

Jewel Of Humanity

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By; Jessica G. Rabbit

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Dedication

This book is dedicated to the dreamers and believers...

"Take a leap of faith and begin this wondrous new year by believing. Believe in yourself. And believe that there is a loving Source - a Sower of Dreams - just waiting to be asked to help you make your dreams come true."-Sarah Ban Breat

Prologue

TWENTY YEARS PAST

It was night. The full moon illuminated the sacred Chapel inside the tower, at the very top of Castle Meadowbrook.

"We must find a way to keep the jewel safe, Your Majesty," confessed the Royal Chancellor of Meadowbrook to the Queen, Bihaldy, who was holding her sleeping, infant daughter, the Princess.

She was such a perfect, beautiful babe to her. She saw the resemblance in the tiny face of the man she had loved and ruled with. He was dead now, and here she stood in the light of the moon with her Royal confidante contemplating how to protect her legacy.

"Are you suggesting I hide it from my new husband, Chancellor?" She asked. Knowing full well that was exactly what he was suggesting.

He looked ashamed of her accusation. She didn't know if it was sincere or if he were playing the part given to him so many, many, years ago.

"I only mean to protect you and your only heir, Your Majesty. This Jewel has been entrusted to your family for centuries. I'm only thinking of your duty to your Kingdom. You have only been wed to him for six months. No one is questioning his loyalty to you, or yours. It is the safest and wisest thing to do."

The Chancellor was right, she admitted to herself. She could not tell her new husband, and new King of Zuff, about the family entrusted jewel. Ever.

He had been there for her when she had been left a very pregnant, vulnerable widow and Queen to a Kingdom on the cusp of war. He had assisted her in Royal counsel and made her Royal guard and home more fortified than she had ever thought possible, and now after the great war her Kingdom was now known for its commanding and resilient army. He was everything she had needed in that moment of turmoil. He was everything she could ever want in a second husband, strong, ambitious, and loyal. He was not of noble blood, but his striking looks, alluring presence, valor, and command of battle strategy seemed to overshadow that. She didn't truly know if he loved her for her or the idea of being wed to a Queen. It had been too soon to tell. They had been married literally seconds before the enemies breached her home. By doing so, he was able to combine their forces, win the war and end the madness that had consumed her land.

She recalled hiding in this very tower as the war waged on inside of her own castle walls. She had held her heavy stomach and feared for her unborn child. She was no stranger to war or to loss, having lost her true love in the very same war weeks prior to this integral attack. He had been her life. Her strength. Her everything. He had been born into nobility just as she. He was known for his power in battle and his strong leadership. His heart and sword had been pledged to the protection of Zuff. He was handsome, charismatic and always wise in his counsel to her. She had loved him instantly. She thought he would be pleased with her match to her new husband. Fresh tears sprang free at the thought of her dead husband, Tehxadlayk. If he had been alive she wouldn't be worrying about any of this, but he was dead and the newfound fate of the Kingdom they built together rested with her. She was thankful for their last moments together before he had gone away to battle. They had been passionate, sexual, loving bliss of the purest kind. She knew she

would never feel that way about anyone ever again. He had, at least, died a hero and left her with an heir. Their child. A beautiful baby girl she named Flossina.

Her heart was still broken and filled with grief, but her duty demanded she remarry, and so she had. She chose Evendal, a warrior from a poor, yet strong Kingdom, who aided in the conquering of the SheHaalte's, The enemy who had almost destroyed Zuff, two neighboring Kingdoms south and murdered her King. Bihadlly thought it only right to marry their most valiant Commander and Chief warrior to show her gratitude and solidify their bond. She had hoped the union would also solidify her position as Queen among her own people, instilling trust and hope back into them, but now, she herself was unsure. They had been married only a few months. The people had loved Tehxadlayk as much as she. He had turned out to be a true King and a kind man, not only to her but to the people.

Now, she stood over her small infant daughter with tears streaming down her face. She had placed the small bundle on the altar. The baby didn't move. The High Chancellor took out a red stone from his pocket and placed it in the center of the infant's chest. He then took his position, which was him standing in front of the altar with his hands in a praying position. His rosary beads were also wrapped around his hands. She knew it was the only way to keep her Kingdom and her child safe, even in the event of another war. She did what she felt was right.

Then the High Chancellor recited the ancient words, and the red jewel glowed like a bright ember.

"A caelo usque ad centrum. A capite ad calcem. A mari usque ad mare. A posse as esse. Ab antiquo. Ab extra. Abhinc. Ad lucem!"

The stone moved from its place, and began to levitate a few feet in the air, spinning with lightning speed above the sleeping baby.

The High Chancellor once again spoke and recited the ancient words, "Ad lucem! I conjuro te!"

An orange light burned bright inside of the jewel, giving off a red powerful glow. Bihadlly wasn't Queen of Zuff, in that moment. She was just Bihadlly, a mother afraid for her baby and family legacy. She had no choice, she kept reciting to herself. She stood a few feet away and watched the small bundle as the Jewel spun and glowed above her only child.

The High Chancellor recited more ancient words, "Absit inuria."

Then Flossina began to glow until she was a bright white light. The light slowly began merging with the red light from the jewel. Queen Bihadlly watched as her small child rose up from the altar. The spell the High Chancellor had cast was working. The Jewel of Humanity would be locked inside of her daughter. Protected. No one would ever guess it. She watched as a great burst of pink light filled the chamber and in one brief flash, it was done. Her baby was still sound asleep on the altar. She picked up her child then and looked at her Royal Advisor.

"Your Majesty, it worked. We can rest safely."

"Yes, High Chancellor, we can... for now..."

1-Course Of Life

Princess Flossina focused in and out of consciousness. She kept hearing a loud, sound, similar to crashing. She also felt a strong hand holding the back of her neck in place while pressing something cold to her lips, forcing her to drink something, which was bitter tasting and sticky. She wanted to spit it out, but she couldn't move. Her body was in so much pain. Whatever she was drinking seemed to stick to her insides and melt into her. She could feel her insides stinging and moving as she was forced to continue to drink the unknown contents. She felt excruciating pain shooting through her body. She didn't know if she screamed out or not, so overwhelming was it. Her eyes felt too heavy to open. Where was she? She asked herself. Even in her mind, asking that question seemed to take forever to develop into one cohesive thought.

She did the impossible task of opening her eyes, to half open slits, and was greeted to the shadow of a man literally fighting over her body. She felt dizzy from watching his quick movements and being gently nudged by his torso as he draped his body over hers and multi-tasked. Someone or something had his full attention. He laid her head back down on the examination table. Her head rolled to the side and she saw three other men, dressed like assassins in their head to toe garb, with only their lifeless eyes looking back at the stranger who clung to her now. Even in her pain stricken haze she recognized them as the elite Royal guards of her Kingdom, Zuff. Maybe this stranger had taken her and they were fighting to get her back. They wore the royal colors. Their swords were drawn and they were attacking the figure with full force. She didn't know who was helping her. She wanted to protest, to fight back, but her body wouldn't move. The pain was slowly subsiding, but she was immobile and helpless. The heaviness of her eyelids seemed to overpower her ability to keep them open. She was overcome with one last wave of pain and she passed out unconscious once again.

When next she awoke, she was in a large room laying in a bed, under a soft fur blanket. She sat up, surveyed the room frantically, trying to remember what had happened before. She saw no Royal Guards or the man that seemed to be helping her, only a wall made up of wooden shelves with thick, leather bound books. Some of the shelves were in her line of vision. With snifters and containers with various powders and ingredients. It looked like she was inside of a healer's bedchamber. Her sudden movements made her head feel like it was splitting open.

How did she get here? And how long had she been knocked out? What had knocked her out? The last thing she remembered was speaking with her mother in the Royal Dining room, in castle Meadow Brook. Her mother had been late to supper, as was her usual habit. Always insisting on taking care of her Royal Garden herself.

Her mother spoke fondly about her father, the true King of Zuff, who gave her a single orchid plant as a token of his undying, and rare love at the beginning of their courtship. Bihadlly had kept it all these years, having planted it in her private garden beside her bedchamber when he had passed in battle. Now nineteen years later she had a vibrant, thriving Orchid garden derived from that plant. She was always reminded of his love for her and their daughter. From time to time Flossina would catch her mother there, sitting on a stone bench, alone. Talking to the wind, or just silently crying. She knew her mother was still in love with her father. It always saddened her to see her mother so vulnerable and grief-stricken.

Flossina had never been in love, and didn't know if she truly wanted to be. The stories her mother had told her about her father were passionate and intense. She sounded so carefree and happy when she spoke of him, and their time together. But seeing her mother now, heart-broken, melancholy, a completely different woman. She didn't know if she had the same strength to go on if she were put in that very same position.

Her mother had to marry someone to solidify her Kingdom while the love of her life, now dead from war's baby grew in her belly. She had quickly strategized a plan that benefitted herself and her people. She married a man, but had never loved him. Flossina was aware that her stepfather knew her mother would never hold him in that same regard as her father, but she always showed him respect, kindness, and wifely admiration. To the Kingdom they were a united front. Her mother was a strong Queen and she could only hope she would follow in her footsteps when, or even if it ever became her turn. She had never understood her mother, even after her great love was gone she never took another man to her bed, not even her stepfather. Her mother was a genuinely good person, and a wonderful Ruler.

She and her mother had been washing their hands in the small stone fountain situated beside the large Oak dining table laden with food, when her stepfather came in with his entourage, bearing news from the neighboring Kingdom about their Prince, who would soon become King and was in search of a Princess to be his bride to fortify his reign inside of his Kingdom. She tried to ignore it all. She knew what her stepfather was up to. He always tried to hide it under the guise of caring stepfather and of wanting to be an 'unconventional' King. Flossina didn't buy it. She wouldn't marry a complete stranger and be shipped off somewhere else because he didn't want to give up what was rightfully hers in the first place.

She had never let anyone know, but she couldn't stand her Stepfather. He appeared kind and brave to everyone else, but she could see through him. He was power hungry. She was to rule over Zuff, just as her mother had, and her mother had before her. She would serve the people and guide them, do her royal duty by upholding the peace of the land, but she would only do that as the rightful Queen of her home, and none other. Her stepfather would have to come to grips with that. They all sat down at the table and began their evening meal and that's as far as her memory went.

She looked down at her clothing and realized they weren't hers, and there wasn't a lot of clothing. She wore a black sheer halter top, trimmed in gold beading and a black, sheer loincloth. Through her confusion she recognized that this was attire worn by the palace courtesans, or so she had been told by her lady's maid. She had seen them once before when the troops were celebrating a holiday. The women had worn outfits similar to this and danced for the men. She remembered thinking she would never have the courage or need to ever wear such clothing. She looked at her left wrist and saw the scar that was in the shape of a Egyptian hieroglyph that was known as her royal marking. Given to all women in her family at birth. Why couldn't she remember? It was beginning to bother her, and make the back of her head throb. She was about to get out of the bed when she saw him. It was the same shadow figure that had been fighting over her. She hadn't noticed him standing there looking out into the sienna red sunset. It was dusk. She looked at his side profile. He was very handsome, she thought.

"You're awake." He sounded relieved to her. "How is your head?" He asked.

She didn't speak. She was frightened, and a little shocked at how off she felt. What were his plans with her? Was he on her side?

"I'm Marlon. Welcome to Moenia, my home." He walked over to her and stopped when he was looming over her.

She noticed then that he was tall, and then she saw his eyes. They were the most beautiful shade of gold she had ever seen. He was a beautiful man to her, if there was such a thing. The stubble and tiny thin white scars peppered the beauty of his strong jaw and chiseled features and made him seem hardened and cold. That mix intrigued and scared her.

He sat down on the bed beside her.

"Moenia?" She played with the name. "I've never heard of this place."

"Of course not. It's fortified and enchanted. To the normal onlooker it looks like a desert wasteland on the outskirts of Zuff, but to you and I, it's our refuge. You're safe here."

She felt herself relax slightly at those words.

"How did I get here?" She asked, unconsciously rubbing the fur nervously.

"I brought you here. It wasn't safe for you there any longer."

"Why not?" She asked slowly.

Not safe in Zuff? Her own Kingdom? Her home? What was going on? She had to get back there and find her mother and to make sure she was safe. She started to remove the furs once more when he stilled her movements.

"Princess, please I cannot allow you to leave."

"But, I must. You must take me back. I have to find my mother. I have to find her... to talk to her. Why am I not safe?" She felt the panic slowly rising up inside of her.

"Because Princess, your mother, Queen Bihadlly has been murdered." He answered gently.

She felt all the air leave her body, as if someone had punched her in the center of her chest. She felt numb.

"No....no... I...can't....It can't be! Who...who would do this? Who would do such a thing?"

"Princess, you did..."

2-To Swear by [Apollo](#) The Healer, by [Asclepius](#), by [Hygieia](#), by [Panacea](#), and by all the Gods and Goddesses...

Marlon had only meant to stay for a few moments, but he had gotten sidetracked with his own thoughts of her. Something other than what he saw was pulling him to her. He didn't like leaving her alone, even if she was unconscious. He felt she was already his ward.

Day was turning into night. He stood there looking out over the sea of desert as the sun set in the

far off horizon, contemplating his next move. He was surprised she had awakened when she had. The damage that had been done to her body was almost completely healed up. He could see that her face, neck, and shoulders were still swollen and badly bruised. She needed rest. The rest in conjunction with the healing potion he had given her earlier at his shop was working very well together.

She looked a far cry better now than how she had appeared when someone had anonymously left her on his shop doorstep the night before. She had been wrapped in nothing but a smelly, brown, burlap cloak and had been drenched in blood. He had made the assumption based off of her lack of attire that she was a Royal courtesan. One that the King had discarded for her immoral misdeeds, or simply because he had grown bored with her. He had always thought royalty were a strange lot, but this habit was quite common among them in these lands. Zuff law stated every discarded servant or Courtesan must never be acknowledged, touched, or helped in any way. To do so meant death for you and your household.

Marlon was a man who believed in his healing techniques and abilities. He believed every person deserved medical care, no matter their station in life. He aided her as he had the many others' before her. Treating them all with the same dignity and respect he used with his regular patients. After gently washing her unconscious body and dressing her wounds he saw that she was alarmingly beautiful, and he had to wonder what crime she committed to be hurt so mercilessly. She must have been a favorite of the King's, fallen from his grace. Only a man in a jealous rage would hurt a woman like this, he thought.

As a physician and healer, he had taken an oath to turn no sick or hurting being away. He had had no formal training, but still took the oath seriously. Healing was not his given trade, but more so his cover. He was a skilled assassin, trained in the art of subterfuge and sabotage. He hailed from a secret order that once resided as the elite militia of Zuff before the King dissolved it after the war with the SheHaalte's, the enemy who had almost destroyed Zuff and the Kingdoms south of it as well as murdered the King. Because of his father's immediate defiance to the new King's hand picked General he was sent to live the rest of his life in the Castle MeadowBrooke. Marlon had sworn a blood oath that when the time was right he would rescue his father at whatever the cost it took. That cost at the moment was his life, a price he thought paled in comparison to his father.

Five years ago he had put his plan in motion and payed the previous healer who had resided there before him with a handsome sum of gold to leave the Kingdom and start fresh somewhere new and faraway, and to forget seeing Marlon. When the physician saw the large amount of gold bullion he was overjoyed and happily taught Marlon everything he knew, which took two years, but finally the man made him recite the ancient oath a healer took, thanked him again for his generosity and disappeared. For three more years after that he had bided his time playing the part by day and thinking of ways to seek out his revenge by night. The first task was killing the King, but not before getting the whereabouts of his father first.

He looked at her discolored and marred facial features. She looked dead to him. Every inch of her, including her hair, was caked in blood. It took him over an hour to fully clean, disinfect, and prep her wounds. He heard Zuff's royal toll bell ring eight times, far off in the center of town, signifying the death of a Royal, and the beginning of mourning for the entire Kingdom and its people. Far off cries of wailing, disbelief and dismay bounced off the stone walls and echoed into his back room, but he ignored them all, and kept to the task of wiping her delicate gray skin with the once white sponge, now rust red from her blood. He positioned her wrist so he could feel her pulse when he noticed the hieroglyph scar. He knew within an instant that she was Royalty and the bells were ringing for her. Just then, Lokul, the cobbler, whose business neighbored Marlon's, came inside his place of business in a frantic haste, calling for him.

"Marlon! Marlon !" He was sweating and out of breath from the somber excitement.

Lokul was a short, fat older man who loved to gossip.

He had placed the girl in his private examination room in the back of his shop because of the law forbidding anyone to cure or heal a punished courtesan or slave once they were sentenced to their fate. Marlon thought it was a barbaric law and had been secretly healing them since he had been here. Making sure to give them enough coin to secure a safe passage on a ship and out of this mad Kingdom.

He quickly walked up to the marble service counter. On the other side stood his business neighbor. He still had his flint blade on him and quickly put his Apothecary apron on to hide his dagger before his neighbor noticed.

"Evening Lokul." He said calmly.

"Did you hear the Royal Bells chime?" Lokul asked in excitement.

"I thought that was what I heard, but I have been in the back working on new healing sacraments." He lied.

"Oh yes, your potions. Marlon, my good friend you have a gift. Our Kingdom must be one of the healthiest thanks to you and your healing magic. There's talk of conspiracy going on in the castle. "

"Conspiracy?" That word intrigued him.

"Aye, Queen Bihadlly was murdered by her daughter, Princess Flossina. They say the Princess fled once it was discovered and has been killed by the Royal guard. They are afoot right now scouring everywhere in search of the Princess's body. Poor Queen Bihadlly."

Marlon knew the news Lokul was telling him could be true. He had the Princess on his exam table heavily sedated and in need of more healing. He would have to move her soon. He tried to not rush his neighbor as to not give any indication something was amiss.

"I will keep an eye out then. Grave robbers are on the move again selling body parts. I'm sure a Princesses corpse will sell for a pretty penny. I could ask around if they know anything when I am at the trading post?" He hoped he sounded convincing.

"Aye, Marlon. That would be a fine idea. I will do the same. They have enlisted an early curfew and the upbringing of the main drawbridge until her body is retrieved. I best get going."

He quickly walked out of Marlon's shop without looking back. Marlon wasn't the least shocked at what the King had told the Kingdom. He knew it had to be more to what was going on, and the proof was lying unconscious on his table. He had examined her body while he had washed and bandaged her. He saw no defensive wounds, and judging by her petite frame he knew she wouldn't have had the strength to kill anyone. He locked his door and hurriedly walked back to the sterile room. She was still lying there motionless, in the place he had left her, looking lifeless and battered. Far from the beauty the Royal lamenters had written songs about. Her coloring was still bleak. He took a healing potion, one of the strongest he had, from a cabinet behind him and began forcing it into her mouth. Holding her neck securely so she would automatically open it, when suddenly, appeared a large cloud of blue smoke and in the smoke stood three Elite Royal Guards. They filled the entryway of the private room. Marlon wasn't surprised by their arrival. Someone

had use a locator spell. It was common for trackers to use in dire situations. He counted and saw there was only three of them. He couldn't fight them, not here anyway, there was a high chance they would undo the work and healing of his patient, and he needed answers from her. He held her head back her lips were open and he could see her lightly drinking the potion. Before he could remove the bottle a sword was slicing the air in front of him. His reflexes were cat-like and he knew what he had to do. With one swift movement, he removed the razor sharp flint dagger from his doctors apron and threw it directly at the light in the ceiling. The entire room went pitch black. He grabbed her limp body and with his back to the window flung himself and the Princess out of it, making sure to protect her from the shards of glass.

As they fell midair he yelled the words, "Draconum, per ardua ad alta!"

A fierce, black dragon appeared from out of nowhere, catching them just twenty feet before they were to hit the ground, and they were off to safety.

Now he stood here, in his private chambers, at dusk with the red and orange ombre sky as a backdrop, looking at her, after just delivering the horrible news of her mother's death. He could see she was about to fall apart. He saw the unshed tears of sadness welling up in her big gray eyes. A telling trait of her innocence. No one could act this good, he thought. She looked so lost and confused to him. Her voice was quiet but regal. He wondered if she even noticed it. He felt like an ass.

"My mother is dead? And I..." She couldn't say the words.

"Committed the crime." He finished for her. She looked at him doe-eyed, but he still needed to ask her the question for his own piece of mind. "Did you do it?"

"How dare you! I loved my mother. She was all I had in this world. Why would I kill her?"

He wanted to believe her. All his senses were telling him to believe her. He wanted her safe, more than he cared to admit.

"I think your father-"

"Stepfather," she snapped. "My real father died in the great war. It doesn't make sense. My stepfather is already King. He controls the largest and strongest army in all the Kingdoms..."

Her head began to throb and she stopped speaking. She winced and cried out from the pain.

He quickly sat down beside her.

She backed away.

"You're safe." He said in a calm tone. His eyes looked into her own, and he felt himself falling into their depths.

She closed her eyes once more trying to shut out the overwhelming pain. She felt it wash over her and knew she couldn't hold on. She fell back. Marlon caught her limp body before it reached the mattress.

He shook her shoulders. "Princess? Princess! "

He touched her forehead with the back of his hand. She was burning up with fever. He couldn't give her anymore healing potion, not until the one he had given her earlier had run its course, and that was a few hours more. He picked her up then, as if she weighed nothing and carried her into the bathroom. He had to get her fever under control or she would die. He sat her inside the empty copper bathing tub while turning the knob on the right. Cool water poured out. He stopped the water when he had filled the tub halfway. Her skin had turned from gray to caramel when she had awakened, now it held a blue tinge to it. She wasn't responsive to the water or his swift pats on her cheek. Her swollen face looked unnaturally peaceful. He touched her forehead she was still hot. It wasn't subsiding. He submerged them both inside of the tub, fully clothed, holding her in his arms as her limp body rested on his muscular chest. He was baffled at what was going on, as well as angry. How much damage had the King and his men done to her? How could a "good" and "kind" nobleman do this to her or any other female? He felt a surge of over protectiveness wash over him when he thought of their cruelty to her. No one would touch her like that again. He would rip their limbs off if they tried. Those royal guards that had located her in his place of business shocked him with their quick hunting skills. He needed to find the real reason they were trying to kill her. He had summoned a meeting with his friend and confidant, Deleav, to inform him of their good fortune, but he wondered how could he leave her like this? She needed him. He looked down at her in the water. Her hair wet. He gently touched her forehead. Her fever had gone down. He got them both out of the tub and placed her inside a large thick towel. He carried her back to the bed, gently dried her off, and tucked her back into the covers. He sat back down in the chair beside the bed looking at his patient and ignoring the fact he needed to get out of his own wet clothes.

Only time would tell if she would wake up, and when she did he would be there for her...

3-Life After Life

Flossina jumped up quickly when she heard the random, loud, crack and rumble of the thunder she heard overhead. The loud sound seemed to vibrate through her body. She felt a gentle swaying motion underneath her. She quickly stood up and realized she was no longer in the bed at the handsome stranger's castle, but on a large, golden papyriform boat. It felt light, yet solid underneath her now sandaled feet. She looked over the side of the boat and noticed that the water was pure black. She then looked heavenward and saw there was no sky, just a black void with flashes of white lightning, rumbling and groans of thunder. She looked down once more to notice she was wearing a sheer, white, linen maxi dress. Her Royal birthmark was no longer on the inside of her left wrist, as it had been since she was a baby. In its place was a golden bracelet. She moved her wrist and the candlelight from the golden oil lamps that illuminated the ship made it sparkle. She saw her name inlaid into the beautiful piece of jewelry. She marveled at its simple, yet intricate design.

What was going on? Once again she was in an unfamiliar place feeling completely out of sorts. Though she had to admit her head felt much better.

The last thing she could recall was being in a bed, speaking with that handsome, surly stranger, whose arms she kept ending up in. They were speaking of the accusations made against her for something she would have never done. The murder of her mother. Her heart broke all over again at the thought. She wiped a fresh tear from her eye and was surprised to notice that there were two more people on the ship with her. One was a strikingly beautiful bald woman of Egyptian lineage. A pure gold scarab amulet adorned her neck while a thin gold scarab crown sat atop her smooth head. Her lack of hair only accentuated her womanly facial features. Giving her an even

more regal appeal, and enhancing her natural beauty. She wore a sheer linen maxi dress similar to the one Flossina adorned, except hers shimmered gold when she approached. Flossina noticed in the woman's hands she held a papyrus scroll.

The woman smiled at her and the thunder ceased. She noticed the second person was a handsome Egyptian man. Standing behind the woman. He was just as beautiful, Flossina thought. His head was not shaved. He had long, thick, lustrous black hair that hung past his waist. She marveled at its beauty. A baby baboon sat perched on his left shoulder quietly eating a small piece of fruit. The man's wrists were adorned with gold cuffs and he only wore a thick white linen ankle length skirt with a gold belt. She knew they weren't like her. They weren't like any of her kind or any kind she had come across. They were something else.

"Welcome, Flossina your journey begins." The woman said smiling at her.

Flossina felt her worry and fear melt away at the sound of the woman's voice. It resonated within her.

"What journey? Where am I going?" She didn't like not being in control of her destiny. "Where am I?"

"You are in Amduat. I am Khepri. This is my brother Thoth. We are your companions for the journey." She explained.

Those names sounded familiar to Flossina. Why? Then it came to her. These were the demigods. Gods her mother had told her stories about when she was a child. She never thought this land existed. It made her love and adoration for her mother heighten, because she had been teaching her even in the childhood stories about her faith. Now she stood on a boat with Khepri deity, goddess of rebirth and the sun's journey, and Thoth, maintainer of the universe, and judge of the dead. Her mother had told her about the land of the dead and stories of these two and the many, many souls they had led to their final descent or ascent. She felt overwhelmed.

Khepri spoke again, "You need our help. The journey home is usually arduous when a person leaves and comes to the afterlife. They have ridden on the suns in a chariot, and when they set they are brought here. They must walk the desert of truth and loneliness and once they reach the mirage of the Nile, we appear. You, however, did not do that. You projected out of your body and located us. Princess, you are special."

"Are you taking me to-"

"Osiris?" Thoth furnished for her.

His eyes were like looking into the sun. They were clear, bright, and infinite. She smiled slightly and nodded her head 'yes.'

"Yes, we are. He will be able to help you."

If her mother's stories were as accurate about Osiris as they were about Khepri and Thoth she would get answers. He was the King of the dead. He would have answers that no one else would. Khepri held her hand and walked with her until they both looked out at the fathomless darkness they were sailing upon. She was always led to believe Khepri was a man, but looking at the beautiful, bald demi-god. She could not deny she was in female form in every sense of the word. She felt worried. Why would she project out of her body? She didn't know if she could do it again, and she began to worry even more about how she would get back to her body.

"Don't worry everything will be fine," Khepri said.

"I feel like I'm dreaming."

"What is a dream if anything but your soul going somewhere else. You have mastered this." Thoth was smiling as Khepri said the words so definitely.

"That's just it. I haven't mastered it." Flossina countered back. Confused as to what she had supposedly "mastered".

"Then how did you come to be here?" She asked.

"I thought you would know that." She sighed.

"It is not my job to know why. It is my job to get you there. What is the last thing you remember?"

"I was speaking with a...healer."

"A man."

"Yes."

"About?"

"About how I came to be in his care. All he could tell me was that I was accused of ..." Her breath caught in her throat. "A horrible crime. My head began to feel like it was about to explode. I passed out again and then I was laying here when I woke up."

"Someone summoned you here." Khepri offered.

"Why?"

"You will soon find out. Take comfort in knowing that."

Flossina heard the somber words of the demigod and it only made it harder for her to comprehend how she had ended up in the underworld. She wished then she could see her mother.

"May I retire?" She asked.

Khepri led her to the chamber inside the boat. It was beautiful, with bowls of fruit and different jugs of wines strewn all around the room on tables. She smiled. She wished she could enjoy this, but the occasion didn't seem befitting. She wasn't sleepy and she suspected they knew that. She was sad. Sad for the loss of everything she held dear. It had happened all so soon, and nothing like she had thought. Her mother and her Kingdom were taken from her. She felt like an absolute failure. She sat down on the bed of large pillows and silk cushions. Her tears streaming down her face. She loved her mother and she loved her Kingdom. She felt as if she couldn't have one without the other and now she had neither one. She felt hopeless.

"Why are you talking to her? Brother said no talking to the passengers unless absolutely necessary. You know the rule Khepri."

She rolled her eyes at her brother. He always took their brother's side.

"I had to talk with her. Did you not see her? One more moment and she would have jumped off the boat, or, at least, tried to. I did nothing wrong. She has no idea why she is here. Why did brother send for her?" The lightning flashed. Signifying her irritation.

"Someone sounds jealous." He chided.

"Not jealous little brother, concerned." She said as she walked past him.

"Keep your concern to yourself. This one is special." He called after her.

"I know, brother. That's what I'm concerned about..."

4-The Here & Now

Delaev watched his longtime friend and leader of the Collective, Marlon, stand over the unconscious young lady sleeping in his bed. Even in her unconscious state he could tell she was a uncommonly beautiful girl. He had come back to the castle to inform Marlon of the King's plans of venturing outside of the Kingdom with only his Valet and they needed to strike fast if they were to make their plan work, but was quickly roped into assisting him in finding a cure for this sleeping beauty. They had researched every book Marlon had on medicinal potions, spells with healing powers, and crux's, but none seemed to have the answer. They were at an impasse.

They had fought beside one another too many times to count, and even in the face of danger never had he seen his friend so distraught. They had been Assassins for a Royal secret order called The Collective that had been formally dissolved twenty years ago. They had both only been young boys learning the dark art of killing discriminately and protecting the Crown of Zuff. Back then Marlon's father had been the leader. There were only a few hundred of them left now. Each one still loyal to the task of protecting the crown even though their families had been stripped of their names and titles. They all hid in plain sight within the Kingdom, taking on a mundane occupation to survive and stay close to the castle.

Marlon had been taught the art of healing by his grandmother when he was a small child and somehow he never forgot. As an assassin, he had learned to care for and heal his own wounds, which only added more to his healing experience when the time came for his disguise. He had taught Delaev a thing or two about the proper way to stitch a wound and what plants would make a paste that could heal a man quickly. It was no surprise to him that Marlon had chosen to be a physician and was doing an excellent job of blending in.

Delaev was a Royal historian now, and knew the history as well as the mapping of the Kingdom. He prided himself on having a photographic memory. Whatever information he read he recounted back word for word, even if someone inquired about it weeks later. It was truly a gift, and one that came in handy in their line of work, especially now in their efforts to take down King Fvendal. They would finally have their revenge. They were so close.

"She doesn't look good," he said, looking grim, standing over her.

She looked dead to him.

"I know. Help me heal her," Marlon barked.

He noticed the dark half moons under his friend's eyes, letting him know his friend wasn't taking proper care of himself and resting. Who knew how long it had been since he had actually slept.

"What have you tried already?" He asked.

"I gave her an aloe kigelia potion earlier. It seemed to heal about seventy percent of her body. She seemed fine, a little distraught, but fine. She was speaking with me and then she passed out again. I can't wake her. Her heartbeat is faint. It's as if she has slipped into a coma. I have to bring her back."

Delaev saw the strain and concern on his friend's face. His friend had always taken his job seriously and he knew he was a great healer, but the way he spoke about her and the way he insisted he had to heal her, he knew his friend was in the budding of love. He just wondered if his friend knew who she was. He noticed a red ribbon tied securely around her wrist. It all made sense then.

"How long ago?"

"A day and a half," he said and raked his hair through his shoulder length tresses. He looked almost on the brink of mania.

That was a sufficient amount of time for the potion he had given the girl to work. Maybe she needed more time. Potions worked differently on different people. She was the missing Princess, Delaev deduced then. There had been talk in the tavern of the guards raping and beating her before she escaped and they ran her down.

"Come, let's leave her to rest. We can do nothing for her now." He suggested.

"I can't just give up!" He roared.

"You're not! Besides, we have more pressing matters to discuss."

"Such as?" Marlon asked, still not taking his eyes off of her.

"I have received news that will be beneficial to our cause."

He was speaking of their plan. Marlon had to concentrate on the plan. He knew his friend was right. He had done all he could for her. He looked at her once more. She lay there perfectly still. He needed her to come back to him. He needed answers. He hoped he would see her again. That thought surprised him. Their encounter had been brief, and under uncommon circumstances. He needed her to know she would be safe with him. He would protect her. He just needed her to wake up...

The dark abyss Flossina was sailing upon was illuminated by a large glowing white Pyramid set in the middle of the horizon. It was more than fifty feet away, and yet she could see it so clearly. It was like a cosmic mirage. She had decided to watch the rest of the journey from the window inside of her chamber, but was so enamored by the bright glowing object, she found herself unconsciously walking out onto the deck until she stood beside Khepri to marvel at it.

"Is it not beautiful?" Khepri asked, turning her face to look at Flossina as she smiled her illustrious smile.

Flossina felt like it lit up the entire ship.

"Yes, it's so much more than that. It feels like home." She heard herself acknowledge.

That thought resounded with Flossina, and she had to admit to herself that she missed the feeling of home.

"We will be there shortly. I will no longer be your guide for the rest of the journey. My brother Thoth will. I only ask that when you meet my brother Osiris please do not speak of us speaking. It is against the rules. I only wanted to make you comfortable for the journey."

"I understand."

Khepri took her hand in hers, brought it to her lips and kissed it. "For your kindness."

She gently removed her hand and when she looked out onto the black sea she was surprised to find they were already at their destination. The light the pyramid gave seemed to be bright, but it was not blinding. She looked down and saw that her breasts and the v shape in the juncture of her thighs were visible now that the light shone so brightly on her. She felt naked. She saw Thoth awaited her and gently clasped her hips and swung her off the boat and carried her until they reached the shore, which was only a few feet. It was all so strange to her. She walked and her feet didn't feel the white, sparkling sand underneath them. Khepri followed suit behind them, and they walked in reverent silence into the pyramid. Above it, there was an inscription that read: ' Know yourself... and you shalt know the gods.' The narrow entrance gave way and they stepped out into what appeared to be a lush Egyptian flower garden. She saw beautifully painted water fountains with, Lotus, Papyrus, and water lilies floating inside of them. It was breathtakingly beautiful and the aroma it gave off smelled so sweet.

"Flossina welcome." An adolescent boy greeted her.

It was also odd to her to see such a beautiful young man alone in such a beautiful flower garden. The sun seemed to shine inside the walls of the pyramid, but looking at him now she thought he seemed to radiate an outer light from within. She was not afraid because something within her recognized it was this young man that was the light. Thoth stood close beside her, showing no outward emotion. He seemed indifferent to her whirlwind of emotions. She watched as he quickly knelt in the boy's presence.

"My brother, rise." The boy commanded.

Flossina's mouth dropped open. This was Osiris King of the dead. Once that realization hit her she began to kneel only to be stopped by him lightly touching her on her shoulder.

"Please, child, we haven't the time." He nodded to Thoth, who began leading the way through the strange, but lovely pyramid. "Your mother has sent for you. We must hurry."

Flossina stopped mid-stride.

"My mother? She is here?"

He nodded.

She smiled for the first time since the stranger, Marlon, had found her.

"She passed the final test of judgement," his tone joyful as he explained. "I knew she would. Your mother is special, just like you."

"What test did she pass, Your Majesty?"

He stopped by an open door and motioned for Flossina to look. She stood in the entryway with Thoth on her right and King Osiris standing behind her. Waves of power seemed to vibrate off of him. She could feel it radiating into her at his close proximity.

In the center of the room stood a gold-laden scale. The hieroglyphs read "Scales of Justice". A man wearing a black Egyptian canid mask and a gold loincloth, was adjusting the scale. On the opposite side of the scale sat a beast unlike any other Flossina had ever seen. It had a body that was part hippopotamus. Its front upper-half torso was of a lion with a mane on its head. Its face was that of a crocodile. They looked on and watched as the beast ate a blackened heart. It was chilling to Flossina. Osiris spoke.

"Anubis and Ammut." He pointed first to the man then to the beast. "The protector, and the devourer. Many Kings and queens have stepped through these doors. Only a few can say they passed this test. Your mother is one of them, for I could find no fault with her heart. She has paid homage to me her entire reign as Queen, and I offered her sanctuary for eternity in return. Her only request was that she speak to you."

His words kept coming and she knew they were true. Her mother had been right about the afterlife, and she was alive, in her own unique way.

"I am ready. Please, take me to her, Your Majesty."

They walked for a few more moments and entered a room. Much like the first one, it was filled with a different variety of flowers. It reminded her of the greenhouse at the palace, and she realized it was an exact replica of it. *

Princess Flossina awakes in a stranger's arms. She has no recollection of how she got there. After being taken to a secret location, she finds out that her mother, the Queen, has been murdered, and they have accused her of the crime. She needs to find out the truth, but how... Marlon, an undercover assassin and healer by trade is intrigued to help Flossina when she is deposited on his doorstep bruised, bloodied, and unconscious like so many girls before her. The girl was everything he didn't expect her to be, fiery, beautiful and an amnesiac. The examination he had done on her while she was unconscious let him know she was more than a castaway. She was the dead, missing princess...

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