

Tutankhamun

Nick Drake

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Extract

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Cast List

Rahotep – Seeker of Mysteries, Chief Detective in the Thebes
Medjay (police force)

His family and friends

Tanfert – his wife

Sekhmet, Thuyu, Nedjmet – his daughters

Amenmose – his baby son

Thoth – his baboon

Khety – Medjay associate

Nakht – noble

Minmose – Nakht's servant

The royal family

Tutankhamun – Lord of the Two Lands, the 'Living Image of
Amun'

Ankhesenamun – Queen, daughter of Akhenaten and Nefertiti

Mutnodjmet – aunt of Ankhesenamun, wife of Horemheb

The palace officials

Ay – Regent, and 'God's Father'

Horemheb – General of the Armies of the Two Lands

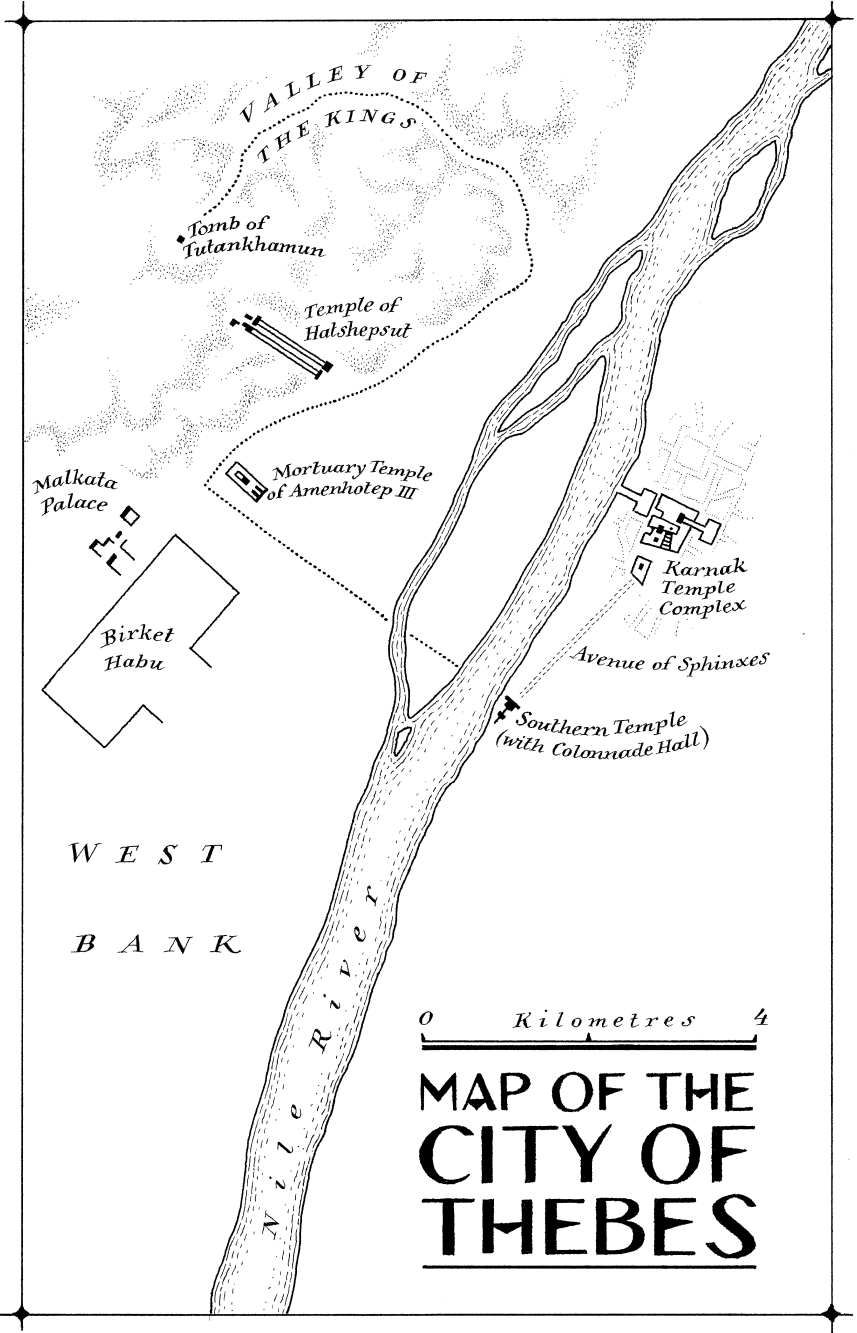
Khay – Chief Scribe

Simut – Commander of the Palace Guard

Nebamun – Head of the Thebes Medjay

Maia – wet nurse to Tutankhamun

Pentu – Chief Physician to Tutankhamun



VALLEY OF THE KINGS

Tomb of Tutankhamun

Temple of Hatshepsut

Mortuary Temple of Amenhotep III

Malkata Palace

Birket Habu

Karnak Temple Complex

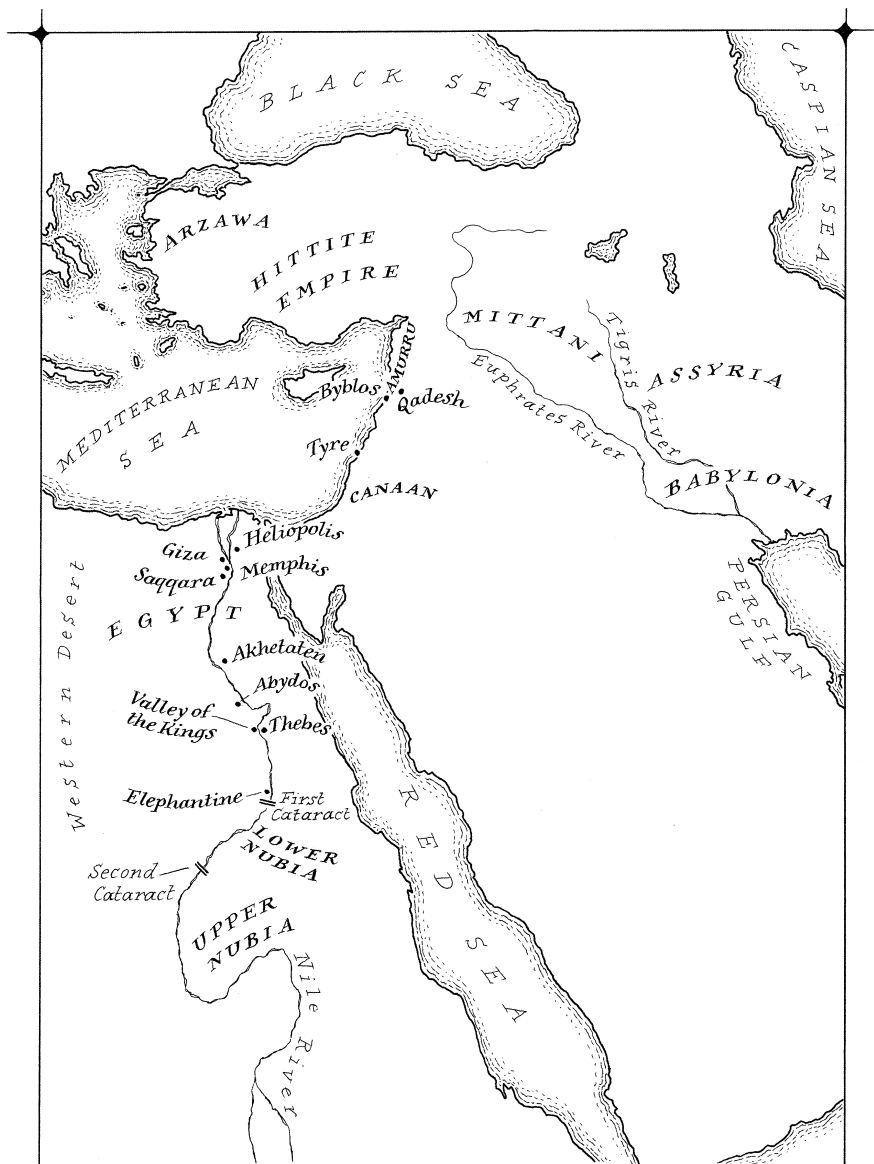
Avenue of Sphinxes

Southern Temple (with Colonnade Hall)

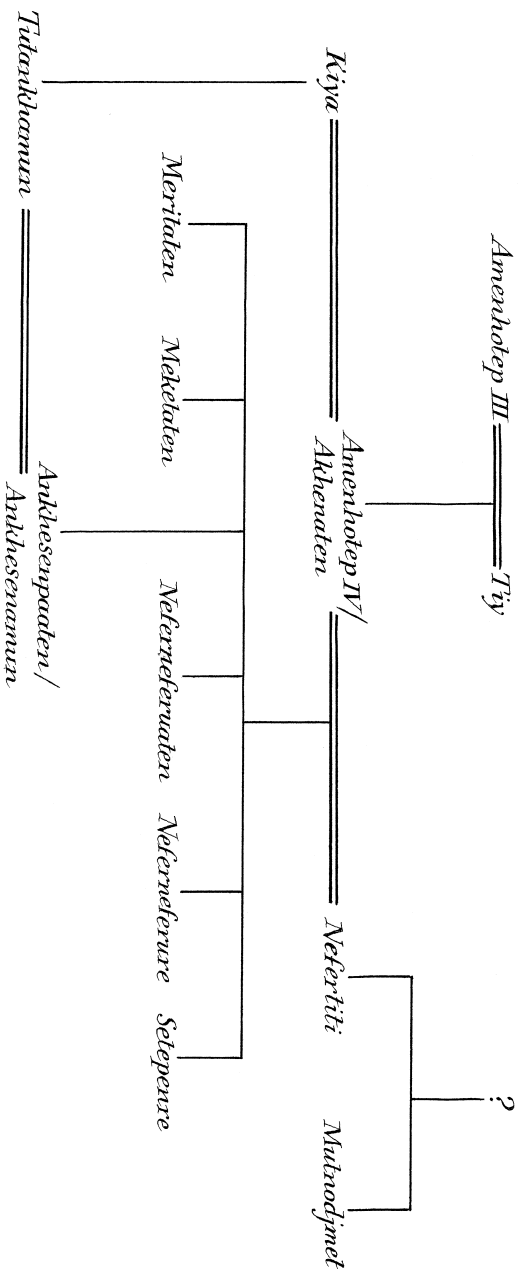
WEST
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MAP OF THE CITY OF THEBES



THE KINGDOM OF EGYPT IN THE 18TH DYNASTY



DYNASTIC FAMILY TREE

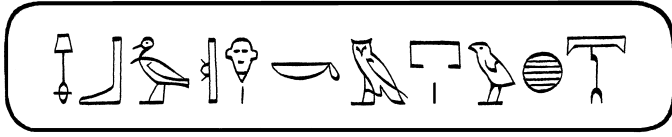
Now when His Majesty was crowned King, the temples and the estates of the gods and the goddesses from Elephantine as far as the marshes of lower Egypt had fallen into decay. Their shrines were fallen into ruin, become mere mounds overgrown with grass. Their sanctuaries were as if they had not yet come into being, and their buildings were footpaths. The land was in chaos. The gods had turned their backs upon it. When an army was sent to northern Syria to extend the boundaries of Egypt, it had no success. If one prayed to a god to ask something from him, he did not come at all. If one beseeched any goddess in the same way she did not come at all. The gods' hearts were faint in their divine statues. What had been made had been destroyed.

From the Restoration Stela, set up in the temple complex at Karnak in the early years of Tutankhamun's reign

Part One

I know you, I know your names

Coffin Texts
Spell 407



1

*Year 10 of the reign of King Tutankhamun, Living
Image of Amun*

Thebes, Egypt

Three short knocks. I listened to the silence that followed, my heart thudding in reply. Then, to my relief, came the familiar last short knock of the signal. I let my breath out slowly. Perhaps I was getting old. It was still dark, but I was already awake, for sleep had betrayed me once again, as it often does in the melancholy small hours before dawn. I rose from the couch and dressed quickly, glancing at Tanefert. My wife's head was resting elegantly on its sleeping stand, but her beautiful, disturbed eyes were open, observing me.

'Go back to sleep. I promise I will be home in time.'

I kissed her lightly. She curled into herself like a cat, and watched me leave.

I drew back the curtain and looked for a moment at my three sleeping girls, Sekhmet, Thuyu and Nedjmet, on their beds, in their shared yellow room crammed with

clothes, old toys, papyri, slates, drawings from their childhood, and other objects whose significance eludes me. Our house is too small now for such grown girls. I listened for a moment to the rattle of my father's strained breathing in his room at the back. It ceased for a long moment, but then another breath worked its way laboriously through his old body. Lastly, as always before I leave the house, I stood beside my young son, Amenmose, sleeping entirely peacefully, his limbs thrown every which way like a dog before a fire. I kissed him on his head, damp with warmth. He did not stir.

Taking my night passes with me, for the curfews were in force, I closed the door soundlessly. Thoth, my clever baboon, loped over to me from his sleeping place in the yard, his short, tufted tail curved upwards, and he rose on his hind legs to greet me. I let him smell my palm, then ran my hand through his thick, brown mane. I made a brief gesture of libation to the little household God in the niche, who knows I do not believe in him. Then I opened the gate and stepped into the shadows of the lane, where Khety, my assistant, was waiting for me.

'Well?'

'A body has been found,' he said quietly.

'And you woke me for that? Could it not wait for dawn?'

Khety knows how bad my mood can be when I am disturbed too early.

'Wait until you see it,' he replied.

We set off in silence. Thoth strained on his leash, excited to be out in the dark, and eager to explore whatever lay ahead. It was a beautiful clear night: the hot harvest season of *shemu* had ended, and with the appearance of the sign of Sirius, the Dog Star, the inundation had arrived to overflow the banks of the Great River, and flood the fields with

rich, life-giving silt. And so once again the time of festival had returned. In recent years the waters often did not rise far enough, or else they rose too much, causing vast devastation. But this year they had been ideal, bringing relief and joy to a population subdued, even depressed, by these dark times of the reign of Tutankhamun, King of Upper and Lower Egypt.

The bright face of the moon cast enough light for us to walk as if she were our lamp. She was almost full, with the great drift of stars about her like a fine mantle: the Goddess Nut who the priests say our dead eyes will gaze upon as we lie back in the little boats of death that carry us across the ocean of the Otherworld. I had been brooding about this as I lay sleeplessly on the couch, for I am one who sees the shadow of death in everything: in the bright faces of my children, in the overcrowded ways of the city, in the golden vanity of its palaces and offices, and always, somehow, in the corner of my eye.

‘What do you think we see after death?’ I asked.

Khety knows he must humour my occasional philosophical musings, as he must humour so much else. He is younger than me, and despite the grim things he has seen in his life of service in the Medjay, his face has somehow preserved its openness and freshness; and his hair, unlike mine, remains naturally as black as midnight. He is still as fit as a thoroughbred hunting dog, with the same passion for the hunt – so different from my own pessimistic and often weary nature. For as I grow older, life seems to me simply an endless succession of problems to be solved, rather than hours to be enjoyed. ‘What fun I am these days,’ I reproached myself.

‘I think we see green fields, where all the pompous aristocrats are slaves and all the slaves pompous aristocrats, and all I have to do all day is hunt ducks in the reed

marshes and drink beer to celebrate my glorious success.'

I let his jest pass unacknowledged.

'If we are supposed to see anything at all, why do the embalmers push onions into our eye sockets? *Onions!* The bulb of tears . . .'

'Perhaps the truth is we see the Otherworld only in our mind's eye . . .' he replied.

'Now you are sounding like a wise man,' I said.

'And yet those who have been born into wealth laze about all day enjoying their luxuries and their love-affairs, while I still work like a dog, and earn nothing . . .'

'Well, that is a much greater mystery.'

We passed through the maze of old, narrow passageways zigzagging between precarious houses built to no plan. By day this quarter would be noisy and crowded, but by night it was silent under the curfew: the expensive shops and their luxury offerings were protected behind shutters like the grave goods of a tomb; the carts and stalls of the Alley of Fruit had gone for the night; and the workshops of wood, leather and glass were deserted and shadowy; even the birds in their cages hanging in the moonlight were soundless. For in these dark days fear keeps everyone in obedience. The disastrous reign of Akhenaten, when the royal court and temples were moved from Thebes to the new desert temple city of Akhetaten, collapsed ten years ago. The powerful priests of Amun, who were displaced and dispossessed under Akhenaten, had their authorities, vast landholdings and incalculable worldly riches reinstated. But this did not restore stability; for harvests were poor, and plague killed countless thousands, and most believed these disasters were punishment for the grave errors of Akhenaten's reign. And then as if to prove the point, one by one the royal family died: Akhenaten himself, five of his six daughters, and finally

Nefertiti, his Queen of great beauty, whose last days remain a cause of much private speculation.

Tutankhamun inherited the Kingship of the Two Lands at the age of nine; and he was then immediately married to Ankhesenamun, the last surviving daughter of Akhenaten and Nefertiti. This was a strange but necessary alliance, for they were both children of Akhenaten, by different mothers; and as the last survivors of their great dynasty, who else could be crowned? But they were merely children; and it was Ay, the Regent, 'God's Father' as he was officially entitled, who since then ruled implacably, establishing his rule of fear, through officials who seemed to me loyal to fear alone. Unreal men. For a world with so much sun we live in a dark place, in a dark time.

We arrived at a house that was no different from most of the others in this quarter: a high crumbling mud-brick wall to defend it from the narrow lane, a doorway with one old, warped wooden door ajar, and beyond it the simple mud-brick house, several floors of new accommodation stacked precariously on top of each other – for there is no space to spare in the overcrowded city of Thebes. I tied Thoth to a post in the courtyard, and we went inside.

It was hard to guess the victim's true age; his face, almond-shaped, almost elegantly delicate, was both young and old, and his body was that of a child but also that of a crone. He might have been twelve or twenty years old. Normally his poor bones would have been twisted and bent into each other from the lifelong errors of his crippled body. But I could see, in the dim light cast by the oil lamp in the wall niche, that they had been broken in many places, and rearranged, like the fragments of a mosaic. I carefully raised his arm. It was as light as

a snapped reed pen; the fractured bones made it both jagged and floppy. He was like a strange doll made of fine linen and broken sticks.

He had been laid out in funereal fashion, his crooked legs straightened, his thin, uneven arms crossed, his clawed hands like a falcon's talons prised open, and laid over each other. His eyes were covered with leaves of gold, and the Eye of Ra, in black and green, had been drawn around them. I carefully lifted the leaves away. Both his eyes had been removed. I stared at the mystery of the empty sockets, and then replaced the gold leaves. His face was the only thing that had not been successfully rearranged, perhaps because its contortions – think how many muscles it takes to make a smile – could not be persuaded from their habitual lopsided grin by the hammers and tongs and other instruments that must have been used to reshape the imperfect material of this body. That grin remained like a little victory in the face of so much cruelty. But of course, it was no such thing. His pale skin – a sign that he had rarely been allowed into the sun – was cold as meat. His fingers were long and fine, the carefully clipped nails undamaged. His twisted hands seemed to have been little use to him in life, and not to have struggled against his grotesque fate. Strangely there were no marks of binding on his wrists or ankles or neck.

What had been done to him was vicious and cruel, and would have required considerable physical strength, as well as knowledge and skill in anatomy; but it wouldn't necessarily have killed him. I had once been called to a victim of the gang wars in the poor suburbs. The young man had been rolled in a reed mat, with his head exposed, the better to observe his own punishment, which was to be beaten with heavy clubs. I still remember the look of terror on his face as the mat, dripping with his own blood,

was slowly unrolled, and his body fell apart, and he died.

Most murder victims reveal the story of their end in their postures and in the marks and wounds inflicted upon their bodies. Even their expression still sometimes speaks, in the clay-like emptiness of death: panic, shock, terror – all these register, and remain in traces for a while after the little bird of the soul, the *ba*, has departed. But this young man seemed unusually calm. How so? A thought occurred: perhaps the murderer had placated him with some kind of narcotic. In which case he must have knowledge of, or access to, pharmacopoeia. Cannabis leaf, perhaps; or else the lotus flower in an infusion of wine? But neither would have had more than a mild soporific effect. The root of the mandrake plant, when extracted, is a more powerful sedative.

But this level of violence, and the sophistication of its concept, suggested something even more potent. Possibly the juice of the poppy, which could be obtained if you knew where to go. Stored in vases shaped like inverted poppy-seed pods, it was imported only by the most secret routes into the country, and most of the crop was known to be cultivated in the lands of our northern enemies, the Hittites, with whom we are engaged in a long war of attrition for control of the strategically vital lands that lie between our empires. It was a forbidden, but highly popular, luxury commodity.

The victim's room, which was located on the ground floor, giving directly on to the yard, was as characterless as a store chamber. There were few mementos of the boy's short, private life, other than some rolled papyri and a rattle. A simple wooden stool was set in the shadows from where he could have watched the passing life of the street through the frame of the doorway – and through which

his murderer could have easily entered in the darkness of the night. His crutches leaned against the wall by the bed. The mud floor was swept clean; there were no traces of the murderer's sandals.

Judging from the house and its location, his parents were of the lower bureaucratic class, and they had probably kept their son hidden from the critical and superstitious eyes of the world. For some people believed such infirmities signalled abandonment and rejection by the Gods, while others believed they were a mark of divine grace. Khety would interrogate the servants and take statements from the family members. But I already knew he would turn up nothing; for this killer would never allow himself to commit any mundane errors. He had too much imagination, and too much *flair*.

I sat in silence, considering the strange puzzle set out before me on the couch, intrigued and confounded by the deliberate strangeness of the act. What the killer had done to the boy must be a sign of something else: an intention or a commentary, written on the body. Was the cruelty of the act an expression of power? Or was it, perhaps, the expression of a contempt for the imperfections of flesh and blood, signalling some deep need for a greater perfection? Or, more interestingly, did the boy's possible similarity to the King, with his own infirmities – although I had to remember these were but rumours – have a specific implication? Why had his face been painted as Osiris, God of the Shadows? Why had his eyes been removed? And why, strangely, did all this remind me of an old ritual of execration, in which our ancestors used to damn their enemies, first by smashing clay tablets on which were written their names and titles, and then by executing and burying them, decapitated, upside down? Here was sophistication, and intelligence, and

meaningfulness. It was almost as clear as a message. Except it was in a language I could not yet decipher.

And then I saw something. Around his neck, hidden under his robe, was a strip of exceptionally fine linen on which hieroglyphs had been written in beautiful ink. I held the lamp up. It was a protection spell, specifically for the deceased during the night passage through the Otherworld in the Ship of the Sun. It concluded: *'Your body, Oh Ra, is everlasting by reason of the spell.'*

I sat very still, considering this rare object, until Khety coughed discreetly at the entrance to the boy's chamber. I put the linen away in my robe. I would show it to my old friend Nakht, noble in wealth and character, expert in matters of wisdom and spells, and in so much else besides.

'The family are ready to meet you,' he said.

They were waiting in a side room lit by a few candles. The mother was rocking and keening quietly in her grief; her husband was sitting in uncomprehending silence beside her. I approached them, and offered my futile condolences. I nodded discreetly to the father, and he accompanied me out to the little courtyard. We sat down on the bench.

'My name is Rahotep. I am Chief Detective in the Thebes Medjay division. My assistant Khety will need to talk to you in greater detail. I'm afraid it is necessary, even at a time like this. But tell me, did you hear or notice anything unusual last night?'

He shook his head.

'Nothing. We keep no night guard, for everyone here knows us, and our house is not rich. We are ordinary people. We sleep upstairs, for the cool air, but our son slept here, on the ground floor. It was much easier for him if he wished to move about. And he liked to watch what was going on in the street – it was all he saw of

the life of the city. If he needed us in the night, he would call.'

He paused, as if listening to the silence in the hope of hearing his dead son's voice calling. 'What sort of man would do this to a boy of such simple love and soul?'

He looked at me, desperate for an answer. I found I did not have one that would help at all, at this moment.

The vivid grief in his eyes had changed suddenly into the desperate purity of revenge.

'When you catch him, give him to me. I will kill him, slowly and mercilessly. He will learn the true meaning of pain.'

But I could not promise him that. He looked away, and his body began to shudder. I left him to the privacy of his grief.

We stood in the street. The eastern horizon was swiftly turning from indigo to turquoise. Khety yawned widely.

'You look like a necropolis cat,' I said.

'I'm as hungry as a cat,' he replied, once he had finished his yawn.

'Before we think of breakfast, let's think about that young man.'

He nodded. 'Vicious . . .'

'But strangely purposeful.'

He nodded again, considering the almost visibly changing darkness at his feet, as if it might provide him with a clue.

'Everything's upside down and back to front these days. But when it comes to mutilating and rearranging lame, helpless boys . . .' He shook his head in amazement.

'And on this day, the biggest day of the festival . . .' I said, quietly.

We let the thought settle between us for a moment.

'Take statements from the family and servants. Check the room for anything we might have missed in the dark . . . do it while it is all still fresh. Find out if the neighbours saw anyone unusual hanging around. The killer selected this boy carefully. Somebody may have seen him. And then get off to the festival and enjoy yourself. Meet me back at headquarters later.'

He nodded, and turned back into the house.

Taking Thoth by his leash, I walked away down the lane and turned into the street at the end. The God Ra had just appeared above the horizon now, reborn from the great mystery of the Otherworld of night into a new day, silver-white, spreading his sudden, vast brilliance of light. As the first rays touched my face it was instantly hot. I had promised to be at home with the children by sunrise, and I was already late.