

THE PHARAOH'S LAST DEATH

By MARGARET LAVIN

(The Egyptian Government plans to inundate Abu Simbel, in Nubia, for irrigation purposes, and the ancient monuments of the kings will be obliterated completely.)

Oh yes, I provided:
Gold and fragrant oils and wheat
amulets and pectorals, crooks and flails of ceremony
daggers toward my enemies, slaves for attendance
musicians for singing dreams—
Even my toes were taken to account:
ten gold stalls for ten separate toes.

Now the waters lip the urns
toy with my earnest of deity
rising, nudge the harpist's armbone
and set her stringless harp to screaming.
I cannot see them for my linen swathings
but I can hear their sibilance
and through my dreams their roar.

My dreams are old and tired.
I am weary of lying fixed in death
perfect with death's immured perfection
embalmed in old tired dreams.
The years have trickled by, swelling
into centuries, flooding to millennia.
I am ready for a dreamless sleep.

In my gold coffin within a gilt coffin
within a gilt coffin within a stone sarcophagus
within a shrine within a shrine within a shrine
within the antechamber of my tomb—
I still hear rumors of a present
which has abdicated history.
These waters have been loosed by little men
for little men—such men as I knew how
to flog flay famish into tools
of royal death, into blocks of sandstone limestone
granite death, whose untimely bones
I built into my timeless house of death.
Let the Nile waters suck my past
and swallow the gear of immortality:

For a man's greening field
they drown the Sun God's skies.
For the living, they kill the dead.
I need not curse the little living: They too
shall die. And lie crammed in little boxes
with no gold no victuals no slaves no music.
Then perhaps no dreams?

The waters surge and roll, mount higher
slap against the stone sarcophagus.
A blasphemy of liquid fingers steals within my coffin.
The cries of wheeling desert birds reach me
one last time before eternity is ended
and gratefully my saeculum is over
and the dead dream finished.

Only—one puzzle rests:
This mean new man does not provide for death.
The dead whisper that he devours his treasures
as he amasses them, nor stores them in his tomb.
Does he thus daily eat his death
spitting its husks to nothingness—
or has he made provisions of which I do not know?

