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# THE GRIM PASSENGER



**B**ECAUSE of the ridicule generally attaching itself to anyone admitting the possibility of the supernatural, I have until now refrained from setting forth the details of certain events which apparently led to a widely known and regretted disaster in mid-Atlantic several years ago. But the opening of the tomb of King Tut-Ankh-Amen and the attending publicity brought the matter back to my mind, and I shall offer it to the public to believe or not as it chooses. Even now I do not admit that there was anything supernatural about it; that there was something strange and terrible about it no one will deny.

For obvious reasons, certain names have been omitted or changed, but with these exceptions I have related everything exactly as it occurred. In my position as secretary to the president of the B——— Museum of London I have charge of the sending out of expeditions in search of valuable specimens, ancient and otherwise. For some time during the year of 19— we had been on the trail of a mummy-case supposed to contain the dead body of a certain king whose name is to be found in history of centuries long past. Creditable information having at last been obtained as to the

location of the tomb containing the mummy, I sent for a man whose name may be remembered even now as that of a famous museum supplier, a man who was well versed in such work and who was thoroughly dependable because of his matter-of-fact and common-sense nature. I shall call him Thomas D. Stevenson. Acquainting him with all the facts at my disposal, I gave him an order for such equipment as he would need and sufficient funds to cover all expenses of the trip. Two days later he left London for a spot not very far from that at which the present activities are taking place. Less publicity was given the matter, however, than at the present time because of reasons which concerned a slight difficulty in regard to the law.

After reaching his destination, Stevenson encountered obstacles in obtaining guides and other natives to help in the excavation. They were finally obtained, however, and after considerable effort the Englishman and his party located the long-lost tomb; within a few days the main entrance to the great vault was partially uncovered and preparations were made for opening it, when the natives suddenly drew off to one side, muttering and casting awestruck looks at the

door, which bore in ancient language an inscription that had been cut into the metal that formed the outer part. When Stevenson peremptorily ordered them back to their work, the head native approached him, tremblingly, and pointed out a little, dried-up old man who seemed to hold a position of importance among the others.

"Master," he said, "he has told us the meaning of the words and we are afraid."

"You fools!" Stevenson stormed. "What is there on that door to frighten men living hundreds of years after it was erected?"

"It says," answered the cowed native, "that he who sleeps there has left his spirit to guard his body and that any who touch it shall die."

"Damned nonsense!" roared the other, and went on trying to drive the men back to their work.

But neither threats, cajolery nor offers of higher pay would move them. The little old man had frightened them with his translation of the words on the door, and the inbred superstitions of generations did the rest.

Seeking a full solution of the problem, Stevenson asked the old native for a translation of the warning, and this is what he heard: "Turn ye away lest ye become as I. On them who heed not my warning shall my curse fall, and it shall so be until my body rests again undisturbed."

At the bottom of these words was a seal bearing the profile of a crowned head. Even Stevenson felt a vague uneasiness and misgiving at this, but he shook off his doubts with a laugh at his momentary weakness, and again attempted to force the men to the work. Finding them determinedly against it, he dismissed them and set about getting other aid, which was no small matter in that out-of-the-way place.

Finally a nondescript outfit of drifters and ne'er-do-wells was assem-

bled and the vault was opened. To the relief of Stevenson and the disappointment of the men, there was very little treasure found, although this is now believed to have been in a second vault near by. The much desired mummy-case, however, lay in state on a terraced stonework, covered with symbols and signs which later proved to be an almost complete history of the life of the dead king. On closer examination Stevenson was startled to find reproduced in the center of the case the identical warning that had been seen on the door. For a moment the Englishman had an almost overpowering impulse to drop the whole thing and return to England and the museum empty-handed; he quickly stifled this and curtly gave the order that started the body of the dead monarch on its journey far from his wished-for resting place to the bustling, unmindful city of London.

Then began the journey to the nearest seaport. Singularly restless and impatient for one of his stolid nature, Stevenson rushed his men, already tired from work, until fever set in and delayed him while he attended to the sick. Instead of yielding to rest and recognized remedies the fever took a more malignant form, and before the party reached their port five men had succumbed. The others, a curious fear having descended upon them, cursed the mummy, Stevenson and the expedition heartily and impartially, nor did they lose any time in severing their connection with the outfit, once the mummy-case was on board ship and their pay was in their pockets.

STEVENSON, his mind wearied and in a turmoil from the trying happenings of the preceding weeks, turned in at his hotel hoping to enjoy a good rest, but instead tossed and turned throughout most of the night. Arising early, preparatory to embarking on his ship, he was astonished

to find a local police official awaiting him.

"What is it?" demanded the Englishman brusquely, short-tempered from worry and lack of sleep.

"Sir, it is that we wish you to identify some bodies," answered the smiling, suave official, as if he were suggesting a stroll in the cool of the morning.

"Bodies?" gasped the other. "Whose—what bodies?"

"Sir, they are five men who are said to have come with you from Z----- yesterday. Last night they became very drunk in one of the places down on the old docks, and started a brawl in which several were hurt and three of your party were killed; the other two attempted escape when our men arrived, and were fatally wounded before they submitted to arrest. One died at once and the other but a few minutes ago."

It was with an effort that Stevenson shook off the depression that this news brought to him, and complied with the police regulations in identifying the dead men and giving his rather slight knowledge of each one. This done, he hurried back to his hotel and at once proceeded to his ship, endeavoring all the time to shake off a foreboding that had begun to be a very part of his mind. Insistently the thought hammered itself into his every waking moment and brought him sinister dreams, that of all the men who had entered the forbidden tomb and had defied the warning that had protected the dead king for centuries, he alone still lived. Again and again he told himself that the deaths were accidental and in the course of natural events. Fever was a common thing, and scores of men were killed in just such quarrels as had occurred on the preceding night. Then before him would come a vision of the mummy-case with its silent warning, and his bolstered-up confidence and courage would fall like a house of cards.

He had been guiltier than the men who helped him in violating that warning. How long would he escape the vengeance of the power that had taken the lives of the rest?

Already unwell from his efforts in the desert, Stevenson rapidly became worse, until by the time his ship had reached England he was a mental and physical wreck. Then it was that we of the museum heard of his plight and went to his aid, removing him to a hospital and the mummy-case to the basement of the museum.

At the bedside of the sick man several of the lesser officials of the institution listened to his story, but when he related the details of the horrors that had attended every moment since the removal of the dead king from the tomb, they raised their eyebrows and nodded to each other in expression of their belief that the heat and the solitude had been a little too much for him. Little attention was paid then, when at the close of his narrative Stevenson raised himself up on one shoulder and, his eyes gleaming in a fierce, unnatural way, cried out, "Don't let them keep the mummy! Have him taken back! Take him back before it is too late!" An attendant rushed up quickly, and soothingly pushed the sick man back into his bed, while the others withdrew, hardly giving a second thought to the words of the man they had just left, feeling only a natural sorrow at the affliction which his long stay in the tropics had brought him.

Two days later Stevenson died, raving about the mummy and uttering warnings to the effect that it should be taken back to the tomb. His words were ascribed to delirium, and no attention was paid to them at the time.

Then the mummy-case was brought to the central exhibition room and placed within a case especially prepared for it. While someone was studying the symbols on the case the inscription was noted and its meaning

found by referring to our records of ancient languages. But the thing was taken more as a joke by everyone in the museum than as anything of serious meaning.

And then, without farther warning, tragedy invaded the museum itself. For the very next morning the night watchman was found dead directly in front of the mummy-case, his eyes wide open, with a look of mortal terror in them, while his face was rigid and drawn with fear, as if the man had died while looking on something so dreadful that his mind had instantly become crazed even as his overtaxed heart burst from horror.

No reason could be assigned, and after a searching investigation a verdict was reached by the coroner's jury that death was due "to failure of the heart, the unnatural pose in which the dead man was found to be due to his fear at dying, being added to by the darkness and silence in which he was when the attack seized him". This was most unsatisfactory, but no other explanation was forthcoming.

Hardly had we recovered from this shock when, early one afternoon, I was startled to hear the sound of a fall, and rushing into the president's room, I found him lying on the floor, breathing his last.

As I raised his head up from the floor, the dying man gasped out, "Send back the mummy—send him back to—"

Before he could finish the words, he sank back limply. A quickly summoned doctor pronounced his death due to a nervous disorder that had affected the heart.

**T**HAT ended the stay of the mummy in the museum. Before another day we had it carried to the basement, although it was with difficulty that we could prevail on anyone to go near the now greatly feared body. Arrangements were under way for sending it back to its former rest-

ing place when we received a call from Basil G. Stoddard, the representative of an American museum of no small fame. Mr. Stoddard wished to see the cause of the mysterious events, which had by that time been well discussed in the newspapers. He was insistent, and I finally gave in to the extent of allowing him to enter the room where we had locked up the mummy-case. The upshot of it all was that he decided to buy it from us, although we told him every known happening that had been attributed to its baleful influence.

"I do not believe any of the deaths were caused by this dried-up old body," he said. "As for the warning, it was only a natural desire to keep robbers from prying into his tomb that caused him to take such a course. Knowing the superstitious nature of the people, he saw that such a caution would be his best protection. The value to me and to the institution I represent is in the mummy itself and the case, which has certain unusual figures worked into it."

"Well, I shall be glad to be rid of it," I returned. "I do not like to believe that there is anything connecting the deaths and the mummy itself which cannot be explained by psychology of fear, but at any rate we shall all breathe more easily when the thing is no longer under our care."

Just one week later Stoddard sailed for New York. With flags flying bravely, bands playing inspiring music, and hundreds of passengers waving good-bye to their friends on shore, the then largest ship of her class slowly dropped down stream and commenced her maiden voyage. With not a thought of anything but a wonderful journey before them on that floating palace, the passengers began their customary plans for shortening the time and making it most agreeable.

There was but one exception to this. One passenger lay deep in the hold, unmoving, apparently an inanimate,

though rather gruesome, bit of cargo. But who knows but that there radiated from that dead body a terrible malevolence which was destined to bring death and disaster to the gay crowds that thronged the decks above? Who knows but that this malevolent influence—all-powerful because of centuries through which it had existed and grown—perhaps penetrated to the minds of those who guided the destinies of the great ship? That it did not give to the captain of the vessel an all-consuming desire to break the highest records for speed to the American port? And that this desire would render him careless of danger, of reports of drifting icebergs, causing him to drive his ship farther and farther into peril?

Who knows but that this influence (if such there was), vicious, unpity-

ing and ruthless in its desire for vengeance at its violated warning, perhaps swerved each mind to its purpose, even reaching up to the lookout in the crow's nest and making him slow in seeing that vast floating danger which loomed up in the path of the ship carrying those precious souls, until the colossal mass of ice crashed into the oncoming ship, crushing it like a shell and dooming many of those on board to death or separation from loved ones and the others to terrible memories that will live with them forever?

And perhaps as that once proud ship settled below the waves to its final resting place the dead king exulted in fiendish triumph as he went down to rule over the world of dead about him in that greatest of tombs, the steamship *Titanic*.