'm programmed into that cell if you need me for anything." He nodded to the table. "Good luck."

"*Shukran*," she murmured.

When the door latched behind him, it was all she could do not to do a happy dance in the middle of the room. She couldn't believe she was here! Her dream job. It had been offered so soon after she'd presented her doctoral thesis she could hardly believe it was real. It had taken her only two weeks to pack up her things in Chicago and find a quaint apartment here. Atef's assistant had emailed over some suggestions and she'd chosen the first one she'd seen. She'd been here a week already, getting everything unpacked and settling in. She would get to catalog, research, expand the history of the dead for the living, and act as a special consultant on the local dig sites up and down the Nile from September to April. Life could not get much better than this.

Elisa quickly typed a text to her best friend, Miriam, who was traveling who-knew-where these days.

**Here. It's perfect. Xoxo**

Three dots appeared, disappeared, and reappeared.

**You deserve it! Love and kisses from Dubai!**

Attached to the text was a selfie of Miriam, who appeared to be on the roof of a very tall building overlooking Dubai at sunset.

*Living her best life, as always*, Elisa thought as she slid her phone back into her pocket.

"Curses be damned," she said to the empty room.

The papers stacked neatly in front of her flew into the air and floated haphazardly to the floor. Elisa felt the hairs on the back of her neck stand up.



“How curious.”

A few hours later, papers and notes were scattered on her preferred space, the floor, as she talked to herself to help her sort out this latest puzzle. All of the papers from the original dig and its itemized contents were in front of her. Thankfully, the previous Egyptologists managed to do a bit of their own documentation and exams so she didn't have to start completely from scratch.

Uncovered in 1881, this particular tomb and its inhabitant were a bit of a mystery. The tomb itself had been found in the Thebes necropolis. This had clearly been a person of some prominence, based on the type of mummification and his jewelry. Many distinguished funerary objects had been found with him. The list of cataloged items included a handful of shabti figures, four canopic jars, wine jugs, a small carved boat, and other ancient ephemera. The photographs of his tomb showed typical décor from the 18<sup>th</sup> dynasty's Book of the Dead: a few spells for navigating life successfully in the afterworld. What was important and noted at the time of the removal and initial investigation of the mummy in the 1880s was that the occupant's heart was missing. In its place, inside the chest, was a heart scarab.

Elisa got up and stretched. She shifted through the x-rays that had been taken in the months before her arrival. She couldn't help but notice the gold jewelry that flashed in front of her from the x-ray of the skull.

She wandered over to the mostly still-wrapped mummy and bent over to examine his face where the wrappings had fallen away with time.

“You had a nice square jaw, didn't you? You were probably very handsome.”

She pulled her digital recorder from the pocket of her lab coat. “Based on dentition, and osteological features of the skull and pelvis, subject is male, approximately 30-40 years old, and 188 centimeters tall.

“There is no obvious indication of any physical trauma to the bones or skull and his teeth are all intact, leading me to believe he had access to good nutrition and diet.”

Elisa glanced again at the bright indications of the X-rays and then at the neck of the mummy. “X-ray and visual inspection confirm the wearing of large earrings in both ears, in the Nubian style, and the presence of a king’s collar in gold and gemstones around the neck.”

“X-ray confirms the evisceration of the brain but the ocular nerves and surrounding tissue are intact, leading me to conclude that the mummification of this man was taken with care.”

Elisa gently ran a finger over the top of his linen wrapping. “Ask Atef if we can get chemical analysis of the bitumen covering the wrapping. It’s darker than most resins I’ve seen before and has taken on a black, shiny, almost lacquered appearance over time.

“All evidence points to the fact that this man came from wealth and status and was afforded all of the mummification rites and rituals of the 18<sup>th</sup> Dynasty, however, all mention of his name has been painstakingly removed from the lid of the sarcophagus. Check the shabti figures for additional carvings.”

Elisa put the X-rays on a counter and bent to pick up a few photographs of the interior of the tomb. She frowned as she examined the black and white hieroglyphs: many of them depicted this person being forever damned in the afterlife.

Elisa chewed her bottom lip and then rubbed her blurry eyes. Why would someone go to such trouble to bury someone in such a prestigious way and then ensure their eternal damnation? She had only heard of two mummies being found without their hearts—King Tut himself and the venerated priest Ipi. The heart was the center of intelligence and emotion to the ancient Egyptians and the only way to be sure of navigating the afterlife successfully. There were thousands of images of Osiris or Anubis weighing the heart against the feather of truth at the entrance of the afterworld. If you had lived a good life, the heart would be lighter than the feather and you could pass on into the afterlife. If it weighed more than the feather, you were judged to have had an evil spirit in life and the crocodile-headed monster Ammit would immediately eat the heart.

It was hypothesized that Tut had had his heart removed accidentally during his hastily botched mummification, or that it had been damaged by an accident and was deemed unworthy to stay in his body. Ipi’s heart had been found not long ago in a heap of natron bags used for mummification, seemingly mistaken for the bags that soak up liquids in the body and placed in a canopic jar in his tomb.

To intentionally remove the heart, though, was one of the worst punishments Elisa could imagine for the soul of an ancient Egyptian.

Gaining a full understanding of who this man was was going to be a lot of work. It was a good thing she liked a challenge.

She studied the anthropoid sarcophagus. It was likely limestone with a wooden interior coffin and had, at one time, been brightly painted, but none of that remained now. It sat, ancient and worn, on a plinth in the middle of the room. She scanned the lid and ran her fingers gently over the deep chisel marks over where his name once was.

“Who did you piss off?” The painted eyes of the death mask that lay next to him held no answers, nor did the relatively well-preserved body in front of her.

On the table behind her, four canopic jars and a heart scarab were laid out. She picked up the scarab and turned it over. The inscribed stone was cold and heavy in her hand. The carved hieroglyphs on the back were so small she could barely read them. Elisa looked around for some kind of magnifying tool and found a large one on a stand with a light.

The fluorescent beam and glass made it much easier for her to read the script and she translated out loud:

*Oh my heart of my love! Oh my heart of my love!  
My heart of my different ages! Do not stand as a witness! Do not oppose me in  
the tribunal!  
Do not show your hostility against me before the Keeper of the Balance!  
For you are my ka which is in my body, the protector who causes my limbs to be  
healthy! Go forth for yourself to the good place to which we hasten!  
Do not cause our name to stink to the entourage who make men in heaps!  
What is good for us is good for the judge! May the heart stretch at the verdict!  
Do not  
speak lies in the presence of god! Behold  
You are distinguished, existing as a justified one!  
It is indeed well that you should bear.*

“Well, that was spectacularly unhelpful,” Elisa sighed and returned the scarab to the table. She’d need to write down that translation while it was still fresh. She turned to the binder on the table at the front of the room and began recording what she’d just read. She’d include measurements and specifics later.

Halfway through her record-keeping, she felt a sudden presence. She started to stand up and then shook her head. She would know if someone walked in—the metal door was too loud to be ignored. But then a low voice came from somewhere behind her.

“That was well done. Most people don’t get it on the first try.”

Elisa dropped the pen she was holding and turned around slowly. In front of her was one of the most beautiful men she had ever seen. His dark eyes matched the darkness of his hair, and he was dressed in the style of the ancient Egyptians—a linen kilt with metal arm bands and a collar where she could clearly make out lapis, carnelian, and amethyst. She glanced at the body of the mummy and then at the figure in front of her. Even in death, the features were unmistakable.

Elisa felt her heart racing and her mouth go dry. All of the blood drained from her face and left a cold tingling behind.

*It was jet lag. Had she eaten today? Maybe she’d fallen asleep while she was reading. She’d always had an overactive imagination.*

Her mouth moved, but no sound came out. The figure in front of her watched all of this without comment but suddenly he smiled. “Hello.”

And Dr. Elisa Kent fainted for the first time in her life.