

The Mummy's Foot

By Jessie Adelaide Middleton

Nothing would induce me to write the full story of the mummy at the British Museum, though an Egyptian friend has given me some information which throws a little further light on the matter. I think the subject is one to be left severely alone, and I only wish the late Mr. Fletcher Robinson, whom I knew, had thought so too, and consequently avoided it.

In the beginning of this year, however, I was involved in a strange episode concerning a mummy's foot, the scene of which was the house at Hampstead in which I am now writing, which is quite modern, and, to say the least of it, the most "unghostly" place I have ever met with.

Last New Year's Eve, Miss Westwood, a girl friend who was staying with us, went to a New Year's patty, after the theatre, at the Moulin d'Or Restaurant in Church Street, Soho. Among the guests was a traveller who had been in the East a great deal and spoke several languages. I will call him Mr. Stanhope, though that is not his real name. Just before the clock struck twelve, he took from his pocket a mummy's foot and held it up, saying, "Which of you would like to have this for a mascot?" The girls who were there all uttered exclamations of horror and disgust; the men laughed.

The foot—a woman's—was passed round and examined with awe and shuddering. It was in beautiful condition, every toe and even the nails being perfect, in colour dark brown, almost black with age and bitumen, but having scraps of the cerement cloth still clinging to it. The shape was slender, the foot beautifully formed, the size hardly larger than that of a child, though, of course, it was much shrunken. Mr. Stanhope said that, according to the hieroglyphics on the coffin, it had been the foot of an Egyptian dancer.

When everybody had looked long enough at it, my friend Miss Westwood, who is very practical and matter-of-fact, and does not believe—did not, rather—in occult influence, said, "Let me have it—just for fun—just to see if it brings me any luck."

Mr. Stanhope, with an air of great relief—which they all took to be assumed for a joke—handed it to her.

"It will bring you luck—eventually," he said; "but you may have some bad luck just at first, before it does so. Are you nervous?"

"No," she said, "not a bit; I don't believe in things."

She wrapped the foot up in her lace handkerchief, and put it in her bag, and presently the party broke up. I gathered afterwards from her own lips all that had happened.

Miss Westwood arrived home with the mummy's foot in her bag, and as she was our guest I was sitting up for her. She took it out of her bag and showed it to me at once—much to my horror, for I am by no means in favour of such "mascots." To begin with, I think that to carry portions of an embalmed body about, however long ago they may have been entombed, is not only irreverent, but is downright desecration. Also, because I have known queer things about mummies and mummy influence; and the foot, though I examined it at first with great interest, repulsed me terribly.

"Do take it upstairs, if you must keep it," I said, "and never let me see it again while you are in the house."

Miss Westwood laughed and joked, and carried off the mummy's foot, which she put in a bookcase in her bedroom, which was on the floor above mine, making a niche for it by moving some of the books.

The next night, or rather early morning, she woke up suddenly with the feeling that there was some Presence in the room. It was, she described later, as if there was some one quite close to the bed, but she saw absolutely nothing. She sat up in bed, more terrified than she had ever been in her life, and instinctively called out, but not loudly. Her impression was, that as she called out there was no longer any cause for alarm, because the Presence was no longer there. The mummy's foot never entered her thoughts; in fact, she had forgotten its very existence, as she was not in the least bit superstitious.

So strongly did the incident fix itself on her mind that the first words she said to me when she came down to breakfast were, "I had such a strange experience in the night—it was just as if there was some one in my room. By the by, did you come in while I was asleep for anything, and go out quietly?"

These words made me feel very uncomfortable, for I had had exactly the same experience as she had herself, and related it to her; and then we compared notes and found that it had been at exactly the same hour, which was proved in each case by the church clock striking four. So disturbed was our rest for the fortnight that the mummy's foot remained in the house that we both longed to get rid of it. Not only were we awakened during the night with the eerie feeling that there was Somebody or Something moving quite close to us, but at all hours of the day there would come stealing over the house the horror of an invisible malign Presence, which terrified us even more than anything more tangible would have done. The impression was like "darkness that can be felt"; we saw nothing, and yet trembled with fear. "All imagination!" the sceptic will say; but it must be remembered that Miss Westwood, at any rate, was both sceptical and unimaginative, and it was only after several days that she suggested "it really must be something to do with the mummy's foot."

She thereupon decided not to keep it, and disposed of it as quickly as she could.

After that we had peace, and a cloud seemed lifted from the house.

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A few months later, Miss Westwood and I were both at a supper party at a friend's house at Hampstead, and met Mr. Stanhope, who also happened to be there, with his wife. After greeting him, Miss Westwood said, "Well, it *was* kind of you to give me that mummy's foot; it is perfectly horrid, and has had a dreadful effect on us all."

"I told you it might bring you some bad luck before it brought you good," he said, "and if you had kept it I think it would have been lucky. But now you have sent it away I may as well tell you that there *was* something uncanny about it; so much so that I can say candidly that I was delighted when you accepted it that night at the Moulin d'Or."

"I stole the foot, as I told you, from an ancient tomb in Egypt, and it really is the foot of a dancer, for her history was told in the coloured inscription on the inside of the coffin. I brought it back with me to England because it was a really beautiful specimen, and I kept it with me because I rather like such things. I was not married then, and was living in rooms at Kensington. My landlady was a dear old soul, friendly and garrulous, and I had often stayed with her before. One evening last winter, when she was bringing up my

dinner, she was crying, and in answer to my questions told me that she was very worried about one of her children, whom she was sure was light-headed and must be ill or was going crazy. The child, she said, kept saying she saw a black naked foot peeping in and out from under the curtain of the kitchen dresser downstairs. She could talk of nothing else, and was simply terrified.

“ ‘Well, that is extraordinary,’ I said; ‘bring her up here after dinner and let me talk to her.’

“ ‘Yes, I will,’ said my landlady.

“After she had left the room I unwrapped the mummy’s foot and placed it on the mantelpiece in full view. Hitherto I had kept it locked away in a box out of sight.

“The landlady presently brought up the child, a pretty little girl of about three or four years old. I did not mention what her mother had told me, but talked to her about dolls and kittens and various other things children like. As we were chatting she looked with childish curiosity about my’ room, and suddenly, as her eyes fell on the mantelpiece, she screamed out—

“ ‘Mother! mother! there’s the foot—there’s the foot!’ and began howling and screaming as if she saw a ghost.

“After that I felt it was time to part with it, for it was something more than a bit of a white elephant; for the child stuck to her guns, and described exactly how the foot used to appear and disappear under the curtain that hung round the lower part of the kitchen dresser, as if it was dancing. The way she told it—in simple, childish words—was sufficiently convincing, one could not but believe her; and she could never have heard of the foot at all, for I had kept it carefully locked up.

“When I met you at the Moulin d’Or I was wondering what I should do with it. By a sudden inspiration I made up my mind to offer it round as a mascot. Perhaps it was not a very considerate thing to do, after the child’s story, but these things do affect different people in different ways, and you might have experienced nothing at all. What *did* you experience, by the way? I am most curious to hear.”

When we told him, he said he was glad for our sakes we had parted with it. “All the same,” he added, “I wish I had left the thing safe in its coffin, instead of letting it go loose in the world. These things can be very devilish. It will be a lesson to me next time.”