

THE CURSED TOMB

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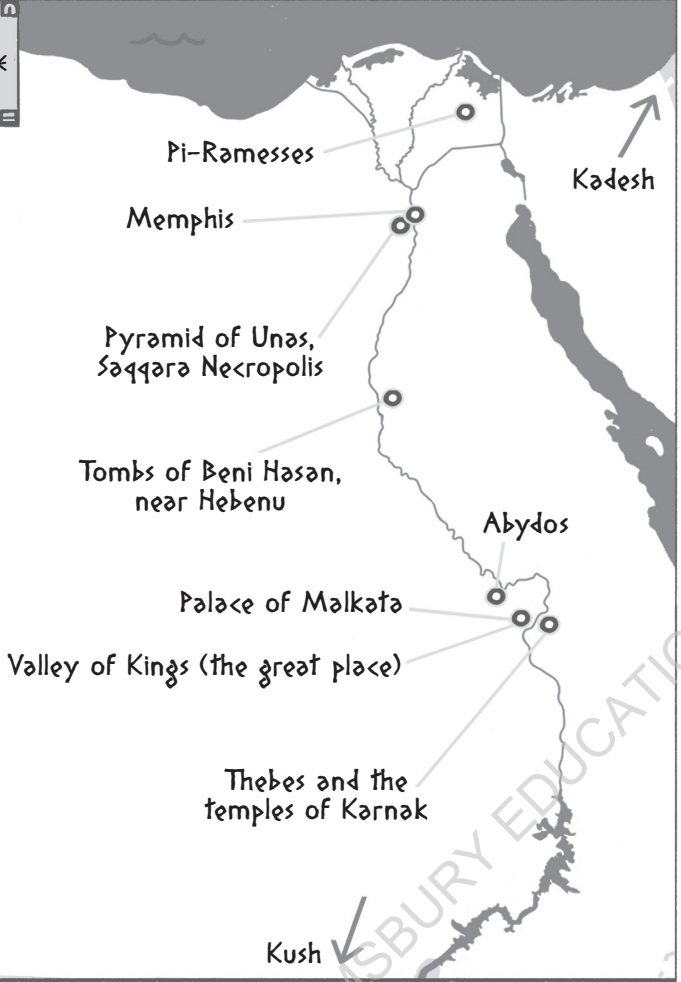
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ANCIENT EGYPT





CHAPTER ONE
The Dream

Henut took the cows away from the city, down to the fields to graze. Forty head of mottled brown and black cattle followed her along the path towards the canal, their long horns bobbing as though they were dancing. The ground was baked smooth like tiles. She stepped confidently onward, looking out over the green fields of wheat rippling in the breeze.

The cattle snorted. Something was wrong.

A jackal was following them. It circled them, leaving the high, dry path to trot down into the flooded fields below. Henut could hear the small splashes and rustling as it scampered through the wheat. Then it was back on the path and sitting

confidently in front of them. The cattle stopped. They stamped anxiously. Their hooves thumped like a heartbeat on the dry earth. A jackal was too small to pose a threat to a cow, but Henut understood why they were nervous. Jackals were scavengers. They followed death. She clapped her hands and tried to shoo it away, but its long ears only flicked in amusement.

It was then she noticed the water. It was rising up silently out of the field. Red with mud, it crept up the shallow bank onto the path and over her feet. She froze. Where was this water coming from? She didn't understand.

The cattle backed away, their splashing hooves sounding like beating wings. She wanted to follow but couldn't move her feet. The red water crept up her legs and she looked again to the jackal. It just sat there as the liquid swirled up around its shoulders.

'You've got to run!' she shouted at the jackal.

The fields were turning into a lake. The water reached the jackal's neck. It still sat quietly as though waiting for her to do something.

'Move!'

The water was rising up over its mouth, its face. The jackal stared at her, blinking slowly. It blinked again, before the water consumed its eyes, then its ears... It was gone, hidden under the clay-red liquid.

And then she realised she couldn't breathe.

Henut opened her eyes and sat up, gasping. Her heart was hammering.

Stars peeked through the reed canopy above. The moon hung low over the flat roofs of the neighbours' houses, casting a fine shadow. She could make out the shapes of the cats and her cousin, Tjay, all asleep on the roof and laid out in a neat line, like drying dates. Morning was close; the faint calls of geese honked in the distance.

It had been a dream.

She heard the sound again, the sound of cattle splashing through the water. It was coming from the room below. It wasn't water, it was a fluttering of wings. It stopped. Then a sharp noise like a pot smashing. More fluttering. Then nothing again. A bird must be trapped inside the house.

She carefully tiptoed around the sleeping felines. The steps down from the roof were still warm from the day before, unlike the chill of the ground in the garden below. There were faint clouds visible now. Not that she worried it would rain; it usually only drizzled a few times a year. But every now and then, if it was heavy or lasted too long, the rain would wreak havoc. The passage outside their house would turn into a stream and the garden would flood. Even if they did their best to protect the clay oven in the yard, the fire pit would get waterlogged and they would have no bread for days while it dried out.

The house sat in the middle of the walled garden with a duck pond and vegetable plot on one side and ordered courtyard, raised water feature, ornamental flowers and trees on the other. The kitchen and outbuildings were to the rear, with a gateway that led down to the canal. The grand entrance was at the front, with a path that led to the courtyard and main building. She walked down the length of the house. The ducks were silhouetted against the garden wall. With no

feed bowl in her hand, they didn't bother to waddle over and instead stayed folded, keeping their beaks warm under their wings.

Henut headed to the kitchen at the back of the house. She heard the noise again. The kitchen was open to the garden and she could imagine how a pigeon or ibis, attracted by crumbs or the warm embers in the oven, could have found its way in. The drying linen might have fallen and covered the kitchen doorway, trapping it inside. However, the noise wasn't coming from the kitchen. It was coming from the centre of the building. The main room of the house. The sound of wings, angry, beating against the walls. Then silence, as though it had never been there.

She ran to the other side of the building and unlatched the door to the main room. She gently pushed it and squinted into the cool darkness.

It smelt of yesterday's incense. It was too dark to see clearly. Tiny strips of twilight were visible below through the high, grated bricks that allowed in air and sunlight. The brightly painted walls looked grey. Yet she could see enough to

know something was wrong. Things were strewn over the floor. The objects by the shrine had fallen and the ink box that rested on the chest had been smashed on the floor. Its contents had splattered against the painting on the wall. The jewellery box had been upturned, and loose beads were scattered over the floor. The cloth that hung over the door that led to her father's sleeping chamber had been torn down.

She stepped one foot inside.

A ball of panic launched itself at her. Feathers and claws engulfed her face, catching in her hair and scratching her cheek. Henut shrieked, inhaling a cloud of musky dust. She staggered backwards into the garden, coughing, and tripped on the fig tree roots. She landed painfully on her back. Whatever it was bolted into the sky.

‘Henut? What’s going on?’ Tjay had come down from the roof. He moved tentatively, running his hands along the wall of the house to help him see. He reached the door to the main room and pushed it fully open. ‘By Thoth, who did this?’

Henut sat up. Her backside hurt from the fall. Her elbow stung. She had a mark on the back of her ankle. It was still too dark to tell if it was mud from the tree root or blood from a graze.

There were hushed voices coming from beyond the dark main room. There was the familiar clinking sound of the half-dozen amulets that hung from her father's neck...

Sennefer's tired face loomed out of the doorway. He looked older without his eyeliner and wig.

'Da...' Henut began.

'We've been attacked!' Sennefer cried.

'A robbery, sir?' asked Tjay.

Instead of answering him, Sennefer slipped back into the main room. Before Henut could follow her father, he appeared at the door again, holding two pieces of stone.

'Someone killed him!' Sennefer said.

He thrust something into Henut's hands. It was one of the statues from the niche above the shrine. It had been broken in two. The head of the statuette rested in the palm of her hand, looking calmly up at her, like the jackal in her dream.

‘Can we use clay to reattach it?’ Henut asked, examining the pieces while her father looked around for a lamp.

‘I can’t have my father-in-law spend eternity without a head!’ he snapped. He started whispering a spell while looking through his necklaces, trying to work out which one to hold.

Henut looked down at the two pieces of stone in her hands. ‘But this isn’t him...?’

‘It’s his *ka*,’ Tjay explained softly. ‘It’s the way he can be fed in the afterlife.’

‘But he was mummified, wasn’t he? His body is still intact,’ she reasoned.

‘His *sah*, his mummified body, lies in his tomb, but this *ka* is what we give offering to,’ Tjay said sagely.

‘I know that,’ Henut said, ‘but he has another *ka* statue outside his tomb. So long as he can still get offerings there, shouldn’t he be alright? Why does it matter?’

‘Why does it *matter*?!’ Sennefer whirled around and pointed his finger at his daughter. ‘You silly girl... You did this! He might curse

our entire household! We could all be struck by sickness, our house could be destroyed, all our possessions taken! How could you do this to us?’

‘I didn’t! It was a bird,’ she said. ‘It must have flown in...’

‘Flown in?’ Sennefer pointed at the building. ‘From where? Not even a tiny flycatcher could get its beak through the windows.’

Henut looked up at the roofline. Small faces peered down at the scene below. The cats had woken up and were enjoying the show, ears pricked to hear what the fuss on the ground was.

‘What sort of bird was it?’ asked a calm voice. Henut’s stepmother, Nefer, appeared in the doorway. She looked beautiful, even half-asleep, with her hair tied and a patterned shawl wrapped around her. She held Henut’s half-sister, baby Nebtu, sleeping in one arm and a lit oil lamp in the other.

‘I didn’t see. When I opened the door it flew right into me. I fell,’ Henut pointed at the fig root.

Sennefer snorted. He obviously didn’t believe her. He took the oil lamp from his wife and went back into the main room, surveying the damage.

‘What were you doing in the house?’ Nefer asked gently.

‘That’s obvious,’ Sennefer said, marching back. ‘Seti will be arriving today. We’ve a store full of sweet fruits.’

‘The fruits are in the kitchen store!’ Henut whispered hotly.

‘Don’t answer back!’ her father hissed and repeated a phrase he often quoted. ‘Be respectful to your father, pleasant to your mother.’

Henut wanted to point out that Nefer was not her mother, but held her tongue.

‘My love,’ Sennefer addressed his wife softly as he pointed at the broken statue in Henut’s hands. ‘What will we do about this?’

Nefer frowned. ‘It’s a shame, but we can have another one made for him.’

‘But the expense! The sculptors are already busy making *shabtis* for my tomb...’

‘We still have time. You’re not going to...’ she stopped herself saying ‘die’. ‘You’re not leaving us anytime soon. You’re healthy, you’re strong.’

‘But your father will surely curse us for not treating his *ka* with care.’

‘I’m sure my father’s spirit has better things to do than worry about one statue,’ Nefer said. ‘Put it down by the door.’

Henut placed it next to the doorstep. Its head teetered at a strange angle.

‘I think I’m unwell,’ Sennefer said. ‘Do I feel warm to you? Unnaturally so? Should we send for a physician?’

‘Come, come, let’s sit you down and find you a drink.’ Nefer offered him her arm, which he took with a gentle nod. ‘Then I’m sure you’ll feel better.’

They walked back inside, but before Henut could breathe a sigh of relief, Sennefer ripped his hand from his wife’s grip and jabbed it in the air. ‘Henut, you’re banned from music for a week! And you’re to fetch the water. For your vindictiveness and your lies!’

Nebtu woke up, and let out a long pitiful wail.

Henut felt like crying too. A rage boiled within her. The injustice!



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‘That was harsh,’ Tjay whispered.

‘It’s fine,’ she lied, brushing the dust from her backside. She was used to this from her father; he always treated her like a criminal.

‘Wait for him to calm down,’ Tjay said. ‘He’ll see reason.’

Henut ignored him. ‘And Uncle Seti is arriving today,’ she said bitterly. ‘I was going to play him a song.’

‘Why *did* he blame you?’ Tjay looked confused. ‘At least Auntie Nefer believed you.’

‘She only wanted to stop him turning into a rampaging hippo,’ she sighed. ‘You believe me, don’t you?’

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‘Sure,’ he tugged at his sidelock. ‘I mean, why would you randomly smash up the shrine?’

Henut smiled to herself at the thought of it. The amount of time and expense her father gave to the gods and his extended dead family made her resentful. It wasn’t as though he’d liked any of them when they were alive, but now they had travelled west he feared their vengeance. If he wasn’t fussing about them, he was paranoid about his own tomb: if it would be ready, if they could secure a *ka* priest for him. It made no sense. Her mother was dead and yet she didn’t have either a *ka* statue or a tomb. Not one they visited anyway.

The idea of smashing up all his obsessions did bring a certain glee to her heart.

‘There really was a bird, wasn’t there?’ Tjay asked.

She nodded without speaking and went over to the yoke in the corner. It was a large wooden beam that you could attach jugs to for collecting water. It was worn over the shoulders, with a cloth pad to make the weight of the water comfortable. The city was well irrigated, with canals and reservoirs

never more than a few minutes' walk from every home. Still, someone needed to fetch water every day to cook, clean and keep the garden alive. It was heavy work, but to Henut's surprise Tjay came too, picking up the spare jugs. It would still be two or three trips down to the reservoir to get enough water, even with his help, but she was grateful.

Ra, the god of the sun, had yet to break free from the underworld but the stars had vanished. They walked away from the houses towards the reservoir. It was a short walk down the same path she'd trodden in her dream.

There were already people clustered around the *shadoof*, a crane-like structure used for lifting water out of the reservoir. The great canals that snaked around the metropolis ended in these reservoirs. Every year the gods caused the Nile to flood. It was called the inundation. Water would cover the farmland for a few weeks then gradually seep away. The canals meant the water was trapped in the irrigation system and reservoirs so that it could be used all year round.

The water in the canals was so low during the harvest that the wheat had to be handed down to the boats. But for now, the canals and reservoirs were fat with water and the fields were coated in a dark mud the flood had left behind.

‘Was it an ibis?’ Tjay asked, as they reached the bank of the reservoir.

‘I didn’t recognise it,’ she shrugged, unhooking the empty jars from her yoke. ‘It seemed bigger than a duck. Like a falcon.’

‘So Horus or Montu?’ Tjay asked, referencing the two falcon-headed gods. ‘If it was Horus, perhaps it’s a sign of healing. Montu may be here to protect Maat. Or it was Sokar! It’s his festival tomorrow after all. He rules the fifth kingdom of the night... he throws evildoers into a big fiery lake!’

Henut rolled her eyes. ‘Or it was just a bird, not everything has to be symbolic of something.’

‘How did it get in the house? Could a cat have brought it in?’ Tjay said, setting down his jars on the muddy bank.

He waded knee deep into the water. Normally, Henut would follow him in. She liked the water. They would play crocodiles, holding their breath and moving as slowly as they could towards a paddling victim before exploding out of the water and grabbing their ankles. There were no crocodiles in this man-made lake, but today Henut was nervous about getting wet.

‘What’s wrong?’

‘I had a weird dream,’ she said as she watched him scoop the water with his hands to wash his face. She told him about the rising water, being unable to move her feet and the jackal drowning itself.

‘You should see a priest about that,’ he said, looking worried.

Henut rolled her eyes. ‘It was just a dream.’

‘All dreams tell fortunes,’ Tjay said. ‘When the jackal-headed god Anubis appears to you it must mean something. Ask your dad, he’d know.’

‘He’d just say I was making it up,’ she huffed. ‘Besides, it was just a jackal. Not a god.’

‘If that’s what you think,’ Tjay said. He began passing the full jars up to Henut. She rested them against the bank.

‘What the...’

Henut followed his eyeline away from where dawn was about to break, back towards the west. Tjay looked as though he were choking.

‘What is it?’

Later on, she would try and remember exactly what it was she could see. The walls of the temples in the far distance, and the reeds on the banks of the reservoir rippling in the breeze. She only glimpsed the figure behind them. It looked out of place. Dark. Had she really seen the shadow moving across the bank or had she just imagined it? She felt it somehow, as though it had been watching them the entire time.

Tjay made a guttural cry.

‘Tjay?’

He grunted. He couldn’t form the words he wanted to say. The boy dropped the remaining jar and rushed to the bank, jumped up, lost his

footing and fell back in the water with a loud splash. His kilt rose up, exposing his behind as he fell. The crowd of people by the *shadoof* looked over. A few laughed, others just shook their heads with disapproval.

‘Look!’ he spluttered. He pointed back to the reeds.

The figure, if it ever had been there, was nowhere to be seen.

Henut helped him out of the water, trying to ignore the people laughing at them. With only one yoke, it took a while to get the heavy jars back to the house. They took turns beneath it, taking tiny steps as the weight bore down on their shoulders. While one balanced the yoke, the other held the smaller jars to their chest, straining under the weight. The task was taking even longer because Tjay was distracted. He kept stopping to stare at everyone who passed, as though they might be wearing a disguise. Eventually they reached the house.

‘We need to go to the temple,’ he said as he placed the smaller jars inside the kitchen.

‘We’ve still got more water to fetch,’ Henut said, emptying her jar into the water trough. ‘And we need to help prepare for the party.’

‘Something strange is happening,’ Tjay said. ‘We shouldn’t ignore it.’

Henut sighed. ‘You don’t need to make everything so dramatic.’

His eyes narrowed. ‘You think something is going on too. How did that “bird” get in? A bird the size of a falcon?’

‘It wasn’t a falcon,’ she said.

‘Was it even a bird?’ he asked.

She felt a small chill creep up her back. She knew what he meant. ‘What do you mean?’

‘What other thing is the size of a large bird, with wings like a hawk that can fly through walls of tombs?’ he asked.

Henut made a scoffing sound. Tjay was talking about a *ba*. While the *sah* remained in the tomb, and the stone *ka* was fed at the shrine, and the spirit shadow roamed between the underworld and the earth; the *ba* was a living being, born into existence at death. At least that is what her

dad said. Then again, her uncle had told her a *ba* was just symbolic. She'd seen models and engravings of the *ba*, a bird with the head of the deceased person. While her father insisted on their existence, it didn't look very realistic to Henut and she'd never seen one in real life.

'You're being ridiculous,' she said.

'Am I?' he said. 'You saw Anubis, the jackal...'

'It was just a dream!'

'... who guides the dead through the afterlife, then moments later you're attacked by a *ba*, and then I saw...' he trailed off.

'A shadow?' she spoke without meaning to, and was irritated by the shock in his expression.

His eyes widened. 'You saw her too?'

'I didn't see anything,' she said. 'Tell me what you think you saw.'

'I don't want to upset you,' he whispered.

'You'd rather irritate me?'

'Forget it,' he said nervously. 'Let's go to the temple and get some answers!'

‘If you won’t tell me what you saw, I’m not going anywhere.’ Henut placed the yoke back in the corner and folded her arms.

‘I...’ Tjay leant over and whispered in her ear. The words made her spine tingle. ‘I saw your mum.’

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CHAPTER THREE

The Woman

‘By Horus’s bloodstained beak!’ yelled a voice from the gate. ‘Won’t one of you ninnies let me in?’

It was Seti! Henut’s mood soared into the sky. She flung herself into the hot sun and ran all the way down the length of the garden to the main gate.

Henut had been avoiding Tjay. She was furious he’d make up such a horrible lie. She’d been hiding so that Nefer and her sister, Tjay’s mother, couldn’t give them chores to do together. Tjay hadn’t managed to avoid them and had been sent out to gather dried cow dung for the oven. Her father, Sennefer, was still scrubbing the spilt ink from

the tiles in the main room. He cast his daughter an angry look as he reached the gate before her. She stopped and waited in the shade of the house.

‘By the Nile! It’s chaos out there!’ Seti dropped his bags as he opened his arms.

Seti was Egyptian, but you wouldn’t know it by the clothes he wore. He was short and portly, and he dressed more like an Asiatic, with tassels hanging from his colourful kilt. He didn’t wear a wig, even though he could afford one, nor did he shave his hair like a scribe. It was short and curly like a common farmer, and thinning at his temples. He sported a large beard with streaks of grey running down from his cheeks.

‘You finally made it!’ Sennefer embraced Seti.

‘Some work came up,’ Seti beamed. ‘My barge is loaded with wine ready to deliver after the festival. It is good to be back in Memphis.’

Henut leant up against the bright white wall as he greeted everyone. After a minute, he spotted her.

‘Sennefer! You have a monkey loose in your garden!’

He opened his arms wide and Henut ran to him, jumping and giving him a big squeeze.

‘How is my most terrible niece? Why haven’t you written?’

‘I did write!’

‘Not enough!’ He kissed her on the cheek and turned to her father. ‘I was wrong about the monkey, this one is large enough to be a baboon!’

‘She is nearly fully grown,’ Sennefer agreed solemnly.

‘Never! I forbid anyone to grow up!’ Seti said, shading his eyes from the sun. ‘Now, let’s get out of the gaze of Horus before our heads form a crust.’

‘You look so tired, let’s get you something to drink,’ Nefer said happily, taking his arm.

Henut smiled again at her uncle. He had dark circles under his eyes. His clothes were dusty, like someone who had been walking for days.

They went through the garden to the door to the main room. Henut moved to step inside when her father’s hand stopped her. ‘This is an adult conversation only. Go and eat some dates in the garden with Tjay.’

‘But you said I’m nearly grown!’ Henut whined.

‘Do you want me to tell Seti why the paintings in the main room are all scratched up and the ink box is broken?’ her father snapped.

‘I told you, it was a bird!’

He shook his head. ‘I hate it when you lie. It is against Maat.’

Henut sighed. He had pulled out his trump card. Maat was the goddess of order, balance and justice. Without her, everything would spiral into chaos. Not only would everyone fight each other, but the Nile wouldn’t flood and no crops would grow. The animals would turn wild, the buildings would crumble, and criminals would rule. According to Sennefer, Maat was easy to offend. Henut knew if she wanted to have her way, she would have to appeal to justice.

‘He’s *my* uncle!’ she hissed.

Her father snorted. ‘So? He’s my brother-in-law. There is a time and place. You would have us upsetting Maat.’

‘Why would it be upsetting to talk to my uncle?’ Henut said.

Sennefer rolled his eyes. ‘It isn’t how things are done.’

‘Why not?!’

‘You can’t sit with the adults until you are an adult.’

‘Why not?’

‘Stop asking questions! This is the way things have always been done. It is Maat. We respect the traditions, we keep the gods happy.’

He slammed the door shut.

‘Henut!’ Tjay called.

He was sitting in the shade of the garden wall. His sidelock had started to wilt like unharvested wheat.

‘Where were you?’ Tjay asked. He handed her some dates.

She ignored the question. ‘Did you wash your hands before putting these in the bowl?’

He shrugged. ‘I thought we could go down to the temple in the ninth hour when it’s cooler.’

Henut shook her head. ‘I’m not going.’

‘But...’ Tjay nearly choked on a date stone.
‘After all that’s happened?’

She rolled her eyes. ‘All that happened is I got woken up by a trapped bird. Then you fell in the reservoir. For no reason.’

Tjay looked daggers at her. ‘You had that dream and I saw your mother.’

Henut scowled. ‘It was still dark,’ she said.

‘Exactly. The dead don’t wake during the day,’ he said stubbornly.

‘You think she rose up, out of her...’ she paused.

‘What’s up now?’

‘I’ve never been to her tomb,’ she murmured. It had always struck her as strange that her mother wasn’t entombed in the same plot as the rest of the family. She didn’t appear on the wall painting by the shrine in the graveyard either.

‘Perhaps she was taken up the river to Thebes?’ Tjay suggested. ‘She was born there, wasn’t she?’

That made sense. Many people made the pilgrimage to Thebes after they were mummified.

Henut had never been; it was nearly two weeks' travel south.

'Uncle Seti would know,' she said, looking past the fig tree back at the house.

'We can ask him later,' Tjay said, spitting a date stone into the pond. 'After the party.'

The party hour came around quickly. Everyone was dressed up. Nefer, like all the adult women, lit a wax cone on her head that smelt like bitter flowers. It trickled into her wig and made intricate patterns. Tjay's father and brother returned to the house, washed their feet, reapplied their kohl in elegant black lines under their eyes, and changed from their working kilts into full length tunics, showing off their colourful beaded collars. The neighbours arrived singing songs and bringing gifts of onions. Sennefer reminded Henut she was not allowed to join in with the music due to her behaviour. So she sat and watched and tried not to feel the sadness clawing at her heart.

The magician came, drank some beer, said a few spells and then moved on to the next house. Incense was lit for the shrines and the food was

offered to the house gods and surviving *ka* statues, then taken back to the kitchen and served up in smaller bowls for the visitors. Little children ran around the pond, splashing the women who were showing off their protective tattoos. The only creatures sulking harder than Henut were the cats who had their usual sleeping spots taken over by visiting humans.

Seti held court, telling stories about the things he had seen while travelling the Nile. Men laughed, children squealed and the women blushed at his jokes, holding their hands over their mouths. Seti had been trained as a scribe before he had become a merchant captain, and knew all the old stories. Sennefer, however, didn't approve of the one he was telling.

'You should never treat servants as equals!' he interrupted.

'It's just an old fable, dear,' Nefer said, pulling him back to help her organise the musicians.

'It is against Maat,' Sennefer insisted. 'If nobles become servants and servants become nobles, it creates disorder.'

Nefer pulled him away, placating him as she went.

‘What happened next?’ Tjay asked Seti.

‘The servant girl was distraught, the necklace was the most valuable thing she’d ever owned,’ Seti said.

‘She should’ve been more careful,’ Tjay said.

‘Indeed,’ Seti agreed. ‘However, she was so upset she’d lost it overboard that she stopped rowing. But when one oarsman stops rowing, it upsets the boat. The king’s royal boat began to turn in the water.’

‘Did the king order her to be whipped?’ asked Tjay.

‘That’s a bit harsh!’ Henut said.

‘Not really, the journey was supposed to make the king feel better and now a girl is ruining it,’ Tjay said.

‘If I were her,’ Henut said, ‘I’d have carried on rowing and hoped no one would notice. Losing the necklace he gave her would be enough to be whipped, let alone making a scene.’

‘Well, it is good you were not the king,’ Seti said. ‘Because he went down to the girl and asked her what had happened. When she told him, he offered to replace her necklace.’

‘Wow, he’s nice,’ Tjay said.

‘But she said no,’ Seti said.

‘No?!’ the children blurted together.

‘Even though the second necklace was three times as beautiful as the first.’

‘Was she possessed by a demon?!’ scoffed Tjay. ‘That makes no sense!’

‘She said the only necklace she wanted was the one that was first given to her by him as that was what made it so precious,’ Seti said. ‘She couldn’t row any more knowing she had lost it.’

‘I’d whip her too,’ Henut said. ‘She’s so annoying.’

Tjay laughed.

‘The king was kinder than Henut,’ Seti said. ‘He ordered his magician to help.’

‘Did he know a spell to make it float?’ asked Tjay.

‘No, instead the magician Djadjamankh...’

‘Jar-jar-mank?’ Henut repeated.

‘... was so powerful he parted the water, and picked up her necklace from the bottom of the lake.’

‘How did he part the water?’ Tjay asked.

‘He put one half of the lake on top of the other. He fetched the turquoise pendant and gave it to its owner.’

‘He folded the lake?’

‘Yes,’ Seti said. ‘The water was twelve cubits deep and it ended up being twenty-four cubits high.’

‘I could dive twelve cubits!’ Tjay said.

‘You could not!’ Henut scoffed.

The music started up again and Sennefer ordered Henut to light the oil lamps. Ra was travelling west and the white garden walls glowed amber, then red. People were getting up to leave before the twelfth hour was called. Stars appeared in the darkening sky.

It was only when Henut hugged the neighbour’s children goodbye, offering them each a garland of onions, that she noticed Seti was missing.

She walked back to the house, into the main room. He wasn't there either. She ran back to the garden and up the steps to the roof.

As the distant drums announced the hour, Henut spotted something. An oil lamp? It glinted like the setting sun. Gold. It flashed again. Jewellery! Whoever it was had slipped into the shadow of the narrow passage that ran between her neighbours' houses.

Henut leant over the rooftop wall. The figure came out of the passageway and walked quickly along the path beyond the garden. It didn't have a lamp anymore. Henut was curious. It wasn't Seti. By the size and shape the shadowy figure looked like a woman. It was unusual to see a woman walking alone after sunset. The figure hid in the alleyway to avoid a group of revellers making their way back home before heading closer to Henut's vantage point.

There was something strange about the way she was moving. Grown women wore *kalasiris*, which were tighter than Henut's dress, and didn't easily allow for running. She was still,

then fast – her movements were eerie. She was crouching then sprinting, as though she were wearing a servant’s loose kilt under her long pleated shawl which billowed when she moved. But she was also wearing gold. What servant had gold?

The figure ran down the alleyway directly below her rooftop and stopped just under Henut’s position. Henut leant further and could see the top of her head. Before she could cry out to get her attention, the figure looked directly up at her.

The shock jolted through her. Her heart beat too fast to think. She scrambled backwards away from the wall, and launched herself down the stairs back through the garden.

Nefer called after her as she ran through the gate, scattering the onions. She paid no attention. Her bare feet skidded on the gravel as she turned the corner into the alleyway.

Nothing.

She ran back past the gate, then around the block, checking each entryway. She’d seen her. She’d seen her. She’d seen her.

‘Mum? Mum!’

She sprinted out onto the path towards the canal. There was no sign of her. She wasn’t anywhere. How? Where could she hide? She’d vanished.

She went back towards the house, retracing the path her mother had taken. She went to stand by the garden wall, looking up to where she had been on the roof. Stars were visible now. She stepped closer to lean against the wall and trod on something.

‘Set’s stupid, snotty snout!’ she cursed, sitting down and rubbing her foot.

Whatever she’d trodden on had clung to her foot before falling off again and landing on the compacted earth. At first, she thought it was a misshapen onion someone had cut and thrown away. She picked it up. It was an amulet, an enormous scarab beetle. She could barely fit it in her hand. It was bound with gold and had a slinky chain made from plaited gold wire. On the beetle’s stomach was religious text. Henut had never been taught to read it.

Her father had taught her everyday writing, but that was very different to these intricate, sacred symbols. She traced the miniscule carvings with her finger. She knew that each represented a sound or an object, but she couldn't decipher it. Then she spotted that a group of symbols were encircled by a thin curved oblong box. She swallowed. Even though she couldn't read what it said, she knew it was a pharaoh's name. This was probably the most valuable thing she'd ever held.

A large figure stepped in front of her.

'Henut?'

She yelped, dropping the amulet so that it swung from the chain in her fingers.

It was Seti. He looked worried. 'By Thoth's bent beak, what are you doing out in the streets in the first hour of the darkness?'

'I...' She couldn't explain.

'What have you found?' He reached out with an open hand.

Henut handed him the amulet.

'Where in Thoth's library did you get this?'

'It was here, I trod on it,' she said. 'What is it?'

‘Trouble,’ he said and hooked it over his neck so that it disappeared under his collar. ‘Best we get you back where you belong.’

‘It’s a scarab amulet isn’t it?’ she whispered. ‘From someone’s grave?’

‘Your father will be worried,’ he said, clasping her arm and marching her back towards the house.

‘You’re outside too,’ she pointed out.

‘The gods and I have a special understanding,’ Seti grinned. ‘But you are young, you wouldn’t want to bring misfortune to your family. Maat says the day is for the living, the night is for the dead.’

‘You sound like Dad,’ she said.

‘And you are acting like your mother,’ he replied.

‘I... I saw her!’ she blurted.

‘What?’ He looked over his shoulder and glanced around the empty alleyway. ‘That’s not possible.’

‘Tjay saw her this morning...’ Henut tried to explain but he cut her off.

‘You probably saw someone else.’ He shivered slightly. ‘Or something else. It is after sunset after all.’

‘That amulet is a scarab beetle, it is given to the dead isn’t it...?’ she began.

‘Before you start, it isn’t hers! She didn’t get one.’

‘Why?’

He stopped. They were outside the garden gate. He leant up against it and whispered. ‘Did your father never tell you?’

A memory flashed through her head. The hush in the house, the women silent. Her father sitting down next to her by the fig tree. His face expressionless and voice monotonous.

‘He told me she was dead and not to upset anyone by talking about it.’

‘And here you are, talking about it.’ Seti ran his fingers through his beard. He looked up to the stars for help. ‘At night, when Horus can’t protect us.’

‘She was standing right where I found it.’

‘She returned to the Nun,’ he whispered. ‘The primordial waters. She drowned. She has no tomb. She has no amulets. She was lost in the Nile. I know you are upset but I promise you, Henut. You didn’t see her. You couldn’t have.’

Henut didn’t say anything. She felt awful, making him say it out loud. She also felt scared. What had she seen? The dead do wander at night. The ones with their faces turned backwards... she shivered as she thought of the strange moving shadow.

‘Don’t worry about the amulet. I’ll find its owner. We’ll take you to the house and give you some honey. That’ll brighten your cheeks.’



CHAPTER FOUR
Chaos Creeps In

She stood in the entrance to a mine. The noise of flint axes scraping. Men in the shadows. Her back to Ra. Men came out with great sleds but she couldn't see what was on them. The overseer had a whip. She snuck into the darkness and felt around the walls, trying to uncover what they were extracting. As she got closer, the overseer walked past her. Be still. She could sense he was close. She didn't move. She didn't gasp for air. He moved past and she crept further into the mine. There, she saw, embedded in the wall, golden scarab beetles. She reached out to touch one. As her fingers got near the beetle, a pitch-black hand came out of the rock and grabbed her wrist.

‘Are you dreaming?’

Henut yelped. She looked up to see onions dangling on a string over her. Tjay’s grinning face was above them. Behind him was the reed canopy and beyond that a dusky yellow sky. It was dawn.

‘What in Thoth’s beak do you want?’

‘You were twitching,’ Tjay said, picking up her headrest. ‘Did you have another dream? We could go and see a priest after the festival.’

She gave him a withering look.

‘Hey, I’m just trying to help.’

A dull ringing filled her ears. She tried to remember the dream but it slithered away. Instead it was replaced by the image of her mother, dead in the water, sinking into darkness. She felt so stupid for running out of the house yesterday. What had she seen? She rubbed her chest to try and stop the thought.

‘Henut! Tjay!’ Nefer called. ‘We’ll be late!’

The narrow roads were packed with people moving towards the fields. To avoid the crush, Sennefer took them down towards the canal,

over the rickety wooden walkways and past the farmers' huts, with their dilapidated reed roofs and unplastered mud-brick walls. Wild papyrus grew from the shallow waterways, which were full of broken pots and discarded animal bones. Here, she could hear other languages spoken and see people in foreign clothing. To her surprise, Seti was among them. He greeted everyone, holding up fresh fruits he'd obviously just picked up. He fussed over baby Nebtu as they wandered up the canal path. The stink of the nearby tanners worked its way into the back of her throat and beautifully matched the bad mood she was in.

'Do you need breakfast?' Seti said, catching up to her and offering a fig.

She shook her head. 'How come you're so dusty?'

'I'm old,' he laughed. 'You should eat. Are you alright?'

She didn't say anything. Instead she noticed something on his arm. A large bruise. He caught her looking and grinned.

‘A tiny accident,’ he said. ‘Have you asked your father about what happened last night?’

‘He’d think I’m lying.’ She shook her head. ‘Or that I’ve been possessed.’

‘Just because you’ve seen things you can’t explain doesn’t mean you’ve been possessed.’

She grunted sceptically. It was easy for him to say; he hadn’t had strange dreams or seen dead people.

‘You said Tjay thought he saw you-know-who...’ Seti looked over his shoulder at Sennefer and whispered. ‘That’s probably why you believe you saw her.’

‘How do you mean?’

‘If I go to a magician and they tell me I am going to meet a man with a missing finger who will give me a fortune, I start to see men with missing fingers everywhere,’ he said. ‘Once your heart has an idea, your eyes see what they expect.’

‘I was telling the truth,’ Henut said. ‘I’m not lying.’

‘I know you’re not,’ Seti said. ‘You probably saw someone, a woman, out after dark, which is

unusual. Your heart chose to fit that with a story you'd heard before.'

'You're saying my eyes lied?'

'It's a kind of magic. You say the words, your heart believes them and so they come true. But think. It was such a long time ago that you last saw her. How could you possibly recognise her? You were so young.'

Henut nodded, but she felt confused. It wasn't as though she could picture her mother's face, but the instant she'd seen her it was like her body knew.

'Best not upset your father with it,' he whispered. 'Or Tjay. Between you and me, it sounds as though he likes to meddle a bit.'

She nodded. 'He does!'

As they moved parallel to the crush of people queuing to cross on the other side of the canal, the landscape grew ever more rural. Looking back, Henut caught a glimpse of two enormous pylons over the tops of the houses. These two enormous towers enclosed the gate to the west entrance of the temple of Ptah. Ptah was a god of

creation, who shouted himself into existence just by saying his name. He was one of the main gods of Memphis and his temple was where festivals were usually held. Except for this festival.

Henut jumped as Tjay appeared at her shoulder. ‘What did your uncle want?’

‘Seti’s your uncle too,’ she said curtly.

‘Not really,’ Tjay said.

She felt irrationally cross at this. ‘Why not?’

‘He’s your mum’s brother. He’s only my uncle because my aunt Nefer and your dad got married.’

‘So you don’t think I’m your cousin then?’ she asked.

Tjay looked confused. ‘That’s not what I’m saying at all! What’s wrong with you today?’

‘What’s wrong with me?’ she snapped. ‘I’m not the one going around putting ideas in people’s heads.’

Tjay looked hurt. ‘What are you talking about?’

‘Lying about seeing my mum,’ she hissed. ‘Trying to upset me about my dreams just so that we could go to the temple and you could get out of doing chores.’

‘I wasn’t lying!’ he said firmly.

‘Yeah?’ she whispered so her father couldn’t overhear. ‘Well, you couldn’t have seen her because she drowned! She can’t come back. The Nun took her. And using her to make your dull little life more exciting is despicable.’

‘I did see her, and the fact that we don’t understand it doesn’t mean you should ignore it.’

‘I should tell my father that you’re trying to bring chaos into the house,’ she warned. ‘He’ll send you to the mines.’

Tjay opened his mouth and closed it again. He looked as though he were about to cry. Henut’s resolve wobbled a bit.

‘If that’s what you really think, then I guess you’re on your own,’ Tjay said. ‘May the gods be merciful.’

He walked up to his mother, Iaret, who was standing next to Nefer. He put his arm around her. She gave him a gentle squeeze that made Henut’s heart rage. She was upset too and she had no one who would squeeze her like that.

They walked in silence for some time, onions bouncing on their chests. Without the shade of the tightly packed buildings, the heat was intense. They were walking past the dark, empty fields, towards the banks of the Nile. The irrigation channels by the footpaths had papyrus and lilies growing in them like lush guidelines showing the way to the river. Flies buzzed around the people, and in the distance Henut heard the murmur of a crowd. Henut tried to forget what had happened and went up to Nefer. ‘What does Sokar have to do with planting crops? I thought he was like Ptah, and helped resurrect the dead.’

‘That’s right,’ Nefer said, stopping baby Nebtu from sucking on her onions. ‘That’s why his festival is held now, because we’re planting crops in the dead fields... Sokar brings things back to life.’

‘So what’s all this got to do with onions?’ Henut said, trying to take the garland out of her sister’s reach.

‘It doesn’t matter what it has to do with onions,’ Sennefer said sternly. ‘What we think doesn’t matter. It is the gods that matter.’

The brown river that had been sparkling in the distance suddenly spread dazzlingly wide and the crowds merged into one buzzing throng. They had arrived.

They stood with the crowd, facing away from the dozens of narrow papyrus boats that were now moored among the thick reeds and wild trees growing along the riverbank. Henut was able to get a glimpse of the royal boat at the far end of the dark field, its bow and stern curled upwards, glowing gold in the sun. Red ribbons tied to the awning in the middle of the deck rose and fell in the breeze. It looked like the boat was burning in a hot flame. Inside that awning was the *ka* of Sokar, the hawk-headed god. It was much larger than the *ka* statues they had at home; it was about the size of a grown man.

‘I’ll meet you afterwards,’ Sennefer whispered, hugging Nefer and running to join his fellow craftsmen at the ropes in front of the royal boat.

Nefer ushered Tjay and the others further into the crowd of people. Henut was about to follow when she felt a hand on her arm.

‘Come on, let’s get a better view,’ Seti said.

Henut followed him towards a cluster of tall trees by the water’s edge. She watched as Seti ran down to a small papyrus boat in the reeds on the banks of the river. He pulled it in. When it was close enough to reach, he untied the mooring rope and let the boat go adrift.

‘You’ll get us in trouble!’ Henut whispered, looking up at the crowded bank. But everyone was looking back towards the god in the field.

‘No niece of mine worries about getting herself into a bit of trouble!’ Seti winked.

Henut thought of all the times she’d heard of people getting flogged, impaled or burned alive because a court commanded it. Her heart quickened but she didn’t say anything as Seti looped the mooring rope over his shoulder and headed for the group of wild date palms that were growing just off the riverbank. He circled

the rope around the largest trunk, tying it off and then stepping into the large loop he'd created.

'Hop on,' he said, offering Henut a piggyback.

Before she knew what she'd agreed to, he had moved the rope up under his waist. With Henut clinging to his back like a baby baboon, he grasped the sides of the rope, leaned back and walked up the tree with ease, tightening and loosening his grip as he went. Henut clung on, wishing that he wouldn't climb so high.

The people below looked up with curiosity, but before an overseer could shout at them, the musicians started to play. Henut clung onto her uncle's back and looked down at the water below her. As the boats bobbed, the reeds waved and shadows flickered over its surface, it seemed alive.

The music was sombre, like a funeral ceremony. Henut looked up to watch a magician cast a spell over the crowd, the ship, the soil. She looked down again at the drop beneath her, and gripped Seti's sides harder. There was something wrong. Something she thought she had seen.

The priests walked forward in their leopard skins, as though they were at a terrible tragedy. There were female priests too, who began a low chant before turning to the ship and ordering the men to pick up the ropes. Only one man stepped forward.

‘Who is that?’ Henut asked, looking up again from the water below them. He was dressed like the pharaoh, with a false beard and a striped linen headcloth. ‘That can’t be...’

‘It’s not the pharaoh,’ Seti answered. ‘It’s his fourth son, Khaemwaset, here to represent him. That’s why he’s dressed like that.’

Khaemwaset began pulling the ship by its mooring rope. It seemed impossible that it would move; after all, it was on land. A new song started up and the crowd began to applaud. As Henut watched the crowd by the riverbank, she noticed a shadow moving in the reeds. At first she thought it was the papyrus boat that Seti had unmoored, somehow moving under the surface of the cloudy brown water.

Just as the clapping stopped, she realised what it was. She'd seen it earlier. She'd felt the danger but she hadn't recognised it.

'Crocodile!' she screamed.

It was as though everything happened in slow motion.

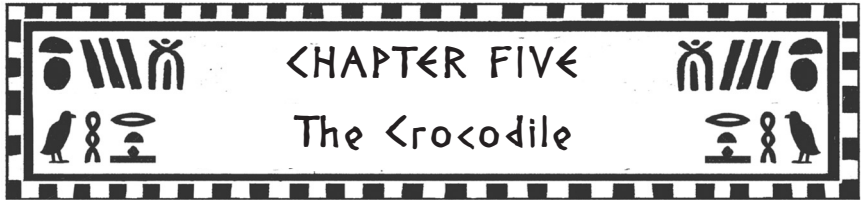
Seti let the rope slip from under him in shock, skidding down a cubit or two before he could regain his balance.

There was an explosion of foam below. The crocodile made its attack. The crowd, already reacting to Henut's warning, reeled back in shock. A mother snatched her child away from the river. An old man toppled backwards, but was caught by his friend. The crocodile's jaws snapped in the air.

Khaemwaset, the pharaoh's son, dropped his rope and ran with his bodyguards towards the water's edge. Henut, already pointing with one hand, was flung backwards by Seti's slip. She lost her grip and fell.



BLOOMSBURY EDUCATION



CHAPTER FIVE
The Crocodile

Henut tumbled into the foaming water with a splash. Yellow sunshine turned black. The shrieks stopped, replaced with the chaotic noise of flowing water. This wasn't the reservoir. This wasn't a game. This was the Nile.

The beast, jaws empty, swung around to see what had fallen in. It dipped back beneath the surface and made for the sound of the splash.

She could sense it was close. Be still. She didn't move. She didn't gasp for air. She acted as a dead weight. The current took her gently downstream towards the jaws of the crocodile.

Her garland of onions bobbed on the surface of the opaque water. As the current turned

her body, she was able to snatch a breath of air before sinking under again. She caught a glimpse of the horrified faces on the bank. Dozens of people, all making noise, were splashing the water with oars and sticks, trying to distract the crocodile.

Her eyes were above the surface again. She looked up to the bank. The faces were frozen in horror. She closed her eyes. She knew she didn't have long. Something brushed against the side of her head. A hard, cool body grazed her shoulder. She felt its power through the water. Its size. She held her breath, waiting for the bite. Waiting for the jaws to clamp down on her. The fear sat in her belly and tickled the small of her back. It made her want to kick her legs, to cry for help. But she kept as still as possible, allowing all her muscles to relax. Her head dipped under the water again. She was waiting for the bite. But the bite didn't come.

The crocodile moved her as it swam slowly past. Its wake rolled her limp body over in the water. Then there was no movement, no bite,

just the gradual pull of the river taking her gently downstream.

Something landed nearby. Instinctively she reached to grab it. It was an oar, and the moment she clasped it, it pulled her backwards towards the riverbank. Then arms, hands frantically snatched her up, through the tangle of reeds and up, up, up, into the warm sun.

She was on the bank. Countless voices were all shouting around her. She opened her eyes. They focussed instantly on a single face. Behind the wet young men who had pulled her out, behind the crowd of people staring at her, was that face again.

The ghost of her mother.

She was there. In the sunshine. As real as the dozens of people around her. It was so strange. She hadn't seen her in years and yet instantly her entire body just knew. There was a magic between them. She knew her mother felt it too because the moment they made eye contact, a flash of recognition and fear appeared on her face and she ducked back behind the crowd.

Henut jumped up to run after her, but her limbs were useless, weak. She was shaking. She couldn't breathe. She fell back onto the grassy bank. More hands were on her now, a magician with flecks of silver in his eyebrows knelt beside her and started reciting a spell while furiously rubbing her back.

'O, you sycamore of the sky, may there be given to me the air which is in it, for I am he who sought out that throne in the midst of Wenu.'

Henut coughed up some water. Instantly, she could breathe again, but inhaling made her cough. The man's hands rubbed harder on her back making it difficult to get any air in. More water splattered from her nose and mouth as she retched.

'I have guarded this egg of the Great Cackler. If it grows, she grows; if it lives, she lives; if it breathes air, she breathes air,' murmured the magician. He continued to rub her back.

Henut stopped coughing. She sat back, exhausted.

'Well done, magician.' The priest in leopard furs crouched down next to Henut. He was old and

smelled of incense, and had a kind, curious face. ‘I thought the great Sobek would make a meal of you.’

‘I’ve never seen such a big crocodile. What was he? Ten cubits? Eleven?’

The magician agreed. He turned to Henut. ‘He was after someone on the riverbank. Your warning saved them.’

Henut smiled weakly.

‘If he was hungry, why didn’t he take you?’ the priest asked with a sense of wonder, studying her like she was a legal scroll.

Henut didn’t answer. She felt a shadow fall over her and looked up. She made a sort of squeaking noise. The pharaoh’s son, Khaemwaset, was standing over them like one of his father’s giant statues. He didn’t look real. He was tall and his clothes were such a fine cloth they looked like butterfly wings. His beard was held on with a golden chin strap and his headdress – it wasn’t the same as the pharaoh’s *nemes*, but made it look like the sun was shining from his face. Henut was mesmerised, as were the people in the crowd, who fell silent.

‘The girl is obviously important,’ he said. ‘Sobek has not only spared her, but has brought her to my attention.’

The priest looked almost angry. He stood up, leaving Henut on the grass at their feet. ‘It does seem that way.’

‘I know your concerns, Pahem, but you must let us continue now. Unas is smiling on us.’

‘My name is Pahemnetjer,’ he bristled at Khaemwaset’s over-familiarity. ‘High Priest of Ptah, and this might have nothing to do with Unas.’

Henut’s brow furrowed. She’d never heard the name Unas before. He didn’t sound like a god. Something strange was happening. These two men had been arguing about something and now she’d quite literally fallen into their quarrel.

‘Pahem suits you better,’ Khaemwaset said. ‘And you cannot deny that pyramid belongs to Unas, not after what my men discovered.’

‘We need proof. Perhaps we can revisit it when you are back from Pi-Ramesses,’ Pahem said crossly.

Henut frowned. Pi-Ramesses was the new capital city, somewhere north up in the delta.

‘No, I will confirm my men’s findings today, before I leave. After all, how else will I convince the pharaoh, my *father*...’ he said pointedly, ‘to allow the work to take place? And we have a miraculous blessing, witnessed by hundreds. Why waste any time?’

Pahem looked crestfallen. Henut was confused. What did her not being eaten by a crocodile have to do with the business of the High Priest of Ptah and the pharaoh’s son?

‘I will take the child.’ Khaemwaset glanced down at Henut, who looked up at him with the expression of a dead fish. ‘What is your name?’

At that moment, Nefer and Sennefer pushed forwards through the crowd. Henut looked around for Seti, but he was nowhere to be seen.

‘Henut!’ Nefer bent down to hug her. ‘What were you doing swimming in the Nile?’

‘Is this your child?’ Khaemwaset asked.

‘She’s mine, sir,’ Sennefer said, holding his amulets nervously and bowing low.

‘I will take her to be a servant in my house,’ Khaemwaset said.

Sennefer’s eyebrows rose. ‘Highness... she’s pretty useless.’

‘You will be rewarded. I will personally vouch for her safety.’ He offered his hand to Henut. ‘Can you walk?’

Henut took his hand. It was smooth and elegant, unlike the rough hands of craftspeople like her father. Khaemwaset’s fingertips were stained with henna. The gold and silver bracelets that collected around his wrist were studded with the blue stone lapis lazuli. She got up on her feet, her other hand clutching at her sodden onions.

‘Very good,’ Khaemwaset said. He clapped his hands and spoke to the crowd. ‘Retake your positions. Sobek has spared the life of this child and now Sokar will bless our fields!’

There was a cheer and the crowd moved back.

‘Wait...’ Henut said.

‘See that this magician is rewarded,’ Khaemwaset said to one of his guards. ‘Gather

the men and tell them to meet us at the barge. We'll travel once the ceremony gets underway.'

Sennefer, his eyebrows still raised in worry, bent down and rubbed her shoulder. It was strange seeing him at eye level, as though he cared about her.

'It'll be alright,' he whispered. 'I can't do anything now but I'll try and get you home soon. You have to try and stay in Memphis. Once you leave, we can't petition to get you back. If you get any opportunity, ask to stay here... but whatever happens, you must do what he says.'

'I...' Henut began but Sennefer had already turned to run back to the ropes at the prow of the holy boat.

The drummers restarted their beat. Khaemwaset looked down at her and, with a nod of his head, she knew she had to follow him towards Sokar's boat. She could feel the eyes of the crowd on them as Khaemwaset retook his position. The crowd fell silent as Pahem began to chant his incantation.

Now she was closer, Henut could see a series of poles under the curved golden barge. Her father and the rest of the craftsmen joined Khaemwaset. Forty priests in leopard skins picked up the poles, and, as one, lifted the boat with the god onto their shoulders. The priests shuffled forward and the enormous contraption began to move. The oars in the boat magically started to row as music started. No longer a solemn funeral march, it was a dance. As it moved, Henut spotted the young boys on the deck of the ship rowing together as the priests below narrowly avoided getting their heads paddled by the oars, moving in unison through the air, creating the illusion. The crowd swarmed behind the slowly moving barge, throwing seeds, dancing and cheering.

Henut pulled her eyes away and searched the crowd for her mother. She was somewhere there, she was certain. It didn't take her long to spot Tjay, who, like her, was ignoring the god in the ship being walked through the field. He was looking at her, with an I-told-you-so smugness

that made rage boil up inside her again. She tried to signal to him to look out for her mother, but Nefer pulled him into the crowd. She waved at her, touching her heart. Henut gave up trying to communicate the impossible and did the same.

She just wanted to run back to them and pretend none of this had happened. She felt awkward standing there at the far end of the field now the crowd had moved away. Having finished their ceremonial roles with the boat, Khaemwaset and High Priest Pahem walked back towards her. The men were arguing but she couldn't hear what they were saying over the music.

Her hair dripped with water and she wondered what was to become of her. Khaemwaset's bodyguards barely glanced in her direction. A thought occurred to her that maybe she'd been forgotten, that she could just rejoin the crowd and leave...

'Henut?' Khaemwaset called.

'Yes, sir?'

'I need you by my side.' He carefully folded a piece of parchment Pahem had marked and

placed it inside his robes. ‘Come, we will walk to the ship.’

‘My lord is still needed at the ceremony...’ Pahem began.

‘I’m sure you can round things off,’ Khaemwaset interrupted. ‘That should make you less paranoid about me taking your job.’

The priest looked furious as Khaemwaset ushered Henut back onto the path by the riverbank. His guards followed like ducklings.

‘You are not to do anything without me present!’ Pahem called after them.

Khaemwaset ignored him and continued to walk away.

‘Big crocodile you slipped by,’ he said to Henut. ‘Thirteen cubits.’

‘I’m not sure if it was quite that big, um, sir,’ Henut said awkwardly.

‘How did you do it?’

‘I played dead, sir,’ she shrugged.

‘But crocodiles scavenge dead meat all the time... You didn’t recite any spells, or call on any of the gods?’

Henut shook her head.

‘Well, if anyone asks,’ he said, whispering conspiratorially, ‘particularly if Pahem asks, will you do me a favour and say that you did?’

Henut was too confused to ask why and nodded. She looked over again at the distant crowd and tried to look for anyone she knew, but they were already too far away. They continued to walk along the edge of the Nile, past shacks and ships on one side and the empty black fields on the other.

‘Where are we going, sir?’ Henut asked tentatively.

‘Not far,’ he smiled. ‘See?’

Henut’s jaw dropped. She followed Khaemwaset’s long arm to a familiar-looking ship. Uncle Seti was yelling orders to someone on the deck. When he saw her, he dropped his rope.



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Henut sat quietly by an oar of the ship, watching Seti prepare the vessel. It was large, some forty cubits long. To the gulls circling above, it must've looked like a giant's eye.

The barge was half empty, aside from a large number of jars of wine that were covered by canvas and firmly tied down. The prince had taken off his ceremonial garb and handed it to Seti, who was placing it into the space at the bow underneath the standing platform. He had to rearrange some other cargo to do this; a guard was placed in front of the platform, presumably to protect the precious jewellery.

There were many people aboard. One man for each of the two dozen oars, plus Khaemwaset's guards. There were a few women, likely the wives of Seti's crew, too busy to offer Henut anything more than a curious glance. They sat repairing ropes near the wine in the middle of the boat, underneath the hawser cable that ran at head-height along the length of the ship. The tension of this rope was what held the boat together.

Henut instinctively knew which way the barge would be travelling. The sail was being hoisted. They would be going south, against the current. Not towards Pi-Ramesses, where Pahem had thought they were going. It might have been all the river water she'd swallowed or her father's warning, but she felt sick. She needed to stay in Memphis, if only to try and find her mother.

She walked to the prince who had settled on a rug near the back of the ship. He was reading a scroll. Despite his less formal garb, his long limbs were elegantly posed, and his demeanour set him apart from the rambunctious Seti and her

anxious father. The shadow of the red sail slowly swept over them.

‘It’s hot,’ Khaemwaset said, without looking up. He nodded at the large paddle fan.

She picked it up and began to wave it over him. The scroll fluttered in his hand.

‘Never mind,’ he said, holding up his hand for her to stop. His face was friendly when he turned to her. ‘Do you want to know what I’m reading?’

‘It’s a letter from...’ Henut squinted at it. ‘Paser?’

‘Yes, he’s one of the high priests in Thebes. He’s cross he’s not attending my father’s *heb sed* festival in a couple of weeks. They’re old friends, I knew him growing up. It is a shame I won’t see him, but he has to stay down south to keep things in order...’ Khaemwaset paused and looked at her curiously, evidently surprised. ‘Wait. You can read?’

Henut looked down at her feet. The drying river mud was flaking over his rug. ‘Yes. All my family are scribes and administrators for craftspeople. Apart from Uncle Seti, of course.’

‘That Seti? He’s your uncle?’ Khaemwaset pointed at Seti tying up ropes. The prince looked even more surprised. ‘He is a sly man. I didn’t even know he had family in Memphis.’

‘I didn’t know he was working for you either,’ Henut said.

‘My fault. I swore him to secrecy.’

‘Why have you brought me here, sir?’

‘I need your help with something,’ Khaemwaset said.

‘After I’ve helped,’ Henut licked her lips nervously, ‘can I go home?’

‘But you will miss the *heb sed* festival!’ Khaemwaset said excitedly. ‘There will be incredible processions and my father is going to prove he is still fit to rule the kingdom. He’ll perform great feats of strength and fire arrows and perhaps even run. I’ve already commissioned sculptors at Saqqara to immortalise it.’

‘What if he fails?’

Khaemwaset glowered at her. ‘He’s not going to fail. If you come, you’ll see just how great he is.’

‘I’d prefer to stay in Memphis,’ Henut whispered meekly.

He looked at her thoughtfully. His face looked younger without his ceremonial fake beard. ‘I’ll think about it.’

Seti moved to the back of the ship and shouted orders to the men who released the boat from its moorings. They caught the wind and drifted into the middle of the river.

They were not the only vessel. Papyrus boats were sailing haphazardly into the small harbours and canal inlets that peppered the west bank of the river. The massive city of Memphis revealed itself as the date palms and sycamore trees slid slowly past.

‘Henut!’ Seti had given his steering oar to one of Khaemwaset’s men and come down to see his niece. ‘How in Duat did you come to be here?’

‘Didn’t you see what happened after I fell in?’

‘No, I saw something else,’ he said angrily, his eyes flicking towards the bow of the barge that was under guard. ‘And then before I could get back to you, I was ordered here.’

‘I saw her!’ Henut whispered. ‘It was my mother. I swear it, Uncle, we need to go back!’

‘Henut...’ he shook his head. ‘You are mistaken.’

‘Don’t you care that your sister might still be alive?’

‘Right now I care more about my niece. What in Amun’s name are you doing on this boat?’

‘I nearly got eaten by a crocodile and now Khaemwaset has taken me into his household.’

His expression relaxed a little. ‘Ohhh, that makes sense.’

‘No it doesn’t!’ She was angry. ‘We have to turn back right now!’

‘We can’t,’ Seti said. ‘Don’t look at me like that, I’m in trouble too! I’m supposed to be delivering wine to the tombs of Beni Hasan as an offering. But he’s commandeered my vessel. It’s the pharaoh’s *heb sed* festival soon, up north in Pi-Ramesses, and he can’t miss it. Beni Hasan is to the south. But what can I do? He’s a prince. You have to beg him to let you stay in

Memphis or there is no telling when we can get you home again.’

‘He seems nice enough,’ Henut said.

‘That’s because you haven’t said no to him yet,’ Seti said.

‘So where are we going right now?’

‘Not far. The pyramid of Unas near Saqqara,’ Seti grimaced. ‘He’s got unfinished business there.’

‘Seti!’ barked one of Khaemwaset’s guards. ‘We’re at the turning.’

‘Of course...’ Seti got up to help them steer the boat.

‘But Uncle!’

‘Not now. Go sit in the shade and keep quiet.’

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Henut looked out over the black fields. She could just about make out the temple of Ptah in the far distance. They'd turned off the Nile and into a canal south of the city. It was busy with traffic. They passed vessels laden with white rock. The coating of dust made the sailors the same colour as the stone. Along with the kohl around their eyes, it gave them the look of skeletons. Their expressions were scrunched against the hard white light bouncing off their cargo. People were walking along the canal. Some were carrying food up to the workers or the shrines that were dotted among the graves at the necropolis. Some were drying fish in the sun, while others were

sitting in the shade of reed canopies, weaving baskets while naked toddlers chased each other around the poles.

The heat got worse the further inland they went. Henut's dress had gone from soaked to bone dry. Flies zipped around her but she was too deep in thought to flick them away.

She'd seen her. Hadn't she? It wasn't as though she just *thought* the face in the crowd looked like her mother. Her heart knew. Could Seti really be right? Had her heart only seen what it wanted to see?

It seemed impossible. Her mother was dead and yet... It was the Sokar festival, after all. Sokar was one of the gods responsible for resurrection. Sokar brings life to the dead fields. Could he bring life to her mother?

She wished she could talk to Tjay. She would've even risked asking her father.

They were close to the desert now. Seti yelled at Khaemwaset's men to pick up oars and navigate them into the harbour of a temple. The fields stopped in line with the canal that branched

north from the harbour. Beyond the narrow band of water was only sand. It was a distinct line. Not like the blur of twilight between night and day. More like the line between life and death. Black on one side, yellow on the other.

Seti brought the barge into the harbour by the southern ramp.

‘I thought we were going to a pyramid?’ Henut asked as the boat slowly came to a halt.

‘The pyramid complex is through a walkway behind this temple,’ Seti said quickly, shouting to his crew to secure the boat at the dock.

The main entrance to the temple was cluttered with papyrus boats, all clamouring to have their pilgrims taken up onto land first. Some pilgrims climbed up the stone steps from the water, others were lifted in their coffins. This was their final stop before being taken to the necropolis.

‘You are not your father!’ a woman shouted.

Henut looked down to see a woman yelling at them from the dock. She was around Henut’s father’s age and wore a priestess’s patterned robes. Her eyes were heavily darkened and she

had tattoos on her neck that branched down to her chest. She signalled with her arms and four elderly soldiers trotted down the dock towards their barge.

‘Am I not?’ Khaemwaset jumped off the deck onto the stone ramp. He was quite athletic, landing just in front of the woman, stopping her soldiers in their tracks. ‘Who are you?’

‘Meryt,’ she said, looking daggers at him. ‘A priestess of this temple, and only my ship is allowed on this part of the dock.’

She pointed at a small boat about a quarter of the size of Seti’s barge.

‘Impressive,’ Khaemwaset said, with a touch of sarcasm.

Henut actually thought it was quite impressive. She didn’t know of any women who owned a papyrus boat, let alone a wooden one.

‘Pahemnetjer forbade anyone to go near the pyramid,’ Meryt said.

The elderly guards raised their curved *khopesh* blades at the prince.

‘It won’t be a pyramid for much longer if we don’t.’ Khaemwaset ignored the guards and helped his men off the ship. ‘I’m here on the pharaoh’s business.’

The guards looked between Khaemwaset and Meryt in confusion.

‘This isn’t the pharaoh’s temple!’ Meryt snapped back. Her tenacity in standing up to the prince shocked Henut. ‘This temple belongs to Bastet and Hathor, and is not to be befouled by irreligious morons. So leave!’

The guards raised their swords again. ‘Do as the priestess says.’

‘We won’t be stopping long,’ Khaemwaset said. He reached into his bag and pulled out the parchment that Pahem had marked and handed it to Meryt. He turned his back on them and helped Henut down off the ship. ‘You can get us some water if you like.’

The priestess read the paper and folded her arms. She stuck her chin out, revealing the two Eye of Horus tattoos on the front of her neck.

‘If you want a drink you can queue up with the other pilgrims at the entrance.’

‘How kind,’ Khaemwaset helped Seti down from the barge, leaving the rest of the crew on board, and sauntered past Meryt and her guards.

‘This says you can go to the pyramid, it does not say you can enter with armed men at the side of the temple!’ Meryt yelled after him.

It was a short walk up the stone incline to the south entrance, which had two large stone columns supporting the high roof. The temple was modest compared to the ones in Memphis, but it was still grander than any house that Henut had been in. Henut was uncomfortable entering the sacred space when the priestess had made clear they were not welcome. However, she wasn’t going to go against her father’s instruction to obey Khaemwaset just because it was a bit awkward.

Henut felt a prod in her back as Seti ushered her past the columns into the cool building. The air was thick with incense. It enveloped them in an other-worldly darkness. At first, Henut

couldn't see much, only the patterned sunlight spilling through the high window grates.

Temples weren't like houses. They were made of stone, not mud-brick. Even though this temple was in disrepair with enormous trunks of cedar propping up the far end of the hallway, it still dwarfed everyone. Even Khaemwaset looked oddly puny as he marched over the cracked flagstones. Scribes working cross-legged in the light of the open doorways had to pick up their parchments and tuck their feet in as Khaemwaset marched past.

The old guards had stopped following them and were bent over, wheezing, by the entrance. Meryt ran to overtake the group and stood directly in the way of Khaemwaset, her arms outstretched.

'Pahemnetjer forbade...' she began, breathing heavily, her arms blocking the inner doorway.

'Pahem is a fool. Sobek himself has sanctioned our expedition, so unless you want to anger the Nile, as well as me, perhaps you could move aside?' Khaemwaset said sharply.

She hesitated. ‘You’re not to take anything from the tomb.’

‘I won’t.’

She didn’t move.

He cocked his head to the side. ‘You doubt my word?’

‘You’ve been sending convicts here to dig at night!’ She pointed at Seti.

Henut looked curiously at Seti. Why did she think he was a convict?

‘We have permission from Pahem, High Priest of Ptah, and we have the blessing of Sobek.’ He gestured to Henut. ‘Which I see as blessing of Unas himself. It is his pyramid after all!’

‘Terrible things befall those who enter another’s tomb,’ she said. ‘They will answer to a divine court.’

Henut was distracted from the argument by a scribe sitting cross-legged on the floor next to her. He was drawing a familiar scene. She’d seen pictures like this painted on the walls of the necropolis when she visited her family’s tombs at festivals. The Hall of Two Truths. The

picture was of the dead person, standing in front of many seated gods, with Osiris and his wife Isis, acting as judge. In the centre was a huge pair of scales. Thoth, the divine scribe, stood ready to record the judgement. On one side of the scales was Maat, the feather of truth, on the other was the deceased's heart. Near the bottom of the scales was a hungry beast with the head of a crocodile, the body of a lion and the hind legs of a hippopotamus. Its eyes were glistening with hunger.

‘You like Ammit?’ the scribe asked, pointing at the monster.

‘You’re very skilled,’ Henut nodded, frowning at the salivating creature.

‘Her name means “Devourer of Souls”,’ whispered the scribe. ‘If you’re judged to have lived a life not in accordance with Maat, you die for a second time and never return.’

‘What do these words mean?’ she pointed to the hieroglyphs surrounding the sketch.

‘Oh, just some spells. A bit of the right magic and this lot,’ the scribe pointed to the gods,

‘can be fooled into letting you pass on into the afterlife.’

‘But how do you trick the scales?’ Henut asked, looking back at Ammit’s greedy expression.

‘Ah! For that you need...’

Before he could answer, Khaemwaset had started marching again, with Meryt at his heels. Seti shoved Henut to move forward, deeper into the dark temple.

To her left, she spied the entrance to the innermost chamber, where the smell of incense was thickest. Oil lamps were lit and, judging by the ethereal glow, the light was being reflected off gold. The gods were just through that doorway.

Khaemwaset didn’t stop to look. He headed straight for the right hand corner of the chamber. It was so dark in this part of the temple, Henut had to concentrate to avoid stepping on her uncle’s heels. Through another doorway and after turning a corner, they came out of the back of the temple. Henut was dazzled by the sun.

‘See?’ Khaemwaset stopped and pointed out at the vista. ‘They are letting all memories die.’

‘It’s old. Things that are old turn to ruin,’ Meryt said. ‘It’s normal.’

They were standing on an old walkway that had once formed an enclosed corridor leading up to the temple complex of the pyramid. The corridor’s walls had fallen down and part of the roof had collapsed, the stones leaning against the remains of the walls. They walked around carefully. Dead ahead was the Djoser pyramid. It had sides that looked like steps and a flat top, a contrast to the perfectly smooth slopes and pointed capstones of other pyramids. The limestone casing of the top of the stepped pyramid was falling off. Sand dunes had attempted to smother the surrounding walls, which were threaded with cracks.

Khaemwaset continued to march down the corridor followed by Meryt and the guards, with Seti bobbing behind them. The path curved away from the Djoser pyramid, so that now they were facing a different complex of buildings in the distance. There were sections where the covered corridor walls were intact, blocking Henut’s view, so it was hard to make out the complex as a

whole. The intact parts of the roof were a glorious relief from the heat. A narrow gap between the ceiling stones allowed enough light for her to marvel at the carved reliefs decorating the walls and dozens of geometric stars on the ceiling.

‘It will cost too much to restore this,’ Khaemwaset was saying. ‘Modern artisans lack the skills to do it justice.’

‘There are skilled artists at Deir El Medina,’ Seti argued.

‘Artists, yes, but this carving is much better than anything modern artists can do. The past kings were great men. We have lost so much knowledge since their time.’ Khaemwaset said solemnly.

Henut noticed Seti rolling his eyes.

It was a long walk through the partially collapsed corridor before they reached the second temple. They marched through a dark hall, full of broken furniture. There was no incense here. It smelt musty. They passed through another doorway into an open courtyard. They chose to skirt around the edges, using the shade of

its cloistered columns. The paint was flaking, but they still looked like giant papyrus. Henut briefly imagined the group were beetles, running between the grasses, but the adults' faces were all too serious for games.

At the far end of the courtyard, they reached another doorway and, after being plunged back into the cool darkness, they saw steps which led up to five dark niches, empty of the statues that once sat in them. It gave Henut an eerie feeling. It was as though even the gods could be forgotten. Seti gave her a nudge. The group turned to walk through a side door into white sunlight.

They were in an enormous paved plaza. It was surrounded by walls and in its centre was an enormous pyramid. The whole area was in disrepair. Henut was shocked. The pyramid was in a terrible state; its entire top had cascaded into the grounds below. Heaps of white stone lay strewn over the cracked flagstones. People had obviously been taking away the white casing, leaving the yellow stone underneath open to the

elements. It looked like a loaf of bread, half-eaten by mice.

‘Is this the pyramid of Unas?’ Henut asked.

‘Yes. One decent storm and the place will flood,’ Khaemwaset said, pointing to the broken drain. ‘I daresay what is left of Unas inside will have rotted away, underwater.’

Seti shook his head, ‘I didn’t see any water damage in the antechamber last night.’

‘It was blasphemy to enter there,’ Meryt said.

‘It is blasphemy to let this crumble,’ Khaemwaset muttered.

‘You went inside? Last night?!’ Henut whispered to Seti.

‘You have to do what a prince tells you to,’ Seti shrugged.

‘But isn’t it illegal to raid tombs?’ Henut asked, trying to catch Seti’s eye. ‘People get put on spikes or left to die in the desert for robbery.’

‘We aren’t raiding,’ Khaemwaset said. ‘We are exploring.’

‘But...’ Henut felt scared as they moved closer. High overhead, vultures circled them.

‘We haven’t even brought any offering for the pharaoh’s *ka*,’ Meryt said.

‘Where would we place them? His shrine is destroyed,’ Khaemwaset pointed to the rubble in the shade of the pyramid.

The group walked over to it, the guards muttering uneasily to each other. Henut dipped down to see a dark steep slope that went under the pyramid.

‘We can’t go that way,’ Seti said. ‘It’s blocked off by a portcullis stone.’

Henut felt a wave of relief.

‘Fortunately for us, someone left this tunnel.’ Seti grinned and pointed to the ground, tracing an imaginary line into the pyramid. ‘It leads right into the centre of the pyramid.’

Just a few cubits from the opening, where the casing of the pyramid met the paving slabs, was a smaller hole.

‘Ladies first.’ Khaemwaset smiled at Henut.



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CHAPTER EIGHT
Inside the Tomb

Henut panicked and ran from the shadow of the pyramid, back into the sun. She heard the men laughing, but she didn't care. Seti ran after her.

'It's alright, Henut,' he said, catching her arm.

'I don't want to go into someone's tomb!' she cried. 'You heard what Meryt said! We'll be cursed.'

'I've already been in and I'm not cursed,' Seti smirked. 'Pharaohs don't leave curses on their tombs.'

'What about that?' she said, pointing at his arm.

He touched his bruise and smiled. 'The guards caught me last night. They thought I was a robber.'

They were a bit rough, but the prince sorted it out. No harm done.'

Henut looked sceptical. 'I don't understand why we need to go down there.'

'We need to verify whose pyramid it is,' Khaemwaset appeared over Seti's shoulder. 'I believe it is the pyramid of Unas, a great king who lived around a thousand years ago. It has been unmaintained for centuries. If we don't prove it, I'll never convince my father that the pyramid needs to be restored. Unas's name may be lost forever.'

'But you already said the pyramid belongs to Unas?' Henut asked Khaemwaset.

'We need proof, witnesses...'

'Seti's a witness...' Henut began.

'Witnesses people can trust. Like me,' Khaemwaset said, puffing out his chest. 'Once we know it belongs to Unas, we can restore it to honour him.'

'If you're not robbing the tomb,' Henut asked, 'why was Pahem trying to stop you?'

‘He thinks I’m after his job,’ Khaemwaset waved his hand dismissively. ‘Last night Seti managed to break into the tomb.’

‘I cleared the path that ancient tomb robbers used,’ Seti explained.

‘All the walls inside are covered with hieroglyphs. See?’ Khaemwaset handed her a scrap of papyrus. It was hastily scribbled with religious text.

‘I can’t read this,’ Henut said.

‘It says, “Unas is Sobek, green-plumed, wakeful, alert. Unas arises as Sobek, son of Neith”,’ Khaemwaset read.

‘The pharaoh buried in that pyramid is Sobek?’ Henut asked. ‘The god with a crocodile head?’

‘It’s just a spell,’ Seti laughed. ‘The walls are covered in them. I wrote that one down, realised I needed more parchment, and when I went to get some I was grabbed by Pahem’s men.’

‘After seeing you survive your encounter with a crocodile, I convinced Pahem that not only did Unas *not* mind us going into his tomb, but he

overtly blessed us to do so by sparing your life,’ Khaemwaset explained. ‘Pahem doesn’t believe in coincidences.’

‘But *you* think it’s a coincidence!’ Henut looked between the two men.

‘Of course!’ Khaemwaset said. ‘Those words Seti copied down were written over ten centuries ago and that crocodile likely only spared you because of the noise of the crowd.’

‘So we don’t have Unas’s permission to enter his tomb,’ Henut folded her arms.

Khaemwaset rolled his eyes. ‘Unas is dead, little girl.’

‘No! He passed through Duat and now lives in the fields of reeds.’

‘Not the fields of reeds,’ Seti corrected. ‘That is for commoners like us. Unas was a king so what happens to him is more complex...’

‘But he lives on, right?’ Henut interrupted.

Khaemwaset rolled his eyes. ‘Have you ever heard of someone, anyone, coming back to life?’

Henut thought of her mother, then quickly pushed the thought away.

‘Osiris,’ Meryt said, as she joined them.

He laughed. ‘The only part of Unas, of any of us, that is guaranteed to live on is our name. I am going to make sure Unas is never forgotten.’

‘That isn’t remotely true,’ Meryt said coolly. ‘I’m telling you again, if we enter here, we risk our path in the afterlife.’

‘We?’ Khaemwaset repeated. ‘Are you coming too?’

‘I have to make sure you don’t damage anything!’ Meryt snapped. Henut could tell she already looked nervous.

They walked back into the shadow of the pyramid. Khaemwaset’s men lit the oil lamps while Seti walked to a crack in the ground.

‘I’ll go first,’ he said. ‘It is a bit of a drop. This robber’s tunnel goes under the other shaft.’

His stomach barely squeezed through the hole, but he managed to shuffle in, dropping the last few cubits. He reached his hands up and Khaemwaset handed down a lit oil lamp and then gestured for Henut to follow.

‘It’s OK, he’ll catch you,’ Khaemwaset said, as Henut dangled her feet into the blackness.

Henut felt the cool stale air rise up as she lowered herself down. ‘Jump!’

She let go of the sides of the stone and felt her stomach slide up her throat. Seti caught her. Khaemwaset followed, and helped Meryt down after him with the bag of spare lamps and papyrus.

Henut’s eyes took a while to adjust to the dim light. Seti held his old lamp high. The walls looked damp. Parts of them shone in a very particular way. Like wet grapes. They moved.

‘Scorpions!’ Henut whimpered.

Meryt raised her oil lamp and cast a spell. ‘No scorpion rise, lest the abomination of the gods fall on thee. Be still, thou of the long back and the many joints. May Selket protect thee and keep thy horns still. No trouble of thine shall arise.’

The scorpions didn’t react. Meryt repeated the words.

‘Why are we waiting around to be stung?’ Khaemwaset muttered.

The tunnel bent around to the right, and the four followed it for a few paces before they came to a dead end. Seti put his lamp down and began to reach up the side of the walls. He was able to pull himself up onto a small ledge, where a much narrower tunnel continued. Khaemwaset passed him his oil lamp and then picked up Henut so she could reach the ledge. She followed her uncle on her hands and knees down the narrow, poorly cut passage.

Henut didn't say anything. Her knees hurt, and every time she paused to get her breath, she could feel the slight heat of the flame from Meryt's oil lamp behind her. The tunnels sloped downwards and opened up into a room with a high stone ceiling. There was a large doorway to the left and a small half-doorway to the right.

'Where now?' Khaemwaset asked.

Seti pointed at the low doorway to the right. 'We go down there, and then up and over the portcullis blocks.'

Meryt was obviously uneasy. As they crept through the tunnel she kept muttering spells.

When Khaemwaset's oil lamp went out she made a whimpering noise. Seti used a taper to relight it. He gave her a withering look.

'See that?' Seti said, patting the wall in front of him. 'That's the granite block they used to seal the tomb. This is the first of three plug stones. We need to climb over them. Once we pass the third one we'll climb back down to the antechamber.'

'Antechamber?'

'Yeah, it's just another room,' Seti explained.

'How do we climb over the stones?' Meryt asked, looking timidly at the giant block.

Seti pointed to a large hole in the right hand side of the tunnel.

'It was covered over when I found it,' he explained, squeezing through. 'It leads to the side of the plug stone.'

Henut followed Seti and climbed up the side of the large granite stone that had been dropped to seal the tomb from robbers.

'I suppose it makes sense the robbers chose to dig through the softer rock than the granite,'

Khaemwaset said, as he crawled through the hole below and started to climb the stone.

Meryt heaved herself up onto the granite plug, pulling the sack up behind her. ‘I’m surprised they were able to take anything back out. Were people smaller in the past?’

‘Right! When were these tunnels even cut?’ Seti asked. He ducked down through another hole cut in the wall. Henut followed him onto the top of the second plugstone.

‘People usually rob tombs right after they are sealed,’ Khaemwasat said. ‘My father has already executed people trying to break into my grandfather’s tomb.’

‘So this tunnel is as old as the pyramid?’ Henut asked, following Seti through another hole to the top of the third, final stone.

‘Most likely.’

They climbed down the side of the third stone and crawled through another hole into a half-height passage.

The oil lamps revealed individual stars carved into the ceiling above. More religious text had

been meticulously chiselled into the limestone walls. The flames revealed carvings on every surface as the lamps bobbed along ahead of Henut.

‘It’s incredible,’ Meryt whispered.

‘Here is the spell about Sobek!’ Seti said, caressing the stone. He crawled along the passage and stood fully upright in the room at the end. He leant down to talk back into the tunnel. ‘I confess, I did sneak a peek in here before I left.’

‘By Horus!’ Khaemwaset said. ‘Light more lamps! I need to see this!’

The antechamber was a comfortable temperature and it smelled oddly sweet, like beeswax and pine. Despite her excitement, Henut yawned. Her joints ached from being bent over and now she was upright, she stretched her fingertips high. She had an enormous urge to lie down and nap among the broken boxes, pots and straw that lined the floor. The room had been robbed of its treasures and only the rubbish remained.

Meryt and Seti lit more lamps and placed them around the room. In the dim light, they could see

up to the pitched ceiling. It was covered in gold geometric stars.

‘How does it stay up?’ Meryt gasped, waving her oil lamp back and forth. ‘The walls at the side do not touch it!’

‘That’s a very fine stone,’ Khaemwaset whispered, caressing the blue text with his fingers. He continued to read, following the text like a cat stalking a lizard. When his flame got close to the wall it appeared to glow. ‘This is a very old version of change the *book of going forth by day*. I can barely understand it. But by the direction of the writing, it starts from there.’

He pointed at another low doorway, to the right of where they’d entered.

The doorway had a big crack above it. Seti ducked under, the faint light of his oil lamp revealing something enormous on the floor beyond. At first Henut thought the roof had caved in. A huge flat block, the same size as a large rug, absorbed the oil lamp light.

‘It’s the sarcophagus lid.’ Seti ducked through the doorway. ‘The thieves must have somehow

heaved it off his stone sarcophagus and searched his body. Oh...’

‘What have you found?’

Seti bent down to see what he had trodden on. ‘The poor fellow. The thieves really did a number on him! He’s been ripped up.’

‘Place what you can back in the sarcophagus,’ Meryt ordered, choosing to stay crouched in the low cracked doorway looking into the room. ‘Something terrible happened in here.’

Khaemwaset moved towards Seti, the whites of his eyes glistening in the lamplight.

‘Why would they rip him up?’ asked Henut, following the prince.

‘Perhaps he attacked them,’ Meryt said from the other side of the doorway. ‘So they destroyed him.’

‘Nonsense. They were looking for the amulets,’ Seti said. ‘There would be amulets placed inside the wrappings.’

Henut felt heavy. She noticed that the oil lamps didn’t flicker in here. They were frozen, like the statues outside a temple. They could be

centuries old, standing sentinel, unmoving like the dead. Perhaps it was a trick of the light, but the flames seemed smaller in this room, darker. It was harder to see what was written on the walls.

She watched Seti pick up something long and thin. To her horror, in the lamp light she realised what it was. An arm. He casually carried it over to the far end of the chamber.

A large black stone box seemed to glow in the darkness at the end of the room. Seti placed the arm in it. Henut couldn't work out how they'd got the box inside. It was much too large to fit through the doorway. The people in the past really had known powerful magic.

Meryt was still crouched in the doorway, whispering spells. Her forehead was damp and sparkled in the lamp light.

Seti's lamp revealed colourful patterns around the far wall.

'Beautiful!' Khaemwaset said, lifting his lamp high so he could read the inscriptions.

Khaemwaset went to one side of the sarcophagus, placed his lamp down and used

the flame to light another. He began to copy the inscriptions onto some blank parchment, using his spit to make his ink liquid. The sound of his reed scratching the papyrus made Henut think of the scorpions again. She felt a bit woozy, as though her heart were struggling to keep beating.

‘I don’t feel well,’ Meryt said from outside the chamber. ‘You can see the name Unas written everywhere. It is encircled on every surface... his cartouche.’

Henut remembered the scarab beetle amulet, the strange name encircled among the hieroglyphs.

‘You have your proof. We should leave this place,’ Meryt insisted.

The oil lamps were dimming. Khaemwaset was yawning.

Henut looked again at the flame of the oil lamp on the sarcophagus. There, next to it, on the brightly coloured wall, she saw something. It wasn’t part of the painting. It was a shadow. A shadow of a man. He was trapped inside the wall, posed like a king. He pointed his spear downwards to where Seti was standing.

She screamed.

‘He’s there! In the corner,’ she panted.

Khaemwaset picked up his oil lamp. The moment the light shifted the shadow was gone. Henut backed away from the sarcophagus. There was nothing there, just a flat painted wall.

Khaemwaset scoffed. ‘You’re mistaken.’

‘It was there,’ Henut said.

‘Believe the girl! There is enchantment in this room,’ cried Meryt from the antechamber. ‘How can it be centuries old yet still so colourful? It is magic!’

‘Have you not noticed that paintings fade in the sun?’ Khaemwaset reasoned. ‘It isn’t magic, it’s the lack of sunlight.’

Meryt took no notice. ‘The stone lining the walls is itself worth a fortune! Why did no one steal it? Unas must have risen from his sarcophagus and killed them!’

‘If he attacked people, where are their bodies?’ Seti said.

‘Perhaps they were fed to Ammit,’ Meryt said.

Henut remembered the beast's hungry eyes on the papyrus in the temple.

'Unas was a king, not a monster!' Khaemwaset warned.

Meryt carried on, her voice echoing in the antechamber. 'Thieves wouldn't destroy a body like that if they were just looking for amulets. Unas's mummy is here. There is evil here. I can feel the chaos.'

'Nonsense,' Seti yawned.

'The child saw him!'

'The child is mistaken,' Khaemwaset panted.

'He was there!' Henut pointed behind the sarcophagus. Her arm felt heavy. 'He was looking at that far wall.'

Khaemwaset slowly climbed up onto the sarcophagus and held his oil lamp high.

'What does it say?' Seti asked, resting his back against the wall.

'O Thoth, go, seize them for Osiris!' Khaemwaset read. 'Bring the one who speaks evil against the name of Unas, place them in your hand!'

‘He means me! He thinks I’m the one who speaks evil against him! Because I said he attacked the robbers!’ Meryt shrieked. She dropped her bag in the doorway and ran back to the exit.

‘Ptah protect me!’ she cried. ‘Bastet guide me to safety!’

As Khaemwaset turned, his lamp cast more shadows on the walls. For a moment Henut saw two shadows on either side of the sarcophagus. They were dressed like kings, their faces blurred by time. They were coming out of the walls. One was harpooning as before, the other pointing towards the low doorway Meryt had been crouching in. Henut’s heart tried to leap out of her body – it was telling her to escape, but her feet felt heavy as stone.

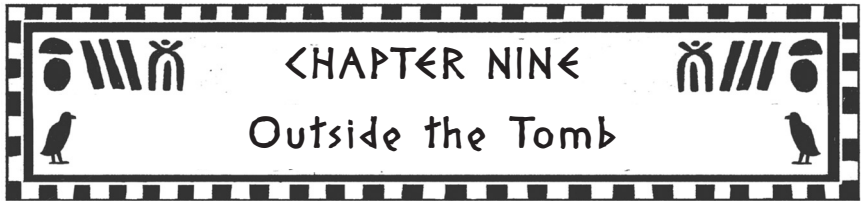
‘I see them!’ Seti gasped.

They danced for a moment in the flame, then their heads turned and looked at Henut. Expressionless.

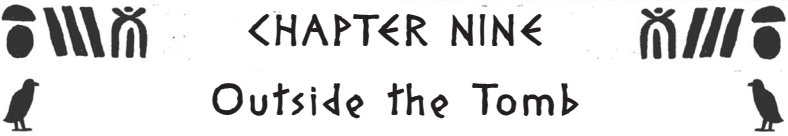
Khaemwaset’s flame went out.



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CHAPTER NINE
Outside the Tomb



All three of them bolted, stumbling into each other in the pitch darkness, feeling around for the doorway. Meryt hadn't got far. Her lamp was still lit, and they followed the glow to find her panting at the end of the low corridor, trying to climb back up over the portcullis stone.

'I can't breathe,' she cried.

'What is this magic?' Henut panted. The air seemed to die before it reached her mouth.

'Something has made us sick,' Khaemwaset said, stooped over in the corridor.

'We're not sick. I've seen this before,' Seti said, helping Meryt up into the robber's tunnel.

‘Men gasp like fish on the riverbank. Tombs are not made for the living. The air is stale.’

Henut looked back at her uncle in the tunnel, the light of the two remaining lamps glistening off his sweating forehead. When had he seen this before?

It felt like an age, crawling back through the dark, cramped robber’s tunnel. The closer they got to the entrance, the brighter the lamps became. The more effort she made, crawling back to the entrance, the more strength she had in her limbs.

Henut didn’t even think about the scorpions and clasped onto the strong arms of Khaemwaset’s guards as they helped her out of the tunnel. They emerged into the sunlight covered head to toe in dust.

‘You look like the dead,’ one laughed, but his face quickly dropped at their pale expressions.

Meryt shook her head. ‘Unas summoned an ancient magic. The air turned to dust in our lungs. Our hearts were screaming to be free.’

‘Don’t be so dramatic. There was simply not enough air to sustain us,’ Khaemwaset said.

‘That doesn’t explain the men,’ Henut interrupted, ‘coming out of the wall!’

The guards looked horrified.

‘A trick of the light,’ Khaemwaset said, unconvincingly.

‘There were spells about me on the walls!’ Meryt shivered. ‘You read them!’

‘Coincidence,’ Khaemwaset said, brushing the dust from his shoulders.

‘Uncle, you saw the shadows coming out of the walls!’ Henut insisted.

Seti gave a weak smile. ‘Our hearts were confused by the absence of air. The shadow kings might be a feature of the stone. They may have been carved that way.’

‘It was like walking into the Duat without Anubis to guide us,’ Meryt said. ‘Unas’s body was ripped apart by chaotic forces.’

‘His name will live on. We will make his tomb right,’ Khaemwaset said, determined. ‘I will see to it. Seti, can you get the barge ready? We will go to Pi-Ramesses! I will persuade my father to re-clad this pyramid. Unas’s name will live on.’

Seti looked uncomfortable, but didn't say anything. He bowed and walked back to the causeway. The guards didn't follow and instead asked about something to eat. After confirming with Meryt that there was bread and beer available at the temple, Khaemwaset agreed.

'Sir,' Henut said quietly, as they walked through the damaged causeway, 'could I... could I stay in Memphis?'

'Why?' Khaemwaset kept on marching, without looking down. 'Henut, this is a once in a lifetime opportunity to travel around Egypt! You'll likely meet my father, the pharaoh himself, because he will be there for his first *heb sed* festival! Goodness knows what opportunities may befall you.'

Henut didn't care what he said. Riches and palaces and promotions were of no interest to her. She only wanted to find her mother. 'I just want to be with my family.'

'Seti is your family, isn't he? We will all go together!'

Henut didn't want to tell the prince the truth. She could barely believe the truth. There was no world in which a man, who dismissed apparitions in a tomb where spells on the walls spoke directly to the occupants, would believe her that her dead mother was somehow alive.

'I'd rather stay.'

'I won't force you,' he sighed. 'You've already served me well. A lucky charm indeed.'

When the group made it to the temple, the guards went in search of food. Khaemwaset nudged a scribe with his foot.

'Sire?'

'I need a formal letter written to my father, with a copy sent to the high priests – Pahem, of course – and my old friend Paser... We'll also need to get some artisans sent up here from Deir El Medina...'

'Why?' Meryt interrupted. 'Can't the people around here chisel your name clearly enough?'

'What's that supposed to mean?' Khaemwaset turned to her.

‘That is the whole point, isn’t it? Sure, you’ll preserve Unas’s name, but you and your father’s names will be there too, right alongside his cartouche.’ She gave a sly smile. ‘After all, your older brother will be pharaoh one day, not you. You won’t have an exclusive tomb in the great place, but this way you’ll get to have your name on a pyramid. Funny how that works out.’

‘Careful,’ Khaemwaset said. ‘You overstep your mark. You are just one priestess in an insignificant temple on the outskirts of Memphis. I am the king’s son.’

‘Lowly priestess I may be, but at least I don’t need to scrawl my name on someone else’s pyramid to feel significant.’

Khaemwaset stared at her for a moment and then stormed off. She smiled.

Henut licked her lips. ‘What do you think we saw in the pyramid?’

‘We saw a powerful magic warning us to leave,’ she said firmly. ‘All pharaohs are gods and sit with Osiris in the next life. The prince would do well to obey them.’

‘Is it possible for someone to be raised from the dead?’ Henut whispered. ‘I mean, back to this life, not the next one?’

She cocked her head, causing one of the Eye of Horus tattoos on her neck to wink. ‘Anything is possible in this world, if Isis wills it. Don’t let men convince you of what you know to be false. Trust in your heart.’

‘Guards!’ Khaemwaset came running back to the temple. ‘Guards! That mangy scoundrel has just left the dock! He has my papers and my ceremonial costume on there! He has my headdress... and my beard!’

Henut followed the guards, running through the temple, out into the sunlight. The barge was only a few cubits away from the dock, she could hear Seti ordering his men to row. She watched in utter confusion. Not just because Seti had left her. Not just because she didn’t know why he was fleeing. But because there, stood at the back of the ship, pulling in the long tow rope, was... her mother.

‘Hey!’ Henut shouted, waving from the ramp.

Her mother looked up at her. She didn't wave back.

She's alive. Not just a face in a crowd. She was right there. On Seti's barge. She had to have been there ever since Henut caught a glimpse of her on the riverbank. It was Seti who had pulled her away, Seti who had hidden her.

Why hadn't he told her? Why didn't she come back? Didn't she care?

'Criminals! Bandits!' shouted the guards.

Khaemwaset was shaking with anger on the dockside. Henut was tempted to jump in the dirty water and chase after them. If her fear of crocodiles hadn't been rekindled earlier that day, she might well have.

'My dad is going to kill me,' Khaemwaset said.

'It's not your fault, sire,' one of the guards said.

'It is! Trusting a criminal like that!'

Khaemwaset spat. 'What was I thinking?!'

'You didn't know he was a criminal, sire,' the guard said.

'Of course I knew! Why else would I have employed him? I needed someone who could

break into tombs!’ Khaemwaset put his face in his hands and screamed with frustration.

Henut was dumbstruck. Uncle Seti... her favourite uncle... was a tomb raider? Tomb raiding was the worst crime you could commit. It was worse than murder. Without your things in the afterlife, you could die a second death. With no amulets, Ammit could destroy your soul. Tomb raiding was against Maat, it was against everything any good Egyptian held dear. Even as she watched him take the barge she couldn’t quite believe anyone could be that evil.

Meryt had made her way to the dock and had a wry smile on her face. She approached Khaemwaset who was still clutching his face. ‘Everything okay?’


‘It’s fine. No matter,’ he lied, dropping his hands to reveal tears of frustration that had made the kohl run down his cheeks. ‘I’ll take another vessel and turn up to the *heb sed* without the robes and jewellery my father entrusted me with... and hope he doesn’t take away all my titles. He may never speak to me again.’

‘Aren’t you going to chase them?’ Henut asked. Khaemwaset shrugged. ‘There is no point. We don’t know where they are going.’

‘Yes we do!’ Henut said. ‘My uncle said he was going to take the wine that was under the canvas down to the tombs in Beni Hasan.’

‘That is near the town of Hebenu, at least a full day’s journey south of here.’ Khaemwaset’s eyes focused on the ground in front of him as he muttered, thinking hard. ‘They will be too far ahead of us by the time we walk back to the Memphis docks and secure ourselves a vessel. We can’t catch up to them.’

‘Can’t we?’ Henut said, pointing at Meryt’s small wooden boat.



CHAPTER TEN

The Journey to Hebenu

‘You want me to take you south? Then back north? All the way to Pi-Ramesses?’ Meryt repeated, outraged, as though the prince had asked her to dance for him. ‘All of you?’

Khaemwaset shook his head. ‘We only need to get to Hebenu, the town nearest the tombs of Beni Hasan. Once we catch up to the barge I’ll force Seti to take us on from there.’

‘Catch up? Seti’s barge is much larger and faster than my boat,’ Meryt said dismissively.

‘He’ll be in Hebenu for a while,’ Henut said. ‘He has cargo to deliver.’

‘Even then, how much do you all weigh?’ She looked at Khaemwaset’s guards. ‘This boat can

take maybe eight at most. But then it'll be going at the speed of a mummified cat.'

'Fine, I'll leave you here and only take two servants,' Khaemwaset said.

Meryt looked panicked. 'What? You can't just take it! I'd rather trust a crocodile with my boat than your pampered paws!'

'I can do what I like,' Khaemwaset said. 'I'm the prince. If you want to come, I'll take your boat and one of my servants.'

'Take me,' Henut volunteered.

Khaemwaset turned and looked at her. 'I thought you wanted to stay in Memphis?'

'She's the lightest,' Meryt reasoned.

'She can't protect you, sire,' protested one of Khaemwaset's guards. 'You need to have guards with you.'

'You heard what the priestess said,' Khaemwaset said to his guards. 'We must be quick to catch up with the thief. Can any of you sail?'

The guards all shook their heads.

Meryt looked furious. ‘How are you going to row out of the rapids when you’ve never lifted anything heavier than a goblet?!’

‘I am taking your boat. If you wish to protect her, you’ll have to pilot her for us.’ Khaemwaset smiled.

Meryt had balled her fists but after glancing at the guard’s weapons, reluctantly nodded her head. ‘Fine. But I am still the captain. I get to say who we take and I say we bring the girl. She’s good luck, isn’t she?’ Meryt asked, looking curiously at Henut.

‘That’s true.’ The prince pointed his finger at his guard. ‘The moment I said I would let her stay in Memphis was the very moment you let Seti leave with the ship!’

The guard’s face grew darker but he didn’t argue back.

‘Why the change of heart?’ Khaemwaset asked, looking down at Henut.

‘I...’ Henut didn’t know what to say. She’d already told him that her mother was dead, to say she now thought she was alive would make her

sound like she was possessed by demons. ‘You need to stop my uncle. Well, if you use me as bait, he is bound to stop and save me.’

The prince looked thoughtful. ‘You mean, if he refuses to give himself up, I threaten to kill you?’

Henut nodded.

Meryt’s ears pricked up. ‘Oh, this could get very dark indeed.’

It was at least an hour before they were ready to follow Seti’s barge. Meryt had to organise someone to take over her duties at the temple. She also had to find supplies, linen and fishing nets in case they couldn’t find food.

They departed the temple dock and made their way back down the crowded canal.

Meryt’s boat was much smaller than Seti’s barge. Henut could nearly reach both sides if she stretched her arms out. Its one square sail moved them slowly forward. It had just four oars, for the four oarsmen. There was also a large steering oar at the back which Meryt refused to let Khaemwaset touch.

‘Did Uncle Seti really raid tombs?’ Henut asked Khaemwaset as they sat on the bottom of the boat, trying to keep the flies away from the supplies. ‘That was the rumour,’ Khaemwaset said. ‘I’ve been doing some conservation work at Saqqara but none of the stone-cutters would risk entering the pyramid. Superstitious fools. They told me about a man called Seti who had once been caught robbing a tomb but miraculously escaped punishment.’

‘And they meant my Uncle Seti? But he’s a merchant!’

‘Perhaps that is how he gets away with it.’ Meryt said disapprovingly. ‘He robs a tomb in one city, flees on his barge and doesn’t sneak back until his crime is forgotten.’

Henut thought back to the previous night. The scarab beetle amulet she had found. It looked so valuable and she had just handed it to him... What had he done with it? Was it from a tomb?

Henut watched the familiar banks of the Nile get further away as the small boat’s sail pushed them gently upriver. The heat of the day pressed

down on her. She was too anxious to sleep, too tired to think. She felt sick. The prince's face was an exact reflection of how she felt inside.

‘Don’t worry, we will get you your stuff back,’ she said.

Khaemwaset sighed. ‘My father already thinks I’m an idiot. Losing those valuable items, holy items... he’ll never forgive me.’

‘It wasn’t your fault,’ Henut said.

‘Like that makes a difference,’ Khaemwaset said, looking down at his hands.

Henut chuckled a bit. ‘My dad’s the same. He shouts at me all the time.’

‘I’m nothing but a disappointment,’ Khaemwaset said. ‘No offence, but your dad is some random craftsman in Memphis.’

‘He’s a scribe in a team of craftsmen...’ Henut began.

‘Yeah, well, my father is a god,’ Khaemwaset said bitterly. ‘He has dozens of children. I’m nothing to him. I’m nothing but a failure.’

Henut tentatively reached over and put her hand on his shoulder. He suddenly seemed very

human. She could see his ribs moving, slightly too fast, like he was trying not to cry.

‘Be careful what you say to yourself,’ Meryt said coldly. ‘The gods are listening. You are listening.’

Khaemwaset looked daggers at her. ‘Mind your own business.’

‘How do you think magic works? It isn’t only by saying the right words in the right order,’ Meryt said. ‘It is believing the words, repeating them, manifesting them. If you go around telling yourself you are a failure, the gods will hear you. And even if they don’t make it true, you will, by believing the lies you tell yourself.’

‘Oh, spare me the mystical nonsense,’ Khaemwaset groaned.

‘This is my boat. I’m the captain and I don’t want to travel up the Nile with a failure. That is bad for all of us.’ Meryt said. ‘You are a prince. Act like one.’

He folded his arms and ignored her. After a few hours of travel, Khaemwaset broke the silence. ‘Do you see those entrances?’

Henut looked at the black holes that contrasted against the pale gold of the cliffs.

‘That’s where they cut the limestone for Unas’s pyramid. They used those quarries for the pyramids of Giza, and I have been using them to refinish the temples and shrines in Saqqara.’

‘Why do you delight in knowing such things?’ Meryt asked, her hand firmly on the steering oar at the stern of the boat.

‘It makes me feel connected to them. Our ancestors,’ Khaemwaset said with a wistful glance at the hills.

‘You should connect with the gods, not their cattle,’ she said sagely. ‘Go tighten that rope. The sail is billowing.’

‘Can’t Henut do it?’ Khaemwaset asked.

‘Henut has to stay at the end of the boat as a counterweight,’ Meryt explained. ‘And I am steering.’

‘How long before we get to Hebenu?’ Henut called, in an attempt to stop the two of them bickering.

‘Not until the day after tomorrow,’ Meryt explained. ‘We’ll stop along here tonight.’

‘We can’t stop!’ Khaemwaset said. ‘By the time we reach Hebenu, they’ll be gone.’

‘If we sail in the darkness, we risk our lives,’ Meryt said.

‘You exaggerate! There is a full moon tonight, we can see where we’re going.’

‘For one thing, there are too many sandbars. If we crash into one, it could damage the boat and leave us marooned for days. Plus, the spiritual dangers are even graver.’

‘Ooh, “spiritual dangers”,’ Khaemwaset repeated in a mocking tone.

They stopped for the night underneath the full moon. After building a fire and cooking on the riverbank, they returned to the boat to sleep. Khaemwaset delighted in his makeshift bed underneath the linen sheets hung from the hawser. These kept out the braver mosquitoes that the castor oil burning in the lamp hadn’t scared away. He said it reminded him of being a boy again, following his father when he went

to hunt lions. He had been a good shot with a throw stick, managing to hit birds on the wing. He started to tell a tale, but something about the stink of the oil or the soft, sorrowful murmur of his recollection must have made Henut drift to sleep.

She was following the jackal down the long temple hall she'd visited that day. There were no scribes. It was night time.

'You'll be too late.'

She had a feeling it wasn't the jackal who was speaking. It was someone else, a shadow in the wall...

'I know,' she said.

Suddenly, Henut found herself splashing through water.

'After the water, you will be taken to the law court. Is your heart with Maat?'

'My heart?'

'You can always use a replacement. Careful. The waters are rising.'

Henut looked down into the dark water. It was as deep as her waist now. There was something

moving towards her underneath it, something pale in the moonlight.

‘Say her name...’

She flinched out of the way of what she had thought was a crocodile, but then she realised what it really was... a lifeless body suspended under the water, drifting towards her.

‘Say her name...’

The current slowly turned the body over. It was dressed as a pharaoh, but had her mother’s face.

‘Say her name...’

Its dark eyes opened, staring right into hers, it opened its mouth as if letting out a silent scream.

‘Hatshepsut!’ Henut shouted, sitting up in the boat.

A flock of birds, the same colour as the ochre light of dawn, rose up and flew away.

‘What did you say?’ Khaemwaset was rubbing his stubbly head and leaning up on his elbows.

‘I was dreaming,’ Henut apologised.

Meryt sat up, stretching. ‘What about?’

‘It sounded to me like she was dreaming about a long-forgotten king,’ Khaemwaset said.

When he saw Meryt's sceptical face, he held up his hands. 'Oh, but you probably have a more spiritual explanation.'

'I'm sorry, I didn't realise you were such an expert on dreams,' Meryt said sarcastically. She moved over and started to apply Henut's eyeliner, holding tightly onto her cheeks and making stabbing motions near her eyeballs. 'Why would a priestess who has actually studied dream books know more than a man who crawls around ruins all day?'

Khaemwaset opened his mouth, closed it again, thought for a moment and took a big breath. 'We should get going.'

The river was wide here, and with nothing to navigate around, Meryt trusted Khaemwaset with control of the steering oar. After adjusting the sail, she joined Henut at the front of the boat.

'You still haven't told me why you had a change of heart,' Meryt whispered. 'Why did you agree to come after I overheard you begging his majesty to stay in Memphis?'

'You won't believe me,' Henut whispered back.

‘Try me,’ Meryt said.

Henut licked her lips in hesitation. She looked out over the water, the black farmland and the distant red desert. ‘This sounds stupid but... my mother has come back to life.’

Meryt’s eyebrows raised so high they disappeared under the fringe of her wig.

‘But Khaemwaset laughed when I said I thought people could come back to life,’ Henut said quietly. ‘Like Osiris.’

‘That man doesn’t think,’ Meryt said. ‘There must be a reason why we bury the dead.’

A chill swept over Henut. She hugged her knees into her chest. ‘How do you mean?’

‘Death is confusing. We grieve our dead loved ones but we also fear them,’ Meryt whispered. ‘Have you ever seen a dead body?’

The image of her mother underwater in her dream flashed into Henut’s mind. ‘No.’

‘Why do we fear them? Perhaps, under the right magic, the dead do wake and move.’ Meryt frowned. ‘That would explain why we seal them in tombs. To stop them from attacking us.’

‘She doesn’t have a tomb,’ Henut explained.

‘Look there!’ It was Khaemwaset.

Henut jumped up excitedly, hoping he’d sighted the barge. The boat wobbled precariously in the water as she ducked under the hawser and made her way back to him.

‘Careful!’ Meryt said, whispering a spell to placate the waters.

‘If you travel down that canal, you arrive at an enormous lake,’ Khaemwaset said. ‘It’s surrounded by fields, temples. My brother has a palace there. But the true wonder is the Temple of Amenemhat, which contains over two thousand rooms built of stone.’

‘Why would anyone need that many rooms?’ Meryt sounded disapproving.

They continued to bicker.

After a long slow day on the river they stopped again by the riverbank.

‘Not onions again!’ Khaemwaset complained.

‘Oh, I’m sorry I don’t have any of your fancy food. Henut can go to pick us up some bread in the morning. There is a village nearby.’

‘And pay for it with what?’ Khaemwaset said.
‘We’ve nothing to trade.’

‘You’ve those pretty trinkets on your wrists.’

‘These are worth more than a merchant’s entire caravan!’ Khaemwaset said, clutching his jewellery protectively.

‘We’ll take all the goods they can offer in exchange and then use those to trade our way downriver.’ Meryt smiled. ‘You want your fake beard back, don’t you?’

Henut struggled to sleep that night. She lay back on the boat gazing up at the stars. Her dreams were the same. The flooded temple, the whispered voices. She didn’t understand what they wanted. All she knew was that whatever it was, it wasn’t happening quickly enough.

By the time they set sail again, the boat was a lot more crowded. Henut had to share her seat with a goat, a box of dried fish, two jars of wine and eight loaves of bread, half of which were eaten by the goat. They got all this in exchange for one of Khaemwaset’s rings and some enchantments

that Meryt wrote down for the local women from the nearby village.

The small boat slipped past the larger vessels through the shallow waters. Henut's heart swelled with hope that they would soon catch up to Seti's barge, but each time they came close to a vessel of the right size, she was disappointed.

Ra rose high in the sky and the river ran straight and wide. Meryt fed some of the bread to the goat and whispered to Henut. 'I've been thinking. About your mother.'

'Yes?' Henut murmured.

'Your father told you she had died?'

Henut nodded. 'But she is alive.'

'Did he tell you how she died?' Meryt asked.

'No but Seti, her brother... He told me that she drowned in the Nile,' Henut said.

Meryt shook her head. 'To be lost in the Nile is to enter into connection with the gods. They wanted her for a purpose. They won't just give her back.'

'They let me return. The crocodile didn't take me,' Henut reasoned.

‘You hadn’t died.’

‘Well, maybe she hadn’t either!’ Henut said.

Meryt sucked her teeth. ‘Then why would your father tell you she had?’

‘I don’t know,’ Henut felt a terrible pain in her chest. ‘But I’ve seen her.’

‘Where?’

‘On Seti’s barge.’

Meryt cocked her head. ‘So that is why you wanted to come? You want to reunite with your mother?’

‘Yes.’

‘To meet with the dead,’ Meryt warned, ‘goes against Maat.’

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CHAPTER ELEVEN

The Goat, the Cat and the Liar

Hebenu was much smaller than Memphis, nestled into the east bank of the river. There were no massive pylons or pyramids, just modest temples and many mud-brick houses, including several large warehouses by the dock.

Khaemwaset pointed out the ancient tombs in the cliffs. Henut could just about make out the dark holes high in the rock. Meryt tried to navigate the small boat into the cramped dock. It was cluttered with barges but a sweeping glance confirmed that none of them were Seti's.

Henut's heart dropped in disappointment. She felt crushed. She had gone against her father, left her home and all for what? She only grunted

when Khaemwaset offered to take her up to the palace of the local governor.

‘When I last saw him I still had a sidelock!’ Khaemwaset said. ‘He must be a very old man by now. Anyway, he’s bound to know if Seti has delivered the wine. It will have come straight to him as he’s the nomarch of this province.’

‘Nomarch?’

‘He’s the local governor,’ Meryt said. ‘You’d better go with the prince.’

‘I want to wait here for the barge,’ Henut said stubbornly.

‘How will it look if I turn up unescorted?’ Khaemwaset said.

‘You can take the goat,’ Meryt suggested.

Khaemwaset left, with the goat, and Henut did two laps of the docks to be certain Seti’s barge wasn’t there. There were other canals leading into the town, but she didn’t want to go down them in case she missed him arriving on the dock.

Henut befriended a handsome cat who followed her back to the boat. She and Meryt settled down

for another night aboard the small ship, but not before exchanging a few spells and dried fish for fresh fruit and bread with a local woman.

As the sun began to sink and the drums beat out the hours, Meryt whispered more spells and lit the castor oil to keep the mosquitos at bay.

Then they heard the commotion. Khaemwaset came running down the dock. He was running so fast he'd taken his sandals off and was holding them.

'We have to go!' he shouted, jumping aboard.

'What happened to the goat?' Meryt asked.

'Hurry!' Khaemwaset was panting, struggling to untie the ropes that held the boat to the dock.

'They don't think I'm me.'

'Who?'

But that question was answered immediately as eight men armed with angular shields, bronze-tipped spears, battleaxes and a khopesh blade ran up to the boat. Henut recognised them immediately and shrank back behind Meryt. They were Medjay. Heavily armed soldiers who enforced order. They broke up fights, closed roads, arrested people and even executed them.

Khaemwaset, realising that he was out of time and that there was no escape without getting very wet, stepped back onto the dock. He stood up straight and folded his arms. He was taller than all of them, and puffed his chest out as he looked down on them.

‘When we tell you to stop, you must stop,’ one with a scar walked right up to Khaemwaset. He was treating the prince as though he were a farmer. The soldier gestured to Henut and Meryt. ‘Is she your daughter? This your wife?’

Meryt made a sort of retching noise. ‘I’m a priestess from Saqqara. I’m transporting the prince in my vessel. This is his servant.’

Henut waved.

The Medjay laughed. ‘So you also expect us to believe that the pharaoh’s son travels in this tiny boat, with no protection, no official documents...’

‘They were stolen from me!’ Khaemwaset interrupted.

‘By my uncle,’ Henut added.

‘And pray, who is your uncle?’

‘Seti,’ she said.

‘The merchant?’ asked the Medjay with the scar. ‘Are you accusing him? He is a very holy man.’

Khaemwaset scoffed. ‘He’s a criminal.’

‘Is he here?’ Henut asked excitedly. ‘Do you know him?’

‘There is a man called Seti staying in the nomarch’s palace. He arrived this morning.’

‘Where is his barge?’ Henut asked, her heart pounding with excitement.

‘It’s moored in the temple’s canal. Who is asking the questions here?’

The Medjay looked angry, but this didn’t perturb Henut, who stood up and made to get off the boat. ‘Can we speak to him?’

‘No, we need to leave, now,’ Khaemwaset said, ushering her back.

‘You’re not allowed to leave,’ said the Medjay with the scar, aggressively. ‘You’ll need to answer to the court.’

‘For what?’ Khaemwaset asked.

‘Impersonating an official,’ said the Medjay with the khopesh blade.

‘Attempted robbery,’ said another.

‘You’re the ones who took my goat!’ Khaemwaset shouted. ‘That was a present for the nomarch.’

‘Attempted assassination then!’ another Medjay shouted.

‘I thought you knew the nomarch here,’ Meryt whispered as the accusations kept being repeated.

‘He’s already left for the *heb sed*,’ Khaemwaset said. ‘I turned up at his palace, waited over an hour, without even being offered beer, and then they took the goat and accused me of being an imposter!’

‘A prince of Egypt doesn’t turn up on his own to the palace, unannounced, without any proof of who he is,’ said the man with the scar.

‘Look at me!’ Khaemwaset said, indicating his jewellery and clothes. Unfortunately, he was still holding his sandals, his clothes were crumpled, and he was still dirty from the long journey. His face had stubble on it and Meryt, out of spite, had put on his kohl lopsided. Turning up at the

palace with a grumpy goat probably hadn't helped either.

The soldiers conferred for a second. The man with the scar walked up to Khaemwaset. 'You say you know Seti. We'll fetch him. If he confirms who you are, all will be well.'

'Er...' Khaemwaset looked panicked.

Two of the soldiers left and the other six stood around, talking about a terrible execution they had witnessed just the other week, for a crime far less serious than impersonation.

'Why is he so worried?' Henut whispered to Meryt. She was looking at Khaemwaset who kept touching his collar and bracelets as if reminding himself he was still a powerful man.

Meryt said, 'Because if Seti says he isn't Khaemwaset, he is going to have a hard time proving he is.'

Henut looked at the guards. 'You mean they'll arrest him?'

'Not just him,' Meryt said with trepidation, as if saying the words would make them come true. 'We've already bore witness that Khaemwaset is

who he says he is. So, if he is found guilty, we will be punished too.'

'Guilty of what though? We haven't done anything wrong.'

'If they think the prince is an imposter, that's a crime against the state, against the order of Maat,' Meryt winced. 'We'll end up left in the desert, or sent to a mine... or put on a spike.'

'Seti wouldn't let that happen.'

'It's either him or us.' Meryt shook her head. 'He stole the prince's valuables. Khaemwaset will want his revenge.'

'What if we tell Seti that Khaemwaset won't accuse him if he tells the truth?'

'Firstly, there is no way either of us can convince that pig-headed prince to do anything,' Meryt whispered. 'And secondly how on earth do we tell Seti in front of the Medjay? It will look like we're trying to bribe him, which is an even worse crime.'

Henut thought for a moment. 'Do you think that the documents are on Seti's barge?'

Khaemwaset's headdress and scrolls and beard?
They prove who he is, right?'

'We don't know where his barge is,' the stress was tightening Meryt's throat as she continued to whisper. 'The only way we can prove who Khaemwaset is would be to find someone who has met him before. Someone who these people trust.'

Just then two Medjay soldiers returned with a concerned-looking Seti. He looked very different from when they had last seen him. He wasn't dusty anymore; his clothes were fresh, his beard neatly trimmed. His skin was smooth with oil. Henut looked back at Khaemwaset and sighed. He looked like he'd just escaped the mines.

If Seti was surprised to see them, he didn't show it. He casually glanced at them and then back at the soldiers.

'What's this got to do with me?' he said.

'These people claim you know them, sir,' the soldier said. 'Do you?'

Before Seti could answer, Khaemwaset shouted, 'You can't trust him! He's the imposter, not us!'

‘I don’t think you’re helping,’ Meryt said softly.

‘I don’t have a clue who any of them are,’ Seti said.

At this, the Medjay made for Khaemwaset. Meryt and Henut dived out of their way for fear of being trampled. The cat leapt onto the dockside and Henut followed. The boat rocked. One of the men caught Khaemwaset by the arm and pulled him to his knees.

‘I am a prince of Egypt!’ Khaemwaset shouted. He pointed with his free arm at Seti. ‘And you are a loathsome thief!’

The soldiers gasped, grabbing the pointing arm and forcing it behind his back.

‘Is the man ill?’ Seti asked innocently. ‘Should we send for a magician?’

‘Arrest him! Not us!’ Khaemwaset yelled.

One soldier grabbed hold of Meryt. Another approached Henut. The cat leapt in front of her and hissed. The soldier paused.

‘If I might, sir,’ Seti said to the Medjay in front of Henut. He stepped lightly down the dock

to stand by his niece's side. 'While the woman knows better than to help a man like this, the child cannot be held responsible for believing his lies.'

'I am not lying,' Khaemwaset said, struggling. 'My father will have you all on spikes!'

'Let me talk to her,' Seti said. 'I might be able to find out where this man is from.'

'We will consult the oracle tomorrow but if you wish to interrogate his servant, I have no problem with it,' the soldier said. 'We'll keep the prisoners under guard overnight.'

Henut watched a bronze-tipped spear move from just in front of her nose back up to the darkening sky.

'Follow me,' Seti said to her, in a serious tone.

'Un...' Seti shot her a warning look and Henut held her tongue from saying the word 'uncle'.

No one on the street gave them much notice either. They were all getting ready for the night, emptying buckets into the street and bringing in sticks and dung to keep the fires going.

They came to a doorway in a shabby wall. A guard was standing outside. He had a dog who began barking the moment they got close. Henut couldn't quite believe this was the entrance to the palace. From the outside it barely looked larger than her own house, but Hebenu was much smaller than Memphis.

The dog continued barking.

'Blessed evening,' Seti said to the guard. 'The child is with me.'

The guard noticed and pointed with his spear. 'And the cat?'

Henut turned to see that the cat she'd befriended on the dock had followed them up the narrow street. It had stopped, evidently disturbed by the noise the dog was making.

'Bastet must be protecting us!' Seti said jovially.

The guard smiled, and offered another blessing before scolding his dog and letting them through the door. It opened into a lavish garden. Oil lamps had already been lit, and there was a smell of cooking. Women were clustered around

one of the three ponds, sitting on the wall and laughing. Two men were quietly talking near a religious shrine. No one paid attention to Seti or Henut as they quietly moved down the garden path, past the pond to one of the side doors of the unassuming building.

‘Uncle...’ Henut tried to get his attention but Seti held up a hand and walked inside.

Inside was a room only slightly larger than the main room of her father’s house, with decorated walls, an armchair, cushions, a bed and ornate boxes.

‘Uncle!’ Henut again tried to get his attention.

Seti slowly took off his sandals and lit the other oil lamps with a taper.

‘Hey! I’m talking to you!’ Henut threw one of Seti’s sandals across the room. It hit the painted wall leaving a small scuff mark.

He pretended not to notice and settled down on the cushions like a happy cat, tucking his feet under himself in a cross-legged position.

‘You can’t just ignore me!’ she hissed, wary not to attract the attention of the people outside

in the garden. She needed to talk to Seti alone. She needed answers.

He nonchalantly opened up one of the boxes with a finger and plucked out a sweetened fig.

‘Where is she?’ Henut demanded, the frustration caught in her throat.

Seti frowned and, between chews, replied, ‘Do you want one?’

‘I saw her on the back of the barge when you left,’ Henut said, trying to stop herself from shaking. ‘She’s alive. You lied to me!’

Seti shut the box and swallowed. ‘It is a touch more complicated than that.’

‘Where is she?’

‘Looking after the barge,’ he said.

Before Henut could run out the door he launched himself on the rug and caught her by the ankle.

‘You can’t see her!’ he said from the floor, his legs untangling as he pulled her towards him.

‘She’s my mum!’ She kicked at his arm.

‘Ow! No!’ he insisted. ‘That woman may have born you into the world but she is no longer your mother.’

‘What’s that supposed to mean?’ Henut stopped trying to get away and looked down at him.

‘She renounced you. She wants nothing to do with you,’ he said.

His words hit her harder than a mace to the head. ‘What? When did she...?’

‘When your father divorced her,’ Seti said.

Her leg stopped resisting and he let go of her ankle.

Henut barely raised her eyebrows, she heard herself repeating his words. ‘They divorced?’

‘Over half a decade ago... It was messy. Once the divorce was final, she promised she’d never return,’ Seti said, rubbing his arm. ‘He told everyone to tell you that she’d died. So it was less painful for you.’

Henut knelt down on the woven rug, its fibres scratched her knees. She clutched her chest. Her heart was so confused. Her eyes looked around for something to cling onto, something real to stare at, to hold her thoughts in place. ‘No, because... W-why? Why would she agree to that? Didn’t she want to see me again?’

‘She wanted nothing more to do with you, or him,’ he shrugged. ‘So, now you know.’

Henut felt numb. What had she done to make her mother hate her?

‘We should get some rest. I’ll take you back to Memphis in the morning.’

Henut’s heart felt like it had stopped beating. She felt neither sleepy nor awake, hungry or thirsty, cold or hot.

‘I’ll need to pack all this up first,’ he gestured at the boxes.

‘I could write to her!’ Henut blurted.

‘Hmm?’

She pointed to his desk that was a mess of scraps of parchment. ‘If I write her a note, will you take it to her?’

‘Henut,’ Seti said in a tone which said this is a bad idea. ‘You can if you like, but she won’t read it. She’s moved on. You need to as well.’

There was a long pause. Henut could hear the women laughing in the garden. The dog was barking again. She felt sick. Like she could never smile again.

‘What about Khaemwaset? And Meryt?’
Henut asked eventually.

‘What about them?’ Seti asked.

‘They’re going to be executed!’

‘Only if they are guilty,’ Seti said. ‘The god won’t convict them if they are who they say they are.’

‘The god?’

‘It’s a statue of a long-dead pharaoh. They balance it on the shoulders of the priests and if it nods, they will be found guilty.’

‘Balanced on their shoulders?!’ Henut said, outraged. ‘If the priests don’t believe them, won’t they just bend their knees and find them guilty?’

Seti smiled wryly. ‘You shouldn’t question the workings of Maat. To question justice is to question the gods.’

‘But you know they are innocent!’ Henut protested.

‘I do,’ Seti said. ‘But Khaemwaset isn’t going to thank me for freeing him. He’ll arrest me and execute me as a reward.’

‘You can’t just let them die!’ Henut said.

‘Hey!’ He looked angry. ‘They were the ones chasing *me*! They wanted to arrest me and now you want me to do them a favour?’

Henut opened her mouth. ‘You took his things!’

‘He left them on the barge. My barge that he commandeered! My barge, which had wine that I was already late delivering when he roped me into his daft pyramid scheme...’

‘Why did he ask you?’ Henut asked. ‘You’re a thief! Is that where all these treasures are from? People’s tombs?!’

‘Henut!’ Seti warned, but he was too late.

She went over and opened some of his boxes. Inside there was gold, lapis lazuli, bright beaded collars, earrings. It shocked her. She dropped the lid of the box and stepped backwards.

‘Careful with those!’

‘So it’s true! Do all these belong to dead people?’

He huffed and clicked his tongue. ‘Some. The rest is stuff we traded for the gold that we melted down.’

‘Don’t you feel bad?’ she turned on him. ‘All these people are without their possessions in the afterlife!’

‘Oh, don’t pretend to be like your father. I know you don’t believe in that nonsense.’

Henut shook her head. She didn’t know what to believe. She only thought of what she had seen in the tomb, the flames, the shadows... her dreams.

He snarled at her. ‘Don’t you think it’s wrong that men die in mines trying to extract gold and gems just so people can bury them again?’

Henut’s mouth fell open. She had thought he would deny it. Tell her it wasn’t true. She wanted to believe he wasn’t capable of this evil. Without their amulets, people might not even get to the next life. And even if it were all a lie, she thought of her father’s face when that *ka* statuette had broken; how worried he had been, how much he had cared. If robbing tombs didn’t hurt the dead, it hurt the grieving. How could Seti try to justify himself?

‘Do you not see how crazy it is that we do all this work for the dead and do so little for the living?’ he reasoned.

Henut looked again at the open box and recognised something. The large scarab amulet she’d found on the ground outside her home. She picked it up.

‘It is hers, isn’t it? I did see her that night. She was at my house. Why was she there if she didn’t want to see me?’

‘She was looking for the amulet. She’d been by earlier to give me a message. The chain had broken and she’d lost it. She’d promised your father that she wouldn’t come near you ever again. That’s why she ran when she saw you.’ Seti got up and walked over to her.

‘Why does she like it so much?’

‘It was as though fate handed it to her. See there?’ He gestured for her to turn over the scarab beetle and pointed at the hieroglyphs. His fingernail touched on a tiny oval. ‘That cartouche says “Hatshepsut”, your mother’s name.’

‘What does it say?’

‘O my heart, which I had from my mother. O my heart of different ages. Do not stand up as a witness against me, do not be opposed to me in the tribunal, do not be hostile to me in the presence of the keeper of the balance,’ Seti read.

Henut thought back to the picture she’d seen the scribe copying out. The heart being weighed against the feather of Maat. The hungry monster looking eagerly on, ready to devour the guilty souls. ‘You can use this to trick the gods?’

‘It will stop the owner’s heart from revealing bad things about them on their day of judgement in the Hall of Two Truths,’ Seti said.

‘So it’s a key to the afterlife?’ Henut’s eyes widened.

‘Sort of, yes. I just happened to...’ he paused and smiled, ‘*find* it on one of my trips. Of course, my sister prized it. It has her name on it. When she thought she’d lost it, she panicked. Thankfully, you recovered it.’

‘But it belonged to someone, to a different Hatshepsut? What about them?’

He shrugged. ‘They are long gone.’

Henut looked down at the amulet. She desperately wanted to take it. It was her only connection to her mother. It had her mother's name etched into it. She might not have an actual mother but this was something. It felt like owning her heart.

'Will she come too? To Memphis?' Henut asked hopefully.

'Hatshepsut?' Seti shook his head. 'She needs to travel on to Thebes. She has business there.'

Henut was shaking slightly. 'Can you tell her to come with us?'

'She won't listen to me,' Seti smiled.

'Why can't I speak to her? What have I done wrong?'

'What have you done wrong?' Seti repeated. He raised an eyebrow. 'How did Khaemwaset know I was making a delivery to Beni Hasan? I never told either of them where I was heading.'

Henut didn't say anything.

He curled his lip. 'What is worse, in the eyes of Maat? Taking from strangers' tombs or helping

strangers arrest your uncle and mother? Your own flesh and blood.'

Henut felt conflicted. She knew what he was saying was true. There was an order to the universe, one where you looked after your family above everyone else.

'I didn't think you'd get in trouble. I wanted to see my...'

'She is not your mother anymore.'

'I wanted to see Hatshepsut,' Henut muttered. 'I'm sorry.'

'It's the gods you'll have to apologise to!' Seti said. Seeing her confusion, he explained. 'If you hadn't chased after me, the pharaoh's son wouldn't have to be executed in the morning.'

Henut's heart sank. He was right. It was all her fault. She'd told Khaemwaset where to find Seti and in doing so he'd been arrested. He was about to be put on trial and found guilty. She'd effectively killed the son of the pharaoh.

Seti stood up and put his sandals back on and gestured at the open boxes. 'I think it's best that

we head off at sunrise. I'll go and explain the new plan to Hatshepsut.'

'Won't it be dark soon?'

He rolled his eyes and winked. 'I told you, the gods and I have an understanding.'

He smiled, and gave her a hug.

It was as though nothing had changed between them. The world had been put right and she'd follow him back to Memphis without any bother. He was so confident he had convinced her. Henut's heart pulsed in her ears.

She lay down on the cushions, among the furs and rugs. She was too sad to cry. She thought she would wait up to question her uncle when he returned, but her eyes felt heavy.

'You must take it to me,' the voice said. 'Take it to me or I will exact my revenge. We are all watching. A heart for a heart.'

She woke in the darkness, looking around for the voice. There was no one there other than Seti sleeping on the couch, his round stomach reflecting the moonlight.



CHAPTER TWELVE

The Cat and the Libyans

Early the next morning Seti went off to get provisions, leaving Henut to make a start packing up his boxes. She couldn't decide the right thing to do. She had promised her father she'd try to stay in Memphis. She knew he would want her to come straight back home. Part of her wanted to go back and pretend that none of this had happened.

Her heart was torn between going back home and trying to help Khaemwaset and Meryt. But how?

She picked up the scarab amulet again. She noticed the chain had been repaired. She held it tenderly. She slipped it over her head and let it

rest over her heart. It was heavy and cool against her skin. She still wanted to feel connected to Hatshepsut and wearing her amulet offered Henut a form of relief. She smiled.

Something flicked past the doorway. She poked her head outside. A falcon swooped low over the garden. There were clouds in the sky. She hadn't seen rain for months. These clouds threatened to drown every oven in the town.

She shivered and turned back inside. It was as though she was seeing the room for the first time. The piles of stolen boxes. The plunder. She felt disgusted. She couldn't believe she'd slept in here. She remembered again her father's panic at the broken statue. The pain in his eyes. She pictured the ripped-up mummy of Unas, the thieves greedily tearing at him to get his amulets. All of this belonged to families who had sacrificed everything so their loved ones would be safe in the next life. Seti had taken away their peace.

Henut suddenly had no desire to see her mother. To hear why she'd abandoned her. It didn't matter. She was as bad as Seti. Worse,

in fact. She never wanted to see either of them again. A hot rage grew in her chest. She needed to get away.

Henut instinctively headed for the gate. The amulet swung under her tunic, willing her on. The soldier was still standing there. She thought about sneaking past him, but decided to speak to him.

‘Excuse me?’

‘Glory to Amun,’ he smiled and pointed to a side street. ‘Your master went down to the canal I think.’

‘He wanted me to give a message to the prisoners.’

‘Prisoners?’

‘Yes,’ Henut blushed slightly. ‘Only, I don’t know where they are.’

He leant on his spear and scratched his chin. ‘Probably in the warehouses by the dock front. That’s where people are held.’

‘Thank you!’

His dog started to growl.

‘Oh look, your friend is back,’ he said pointing down the road.

Henut whipped round, fearful of seeing Seti but instead the cat had reappeared, its tail high in the air as if greeting her.

‘If you can’t find the warehouse, follow the cats. They hunt mice there!’

Henut followed the cat downhill towards the dock. The clouds above grew purple as Ra rose higher. She felt the wind pick up. Was it going to rain? Evidently the people of Hebenu believed it might. Workers were running back to their homes, presumably to protect their rugs and fires. Women were calling for their children; men were coming down the hills with their animals.

Henut followed the cat through the chaos, slipping past the goats, the singing boys, the elderly women calling. Before they reached the canal, the cat turned left, jumping on a wall. She went over and let it rub its face on her hand.

‘Do you think it’s going to rain?’ she whispered.

The cat winked, arched its back and stretched its dusty paws. Apparently not. The wind rippled

Henut's tunic. She thought for a moment about the goddess Bastet, who looked after mothers and fought the forces of chaos. Benevolent yet bloodthirsty. Bastet was the god of Meryt's temple.

'Bastet, take me to Meryt,' she said as if it were a spell.

The cat immediately hopped down and ran along a narrow alleyway to the back of a large building. Henut followed, and watched it leap over a tall wall and jump down the other side. The walls here were crumbling, undecorated mud-brick. There was a stench of drying fish and sewage. There was no way Henut could climb the wall, so she walked calmly around it, trying to find the entrance.

On the west side she found a large doorway. The door was ajar and she entered, her sandals slapping on the flagstone floor. It was totally unguarded. She peered around the corner. No one. No noise, no lamps or fires. Had the guards run home to protect their things from the oncoming rain? A small amount of grey light peeked in

through the neglected reed canopy above. She scanned the piles of sacks, jars and crates in the gloom. There was no sign of life. She was about to leave when she felt something on her leg.

It was the cat again. It chirruped and ran deep into the warehouse, leaping up onto a heap of sacks.

‘Get away, you mangy creature!’ said a voice.

‘That animal is sacred,’ a woman’s voice scolded.

‘Meryt?’ Henut asked.

‘Henut?!’ Khaemwaset shouted. ‘We’re in the corner, get a knife!’

Henut looked around the floor, saw a bronze blade lying next to some twine. She snatched it up and ran over to the pile of sacks.

Khaemwaset and Meryt had their hands and feet bound and were propped up against the wall of the warehouse. They were no longer wearing their wigs. It was clear that they had tried to escape, because the dust that covered the floor was all over them. Henut immediately went to

Khaemwaset and began scraping at the twine around his wrists.

‘Careful with that,’ Khaemwaset said. ‘Don’t cut me. Take your time.’

‘We haven’t got time,’ Henut said. ‘My uncle will soon notice I’m gone and come after us.’

‘You know, betraying a family member is against Maat,’ Meryt warned.

‘She’s helping us, don’t put her off.’

‘I’m hoping rescuing a pharaoh’s son will balance out Maat a bit!’ Henut said, yanking on the thread so hard that Khaemwaset yelped. The twine snapped and he immediately rubbed his wrists before taking the knife and cutting his feet free.

‘It’s important,’ Meryt said. ‘A decision like this can weigh on your heart.’

Henut touched the chain around her neck.

‘She’s done it now anyway,’ Khaemwaset said, using the knife to quickly cut through Meryt’s bonds. ‘Now, we need to find the man in charge. He’ll put things right.’

‘Are you possessed?!’ Meryt said. ‘We should get back to the boat and head to somewhere where they can verify that you are who you say you are.’

‘So we flee?’ Khaemwaset said.

‘Yes, like your father did from Kadesh,’ she said.

‘He did not flee!’ Khaemwaset raised his voice so loudly the cat ran away.

‘We need to get back to Memphis,’ Meryt said, standing up and dusting herself off. ‘Have Pahemnetjer vouch for your authority.’

‘My father negotiated their surrender!’ Khaemwaset was still obsessing over her comments as they left the warehouse.

‘The Hittites surrendered, did they?’ Meryt said, checking to see if they had been spotted and then sneaking into another alley that led down to the docks. ‘So what land did your father take after their defeat? What treasures did he win?’

‘Shut up,’ Khaemwaset said, stopping in the alley. ‘You know nothing about battles.’

‘It doesn’t matter! Can we focus on how to get out of here?’ Henut said. ‘Before we are all arrested!’

‘We need to get to Memphis,’ Meryt said.

‘No! To Pi-Ramesses,’ Khaemwaset insisted. ‘My father’s *heb sed* is in less than two weeks. Pahem will have left for the festival by the time we get to Memphis anyway.’

‘We’d need oarsmen to travel back north. The wind isn’t with us,’ Henut pointed out.

Meryt sighed.

‘Perhaps we can get a lift with someone?’ Khaemwaset suggested.

‘And leave my boat? Never!’ Meryt said, outraged.

They turned again, narrowly avoiding a group of men carrying boxes up the hill.

‘Will it rain?’ Khaemwaset asked, looking up at the brooding sky.

‘I don’t think so,’ Henut said.

‘You’re the only one with that opinion,’ Meryt replied as they came to the docks.

People were frantically pulling down their sails, and using them to cover their cargos. Warm air blew across the water, whipping it up and spraying them in the face.

‘The wind is like lion’s breath,’ Meryt said. ‘It will be tricky to sail in. Perhaps we should wait for the storm to pass?’

‘We don’t have time,’ Khaemwaset said, indicating some soldiers on the far side of the dock. ‘They look like they’re searching for something.’

Meryt shoved them both along the jetty, where they could hide among a large group of men loading reels of fabric onto a barge.

‘Excuse me,’ Meryt said. ‘Where are you going?’

‘Kush. But we have no room for travellers,’ said one.

‘Do you know of any ships heading north?’

‘Many are leaving for the *heb sed*,’ he said knowingly. ‘But there are too many passengers, you won’t find space on a vessel. There are people looking for work, however.’

He indicated a group of four men sitting on the dockside looking somewhat dejected. They wore patterned shawls and, unlike the Egyptian fashion, wore their hair and beards long.

‘Brothers,’ Meryt said, approaching them with a wave.

‘We’ve no food,’ one said, without looking up.

‘We’re not beggars!’ Khaemwaset scoffed. ‘Are you looking for passage to Pi-Ramesses?’

‘No, we need to go south to Thebes, but unfortunately our boat was damaged,’ he looked over at the other vessel, the one headed to Kush. ‘And we have no way to travel.’

‘Are you Libyans?’ Henut asked. Libyan merchants in Memphis often wore their hair long and had beards like these gentlemen.

‘Yes, I’m Takelot,’ the young man smiled, nodding his head in a bow. ‘This is Nimlot, Osokron and Shoshenq. They don’t speak Egyptian but I can translate.’

The other men smiled pleasantly, looking curiously at Khaemwaset.

‘We have a boat, but no men to row it,’ Meryt explained. ‘We can reward you if you help us travel north.’

‘We need to go south,’ Takelot smiled. ‘If you have a boat, we’d be happy to travel with you

that way. You will need oarsmen to get to Thebes where the Nile twists.’

‘No,’ Khaemwaset shook his head and started looking around for other people who might help. ‘We need to go north. We need to row there.’

Henut smiled apologetically at Takelot, and also started scanning the docks for potential oarsmen when her heart stopped.

Less than a field-width away from them were the same Medjay soldiers who had arrested Khaemwaset and Meryt the previous night.

Meryt had spotted them too and was tugging on Khaemwaset’s arm, her face suddenly pale.

‘I don’t know, your majesty, a nice trip south might suit us very well,’ she whispered.

‘What?’ Khaemwaset scoffed and then saw the soldiers. His jaw tensed.

They hadn’t been spotted yet, but there was no way off the docks now. They needed to get away. Fast.



CHAPTER THIRTEEN

The Escape

They rushed to Meryt's boat, still moored against the dockside wall. The Libyans smiled when they saw it and Meryt hurriedly showed them the ropes.

Takelot and his friends had looked delighted when Khaemwaset, in a panic, agreed to travel south with them. Henut thought he would have gone all the way to Kush by the look of terror on his face.

Henut climbed on board, watching the soldiers slowly make their way up the dock. She knew it was only a matter of minutes before they were recognised. This time it wouldn't just be Khaemwaset and Meryt facing execution.

Henut would be guilty of aiding and abetting escaping prisoners. She was pleased to see that although the boat had been searched, no one had stolen their limited supplies. They had enough food left for today at least. She tidied up the mess while Khaemwaset hurriedly tried to raise the mast.

‘Not now,’ Meryt whispered. ‘We’ll put it up once we’re out of sight of the dock. The wind is too strong, it could capsize us.’

The soldiers still hadn’t noticed anything. They were within twenty cubits of them, talking idly to the merchants, opening their cargo and tasting some of the foodstuffs, obviously none the wiser that their prisoners had already escaped.

The Libyans made a good rowing team. The boat moved quietly out of the dock, still fighting the wind which churned up the water. They were already several ship lengths away when they heard the yelling. Finally, they had been spotted. Medjay soldiers were on the edge of the dock, calling them to stop. With them was Uncle Seti. He grimaced, his face riled with anger and the

spray from the water as the soldiers ran to their boats and started to chase them.

‘Quick!’ Meryt said. ‘Get the sail up!’

The clouds may not have produced any rain but the wind was unforgiving, making raising the mast even harder than usual. The boat rocked as they frantically tried to get the ropes under control. Khaemwaset looked like a spider caught in its own web as Meryt bellowed instructions at him.

Henut looked over towards the harbour. Two boats had been sent out and were gaining on them. Meryt was still yelling instructions while Takelot and Osorkon were helping with the mast and the other two Libyans were singing prayers to their own gods, using the rhythm to keep their oars in time. The wind roared furiously, bucking them back and forth as the mast was tied in place.

The boats of soldiers had nearly caught up to them. On the furthest one away was the unmistakable plump figure of Seti. Next to him was a figure dressed in black, with a red beaded collar. Her eyes were heavily kohled and her

expression was determined. It was Hatshepsut. Her mother was closing in on them.

‘Henut!’ Seti called. ‘Get back here!’

The Medjay on the boats threw a metal hook on a line to them, so they could pull themselves to the boat, but Henut snatched it from the deck and threw it back in the river.

‘By the gods!’ called one of the Medjay. ‘Surrender in the name of the pharaoh and you will not face a cruel execution.’

Nimlot and Shoshenq picked up their oars and pushed one of the boats away. When they tried the same trick on the second vessel, a Medjay soldier grabbed hold of the oars and attempted to pull themselves in. Takelot pulled his friends backward, causing them to topple into the boat, still holding their oars, so that the Medjay holding the other end were plunged into the river.

That was when the Medjay took out their bows. An arrow missed Khaemwaset’s face by half a cubit, embedding itself in the mast.

‘Stop!’ Henut said. She’d had an idea. She ran to the part of the boat closest to Seti and

Hatshepsut. She took off the amulet and dangled it over the side of the boat, threatening to drop it.

‘No!’ Hatshepsut stood up in the boat, her eyes focused on the amulet.

‘Tell them to stop!’ Henut shouted.

‘I’m not their master,’ Seti said. He looked nervously at the amulet.

‘Give it to me!’ Hatshepsut yelled.

‘Tell them the truth!’ Henut replied furiously.

Just as Henut was about to drop the amulet, Meryt finished setting the sail. It caught the wind and jolted the boat forward. Meryt and Khaemwaset fought the steering oar at the stern to keep them from veering into the reeds. The wind was so strong, the boat moved quickly. Henut watched her mother and Seti shrink away from her.

‘We will catch you before the week is out!’ Seti called.

‘You’d better catch us before I can prove who I am and have you all flayed alive!’ Khaemwaset yelled back.

‘You’re a delusional old fraud!’ shouted the Medjay captain.

‘Who are you calling old?!’ Khaemwaset shouted back, but it was doubtful that they heard him. Henut watched the papyrus boats disappear in their wake.

When the wind calmed down, the sky began to clear and the heat of Ra beat down on them. The sail was full above them, Nimlot took the steering oar and Meryt, Khaemwaset, Henut and the new crew settled in the bottom of the boat, sharing some of last night’s leftover fruits. They were still travelling south, away from Seti and the soldiers, but also away from Henut’s home, from Memphis and from the *heb sed* festival in the far north that Khaemwaset was fearful of missing.

‘What did you do that made those soldiers chase you?’ Takelot asked.

‘They think we’re imposters,’ Khaemwaset said.

‘We’re not,’ Meryt said quickly. ‘We just need to get to a town where someone knows Khaemwaset. Then we can go back home.’

‘After we get to Thebes, like we agreed, yes?’ Takelot smiled.

Meryt and Khaemwaset looked at each other before nodding reluctantly. They clearly regretted letting Takelot and his men use the boat, but there was no way they could have escaped the soldiers without them.

‘So, why didn’t anyone in that town know you?’ Takelot looked confused.

‘My friends have already left for the *heb sed* festival. There was only one man who knew who I am. Seti. He and that woman lied,’ Khaemwaset looked furious. ‘He wanted us to die.’

‘Who was the woman?’ Takelot asked, translating for the others.

‘Hatshepsut,’ Henut said.

Khaemwaset cocked his head. ‘That is a rare name.’

‘I’ve never heard it before,’ agreed Meryt.

‘I thought it had been erased from history,’ Khaemwaset said.

‘How do you mean?’ asked Takelot.

‘There was a pharaoh called Hatshepsut who ruled Egypt two centuries ago,’ Khaemwaset explained. ‘She built a unique temple and gardens

in the great place, where the tombs of the kings are. It's in a valley across the river from Thebes.'

Henut paused for a moment. They were heading towards the tomb her mother must have robbed to get this amulet. It was the only explanation for 'Hatshepsut' being written on it in a cartouche.

'Wait,' Takelot shook his head, chuckling. 'The pharaoh was a woman? You Egyptians!'

'She ruled for two decades. She was the daughter of Thutmose I and the aunt of Thutmose III, I think... I have to guess, because after she was in power they chiselled her name off the walls of the temples.'

'Why?' asked Henut.

'I don't know, but they didn't manage to get rid of every cartouche. Hence why I know about her,' Khaemwaset said smugly.

'Did she wear the *nemes*?' asked Meryt

'Yes, and a beard,' Khaemwaset smiled. 'I haven't come across anyone living called Hatshepsut before.'

‘Is Hatshepsut buried in the great place?’
Henut asked.

Khaemwaset nodded. ‘Probably.’

‘You don’t know?’ Meryt asked.

‘Obviously not, tombs are hidden so they are protected from men like Seti,’ Khaemwaset said. ‘A pharaoh’s tomb is full of the most exquisite riches you can imagine.’

Henut felt the weight of her amulet around her neck. If this was the pharaoh’s scarab beetle, was this the gods interfering, trying to get the amulet back to its owner in Thebes? After all, now the prince and priestess had promised the Libyans to travel there they had no choice. It was against Maat to go back on a promise, so it seemed the entire party were destined to go to Thebes. A chill trickled down Henut’s back.

They made slow progress up the river. The Nile wasn’t just one clear straight channel as they travelled south. It curled leisurely around islands densely surrounded by reeds. Meryt

was convinced the Medjay would follow them in large ships, so they stuck to the riverbank rather than risk running into them in the deeper channels.

As Ra dipped down to the west, they hid their boat deep in a reed bed. They ate what was left of the fruits and fish, stomachs rumbling, and promises were made of freshly caught waterfowl in the morning. Henut had to huddle up with Meryt as there wasn't much room for everyone to sleep.

'Where is the girl? She's late!'

Henut pressed up against the wall in the flooded temple, trying to hear the voices.

'She will be here. If she doesn't give it back we will take it from her. Take everything from her...'

'Ha ha ha ha...'

Huh. Huh. Huh. Huh.

Henut woke up with a start.

Huh. Huh. Huh. Huh.

Her heart retreated back into her spine. She could see the pale blue outline of Meryt's shawl in the moonlight and hesitated. She didn't want

to wake her up, she didn't want to be told she was imagining something.

Huh. Huh. Huh. Huh.

She shook Meryt's arm. 'I can hear hippos.'

It wasn't uncommon to hear hippos; their grunts boomed through the water, so they could be thousands of cubits away. But this one... This one was close.

Huh. Huh. Huh... huh.

Meryt's eyes shone in the moonlight.

The men on the boat had woken up too, they exchanged whispers. Khaemwaset crept over them, trying not to rock the boat in the water.

Huh. Huh. Huh... huh.

'Don't be frightened,' Meryt said. 'It could be Taweret protecting us.'

'Shouldn't we get away?' Henut asked.

'From where? We don't know where it is,' Khaemwaset whispered.

'It has left us alone all night, I'm sure it's not interested in us.' Meryt rubbed her hand. 'Trust in Maat.'

Huh. Huh. Huh. Huh.

They heard a splash in the distance. And talking.

‘Over there,’ whispered Takelot.

Through the reeds Henut caught a glimpse of a light. It was another boat, gliding through the water beyond the reeds.

The crew were happily chatting while the helmsman held up an oil lamp in the darkness. The beast stopped grunting.

Henut wanted to warn them, to tell them to be quiet, that their light and their talking would attract attention. But it was too late. There was an enormous sound of water, and the light went out. One man was screaming; they could hear it over the splashing. Then it stopped. Their own boat bobbed playfully as the shock of the attack rippled the water underneath them.

‘They have been chosen, they will go to the Nun, the gods must have a plan for them,’ Meryt whispered as she hugged Henut.

Ra crept up over the horizon illuminating the sky. The crew looked around for survivors.

‘They were Medjay,’ Nimlot said, picking up a broken oar that was floating by the edge of the reeds. It was all that remained of the boat. The bodies had vanished. Like their souls had been taken.

‘They were looking for us. Taweret really was protecting us,’ Meryt whispered.

‘They followed us this far?’ Takelot said, aghast. ‘And were travelling at night?! What did you do in Hebenu to make them risk their lives hunting you?’

‘I told you. They think I lied to them about who I am,’ Khaemwaset said coolly.

‘Who are you exactly?’ Takenot asked.

‘I’m Ramesses’ fourth son,’ Khaemwaset said.

Takelot translated for the others and the men laughed.

‘He isn’t lying to you,’ Meryt said.

‘You told them you were a prince of Egypt and you turned up in a sailing boat with just two servants and expected them to believe you?’ Takelot asked incredulously.

‘I had a goat too!’ Khaemwaset said defensively.

‘But why hunt you so ruthlessly?’

‘Seti will be offering a massive reward,’ Henut explained. She thought of all the riches in the boxes. ‘But if we can prove who Khaemwaset is then Seti will be the one on the run. He is also racing for his life.’



CHAPTER FOURTEEN

The Lion's Head

Each night, Henut had the same recurring dream. She would hear the voices. She would try to get to them but every time something would stop her. Dead bodies in the water, crocodiles... She always woke up before succeeding. She hadn't slept properly in days. Her eyes grew dark from more than just kohl.

The Medjay soldiers who had been killed by the hippo were not the only people from Hebenu to come after them. Seti sent messengers too. They travelled through the night, overtaking them and visiting towns further upstream, telling the tale of a band of Libyan tricksters attempting to fool honest Egyptians at every stop they came

to. Henut's group were chased out of every port. With all the nobles already on route to the *heb sed*, there was no one in any of the towns they came to who could verify Khaemwaset's identity.

Even if the nobles were there, Henut doubted they would recognise him. The journey had transformed Khaemwaset. It wasn't just the fact his expression had grown more serious (after all, he was fleeing for his life and quite literally going in the wrong direction). His hair had grown fast, in the places it still did. It was speckled with silver. His red skin darkened. The Henna wore off from his fingers and his long, elegant hands grew rough. It was clear from the expletives hurled at them from the angry captain of a funeral boat outside Abydos that all of them now looked like the enemy.

'You hairy flea-ridden Libyans!' he yelled, throwing empty pots at them.

Henut was outraged, not just because she didn't like being misidentified, but she felt protective of Takelot and his friends. They had not only saved their lives but they were kind, friendly

and polite. They didn't have fleas! How dare that man call them hairy! She liked their long hair. So what if it was more usual for Egyptians to wear a wig over a shaven head? Less wealthy Egyptians normally let their hair grow naturally and cut it short anyway; how was that any different? Why should the Libyans be treated so badly?

However, Henut also knew that befriending foreigners was against Maat. Egypt was for Egyptians, the western countries were for the Libyans. Trade and friendship could upset the natural order of the world. Anything, even good things, that went against Maat would cause chaos. However, a bit of chaos was needed if they were to reach Thebes and have order restored.

Once they reached Hiw they took down the sail. Here, the Nile twisted east and the wind was no longer at their backs, forcing them to row hard against the current.

They travelled slowly without the sail. They traded with the small farms and villages along the eastern bank, filling the boat with supplies of onions and bread. They ate the birds they

caught, but didn't stay long on the land when cooking. Henut's fingers got cramp from all the constant plucking. They left a trail of feathers in their wake.

Once they turned the corner and the river meandered to the right, they were travelling south again and could hoist the sail. Now with Thebes just a day away, they didn't risk stopping in Koptos or Naqata. Instead they moored up for the night, knowing they had only a few hours left before they arrived at Thebes. Henut remembered the letter belonging to Khaemwaset that she had read nearly fourteen days ago on her uncle's ship. It was from Paser, the High Priest of Amun-ra who lived in Thebes. He wasn't going to the *heb sed*, so she knew there was someone there who would believe their story. They would be safe there.

It was the morning of the tenth day of their journey. Henut had been pining for fresh bread and her stomach growled as they made their way out from behind a small reed-covered island into the main channel of the Nile. Ahead of them rose the obelisks and pylons of Thebes.

They were so close, but no one on board rejoiced at the sight of the incredible skyline. Seti's barge was moored lengthways across the river channel. Even if they chose to go around and risk getting stuck on the sandbars, they knew they wouldn't make it. Twelve Medjay soldiers stood on the gunwale, their arrows pointing straight at them.

'Why haven't they fired?' Henut asked.

'We aren't within an easy range, they're against the wind,' Khaemwaset said. 'Magician, we need a miracle right now!'

'There is a spell that divides the water...' Henut suggested, remembering the story Seti had told her about the servant who had dropped her necklace in the water and the forgiving king.

'I'm not a magician, I'm a temple priestess!' Meryt said, turning her back on Seti's ship to talk to Henut. 'No magician is powerful enough to divide the Nile, only a god... by Thoth's beating heart!'

Meryt's jaw dropped as she pointed downriver to where they had joined the main channel of

the Nile. A vast war ship was bearing down on them. It was larger than Seti's barge and had an enormous lion's head battering ram. Its sail was full, and it was travelling at speed. The bronze trumpets blared, warning the smaller vessels to get out of the way.

The Medjay on Seti's barge abandoned their weapons and ran to the oars, while Seti shouted orders in a frantic bid to not be hit.

The Libyans started to copy the barge, grabbing the oars in panic. Khaemwaset stood up, rocking the boat. 'Don't move.'

'It will hit us!' Takelot warned.

'No! The water is too shallow here, it will pass us, and hit Seti.' Khaemwaset handed him a rope. 'Tie that to the end of the broken oar. Let's see if my arm is as good as it was when I was a boy.'

The barge had managed to turn in the water. Seti was at the steering oar, trying to keep the ship from being hit. Their sail was no longer catching the wind now they had turned, and they started to drift downstream towards Henut.

Within moments, the warship was on them. With a leap, Khaemwaset threw the broken oar with the rope tied around it at the lion's head. The oar flew over the top and rope looped like a collar around the lion's neck. Nimlot saw what was happening and took hold of the end of the rope, driving his legs against the side of the boat to hold himself in place. The trumpets blared. Men on the bow of the warship shouted down at them to move. The vast vessel only just missed them. The warship's oars smacked into the sail and mast of their small boat. Splinters flew close to their heads as they ducked. And then the rope around the lion's head ran out of slack and pulled them alongside the giant ship.

Nimlot grunted as he was jolted against the side of the boat. Takelot and Shoshenq seized the rope too, taking the strain as they were dragged alongside the warship. Meryt and Henut picked up oars to push against the sides of the warship, to stop them from colliding with the hull.

‘What in Osiris’s name do you think you’re playing at, Libyan?’ shouted an angry man from the deck.

‘I am Khaemwaset, prince of Egypt! I demand to come aboard.’

The man laughed in disbelief. Then a second face appeared over the side of the ship. He was an elderly man with a bright collar and fine wig.

‘Paser!’ Khaemwaset shouted. ‘It’s me!’

Paser looked taken aback and immediately shouted for help. Ropes were thrown down to the crew and Osokron, Takelot and Shoshenq grabbed them, tying them off. The small boat, still buffeted by the wake of the warship, was now travelling in tandem with it.

Henut looked back on Seti’s barge. He had lost. They were safe.

Amun-Ra was a temple so large it rivalled even that of Ptah in Memphis. The enormous second set of pylons sank behind the colossal first set as they got closer. After being untethered from the warship, Meryt steered the boat into the square dock. They were met on the ground by

more Medjay soldiers, but these men didn't raise their weapons.

The elderly man from the warship was helped down to the dockside. He looked at Khaemwaset's dishevelled appearance in horror, but didn't hesitate to grab his hand and kiss him on both cheeks.

Khaemwaset beamed at him and gave him a big hug. It looked as though he was going to crack every bone in the old man's body. 'It is so good to see you, Paser!'

'What in the world happened to you?' Paser asked.

'We were falsely accused of a crime in Hebenu by Seti.'

'Seti?'

'The merchant whose barge we just passed. He's a thief and when I chased him down, he convinced everyone I was an imposter,' Khaemwaset explained. 'He's been trying to capture and kill us before we could prove who we were.'

'What?' The old man's jaw dropped. The servants around him stepped in as though they

were worried he might fall, but he shoed them away.

‘He stole my things on his barge – my ceremonial headdress, jewellery and beard. I escaped with only my life, thanks to these loyal people.’

Paser looked at the men. ‘Libyans? Your father will reward them, I’ll see to it. They can stay here in Karnak.’

Takehot grinned and explained to the others what was happening. Paser’s servants walked over to them and offered to carry their belongings.

Paser’s dark eyes swept over Meryt. ‘You are a priestess? Whom do you serve?’

‘Bastet, your holiness,’ Meryt bowed her head, though her expression looked unsettled.

Paser picked up on this. ‘You seem upset, my dear?’

Meryt pointed to her boat. The mast had been damaged by the oars of the warship, the sail torn. ‘My father’s boat, it is ruined.’

Paser nodded. ‘We will have it repaired for you.’

Meryt blinked in surprise. ‘Thank you, but...’
‘Ah... she is your boat,’ Paser’s eyes twinkled.
‘You wish to oversee her repairs?’

Meryt nodded.

‘I daresay we can accommodate that.’ Paser smiled and moved on. ‘And who are you?’

‘Henut, sir,’ Henut said. ‘I’m just a... um... servant.’

‘She saved my life, Paser. I wish to keep her.’

‘Roy!’ Paser called to one of his scribes.

A friendly young man bowed low to him. He had a clean-shaven head and wore the white linen of a priest. He smelled heavily of incense.

‘See to it that the Medjay arrest this Seti character. I will have him on a pike by tomorrow.’

‘Sir, isn’t that the barge they’re talking about?’ Roy pointed to the far side of the wide river Nile.

Henut looked out across the water. There were houses on the opposite bank, a small temple and a canal entrance leading towards the red mountains beyond. Just turning down into the canal was Seti’s barge.

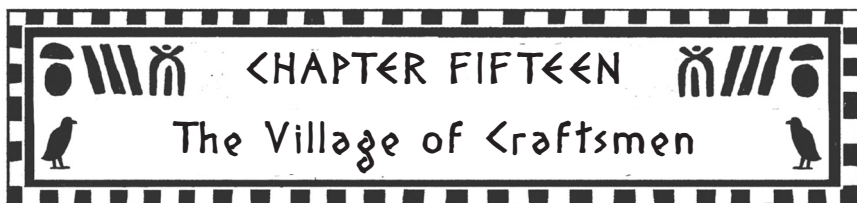
‘The nerve of the man!’ Khaemwaset spat.

‘We’ll send troops to arrest him,’ Paser said.

‘We’ll go too,’ Khaemwaset said, his eyes narrowing.

‘Indeed, we will go to the palace and meet this fellow when he is captured. I wish to discipline him myself,’ Paser inclined his head. ‘After we freshen you up.’

BLOOMSBURY EDUCATION



CHAPTER FIFTEEN
The Village of Craftsmen

Henut was exhausted. She was lying next to Khaemwaset on a large rug underneath a canopy at the far end of the ship. They were being rowed across the Nile and down the canals to Malkata, which, Khaemwaset excitedly explained, had been built over a century ago by the great pharaoh Amenhotep III. In order to drown out the prince's history lesson, Henut had gorged herself on the plentiful plates of food that were offered. Her stomach was full of bread. It swelled in front of her like the god Atum creating the land rising out of the waters. It was so hot. There were two boys standing either side of them solemnly wafting colourful fans. Twenty oarsmen kept perfect

rhythm under the relentless gaze of Ra. Young boys went up and down the galley with cups, offering water to each man in turn.

Khaemwaset sat with his eyes shut as Roy shaved his head. Another servant trimmed his toenails and another dyed his fingertips. There was a small group of musicians playing a gentle melody and a group of Medjay soldiers behind them, nodding off in the heat.

They had left Meryt on the docks, where she was already giving detailed instructions to the men tasked with repairing her ship. Paser was travelling with them on the boat, talking quietly to Khaemwaset about what had happened, and how Khaemwaset could make up to the pharaoh after missing the *heb sed*.

Henut's head was thick with thoughts. It wasn't just that she wished she could have stayed with Meryt. She was worried about what would happen to her uncle. Would they catch Seti? Would they really put him up on a pike to die? She didn't like the idea at all. She was angry at her uncle, but she didn't want him to die.

Worse, to die like a criminal. To not be buried.
To have no chance of an afterlife.

She felt guilty. If she hadn't run away from him to free Khaemwaset and Meryt, they would be dead, but she would be home and her uncle would be safe. After all, he had never mistreated her. Unlike her father, Seti had always been kind.

She imagined entering the Hall of Two Truths and dutifully naming each of the forty-two gods as Thoth marked them down, swearing her innocence and weighing her heart on the scale. Would it balance with the feather? Would the beast devour her?

She thought about one of the rules of Maat.
Be respectful to your father and pleasant to your mother.

She felt ashamed. She hadn't been respectful to Sennefer. She'd disobeyed him. Was she pleasant to her mother? Sure... Apart from the time she had betrayed her and threatened to throw her amulet in the Nile.

Henut thought about being devoured. How would it feel to be swallowed out of existence?

Her name would never be on the side of a pyramid or written on a stone. She would be forgotten. Her eyelids slid slowly shut.

Back in Memphis. The land was dry. The fields were cracked. The soil had turned to dust. She ran to her house. The jackal was rolling happily on its back by the leafless fig tree.

'Where's my father? Nefer? Tjay? Baby Nebtu?'

'Lost to chaos,' the jackal said.

Henut's heart raged inside her. 'How?'

'The servants dressed like pharaohs, the noblemen acted as labourers... The gods abandoned Egypt just as the people abandoned Maat.'

'Why is there no water?'

'The floods didn't come,' the jackal said happily. 'The pharaoh taxed the people, the people had no food, then there were no people left to tax.'

'Everyone is dead?!'

'Maat is restored. There is order now.'

'No! Please stop this!'

'I cannot.'

'Why did this happen?'

'The servants dressed like pharaohs, the noblemen acted as labourers...'

Henut woke to find everyone was moving around her. The ship had come into a dock and everyone was getting off. The amulet slid from her chest as she sat up. *The servants dressed like pharaohs...* She touched it, feeling its weight, and tried to work out where they were.

Many papyrus boats were in the dock, as well as several larger ships. Seti's barge was moored across from them. She squinted to see if anyone was on board, but the sun was dancing off the water, blinding her.

Lush, well-maintained gardens lined the walkway to the palace. Women trading fish, onions and bread on the shoreline were hastily packing up their wares as soldiers cleared the crowd. Young men heaved their washing pots out of the way as swarms of servants dressed in crisp white kilts fussed on the dockside, like wasps around a carcass.

Khaemwaset stood up next to her. He was now dressed in the finest clothes Henut had ever seen. Even his sandals were made from an intricate pattern of colourful beads, each alternate square filled with gold. He had a new wig, his skin was oiled and henna re-darkened his fingertips. He didn't look anything like the man she'd shared a cramped boat with. He looked like she imagined his father would look. Like a god.

He glanced down at her. His expression was apologetic. She understood. He had to play his role. They couldn't speak. Paser followed him with his entourage down the gangplank, but as Henut was about to follow she was stopped by a Medjay soldier.

'Who are you?' he bellowed over the sound of the trumpets warming up.

'No one,' Henut said.

The soldier raised his eyebrows. 'If you don't have a name, you don't exist.'

'You're Henut, aren't you?' The smell of incense told her it was Roy before she looked up to see.

Henut nodded.

‘Fantastic. The prince and high priest are going up to the palace. Paser put me in charge of clearing up this little matter of thievery, treachery and assassination. By one...’ he happily checked the scrap of broken pot he’d made notes on. ‘Seti? If you would be so kind as to join me and those lovely fellows over there.’

Henut followed his finger to see a group of grumpy looking Medjay. ‘Why? Have I done something wrong?’

‘Goodness, no! You see, we have no idea what this Seti chap looks like. Yet we need to arrest him. So we need you to identify him for us, alright?’ Roy said with a gentle smile. ‘Please, we have some new sandals for you.’

Henut, in a daze, donned her new sandals. They were the same as Roy’s, with a lotus design between the toes.

The geckos skittered when the music swelled. Khaemwaset was carried towards the palace on a golden litter followed by Paser, his servants and some dancers.

As Henut followed the soldiers up the hill she looked back to see the procession towards the white palace.

‘Keep up,’ grunted a soldier.

They followed servants lugging water up the dusty track to the workmen’s village. It was a steep climb. Ra beat relentlessly down on them. When they finally made it to the village, Henut gasped in pleasure as they walked into the cool of the shadowed streets. The buildings were packed tightly together. Cats and children peered out of the dark doorways.

‘People of Deir El Medina, this is the Medjay,’ yelled Roy once they were in the shade. He turned to Henut and gave a small excited smile. ‘I’ve always wanted to say that!’

People looked over from the rooftops, angry-looking women were coming out of the doorways, arms folded.

‘We seek the merchant Seti,’ Roy shouted. ‘Bring him to us and we won’t have to search the houses.’

‘We don’t know him,’ a woman shouted.

Roy sighed. ‘Alright then, has anyone arrived recently?’

‘How recently?’

‘In the last few hours?’

‘Sennefer arrived not long ago.’

Henut’s heart jolted a little when she heard her father’s name. He couldn’t be here?

‘Sennefer, can you come out? Please?’ Roy waited, wringing his hands awkwardly while the Medjay soldiers rolled their eyes.

‘He’s here,’ shouted a kid.

Sure enough, a small plump man was being pushed out of a doorway about ten doors down. At first, Henut didn’t recognise Seti. He’d put on an ill-fitting wig, and was wearing a plain white kilt, not his usual garb, and had shaved his beard off. Rather badly. There were cuts on his cheeks, which were a shade lighter than his suntanned nose. He looked nervous, his large eyes locked on her. She suddenly realised what was about to happen.

‘Is your name Sennefer?’ Roy asked politely.

Seti’s eyes flicked from Henut to Roy. He swallowed and nodded.

‘You’ve only just arrived at the village? Today?’

‘Yes, sir,’ Seti said.

‘You’re a scribe?’

‘Painter, sir. One of the gangs is short a man and so they called for me,’ Seti said unconvincingly.

‘I hope you don’t mind me checking,’ Roy said and turned to her. ‘Henut, please can you confirm this man isn’t the merchant Seti?’

Henut looked at Seti. He looked pathetic. He was sweating. The guards around him slowly pointed their spears at him. His eyes were pleading with her. She let out a long slow breath.

‘No, he’s not Seti,’ she lied.

Seti visibly relaxed.

Roy sighed. ‘I’m sorry, everyone! We have to search your homes. If you would be so kind as to step out into the street.’

There was a lot of fuss at this, with women complaining and angry insults thrown at the soldiers as the doors were being opened.

‘Thank you,’ Seti whispered to Henut.

‘Your disguise is ridiculous,’ she said.

‘You saved my life,’ he said.

‘I didn’t do it for free,’ Henut said crossly, looking down the street at the Medjay, dragging out a child and a baboon on a rope from someone’s front door. ‘If you don’t tell me the truth now, I might remember who you are.’

Seti looked appalled. ‘What do you need to know?’

‘Hatshepsut, I need to know where she is.’

‘Your mother doesn’t...’

‘Not my mother! The pharaoh. Her tomb. She wants her amulet back. I’m going to return it to her.’

Seti paused. He looked at her like she’d been possessed. ‘You want to throw away the amulet? It’s worth a fortune... It’s priceless to your mother.’

‘But she wants it back,’ Henut said. ‘I saw it in a dream, she’ll convince the gods... Then the inundation won’t come.’

The Medjay cast another family out into the street. There were clanging pots and cries of ‘That’s my grandmother!’ as an old lady was dragged out.

‘You’re talking nonsense,’ Seti said.

‘I am not.’ Henut started waving. ‘Hey! Roy!’

The scribe turned back towards them.

‘No!’ Seti panicked. ‘Henut, you wouldn’t. I’m your uncle!’

Roy began trotting towards them.

‘It’s your choice, *Sennefer*...’ Henut said.

‘Alright, alright,’ Seti whispered. ‘I can tell you where her tomb is, but you’ll never find it on your own. The cliffs erode, covering the entrances. The workmen usually dig where there is a natural fissure, but the landscape changes as the cliffs crumble. I doubt even I could find it again.’

‘Everything alright, Henut?’

‘Yes, sir. I was just wondering how long we would be here for.’

Roy sucked his teeth. ‘A good while yet. We’ve only searched five homes, there are seventy more...’

Henut nodded. ‘*Sennefer* was just saying he worked up in the great place when he was last here...’

‘That’s right,’ Seti said quickly. ‘It’s behind these buildings here. If you walk around the village there is a path through the village necropolis. It continues up to the cliffs there, where you see all the graffiti...’

Roy nodded. ‘I’ve seen that graffiti, some of it is very old.’

‘And if you continue on that path, you will get to the clifftops over there,’ he pointed to the mountain. ‘There’s a footpath that takes you up over the top between the peaks.’

Henut followed his finger along the distant mountain cliff. To her surprise, there were clouds forming above the mountain.

‘The weather is turning, do you feel the wind?’ Roy said.

‘There is a large rock like a cooked duck,’ Seti continued. ‘There, the path splits. When you crest the hill, if you look down you can see Ramesses I’s tomb being dug at the bottom of the valley. If you look down to your right, there’s a gully with cliffs on the other side. There are dark cracks and clefts in the cliff face. Look for places where lots

of stones have crumbled down; the loose stones disguises entrances to much older tombs.’

‘It does look like it is going to rain,’ Roy said distractedly.

‘Plenty of Medjay patrol up there though so I wouldn’t try,’ Seti glanced at Roy to make sure he wasn’t really listening, ‘to *enter* a tomb. Particularly not one about five hundred cubits away from the crest of the hill, over the gully, high in the cliff.’

‘It *is* raining up there! Set preserve us,’ Roy exclaimed. ‘Go find shelter! We need to help everyone protect the fires!’

‘Come, I’ll show you my lodging,’ Seti said.

Henut followed him up the narrow street to the house. They entered the dark front room, its high walls patterned with sunlight from the vented windows.

‘Would you like a drink?’ he asked, walking through the gloom to a second chamber with a higher ceiling. Henut’s breath caught in her throat. Hatshepsut was sitting by the family

shrine on a rug on the floor. She looked up, her eyes widening in horror.

Henut froze. She looked down at her mother. Drank her in. Her large eyes, her sharp nose and small neat mouth. She wore the same wig and gold jewellery as before. Her kohl was applied with care.

‘Do you have the amulet?’ she asked, holding out her hand.

Henut sank into the pools of her dark eyes. She wanted them to smile at her. So badly. She nodded.

‘Would you let me have it?’ Hatshepsut spoke very softly, like she was speaking to a wild animal.

Henut’s heart flipped. She felt torn. She wanted to both hurt and hug the woman in front of her. She couldn’t bear it.

‘Why did you leave me?’ Henut’s voice shook. ‘Why did you let me think you were dead?’

Hatshepsut retracted her hand and rested it lightly on her knee. ‘This is too complicated for a child.’

‘Hatshepsut,’ Seti said, sitting down next to her. ‘You owe her an explanation.’

Hatshepsut gave her brother a disdainful look. ‘The whole story, Seti? Do you want me to tell her exactly how you managed to wriggle out of your trial?’

Seti looked embarrassed. ‘You went too far that night.’

‘Tell me!’ Henut demanded.

‘We had been caught robbing a tomb in Memphis,’ Hatshepsut said. ‘We were a band of five. The Medjay captured our friend Horemheb, the others didn’t survive their arrest. Seti and I hid.’

‘We couldn’t let Horemheb stay in the hands of the Medjay. He would be tortured and confess our names,’ Seti said.

‘Why did you do it?’ asked Henut.

Hatshepsut looked up at her daughter. ‘I worked as a professional mourner before I met your father. When I moved in with Sennefer, I resented my role as mistress of the house. It was tedious. This was before your father had been

promoted. The harvests had been disappointing, but the tax stayed high. Everyone was struggling. I knew how to improve my situation. When my brother visited, I told him about the wealth I'd seen buried in the tombs. If Horemheb hadn't been captured... everything would be different.'

Henut thought she glimpsed some sorrow in her mother's eyes, but her focus turned to Seti who carried on the story.

'I knew where they were holding him. I was confident I could break through the door and free him, but there were two guards on watch all day and all night. So I came up with a plan.'

Hatshepsut scoffed. 'It was *my* plan...'

'It was my wine!' Seti said crossly. 'And my mule.'

'I approached the guards in the night with two casks of wine. I wailed. I said I must be cursed. The jars were cracked. They were leaking over the road. I begged the soldiers to come and drink some rather than let it go to waste.'

'Which they did. After all, who would turn down free wine?' Seti said. 'Meanwhile I'd

broken into the prison. But Horemheb was injured. He couldn't walk.'

'His life ended there,' Hatshepsut said coldly.

Henut swallowed. Had Seti's friend died of his wounds... or had Seti murdered him?

'The guards had passed out from too much wine,' Seti continued quickly. 'And for some unknown reason, you decided to shave half the hair off their heads!'

Hatshepsut giggled. 'They looked so stupid.'

'I don't know what genius possessed you! The Medjay were so humiliated they didn't want to ask around about the culprit,' Seti chuckled. 'They didn't want rumours to spread. Still, you should have worn the disguise, like I told you.'

'I did, but they saw through it. If I'd wanted to stay in Memphis I should have killed them,' Hatshepsut said cruelly. 'They knew my face. Every second I spent in that place, I risked being recognised. I had to leave.'

'I could have gone with you,' Henut said in a small voice.

‘You were too small,’ Hatshepsut shook her head. ‘If I’d been caught, Thoht knows what they would have done with you.’

‘How come Seti came back and you didn’t?’ Henut asked angrily.

‘The guards never saw me,’ Seti explained. ‘There were rumours afterwards, but no one could identify me.’

‘Plus, Sennefer didn’t know Seti was involved. He still doesn’t. Your father is oddly principled when it comes to tomb robbing,’ Hatshepsut said nonchalantly. ‘When I told him what I’d done, he rejected me utterly. There was no point coming back.’

‘But you’re my mum!’ Tears welled up in Henut’s eyes.

‘I haven’t been for more than five years,’ Hatshepsut said coldly.

‘Didn’t you miss me at all?’ Henut asked.

‘Be respectful to your father, pleasant to your mother,’ Hatshepsut quoted sternly. ‘I did what was best. Now, give me my amulet back.’

Henut hesitated. She'd only taken the amulet so she could feel close to her mother. Now she felt overwhelming disgust for it. She didn't care about returning it to the pharaoh's tomb. She wanted nothing to do with it. She took it from around her neck and held it in her hand.

'Do you think this amulet will make it all better? So you can hide your crimes from the gods and pass into the afterlife?' she asked.

'It is worth a try,' Hatshepsut said, reaching for it.

At that moment, Medjay soldiers barged through the front room of the house. Seti jumped up in a panic.

'Henut?' asked one looking around for her.

'Yes, sir?'

'Roy needs you to identify another Seti,' the soldier said.

Henut obeyed, leaving her mother and the real Seti behind in the house. She was surprised when she got outside. She was expecting bright sunshine, but her shadow had disappeared.

A warm wind ruffled through her hair and kicked up the dust on the ground.

Henut stared blankly at Roy, who was pointing to a worried-looking man being held by the soldiers. She shook her head. Roy asked her some more questions. She wasn't listening. She wasn't seeing. The only thing she felt, other than the pain in her heart, was the scarab in her fist.

She didn't know why, but she started to run.



BLOOMSBURY EDUCATION



Henut sped down the road, ignoring Roy's confused calls. She ran up the shallow hill to the necropolis. She ran past shrines, *mastabas* and small pyramids, towards the sheer cliffs that cradled the village below.

The way was steep. Her sandals slipped on the loose stones. She had to use her hands to steady herself. Once she got to the cliff she saw the graffiti. Who loved who, their names, where they came from.

There was no vegetation. The only creatures that could live here could slither into the underworld and back. Magic felt possible. She turned to stare back at the smoking village, and

crouched like a gecko between the sandy rocks. Below was the path she'd walked, the shining white palace and, beyond that, the angular canals and black farmland mottled with fresh green shoots.

There was movement in the necropolis below. Medjay. They were looking up at the cliffs. Were they searching for her? She didn't want to find out. She slipped the scarab amulet back over her neck and ducked down to make herself harder to spot over the tops of the tombs. Moving quickly around the base of the cliffs, she came to a path that guided her up to the top. She kept looking back towards the immense view to see if anyone was following her but she was alone.

The amulet swung as she panted up the hillside. She was gasping for air but something was driving her on. It was as though the moment she stopped, her memories would return. She didn't want to remember what her mother had said. She was trying to escape her heart. She kept walking. She had to. She had no choice.

She was at the edge of the storm now. Desert wind roared into her from the cliff edge, buffeting her away from the sheer drop. The occasional fleck of rain landed on her exposed skin. Now on less of a slope, she marched quickly along the path that had been compacted by centuries of workmen's footsteps, travelling to the tombs.

Looking up, she saw people in the distance, coming towards her. They were workers clutching their equipment, their clothes whipping about them in the gusts from the purple clouds above.

'Turn back. It is raining,' they warned. 'It's not safe to be out here.'

She ignored them, marching on.

'It is dangerous, you could be killed.' One of them tried to grab her. 'Come with us.'

Henut didn't understand. Rain was unpleasant, it put out fires, it got everything wet – but she didn't see how it could kill anyone. She dodged his grasp, bolting away.

She heard the beat of his footsteps running after her, but she was faster. The amulet bounced

off her chest with every stride. The rain started to fall. It felt amazing. She was soaked through; warm from running, cool from water, her sandals slipping so close to the edge of the enormous drop. The path ahead turned red as the water hit it.

There was something in front of her. It was trotting along the path, a small jackal-like figure in the distance. She slowed down, gasping for air.

‘Anubis,’ she whispered. It seemed to hear her, looking at her over its shoulder, then trotting away from the path, up a separate track higher up into the hills.

That’s when she noticed the large rock. It looked like a cooked duck and, remembering Seti’s words, she turned up the hillside. The path was ridiculously steep, and with the cliffs below she was aware one misstep could send her falling backwards, thousands of cubits to the ground.

Then she heard the rumble. Thunder. She stopped. It was louder than any noise she’d ever heard. She gasped and hunched down, falling to her knees.

She suddenly felt very alone. Scared even. She pictured Ammit with her jaws opening, the rumble of thunder being her roar as she was cast into her mouth. She had to focus. Henut slowly got up, shivering slightly. It was like the night had come early. The darkness enveloped everything. It was easy to make out the path now, it had transformed into a miniature stream. She followed it up to the top.

As she crested the hill, she saw the path skirt around and down into the valley below. It was steep, but not as steep as the sheer cliffs that edged the valley side. At the bottom of the valley she could see the piles of chippings that had been freshly taken out of the mountainside to make room for a new tomb.

The hillside was slick with mud and water. She gingerly made her way down. Her foot slipped. She fell sideways, down the steep side of the slope towards the cliffs. She landed on her side but kept falling, being sucked into the gully between the hillside and the sheer cliffs. She tumbled along with the stones that had slipped

from under her. She yelped. She felt her skin tear against larger stones as she continued to slide. She reached out, her fingers stinging as they collided with more rocks, then wham! She fell against a large rock jutting out of the hillside.

Everything hurt. Her hands, her elbows, her knees. Her left arm felt really bad. She tried to use it to stand up and let out a wail of pain. It wasn't a stinging pain like the cuts and scratches that covered her legs. It was a deep pain, like her arm didn't belong to her anymore. It made her want to be sick. She gasped for air, clutching it protectively to her chest and leaning back on the rock that had broken her fall.

She howled in pain again. There was no way she could climb back up that hillside in the rain, not without using her arm to steady herself. There was no one here to help her. Why had she come here? She was such an idiot. If she died here, it was her own fault.

What was she thinking? That she could find a hidden tomb? All on her own? Seti had probably lied about where it was anyway... There was

another rumble of thunder and a flash of white light spread across the sky. It forked in a line like writing, pointing towards a dark slit in the rock, high up, near the top of the cliffs. The rain had washed the crumbling limestone away, making the dark cave entrance at the bottom stand out.

She looked back up to where she had fallen from, and then around five hundred cubits along to that dark entrance. Her heart fluttered.

It had to be Hatshepsut's tomb. Why else would the gods show her?

She made her way steadily around the cliff face. Water was trickling from above, running down the rocks already made slippery by the falling rain. She edged along, clutching her arm. Stones crumbled to mud under her feet. They fell down into the ravine below where a small trickle of water had turned into a stream. The sky lit up again, flashing its warning. Loose stones bounced down the cliff. Whole chunks of the hillside broke off like wet bread, sliding down into the gully below.

She kept going. She must be over two hundred cubits up from the bottom of the gully. Not even

the throbbing pain in her arm could stop her now. She reached the loose stones at the base of the entrance. Henut struggled up it. The sky roared at her, the stones slid beneath each step, water blinded her, and then... she was at the top of the mound, by the cliff face, and below her was an undecorated square black hole.

The sky flashed again. The rain made it look like the mountain was salivating to swallow her whole. She wasn't going to disappoint it. She crouched low and crept down towards the entrance. The loose stones slipped from under her. She skidded straight into its wet mouth.

It was incredibly dark. She could only see a few cubits ahead of her as she continued to step slowly down into the entrance. Soon she couldn't make out anything at all. She felt around with her sandals before making each step, keeping her injured arm to her chest. The tunnel curved to the right. She shut her eyes and opened them. It was pitch black. Her ears heard nothing but scattering stones, the trickle of primordial waters, distant thunder and the rapid pulse of her heart.

The next step she took was level. She felt around with her foot and discovered it was a step. The steps were on the left side of the corridor, making it hard for her to feel the wall, so she had to go slowly. She calmed herself by counting them.

One, two, three...

Forty-four, forty-five, forty-six...

There was no forty-seven. She'd reached a chamber... was it the burial chamber? Her foot brushed against something, an old pot perhaps. It rolled, making an enormous echoing noise that reverberated against the stone. The noise stopped. Then she heard a clink, several times, bouncing down more stairs, and finally, somewhere deep below her, it smashed. She froze. There was a ledge hidden somewhere in the darkness... if she fell, she'd never be able to get out again.

The staircase must continue, somewhere to her right. She turned around and tried to retrace her steps. Scared of falling in an unseen hole, she bent down, feeling the floor with her right arm. Her fingers ran into something. It was a

stick, slightly less than a cubit long. It had fabric wrapped around it and smelt strongly of oil. A discarded torch! But she didn't have anything to light it with. Instead, she used it to feel the floor back to the steps. Just to the left of them she felt another staircase and continued her journey into the belly of the mountain.

Eighty-five, eighty-six, eighty-seven...

The corridor was lower here. She reached up with her stick and tapped it on the ceiling. Dust fell on her head. As she scraped it along the walls they crumbled. The tunnel was going through a softer rock. The steps were badly made and she stopped counting, choosing instead to crouch low with the stick feeling the floor in front of her. After another thirty paces or so it seemed to disappear.

She knelt down and sat on the ledge, feeling the darkness with her feet... there was no step. She didn't know how high the ledge was. She put the stick down and felt for a stone. She picked one up and tossed it over the step, listening carefully for when it landed. It bounced immediately. She

gingerly felt as low as she could with her feet. They scuffed against the tunnel floor. Picking up her stick, she lowered herself down.

She descended further, sweeping her stick in front of her. She could hear trickling water, the faint boom of the thunder, and the tapping of her stick on the crumbling tunnel wall. The floor turned dusty and cracked underfoot as she trod on loose shale, then her stick met an obstacle directly in front of her. It was large, hard, there were cracks and holes in it. She reached out and felt what must be a massive pile of rocks. The ceiling had collapsed. She worked her way around, feeling to see if it blocked the tunnel completely. Finding that there was a gap she could squeeze around, she fed herself through it, and followed the tunnel as it turned sharply.

Her stick once again hit something and she had to duck through a low gate. The air felt strange here. She felt a sense of calm wash through her. As she descended further, her footsteps reverberated differently. The ceiling of the tunnel had vanished, she was in a tall cavernous

space. Her footsteps echoed. She was close. She continued shuffling down and, at last, the floor flattened out.

The hairs on the back of her neck bristled with excitement. She slowly mapped the room, colliding with rubble, and discarded rubbish on the floor. Something large, cold and flat was lying at her feet. She touched it. It was incredibly smooth. She immediately thought of the stone sarcophagus lid she'd seen lying on the floor in the pyramid.

‘Hatshepsut?’ she whispered.

Something changed. Something flashed. She yelped, falling backwards, landing painfully on her backside. She heard rocks moving behind her as in front of her the walls began to glow. Dancing shadows swept over the burial chamber revealing two sarcophagi, their lids on the floor. Limestone slabs had fallen off from the walls and crumbled in heaps. The light was coming from behind her and she spun around to see someone standing with a lit torch.

‘Give it to me.’



CHAPTER SEVENTEEN

A Heart for a Heart

Henut slowly stood up, her eyes wincing in the light of her mother's torch. Hatshepsut looked dishevelled. She was soaked through, grey dust caked in her hair, soot on her clothes...

'You followed me?' Henut asked.

'The amulet.' Hatshepsut held her torch higher. 'I'm surprised you found this place. It took my brother weeks of nearly getting caught by guards to finally locate this tomb.'

Henut glanced around at the destruction. 'Was it worth it?'

Hatshepsut shook her head. ‘It had already been plundered. We only managed to find a few amulets. So hand it over.’

‘You should give the amulet back to the pharaoh,’ Henut said, pointing at the sarcophagi.

‘I need it more than she does,’ Hatshepsut said.

‘I’ve had dreams...’ Henut began, but she was in no fit state to refuse her. She put down her stick before looping the amulet over her head and handing it to her mother.

A cold wet hand snatched it from her. It was back around her mother’s neck.

‘What is wrong with your arm?’ Hatshepsut asked.

‘I fell,’ Henut said.

‘Is it painful?’

Henut nodded.

Hatshepsut pointed at her stick. ‘Is that a torch? I’ll light it.’

She took Henut’s stick and held it to her lamp. They heard a great rumble... as though Ammit’s stomach was angry.

‘What is that?’ Henut said, taking her torch.

‘The tomb isn’t stable,’ Hatshepsut said. ‘The ceiling hadn’t collapsed when I was last here...’

Henut yelped. She pointed at the floor by her mother’s feet. It looked like blood was oozing around her sandals.

‘Floodwater,’ Hatshepsut muttered. ‘I have to leave.’

Henut chased after her mother, ducking under the gate and back up into the tunnel. The torch revealed the full destruction of the ceiling. Fractured flat rocks were strewn haphazardly, from great slabs like flagstones down to the smallest flakes like razors. Great wooden beams balanced precariously, bowing under the weight of the mountain. Water was pouring past their feet, washing the smallest flakes towards the burial chamber. Henut climbed one-handed onto the ledge she’d blindly jumped down. She was shocked at how shallow it was; it had seemed a vast chasm in the darkness. She followed the fast-paced Hatshepsut up the stairs, which had since become a miniature waterfall.

Henut was struggling to keep up. She felt exhausted. The last steep incline to the surface was the worst; the water was pouring down, making her slide backwards as she heaved herself forward. Henut dropped her torch, using her fingers on her right hand to grip onto the wall, thankful for the finger holds left by a tomb-builder's hand-axe centuries before.

Once out of the mouth of the cave, Hatshepsut was frozen in horror. The rain was lashing down, less violently than before, but the valley had flooded. The small stream of water in the gully had transformed into a river. The path Henut had used to get to the tomb was now submerged.

Hatshepsut looked worried.

'How deep is it?' Henut asked, her arm still throbbing next to her heart.

Hatshepsut frowned. 'I will have to find out.'

She skidded down the side of the rocks and tentatively took a step into the stream. It came to just above her knees. She didn't look back to Henut before wading into the moving water. In

what felt like no time at all, she had crossed the thirty or so cubits to the opposite side.

Henut was still trying to recover her breath from climbing out of the tomb. Her left arm felt hot and angry, pulsing in time with her heart. She saw her mother was already climbing the steep hill on the opposite side. She wasn't going to wait for her. Henut hurried as fast as she could to the stream of brown water. It was flowing faster than she had imagined. It was already deeper than it had been for Hatshepsut. Every graze and cut on her legs burned instantly on contact with the water. To make matters worse, hundreds of small stones scratched and tumbled against her skin as the current pushed against her. It was so thick with debris that she couldn't see the bottom.

She should have been more careful. She shouldn't have chased her mother, but she was in pain, she was scared, and didn't want to be left behind. That's when a rock she hastily trod on flipped over, causing her to lose her footing and fall face-first into the fast moving water.

Hatshepsut heard her scream. Henut was trying to regain her balance, but she had been pushed further down, towards the valley floor, where the water was pooling in a dark churning mass. Henut's good arm found a large rock and clung onto it. She managed to put her legs down, but she couldn't move from her spot. She didn't have the strength or the trust to take another step for fear of being washed away. This was it. The moment Anubis had warned her about. The floodwaters were coming. She was unable to move.

'Give me your hand,' a firm voice yelled over the chaos of water.

Henut realised the voice had been yelling for some time, but fear had caused her heart to beat so fast she couldn't think. She unfroze and looked up to see her mother's hand. She'd come back for her.

The water was around Hatshepsut's waist. She was barely standing, but managed to grab hold of Henut. 'Get up onto my back and hold tight.'

Henut managed to climb up onto her back. She gripped her as best she could, squeezing her with her thighs, trying not to let the pain in her left arm

get in the way. It was a struggle for them to keep balance and Henut was doing her best not to be a dead weight, stabilising herself as they inched slowly to the opposite bank. She could hear her mother's ragged breathing, the grunting with each step, the sharp intake of breath as stones hit her.

The closeness Henut felt in that moment, her mother's bony ribs, the softness of her skin, the heat of her body, the little mole that lay just inside where the gold chain of the amulet fell... It took away the pain in her arm. She just wanted to close her eyes and bury herself in her wet hair, and smell the scent of her skin. The fear eased, and with each pace, they got closer to safety. As the water got shallower, the sky seemed to brighten and Henut's heart felt lighter. She wasn't going to drown.

Hatshepsut stopped and Henut lowered herself down. The water was only up to her ankles. She was safe.

'Thank you, Mum!' She gave her a little squeeze and ran to the bank.

She climbed the hill a few feet before looking back. She felt such relief, and so happy.

Her mother had saved her. She'd come back for her. She'd changed her mind.

Looking back as Hatshepsut caught her breath, her hands on her knees still ankle deep in the stream, she couldn't believe she had doubted her. Despite everything, despite not giving back the amulet, Maat was restored. Her mother loved her. She had saved her.

Henut was so happy in that moment that she didn't register the rumble. Hatshepsut hadn't noticed it either. She was still catching her breath in the shallows of the runoff.

It wasn't thunder. It was water breaking through the other side of the cliffs. It had forced itself into cracks, pushing into them more and more as it collected behind. Finally, the rock couldn't take the pressure. The cracks failed. Huge boulders exploded from the cliff, like a crocodile launching itself out of the river.

Hatshepsut didn't stand a chance. She barely had enough time to stand up and turn her head before the great monster swallowed her whole.

She vanished into the violent wall of white foam and rock.

Henut didn't have time to scream. She immediately ran for the high land, her limbs working frantically as the water began to chase her up the side of the hill. She couldn't feel her legs as they wobbled under her. She was barely breathing, only noticing where to place her foot a split second before placing the other one. Death was chasing her higher and higher, licking hungrily at her heels until, eventually, time came back to its regular rhythm. The tide stopped rising, cubits above where she started. She could barely take another step and flopped down onto the wet rocks, gasping like a dying fish.

Her heart flooded her eyes with tears so thick she couldn't see the blue sky peeking out between the clouds. She howled in sorrow.



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Roy had found her when he, the villagers and the Medjay came up the hill after the storm to look for survivors. Seti, of course, had fled, leaving his barge behind. Maybe he had got a job on a different ship or travelled south to Kush. Henut didn't know. She didn't care.

Henut didn't remember much, just the magician casting spells over her arm and wrapping it like a dead body.

'If she doesn't suffer a fever within two days, she will live,' he said sagely.

She was taken to Khaemwaset's quarters in the palace of Malkata. Perhaps because the pharaoh was a god, she'd imagined the palace to

be like a great temple, with stone walls and high ceilings. It was actually more like a large house with elaborate gardens.

Meryt arrived once her boat had been mended, expecting to have to persuade Khaemwaset to take Henut back to Memphis. Instead she sat by Henut's bed and tended her cuts with ointments and whispered charms. Khaemwaset repeatedly dropped by the servants' quarters, bringing varieties of baked foods, fruits and beverages. Henut didn't eat. At least not until the second night, when the smell of honeyed duck overwhelmed her.

One thing that had changed was that Henut wasn't dreaming anymore. But she also couldn't talk. Every time she tried, her heart closed her mouth and she shook her head at every question. Gradually, her arm started to feel better, and the swelling began to subside. It was still weak though, and Meryt insisted on raising it regularly to cast protective spells.

Two weeks later, when Paser and Khaemwaset were attending a small procession in the temples

of nearby Karnak, Henut finally confessed to Meryt what had happened.

Meryt stayed quiet, absorbing the story, and giving it the weight of her consideration. She inclined her head at an angle, causing the Eye of Horus tattoo to open in shock, as Henut explained how she and her mother had tried to cross the floodwater, and about her mother coming back for her, and then being swept away.

‘Hatshepsut was a powerful magician,’ she said finally.

‘Yes,’ agreed Henut. ‘She convinced me in my dreams to go into her tomb to return her amulet...’

Meryt shook her head. ‘Not the pharaoh, your mother. Do you remember what I told you about spells?’

Henut looked confused.

‘The way they work isn’t just through words, it is the belief behind them. That works both ways. If you think something often, and if the gods are listening, you will manifest your words in reality.’ She smiled at Henut’s confusion.

‘You can believe your own lies. And if you believe in something so much you can essentially make it come true.’

‘I don’t understand.’

‘Your mother convinced everyone she had drowned, that the waters had taken her. And so they did. It wasn’t the tomb that had cursed her. It was herself.’

‘What rot!’ Khaemwaset appeared at the door. He had been listening to them. He was dressed in the sheerest linen, gold cuffs and a dazzling collar. ‘Floods are rare but they happen. It is just a coincidence.’

To Henut it didn’t feel like a coincidence. It felt like she’d been a piece in a massive board game.

‘Have you been spying on us?!’ Meryt said. ‘Why are you back so early?’

‘A messenger arrived. I’ve been ordered to travel to Pi-Ramesses,’ Khaemwaset held up a scroll and plonked down on the rug by Henut’s cushions. He helped himself to the meal she hadn’t finished. ‘My father has heard of my escapades and wishes to talk to me.’

‘Are you in trouble?’

‘I’m not sure. I think he’s glad I wasn’t there to witness the *heb sed*. I think he’d secretly been nervous about it,’ Khaemwaset grinned.

‘Do pharaohs get nervous?’ Henut asked.

Khaemwaset held back a smirk. ‘Of course not, I was joking. However, he can’t be too upset with me. He’s agreed to the conservation works at the pyramid of Unas. I will have the sculptors carve him a dedication explaining what the pyramid is for generations to come.’

‘Oh yeah?’ Meryt raised her eyebrows. ‘Who is going to have the largest cartouche, your father, Unas or you?’

‘Cheeky,’ Khaemwaset grinned, nudging her playfully. ‘Only a pharaoh’s name is written in a cartouche but, yes, I will write my name. That is, after all, the only part of the soul guaranteed to exist after death. And mine will be only slightly smaller than my father’s. Anyway, all this means I’m heading north. I’ll be able to take you both back home.’

The journey home took less than two weeks. Sixteen days. A group of six oarsmen rowed Meryt's boat in the wake of Khaemwaset's more comfortable vessel, which he had borrowed from Paser. Meryt spent a long time looking out protectively at the smaller boat, inspecting it every evening when they docked for the night and complaining of any mess left by the men.

The closer she got to Memphis the more Henut worried about how much trouble she would be in with her father. She tried to come up with some convincing lies and concocted a story that might get her out of trouble. She hadn't volunteered to chase Seti, Khaemwaset had *forced* her to go with him. She wasn't going to tell her dad about the amulet, or entering tombs, or seeing her mother, or letting Seti escape or about how the prince had taken her down to Thebes. She couldn't deny she'd injured her arm... but she'd tell him she'd done it by slipping on the fine stone of the palace steps. After all, she didn't need to upset him. She could pretend that she still thought her mother had died years before and that Seti had left to

travel down to Kush. Why hurt her father with the truth?

It was only when they were a few days from Memphis that Khaemwaset told her what he had done.

‘I’ve warned your family that we are coming,’ he explained. ‘Sent a message ahead of us so they know when to expect you.’

‘What?’ Horror filled her heart. ‘What did you tell them?’

Khaemwaset looked confused. ‘The truth. That you helped save my life. That you saw your mother die, and are still in a delicate state...’

‘I’m fine!’ Henut shouted, bursting into tears.

She was terrified that her father would be furious with her. She had gone against his instructions to try and stay in Memphis. She had led a prince into a death-trap and then allowed her uncle to escape justice. Not only that, she had entered two tombs and risked her soul forever. She was sure on hearing this news her father would cast her from the house, just as he had her mother.

To Henut's shock, Tjay, Nefer and her father were all waiting for her at the dock, behind Pahem and his collection of priests and servants.

Khaemwaset casually handed Pahem a scroll and swept aside the priests in their leopard skins to speak to Henut's family. They bowed low to Khaemwaset, who thanked them and praised Henut loudly for everyone to hear.

'This child restored Maat by saving the life of Ramesses' fourth son,' he proclaimed to the crowd. 'See that their rations increase.'

'Thank you, sir,' Sennefer stammered, beaming at Henut. 'Thank you for bringing her back.'

'Did you follow up on my suggestion?' Khaemwaset leaned into Sennefer's shoulder as he embraced it.

'I did. Nefer is going to pick it up on the way home.'

Pahem was growing impatient and there was only enough time for Khaemwaset to take Henut into his arms and hug her. 'You are an amulet to me, little one. A treasure. Keep yourself safe.'

The crowd gawped at Henut, murmuring in interest.

Khaemwaset swung around to a scowling Pahem and started furiously talking about his plans to repair the pyramid. Meryt was about to follow, when she also snatched Henut up into a hug.

‘Visit the temple soon,’ Meryt said. ‘At least to see how the restoration is going.’

‘I told you we should have consulted a magician,’ Tjay said smugly, playfully punching her arm.

Henut smiled and hugged him. ‘I’m sorry I didn’t listen to you.’

‘Come,’ Sennefer said, pulling her away from the eyes of the crowd.

Tjay didn’t ask her questions about what had happened, but instead filled her in on all she had missed. They walked slowly; the familiar sights and sounds of the city were like a balm to Henut’s heart. When they eventually reached the house, Sennefer took her into the main room, closing the door behind him. The splatter of ink from

the bird was still visible on the coloured walls. Henut sat on the rug and prepared herself for the telling off she was about to endure.

‘You must think I’m a terrible father,’ Sennefer said quietly.

Henut looked up, shocked. He sat down next to her on the rug and placed his arm around her.

‘You look so much like her. It pains my heart to watch you sometimes. She was so clever, could read and write like the best scribes. But so full of secrets. Terrible secrets.’

Henut realised he was talking about her mother. ‘You didn’t know she was robbing tombs?’

‘I couldn’t believe she was capable of such evil,’ he sighed. ‘When the Medjay came looking for her, I did as she’d told me and said she’d drowned. That seemed the easiest thing to tell you too. After all, she couldn’t come back and it was far too dangerous to flee with her.’

‘She has gone now,’ Henut said in a quiet voice. ‘She saved me. She got me out of the water before... it happened.’

‘I was so blinded by her treachery I forgot she could be good too,’ Sennefer smiled, though his eyes were almost tearful. ‘Priests and magicians say the same thing about those that are drowned.’

‘That the gods have taken them for a special purpose?’ Henut said.

‘Indeed, but just because we have lost her does not mean that she will go without in the afterlife...’ He rose and opened the door to the garden, the heat wafted in. ‘Nefer? You can come in now.’

Nefer was beaming with pride. In her hands was a large statue. At first Henut believed it to be the repaired *ka* statue that the bird had damaged, but then she saw it was of a woman.

‘See there?’ Sennefer said, pointing to the writing on the back. ‘Hatshepsut. It’s your mother’s *ka*.’

Henut’s eyes began to prickle. ‘For... here?’

‘Yes, she’ll take pride of place on the home shrine. You can offer her food and speak to her every day now.’

‘You think...’ Henut looked up at him. ‘You think she made it past the Hall of Two Truths? Past Ammit? You think she is in the afterlife?’

He rubbed her back. ‘The only thing I know for sure is that your mother could break in anywhere.’

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Amulet

An amulet is an object believed to give protection. There were lots of different kinds for the living and for the dead. Typically, a heart scarab like the one in this book was placed on the heart and secured beneath the mummy's bandages to prevent its removal. This meant tomb robbers had to rip into mummies to take their amulets.

Antechamber

A small room that leads to a bigger room. Wealthy people's tombs were often more than one room, filled with beautiful and useful objects they wanted to have with them in the afterlife.

Ba

The part of a person's soul which represented the personality and power of an individual. Imagined as a bird with a human head, the *ba* could fly between the tomb and the underworld.

Cartouche

An oval shape with a pharaoh's name written inside. It's like a name tag for Egyptian kings and queens. It is said that when Napoleon invaded Egypt, the French noticed these ovals on the walls and thought they looked like containers for gunpowder called cartridges. So they called them cartridges. *Cartouche* means cartridge in French!

Cubit

An ancient measurement. The length of an adult's arm from elbow to fingertip.

Djoser pyramid

A famous step pyramid built for Pharaoh Djoser. It's the earliest colossal stone building in Egypt.

Duat

The underworld; where the dead go on their journey in the afterlife. It is also where the sun goes at night. It sets in the west and travels through the Duat and then it is born again the next morning in the east.

The Hall of Two Truths

A sort of court room in the Duat where the dead person's heart is weighed in front of the gods to see if they lived a life in harmony with Maat. First, the person had to declare that they had not done a list of 42 bad things in front of the gods. Then their heart was placed on one side of a scale, with the feather of Maat on the other side. If their heart balanced with the feather, they were found worthy. Those who were deemed unworthy had their hearts eaten by the creature Ammit!

Hatshepsut

Hatshepsut was pharaoh from around 1479 to 1458 BCE. Daughter of Thutmose I and wife of Thutmose II, she initially served as regent for her

stepson, Thutmose III. However, she eventually declared herself pharaoh, assuming full royal titles and the role of a male king. About 25 years after her death, Thutmose III tried to erase her name from history by destroying her images on her temples and obelisks. Her tomb description in this book is accurate.

Hearts

The heart, regarded as the centre of intelligence and memory, was the only organ left in place and intact during mummification. Other organs like the liver, lungs, stomach and intestines were put in canopic jars while ‘unnecessary’ organs like the brain were thrown away!

Heb sed festival

A celebration first held after 30 years of a pharaoh’s reign, then every few years afterwards, to show their strength and renew their power. They had to prove they were still strong enough to fulfil all their duties by performing athletic abilities like firing arrows. It was like a jubilee celebration crossed with an obstacle course.

Hittites

An ancient people who lived in what is now Turkey. They were powerful and sometimes fought with Egypt.

Inundation/irrigation

Inundation is the annual flooding of the Nile River which provided water for crops. Irrigation is the canal and reservoir system, which was used to bring water further inland so it can reach more fields.

Ka

A part of the soul. It's like a person's life force or spirit that stays with their body. If the body was destroyed, the *ka* could still exist in an image of the deceased, such as a statue or a two-dimensional image painted on a tomb wall. After death, the *ka* continued to exist. The *ka* was an exact copy of an individual, and so required the same things to survive as a person did in life – food, drink, clothing and entertainment. Goods were provided for the *ka*,

along with models, images and offering spells, which magically ensured that they were well supplied for eternity.

Kadesh

Now in Syria, in the 13th Century BCE it was part of the Hittite empire. The Battle of Kadesh in May 1274 BCE is the earliest recorded battle with known tactics and formations. It's also believed to be the largest chariot battle ever, involving 5,000 to 6,000 chariots. Famously, Ramesses II was ambushed by the Hittites, but fought them off, leading his bodyguard in a charge against the enemy. The outcome is generally considered to have been a stalemate, although both sides claim to have won.

Karnak

A vast temple complex dedicated to the god Amun, located in Thebes.

Khaemwaset

Credited as being the world's first Egyptologist, Khaemwaset was the fourth son of Ramesses II

and is known for restoring old monuments. He left inscriptions under the statues, pyramids and monuments explaining his restoration projects. He was never Pharaoh, but he is more well-known than many of them. He's a hero of many stories (like this one) written centuries after he died. If you're visiting London you can see a statue of him in the British Museum (object number EA 1376).

Kohl

A thick black ointment used as eyeliner, to protect the eyes and for beauty.

Lapis lazuli

A deep blue stone used in jewellery and decoration. It was considered very valuable and mined in what is today Afghanistan.

Maat

The concept of truth, balance, and order. Following Maat is what kept the universe in harmony. The concept is also personified in a goddess, represented by a feather.

Mastabas

Flat-roofed, rectangular tombs, first built before the pyramids. If you think about it, if you want your mastaba to be better than other people's you could put another slightly smaller mastaba on top of it... and then another and another... and boom! You have made a step pyramid.

Medjay

A group of people who worked as desert scouts and police.

Necropolis

A large cemetery with many tombs. It means 'city of the dead' in Greek.

Nemes

A striped head cloth worn by pharaohs. We've never found a *nemes* in a tomb, but we see them in the art. It suggests it was passed down and not buried with the pharaoh. In this book Khaemwaset wears an important ceremonial headdress, but it seems only a pharaoh would have worn an official *nemes*.

Nomarch

A governor or leader of a region.

Obelisk

A tall, four-sided stone pillar that tapers to a point at the top, often placed in pairs at temple entrances. The tallest ones are over 30 metres high and weigh over 140 tonnes!

Pahemnetjer

High Priest of Ptah up until roughly the 35th year of Ramesses II's reign. You can see his sarcophagus in the British Museum (Museum number EA18).

Papyrus

A grasslike plant used to make a type of paper for writing or painting on. It was also used to make ropes, boats and other materials.

Paser

Paser was part of the entourage of Ramesses II when they were children and went on to become vizier (like Prime Minister) during the reigns of

Seti I and Ramesses II. When he was older he became High Priest of Amun.

Portcullis stone

The portcullis stone was made of very hard rock and lowered after the tomb was finished to seal a pyramid or a mastaba forever. That is, unless you tunnel around it.

Professional mourner

People paid to attend funerals to honour the dead.

Pylon

The monumental gateway to an Egyptian temple, made of two tall towers with a doorway between them.

Ramesses II

Ramesses II became Pharaoh after his father Seti I died in 1279 BCE. He was the longest reigning pharaoh in the New Kingdom and had at least 88 children. He is famous for his great building projects and military achievements.

Roy

Roy was a real scribe. You can see his statue on display at the British Museum (Museum number EA81), although he's about twenty years older in that statue than in this book, and by that time was a well-known high priest of Amun-Ra in Thebes.

Sah

The ancient Egyptian term for a mummy. It roughly translates to 'honoured one'.

Sarcophagus

Stone coffin, often decorated with carvings and inscriptions. The term sarcophagus is Greek, and literally translates to 'flesh eater'. It was difficult to stop corpses from decaying quickly inside them, so mummification was necessary to preserve the body.

Shabti

Small magical figurines placed in tombs to serve the deceased in the afterlife. The Egyptians thought the afterlife was just like normal life and you would be expected to work. However,

shabtis could do that work for you, so you could enjoy the beautiful afterlife!

Shadoof

A tool with a bucket and lever used to lift water from the Nile River for irrigation.

Sidelock

A hairstyle with a lock of hair on one side of the head, worn by children.

Spells

Many of the spells in this book are real spells translated from surviving texts. Using words to call on the gods for help was obviously very important to their religion.

Unas

A pharaoh known for having the Pyramid Texts, the oldest Egyptian religious texts, inscribed inside his pyramid and quoted in this book. What we now call the *book of the dead* probably evolved from the texts carved onto the walls of his pyramid. The ancient Egyptian name for

what we call the *book of the dead* was the *book of going forth by day*. Unas ruled from around 2345 to 2315 BCE during the Old Kingdom. That is over a thousand years before when this book is set!

Valley of Kings

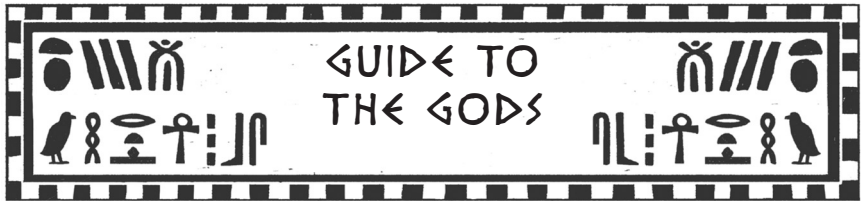
Known to Ancient Egyptians as ‘the great place’, the Valley of Kings is where many pharaohs from the New Kingdom were buried. This includes King Tutankhamun, Ramesses II and Hatshepsut. They picked this desert valley because it was remote (to deter tomb robbers) but also close to the religious centre in Thebes. Plus, el-Qurn, the peak of the Theban mountain, resembles a gigantic natural pyramid.

Week

A week in ancient Egypt lasted 10 days.



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There were many gods with changing roles throughout Ancient Egyptian history. Pharaohs were considered divine. After death, they were associated with Osiris rather than joining the pantheon.

Ammit

A creature that devours the hearts of those judged to be unworthy in the afterlife. She has the head of a crocodile, the arms of a lion and a hippo's bottom!

Amun

The king of the gods. In older texts Amun is referred to as 'the hidden one' and associated with

creation and the city of Thebes. During the time of this book he is often combined with the sun god Ra (or Re), becoming Amun-Ra. Religion didn't stay static over time and different gods became associated with different things, as well as combining with each other to reflect changing beliefs and politics.

Anubis

The god of mummification and the afterlife, often depicted with a jackal head. He's often shown as dangerous in modern depictions, but in ancient Egypt Anubis served as a protector and guide, someone to help the dead travel through Duat to the next life.

Bastet

The goddess of protection, fertility and childbirth, often depicted as a woman with a cat's head.

Hathor

The goddess of love, beauty, music and joy, often depicted as a cow or a woman with cow's horns.

Horus

The god of the sky and kingship, often depicted as a falcon or a man with a falcon head. He was Osiris's son, miraculously born after his father had been murdered. He avenged his father's death by fighting his uncle Set and became King of Egypt. The Eye of Horus symbol has many possible origins. One version of the myth explains that Horus lost his eye in battle with Set, and that it was restored to him by the god Thoth. Therefore, the symbol was often used as an amulet for protection and healing.

Isis

Goddess of magic, marriage, healing and protection. Wife of Osiris and mother of Horus. She was so powerful a magician she managed to resurrect Osiris after he was murdered.

Maat

The concept of truth, balance and order, personified as a goddess and feather.

Montu

A god of war, often depicted as a man with the head of a hawk or falcon.

Nun

The chaotic primordial waters from which the universe was created.

Osiris

The god of the afterlife, death and resurrection, often depicted as a mummy. He was said to be the first King of Egypt until he was murdered by his brother, Set. He was resurrected by his wife Isis. After his death, he became king of the underworld.

Ptah

The god of craftsmen and creation, often depicted as a man wrapped in a tight white cloak. He was patron god of the city of Memphis, one of the early capitals of Egypt. He also has his own creation myth where he brings himself and the universe into existence by saying ‘Ptah!’.

Ra

The sun god, who travels across the sky during the day and through the Duat at night. Often associated with other gods of creation and the sun. Like Amun.

Set

God of chaos, storms and the desert, often depicted as a strange animal or a man with a mysterious animal head. He murdered his brother Osiris and tore up his body so that Isis, Osiris's wife, couldn't resurrect him (she managed to anyway). He then had to do battle with Osiris's son Horus, who, on beating Set, restored order to Egypt.

Sobek

A god of the Nile and crocodiles, often depicted as a man with a crocodile head. His mother is Neith, goddess of war and hunting who is also associated with water and the Nile.

Sokar

A hawk-headed god of the Memphis necropolis, associated with death and rebirth. Celebrated after the inundation, in October, when new life starts growing in empty fields.

Taweret

A goddess of mothers, childbirth and fertility, often depicted as a hippopotamus with a pregnant belly.

Thoth

The god of wisdom, writing, and knowledge, often depicted as an ibis bird or a man with an ibis head and sometimes a baboon body. He is associated with the moon and said to have reconciled Horus and Set after their battle. Said to be the inventor of hieroglyphs.

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by Iszi Lawrence!

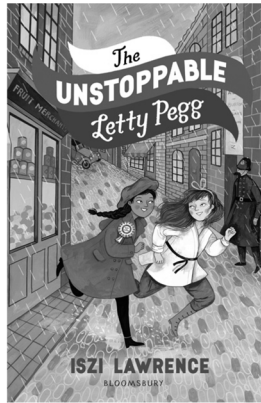
9781801990967



“‘Blackbeard told me,’ Abigail said... ‘that no one knows where his treasure is hidden except him and the Devil.’”

The year is 1718 and eleven-year-old Abigail lives with her father in the Caribbean. But when pirates attack, Abigail’s life will change forever. Suddenly her old certainties about right and wrong, good and bad start to unravel.

9781472962478



Letty's mum is a suffragette and her dad is a policeman: opposite sides in the struggle to get women the vote. Meanwhile, Letty mostly cares about her new roller skates.

But as the protests hot up, Letty is shocked by the police violence and astonished to see that some suffragettes have a secret weapon: jiu jitsu. Soon she's training with them, and the battle for the vote and the fight for her family become tied together. And it just so happens, that Letty Pegg is unstoppable...

9781472988171

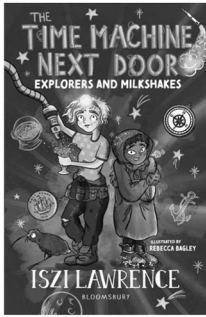


Billie is fascinated by aeroplanes so, after witnessing a Spitfire crash, she tries to find out what happened. She discovers that the local airfield is the home of the ATA – a group of amazing pilots who defy the odds to get planes from the factories to the front lines and, what’s more, many of them are women.

Billie wants to fly, but first she must try to prove she can be part of the ATA...

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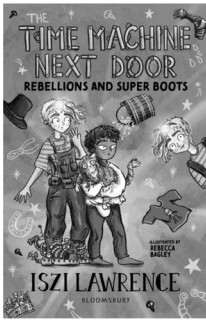
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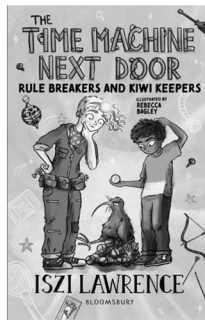
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Sunil's next door neighbour Alex isn't like other people's next door neighbours. She has strange contraptions everywhere, including the world's only working time machine.

Join Sunil and Alex on their madcap adventures through time and meet everyone from Charles Darwin to Rosa Parks!

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