

# The Mummy

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*What will wake the dead?*

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"Death doesn't exist. It never did.. Everything that happens before Death is what counts." -Ray Bradbury, "Something Wicked This Way Comes" \*\*\* It was late, and everyone else had gone home. There was no one to keep Sharon company. No one but the dead. Sometimes, when she was alone in the museum like this, she thought of the collection as something she could hear. Most of the artifacts were made to be vessels for some ancient god or spirit, after all, so the building should be crawling with the sounds of old ghosts and gods. If she listened carefully enough, would she hear the ancient priests touching the possessions they were buried with or caressing the outlines of their own mummified bodies? Would she hear them ask what became of their sacred tombs? Would she hear their prayers? She took her glasses off and pinched the brow of her nose. God, I've been working here too long, she thought. She drank her cold coffee and looked around the cluttered office. I should go home. It's too late to be here. Too late to be surrounded by all these dead people and their dead things. It wasn't that she didn't love the job; bigger museums had offered her jobs with better money and more prestige, but she always turned them down. She stayed because she wanted to be with the collection. But on nights like this, alone, in the dark, it was too easy to think of the building as her own tomb. She felt like one of the slaves buried with the old kings, tending the dead forever. Someone knocked on her office door. She jumped. "Dr. Hiller?" said a voice. She groaned; Marcus. She'd forgotten he was still in the building. "Come in," she said. He looked slightly sheepish standing in her doorway. He always did. "I finished in D-Gallery like you asked." He looked at the floor rather than at her, idly clicking the box cutter he used to remove the wire from the shipping crates. She always told him he'd lose a finger if he kept doing that. "Good," she said, moving papers around her desk in a meaningless way. "Is there anything else?". She thought. "Inventory the new artifacts for A-Gallery one more time. Then you can go. Make sure everything is in the right place. But don't touch anything this time." She still hadn't looked at him. Maybe if she didn't look at him he wouldn't ask. He made it as far as the door before turning around. Damn, she thought. "Dr. Hiller, I was wondering—" "No." He blinked. "I didn't even finish?" "Would I like to join you for a drink after work? That's what you were going to ask, right?" "My friend is opening a new bar in the city tonight. We could drive up." "It's late." "We can still make the after-party." "You're my assistant, and it's not appropriate for us to date." "One drink?" "Is one too many. Go do inventory. Now." He shut the door very quietly behind him. Sharon

pinched the bridge of her nose again. A headache was coming on. Where was the rest of that coffee? She was in the middle of pouring and wondering whether falling asleep at your desk this many times per week was a warning sign of something or other when she heard Marcus screaming. She took the time to place the full coffee cup on her desk without spilling a drop before running out. She took the stairs to A-Gallery two at a time and, out of habit, inventoried the room with a sweep of her eyes as she entered: the sarcophagus of Lady Mesehti straight ahead, the entrance to the replica tomb to the right, the collection of canopic jars and mummified animals against the near wall. And against the back wall, the new relics from the tomb of Usermontu, vizier to Horemheb. Marcus was standing next to Usermontu's sarcophagus; the display case was open, and was the lid off. "Marcus! What the fuck are you doing?" "There's something in here! There's something in—oh my God, did you just swear? I've never heard you—" She pulled him away from the display. He nearly fell over. "Did you open the sarcophagus after I specifically told you not to touch anything? You put your hands on our brand-new, incredibly old, incredibly valuable, INCREDIBLY fragile—" "I thought I heard something moving in there. I was afraid a rat or something might have gotten in and damaged it, so I peeked." "You should have gotten me," said Sharon. She felt her face go red and realized she was clenching her hands into fists. "You really crossed the line this time. I can't cover for—" "There's a mummy," Marcus said. She stopped. "What?" "In the coffin. There's a mummy in there." Sharon blinked, then shook her head. "No there's not." "I just saw it, I was looking right at it. Hell, it was looking right at me. See for yourself." "This is just Usermontu's sarcophagus. Usermontu isn't in it. There were no remains when—" She looked inside. She screamed. Putting a hand to her heart, she backed away. "Told you," said Marcus. "Shut up" She looked again. The mummy lay with its arms folded. Its skin was black with bitumen, and there were no wrappings except for a few stray scraps of linen. Sharon exhaled in a rush. "Well?" said Marcus. "Well what?" "Is it real?" "Yes. ...I don't know. ...yes. Go to my office and find the number for the seller." "Why?" "No reason, I just thought that the man who sold us this artifact would want to know that he mislaid a 3,000-year-old dead body." Marcus checked his watch. "It's a three-hour time difference?" "People wake up for this kind of thing." She examined the mummy while Marcus was gone. It was in excellent condition, especially considering it had been unwrapped. It had fingernails, eyelids, and what looked like a few hairs on its scalp. The mouth was slightly open and the dried, flat stump of a tongue peeked out. One of its kneecaps was gone, but other than that it looked intact. It was an incredible find; but where the hell had it come from? There was no answer when she called the seller. She left a message saying that there was an urgent problem with the artifact and to please call back. Marcus brought a heavy flashlight from her office and she shone it over the body. Its sudden appearance felt like a third wheel, and for a for a while neither knew what to say. "For the record," Sharon said after a moment, "I haven't forgotten that you touched the display." "Got it." "I may still get you fired. I haven't decided yet." "Got it," he said again. "So did the other museum seriously not know they had a mummy in this thing?" "This came from a private collection, and yes, I would guess that they never knew. Very likely they never opened it. But that still doesn't explain how it got in there." Marcus circled it. "Maybe it's Usermontu?" "Couldn't be," said Sharon. "They'd have checked when they first recovered the coffin. Someone must have had a stray mummy

to stash at some point and just...stuck it in here. And this style looks all wrong for a Rammeside-era embalming anyway. I mean, that's just a preliminary guess, but look at the quality of the—" Marcus jumped. "Jesus!" Sharon looked up. "What?" "It moved!" She frowned. "Don't be silly." "Its hand moved. Look!" Marcus pointed. He'd gone pale, and his voice trembled. "It's your imagination. I do it all the time." "But I heard something move in the sarcophagus before I opened it, and now it just did it again. I know what I saw!" Sharon sighed. "Ignoring the very obvious fact that he's dead, his body would crumble to dust if there was so much as the slightest — " She stopped. Something was touching her wrist. It felt leathery and dry. She tried to talk but her voice cracked. She swallowed hard and tried again. "Marcus?" she said. He whimpered. "What's touching my hand?" "Why don't you look?" His eyes were wide as two hard-boiled eggs. "Because I don't want to look." Whatever it was, it squeezed her wrist harder. Marcus was hyperventilating. Sharon's blood froze. I don't want to look, she thought. I don't want to look. But she looked anyway. \*\*\* Sharon woke at the feet of Osiris. He wore the feathered crown, and he held the crook and the flail as he looked down at her with a blank, inscrutable expression. The walls were rough stone, and the light was dim and yellow. I'm in the tomb replica, she realized. There are the pillars, and there's the spirit door, and there's where three of the lights are burnt out and make a tripping hazard on the stairs. She rolled over and felt two hands pulling her to her feet. It was Marcus, smiling with just the corners of his mouth. Sharon had the mother of all migraines. "What happened?" she said. "You fainted," said Marcus. He had not taken his hands off of her yet. "Why are we in here?" "We're hiding," said Marcus. He smirked more, as if trying very hard not to laugh at a private joke. "From what?" said Sharon, though she already knew the answer. "It's out there walking around right now," said Marcus. "It looks lost, actually." "That's insane." "Maybe, but it still happened. You saw it." "I didn't," she said, too loud and too fast. "I didn't," she said again, quieter. "Then why did you faint?" "Stress. Lack of sleep. Overwork." "If you say so." Sharon put a hand to her head. "Why would we come in here to hide anyway?" "I thought maybe it would be afraid, you know, to come into a tomb that isn't its own." He shrugged. "Sounds crazy, but it's that kind of night. It didn't follow us, at least." His voice sounded strange, like he didn't know what emphasis to put on each word. "How long was I out?" said Sharon. "A few minutes." She shifted against him, realizing that he still had his arms around her waist. "Let me go please." "Why?" She looked at him. "Because I asked you to." "But it's not what you want." He backed her against the wall. The uneven plaster rubbed through her blouse. "What the hell are you doing?" she said. "What you want me to." He reached for the buttons on her blouse. "You'll never make a move on your own, so just let me do the hard part. Pretend you said no if it makes you feel better." "That kind of talk can land you in prison." "Can't, but won't." He popped a button. Sharon slapped him so hard her wrist ached. He backed away, pressing a hand to his face. "Jesus!" he said. "You don't have to take it that far. I was just playing around." She balled up a fist to hit him, but checked herself. "Playing around?" "I thought you liked it that way," he said, affecting casualness. She began hyperventilating. "You...arrogant, selfish, presumptuous, stupid—!" He burst into laughter. She'd never heard him laugh this way. He sounded like he'd lost his mind. Maybe he has, she realized. After all, he did tell her that the mummy got up and walked away. The mummy! "Quit fooling around," she said. "We need to

check on the condition of that artifact." "Don't go out there," Marcus said, giggling under his breath but more or less regaining his composure. "I really think it's dangerous." She paused at the tomb entrance. The gallery outside was dark, but she could see that the mummy was no longer in its sarcophagus. Had Marcus moved it? He came up behind her and whispered in her ear. "Forget that dead thing for a second. I'm alive, and I'm right here." "You must be drunk. Or insane. I've never heard you talk like this." She didn't turn around. "Not even in your dreams?" "Stop it." He was massaging her shoulders. It really did feel good. "I'm sorry about a second ago," he said. "You know I wouldn't try to hurt you. I was an ass. Let me make it up to you." He kissed the side of her neck. She shivered. "We have to call the owners," she said. "And try to call the buyer again, and—" "Later. The damn thing will still be dead when we're done." His arms wrapped around her. When he kissed her neck again something inside of her snapped. He cupped her breasts through her blouse and she turned, looking up at him...and then she grabbed him by the hair, pulling his mouth to hers. Hell with it, she thought, odds are we're both going to lose our jobs tomorrow anyway. She kissed him hard while pushing on his chest, backing him against the wall. She pinned his shoulders and kissed him again, their tongues tangling as she ground into him, feeling the line of their bodies mesh. He seemed flustered and out of breath very quickly. His touch was insistent but clumsy, and his kiss uncertain; it reminded her of middle school make-out sessions. Was Marcus really this inexperienced? She guided his hands, showing him how to take his time. His fingers ran up and down her back as she pulled off her blouse then tore his shirt off. Their naked skin touched for the first time. "You're pretty aggressive for someone who was saying no a few minutes ago." "Shut up," she said again, biting his neck and pulling him down with her. The tomb floor was uneven and her bare back chafed. She spent a few clumsy seconds unhooking her bra, then pressed Marcus' face to her bare breasts; he seemed tentative at first, but after a moment he sucked one of her nipples, catching it between his teeth so that she cried out in sudden pain, then soothing it with the flicking of his tongue. She looked up at the low ceiling, tinged yellow by the dim emergency lights, and put her hands over her head to give Marcus free range. What the hell am I doing, she thought? Well, really, she knew perfectly well what she was doing, and knew that really it had only been a matter of time, but why now? And why like this? The tomb felt tight and claustrophobic. She imagined being buried alive in here and then pushed the thought away. She loosened her belt and wriggled out of her pants, pushing them down her hips and wincing as the floor scraped the backs of her thighs. Her panties came down easily and she stuck Marcus' hand between her legs. He had a far-off look, but now the reluctance and confusion of a few minutes before had melted away. He stroked the length of her with two fingertips, teasing her outer lips and the delicate slit that parted them. She moaned, squirming, and ran her fingernails down his bare shoulders. "More," she said. "What's the magic word?" "Now," she said, digging her nails in. He pushed one finger all the way.. She groaned deep and a second finger joined the first, pumping in and out with a quick, driving motion. Her body lit up. Sharon let her head loll to one side, eyes rolled back as Marcus' other fingers glanced against her clit. Now she couldn't think, and she preferred it that way. He turned his wrist over halfway and she bit her lip, held it for a second, and then gave in, screaming, "Ohhh my God, you fucking bastard!" He stopped, as if unsure, so she wrapped her legs

around him and kicked the back of his calves with her heels, spurring him. He turned his wrist back the other way, twisting his fingers inside of her, and she felt herself drench him. The inside of her grew tighter and hotter. She put her hands over her mouth, groaning through her fingers "That's it you fucking bastard, fuck me." He looked startled. She pulled his head in again. "Come on Marcus," she said, "don't you want to talk dirty to me?" "I...don't know—" "Don't you want to call me a filthy tramp?" He licked his lips. "Yes." "What about a dirty whore?" He had not stopped pushing his fingers up inside of her. "Yes." "A cock-hungry slut?" "Yes," he said, and bit her lip. "Then fuck me. Now." Marcus took some time getting his pants down, and when he finally did he just stared at his cock, seemingly dumbfounded. What is wrong with him, she thought? He was acting like a man with a concussion, and it occurred to her that he really might not be in his right mind, that she might somehow be taking advantage of him. But before she could have any more second thoughts, he gripped himself by the base and pushed between her legs, finding the slippery wet entrance and gliding inside. He eased into a hard, persistent rhythm that rocked her against the floor. She knew her back would be killing her tomorrow, but she encouraged him anyway, continuing to give him little kicks with her heels to indicate when he should speed up. She had him going faster and faster, gradually. In the soft yellow light she saw beads of sweat standing out on his naked skin. Sharon felt the pulsing length sliding in and out. She felt it pushing the ache inside of her up and out, rising and rising until it spilled out of her mouth in a stream of moans and obscenities: "That's it you fucking little shit. Fuck me like the nasty little cunt whore that I am. Put me down on the ground and spread my legs and treat me like I deserve. Make me your filthy little fuck slave, Marcus." He tensed and quivered. It seemed the dirty talk was too much stimulation for him, as she felt a hot squirt inside of her. "That's it," she said, her mouth right next to his. "Fill me up. Fill me all up." Marcus shuddered and writhed, and she bucked with her hips, pushing up against him, drawing him close, holding him while his muscles flexed and contorted and he pumped into her again and again. She felt burning hot, and then a sudden, cold empty feeling as he finished, sliding out, sitting back and appearing stunned. She lay there, waiting for her heart to stop racing. Rolling over, she faced the wall. A blush spread over her cheeks. When her voice came to her she said: "I'm sorry. I don't know what came over me. I...wasn't myself." "You weren't yourself?" said Marcus. Then, his voice rising: "YOU weren't yourself?" And he began to laugh hysterically again. Sharon's face burned. She collected herself and dressed in silence. She wanted to hit him again. Instead she took several deep breaths and sorted out what to say next. "That wasn't at all what I expected," he said. "What just happened was a mistake. In fact, a lot of things that happened tonight were mistakes." He leaned against the wall, eyes half closed. It was hard to say if he was listening. She plowed on. "Since it's at least partly my fault, I won't cause any trouble for you, but I don't think it's appropriate that we work together anymore. I'll have you moved to someone else's project tomorrow. For tonight, let's just get all of this mess sorted out." She crossed her arms and waited. He didn't say anything. Eventually she said: "Well?" "Well what?" "Where is the mummy? How did you move it?" "I told you, it went for a walk all on its own." "We don't have time for this." He shrugged. "If you don't believe me, just turn around." "This is not funny." "No," he said, "it's not." And he turned her around. It was standing at the tomb

entrance, staring with empty eyes, reluctant to cross the threshold. There was a sound like dry leaves rustling and old timbers creaking as the mummy swayed, obviously pained to hold itself up. But it did stand. And it did move. "There we are," said Marcus. His voice sounded strange again, as though he were faking some kind of accent. "Satisfied? No, don't faint again, we don't have time. You," he pointed at the mummy, "go back out to the gallery please, and wait for us." The dead thing teetered out toward the gallery proper. The rustling of its dried flesh was audible the entire time. Sharon swooned and Marcus caught her. She buried her face against his chest and sobbed once or twice. "There now, it's okay," he said. "It's alive!" she said. "Not really," said Marcus. But it moved! It got up and, and—" she fumbled for words. "It's animated by what they call the akh, something like a ghost. A ritually preserved body is a vessel that the akh can hide in. That's how the old priests used to explain it, anyway. Of course, the akh can leave too. The akh hidden in a mummy can, for example, enter the body of a living person instead. If it's had thousands of years to plan such things." His voice became brittle. Sharon froze, her heart beating faster and faster. "What are you talking about?" "Just some fascinating tidbits for your research." He held on tighter, constricting her so that she couldn't move. "Marcus, what the hell are you doing?" "Marcus?" His eyes lit up. "No. I have rather enjoyed being Marcus for a few hours, though. I suspect I got more out of it than he ever did." Sharon pulled away, but Marcus (not Marcus, she realized, panicking) had too firm a grip. She was stronger than him, she knew, but he had leverage, height, and surprise in his favor. She tried to slap him again but her arms were pinned. "Now, now," he said, talking as though to a child. "There's no point in trying to hurt me. This isn't even my body, so I don't care what happens to it. If you want to help Marcus, the first thing you'll have to do is behave." He raised an eyebrow. She stopped struggling. "If I let you go, do you promise not to run?" Sharon gritted her teeth, but nodded. He let go. She backed away. He took two steps forward, arms out, but she held up a finger. "Stay right there," she said. "Don't come near me." I've been very near you already. But as you will." He sat on the plaster sarcophagus. Minutes passed. Sharon wrestled panic. Every time she was about to say something she looked at him and felt sick. He waited. Sharon took a deep breath and, without looking directly at him, said, "Who are you?" "My name is Ta'Awa." She hesitated before the next question. "Are you...the mummy?" He shrugged. "Not strictly. A mummy isn't a person, it's just a vessel for a soul. But yes, that mummy was made from my body, and I was in it for a long time. And now I'm out." He put his hands out to the side. "Ta-da." Sharon shook her head. "How do you speak English?" "The last owner of that mummy was an Englishman; I've listened to the language for decades. In fact, I know a lot of languages. You pick up on things, listening to people." "But what about Marcus? What did you do to him?" Her voice went up an octave. "Just traded places, until I decide to let him out. Which I will, shortly. I'm sorry about the pretense. I thought a scare would help put you in the mood." "In the mood? Wait a minute!" said Sharon, standing up straighter. "If you're not Marcus, then why did you...I mean we—we..." "Ah, yes, I can explain that." Sharon waited. Ta'Awa said nothing. "So?" she said. "Hmm?" "Explain!" Ta'Awa shrugged. "Look, it's been thousands of years and I saw an opportunity, what did you want me to do?" He examined his nails. "Besides, I thought this might be my only chance to see what it was like...as a man." He looked up. Sharon frowned, and then his meaning dawned on her. She gaped.

"Do you mean—?" "Surely you realized that 'Ta'Awa' is a feminine name?" "Oh. My. God." Sharon had to sit down. "God? Yes, you have a strange notion of gods these days. I was a priestess of Sekhmet for most of my life." "This can't be happening." "I'll admit the circumstances are a bit odd," said Ta'Awa. "But there's really nothing wrong with—" Sharon walked away. She heard Ta'Awa calling after her, but she ignored it, focusing on the entry to the gallery as though it were the only thing in the world. She was almost there when the skeletal figure blocked her path. At first she panicked but after thinking for a moment she stopped and said, "Marcus! Are you okay?" The mummy's leathery face was blank, incapable of expression. She wanted to touch him but was afraid of how fragile the body must be. "Can you hear me? Marcus!" "He can hear you," said Ta'Awa, emerging from the tomb behind them. "But he probably has no idea what's going on." Sharon backed away. Ta'Awa pointed to the mummy and said, "Rest." The mummy walked back to the sarcophagus, lying down inside and becoming still. Ta'Awa stood over the case, looking at the shrunken, skeletal thing. "Strange," she said, "to think this was once me." "Look, are you going to help him or not?" said Sharon. "Of course. It was fun to try, but I have no desire to remain in Marcus' body forever." "What then? What do you want?" "Can't you guess? I don't want Marcus' body, Sharon. I want yours." Sharon was stunned. Half a minute passed before she managed to gasp out, "What?" "You mean you didn't realize? There are only two bodies here, after all, and I don't want this one." "But why do you need any body at all? You're dead; you're ancient for crying out loud, why are you doing this?" They stood on opposite sides of the display now, the mummy stretched between them. "Because I'm awake in a way that I haven't been for centuries," said Ta'Awa. "I'm tired of eternal life. Now I want to live. You understand, don't you? You can't deny me that? You wouldn't be that cruel?" "But what will happen to me?" said Sharon. "Something wonderful. You'll sleep for ages, but you'll have the most divine dreams, and in your dreams you'll learn everything that goes on around you. You'll awaken some day, maybe in a hundred years, maybe in five hundred, maybe in thousands, and find a new world waiting for you. Doesn't that sound incredible?" Sharon said nothing. Ta'Awa leaned in. "Don't you want the promise of eternity? You can have it; I don't want it anymore. And what are you even giving up? How happy are you here? How happy have you ever been?" Sharon's head was spinning. She was confused, and scared, but a chance like this was never going to come again... Ta'Awa slid around to the other side of the display. "I know all about you," she said. "I know all of Marcus' thoughts. You're just like me, in a way: I spent my entire life tending to these same artifacts, to the bodies of the priests, to the images of the gods. It's emptying, isn't it? I never believed in the next world or the power of the spirits any more than you do. We just live for icons, you and I, placeholders of things that never existed." Sharon was afraid that if she talked she might cry, so she said nothing. Ta'Awa took her hand. "You have a choice, now. You can take my offer, and live the life of a goddess reborn. Or you can stay here, in your office, with your dead people and no one but naïve little Marcus to keep you—" Marcus! "No," Sharon said, backing away. "I don't trust you. And I don't want what you're offering me. I just want you to...go away. However it is you do that. Bring Marcus back, and go away. Now." Ta'Awa stepped forward, silhouetted under the dim late-night lights. "Then I'll just take your body by force, the way I did Marcus." "But then what will you do about him?" said Sharon. "He'll

know what happened and he won't give you any peace. You'll have to kill him to shut him up, and have the danger of getting caught hanging over your new life forever." "I—" said Ta'Awa, but then she stopped, perplexed. "Didn't think this through very well, did you?" Sharon said. Ta'Awa glared at her. Then, moving so fast that Sharon didn't have time to react, she hit her, the back of Ta'Awa's hand grazing Sharon's jaw. Sharon lost her balance and fell, and before she could stand Ta'Awa was on her, leaning all of the weight of Marcus' body on top of her. Sharon felt something press to the side of her neck and realized that it was Marcus' box cutter. She became very still. "Are you going to think your way out of this?" said Ta'Awa. Sharon spit in her face. Ta'Awa pushed the blade a little closer. "You're right, I don't know enough about the world yet to get away with murder, but I don't have to kill you. I can just make you wish I had. I know how to do things that won't even leave a mark but will have you screaming until you forget your own name. You think you're so—" Sharon brought her knee right up into (Marcus') crotch. Ta'Awa's eyes bulged, and Sharon grabbed her by the shoulders, rolling them both until Ta'Awa was on the bottom, pinned. The box cutter slipped out of Ta'Awa's hand and Sharon grabbed it. She pushed the point against Ta'Awa's throat. Ta'Awa exhaled hard and groaned. "Wow," she said. "That really does hurt." She looked at the blade pointed at her. "What are you planning to do with that? You know you can't hurt me. If you kill me, Marcus will be trapped forever." "Won't he be anyway? Or me instead? You're not going to let us both walk out of here, so what difference does it make? You might as well be dead if one of us is going to end up stuck no matter what." "But you can't kill anyone, you won't get away with it!" "I'll take my chances. I think I can get people to sympathize with how I fought off my attacker after he cornered me at work, late at night, alone, when everyone knows how many times I've fended off his advances. I think my odds are at least fair. What about yours?" They froze, glaring at each other. "You're bluffing," said Ta'Awa. "Hard to say. I'm willing to take my chances. Are you?" They stayed that way for a long time. Finally, the features of Marcus' face settled into a smirk, and Ta'Awa said, "Fine. I'll just put things back as they were." Sharon blinked. "You will?" "Sure. I'll put everything back and let you both go." "You're just giving up?" "What choice do I have?" Sharon shook her head. "I don't believe you." "That's your whole problem: For someone who spent her life studying history and eternity, you don't have much perspective. I can go back because I can afford to wait. I'll still be waiting when you and lover boy are dust in the ground. Some day I'll find a way out. But you? You'll be trapped here until you die, and unlike me you really will die. Don't feel too sorry for me, Sharon. I'll be dreaming about you while I sleep." And then she left. Nothing spectacular happened to mark the change; there was not even any alteration in Marcus' posture or demeanor, but rather just the barest flickering of expression, from Ta'Awa's resigned anger to Marcus' pained bewilderment. He looked up with glazed eyes and Sharon realized, with embarrassment, that she was still straddling his body. She rolled off and he sat up, wincing. "What the hell?" he said. She put her hands on his shoulders and shook him. "Marcus, is it you?" He blinked. "Yes?" "But is it REALLY you?" She shook him again. "It's me, it's really me;" he said, untangling himself from her. "Want me to prove it? You drink six cups of coffee a day; you always wear your red pumps on Tuesdays; you read cheesy romance novels on your break and think no one notices when you tear up over them; we first met on a bus coming from Daly City without



realizing we worked together; your middle name is Ginsburg because your father wanted to be a Beat; your favorite song is 867—" She put her hand over his mouth. "They stared at each other for a while. Then she said: "I do not tear up reading those books." Marcus was about to laugh, but at all at once he noticed the mummy again. Looking panicked, he grabbed the heavy flashlight, raising it up and preparing to dash the mummy's skull into fragments, but Sharon said, "Wait!" "Why?" said Marcus. "She's dangerous." "Yes. But what if what you're about to do doesn't kill her?" Marcus frowned. "Do you think?" "She said that a mummy is just a vessel for a soul. I don't want her soul out wandering around on its own. I don't even know what she'd do then." "So what are we doing to do about her?" Sharon looked at the mummy, considering. Then she said, "Nothing." "Nothing? But what are we going to tell everyone about what happened tonight?" "What happened tonight?" said Sharon. "Why, tonight we both took off early to have a drink at your friend's bar. We just made the after-party." Marcus blinked dumbly. "That party was over hours ago." "Really? I don't even remember. I guess we had a really good time." She shut the coffin lid and turned the lights off, and she and Marcus left, hand-in-hand. In the gallery, in the dark, something stirred. But a second later it was gone, and everything was still again. Still as the grave. \*\*\* The mummy it still there. Sharon Hiller and Marcus Greene abruptly resigned their positions the day after its arrival. They had one meeting with the museum owners, but no one except those present knows what was said there. When the sarcophagus' previous owner was contacted he said that he knew all about the mummy, and in fact he'd put it in there on purpose. He said that it should be considered a gift to the museum, and that he was "tired of dealing with it." He would elaborate no further. It is perhaps not surprising that the mummy became the focus of various superstitions, some facetious and some not, on the part of museum staff. More than one person has been caught staring at it, rapt, for minutes on end, unresponsive. More than one staff member has quit the museum following such an episode, though few say why. Those who have seen the mummy comment that it is so remarkably well-preserved, and its face so expressive, that at times it seems not to be dead at all, but only sleeping. Most are unnerved by this thought, since it stands to reason that anything that is sleeping will some day awaken. But if the mummy knows how long the sleep of the dead lasts, it keeps the secret to itself.