

# How to Steal an Afterlife

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*LOIS MARIE HARROD*

First you must become an Egyptian priest,  
which if you are a woman will require a sex change,  
but we're talking eternity, so you are willing—

then you must get a job tending someone  
who is rich and already a god like the pharaoh Teti,  
because stealing an afterlife is expensive.

When the hacks who want just an average afterlife—  
a keg of Egyptian beer once a week with a little moussaka  
come with their gifts to Teti,

you must appropriate the gifts for yourself.  
It's good to have a confederate, in fact, necessary,  
but you may compromise your own immortality.

Now you must begin building your own tomb,  
that is the nature of art, and you must be careful  
not to build it too big because people will notice.

You must pay all those workers out of the gifts  
to the great pharaoh god Teti who has begun to die  
because there is no proof that anyone reads him.

That's the secret about the big guys, they die when  
no one reads in them, they give up, shrink,  
shrivel like a page in an abridged book,

and you get a stone cutter to copy Teti's grave stones  
the ones that the spirits read when a pharaoh dies,  
so they can spritz you away to the world of great pleasure

where you will be met by 72 virgins and all the beer  
you can drink, where you can fight great battles  
and always win and in a reflective moment or two

you can hope that those grave pails you paid  
by robbing peter haven't re-dug your grave and filched  
your magic words, that is the way with poetry

as it is with the afterlife, willing to go with anyone,  
every Jack and Bill is digging his own modest grave  
with a stone sign that says he is at least a minor dignitary.