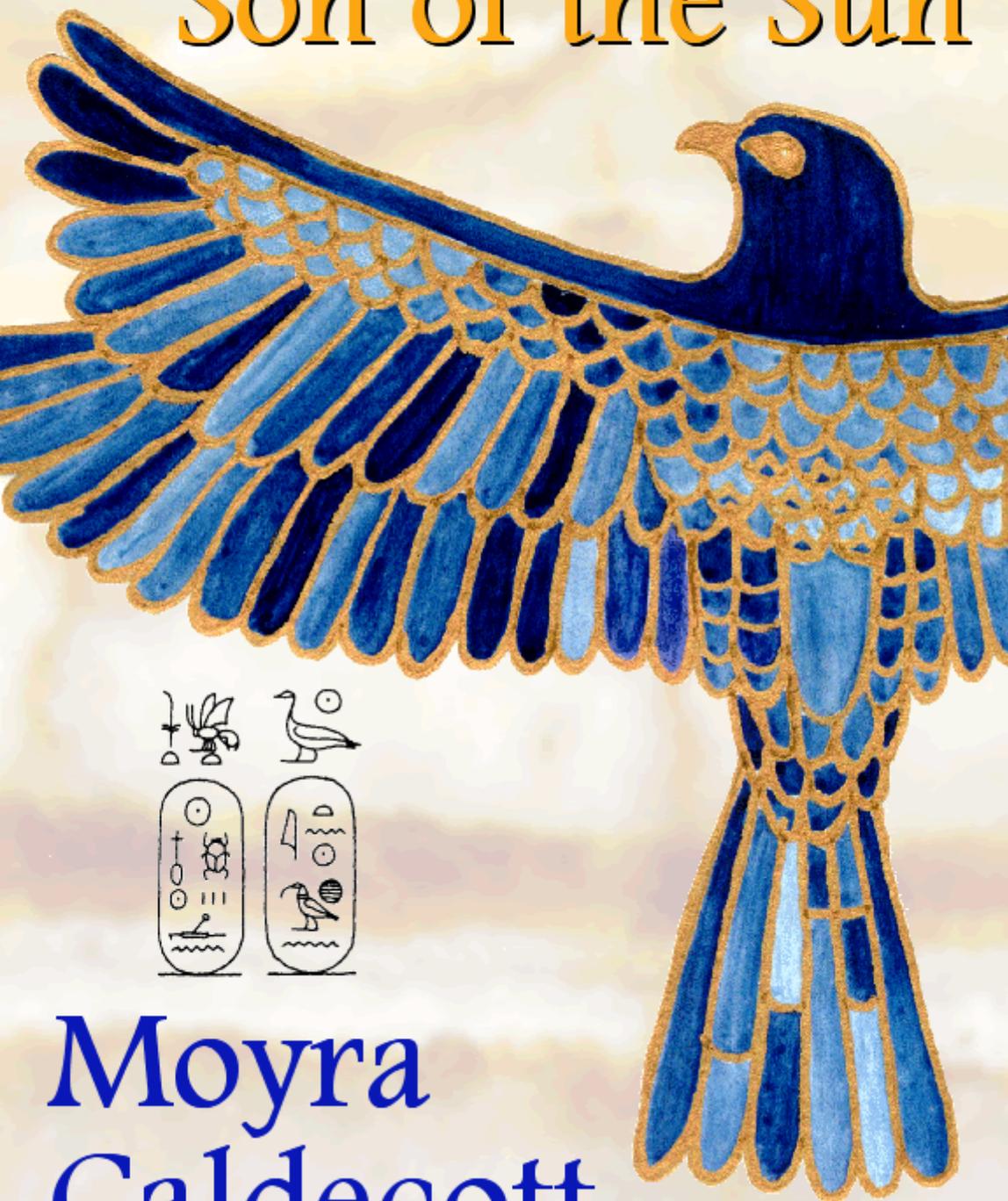


Akhenaten

Son of the Sun



Moyra
Caldecott

**AKHENATEN:
SON OF THE SUN**

MOYRA CALDECOTT

a Mushroom eBooks sampler

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*I tell you this three millennia
after these events took place.
Mark them well.
They did not end with my death,
and they will not end with yours.*

INTRODUCTION

This story is based on the brief but remarkable reign of Akhenaten in Eighteenth Dynasty Egypt, circa 1353-1335BC. It is told as if by a contemporary of his, Djehuti-kheper-Ra.

The whole Akhenaten period is still a matter for conjecture and careful detective work by archaeologists and Egyptologists. I have sought clues in books and museums and in Egypt itself, studiously researching where I can, and accepting my intuition where I cannot. In the end I have followed J R Harris and Julia Samson in believing that Nefertiti herself reigned briefly after Akhenaten's death, taking the throne name Smenhkhare. As far as I know, this is the first novel to incorporate this new research.

Though I have made this novel as close to history as is possible on the evidence we have, and have described the political machinations of the time, I have also traced the spiritual journey of the protagonists, the journey on which we are all engaged whether we know it or not.

The story begins with the suffering of a boy oracle, or medium, about to be sealed alive into a pyramid chamber for three days so that he may "astral-travel" to

the realms of the gods and plead for the waters of the Nile to rise, bringing life-giving silt to the farmlands. The story follows him through his lonely despair until he becomes the honoured companion of a king and an important figure in an extraordinary revolution.

At this time the high priests of the god Amun, brought to prominence by the female pharaoh Hatshepsut about a century before, are rich and powerful enough to challenge a king . . .

Chapter 1

THE THRESHOLD

Today the choice is mine: I live or die. When I enter the House of Many Thresholds, the ancient pyramid, the tomb which is no tomb, my duty as oracle is to travel, clad only in my soul-double, to the regions of the gods and there to intercede for my people, pleading for the rising waters, the inundation of the Nile, which yearly deposits the rich black silt on our farmlands, that we may eat and thrive. This year, the year before and the year before that, the waters have not risen at the appointed time: the fields have baked and cracked in the heat, the seed shrivelled, the people died of famine. No ordinary prayers will serve this day. The oracle himself is to be sent beyond the earth, held by a slender silver thread to life, to speak with the gods directly. When it is done I am to return to my body with their answer and live out my life of waiting, my life of service, my life that is no life.

Today, the choice is mine, and I have decided that I will not return. I will kill myself.

That music I hear? A flute playing notes as lonely as my heart.

Am I afraid? Yes, I am afraid. I am Oracle. I speak with the gods; but I have no name that is my own. How will the spirits call me to the weighing in the Hall of Osiris? What name will my heart bear on the scales as it lies beside Maat's feather of Truth and Justice? Like an enemy or a criminal, a name has been denied me: but worse for me, since it has been denied since birth.

It is known that a man is of nine substances. He has his shadow, his double, his soul, his spirit and his body. He has his heart, his intelligence and his power. He has his name. Into life he comes blinded by splendour: into death he goes knowing what he knows. But wherever he goes his name is with him. In the silence, in the waiting and the listening, the cry of the one without a name is lost. Because I have no name I will live no more when I am dead. I will become nothing and will fall back into the void.

I see a star, brighter than any other star, still hanging from Nut's nipple even as Ra rises. It is Sopdt, the star that I was born under, the star that should herald the rising waters. I call it "deliverer", "fire-quencher", "bringer of life", but it does not answer. For three years it has been a dry star, pitiless: no inundation has come at its beck, no Osirian green has touched the barley into life, nor drawn the corn shoots from the earth.

They gave me no name in a world where everything is named, but perhaps I, who am nameless, will be named in my death: "Deliverer", "Fire-quencher",

“Bringer of life”. I will pull the cloth of waters across the world as I die, and leave it as rich as they left me poor, as hopeful as they left me hopeless.

Reflecting in the pool at my feet the star shimmers briefly among the sleeping lilies and then disappears, swallowed by the sun.

Now, it is only as I remember it.

In the west the full moon plunges. The day in which I have chosen to die is with me.

* * * *

From the dark house the priests, my gaolers, come, padding softly on the flagstones of the courtyard. I hear their voices chiding me, feel their hands pulling me back into the darkness even as the sky bursts into light. Inside, the lamps are still lit because inside it is always night. I should not have been in the high-walled court. I have missed the first incantations, and there is no time to repeat them now. I will have to go on my dangerous journey without the full invocation. No matter. Our words are but the creatures of Time.

I am stripped of my night-clothes, my head shaved, then squeezed into the hard, painted wooden head-dress that tells the world that though I am lesser than the lowliest man because I have no name of my own, I am mightier than the mightiest because I speak for the gods.

I? Speak for the gods!

Why do I not scream and rage, now, while they are pushing and pulling me into their ceremonial robes?

They understand nothing of the spirit realms. Some of those they call gods are no more than servants of the Most High, and others are but named aspects and attributes of the One Beyond all Others. The priests teach – but they have not learned. And I? I fear my gaolers. I fear the physical pain they can inflict when I do not obey. But most of all I fear the demons of darkness that they conjure to torment me.

Once again I keep silent. But this time I know that there will be an end to my suffering, to the lie I live. I will not come back from this journey. I will be out of their reach forever, beyond their filthy spells and their stinging whips.

They never talk to me except to give me orders. How can one talk to a person without a name? But they talk among themselves, and I hear the king himself is to be there to watch the procession and the sealing. Shall I call out to him? Shall I tell him how they treat me, how they lie? The voices I speak with are false, tricks of Ma-nan, the so-called priest of Amun. I will tell the king. I will shout out with my own voice that has never been heard outside this house. I will tell him everything. I will destroy my captors. I will pull down their edifice of power. Beggars will spit on them, dogs urinate.

Ma-nan narrows his eyes and looks at me. I have never been sure whether he can read thoughts or whether he is just shrewd at interpreting the signals of the face. He looks at me hard and then mutters something I don't catch to the thin one, the one who is always bowing to him. The creature, Pi-en (even he has

a name!), slobbers off and comes back running with some thin sticks of that resin I hate.

“No!” This time I scream and struggle, but Ma-nan holds me down, his arms like a vice, my bones almost cracking under his grip. The resin is already lit and the smoke waved in front of my nose. I try not to breathe, but my lungs rebel and finally, after enduring almost unendurable pain, burst open, and I suck in the foul stuff, Set’s cursed breath, the dark god’s poisonous effluvium.

Ah, but now the pain is gone and I float, float on soft cushions of air . . . Sleep is near . . . Do I drift to my golden bed, or do the men lift me? I am as docile as a doll as they arrange my arms across my breast and slip the symbols of my high office into my hands . . . smooth my brow and close my mouth for me. Then a third eye is drawn upon my forehead with kohl, with powdered malachite and lapis lazuli – the eye that will see what no ordinary eye can see. Then the black plumes are set in place at the four corners and we are ready for the tall Nubians who come so swiftly to Ma-nan’s call.

I must have dozed off, because now I am in the open air. My body feels numb, and I cannot move my head to see what is on either side of me. I can see the shoulders of the men carrying me, the tall black plumes fluttering in the air, the high, high arched sky, totally blue, totally blank. I try to remember the star Sopdt, but even that memory is fading . . . I taste bitterness with my tongue, but I can say nothing. Ma-nan has played this cruel trick

on me before. Inside my head I scream. But no one can hear.

The carrying-bed tilts as the Nubians walk down a ramp. Without moving my head I can see the crowds now, thousands and thousands of people crushing forward, ragged, dusty, starving, anxious . . . pressing forward to glimpse the great oracle who will speak with Hapi, the great river god himself, and Osiris who was dead yet gave life, who was buried yet lived again. He will bring the green and golden grain back to the land and save the people from famine. They see me encased in gold, painted with powerful magic symbols. They do not see the one who lives in that house of darkness, a prisoner of loneliness. If they were to look more closely, they would see the tears leaking out of the corners of my eyes.

Level ground is reached, and I can no longer see the people, the parents clutching the hands of children, the youths sidling up to young girls. The tears stop flowing, but I can still feel their uncomfortable dampness at my temples. The bitterness knots in my heart. I can feel the tightness of it squeezing the life out. Let them do what they like; after today they will have no more power over me. I know from experience that the effect of the resinous fumes will last only a certain time. Ma-nan has become very skilled in judging just how much he needs to use to keep me docile for the required length of time. But he knows that he must not use so much that when the time comes for me to “perform” I will be unable to.

Today is a very special performance. Instead of going to the temple as I usually do, I am to be taken to a pyramid, the House of Many Thresholds, and sealed in. There, there will be no priests to harass me as I separate that part of my soul we call the “ka” from my body. In death the ka is naturally released from the body, and may travel freely through the many realms of matter and spirit, earth and sky. In life, usually only initiates of a very high order can separate the various substances of their being while they still remain attached to the body. But I have been trained for this – if for nothing else.

“What if the gods refuse my plea, refuse to give the waters to the Two Lands?” I had asked Ma-nan. “Must I bring this message to the people?”

I see by Ma-nan’s face that, as usual, the words I bring will be rephrased by him, cunningly, ambiguously, and without hesitation.

The Nubians stop moving.

This will be because we are about to board the barge that will take us by river to the House of Many Thresholds. There will be singing. The rowers will sing rhythmically and the water will slap the sides of the boat.

There seems to be a longer delay than usual, and my muscles ache with the unsuccessful effort to lift my head to see what is happening.

Suddenly, a man stands beside me, looking down into my face. Beside him is a pale, thin young man whose crisp pleated kilt and golden menat collar seem too large for him. The older man is broad-shouldered

and strong, and on his head the double crown fits snugly. The king himself! And, probably, the prince who will succeed him.

Now I should speak out and tell them what I know and how I am being treated, but though my voice, fumbling at first but growing stronger every moment, sounds clear to me I can tell that he is not hearing a single word. I begin to shout and cry and plead, but he hears nothing, sees nothing except the beautiful young painted body with its mask-like face, lying completely still on the bed of gold.

“Look into my eyes,” I scream. “My eyes will tell you!” He stares into my eyes sombrely, and it seems, for a moment, that he is deeply troubled.

The young prince takes a step forward and leans over me, looking into my eyes. He starts, and turns to his father to say something, but at once Ma-nan steps forward, bowing, and speaks to the king. The king and the prince withdraw and I can no longer see them. The bed that is to be my bier is picked up again, and carried aboard. The river journey has begun. This time, I think fiercely, for the last time!

I listen to the drumbeats of the time-marker, the rhythmic song of the rowers. I listen to the swish and slap of the water, to the captain calling to the steersman. But mostly I listen to my own breath and my own heartbeat, and wonder if, when I come to it, I will have the courage to give them up.

As long as I can remember I have been in the dark house. It has a name: “the House of the Oracle”; but I

never call it that. I have been told nothing about my parentage, nor why I have been chosen for this office. I am treated with remote respect by the few servants who work in the house, all deaf-mutes. My meals are brought to me by them on rich and elegant dishes. There is a tutor who teaches me the holy texts, but he will never answer my questions. There is a girl flute-player, but I have never seen her. I don't even know for sure that she is a girl; I just find myself thinking of her as one. Her music is always so haunting and sad I believe that she is not only beautiful, but blind, and I long to run away with her, far from this place, and teach her to see with my visions. Yes, I have visions of my own. Real visions, nothing to do with Ma-nan and his sorcery.

Ma-nan, who is in charge and has been always, treats me with cold severity, and it is he who inflicts pain if I refuse to do what he demands of me. His underling, the thin one, seems as frightened of me as he is of Ma-nan, and avoids me as much as possible. When I am taken to the Temple of Amun I see other priests, but they are always encased in rigid ceremonial robes and their faces are as expressionless as masks. Beneath the robes and the paint I wonder who the real men are.

Everything that is said and done in the temple is ritualised. The very way the lector priest reads from the holy texts in his high whining voice hides, rather than reveals, any meaning the texts were once supposed to have. How can they expect me to believe the god is really there when they themselves do not address him as though he were?

After the chanting it is my turn to perform. I am placed before the god in the high place of the sanctuary and am expected to stare into his eyes with the one eye painted on my forehead. I have to stare and stare, unblinking, until my own eyes sting and water in the smoky atmosphere. I am never told the “why” of anything, only that I have to stare until Ma-nan gives me a signal by moving the taper he holds up to the god. Then I have to speak out the words Ma-nan has taught me to say. If I try not to say them, knowing that they are his words, and not the words of the god I am supposed to be speaking for, he will rouse his familiars; and I will be surrounded by ghastly figures, man-bodied, animal-headed, like the gods, yet not like the gods, demon figures who surround me and torment me.

No one else sees them. Only I.

Then, if I have rebelled, I will be punished when I am taken back to the dark house.

I shudder as I remember the punishments. I hear my heart beat faster. I know I cannot go on like this. I *will* not go on like this! This river that bears me now alive, will bear me tomorrow, dead.

We arrive at the jetty. The bier is lifted again. Again the plumes flutter against the sky, as the Nubians lift me and carry me along the causeway to the pyramid, the place where all the worlds meet, the only place I know of where man can leave his body, travel in the other worlds and return to his body, without experiencing body-death.

I shiver as we pass through the low door and into the long gallery of stone. Warmth and sunlight are gone and I will never see them again. For a moment I weaken and think: *A little longer . . . perhaps I could endure this life a little longer, just so that I can occasionally feel the sun's warmth and see its light . . .*

The darkness oppresses me.

I smell the sticky black blood of the torches, and see the soot-grimed rock ceiling getting lower and lower as we go deeper and deeper in, further and further from the sunlight.

I'm afraid. I don't want to be sealed in. I don't want to be left alone in that impenetrable dark. I begin to scream; but my lips do not move. No sound comes from my throat. The footsteps of the Nubians are enormously loud on the stone floor. I can hear them panting with the effort of climbing up the narrow ramp. I feel I will suffocate long before I reach the chamber at the centre. Huge and grotesque shadows flicker over the walls and the ceiling.

I am going to die with no one knowing my story. No one knowing what I have suffered, am suffering. No one has ever loved me, known me, cared. My loneliness is huge. Having no name, my story cannot even be scratched on the walls, cannot even be written in blood. In my death I will cease to exist. I will never have existed . . .

We have reached the chamber, and I am lowered carefully on to the slab of cold black granite.

I hear them leave. I hear the hollow clang of the rock door as it is shut. Every muscle in my body is straining to lift me off the bier, to call out, to plead for them not to leave me. The Nubians will listen. I suspect they don't like Ma-nan any more than I do. But Ma-nan's resin has worked well and my body is still paralysed, though my consciousness is agonisingly active. I smell the different kind of resin smell, the kind that is used for sealing. They are sealing the cracks around the chamber door. No one may break these for three days and three nights.

Ma-nan thinks that when he opens the door again, he will find me as he did last time, on the floor, my fingernails broken and my fingers bleeding from trying to dig away the resin and open the door. But this time he will find me lying on my bier as he left me, my face composed and calm: and he will no longer have me in his power. This time when I leave my body I will not return, but travel on until I am transformed and become one with the mighty splendours of the Secret God who is beyond all gods.

But to achieve this I must keep calm. I cannot die of starvation in three days, and there are no weapons with me to kill myself. No, I will do what I have been sent to do. I will leave my body and travel to that realm where I have been before in soul-form, the abode of the free spirits who have chosen to help our world. There I will plead for the water for the fields, for life for the people of Egypt. When this is granted, and only then, will I plead for myself. If they will not take me I will defy even them. I will not return to my body, no matter what.

But first the preparation and the journey.

I try to conquer my fear. I can feel the paralysing effect of Ma-nan's drug wearing off, and I can move my limbs again. The temptation is to jump up as I did last time, and tear at the door. The darkness is absolute. The cold is the cold of the tomb. My heart is pounding. My thoughts race about in my head like rats in a trap. What if I can't control myself, and at the end of the three days I am gibbering and whimpering at the door of life, whining to be let back in?

I waste precious time, weeping.

Now I have the full use of my limbs back. To give that up, voluntarily . . . I have had few pleasures in this life, but one of them is to sit by the pool in the tiny walled garden of the dark house and watch the water-lilies open. Can I give this up? Can I?

I take a deep, deep breath and bring myself under control. I must not think of the water-lilies, the one star of dawning, the moon, nor of the faces of the people I sometimes glimpse when I am taken to the temple. I must think of the pain, the loneliness, the darkness, the constant harassment from Ma-nan; the demons waiting to get me if I say or do something against his will . . .

What if Ma-nan has planted his familiars in this chamber? I look around fearfully. But it is as though I am blind, the darkness is so complete. My skin does not prickle as it does when Ma-nan's demons are near. I feel increasingly calm and relaxed, as though there are good spirits present . . . or at least . . .

I begin to do my breathing as it should be done in preparation for the separation. I flex all my muscles, rejoicing that they now obey my commands, and gradually relinquish the use of them, one by one. Every time my old fear threatens to rise to my throat and choke me I say the words I was given in one of my visions, words not even Ma-nan knows. I think, with brief satisfaction that Ma-nan does not know how to leave his body as I do, that in this he cannot interfere – though he will no doubt insist on giving me the words to say to the people when I come out. But in here now – I am alone, and what I experience is my secret, and the secret of those I reach towards. If only I can keep my fear under control.

It gradually becomes easier.

I know my ka is slipping from my body when I begin to see again. The darkness no longer exists for me, and I can see my body as though it is a stranger's, lying on the dark stone. I see inscriptions and paintings on the walls in minute detail, yet I know that the walls of the chamber are not painted or inscribed. To anyone existing only in the body the dark stone is smooth and unmarked. To the ka it is filled with signs and symbols needed for the journey. This is the threshold between the known and the unknown, and there is a map here of the universe beyond the stars, of the realms where the gods sail throughout eternity – and I do not mean the eternity of endless time, but the eternity that only the gods know, the eternity that has never known time. The words inscribed are not of worldly matters, but are

written in the old language, almost forgotten, hinting at mysteries too deep for the human mind to grasp. I feel strange – as though as I look at them they are keys that are turning lock after lock in my invisible self, and as each one turns, a little more of me is released from the world I know.

I hover, enjoying the freedom from the restrictions of the body.

I look dispassionately at the youth lying so still. He is thin. I can see his ribs and his prominent shoulder bones. The kohl has run down his temples where his tears have soaked it off his eyelids. His lips are set in a sad line as though he rarely smiles.

I speak the words of praise I have been taught to Hapi, god of the Nile, spirit of the inundation who lives in a great cave under the river and in whose power it is to draw on the primeval waters beneath the world.

“Thou who canst not be sculpted in stone, nor seen in the images that are set in the crowns of the South and the North. Thou who accepteth no works nor offerings and cannot be brought forth from Thy secret abode, for the place wherein Thou dwellest cannot be known. Thou who canst not be found in inscribed Shrines, for there is no habitation which is large enough to contain Thee . . . nor imagining that can fashion an image of Thee . . . Whose blood flows with the green waters of the great primeval ocean from which we all come . . . hear my prayer . . .”

I visualize the river swelling as it does at times of flood, flowing with its rich green and brown over the fields; the festivals of greeting in all the towns and villages; the fleets of little boats decorated with coloured streamers by day, and torches by night, passing from village to village over areas that a few short hours previously had been dry, cracked earth and withered shoots.

And then I invoke Osiris, the great spirit of fertility, who will bring from Hapi's waters and from the rich black silt they have deposited, the bright green growth that will feed the people of the Two Lands.

“Homage be to Thee, O King of kings, Lord of lords, Ruler of princes, who from the womb of Nut hast ruled the world and the underworld. Thy members are like bright and shining copper, Thy head is blue like lapis lazuli, and the greenness of turquoise is on both sides of thee, O Thou god of millions of years, whose form and whose beauty of face are all-pervading in the underworld. Thou art Nepra and Thou givest all green herbs and all flowers. Thou art the Lord of Food, presenting all lands with thy abundance. Grant Thou unto me a path whereon I may pass in peace.”

Slowly I climb the ladder of the sacred words. Slowly I say the spells that have come to me from ancient times. The scene around the youth is no longer there. Without passing out of the chamber I am no longer in it. I am in a boat. I look over the side and the water is crystal clear, and beneath it I can see the continents and

the oceans of the world laid out as though on a map. I see my country is small; is one of many.

I drift to the masthead and see that there are no horizons. We are sailing towards a huge darkness, and behind us I see that we have come from a darkness equally vast. I pray for spirit-sight and that I may not be afraid of the dark.

My prayer must have been granted, because out of the darkness looms a huge and beautiful figure. I can see the stars through her body, and feel her breath on my cheek like the whisper of a great and potent secret. It is Nut, who is the spirit of the sky, created before the earth . . .

I bow as low as it is possible to bow, and my heart breathes the prayer my lips are now too awed to speak. I ask to see Osiris, he who has power to give life on the other side of death. She reaches out her closed hand to me, and as I stare at it enquiringly, she opens it slowly in front of me. Resting on her palm is a golden falcon. He spreads his wings and flutters on her palm, light sliding from his feathers like drops of water. He is a being of light beyond anything I have ever seen. I understand he is to be my guide and my protector. Silently I follow him as he wings away from her towards the darkness. One by one we reach the guardians of the way, monstrous figures, fierce beyond belief, who reach for us – but when the falcon cries the name of Him we go to seek, fall back and let us pass.

“How can such hideous demons serve the Lord of Life?” I ask.

“Look back,” the falcon says, and as I look the guardian that had seemed so dangerous and harsh, is now as beautiful as fire on the hearth. I remember Set, whose other name is Violence, the slayer of Osiris, the enemy of Horus, standing at the prow of the Boat of Millions of Years and in his role as Protector, destroying the enemies of Ra.

We reach the Great Waters out of which the first hill rises. Osiris, green god, rooted in the earth, his branches reaching to the sun, is before us.

How can I speak to such a one? Who am I, to address a spirit so lofty? My throat is dry: my words sticking in it like bones. And then I remember the suffering of the people without food and water; the potbellies of children with skeletal bodies; the withered vegetation; the cracked red earth. I forget myself, and pray for them, for the mysterious waters that will bring the rich black earth to my land.

He hears my words, and lifts his hands to receive them, and then he lets them go again so that they drift upwards like smoke . . . higher . . . higher . . . until they disappear into a light-source impossible to look at, so dazzling, so great, that our own sun if placed before it would appear to be a dark hole; our own gods, like moths around that sun.

I tremble, and find myself back in the chamber with the youth who has no name. I remember that I have forgotten to ask for his death.

I can feel his suffering drawing me to him again. Soon I will be back with him, and he will have to face the life he hates.

I am no longer in the world of spirit, but I pray to Isis who has suffered more than any mortal, who has known loneliness and loss. I will pray to her though now I know the gods we pray to, the gods we worship, are no more than mediators between us and the unknowable – bridges that span for us the mighty chasms between reality and reality.

Suddenly, the youth and I are not alone in the chamber. A figure stands to one side of me. He is very beautiful. Not young. Not old. Where have I seen him before? Was it on a granite wall carved by a sculptor with the seeing eye, or is it that he has the eyes of the falcon who was my guide on the journey to Osiris?

“I am Khurahtaten,” he says quietly, proudly. The name is unknown to me. His golden eyes watch me.

I look at him, not knowing what to make of him.

“Many things will become clear to you soon,” he says gently. “Let my name stand on your doorstep, sit at your table, walk with you in the evening . . . All things will become clear . . .”

“Why do you come to me? What have I to do with you?” I ask.

“I seek help.”

“How can I help you?” I say. “It is I who need help.”

“Nevertheless it is you who must help me.”

“But how? I have a body that is kept prisoner by the priest Ma-nan.”

“It is a body that houses the soul of a true adept in the mysteries. With recognition of who he really is will come freedom from whom he thinks he is.”

“But now he is lonely and afraid. He does not know who he is. He has no name.”

The being looks thoughtfully down on the young body.

“I will help him with my strength. He will grow strong,” he says.

I feel the urge to return to my body, to cling to what I know. It is as though I have glimpsed for a moment what we truly are, and am as frightened as someone who had thought he was a child, and finds suddenly that he is expected to be a responsible adult. There is a moment when I have partly returned to the motionless figure of the boy, and partly not. I feel the searing of his pain, his fear returning; yet I am still separate and he screams at me to keep away.

“I won’t let you return!” he cries. “Leave me! Leave me! I want to die! I want to die! I must die.”

His body shudders and jerks as I unite once more with him.

* * * *

I have failed . . . failed . . . now there will be no escape.

The blackness is oppressive. How can there be such darkness? I, as nameless oracle, struggle to my feet and rush forward, feeling for the wall. I tug the hated wooden head-dress from my head and start to beat my bare skull against the wall, again and again, with all my

might. The pain is terrible but I seem unable to kill myself. I remember nothing of what happened while my ka was on its journey . . . I can think of nothing but my fear of returning to life.

Blood fills my eyes where tears filled them before.

I join the darkness, and fall unconscious to the floor.

Chapter 2

THE JOURNEY

My return to the city of Men-nefer passes like a dream, I am only partially aware of the sun's bronzed disc low against the horizon, the river sounds – a boatman calling to the boy who climbs the mast, the cry of birds . . .

Sometimes I am aware of nothing.

Then images swim into view and through a mist I see the crowd being held back, while the young prince moves forward to gaze at me. There is something in his face . . . I cannot tell what it is . . . but it is as though he desperately wants an answer from me and does not know how to word the question. I see horror and pity in his face when he notices the blood that has seeped out from under the formal head-dress and dried on my temple. I look over his shoulder half-expecting to see his father, the king . . . but I meet Ma-nan's eye and close my own with a sigh. What if the king is there or not? What if the prince pities me? There is no escape. No way out.

In the night the prince is in my dreams. We are reaching out towards each other through a jostling crowd of people who are driving us further and further apart. Behind him I see his father, Amenhotep Nebmaat-Ra, and his mother, Queen Tiye, calling to him . . . behind them is a young woman weeping . . .

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When I wake I am aware of nothing but the throbbing of my aching head. I am told that by the king's command I am to be taken at last from this dark house, this place of sorrow. I know not where I am to go, but Ma-nan is agitated and shouts at the thin one. The servants scuttle about seizing things and hurrying them into boxes. For the first time in all the years I have been here routine is broken.

I lie on my bed swathed in bandages, unable to die. Is the move to be a punishment because I tried to kill myself? Is some worse prison awaiting me? Ma-nan, of course, tells me nothing. Through the thundering of the pain in my head I hear snatches of words not meant for my ears, and gather that it will be a long journey. I ask no questions, knowing that if I did, they would not be answered. Worse, my voice would be ignored as though it had not entered their ears, and I would feel again as I have often felt, as though I have no existence except as a tool for them.

When all the house is empty and the echoes double each footstep, each word, Ma-nan comes to me and stands over me, looking down. I cannot read his

expression. Is it triumph or bitterness? Only Ma-nan knows how to combine these two. Snatches of my ka's journey have been coming to me, but my head is too painful to sort them out into real and not-real, memory and imagination. Did I do well for the people and Ma-nan in the House of Many Thresholds? I am not sure. I am sure only that I failed to take my own life, and now I am worse off than before because my head is in agony as well as my feet.

I shut my eyes and Ma-nan's face disappears, but I can still sense him beside me. Why doesn't he speak or go away? At last I hear him clap his hands, and then feet without sandals pad across the floor. The Nubians. Surely not another performance already? But it can't be, because a cloak is put over me and I am placed on an ordinary stretcher, the kind for carrying sick people. The rich trappings of my office as oracle are nowhere in sight, packed up no doubt with the kitchen utensils and the excretion bucket – where they belong.

I am taken through the early morning streets back to the harbour, only a few citizens out to see me pass. Very different from yesterday, when the crowds were staring, pleading with me to bring them salvation. When a prince tried to speak to me . . .

The streets are narrow, mud-brick houses crowded together. The administrative capital of the Two Lands, placed strategically at the junction of the broad, rich delta lands and the narrow strip of green hedged in by desert that comprises the rest of the country, is an old city, sprawling and ungainly. The huge Temple of Ptah

dominates it, the streets close to the temple less oppressive, the houses of the noblemen who provide most of the priests to serve the god, more spacious and elegant than those we have been passing. Palm trees in their gardens rise above the walls and flowering vines flow over the brick almost to street level. We pass the south gate of the Temple of Ptah and my heart skips a beat as I meet the eyes of the two gigantic alabaster sphinxes that guard it, unsleeping day and night. I have passed between them many times – never happily. In this temple too I have spoken lies. I have been taken from the Temple of Amun, the Hidden One, to the Temple of Ptah, the Creator – in both I have been manipulated like a puppet by Ma-nan. Can I hear the chanting still? Ptah who created all I see around me, mighty and powerful energy beyond imagining, reduced to the small figure of a man carved of stone with a skull cap, holding to his chest the sceptre, the wand, the rod of power – the means to create, to bestow life. Ptah speaking with my voice. Ptah taking the piping voice of a child to mouth his Wisdom Words. Sometimes he has spoken to me alone and I have told no one. He has reassured me that everything has a reason and a purpose, even my own shadow-life. He has told me that I must not despair, that my time will come.

In these temple precincts there is also the smaller temple of Ptah's consort, Sekhmet. I have been used for her too. She I fear as much as I love Ptah. Visits to her I dread. Great scarlet woman, fearsome lioness, drinker of blood, the Destroyer that shakes the earth and tumbles

cities down. When I am in the chamber behind her shrine and am told to speak with her voice, I tremble. Many a night I dream of running through the desert with Sekhmet padding after me, her sinewy limbs rippling in the starlight, her eyes seeing in the dark, seeing through rock, seeking me out wherever I try to hide. Sekhmet the Destroyer, angry. Angry with me!

But today we do not enter. We skirt the high walls that keep the secrets of the god and goddess safe from the uninitiated and head for the river that laps one of its sides. We board a sailing-boat of the kind that plies up and down the river for long distances, not the narrow barge I usually travel in. I find my heart contains a tiny shoot, a bud . . . possibly it is hope for a better life . . . possibly excitement that whatever happens it, at least, will be a change.

The day goes by and I lie under an awning, protected from the worst heat of the sun; the banks slide past. I doze and wake and doze again.

Where the green of the cultivated lands ends, behind the forest of palms, rises the desert and there on the escarpment of reddish rock and sand we glimpse something of the ancient necropolis of Men-nefer, the tall step pyramid of King Djoser rising higher than any of its fellows, towering above the smooth walls of his mortuary temple, like the first mound that rose from the waters of chaos and on which the shining spirit-bird of the greatest god landed to lay its golden egg. I have heard tell of this place in the ancient texts but, as far as I know, I have never seen it before. Yet, as I look at it, I

know it is familiar. As I look at it, I know what I will find if I turn my gaze to the north and the south of it. I know what will be on the other side of it, though from here I cannot see further than the gleaming walls of stone. I have seen this place in a dream and in the dream I stand in the moonlight with a roll of papyrus in my hands and, as I try to read the hieroglyphs, it disintegrates into fine dust and is blown by the mocking breath of Set to every horizon. Is that sound a dog howling or my own voice howling in despair for a great wisdom lost and an opportunity missed? The sorrow in my heart tells me it is my own voice. I have been here before and I have not been here. Is it a memory from a long-gone life – or are the gods trying to tell me something?

We pass the landing quay, the entrance to the causeway that leads from the river to the field of many pyramids. Here the great funeral barges would have come in the old days, here the royal burial processions would have started. Nowadays kings are buried in the far south, at Waset, in tombs cut into the western mountains. The great days of pyramid building are over. Even here some are crumbling, their fine casing stone loosening and slipping, quarried for the sumptuous buildings of the living city to the north, their secrets violated by the tomb robbers. Only Djoser's stands as perfect as it was at the time of its building, the greatest of them all, constructed by a visionary, the god Imhotep himself, surrounded by ancient glories and the tombs of priests and high officials.

I am drawn to the place and long to stop, but the oarsmen pull even harder against the current and we sweep on to the south.

There are other people aboard, but they are kept well away from me. In the long, dark, moonless night I think that perhaps, when I am stronger and the pain has eased off, I can creep to the side of the boat and leap off. They will not notice that I have gone until the morning. I can hear Ma-nan's ugly snore beside me. But not now. Now, I have not the strength. I drift off to sleep again. Strange dreams. Someone seems to be trying to reach me. I turn my back on him. I know he wants me to do something for him, but I am too tired . . . too tired . . .

"Go away," I say, "go away. Leave me to sleep. Leave me alone." I wake and am in a huge night . . . people all around me sleeping, but I alone.

Days pass and I gradually grow stronger. Ma-nan changes my bandages from time to time, and gives me food and drink. He never talks to me. It is as though I am deaf and dumb like the servants. Perhaps I am dumb, I think. I haven't used my voice for a long time.

A north wind begins to blow, cooling the air. A Horus wind that presages the inundation.

I sit up, feeling considerably better. I had thought I had noticed a change in the motion of the boat and now I see what it is: the river is running strongly against us, very strongly. I take a deep breath, hardly daring to hope, and look closely at the banks. I was right. The floods have come, the river is on the move to cover the fields with its beautiful, deep, rich, life-giving black silt.

I look at Ma-nan, half expecting him to show some spark of gratitude for what I have done. I, done? Even as I think it, I know he will show me no gratitude. Quite rightly. It is not I who have brought the water . . .

O Osiris!

They come, the waters of life which are in the sky.

They come, the waters of life which are in the earth.

The sky is aflame for you, the earth trembles for you.

The god comes into being, the god has power in his body.

The month is born, the fields live.

Each night that comes I think that I should jump overboard, and either die in the turbulent water or escape. But each night that comes, I put it off to the next. Is it possible that I am beginning to enjoy life and want it to continue? I am still kept away from the others and treated with cold contempt by Ma-nan, but now I don't care because every day my eyes are dazzled by beauty. Ducks, with a green translucence in their wings, fly over me. Flowering water-reeds shimmer above the surface where the banks used to be. Flotillas of little boats bob beside us, their occupants waving joyfully. At evening I am awed by the splendour of a procession of shining beings accompanying the mighty golden disc of the Sun as he enters his unseen realms, his hidden kingdom. I never cease to catch my breath with surprise at the sudden flare of fiery light that suffuses the whole sky, long after the disk has disappeared. Slowly, slowly fading, easing us into darkness. At dawn my heart beats

with love, as first light stains everything pale green like a new shoot, and I see my star still there when all the others have faded from the sky. The nights are lighter now, as the moon steadily grows from silver feather to polished wing. The only pain I feel now is fear of losing all this beauty, this day-by-day growing intensity of love for the earth and sky and water – the gift of life I have received. When I sleep, I see the one who had wanted to reach me that first night, and I welcome him. We stand on the deck at night with the stars like enormous lamps above us, and he talks to me, telling me that his name is Khurahtaten, an incarnation of the great spirit, known to us as Horus, sent once before to guide me and now returned to guide me again. He tells me he has a task for me, something that I started when I last lived on earth but failed to complete. He wants me to work with him. At first I argue that I cannot, and then I say “maybe”. And now I know I shall.

At first he came only at night when I was asleep. But now he comes in the day . . . at any time. I might be staring at a hawk circling, and I hear his voice inside my head. I might be admiring the infinite shades of blue and pink in a distant mountain range, and he is beside me. I ask questions, and am answered, but I am worried that our time together will be brief and that at any moment Ma-nan may notice the strange trances I slip into, and find a way to stop them. Khurahtaten asks me if I am prepared to take a step from which there is no turning back. Eagerly I cry “Yes!” And then I know that where Ma-nan used to paint the Seeing Eye on my

forehead I now need no paint. I am no king, but on my forehead I feel the golden ureaus, the cobra poised to strike at darkness, like the sun. There is no mild recognition, but fission and terror as meaning leaps to meaning, like lightning in iron mountains. Words split in revelation. The crust of my former understanding shatters, and inside, like a geode, an unimaginable crystal landscape is revealed. The myths of my people take wing, and leave behind the shabby trafficking of priest-magic and empty incantation as the golden eagle leaves behind the sparrow. I know my task is to find the living truth behind the holy words and the holy rituals, to bring understanding to a people who have so misunderstood the ancient revelations that they believe the body has to be preserved in Time for the spirit to live in Eternity, and that magical formulae alone can open what is truly closed.

My instructor, day by day, night by night, goes deeper into the truth for which my soul thirsts. His knowledge comes into my mind and becomes my knowledge. I grow in wisdom and strength moment by moment.

Now I do not care that I am kept isolated in one part of the boat, and that no one is allowed near to talk to me. I welcome it, and dread the breaking of my silence. People sometimes come to where the cord is drawn across the deck to keep me separate, and stare at me.

I squat on the deck for hours, unmoving, staring at the blue water rushing past the boat, or stand, still as stone, my eyes fixed on some distant rock-formation

from the moment it appears until the moment it disappears. The clarity of the air makes it possible to see great distances, and figures of stone a morning's walk away seem only arrow-far, every cleft and cranny clear.

I presume Ma-nan has strengthened the effectiveness of the cord with some spell, because no one attempts to push it aside and come to me, though it looks easy enough to do. And I too make no attempt to escape my confinement.

From time to time we change the oarsmen. More rarely we stop, pulling in at some small quay to take on bread and beer. Often I have no idea of the name of the village that serves us and I do not care to ask, but one day I notice more than the usual flurry of excitement that characterizes these pauses in routine. I hear the name "Abedju" and realize we have reached one of the holiest sites in the Two Lands. It is here the head of Osiris is said to lie and it is here everyone from king to commoner wants to be buried or at least have some monument raised to associate himself with the great King of the Underworld. The place is a forest of stelae and cenotaphs. The temple itself on its sacred mound lies some way back from the river and it is clear there is no intention that we should visit it though some people leave the boat and do not return. I lean over the side and gaze into the heat-haze that almost obscures the town and certainly the hills beyond it. I wonder at the long centuries that have seen this as a place of pilgrimage and miracle. I picture the continual seasonal re-enactment of the death and resurrection of the Great

God – the battle he loses against his brother, Set, his dismemberment – the long search of his sister-wife, Isis . . . I wonder at the magnificent Book of Coming Forth by Day that is buried with so many kings – the book that gives such clear instructions for their progress through the Underworld where they endure trial after trial until they stand at last before the throne of the Living One, the resurrected Osiris. I look at the water of the inundation lapping high upon the banks, covering the low-lying fields, and know that when it recedes Osiris will bring the green world to life again.

*“Hail to you who are pleased with justice; you are Lord of Abedju, and your flesh has enriched the sacred land . . .
. . . All hearts are at peace for what you have done, for to you belong eternity and everlasting . . .”*

We leave Osiris and travel up-river again. The next stop is at Tantere. Here Hathor, the daughter of Ra and wife of Horus, gave birth to her son, the god of music. Here music and dancing enliven her temple, the Lady of Turquoise, the Beautiful One, the Mother of the earth. I have always loved Hathor, fantasizing that she is indeed my mother, that I have suckled at her breast, that she comes for me and visits me in the night to comfort me when I am lonely and afraid. I long to visit her cult-centre and put flowers on her altar – but Ma-nan refuses to let me set foot off the boat. I have never known a mother of flesh and blood, and I weep secretly for Hathor who is also kept from me.

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One day I am standing urinating over the side, when I see that we are approaching a great city. I hear the others on the boat excitedly shouting and pointing, and gather by the collecting together of possessions, the squabbling over position on the decks, that this is our destination. I have a twinge of disappointment. My journey is over and I am still prisoner. No, I think, *never again*. I look across at Ma-nan giving curt instructions to his servants, and find that I no longer fear him. I will stay Oracle, for Oracle has power. I will bide my time and take this power when I am ready, and neither Ma-nan nor anyone else will know the moment of its approach or be able to understand it when it comes.

With apparent docility I wait, peering at the great city, Waset. Men-nefer was huge and sprawling, but, nothing like this. It always gave the impression of clutter, as though it had grown up haphazard and too many people had crowded into it. Here there is shape and order. Hugging the earth are the mud-brick houses of the people. Above them rise huge stone edifices, obelisks with glittering pyramidal points reaching to the sun; mighty temple-gates under the protection of the winged sun disc colourful with the fluttering pennants of the pharaoh and his priests; noble houses, palaces with green and leafy gardens beside the waters of the Nile . . . Set back on the west side of the river lie the silent hills of pale stone which hide the entrance to the Underworld, the tombs of the kings. And between the river and the mountains is the huge mortuary temple of

the present pharaoh with its tall painted columns, its magnificent cedar doors inlaid with golden silhouettes of the gods, and, flanking the entrance pylons, two gigantic seated effigies of the king himself set to keep him in the minds of his people as long as time lasts. I cannot help being impressed. If I had not seen the king (shorter than myself, though I am scarce full-grown) from his statues I would have believed him to be a giant among men.

I try to re-establish contact with my friend and counsellor, Khurahtaten, but he has left me alone to find my own way and form my own impressions in this new place. He warned me that he did not want to be gaoler of my mind as Ma-nan was of my body. But I find something of the old fear creeping into my heart as I see the huge walls of the temples, and the darkness from inside lurking behind them. The sun blazes down on them but does not penetrate.

Chapter 3

THE MEETING

The inundation has come and gone several times since the day I pleaded with the spirits in the House of Many Thresholds. My body is changing and growing and day by day I seem to be a different person. Sometimes I am consumed with restless indignation at my plight, at others I am indifferent to what happens to me. I live in the crowded precincts of the Temple of Amun and come in contact with many more people than I ever have before. Some of them are women and young girls and I dream of touching them but never dare to do so. Ma-nan still has an extraordinary hold on me. Whether it is by his orders or because there is something about me that repels others, I am somehow still alone. I have noticed on more than one occasion when I have tried to befriend someone that they withdraw from me with something like fear in their eyes. I am nameless. I am an oracle. My body is a vehicle inhabited by the gods from time to time. They are made uneasy by my presence and do not want to get too close to me. Sometimes I wonder

if I was not better off alone in that house in Men-nefer than I am now, lonely in a crowd.

Ma-nan finds it necessary to control me with charms and hypnotic spells and more and more frequent use of the smoke. My only comfort is Khurahtaten. He and I speak many secret words together, and I learn it is almost time for me to show my strength and find my living partner for the task. My spirit companion tells me that charms and spells and smoke will have no effect on me when my time comes, and I must abide till then in patience, storing knowledge against the time it will be needed. When I ask him who my partner will be, he tells me to be patient. He will find me, and I will find him, when the time is right.

Meanwhile day follows day and at least there is a great deal of activity in the community in which I find myself, even if I take no part in it. The temple itself is sacrosanct and no one enters unless he or she has a specific role to play in the elaborate rituals of the day. Even the sweeping of the floors with brooms of soft green reeds is done by an initiate priest. But in the cluster of buildings kept separate from the city by vast mud-brick walls there is a microcosm of the world outside. Here there are rivalries and jealousies as people jostle to improve their status in the temple hierarchy. Here there are loves and hates, courtships and disappointments, intrigues, frustrations and triumphs. Farmers bring in a proportion of the produce of their labours to be offered to the god and consequently consumed by the huge temple staff. Scribes record what

is brought in and what goes out, contrasting strongly in their crisp white linen kilts and their clean and perfumed bodies, with the rough and dusty workmen of the fields. Cattle are brought in and driven, lowing, to the cattle pens, stirring up the dust with their hooves. Geese cackle and honk on the sacred lake. Gardeners shout to each other as they tend the gardens, while novices squabble and adepts debate. My favourite sight and sound is a group of young girls, chantresses of the temple, walking together with their flimsy robes floating out behind them, lotus blossom in their hair, laughing and chattering as they leave the temple for their dormitory quarters, pretending to ignore the admiring whistles of the builders who are almost constantly working in the area, but giving covert glances over their shoulders to see whether the whistler is handsome or not. Sometimes I meet the eyes of one of them as they pass me and fancy I see a spark of interest there, a curiosity that is not as unfriendly as usual. Nothing more ever happens – but I begin to dream and my dreams keep me awake at night.

The higher orders of priesthood have their dwelling houses outside the temple precincts, but usually close by. Most of them have other houses as well on the outskirts of town or in the country – huge mansions rivalling the palaces of the king, with storehouses and columned halls, with lily ponds and shady walkways of sycamore and palm. They retain quarters in the precincts as well, but when the day's work is done I see

them striding out between the guards at the gate, glad to get away from the hubbub surrounding the god's house.

I long to go out into the town, but am not allowed. It is continually impressed on me that I must stay ready, and absolutely pure, for the moment when the god or his representative, the High Priest, wants to use me. Whenever I make an attempt to stray beyond the areas that have been allotted to me, I find someone there to turn me back.

* * * *

The preparations this year for the Opet Festival, Amun-Ra's journey from his great sanctuary at Ipet-Esut to Ipet-Resut in the south where his consort, the goddess Mut, has her sanctuary, have been as elaborate as usual. The young Prince Amenhotep, in whom Ra-Horus glories, and who will succeed his father to the double crown, is to be present; his father being, at this time, confined to bed with an illness that has been troubling him more and more lately. I have been instructed as usual in the words I am to speak as Oracle, Ma-nan manipulating my mind with the power of his dark and piercing gaze, his smoke, his incantations. I wait, in the darkness of the chamber behind the sanctuary of Mut, dazed, scarcely thinking, the words Ma-nan having fed me lying dormant, to spring forth when he gives the signal.

Idly, my mind's eye follows the progress of the procession of Amun-Ra. There will be thousands upon thousands of people to see the journey; more than usual

because of the illness of the king, and their curiosity to see Prince Amenhotep, who was not born to wear the double crown, but became heir only on the death of his elder brother, first-born and beloved of the king. They expect the prince to ask for the oracle's pronouncement on his father's health, and for confirmation of his own right to succeed him.

At the quay the god, safe in his curtained shrine, will be placed on a gilded barge, beautiful with fluttering feathers and ribbons, and towed from Ipet-Esut to the southern sanctuary, the crowds following on the towpath, children running and jumping, adults shouting and cheering, traders selling ribbons and fans, and small effigies and amulets. Everyone is happy at last to be near the great god – or at least because this is a holiday and the musicians are playing lively tunes.

Once disembarked, the chief prophets of Amun-Ra, now a tremendous power in the state, walk ahead of the procession. The bearers of the jewelled model of the sacred boat in which Amun-Ra sails towards his beloved are all relatives of the king. One is the prince himself, older than I, but smaller, thinner and round-shouldered. His coronet, his pectoral collar, the stiff and jewelled apron that overlays his kilt, all seem too heavy for him, dwarfing him in some way, making him look outlandish and ungainly. Beside him walks his uncle Ay, the brother of his mother, the Great Royal Wife, Queen Tiye. Ay has been many things to the old king, from household confidant and steward to Master of the King's Chariots. He has carried the ceremonial fan and sat at

the king's table when feasting was in favour. Having chosen his queen from one of the minor noble families instead of from the royal line, King Amenhotep Nebmaat-Ra has always been at pains to honour his wife's brothers almost above anyone else. Other priests from Ipet-Esut walk behind, while Ma-nan and Na-aghte, responsible for the Amun Oracle on loan to the Temple of Mut for the day, wait with the priests of Mut in the great courtyard of the southern temple for the procession to arrive. They stand almost as still as the statues of the pharaoh-as-god that guard the entrance.

The darkness is very silent in this chamber. I can almost feel it, touch it, as though it were solid. I am seated on a gilded chair raised on a platform, carved with devices from the earliest days, the magical formulae of my trade. My fingers read them as a blind man would, tracing their shapes, bored with the time of waiting. I wish I could see the crowds, the sunlight glinting on the silver and precious jewels of the bark and the divine effigy. I am looking forward to seeing the prince again. I still sometimes puzzle about that dream I shared with him. I have heard that he is something of a weakling, nothing like his father. The rumour is that his father was bitterly disappointed in the death of his eldest son, and barely tolerates his younger. It is to his mother, Tiye, that Amenhotep must look for encouragement; it is said that there are times when she half smothers him with her love.

I have seen the king twice, once when I was on my way to the House of Many Thresholds, and a year ago at

this same ceremony. He had looked into my eyes as I declaimed the words Ma-nan had put into my mouth, and his expression had been very strange. For the second time I had tried to fight the spell I was under and say the words that I believed needed to be said, rather than the words that had been prescribed. For the second time I had failed.

The configurations on the chair are beginning to give me strength. Khurahtaten has taught me many things about the ancient texts that the priests these days seem to have forgotten. The saying of names is not enough, the drawing of signs, the carving of figures – you have to know the inner meaning of the names, the signs, the figures. As my sightless fingers work I feel the circle that is the wholeness of all things, the spot inside the space within it that is the dimensionless moment from which all things grew . . . *Who sees, when they see me, that I am many? Who sees, when they see me, that I am One?*

I find the shape of a falcon's eye and remember that Horus gave his eye to his father, that blind Osiris might see. It was given with love, and with it the seeing is clear and true. There is a left eye and a right eye. The eye of the moon: the eye of the sun. The one to illumine the secrets of the heart: the other to illumine the secrets of the mind. Slowly, slowly I work around the chair as far as my fingers will reach, my mind gradually clearing of Ma-nan's spells as I do so, my own mind taking over.

I hear the distant cry of the crowd and know that I have not much time left. The sign I touch is Maat's

feather, that which is weighed against the heart in the Halls of the Two Truths, after the first death, the death of the body. I remember inscriptions on the walls of tombs thought to mislead and placate the forty-two assessors:

*O thou being, broad of stride, who comest forth from
Yunu,
I have done no evil!*
*O thou embracer of flames, who comest forth from
Kher-aha,
I have not robbed!*
*O thou nose, who comest forth from Khemnu,
I have not been covetous!*

On the walls of my tomb, if I have one, there will be no such inscriptions. I know no words can turn aside the last judgement, no green heart-scarab of stone prevent the real heart speaking for itself. It cannot lie, once it is free of its physical sheath, no matter how loud one cries: “*O my heart of my mother! O my heart of my mother! O my heart of my transformations! Do not stand up against me as a witness! Do not create opposition to me in the council! Do not cause the pan to sink in the presence of the keeper of the balance!*” The secret motives that have lain hidden in the heart will out!

I hear chanting now, and know that the procession must have passed under the protective winged sun above the entrance gate and have entered the great courtyard. Most of the people would have been left outside the walls of the holy precinct: only a few

privileged ones are allowed through to participate further in the ceremony.

The sounds are muffled and very distant. I think I hear a drumming, but it is my own heartbeat. I have decided that this day will be the day I make my stand, partner or no partner.

After what seems a very long time, the pitch of distant sound rises again, and I know the next stage has begun. The uninitiated people will be left outside, and the small group of initiates, including the prince, will enter the antechamber. Prince Amenhotep's training as a priest was at Yunu in the Mysteries of the Sacred Nine, though no doubt he has been instructed in the rituals of Amun and Mut. Once in the antechamber they will all be sprinkled with holy water, while the incantations for cleansing are made. Then they will come into the first hall. Their progress through this will be slow, for they will stop every few steps by some particular inscription, while the priests of Mut intone sacred words and the priests of Amun utter the responses. Once they reach the sanctuary, the chamber immediately in front of the one I am in, the ritual will take even longer.

What are they thinking, I wonder, these priests mouthing these words, making these ancient gestures? Do they think the gods are children taken in by make believe, enjoying the same bedtime story over and over again?

My hands begin to sweat.

I try to pace out the ritual in my mind so that I will know exactly when my time is come.

Now they will be placing the effigy in its costly boat beside his consort Mut, on the plinth kept ever ready for it . . .

Now they will be bowing . . .

Now they will be praying . . .

Now the offerings will be brought and laid before the god and goddess. I wonder what rich gift the young prince has brought.

More praying.

Now the two high priests will be preparing to lead the prince, in his role as representative of the pharaoh, through the door to me.

I hear Ma-nan breaking the seal that had been placed over the lock when I was led there early in the morning. I compose myself. I sit as straight and still as a statue, the paint so thick on my face it feels and looks like a mask. I hold so tightly to the sign of the ankh, the symbol of eternal life carved on the chair, with the one hand, and to the sign of the seeing eye of Horus with the other, that my knuckles hurt.

As the light from the tapers shines into them, my eyes are momentarily blinded. I cannot see the figures that enter and take up their positions in the small dark room, but I know the prince will be in front of me, priests of Mut and Amun on either side, a step or two behind the prince. I know Ma-nan will be looking at me, anxious to see whether the spell he has put on me has stayed – confident it has, but checking nevertheless. I keep my face still, my eyes staring straight ahead, trying to fool him.

Gradually my eyes adjust, and I can dimly make out the figures, the small flames grotesquely accentuating noses and the hollows of the eyes. I can feel the young prince's fear at the same time as I can feel mine. We both suddenly know that this is a significant moment in our lives and are afraid of it.

Ma-nan has instructed me under spell to promise the prince the life of his father, in exchange for unbelievable amounts of bounty. But he has worded the lists of gifts for the god so carefully, and made it so complicated, that if the king dies it could be claimed that it was because the prince had omitted something from the bargain, not because as Oracle I had failed.

Prince Amenhotep speaks the asking prayer, and I notice that his voice is faltering. His face is so sensitive it is almost luminous, his eyes deep-seeing, his lips full.

I stay silent for the required amount of time, taking my cue for speaking from the signal Ma-nan always gives me, the raising of his hand.

I pause slightly longer than usual after the signal, gathering my strength. It is not easy to push aside Ma-nan's powerful spell and I know the effort to do so could destroy my sanity. My companion and counsellor, Khurahtaten, has given me advice for the chosen moment and I try to follow it, knowing that if my mind wanders a second from the task in hand I could be destroyed.

I visualize a tremendous source of light beyond and outside everything I have ever known, yet infusing everything I have ever known, just as my soul saw it in

the House of Many Thresholds, our own sun dark compared to it.

I visualize the secret source of the river and in its turbulent spring I plunge and wash myself, the water as clear as the clearest crystal, colder than the coldest stone at dawn. I visualize myself rising from the spring washed clean of everything that has gone before . . . And then, and only then, I begin to speak.

At first, what I say is no more than the expected words anyone would use honouring the prince and his forbears, but then I startle them all by breaking tradition and standing up. I begin to speak my own words, telling the prince that his father's time for death has not yet come, but that from now on he will not be as strong as he has been, and the prince must prepare himself for the day when he is pharaoh.

"When this day comes," I say in a voice that seems louder than any I have ever known. "When this day comes you will have a task that is mightier than the expulsion of the Hyksos, mightier than the conquest of Nubia."

Open-mouthed he looks at me. I cannot afford to make a long and subtle speech, for Ma-nan is already recovering from the shock, and is reaching into the small pouch I know he keeps hidden in his kilt.

"Turn the people round, beloved of god," I cry, "set them to search their own hearts for the meaning behind the ancient texts, set them to listening for the voice that speaks in the silence. Behind the many names of the

gods is the one beyond all names. No man can give it to you. No man can take it away from you.”

I feel the icy prickling on my skin that tells me Ma-nan’s demons are near. I am determined to look neither to the left nor the right, where they are lurking in the shadows, but stare, as before, only into the eyes of the prince. Above his head it seems to me I see the light in all its splendour. I cry out in awe of it, holding up my arms. Around me I hear the rustling of wings and feel the air stir with their beating. Is it Mut’s vulture, or is it the Horus hawk? With eyes blazing, Ma-nan leaps forward waving the resin smoke that I dread in front of my nose. The instant it enters my nostrils I stagger, my body twitching convulsively, my tongue cleaving to the roof of my mouth.

Prince Amenhotep moves forward, reaching up to me, in astonishment and alarm; but two of the priests take him, one by each arm and, whispering urgently but soothingly, lead him out of the room. He looks back over his shoulder, but I see that his eyes are rolling strangely. It is more than likely the resin fumes have affected him too.

Ma-nan gives me a look of fearful malevolence, and backs out of the door after them, clanging it shut behind him. I try to get off the chair to open it before the bolt is drawn, but I cannot move. I am slumped half-on the chair, half-off, and around me in the dark I hear the howling of his familiars and see their ghastly eyes.

“No,” I scream. “No! No!” But they are already clawing at me, and my skin is coming away from my bones like the grey rotting skin of a corpse.

The dark beasts almost make me forget that I am man and have within my flesh that which is not flesh, that which cannot be touched by man or demon.

“Take my flesh,” I cry, trying to stop whimpering with pain. “I don’t need it. All that was ever mine I still have, and all that ever will be, you cannot touch.”

Why do I see Djehuti here, the ibis-head, and Khnum with his potter’s wheel consorting with demons? Anubis with jackal-head; the wolf-head Wepwawet, and many others whose presence should give comfort. These are gods from the regions of the other world who should record with wisdom, guide and guard. Why do they consort with Apep the serpent of non-existence? Why with Ammut the Devourer, Set and Sekhmet? Round they go, their howling chilling me to the heart . . . demons all . . . all demons! Who shall I pray to if the gods are demons! Who shall be my help when there is no help?

I know Khurahtaten is trying to reach me; like a trapped golden hawk he flutters against the ceiling of the chamber, bruising his wings, his beak like the flashing of a blade moving for my benefit, pecking at an eye here, ripping an ear there. Snarling, my tormentors turn on him and leave me alone. Feathers fall from his wings as jaws snap and teeth tear. His screeching is beyond any sound the ear can hear. There is no human word that can give expression to what I witness.

Shuddering, I pull my grey skin from the floor and wrap it round me like a cloak. It warms me, comforts me. It is familiar.

His claws sweep close and then are gone, the flesh of demons dripping from them.

I am alone in the dark chamber, sobbing.

What is the meaning? I plead for meaning. I as man cannot live without meaning. Without it my limbs have no strength, my heart no power. I fall back into the first chaos and know nothing.

Khurahtaten in his human guise stands before me, strong and whole.

“You have seen the meaning of things corrupted. You have seen the image and the cipher take the place of those truths they were chosen, in the ancient time, to represent. Priests now play the “gods” like counters in a game of senet: kings move them like the knuckles of their own hands. You have been tormented by the shadows of shadows, the withered shell of a good that has lost its goodness; of a protector that no longer protects; of a teacher who does not understand what he teaches; of a recorder who records what he has not witnessed . . .”

“Help me to bring back meaning to the gods,” I cry.

“I will help you, if you help yourself. I must not play you like a counter in the game of senet. I must not move you like the knuckles of my hand.”

“I will help myself, if you help me.”

“This bargain is well struck. See – the light is a seal on it.”

I look around and the dark room is light. I have confidence. I can see. But Khurahtaten, my counsellor and friend, my defender and mentor, is no longer there.

I look at the heavy wooden door. I know the huge bolt will be in place on the other side. Ma-nan will want me dead.

I sit back in the oracle's chair. I compose myself; calming my breath; straightening my back; my arms lying on the two arms of the chair. My ka, half in my body and half out, folds its luminous wings around me like a healing cloak, its head resting on my head, its eyes looking through the door, through the carved walls of the shrine in the sanctuary to the silver statue of Amun-Ra resting in its jewelled boat. Amun the Unseen, ceasing to be as soon as seen. Amun the creator of multiplicity out of potential: become the destroyer out of greed. My gaze is so intense that the metal seems to melt and run, until there is nothing left in the shrine but a shapeless pool of molten silver and a few deformed gems, their crystal shapes mutilated by the jeweller.

My next task is to release the inspiration that in the beginning brought Amun into existence.

My fleshly brows are frowning, but the soul-bird who rests his head upon my head, is smiling. The joy of recognition darts from his heart to the heart of the god, and, from horizon to horizon, the images of Amun give forth the song they were meant to sing. In temple after temple, horrified, the priests shut their ears, slam shut the doors, trembling as the pillars of the holy halls

shake and rumble, the statues of mighty kings tumble down.

Here at Waset in the southern sanctuary I hear footsteps running, and see the priests gathering in the hall, approaching the shrine with cries of astonishment as light blazes out of it.

The shaking of the building dislodges the bar across the door of my prison. Ma-nan, Na-aghte, Ay and the other priests gasp as I stand before them, the wings of my soul spread above me with feathers of light. My eyes, my own two, and the one Horus has lent me on my forehead, seeing into the roots of their souls, the shrine doors opening, and from them the Unseen gliding away like a breath of wind, the shrine left empty.

“HE RETURNS WHERE HE BELONGS, IN THE ONE.”

Are these my words? They come from my mouth like thunder. Yet I have not spoken.

I begin to shiver, remembering suddenly that I have no name.

The eyes of my body gaze across the chamber, and see the young prince once again. He has heard what Not-I have said. He has heard.

The wings of my soul are folded in my heart once more.

I walk with careful dignity across the room to the far side that leads out from the sanctuary to the great hall. If I do not look back perhaps they will not stop me. I intend to leave the prison of the temple and go out freely into the great world.

“Stop!”

I hear the shout, but do not stop moving.

The prince is close now. He looks pale and bewildered but he is Pharaoh’s heir, and no one dare touch him.

“I put myself under your protection, my lord,” I say quickly to him. He looks from me to the angry faces of the priests approaching. Behind them the shrine is closed, no longer emitting light. Shadows are gathering close again.

Will he?

He looks back at me, frowning, confused.

“Please, my lord,” I whisper urgently. “It is in your gift.”

He seems to make up his mind suddenly and straightens up, looking into Ma-nan’s fierce eyes with something of his father’s commanding strength at last.

“He is to come with me,” he says. “He is under my protection.”

“He is Oracle, my lord, and cannot be taken from the temple,” Ma-nan says smoothly.

“I am son of Amun-Ra and to be Pharaoh of the Two Lands. I say he is to accompany me.”

Ma-nan tries to control him with the magic of his gazing, but I take the prince by the arm and turn him quickly away.

“My lord,” I whisper urgently, “there is danger here. We must go.”

He turns with me, and we walk out together.

We both know we are breaking every kind of temple rule and that we are taking a great risk, but he, as well as I, seems convinced that now it is the only course to take. We try not to hurry. We try to give the impression that we are walking out in perfect command of ourselves and with a perfect right to do so, yet I can feel by the tautness in the muscles of his arm under my hand that he is as nervous as I am.

The priests follow a little way behind. They seem nonplussed. There is no precedent for this. No rules laid down.

We do not look back until we are safely through the final courtyard and almost ready to pass under the great pylon. Then I cannot resist turning my head to look at my old enemy.

He is standing very stiff and straight, his eyes blazing at me, and, as clearly as though he were saying the words aloud, I hear his thoughts: "You are dead, Nameless One. And in your death there will be no journey to the kingdom of Osiris. You will be dead beyond all death, and I will see your soul pinned for ever to your rotting bones. There will be no going out and coming in. No travelling through time and walking in other bodies on this earth. You without a name, will never have a name . . ."

I shudder. The curse is the most fearsome I have ever heard, and I believe he has the power to implement it.

Chapter 4

THE FRIENDSHIP

The long night of my half-life is over. I stand as a free man stands beside my prince. The sun shines on our friendship, and he has forged a name for me in its fire and pinned it on my forehead, that anyone with eyes to see might see it. Djehuti-kheper-Ra. Now, when my name is called, I answer. Now, when people ask who I am I say my name is Djehuti-kheper-Ra, and they go away satisfied, thinking that they have been given an answer. It has always been believed that without a name the spirit returns at death to the great void and is as if it had never been. The worst punishment a criminal can suffer is that he be declared nameless: the greatest honour a man can receive is to be endowed with a new name. From the words a mother cries out at a child's birth the first name is chosen. Later, in maturity, another may be added, expressing what he has become or what he has achieved. In death all the names are called as he or she starts the journey through the Duat. I had thought that because I was nameless, I was no one,

but now I see an earth-name is only a mask like other masks, a branch to grasp in the roaring of the cataract; no more. The only name I need, or have ever really needed, is the secret one I had at my creation as spirit endless aeons ago, and that no one knows, or will ever know. It has held me in the Light of the Creator and identified me to the Great He-She. It is longer than time itself, and contains within it all that is and was and ever will be. No man has breath enough to say it: but the One speaks it in the heart and knows every nuance of it. When it is called I will know it is mine, and go forward. "Great One" I will say, "here I am," and I will speak it for the first time myself, and in it will be all my thoughts and deeds, all my fears and hurts and joys . . .

* * * *

As the months pass there are fewer and fewer secrets between Prince Amenhotep and myself. We walk beside the lake at his father's palace at Per-hay and open our hearts to each other. I tell him of the hardships of my life as oracle, and he tells me of the hardships of his life as prince. Sometimes I think that there is not much to choose between them. He has always been a dreamer, a thinker, but has never been allowed time to dream or to think. As a young boy, scarcely adolescent, he was sent to the eastern frontier to learn soldiering. Although the pharaohs of his dynasty, Thutmosis III and Amenhotep II, had secured territory far into Djhai, the peace there is always uneasy and there are always places where corrupt officials exploit the people, where men who do

not know how to love can ease the itching of their disease by violence and bloodshed, where Pharaoh's soldiers and the boy Amenhotep with them, can learn to kill.

He tells me that his learning of this most degrading of all sports had started in the marshlands of the delta, long before he reached the eastern frontier. The tall papyrus sedges were alive with duck and waterfowl of every kind, geese and herons, storks and cranes, waders on spindly legs, divers and plungers, which the soldiers had great enjoyment in killing. He himself soon became an expert fowler, though the only thing he enjoyed about it was the time he had to himself, hiding and waiting, the sun glinting through the brown-gold puffball clusters of flowers shimmering in the breezes above his head, the columns of sturdy green stems enclosing him like the tall columns of a temple. He could imagine Isis living hidden in these marshes. Amenhotep as a young boy had shivered with excitement when he had heard the tale of how she had sought her husband, Osiris, tricked and killed and cast into the sea in a sealed coffin by his own brother, Set: how she had found him within the trunk of the tree that had grown round the coffin at Kepel, and how she had brought him back to Khemet and hidden him in the papyrus marshes of the delta. The prince's eyes had grown round with amazement when he was told that she had brought him back to life from death by the power of her magic and her love and had conceived a son by him: no ordinary son but an incarnation of the mighty spirit

Horus, one of the companions of the Most High. Once again Set had found his brother and torn him apart, scattering pieces of his body across the length and breadth of the Two Lands. Once again Isis had hidden in these same marshes, protecting her son, teaching him her wisdom, that one day he would be able to challenge the dark and re-establish the light.

But the young Prince Amenhotep couldn't hide dreaming for ever, and from time to time he had to return to his companions with a kill. He described to me how his marksmanship eventually drew praise even from the young captain he knew to be closest to his father's ear, Horemheb. This pleased him particularly because he had felt Horemheb's disapproval blowing on him like a hot wind ever since they had set off.

Each night in the marshes they had eaten well, and each morning they had wakened to a cacophony of bird calls, a honking and a squawking, a trilling, rilling and a chirping so loud that some of the men had laid about them with sling-shots and curses. For his part, he had listened with delight, astonished that there could be so many sounds emitted by the feathered kingdom. If he had massed his father's musicians from every palace they would have been drowned by this excitable chorus of birds.

The lotuses were in flower, and he had secretly composed a song for his cousin Nefertiti, to be sung on his return. He had no means of writing it down, and he dared not let the others know that he composed songs and poetry. Pharaoh's son or no, they already teased

him about his short breath, his thin arms, his womanish habit of dreaming rather than boasting of his past exploits like the rest of them. He suspected that his father had passed the word that he was to be treated no differently from the other new recruits. He repeated the words of the poem in his head as he walked, using it to buffer himself against weariness and the weight of the pack he carried. Suspecting that he had a secret way of escaping the taunts of the others when he limped or lagged behind, the group responsible for most of the cruel tricks played on the young recruit in the name of fun engineered trap after trap for him. On one occasion they very nearly brought about his death. He had been, “accidentally” eased into the water, and found himself out of his depth, being pulled down by the entangling water weeds. He struggled silently, trying not to show his fear; his chest hurting, his limbs powerless. The men were laughing at him as usual, pretending to offer him a rescue pole, and then deliberately moving it beyond reach just as he was about to grasp it. Suddenly Horemheb appeared beside them and his heart leapt to think that now at last they would haul him out. Perhaps they would be punished for their disrespectful treatment of a royal prince. But to his horror, as his head went under the muddy water once again, he saw Horemheb fold his arms and stand beside them, watching him dispassionately. Anger mingled with his fear now. It is possible they did not realize that he was drowning and that he could not hold out much longer; it was also possible that this was a deliberate attempt to murder

him. Rage and the will to live combined to give him unusual strength. He heaved himself out from under once more, and, his face distorted with anger, strove and floundered until, without their help, he broke free of the rope-like weeds and managed to grasp a bunch of reeds that gave him support and leverage. Spitting green slime and sodden feathers from his mouth he finally dragged himself on to the bank. His tormentors had melted away like marsh mist at sunrise. Only Horemheb towered above him, still with his arms folded, looking down.

“Get yourself back into line immediately,” he said coldly. “We are about to move off.” Then he strode away without a backward glance.

Amenhotep tells me how he had lain on the bank sobbing; how he had looked at the sky and wanted to put a curse on his tormentors, and on Horemheb, that would blast them and their descendants until the end of time; how words had formed in his head so fearful that Set himself would have been proud of them. But something had stopped him. Quiet, strong words had unravelled in his mind like a long golden thread: “More powerful than the curse, the love that unfolds the lotus.” He had listened to them with surprise. They were from his own song. He squeezed the mud and water out of his soldier’s kilt and knew that he could send the vicious circle of his anger and their cruelty spinning through time, and neither he nor they would ever be free of it, or he could break the circle now, and there would be an end of it.

When he rejoined the others he appeared so calm and composed they looked at him with astonishment. He took his place in the line as though nothing had happened. One by one, over the next few days, his tormentors came up to him, each claiming that it had not been his idea to leave him in the water, but that he had just gone along with the others. He remembers smiling. Where was this mysterious person whose idea it had been then, if not a single one of them was responsible? Was it possible they were not lying, that someone else had been present, invisible, sly, deadly, feeding thoughts of darkness to them as surely as he had been fed thoughts of light from another source in the lotus song? Yet they were still responsible. Being fed thoughts is one thing; accepting them and acting on them is another.

It seemed that even Captain Horemheb treated him with slightly more respect than before. Had the whole thing been, perhaps, a kind of test devised by his father to “make a man of him”? He had earned points in the moment he ceased calling for the help of others, and decided to help himself.

* * * *

Beyond the rich farming lands of the delta and the marshlands and lagoons they had had to skirt lay the desert, and to the north of the desert lay the ocean, the Great Green. He had heard of it, of course, but until that moment, reaching the top of a dry and rocky hill, out of breath and running with sweat, he had never seen it. He

was stunned. A water-desert as far as eye could see, a fit companion for the sand plains that stretched ahead of them. Day after day they walked beside it, thirsty, beginning to hate its tantalising wetness. Sand chafed his feet and scratched his eyes. The sun almost blinded him as it shone off the water. He was not sorry when the route took them out of sight of it for a while. How could such vastness be? Sky and desert and ocean . . . sky and desert and ocean . . . He began to lose identity, believing himself less than an ant climbing the great pyramid. From time to time they came upon huge statues, stelae and monuments extolling the deeds of kings and their armies who had passed this way, in every case encouraged in their violence and their arrogance by the god Amun. He remembers one erected by his ancestor, Menkheper-Ra, Thutmosis III:

*“I have come that I may cause Thee to tread down the
princes of Djahi.*

*I spread them out beneath Thy feet throughout their
countries.*

*I cause them to behold Thy majesty as the Lord of
Radiance,*

Thou shinest in their faces as mine image.”

Some had been overturned as the fortunes of war changed, and the sand was already burying them, but the Two Lands were in the ascendant at the moment, and the monuments of Thutmosis I and III, and of his own father and grandfather were still standing proud, hardly weathered by the blasting of the sand-winds.

Amenhotep wondered if it was because people felt so small that they built so hugely; so insignificant that they carved in stone such absurd and grandiose eulogies of themselves.

* * * *

The young Prince Amenhotep stayed in the eastern province until he had learned everything his father thought necessary for him to learn, and many things his father would not have approved of his learning. Amenhotep would never make a warrior king like his great ancestors, but he learned enough to talk knowledgeably about troop movements, tactics and provisions. He learned to march, to shoot, to ride. He learned to defend himself in close combat, and inflict death on others if need be. In the early days he hardly saw his father, but once Amenhotep Neb-maat-Ra decided to visit his eastern dependencies, the prince was expected to attend banquets, standing behind the king's chair, observing the delicate art of diplomacy. He learned to say one thing and mean another, to hear what was not said, to couch a threat in a compliment and a compliment in a threat.

* * * *

When his father returned home the prince was left under the special tutelage of Horemheb. The man was hard, and determined to make the king proud of his son. At first, each day seemed longer than the last as they drilled and marched, rode and practised, the few

breaks filled with the soldiers' boring anecdotes of how much they had drunk the night before, how many women they had laid since they left home. The nights passed in oblivion brought on by desperate weariness. He despaired of ever having a real life. His limbs ached, his blisters festered, his eyes were red and sore. But in the sixth month after his father had left, when they were faced with a sudden raid from over the border, time suddenly speeded up. He found himself to his surprise remarkably agile and fit, as he rode his chariot into action, even killing without thought when Horemheb gave the word.

The prince having proved himself, the captain was not so vigilant, and Amenhotep found, as time went by, that he could get away from the others more often, and pursue a study that fascinated him: the religious practices of the countries in which they were stationed.

There were gods to whom the people sacrificed bulls, gods to whom the people sacrificed rams, gods with the tails of fish, gods that lived in trees, gods of the sky, gods of the earth; Astarte riding on her lion. Baal worshipped with fire. Everywhere he looked there were gods of different shapes and sizes and names; but when he looked closer it seemed to him they were not so different from his own gods, each an element of the mystery of life given features and a name, but not whole as a person is whole. It seemed to him that in a sense a god was an inferior being to a man, for each god had only one aspect, or at most two or three, while a man has many. Huge god may be and man may be small, but

in a man's heart lay unfathomable things, distance beyond distance, and time at the movement of a thought. He stood before statues in temples as he had stood before statues in the temples of his own country, and he heard the words of the priests and suddenly he knew; knew why the temples were so oppressive, so dark, so alien.

The true temple for the true god is in the heart. His being is dimensionless, invisible light. It takes up no space, extends through no time ... Amenhotep remembered how, since he was a very small child in Waset, he had witnessed the carrying of the god Amun from his sanctuary, his holy of holies, down the great processional way to the river and thence, to sojourn, for the full cycle of a moon, in the great southern sanctuary. He had seen the joy of the people, the dancing, the singing, the solemn faces of the priests, the beautiful robes, the glittering jewels he and his family wore as they walked behind the god. He knew that when he was older he would be required to train as a priest. But even then he saw Amun's eyes, stone staring out of metal. He knew he should not think like this, this was blasphemy, heresy. He knew that the Amun he saw was only a mundane shell into which the divine could step from time to time if it so wished, and the real Amun was unseen, the father of the gods, the Great One, the Mighty. But everywhere he went, each country claimed this for their god or their goddess. He saw many Great Ones worshipped, many Mighty.

He walked by a great river far from his homeland, and his thoughts thrashed about like a trapped animal. At last, wearily, he sat on a rock at the water's edge and watched the image of the sun dancing in the water in front of him, its reflection distorting its true shape, ripples causing it to break up and appear as many different images. He looked up to the magnificent arc of the heavens. He tried to look directly at the sun itself. Instantly the pain made him shut his eyes. An afterimage of the fire danced on the inside of his lids. He remembered the words that are written in the book for all those who leave this earth and travel in the Duat – the guide that leads the being through all the transformations necessary for life beyond life: *“He is not the Sun of this or that moment, but of yesterday, today, and of all eternity, the ‘One proceeding from the One’. We call him Ra, Ra-Harakhki, Kepher, Aten and Atum in his different aspects, and in all the naming we forget he is none of these but mysteriously, powerfully, ultimately the One proceeding from the One.”*

When he tells me of this vision I am tremendously excited. Now there is no doubt in my heart that he is partner with me in the great task that Khurahtaten has set us.

* * * *

“Djehuti-kheper-Ra!” My prince calls my new earth-name and I go to him. We walk beside the lake in the cool air before dawn, the last stars like flecks of light in lapis lazuli. I remember how Khurahtaten has told me

that lapis lazuli was brought from the east where the sun rises and used for the eyes of the gods, not because it has magic properties in itself, but because it reminded our forefathers of the deep blue sky of evening and of the dawn: the times when the invisible sometimes becomes visible.

I see that my prince is troubled. He has taken me from my prison and I love him for it. His trouble is my trouble. He is pacing beside the lake, and I can see that he has not noticed the mother-of-pearl sheen on the water turning to molten gold as the sun suddenly bursts over the eastern desert. He has not noticed the tall obelisks tipped with gold, igniting with the sun's light like a line of running fire. A kingfisher hovers, and then dives so cleanly that scarcely a ripple shows where his beak has entered the water. He rises again, with a struggling blue and silver fish.

"What is it, my lord?" I ask quietly, not wanting to break the fragile mood of the dawn, but knowing that he needs to be asked. He looks up at me thoughtfully.

"There are so many things I want to know – so many things I need to know," he said, "but life goes by too fast and now . . ." He paused, frowning.

"And now?" I prompt.

"And now it seems I am to be king before I am ready." I look surprised.

"Is the king's condition worse?" I ask.

Amenhotep shakes his head.

“No, not worse,” he says, “but last night he called me to his room and spoke to me in a way –” he hesitates – “in a way I had never thought to hear him speak.”

I wait patiently, knowing that I will be told.

“His fever had broken, and he seemed quite calm and relaxed. It was better than the time before,” Amenhotep says. He has told me of his father’s strange fantasies when his fever was high, when even the touch of his queen, Tiye, whom he loved beyond all others, offended him, and the intoning of prayers and spells by the priests drove him crazy with rage. He had spoken then as though he didn’t know whether he were alive or dead, confusing his feverish dreams with his journey through the Duat after death; calling his pleasure lake at Per-hay the “Great Lake of Peace”, and claiming that the barge named *Aten Gleams* was in fact a spirit-barge ferrying him to the kingdom of Osiris. Was it Horus himself, Lord of the Sun and of the Two Lands, or a hawk, circling over him with outspread golden wings? Were the stars he saw the jewels of Nut – the spirit-lamps in the throne room of Osiris where he would face the Great judgement – or the flickering candles lit by Tiye in his room at Per-hay? Sometimes, the creature lurking in the corner looked like Ammut, the hideous Devourer of those souls that had failed to satisfy Maat and the forty-two assessors, and at other times like one of his own physicians.

When the king first became ill he had become obsessed by Sekhmet, the goddess with the body of a woman and the head of a lioness, the Lady of Destruc-

tion, consort of Ptah the Creator. She had come to him in dream after dream and he had begun to believe that he had offended her in some way and his only chance of returning to good health would be to placate her. He had called upon his workmen to make statues of her in her benign aspect, seated on a throne, a lotus wand in her one hand and the ankh, the symbol of eternal life, in the other. They were carved of fine-grained black granite and imported basalt. One after another they were polished and erected, each one accompanied by prayer and sacrifice. Surely the river of blood he caused to flow at her feet from the slaughtered animals would turn her anger from him? In the night when he could not sleep he prayed to her, sometimes visiting the place where so many images of her stood. It was in her power to purge the earth and its inhabitants of their sins and their diseases however painful and cruel the process was, and when she was finished, it was in her power to set the scene for healing and renewal.

Something gnawed at the king's heart and no one, not even Tiye, could reassure him. The statues of Sekhmet grew in number, the craftsmen who created them working night and day, trying to satisfy his desperate impatience.

Now he was tired, and longed for rest. The burden of being god-who-walked-on-earth was sometimes too much, and this was one of those times. He was weary of being the fulcrum on which the invisible and the visible turned, the shoulders that bore the teeming millions of the earth. When he was young and strong, dressed in his

full regalia with his crown upon his head, everyone bowing, everyone listening to every word he said, and jumping to carry out his commands, it had seemed an easy and a pleasant thing to be a divine king. As he grew older and less arrogant he had realized that he, the man who grew tired and angry and disillusioned, was very far from being a god . . . but the pretence had to be kept up.

Prince Amenhotep pauses. He is obviously deeply moved by his father's confidences, but he has reached a point in the telling of them where he thinks perhaps he should be silent. Again I wait.

He hinted that he had done things at one time that he was now ashamed of. I tell him that he must not reveal to me what his father had said, if he thinks it wrong.

"There was a moment when I thought he was going to tell me something about you," my friend says, and looks at me for a moment doubtfully. My heart skips a beat, but I say nothing. "He has never approved of my bringing you here," he continues. "I've never understood it. It is almost as though . . . almost as though he fears you in some way." Amenhotep looks at me very closely. "Should he?"

I shake my head. "I can think of no reason why he should."

"Nor can I," he says, suddenly with conviction.

"What did he say?"

"Oh, it wasn't anything . . . his mind seemed to wander for a moment, and then he was quite clear again, and talked about how, after his illness, he feared he

would not be vigorous enough again to shoulder the full burden of the two crowns. He said he felt it was time to share the government with me.”

“A co-regency?”

“Yes.”

I pace beside him in silence. I know he is not ready to be king. But regent? How would this affect the task Khurahtaten had set us both, the task of opening the mouth of dead ritual, that the living truth might be heard again in our land?

We hear a call and turn at the lake edge, both finding it difficult to leave our thoughts. From the flowering terraces in front of the palace we see the figure of a young girl running towards us, fine pleated muslin billowing out like a sail behind her, the curves of her figure as beautiful as Hathor’s, the lady of the southern sycamores.

My pulse quickens. Nefertiti, whose name means “the beautiful one comes”. Nefertiti, beloved of Prince Amenhotep, daughter of his uncle Ay.

We begin to walk to meet her. Her cheeks are flushed with the exertion of running, her eyes alight with the news she carries. She flings her arms about him and dances him around, laughing with delight.

“You’ll never believe the good news I bring!” she cries. Her dark eyes are the night sky at full moon, her hair a raven’s wing. He holds her and kisses her. I notice her breasts – yes, her breasts.

I ache. And turn away.

“The marriage is arranged at last! After the next full moon we’ll never be parted again,” she sings.

I don’t hear his reply. I step closer to the lake, stoop down and pick up some pebbles, and start to skim them across the water. A heron standing sombrely on a rock surveying the scene, flies up with a loud and indignant cry, and wings away low over the water.

But they insist on sharing their joy with me. They put their arms around me and make me dance with them along the shore, singing a ridiculous, happy song. Tears are running down both their cheeks. They have been in love as long as they can remember, but there had been talk that Amenhotep would have to take another as his Great Royal Wife. But the king must have relented, perhaps persuaded by Queen Tiye, whose brother was Nefertiti’s father, and who indulged her son Amenhotep whenever she could.

The prince is not handsome. His body is somewhat out of proportion; hips too wide for a man, shoulders too narrow, chin long, lips thick; but Nefertiti loves him and in her love he becomes beautiful.

I am handsome. I am tall and well proportioned, my features regular. But because Nefertiti does not notice me, I am ugly.

* * * *

As soon as he is declared co-regent at his father’s jubilee festival, the prince takes the name Nefer-kheperu-Ra Wa-en-Ra Amenhotep: Amenhotep IV. He begins to plan a new temple at Ipet-Esut to Ra-Harakhki – the

combination of Horus and the Sun – which he hopes will rival the might and splendour of the great Temple of Amun close beside it. The dedication in this temple is the first public hint he gives that there is to be a change in the way the gods are viewed.

He uses the name Aten frequently, as the one closest to what he wants to express, pleasing his mother and father who have always had an affection for this ancient sun-god, but who do not realize that his concept of it is slightly different from their own. He is watched closely by the priests of Amun, jealous of their privileged position as custodians of the Two Lands' current most powerful god.

* * * *

In spite of what I have told the prince about my experiences as Oracle, he does not at first think it is necessary to forbid the use of oracles in the temple of the Two Lands.

“Many have proved reliable,” he says. “Not all priests are as corrupt as Ma-nan.”

That is true, I think. The skills of an oracle are important, and these, combined with an honest and reliable priesthood, can make communication between the different levels of the spirit-world and the physical world so much easier. I know from my own experience that I do speak words that are sometimes not my own, nor those of Ma-nan. These occasions are precious and rare, and it was after one or two of these that my reputation as medium for the gods grew so great. Ma-

nan was in an awkward position. My very aptitude for true mediumship gave me credibility – yet he could not rely on the gods speaking when he wanted them to or saying what he wanted them to say. It was then he started to control me with the smoke so that I would appear to be in a trance, yet be incapable of being a spokesman for anyone but himself.

One day, not long after the prince has built his temple at Ipet-Esut and made it clear that his support when he is king will be almost exclusively for the Sun-god, an oracle in the Temple of Amun, amidst spectacular lightning flashes and crashing of thunder, declares that the Two Lands will be all but destroyed if Prince Amenhotep becomes king and that an heir for Nebmaat-Ra must be sought among one of the lesser princes. The heir is not specifically named, but the prophecies of what will happen if my friend becomes king are frightening. Under guise of trance-possession, the oracle speaks harsh calumnies against the prince.

My friend is called before the king at once and is closeted there with only Tiye as witness for a long time. When he comes back to me he is white with anger but will not tell me all that has passed between his father and himself. I gather, however, that the king himself has expressed doubt that he is capable of ruling effectively, but that Tiye had spoken so eloquently for him, he had, in the end, apologized to his son.

Whether it was Tiye or the king who stages the next scene with the oracle I don't know, but the boy is taken suddenly ill and on his death-bed confesses dramatically

before many witnesses that it had been the god Set who had spoken through him, and not Amun, that day. Set, the fearsome storm god, the cunning predator, who had tried to destroy the prince because he knew he would be the perfect pharaoh and guard his people well from Set's dark and dangerous schemes.

Prince Amenhotep tells me that when he is king the temple oracles are to be abolished. I see by his face that with this latest example of corruption the priesthood of Amun have roused a formidable enemy.

* * * *

Soon after building his temple he and Nefertiti build themselves a separate palace. They use mud-brick and painted plaster, and tile the floor with lively, colourful ceramic tiles. It becomes a cheerful place to be, the evenings noisy with young people enjoying themselves. Amenhotep himself is not particularly interested in the revelry, but Nefertiti enjoys every moment of it. He tends to carry on long, rambling discussions about the new theories of art and religion he is trying to introduce, with anyone who will listen, while she is enjoying the dancing and the music, passing among her guests like a butterfly with brilliant wings.

It seems to them a new age is about to begin, and they are set to change the world. I share in all their plans and all their hopes, but sometimes wonder if their enthusiasm is not blinding them to difficulties and dangers.

The temple to Ra-Harakhki at Ipet-Esut is not to have darkly roofed halls, though there will be colonnades for shade. The worship of Aten will be in the open air, and the altar for offerings is to be placed so that at no time during the day will the sun's rays leave it. There is no dark and secret inner sanctuary where the god will be kept behind closed doors, no gloomy places for shadows to gather.

"His sanctuary is everywhere," Amenhotep declares, waving his arms to indicate the desert cliffs, the green and fruitful strip of land beside the river, and the wide and arching skies above. This brings uneasy mutterings from those who are used to the sun-god in his other forms; vividly portrayed on stone and papyrus, and available in handy amulet form.

But as the shining sandstone columns rise, the pylons receive their fluttering pennants, the obelisks their caps of gold, young Amenhotep seems unaware of the undercurrent of dissension. He surrounds himself only with his friends, people who find excitement in the new ideas and have hope for the new age. Throughout the land new temples to Aten are built, old ones refurbished.

Nefertiti is pregnant, and gives birth to a daughter. They call her Merytaten and carry her at once to the new temple, though it is scarcely finished, to lift her in their arms above the altar and dedicate her to the deity they believe was before all others, the mysterious one, the great He-She, symbolized by the light of the sun.

In his delight he orders the building of a new chapel entirely devoted to Nefertiti. The queen is to be seen in her relationship to the sun alone, in her own right – not as his consort. In this he has broken totally with tradition and convention. In the cartouche bearing her name the sign indicating the sun is to be turned round to face Nefertiti herself, as though she and the sun are equal divinities.

If there is murmuring among the priests and the craftsmen who carved the reliefs at this extraordinary departure from the norm, Amenhotep does not hear. I wonder about it – but say nothing.

* * * *

Before dawn on the day the carved wall-blocks are to be put in place in her private chapel, Nefertiti calls on me to accompany her. The rest of the temple is almost finished, but her own chapel is no more than a shell constructed of rough filling-blocks.

We take torch-bearers to light the way, but no one else. I give the password to the guards and we pass through gateway after gateway until we stand at last in the sacred space her husband has dedicated to her. Life will come to it when the carved facing-blocks are in place, when the rituals are performed, when the god takes up residence.

She paces the walls with long strides, touching the blocks from time to time. She has told me to bring holy water, and she takes the jar from me and begins to sprinkle it, anointing the stones, laying the dust. Her

face is transfigured. I cannot hear all that she is murmuring, but the words of the prayer she utters are not the traditional ones. She has brought her own passion to this place and broken with centuries of rigid custom. I thrill to hear words from the heart spoken in such a way, in such a place.

As first light comes she stands in the centre of the space prepared for her chapel and lifts her arms to the sky. Quietly I send the torch bearers away and we are alone.

But it is not only I who hear her hymn to the rising sun. I fancy I feel the presence all around of other great beings; other voices seem to join with hers in praise of the disc – the mighty cipher for the divine source of all light. At this moment there is no question that she is the channel through which this light will reach the earth. Her husband has deliberately stepped back and given her this sacred responsibility. There is no precedent for this in the records, but I have the feeling we are entering a time when new records will be written and old ones discarded.

She stands so long entranced that she is still there when I hear the sound of workmen approaching. The foreman's voice is loud above the chanting of the men as they heave the great blocks along on rollers.

What shall I do? I do not want to interrupt her.

I slip away and wave my arms at the approaching throng. The foreman barks a command and the men come to a halt. The sound dies down like a wave

retreating from the shore as each group of men in turn react to the command.

We wait. The men do not know why, but obey without question. The foreman approaches me, the question in his mind almost visible, I am too near the royal priestess and do not want to speak aloud. I try to indicate in dumb-play that there must be absolute silence and stillness.

At that moment I hear a sound from the waiting men that reminds me of wind through corn, a hush that becomes a roar, rises to a crescendo and then dies down again to a sigh. I look at them in surprise. Every eye is on something behind me. I turn around.

She stands there framed in the entrance, and not a man, however distant, but can feel her power.

I hesitate before I walk towards her – awed. Sometimes she is like a kitten. Sometimes she is like a lion. At this moment she is a divinity.

They can put the carved pictures up, the inscriptions, the images that will keep her memory alive for thousands of years – but bare and rough as it is, this chapel is now a living, holy place.

* * * *

After two other daughters have been born, Maketaten and Ankhesenpaaten, and have been blessed in the new Temple of Aten at Ipet-Esut, I am told that a new city is to be established on virgin ground, half-way between Waset and Men-nefer: a threshold sacred only to the

Aten, free of the clinging spells and the dark ghosts that haunt the environs of Amun's temple.

At Ipet-Esut the two temples are separate, and the worship of Amun and his family, Mut and Khons, go on unhindered as before; only the young friends of the co-regent and his wife shun their precincts entirely. The old king still worships in the traditional way the traditional gods, and pays as much tribute to Amun as before, but he sometimes honours us with his presence. I am often disturbed by the way he looks at me. What is he thinking? His queen, Tiye, seems to dislike me and does everything in her power to discourage my close friendship with her son.

I have not seen Ma-nan for years, for the prince had banished him under strong guard to Nubia soon after he had given me my freedom, but I am very much aware that Na-aghta of the Temple of Amun is my enemy. He does not attack me openly, because I am the favourite of the co-regent. His position is not as secure as it used to be, and he takes care to ingratiate himself with the old king, while leaving the co-regent and his protégé well alone. I see by his eyes when I meet him that he has not forgotten the incident in Mut's temple, and is biding his time for revenge. I often ponder what went wrong with the worship of Amun, and at what point human corruption destroyed the ancient archetype.

What makes men, when they have so much, demand more? I have seen peasants with scarcely enough food to keep themselves and their children alive made to fear that they will be punished by the god because they have

not brought a generous enough offering to the temple. I have seen so much cynical misuse of power, so much greed for material possessions and so much ruthless exploitation of others all in the gods' name that I fear the gods will grow impatient with us and destroy us as we destroy the pest that threatens to undo all our good work in the garden.

The elaborate rituals of the temple have become meaningless.

The temple, the sacred place, was set aside originally to be a space where the human and the divine could meet and communicate in privacy and quiet, uninterrupted by the noisy hubbub of everyday life. It was a place chosen because of its association with some extraordinary numinous event, built to represent and symbolize that event. The temple was a place where a great spirit could cross the threshold between the realms and speak with us, listen to our petitions and advise us on what we should do through the mediumship of the chosen ones, the initiates, the pharaoh and his priesthood. Just as the building had to be kept clean and perfumed and beautiful in anticipation of the arrival of the honoured guest, the god, so those who were to talk with him and pass on his messages had to be pure and dedicated and honourable.

But now I see that the cleaning and purifying of both building and man is done as an empty act. No one expects the god to arrive. The priests themselves play god, using his name to demand anything they wish for themselves, ignoring the general good of the people and

the land, and indeed anything at all that might conceivably be the wish of the god himself.

Sometimes, at night, I feel that malevolent spells are reaching me. My childhood fears return and I sense Manan's familiars around me. But now I have Aten's strength, and prayers that are more powerful than any spell keep me safe.

It seems to me there is a purity about the worship of the Aten. The concept of the god has existed since the beginning as part of Ra, but perhaps because it has never before been singled out for the particular attention of a district or a pharaoh it has so far escaped the usual corruption that follows the accession of power.

The love of the young Amenhotep for his god and for his wife, Nefertiti, knows no bounds. Nefertiti is his partner in everything and is depicted as such publicly. In statues and reliefs and paintings she is at his side, proudly taking her place as his equal in the Divine Light of the Aten rays. Her figure is life-size in proportion to his. Rarely is she shown smaller as other Great Royal Wives have been. More than once she is depicted alone worshipping the sun's rays, taking the life-giving gift of the sun into her own body on behalf of the people. The priests of Amun who do not like this upstart temple crowding them out at Ipet-Esut, stealing the royal attention from them, try to encourage an undercurrent of dissatisfaction and alarm – complaining that a queen should not be accorded the same relationship to the god as is traditionally and immemorially accorded to a king. But though the older generation is nervous about the

innovations, the younger generation loves them. Nefertiti, the Beautiful One, is idolised and wherever the royal couple go, it is she who draws the attention of the crowd.

* * * *

Meanwhile Khurahtaten comes to me less and less as I feel my own strength. Sometimes I long to ask him questions, but I soon learn that if the questions are important to me I will be given the answers – either in dream, or in conversation with someone I casually meet, or in some ancient papyrus I happen to be studying at the time. All I have to do is look around me with eyes to see. Everything and everyone is my mentor.

* * * *

I am given a position of honour in the new temple, and take up residence there. One day Nefertiti and Merytaten come to the temple to see me. Merytaten runs to me at once holding out her arms. I lift her in mine and swing her round. She laughs her lovely, bubbling, child's laugh and my heart sings. Young as she is, she is very like her mother.

Nefertiti looks at us both fondly.

“She insisted on coming to you today,” she says.

Merytaten's arms are around my neck, her little face buried against my cheek. I can't stop smiling. I have family at last, love and the warmth of belonging. No one will take that away from me again. No one.

* * * *

Nefertiti has changed in the past six years. The lithe mischievous girl is gone. A woman who has borne, and is bearing, children is in her place – confident and poised. It is her strength that will make her husband’s dream come true. She wears her crown with authority. I have seen strong men tremble when displeasure sparkled from her eyes. I have seen weak men become strong when she has smiled at them.

Today, her cheeks are glowing and her eyes shining.

“Can she stay here with you for a few days?” she asks.

Would any other temple in the land be asked to act as nursery to a five-year-old child? I remember my own childhood as the oracle, the Nameless One, and shudder to think of any child exposed as I was to the long and tedious rituals, the gloom, the oppressive darkness. At Merytaten’s age I was already cased in gold, and forced to sit statue-still from dawn to dusk, punished if I so much as moved a muscle or blinked an eye. In this temple she will run about and play in the sun’s light, and at noon she will rest in a shaded garden.

“We are going to look at the site for our new city,” Nefertiti says excitedly, and then, because she thinks I will be hurt not to have been asked to accompany them, she adds: “As soon as we are ready to put down the boundary stelae you will be called.” I nod and smile, and swing the child around. What is a city to the mystery of the spirit that lives forever! A city can be razed to the ground, and generations may walk unknowing on its

dust, but a living being – ah, yes – a living being! Now, there is something worth thinking about . . .

The new city is to be on a plain bounded by the river to the west, and a natural amphitheatre of limestone cliffs to the east. No city has ever been built there before – no temple, no palace. The powerful priests of Amun own not a grain of its sand, nor a sliver of its rock. It was a childhood dream of Amenhotep and Nefertiti to live in that place one day, having reunited there after a long separation, he returning south after years of study in the City of the Sun, and she, sailing to meet him from their father's southern estates. Their two boats had come in sight of each other just as the sun partially emerged from cloud, casting long and brilliant rays to the earth, the fan-like shafts turning the bare plain to a magical, luminous gold. It had been one of those unforgettable moments, charged with emotion. They were a long, long way from the rigorous disciplines of the temple college at Yunu, and the rigidity of court ritual and protocol. They had picnicked there for a whole day and had never felt so happy. It was on that day that they knew they would be lovers.

In the third year of their marriage they had laid down three stelae marking the place, and had started planning and building. Now, in the sixth year, they will mark its boundaries more precisely with a further eleven stelae. They will ride in their chariot from point to point, followed by crowds of their people, marking their intentions in stone. He changes his name to Akhenaten: “the servant of Aten”: names his city

Akhetaten: “the horizon of the Aten”: “the threshold from which the Eye of the Sun’s Disc looks upon the world”: and for Nefertiti he chooses the name: Nefernefruat: “beautiful are the beauties of the Aten”.

“Long live the Horus, Strong Bull, Beloved of Aten; the Two Ladies, Great in Sovereignty in Akhetaten; the Golden Horus, upholding the name of Aten; the King of Upper and Lower Egypt, Living in Truth, Lord of The Two Lands, Nefer-kheperu-Ra Wa-en-Ra; the Son of the Sun, Living in Truth, Lord of Diadems, Akhenaten: Great in his length of days, who giveth life for ever and ever.

“The Hereditary Princess, Great of Favour, Mistress of Happiness, gay with the two feathers, at hearing whose voice one rejoices, soothing the heart of the King at home, pleased at all that is said, the Great and Beloved Wife of the King, Lady of the Two Lands, Nefernefruat Nefertiti living for ever.

“As my father the Aten lives, I will make Akhetaten for the Aten my father in this place. I will not make him Akhetaten south of it, north of it, west of it or east of it. And Akhetaten extends from the southern stele as far as the north stele measured between stele and stele on the eastern mountain likewise from the south-west stele to the north-west stele on the western mountain of Akhetaten. And the area within these four stelae is Akhetaten itself: it belongs to Aten my father; mountains, deserts, meadows, islands, high ground and low

ground, land, water, villages, men, beasts and all things which the Aten my father shall bring into existence eternally for ever. I will not neglect this oath which I have made to the Aten my father, eternally.”

On an obelisk of red quartzite that sparkled in the rays of sun, Amenhotep inscribed a prayer from the ancient days to the sun-gods, which for him had been the turning point in his long struggle to understand the gods. The words were not exceptional in themselves, but because they came to him at the moment when he was ready for them, they unlocked a door that for him would never close again:

*“May You wake in peace, O purified, in peace,
May You wake in peace, O Horus of the East, in peace,
May You wake in peace, O soul of the East, in peace,
May You sleep in the Night-bark,
May you wake in the Day-bark,
For You are He who oversees the gods,
There is no god who oversees You.”*

He causes this to be set up where the great temple to Aten is to be built.

*“For You are He who oversees the gods,
There is no god who oversees You.”*

How many times has the Spirit-from-whose-source-all-else-flows spoken: the words sounding in the minds of those who have ears to hear, like flute call or silver

lute, but when translated into the language of time becoming like a drum crashing on the wrong beat, or a sistrum shaken to the wrong tune. Already I can see that my friend's clear and flowing vision will inevitably harden, as he is forced to flex his muscles against opposition, and as I look into the bright eyes of his children my seer's eye sees the shadows of the future, though as man I refuse to admit it.

**That's the end of the sampler. We hope you enjoyed it.
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Moyra Caldecott was born in Pretoria, South Africa in 1927, and moved to London in 1951. She married Oliver Caldecott and raised three children. She has degrees in English and Philosophy and an M.A. in English Literature.

Moyra Caldecott has earned a reputation as a novelist who writes as vividly about the adventures and experiences to be encountered in the inner realms of the human consciousness as she does about those in the outer physical world. To Moyra, reality is multidimensional.

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