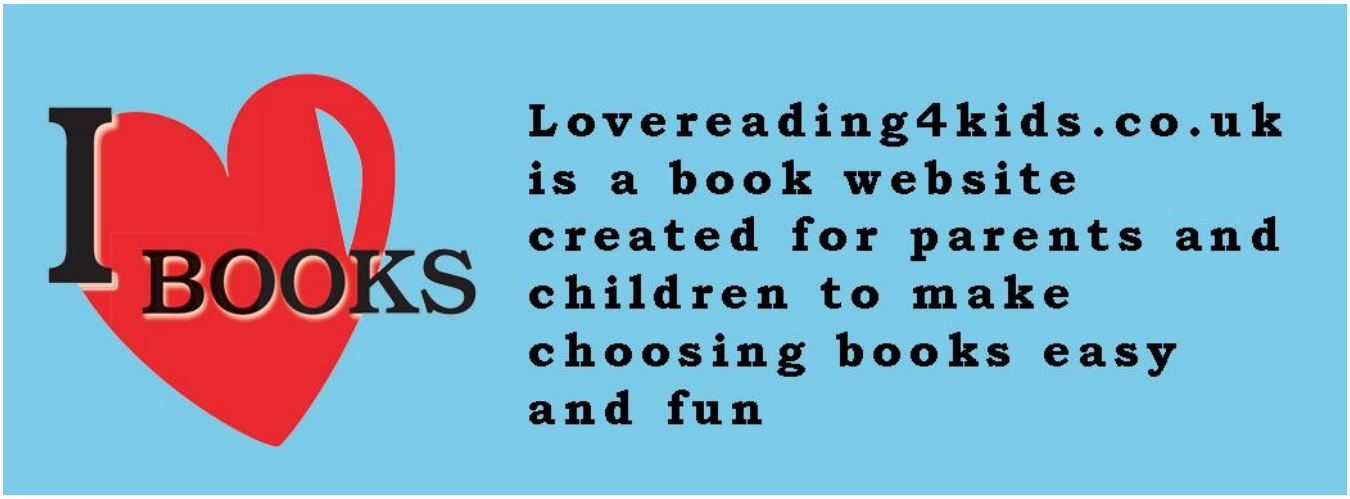


Opening extract from

The Mummy's Revenge

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The sarcophagus lid swung wide and the mummy almost fell into the room. The thing staggered on stiff, straight legs. It was wrapped in bandages from head to foot. But if the bandages had ever been white they were filthy now, like rags. And as the creature flexed its withered muscles, here and there more strips of cloth started to come loose, revealing horrible glimpses of the body inside...

For Mam and Jack,
with love and heartfelt thanks

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ANDREW BEASLEY



PROLOGUE

DANGER UNWRAPPED

For eternity I wish to sleep,
This deadly curse I vow to keep.
For those who dare disturb my tomb,
Remember you have sealed your doom!

The words spun round and round inside Douglas McCrimmon's head. Just thinking about the mummy's curse made the young lad shiver beneath his uniform, as if a clammy hand was tracing a finger slowly down his spine.

Douglas, "Doogie" to his friends, knew that it wasn't his place to speak out. He was a servant, and the first rule of being a servant was *Hold your tongue*. Well, that and *Do as you're told*. So Doogie said nothing and kept pouring the drinks. All around him people were eating sandwiches from silver trays and drinking champagne, laughing and

joking without a care in the world. But with every glass that Doogie filled, he stole another glance at the looming shape of the sarcophagus at the far end of the great hall.

An upright box. An ancient coffin. *With a monster inside.*

Doogie rummaged in his waistcoat pocket for a crumpled square of card. He'd sneaked one of the invitations and although he had read it a hundred times he still couldn't believe it.



What kind of numptie thinks that's a good idea?

But if Sir Gordon was worried, he didn't show it. With a red fez balanced on the top of his head, like a cherry on a bun, Sir Gordon was having fun. The great and good of Scottish society crowded round him; lords, ladies and

gentlemen. *Tell us again about the pyramid… We must hear more about the tomb…*

Doogie took a sideways look at Mr Cowley. As always, the old butler was the calm at the centre of the storm. Strong and silent as stone – his angular face might have been carved from Edinburgh granite. Unflappable, unmoveable. Not one grey hair out of place. Doogie flashed the butler a quick smile, hoping for reassurance, but Mr Cowley didn't show even the merest flicker of emotion. Even so, Doogie was certain that Mr Cowley felt the same way he did – *Sir Gordon would bring the mummy's curse down on them all*.

Doogie weaved his way between the guests, edging across the tiled floor until he was close enough to hear what Sir Gordon was saying.

"I cannot think of anything worse than leaving a mummy in the sand to rot…" said Sir Gordon.

I can, thought Doogie. *Bringing the evil thing home!*

When Sir Gordon had first announced that he was going on an expedition to Egypt, it had sounded so mysterious and daring. However, the servants hadn't got too excited – they were used to Sir Gordon's enthusiasm for new hobbies, and how quickly those pastimes were put back on the shelf when the next thing came along.

Sir Gordon had filled his enormous house with every new gadget and invention that money could buy. In the last three years alone he had been absolutely passionate about photography, then British wildlife and finally exotic insects, all of which had been pursued wholeheartedly…for about five minutes.

Doogie remembered when Sir Gordon purchased a camera, the most expensive on the market, naturally. His Lordship didn't use it to capture scenes of the beautiful Scottish Highlands or formal pictures of his family and friends. Oh no, Sir Gordon only took *post-mortem* pictures; photographs of the dead, which he had framed and displayed in his study.

Sir Gordon's interest in animals was equally odd. He preferred them dead, so that he could stuff them, dress them up like people and arrange them in glass cabinets. He had squirrels playing cards, a rabbit on a miniature bicycle and a badger smoking a pipe.

Sir Gordon's insect and arachnid collection on the other hand was very much *alive*, mostly poisonous and almost entirely terrifying. Sir Gordon had spoken of nothing but tarantulas and scorpions for nearly two months before he got bored and never mentioned them again. Cowley still had to clean the glass tanks and feed

them dead mice though. Sir Gordon insisted that only his faithful butler could be trusted to look after his pets. Come to think of it, Sir Gordon made it clear that Mr Cowley was the *only* man for quite a lot of things around the house. Certainly the poor old butler got all the rotten jobs.

The way Mr Cowley described it, Sir Gordon's new Egyptian hobby was basically grave robbing, although the graves were in another country and the bodies were very old, so that made it archaeology or something. Whatever it was called, Doogie had been amazed by the enormous hoard of treasures that Sir Gordon had brought home from the desert. Naturally it was Cowley who'd had to painstakingly label and catalogue each item, arrange and clean and polish them, then position the gas lamps so that they might be seen in their full glory.

Still, the effect was breathtaking.

The ballroom of 44 Morningside Place had been transformed into a private museum, and the whole chamber gleamed with gold. All around Doogie there were statues and burial masks and curved swords and bracelets and amulets and brooches and jars and…the list went on.

"I'm overjoyed that these marvellous objects didn't

stay buried in Egypt, just gathering dust," Sir Gordon continued, his pink sweaty face beginning to shine like boiled ham, "but instead were brought here, to *my* house, for all my dear friends to enjoy."

There was a lot of *oohing* and *ahhhing* at this point as everyone paused to appreciate the ancient artefacts which surrounded them on every side.

Like magnets, Doogie's eyes were once again drawn to the burial casket at the far end of the hall. It stood there like a soldier on guard; unmoving and yet filled with the potential for danger. An Egyptian coffin. Complete with a dead Egyptian inside.

Three other mummies were arranged beside it. A baboon, a cat and a baby crocodile. They made Doogie go all shoogly inside with dread.

Mr Cowley had told Doogie all about mummies – he was an absolute expert. Thousands of years ago, when a rich Egyptian died, he had his body preserved so that he could live again. It was a long and horrifying process. As Doogie understood it, all of the bits inside the body were taken out and saved in special jars, then the hollow body was filled with cotton, a lot like Sir Gordon's poor stuffed animals. Oils were rubbed on the skin to keep it from drying out and then the body was wrapped from

head to toe in bandages, before the boiling hot *mūm* – sealing wax – was poured on. The whole idea terrified Doogie…but at the same time it excited him just a little bit too. Perhaps it was the same for Sir Gordon?

Sir Gordon called for quiet, banging a cake fork against his glass. Men in tweed jackets and women in ostrich feather hats jostled, ever so politely, for the best position to view the unwrapping.

Sir Gordon tapped too vigorously. The glass shattered.

"Dear friends," said Sir Gordon, as Doogie stepped in to take the broken glass from his hand, "some of you might know about my death-defying exploits in a distant desert land. Last year I led an expedition to a secret location in the desolate waste of the Theban Hills, beneath the mountainous shadow of the peak of *al-Qurn* – 'the Horn'…" Sir Gordon's voice trembled like a bad actor's. "There I was, in the great Valley of the Kings, the sun burning down on my head, the sand blistering my feet, the vultures circling endlessly above…"

"Oh no, not this old story again," one of the guests whispered too loudly. "I know for a fact he never left his hotel."

"Anyway, enough about me and my brilliance," Sir Gordon continued, pretending he hadn't heard.

"Let's get this chappie out and have a look at him, eh?"

An expectant hush fell. No one moved. Doogie could feel his own breath trapped inside his chest in anticipation. Sir Gordon grinned like a schoolboy who's been given the key to the sweet shop. The great hall was as silent as the grave…

Then they heard the knocking. Three loud raps.

Tap. Tap. Tap.

The crowd gasped and started to shuffle uncomfortably. *Where was it coming from?*

TAP! TAP! TAP! The knocking came again. Louder, more insistent this time.

It couldn't be…could it?

In spite of the mass of bodies in the hall, the temperature suddenly seemed to drop. Impossibly…terrifyingly… the sound was coming from the sarcophagus itself. As Doogie watched, the coffin lid shifted a fraction. Something inside wanted to get out.

Instantly Sir Gordon's guests were wide-eyed and sober; fear ran cold in their veins. The sarcophagus was opening in front of them. Inch by inch it was being pushed open…*from the inside.* One woman with an enormous bottom – and an even more enormous bowl of trifle in her hand – wobbled, and before anyone could

catch her, she fainted to the floor. The bowl shattered; trifle went everywhere.

"Stay calm," Sir Gordon mumbled. "It's just gas that has built up inside the casket. Yes, that must be it…" He tried to convince himself. "The warm air in the room has reacted somehow with the air inside and—"

The lid opened further with a terrible screech. Sir Gordon took a step backwards as a foul stench poured into the hall.

"Just gas… I'm only moving backwards in case the body explodes…"

Doogie retched – the smell was worse than cleaning out the toilets. All around the hall the guests began to gag as their nostrils were filled with a stink more disgusting than rotting vegetables, putrid fruit, overripe cheese and decaying fish. Like the worst fart imaginable; silent but deadly.

A gentleman removed his hat and, with as much dignity as he could muster, vomited into it.

There was a gasp from the crowd as a bandaged hand appeared around the edge of the lid. The exposed tips of bone tapped against the stone as if the creature was impatient to be free.

That was when the screaming started.

No one was very polite now. There was no "Ladies first" or "After you, sir". This was every man for himself; a desperate, messy rush for the doors. Chairs were flung aside and tables upturned as people fled for their lives, stumbling and falling over each other in the chaos.

Only Sir Gordon, his butler and Doogie, stayed put; Mr Cowley no doubt out of a sense of duty, His Lordship possibly out of stupidity. Doogie could feel the hairs standing on end across the back of his neck. He was desperate to run away but his legs felt as if they had turned to lead.

The sarcophagus lid swung wide and the mummy almost fell into the room. The thing staggered on stiff, straight legs. It was wrapped in bandages from head to foot. But if the bandages had ever been white they were filthy now, like rags. And as the creature flexed its withered muscles, here and there more strips of cloth started to come loose, revealing horrible glimpses of the body inside.

The mummy lurched forwards and its knee joints squeaked as they were forced to bend for the first time in five thousand years. All the monster's movements were clumsy and awkward, like a newborn's. Although this

creature wasn't a newborn; it was just the opposite: old and dead.

Doogie was still frozen to the spot, unable to move, or hide, or do anything other than stare. They were utterly alone: the boy, the butler, their master and the monster.

The mummy stumbled around like a drunk, but it seemed to Doogie that it was gaining strength with each passing second. The thing blundered into one of Sir Gordon's display cases, shattering the glass and sending the Egyptian amulets inside cascading down. The creature looked at one of the gold bracelets and paused, as if it was trying to remember something that had been very important many centuries ago.

Then it began to roar.

"Rrrrrrrrrrrrgggggggggggggggggggghhhhhhhhhhhhhh!"

The sound was sudden and shocking, an angry animal noise which grew louder as the mummy started to rampage further through the room. With outstretched arms, it lashed furiously at the displays of Egyptian treasure…all the precious things that had been stolen from *his* tomb.

Sir Gordon and Mr Cowley clung to each other in terror while the mummy smashed the head off a statue

with a final snarling roar, and then lurched towards the doorway. It was halfway out when it paused and turned its neck with a creaking sound, until it was gazing directly at Doogie.

Doogie might have been mistaken but it looked as if the mummy only had one eye.

It was either that, or the monstrous thing had winked at him.