

Secrets of a Sun King

A girl from London becomes an unlikely heroine in a quest to break an ancient curse that threatens her family. Her quest takes her to Egypt. She forms good friendships along the way and solves mysteries about her life and the life of the young pharaoh, Tutankhamun, who lived 3000 years ago.

Author

Emma Carroll was born on 26th March 1970. She lives in Somerset with her husband and two Jack Russell terriers. She used to write stories as a child about ponies and pop stars. Later, she became a secondary school English teacher then left teaching to become a full-time writer. *Frost Hollow Hall* is her most famous book – it was the North East Book Award Winner 2013.

Historical context

In 1922, people in Britain were dealing with the aftermath of the First World War, such as losing loved ones, high unemployment and inequality. Poor people could not afford medical care and only 40% of women could vote. Howard Carter was a British archaeologist who discovered Tutankhamun's tomb shortly after Egypt gained independence from the British Empire.



Howard Carter

Characters

Lil

Lil is a working-class girl who has won a scholarship to a girls' school where she has difficulty making new friends. She worries about her grandad and will do anything to help him, such as keeping secrets, telling lies and facing danger.

Grandad

Grandad is a mysterious character who has secrets and regrets. He has a rarities and antiques shop and is a collector, so his house is always messy. Lil and her grandad are very close and share a love of ancient Egypt.

Tulip

Tulip is an adventurous, friendly girl who Lil meets at the British Museum. She comes from a wealthy family and shares Lil's interest in ancient Egypt. Tulip can be bossy and resourceful when putting a plan into action. She can also be brave and kind.

Lysandra

Lysandra is a scribe who lives in Egypt in 1323 BC. Her job is to write an account of everything that happens in the palace. She is friends with the young Tutankhamun and can interpret dreams.

Themes

- equality
- friendship
- putting right old wrongs
- respect
- secrets

Settings

London 1922

Lil lives in a flat in London. There are toilets, coal bunkers and mangles in the back yards. People have few clothes and little food.



Cairo

'I could smell Cairo: warm, dusty, animal dung, old apples.' Egypt is a feast for the senses with exotic sights, such as camels and mosques, the constant sound of mosquitoes and the scent of fig trees.



Valley of the Kings

The valley is silent with an unsettling atmosphere. It has a winding road along the bottom with sheer rock faces and huge boulders on both sides. The tombs of ancient pharaohs were built there.



Story timeline

These are some of the key chapters in the novel. When you read the chapters, use the questions as starting points for discussion.

Chapter 1

Lil's grandad is taken into hospital with a mysterious illness. She finds a parcel on his doorstep, which was sent by a man who had died earlier that day in peculiar circumstances. What mysteries has the author created so far?

Chapter 4

Lil finds out about a curse and a quest she must go on to save Grandad's life. How would you describe the relationship between Lil and her grandad?

Chapter 5

Lil reads a letter from Egypt that was written over 3000 years ago. It tells the story of the boy pharaoh, Tutankhamun, and his friends. What are your first impressions of Kyky?

Chapter 13

Lil discovers the rest of Kyky's story. Does anything surprise you in this chapter?

Chapter 23

Back at home, another secret is uncovered. Have all the mysteries been explained by the end of the novel?

Language

The novel is written in the first person. This allows the reader to know the main character's thoughts and feelings, such as *'a strange, shivery feeling came over me. I didn't want to go any further'*. The reader lives through the story with the main character. We find out things when she does and have similar reactions. Lil often asks herself a series of questions, such as *'Was the parcel moving? What was that rustling sound? Was the package unwrapping itself?'* These create a sense of urgency and add to the mystery as the reader does not know the answers either.

Structure

The novel tells the story of Lil in 1922 but it also tells the story of Kyky in 1323 BC. The ancient Egyptian story is told through a series of letters that Lil finds and reads. The author gives information about the customs and practices of ancient Egypt in these letters to help the reader visualise and understand the events that happened there.

Historical fiction

Historical fiction combines historical facts and fiction. In this novel, there are facts, such as Howard Carter discovering Tutankhamun's tomb and rumours of a curse that led to Lord Carnarvon dying from a mosquito bite. There is also fiction, such as the letters describing what happened in Kyky's last days and the explanation of what happened to his heart.

Literary terms

first person

A text in the first person is written from the main character's point of view. For example, *'I rubbed my eyes, like I was waking up from a dream of my own.'*

heroine

The heroine of a book is the main female character, who usually has good qualities.

historical fiction

Historical fiction stories take place at a real time in the past but the events might not have really happened. Though Lil's story takes place just after the First World War, the events are fictional.

quest

A quest is an adventurous journey with obstacles that the characters must face. The main character usually leaves home to find an object, place or person.

