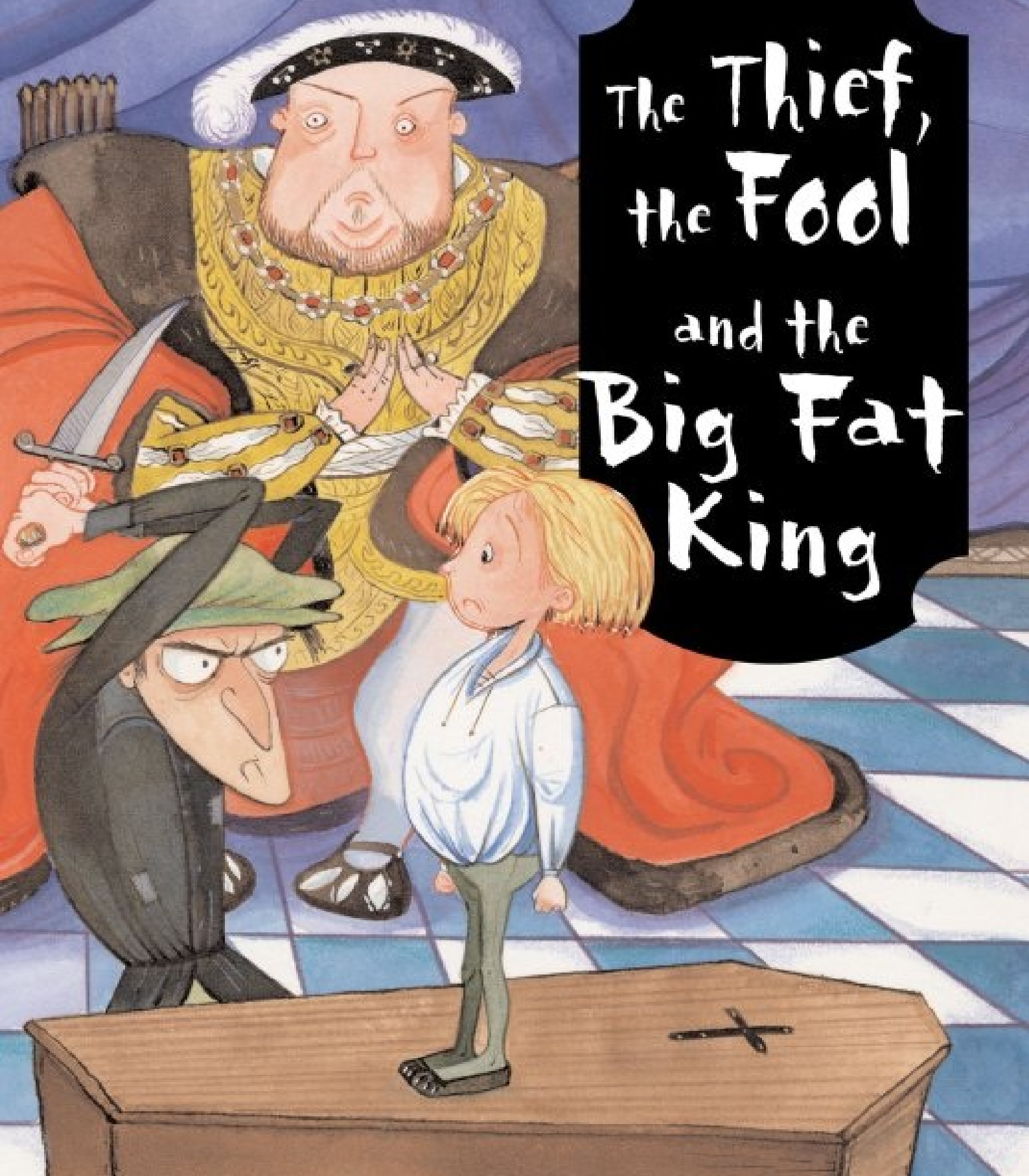


TERRY DEARY

TUDOR TALES

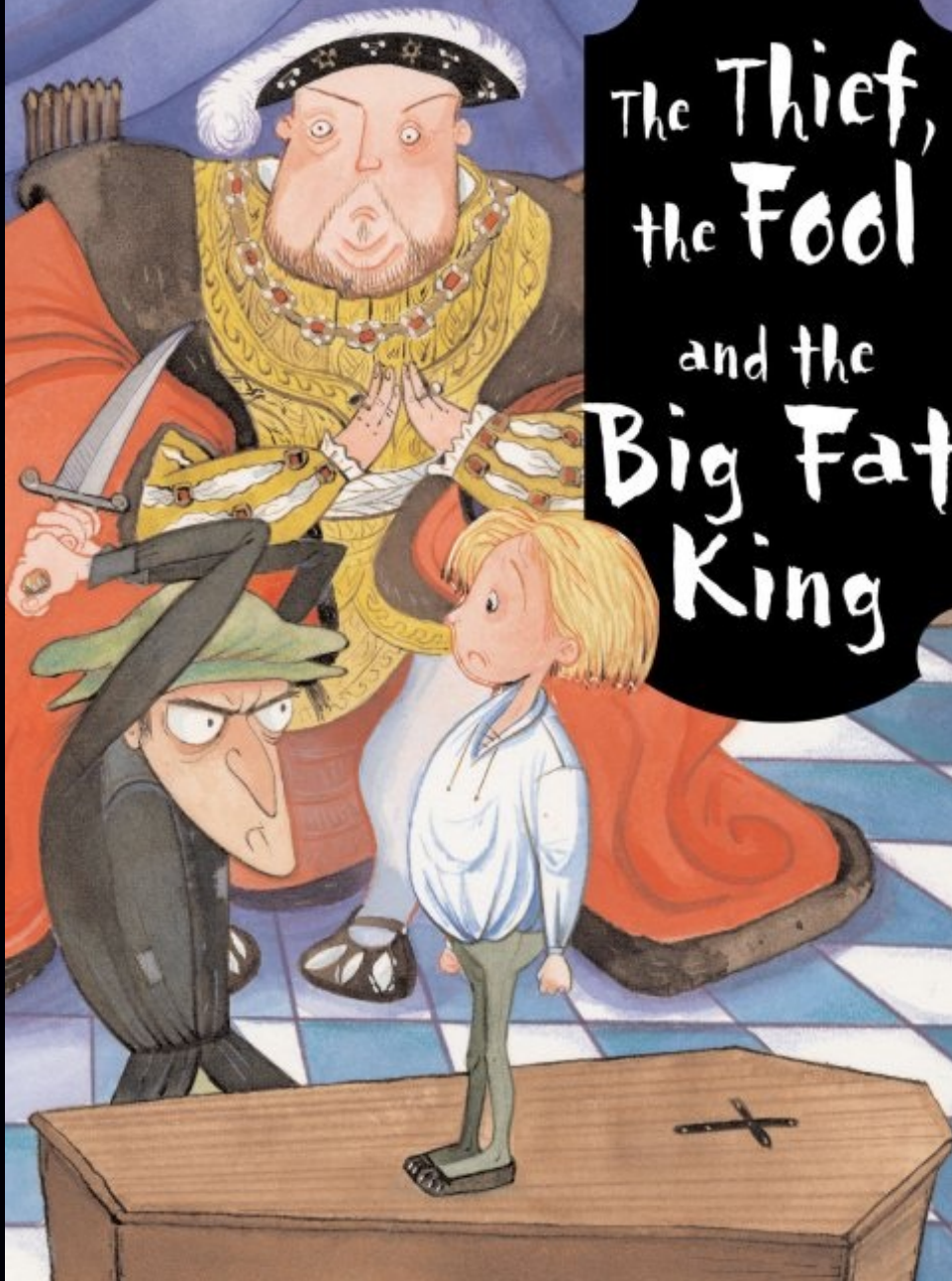
The Thief, the Fool and the Big Fat King



TERRY DEARY

TUDOR TALES

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THE THIEF THE FOOL AND THE BIG FAT KING



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Illustrated by Helen Flook

A & C Black • London

*This book is dedicated to the memory of the hundreds of people who died for the greed
and stupidity of the monstrous King Henry VIII—Terry Deary*

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Chapter One

Cowards and Coffins

“Lay-deez and gennle-men!” my father cried to the crowd that gathered round. “See this poor, hungry little boy?” he roared, pointing at me.



People drifted from every corner of the churchyard to see what was going on. There must have been five hundred people in St Paul’s churchyard that day: meeting friends, doing business or just watching the entertainers. Entertainers like me and my father. He kicked me on the ankle.

“Oh!” I cried. “Oh! Oh! Oh! I am so-o-o hungry! I would do anything for a crust of bread!”



The truth was, I was full of mutton pie, but you have to put on an act if you want to make some money.



About fifty people pushed and jostled to get a better view. My father lifted me onto the rough wooden coffin we had brought with us.

"This little boy is so-o-o hungry he is willing to risk his life to make a few pennies."

"What's he going to do?" a tangle-haired girl called out. "Jump off the coffin?"



The crowd laughed. Father turned red.

"He is going to let me stab him!" my father shouted, and the laughter died suddenly.

"Tshah!" the girl sneered. "I'll give you a penny if you let me do it." She pulled a knife from the pocket of her scruffy brown dress and waved it under my nose. "I'll cut his head clean off."

My father tried to ignore her. He pulled off his green cap and held it out. "Come on, lay-deez and gennle-men. Give just a few pennies to see this terrible sight!"

"Oh!" I cried. "Oh! Oh! Oh! I am so-o-o hungry! I would do anything for a crust of bread!"

A thin man in a yellow jerkin and red trousers shouted, "Let's see you stab him first!"

The rest of the crowd agreed. "Stab him first!"



And the tangle-haired girl said, "Let me do it!"

My father slapped his cap back on. "Oh, very well," he snapped. "I will stab him." He turned to me. "Are you ready, my dear, darling little boy?"

I squeezed my eyes tight shut and squeaked, "Yes, my dear father. But if I die, please give my love to Mummy!"

The crowd shuffled and sniffed and looked unsure now.



Even the tangle-haired girl in the scruffy dress was watching in silence.
“If I get it wrong and I kill you, will you forgive me, little James?”
“I forgive you, Father,” I sighed.



I wished he'd get on with it. But I knew he was waiting till everyone in the graveyard was watching. The bigger the audience, the more money we'd make.

"Lay-deez and gennle-men," Father went on and I opened my eyes a little. "This is no trick. See this knife—it is sharp enough to shave a swine!"

He reached forward, grabbed the girl in the brown dress and sliced off a lump of her tangled hair with a stroke.

The crowd gasped.



"Oi! What are you doing?" the girl raged and her face, under the dirty smudges, glowed red with anger. I tried not to laugh.

My father turned to me. He raised the knife high in the air so the spring sunlight glittered on the blade. It was so quiet, I'll swear you could hear the worms below the graveyard chewing away at the bodies.

The knife swept down and struck me in the stomach.

Chapter Two

Blood and Bladders

“Oh, Father!” I gasped and clutched at my stomach. The cold blood trickled through my fingers. The crowd shouted and cried in confusion. “Oh, dear Father, I think you have killed me!”



I moved to the end of the coffin and fell into his arms.

“My son, my James, my little Jimmy!” he wept. “I have your coffin here,” he said.

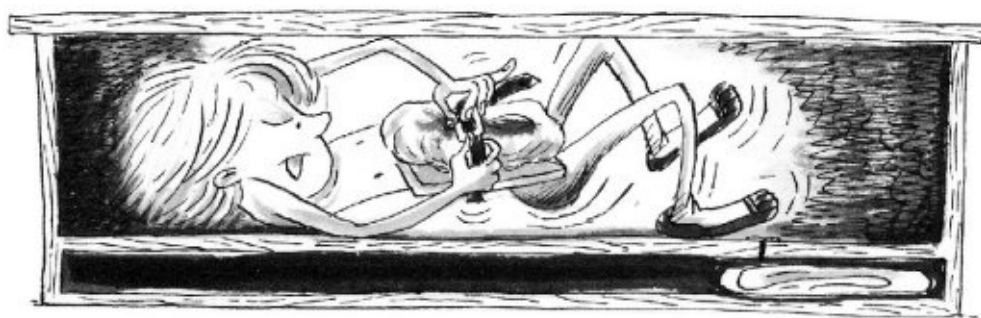
I let myself go limp in his arms.

He kicked open the lid and lowered me into the box.

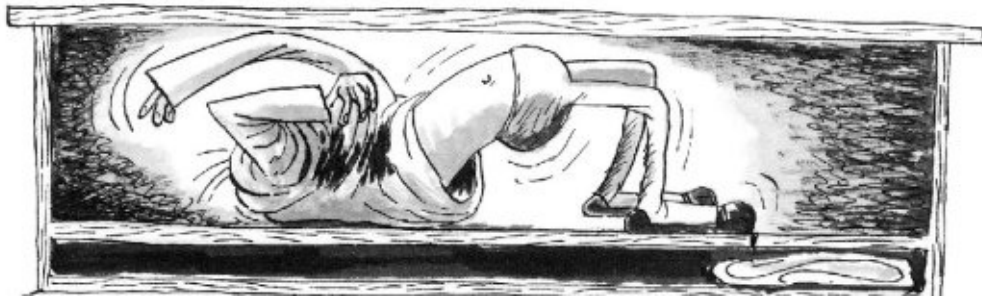


The lid slammed and I was in darkness.

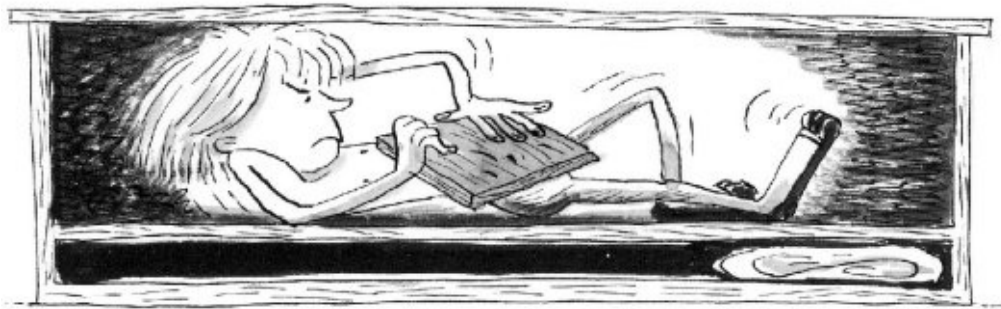
That didn't matter. I'd done this fifty times before, all over England and Wales. I didn't need light. I wriggled out of the blood-wet shirt and untied the pig's stomach that was strapped to my waist.



There was still some pig's blood in it and I wrapped it quickly in the shirt and stuffed it in the hidden cubbyhole at the head of the coffin.



I took off the wooden board that was strapped to my belly—the one that had stopped the knife from really going into me.



I placed it, clean side out, over the secret cubbyhole so the blood-stained shirt was hidden. The board fitted perfectly—it was made to. No one who looked at the coffin would find the shirt. I groped at my feet and found a clean shirt and struggled into it. I could hear muffled voices through the thin wood. Father was crying, “Is there no one who can help me in my hour of despair? I cannot even afford to bury my little James!”



Then I heard a woman's voice say, "I have heard of a spell that will raise the dead—if you say it quickly enough. And it will only work the once!"



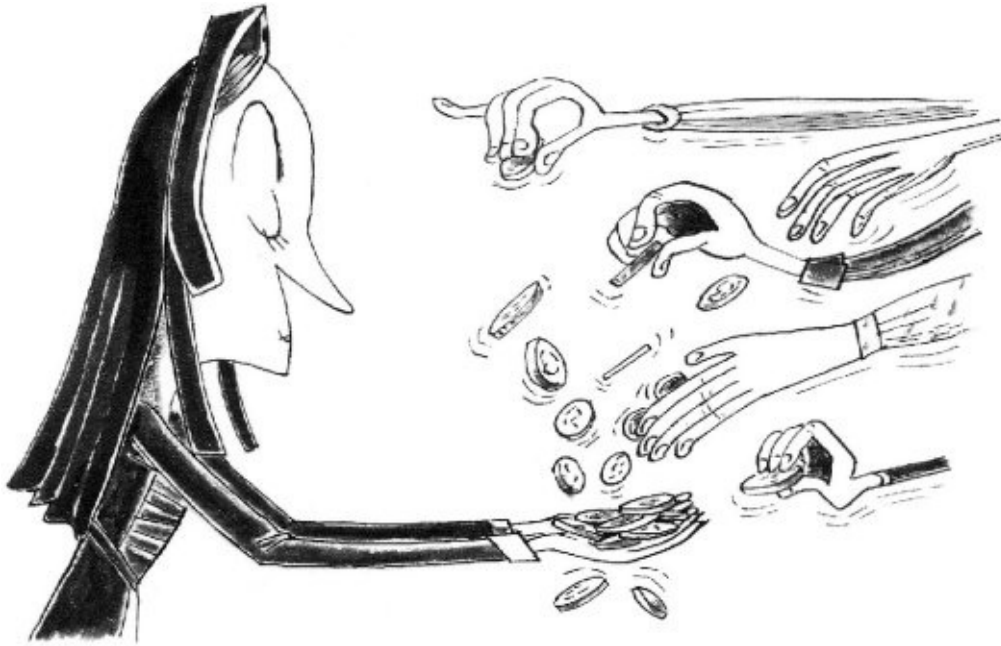
I heard the crowd gasp and shuffle away. I heard them mutter “Witchcraft!” in terror, and you could be hanged for witchcraft.

“Please say the words, good woman!” Father groaned.

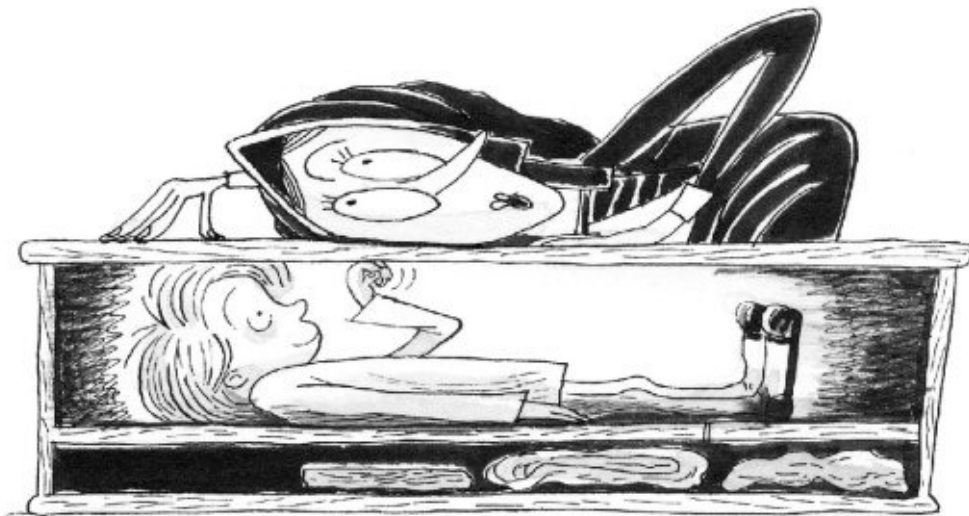
“Sorry, dear sir,” she sighed. “I need silver and gold in my hands or the spell will never work—and I am a poor woman!”

“Has no one any silver or gold?” Father cried.

There was a chinking and tinkling as the crowd opened their purses and placed the money in the woman’s hands.



I heard the woman place her hands on the top of the coffin.
I heard her rest her head on top of the coffin lid...



...and mutter the strange Egyptian words she had learned.



Then the coffin lid was thrown open and the woman looked in. No one could see me as I gave her a quick grin and mouthed, “Hello, Mum!”