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The Egypt Game

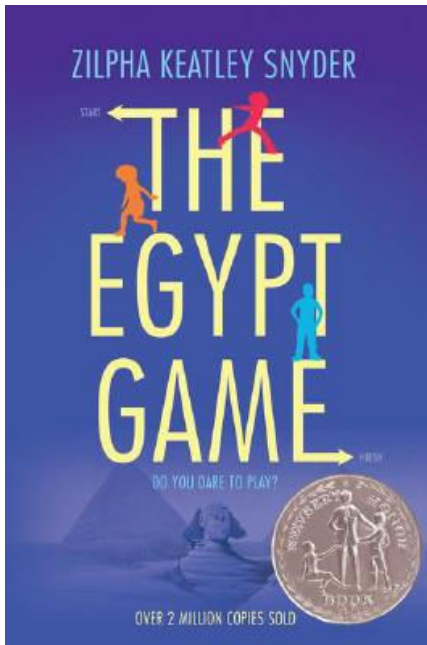
by Zilpha Keatley Snyder

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Summary



April Hall has been sent to live with her paternal grandmother, Caroline Hall. Although she misses her mother, Dorothea, and longs for the time when she can return to her, April knows she must make the best of the situation.

Not long after moving in with her grandmother, April meets a fellow sixth-grader named Melanie Ross. A fast friendship is formed when the two girls discover they share a vivid imagination and love for inventing stories and making up games. Of particular interest to both girls is ancient Egypt, and both Melanie and April spend time learning about Egypt and its ceremonies after finding a hidden storage yard in which to play. Along for the ride is also Melanie's four-year-old brother, Marshall. The storage yard is in back of a shop run by a reclusive Professor. He is as mysterious as their new game, The Egypt Game.

Melanie works hard to help April fit in at her new school. A child of Hollywood, April has a fondness for wearing false eyelashes and her hair in a dramatic upsweep much like her mother does when she is acting in movies. Thanks to Melanie, April is able to easily discard the "Hollywood act" and make new friends at Wilson School. Another new girl, fourth-grader Elizabeth Chung, moves into the same building as Melanie and April and becomes a member of the Egypt gang.

Not long after school starts, a neighborhood girl is murdered and her body is found in a nearby marsh. This throws the entire neighborhood into a state of panic and paralysis and The Egypt Game is put on hold while children are kept indoors to play. On Halloween night two fathers of Wilson School students take a large group of kids trick-or-treating. Melanie and April's secret game is

discovered by two sixth-grade boys, Ken Kamata and Toby Alvillar, who are from the girls' class. Initially, they invite the boys to join in order to make sure that they don't tell on them.

As the game goes along and as fall turns into winter, Ken and Toby continue to participate in The Egypt Game. One night, while April is babysitting Marshall, the two of them go to the land of Egypt to rescue April's math book. As a result of this adventure, April is attacked by a man, but is rescued thanks to the Professor's help. If it hadn't been for the Professor yelling out for help, April could have met with the same fate as the neighborhood girl who was killed.

The land of Egypt is closed down because of what happened to April (the loose board in a wooden fence is replaced and there's no other way into the yard). Over Christmas vacation, the Professor meets with all of the kids from The Egypt Game and gives them each their own key to the new padlock on the storage yard door. This permits them to continue their game, which he had watched with a rapt attention all along.

Source: <http://litsum.com/egypt-game/>



About the Author

Zilpha Keatley Snyder is a wonderfully imaginative woman who has written around forty-five books in her long life, most of them for children ages 9 to 13. She also has four picture books for younger children and two novels for older children, but she most favors writing for children around age 11.

Her best-known books may be the Green Sky Trilogy, published between 1975 and 1977, which depict an idyllic, peaceful world shattered by the long-kept twin secrets of violence and an imprisoned people. While the books are written for middle-school children like most of her works, some of the ideas she explores involving utopian culture, social engineering, and the cause and control of violence may not be fully understood except by older children. Other well-known books include the *Egypt Game*, *The Headless Cupid*, and *The Witches of Worm*, all of which received Newbery Honor Book awards.

She was born on May 11, 1927, in Lemoore, California. From a very young age she learned storytelling from her mother, who while encouraging her daughter not to embellish the truth told her many stories of her own childhood in California. Dessa Jepson came from a Quaker family, and her father, Isaiah Clarkson Jepson, made a point of discouraging her early suitors. She met Zilpha's father, William Solon Keatley, when she was teaching in a small place in California called Yorba Linda. William came from a family of English immigrants and had grown up on a cattle ranch. He was in his forties and had just relocated to California from owning his own ranch in Wyoming when he met Dessa as a thirty-five-year-old schoolteacher. He started working for Shell Oil as a temporary job until he could go back to ranching, but by this point the Depression was in full swing and Zilpha and her older sister Elizabeth had been born.

From age 8, Zilpha had decided she wanted to be a writer, although she did not actually begin publishing her work until much later. As a child she was very good at reading and writing and did very well in school up to seventh grade, when she went to a much larger school in Ventura. There, she had trouble relating to the other girls, who did not share her interest in the world of books rather than the world of society. It wasn't until she attended Whittier College in Southern California that she learned how to relate to other people. Also there she met her future husband, Larry Snyder, a music major, who was playing piano when she first saw him. They were married in June 1950.

She has three children with him. Their first son died two days after he was born in 1952. Then, in 1954, Susan Melissa was born in Rome, New York. Two years after that, Douglas was born in Alaska. In 1966 they adopted a Chinese child born in Kowloon, China, called Ben. He was eleven when he came to live with them and he spoke no English then, but by the time he graduated from eighth grade three years later, he was at the top of his class.

Along with writing, traveling is one of her favorite things to do. With her husband, she has traveled to many different countries over the years. In 1970 they took a month-long trip to France. The year of 1977-8 was Larry's sabbatical year, which they spent entirely in Europe since their children were all grown and away from home by then. Larry, who is fluent in Russian, spent some time doing more research to add to his graduate work on Russian music, so they traveled for seven weeks in the Russia-Poland area. Four months of the year they spent in an Italian villa, in which Zilpha enjoyed writing very much. Even in just the last ten years they have traveled to a number of countries in Asia, the Middle East, and South America, including Japan, China, Israel, and India. She has actually visited every continent except Antarctica.

She has her own website, www.zksnyder.com, which contains a list of all of her publications and awards. It also contains her autobiography, which includes much more detailed information about her life in her own words. She says in her autobiography that she writes for children because she personally shares their optimism, curiosity, and imagination, and she has great joy in sharing her worlds with them.

Source: <http://www.helium.com/items/96595-biography-zilpha-keatley-snyder>



Book Review

The Egypt Game was one of my favorites when I was young and I picked it up recently with some trepidation. Would I still like it after all this time (and no, I won't tell you exactly how long it has been)? I really shouldn't have worried.

Zilpha Keatley Snyder is a wonderful author and she has a gift for timeless stories. *Black and Blue Magic* is another one of my favorites from her, though that one is harder to find than *The Egypt Game*.

The Egypt Game starts when April moves in with her grandmother. Her mother is a glamorous Hollywood-ite and April is very reluctant about her new not-so-glamorous accommodations. She soon meets Melanie Ross, who also lives in her grandmother's building and the two become friends even though they have little in common.

One thing they do have in common is imagination and that's how the *Egypt Game* starts. While reading about Egypt, they become completely entranced with the pomp and circumstance. They find a deserted storage yard behind the Professor's A-Z Antiques store and turn it into their very own Egypt. Melanie's precocious little brother Marshall joins them for the fun.

Soon, two boys from school also discover the fun and join in the play. Everything is going fine until disaster strikes in the neighborhood: a child's murder. To make a long story short, the Egypt gang winds up ultimately finding the bad guy after some scary events.

Some of the good stuff in this book: learning about responsibility and safety, acceptance, and finding out that things are not always what they seem. It also has all the elements that make up a good story: action, intrigue, mystery... I highly recommend this book to readers of all ages.

Source:

http://www.yabookscentral.com/cfusion/index.cfm?fuseAction=books.review&review_id=458 a review by Kimberly Pauley



Discussion Questions

Warning! Some of the questions contain key elements of the plot. Do not read if you don't want to know what happens!

1. April exhibits strange behavior during her first few days at the Casa Rosada. Why do you suppose she dresses the way she does and says such outrageous things?
2. What impresses April about the Professor? Is she a good judge of character? Give examples.
3. What is Melanie's family background and how does it influence her behavior and the sorts of games she invents?
4. How does the *Egypt Game* begin?
5. What is there about April and Melanie that would lead to such an elaborate game? What part does Marshall play in all this?
6. Why do you suppose the girls find it necessary not only to have an altar for a good god but also one for an evil god?

Source : <http://k8talksbooks.blogspot.com/2007/12/gooney-bird-greene-by-lois-lowry.html>



Author Interview

Zilpha Keatley Snyder is one of those authors who have accompanied many people through their childhood. Her words have danced through their heads as they fell asleep at night and awakened in them a joy and love for reading.



She is perhaps best known for *The Egypt Game*, *The Headless Cupid* and *The Witches of Worm* -all of which were recognized with Newbery Honors. In all her books, though, she creates characters whom her readers recognize; characters they befriend and who make their lives the more richer for having known them.

Book Help Web: You've written for several decades now. What is most different about writing for today's teenagers than writing for teenagers in the 60s?

Zilpha Keatley Snyder: I don't find any overall difference. I still hear from kids who are fascinated by books and reading but, as always, there seem to be others who only read what and when they have to. Modern kids still seem to relate easily to the characters I wrote about in some of my early books--particularly the to the boys and girls in *The Egypt Game* which still seems to be widely and enthusiastically received.

BHW: What has been one of the most interesting reactions to your books, either by a child or an adult?

Snyder: Oh dear! This could range from a girl who wrote "I don't know how I lived before I read *The Changeling* --to a woman with far right religious convictions, who once confronted me on a stage and thrust a book matches into my hand--and told me it was a gift because I was "going to repent and burn all my own books."

BHW: In your autobiography, you say that you write for children because they share your optimism, curiosity, and imagination. How have you managed to keep these three traits in such abundance given all that you have experienced and witnessed in your life?

Snyder: I don't see any decrease in my curiosity and imagination. Optimism has been a little harder to hang on to, given the mess the world is in at present. But my optimism is quite resilient due to the fact that it seems to be largely organic and the result of (as I have quoted before) "a short memory and a good digestion".

BHW: Do you ever have a desire to go back to any of your stories and "find out" what happened to your heroines after they became adults? Where do you think you would find some of your characters today if you were to write more of their stories?

Snyder: No, I rarely do that. I think I tend to leave that up to my readers. I once got a package of letters from a sixth grade that had written sequels to *The Egypt Game* in which the characters had grown up, married each other and had produced any number of children. I'm willing to take their word for it.

BHW: There is an element of the supernatural or magical in many of your stories. Why do you think this element resonates so well with young readers?

Snyder: I think nearly all kids enjoy the feeling that there is more to the world than what is known and accepted by "all-knowing" adults and that no matter where you are and what you are doing; you never really know what might be going to happen right around the next corner.

BHW: You've won Newbery Honors for three books: *The Egypt Game*, *The Headless Cupid*, and *The Witches of Worm*. If you had been able to give any of the 43 books you've written a Newbery Award, which one would it be and why?

Snyder: Other than the three all ready so awarded? I think I might suggest *Cat Running* and *Gib Rides Home*.

BHW: Have any of your books turned out vastly different than how you thought they would when you began? What happened?

Snyder: *The Gypsy Game* was one. When I began the story, I was planning a more light-hearted story. I did know that Hitler included them in his genocidal activities, but other than that I basically thought they were people who told fortunes, danced to accordion music and kept dancing bears. But when I began to research their history, I was so saddened by what I learned that the book took on a more serious ambiance.

BHW: What do you do with a story when you get stuck-either because the plot isn't working or the characters aren't coming to life?

Snyder: I go downstairs and make myself a cup of tea. No, not just that. But I do have writers' block rather rarely. But when I do there is the tea, and then I go back and read over what I have just done, and begin to rewrite.

BHW: Which other juvenile fiction author do you most like to read?

Snyder: Going way back: Some of my early loves were *Smoky the Cowhorse*, *The Secret Garden*, and *Anne of Green Gables*. A little later there were the Borrower stories by Mary Norton, the Green Knowe stories by Lucy Boston, and books by Madeleine L'Engle and Susan Cooper; recently I have been enjoying Daniel Handler and Gennifer Choldenko.

BHW: What project/book are you working on now? What will it be about?

Snyder: I will have a new book this year called *The Treasures of Weatherby*. Once again it is a fairly realistic story with slightly magical overtones. It concerns the biggest and oldest house that I have ever written about, and the undersized boy who will someday inherit it. And I am now about fifty pages into something that is in too delicate a stage to talk about.

Source: <http://book.consumerhelpweb.com/authors/snyderz/interview.htm>



Further Reading

If you liked *The EGYPT GAME* by Zilpha Keatley Snyder you might like to read the following books, too!

BETRAYED!: THE 1977 JOURNAL OF ZEKE MORRIE by Bill Coyle

THE EGYPTIAN BOX by Jane Louise Curry

THE MUMMY CASE by Franklin W. Dixon

THE MUMMY'S CURSE by Franklin W. Dixon

MUMMY by Kathleen Duey

ME AND MY MUMMY by Dan Greenburg

THE MUMMY'S MOTHER by Tony Johnston

THEODOSIA AND THE SERPENTS OF CHAOS by R.L. LaFevers

THEODOSIA AND THE STAFF OF OSIRIS by R.L. LaFevers

I WANT MY MUMMY by Bill Myers

CURSE OF THE MUMMY'S TOMB by R.L. Stine

RETURN OF THE MUMMY by R.L. Stine

THE MYSTERY OF THE MUMMY'S CURSE by Gertrude Chandler Warner