

CHAPTER 1 STRANGER

It's late April here next to the foothills on the edge of the Denver suburbs, and yesterday's storm dropped two feet of snow. Overnight, it turned into a roaring blizzard plummeting temps below zero. The snow has moved on, but not the biting cold. The wind gusts not only create impassable drifts, they also keep the wind chill factor far below freezing. Even sheltered behind this window in my darkened living room, I find myself rubbing my arms for warmth.

Outside, newly leafed trees fight against the ice coating their branches, a fight lost for several. The crackle of breaking limbs echoes through the glass. I shudder from sadness at the thought of the new life coming to an end so soon after emerging. But that's Colorado for you. Here the weather changes from one day to the next, sometimes from one hour to the next.

For the second day, schools are closed. My friends are inside playing video games or chatting online hoping that the afternoon will be calm enough for sledding and snowball fights. I'm usually one of those. Nothing like a wet spring snow and a roaring ride down the hill below my house. I might even talk my dad into sledding, if it's not too dark once he and Mom get home from work. I'm not a fan of the snowball fights—though my cousin Jerome, who lives across the street, is—after having my nose broken by an errant snowball. On these days, I can still feel the impact, the pain, and the blood running down my face and throat. A warm liquid that is nothing like a cup of hot chocolate, soothing as it goes down. The memory almost gags me even now.

Usually I welcome Mother Nature's little tantrums, but not this late. A wet chill hangs in the air, and in my body, refusing to let go. And today, in particular, I long for the stifling heat and that burning orb of the desert sun on my skin. Heat so thick I can see it rising in twisting streams from the blistering sand. And the sun literally baking my body, my hair, my skin. Never thought I'd wish for that again.

I don't hear dead people anymore, and that makes me sad. You heard right, sad. After all I went through

with Tut and Hesena in ancient Egypt...thirteen-thirty B.C. to be exact...I miss it. Well, let me rephrase that. I don't miss the dead who talked—complained is more like it—before Tut came to me. I miss Nana's gift that let me help Tut find Hesena, his love, and helped him restore his family's good name.

Those others, the ones who wanted a second chance at life, are gone now. I've even gotten through almost two years of school without the other kids wondering if I'm ever going to be sane. I'm sure they're as relieved as I am that those dead don't interrupt my classes or my tests. A small part of me even misses the challenge of defeating General Horemheb, though not the almost dying part.