
THE LOST QUEEN OF EGYPT



BY LUCILE MORRISON



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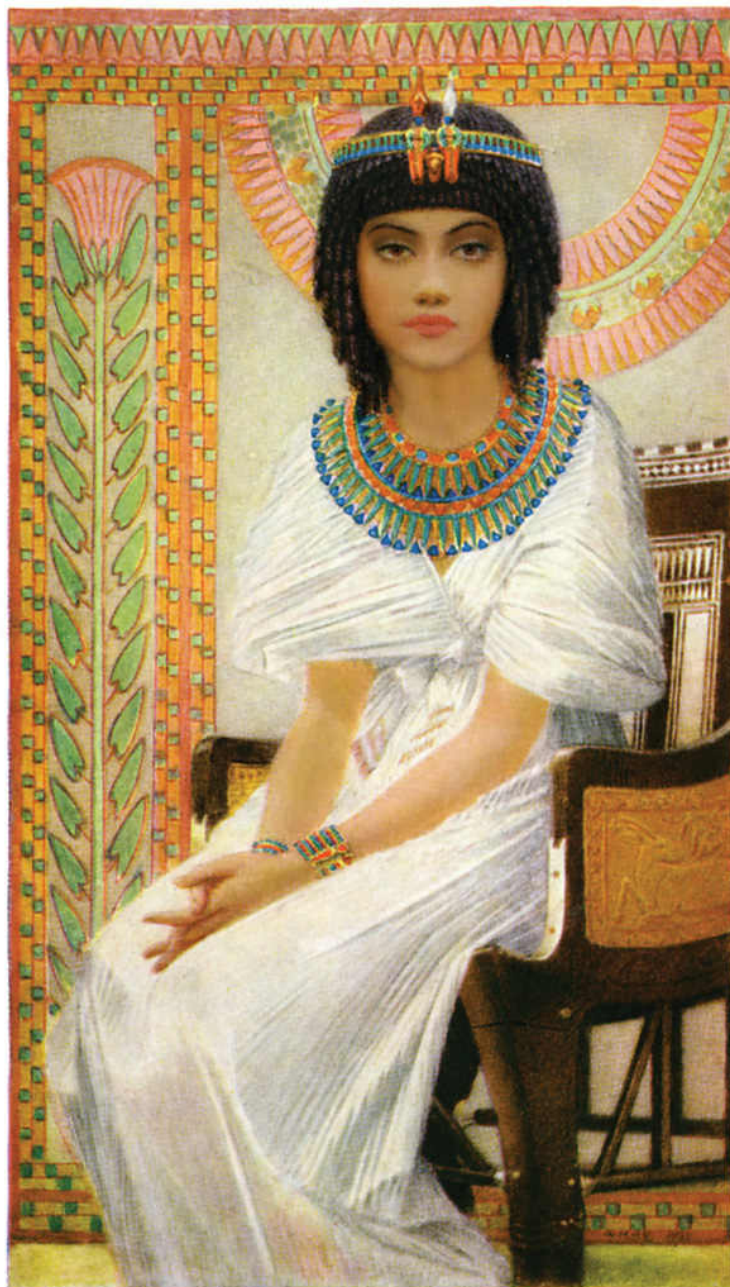


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QUEEN ANKHSENAMON

A painting by Winifred Brunton
from her book *Great Ones of Ancient Egypt* [1929]

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by

LUCILE MORRISON

Illustrations by FRANZ GERITZ

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Other Books by LUCILE MORRISON

THE BLUE BANDITS

THE ATTIC CHILD

MYSTERY GATE

TO

LEE ALLEN MORRISON

for whom this book was made

and to

FLORENCE LOUISE BEMIS and A.S. ARNOLD

who helped to make it

LUCILE PHILLIPS MORRISON (1896-1991) was among an elite group of women who attained higher education at a time when women were not valued for their intellectual prowess. She obtained a bachelor's degree from Vassar in 1918, a master's degree in psychology from George Pepperdine University in 1958, and received numerous awards during the 1970s. But such accomplishment, while showing marked tenacity, does not reflect the warmth and sense of magic with which she approached the world. Lucile could wave her wand of words and create mystery, love and wonderment at any moment. She was my grandmother, role model, mentor and my favorite author as a youth. May you be as captivated as I with this journey into the world of Egypt so long ago.

Sharon L. Morrison, Ph.D.

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THE PERIOD

NOT long after 1800 B.C. Egypt was overrun by the Hyksos, a people from Asia who first introduced the horse and chariot to the Egyptians. Armed with these new weapons, Ahmose I two hundred years later succeeded in driving out the invaders. Pursuit soon changed to conquest. Under such brilliant Eighteenth Dynasty leaders as Amenhotep I and Thutmose III the boundaries of the Empire were extended between 1557 and 1337 B.C. to the Euphrates River and the northern limits of Syria. Even the islands of the Great Green sent tribute to Thebes, the capital of the Egyptian Empire.

Prosperity reached its height under Amenhotep III, the Magnificent, and his wife Queen Tiy. Constant contact with the culture and thought of the East had brought a new element into the life of the Court. Amenhotep IV, the King's youthful and visionary son, encouraged by his mother, developed for the first time in history the conception of one supreme God, Aten. He changed his own name to Akhenaten, drove the powerful priesthood of Amon from the temples at Thebes, and wiped out the name of Amon wherever it appeared. He then built a new city, Akhetaten, one hundred and ninety miles down the Nile from Thebes and there established his Court.

Since Akhenaten was opposed to war, the Empire disintegrated rapidly during his reign. His immediate successors could do little to stop the Hittite advance. Later Horemheb, Seti I, Rameses II, and the other Pharaohs of the Nineteenth Dynasty (1350–1205 B.C.) did their best to reestablish the power of Egypt, but the great days of the Empire were at an end.

All the characters found in these pages lived in Egypt during the latter part of the Eighteenth Dynasty (1580–1350 B.C.). Only now and then has a name been supplied for artist, nurse, or slave whose exact title history does not record. It is inevitable that known facts should be variously interpreted

by different authorities, but every effort has been made to select those interpretations which seemed most in keeping with the spirit of the characters and the written records of the times.

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THE CHARACTERS

AKHENATEN (Akh-en-at'en).* Amenhotep IV, Pharaoh of Egypt.

NEFERTITI (Ne-fer-tee'tee). Queen of Egypt, Great Royal Wife of Akhenaten.

ROYAL PRINCESSES , daughters of Akhenaten and Nefertiti:

MERYTATEN (Me-ryt-at'en).

MEKETATEN (Me-ket-at'en).

ANKHSENPAATEN (Ankh'sen-pa-at'en). Later changed to Ankhsenamon (Ankh'sen-am'on).

NEFER -NEFRU -ATEN -TA -SHERA . Known as TA -SHERA (Ta-Sher'ra).

NEFER -NEFRU -RA (Ne'fer-nef'ru-Ra). Known as Little Kitten.

SETEPENRA (Se'te-pen'ra).

QUEEN TIY (Tee'ee). Great Royal Mother, widow of Amenhotep III, mother of Akhenaten, Nefertiti and Baketaten.

BAKETATEN (Ba-ket-at'en). Youngest daughter of Queen Tiy.

SMENKHKARA (Smenkh-ka'ra). For a short time King of Egypt, co-regent with Akhenaten.

TUTANKHATEN (Tut-ankh-at'en). King of Egypt. Name changed to Tutankhamon (Tut-ankh-am'on).

KENOFER (Ken'o-fer). An artist.

INTEF (In'tef). A goldsmith of Thebes, brother of Kenofer.

AY (Eye). Fan Bearer on the Right of the King, Chief Counselor of Akhenaten.

TY (Tee). Great Royal Nurse, wife of Ay.

HOREMHEB (Hor-em-heb'). Chief of the Army.

YATU (Ya'tu). Nurse of the royal children at Akhetaten.

HOTEP (Ho'tep). A Captain of the Mazoi (Ma-zoi') Police of Akhetaten.

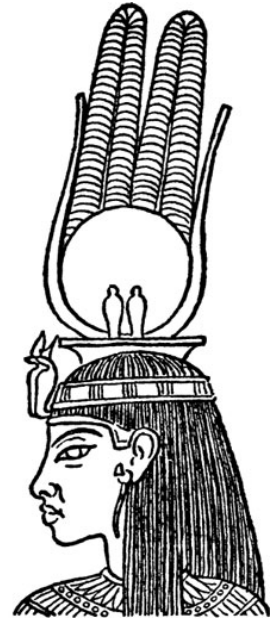
TERGEN (Ter'gen). A Hittite slave boy.

KHATAKA (Kha-ta'ka). A Hittite slave girl.

* a as in father; e as in pet; u as in lute; i and y like ee in see; kh as ch in loch.

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THE LOST QUEEN OF EGYPT



Queen Tiye

CHAPTER I

THE GREAT ROYAL MOTHER COMES

WHITE as alabaster lay the city of Akhetaten along the eastern bank of the slow-moving Nile. In the brilliant sunlight the mighty pylon towers of palace and temple stood out against the brown of desert and distant cliffs, like vast reliefs upon a temple wall. Above the flat-topped roofs floated long pennons of scarlet on slender poles, and from every building hung colored streamers and festoons of flowers.

Early as it was, the City of the Horizon of Aten had been long astir, greeting the rising disk of the sun with hymns of rejoicing. Eager crowds thronged the wide, paved streets, for all the city made holiday at Pharaoh's bidding. Gilded chariots clattered along High Priest Street and the Royal Road, horses' heads gay with plumes, harness glittering. Some came from the south where lay Maru Aten, Pharaoh's pleasure palace, and the great walled estates of nobles high in the favor of their King. Others came from

the north, a new suburb of less pretentious dwellings, where the North Palace was under construction, with its animal haven and aviaries planned for the Queen's delight.

Today all workmen had left their tasks. Workshops were closed, and the School for Scribes was silent and deserted. Even those who labored in the tombs carved in the face of the eastern cliffs had come with their overseers to share in the day's festivities. Pale-faced artisans from Crete and black-skinned slaves from Nubia, bearded Syrians and Babylonian traders mingled with the white-clad Egyptians, who laughed and shouted gay greetings as they hurried by. On the broad parade ground to the east of the city, the Mazoi, police and keepers of the peace of Aten, moved briskly through their morning drill, the sleek horses of the flying squad prancing and capering under the skillful hands of their drivers, while men on foot passed before the Chief to receive assignment for the day. That white ribbon of city and the curve of desert between river and cliffs were in their keeping, and it was a trust not lightly held by Mahu, Chief of the Mazoi, and his men.

In the nursery of the Royal House, which lay in the heart of Akhetaten, the six small daughters of Akhenaten, Pharaoh of Egypt, were being attired for the approaching festival. The Great Royal Mother, their grandmother, was coming to pay her first official visit to the new city built by her son to the glory of Aten, his God. Down the river from Thebes, nearly two hundred miles away, she was coming in her royal barge, and every member of the King's household must be ready to do honor to the Dowager Queen, Mother of a King and Great Wife of a King, Tiy, Living Forever. It was said she would arrive three hours after sunrise, and already the summer sun had been two hours above the horizon. Nurses and attendants hovered about their small charges, adjusting finery with meticulous care, while the children voiced their curiosity in eager questions.

“Will she be very old, Yatu, the Great Royal Mother of our father? Will she be stern and haughty, like the statues in the temple the King has built for her?” The Princess Meketaten, frail and limp among the pillows of her ebony couch, looked anxiously at the faithful Yatu who knelt by her side. With tender care the old nurse adjusted sandals of gilded leather that never would touch the painted floors. The excitement which had brought a flush to her sisters’ brown cheeks had left Meketaten’s as pale as the waxen leaves of the water lily she held in her fingers.

“The great Queen Tiy, old?” Yatu shook her head. “No, the beloved wife of Neb-maat-Ra, Amenhotep III, could never grow old in the eyes of those who once served her. Stern, haughty? Rather has she the dignity which becomes a queen. Well I remember the day when she was made Great Royal Wife, honored above all. Bitter the jealousy among the women of the harem when she was chosen!”

“That was because she was not Pharaoh’s sister, as a queen should be. Is that not true, Yatu?” The first-born Princess spoke quietly from beside the couch. A grave child, Merytaten, wise beyond her eight years. Already a great sadness lay upon her, the lines of her face deep-etched by anxiety for the small sister whose seven summers had been long months of pain. With watchful tenderness she made her love a staff whereon the little cripple leaned.

“ ’Tis true the Queen was not of royal birth,” Yatu admitted with evident reluctance.

“I’ve heard it said the priests of Amon called her That Daughter of Nothing!” A young nurse ventured a bit of hearsay.

An excited titter swept through the room. A slave, waving an ostrich-feather fan slowly to and fro, stopped long enough to add, “And I am told her tongue is barbed as a bee’s sting!”

“Hush, Unworthy Ones! Such things are not for the ears of children nor the lips of slaves!” With a word of command, Yatu closed the eager ears of curious underlings and sent them, chastened, back to their respective tasks. “The daughters of Akhenaten, living in truth, must shut their minds to the clack of idle tongues!” she scolded. “Can none of you remember the Great Queen? You, Meketaten, were four the year the Court moved here from Thebes.”

“I have no memories of Thebes at all, except the magicians who said strange spells over me until I cried out in fright!” Shuddering, the child buried her face for a moment among the soft pillows. Merytaten bent over her.

“Do not try to remember, Little One. That was long ago, and no magicians of Thebes will come with the Queen Mother. I was five when last I saw her, but now if I try to think just how she looked, I see only her statues in the temple court.”

“Ah, but she was far more beautiful than any statue man has made—and still is,” Yatu insisted.

“Yet not so lovely as our Royal Mother—you have told us that yourself, Yatu. How perfect is our mother’s name: Nefertiti, the Beautiful One Has Come! No wonder our father loves her as he does, openly for all the world to see.”

“And I have her name: Nefer-nefru-Aten-ta-Shera!” Plump as a pigeon was the child who spoke, squirming impatiently in the grasp of her nurse. “I am Nefertiti the Little, and when I grow up, I shall be the most beautiful Princess in the world! Stop, Disnek! It is hot and the pleats scratch. I do not need fine linen to make me pretty.”

“Be not vain, Ta-Shera. You must grow more sweet of temper before you can be worthy of your name.”

The reproving voice of Merytaten made no impression on the rebellious one. She stamped her foot in the dust of lapis lazuli spread upon the floor. All of her four short years she had been free to run about without so much as a wisp of linen to cover her baby fatness.

With an envious eye Ta-Shera viewed her small sisters, Nefer-nefru-Ra and Setepenra. The two Wise Little Ones were bare brown figures playing happily on a rug. About them was strewn a gay collection of wooden animals, bright balls of colored leather, and dolls with strings of beads for hair. Two young Nubian slaves, as black as the ebony of Meketaten's couch, danced attendance upon them and tried in vain to keep Setepenra's necklace of bright beads from her hot, teething mouth.

"Do you think the Great Queen will like the feasting and the festivals prepared for her?" Meketaten asked. "She must be old, Yatu, even though she seems not old to you, and a little bit cross, for the aged are always so."

"Who would not be cross, with six granddaughters and not one grandson to be Pharaoh of Egypt? I wish I had been a boy!" The voice from the doorway brought a smile to Meketaten's face. Beyond that doorway were the six night nurseries, side by side. Ankhsenpaaten stood tiptoe on the threshold, then danced lightly across the room, sheer draperies swirling about her. Tall for her five years, her slim, lithe body seemed always poised for flight.

"See, Meketaten, this is how the Royal Mother will look, her teeth fallen out and lips fallen in, like those of Any, the ancient Scribe of the Altar." She paused before the couch, and with an impudent gleam in her slanting eyes, sucked her cheeks into hollows and tried to twist her lips into a toothless line. The small invalid's laugh brought a smile to every face. Laughter came seldom to the wistful second daughter of Akhenaten, who would have given all his earthly kingdom to keep her free from pain.

There was no smile, however, on the face of the Great Royal Nurse who entered at that moment to inspect her charges. Too late came Merytaten's gasp of warning, for Ankhsenpaaten turned in mocking greeting to the newcomer, and found herself gazing into the proud and puffy countenance of the Great Nurse Ty. Into the room swept the short, thick figure of the royal favorite, trailing a billowing cloud of draperies. Before her withering glance Ankhsenpaaten quailed.

Without a word each Princess took her place in line according to age, even the baby wavering on uncertain feet as she clung to the hand of the sturdy two-year-old. Only Meketaten lay quiet on her couch, watchful eyes upon that frowning face. Would the Royal Nurse be satisfied with Yatu's work? It was not easy to satisfy the haughty Ty, who had cared for Akhenaten and the lovely Nefertiti, brother and sister in the royal nursery at Thebes. She knew her power as Pharaoh's nurse, and used it openly.

In the haste and excitement, Ankhsenpaaten and Yatu both escaped the reprimands they fully expected to receive. At a sign from Ty, two slaves lifted Meketaten gently into the litter which was waiting in the hall without. Then the Royal Nurse, followed by the other children with their chosen attendants, led the way down a long corridor and through the Great Hall to the upper terrace of the palace garden. Here nobles and their ladies had gathered to await the coming of the royal family, while a group of musicians played softly from the shelter of a bright awning stretched to form a pavilion on the edge of a pool, blue with water lilies. Below, the garden fell away in terraced slopes, walks lined with trees and bordered by open irrigation ditches, where water sparkled in the sun. Here and there an arbor arched above the path, heavy with vines which offered a cool retreat from the relentless glare.

A gay clash of cymbals announced the appearance of the royal pair just as the children arrived upon the scene, and the Court bent low before

Akhenaten, Pharaoh of Upper and Lower Egypt, Ankh-em-maat, Living in Truth, and Nefertiti, Great Wife of the King, Mistress of His Happiness, Lady of Grace. Very radiant and young they looked in their white draperies and lofty glittering crowns. As yet illness had touched but lightly Pharaoh's youthful frame. At twenty-one he was indeed a Beautiful Child of the Sun. A full skirt fell in complicated folds below his knees, but above the waist the spare brown body was bare of all adornment. He wore no jewels save those in the elaborate white and red double crown of Upper and Lower Egypt, which seemed to accentuate the pallor of his long, thin face with its narrow jaw thrust forward and its somber, heavy-lidded eyes. Even when he smiled, a brooding melancholy lay upon him like the faint blue shadow of a cloud across a cliff. In one hand he carried the hek, curved like a shepherd's crook, and in the other, the nekhekh, an inlaid whip of gold with beaded thongs, both scepters of exquisite workmanship which symbolized his power.

Nefertiti was more elaborately adorned in honor of her mother's arrival. In addition to the high, jeweled headdress, she wore a necklace of blue faience beads with medallions of beaten gold delicately wrought. Her arms were decked with bangled bracelets which tinkled sweetly as she moved. The gauze veiling her figure was so sheer it seemed to envelop her in transparent mist, above which the beauty of her face was like the cool perfection of a lotus bloom above a pool.

Hand in hand the royal pair moved across the terrace toward the six small Princesses waiting in their holiday finery. Ankhsenpaaten ran to meet them, catching her father's welcoming hand in both her own, and dancing backward before them as they walked, to feast her eyes upon her mother's loveliness. Tenderly they greeted the smiling Meketaten and the others, then moved to the head of the procession forming at the entrance of the great

covered bridge which spanned the Royal Road between the King's House and the Official Palace.

The high sweet piping of flutes and the steady rhythm of drum and sistrum announced their coming to the throngs of people gathered in the broad highway below the bridge, where they had waited since dawn for a glimpse of Pharaoh and his family on their way to greet the Dowager Queen. To the measured beat of the music, the royal family entered the covered bridge and moved slowly along the corridor toward the great palace built beside the Nile. In the center of the bridge the corridor widened into a large room painted with elaborate frescoes of flowers and birds—a bit of garden held captive high above the ground. Here was the wide-open Window of Appearance from which, on state occasions, Pharaoh greeted his people or showered gifts upon some faithful follower who particularly merited his gratitude. Today he paused but a moment, since already the royal barge of the Great Queen Mother had been sighted, drifting slowly downstream from the south. With Nefertiti close beside him, the baby held high in her arms for all to see, Akhenaten smiled his greeting to the shouting multitudes.

“Life! Prosperity! Health!” The voices rose in eager unison.

Ankhsenpaaten lifted the two-year-old Nefer-nefru-Ra, affectionately known as Little Kitten, to the edge of the sill for a better view, but the child was promptly rescued from that precarious position by the practiced hand of Merytaten. The first-born of six, Merytaten kept a watchful eye on all that small brood. She snatched the bare little body from Ankhsenpaaten's careless grasp and handed her to a nurse hovering anxiously in the background. Nothing daunted, Ankhsenpaaten then offered to give Ta-Shera a helping hand, since she could barely see above the cushioned ledge. That young lady refused.

“If I have to wear clothes, I shall keep them fresh until the Great Royal Mother comes. Your pleats will be all mussed, and she will know at once that you are not a tidy child!”

Such righteous virtue moved Ankhsenpaaten not at all. “What does it matter? Merytaten and Meketaten will be spotless enough for the whole family. No one can expect six Princesses all to be beautiful and well behaved!”

Through the great columned court with its brilliant colors and waiting crowds of courtiers, through the doors which opened on the wide stone terrace overlooking the river, went the royal procession. Opposite the door a flight of steps led down to the quay where the barge would land. At the top of these steps three thrones had been placed on a winered carpet. As the King seated himself in the center throne, his wife on his left, the nobles and Court officials lined the steps to form an avenue through which the Dowager Queen would pass. At the King’s elbow stood the ever-present Ay, thin and pale in his regalia of office. The Divine Father Ay, Fan Bearer on the Right of the King, was always there to admire, suggest, advise, his crafty eyes watching intently the play of expression on the mobile face of his sovereign. His wife might speak her thoughts with arrogant assurance, but he veiled his with careful deference.

The gold litter which held Meketaten was placed beside the Queen where the child could see out over the slow-moving, muddy river, almost hidden by gay pleasure boats and fishing craft, save where a broad channel was left for the flotilla of boats accompanying the royal barge from Thebes. Near her stood a tall youth of unusual beauty, in whose fresh young face and softly modeled body there was a strong family resemblance to the Queen. Nefertiti nodded to him as she took her place, and he returned the smiling greeting as one privileged to consider himself part of the family group. Merytaten had seated herself on a stool where she could be near the

small sisters tumbling about on the carpet with as little concern as if this were not a day of grave importance in the destiny of their city. Ankhsenpaaten, however, who was never known to sit still if permitted to have her way, tripped lightly up and down the stairs. She stopped now and then to speak to a friend among the nobles, or paused to watch the musicians as their supple fingers plucked the strings of lyre and harp.

She envied the boys and girls far below on the river, where all the boats of Akhetaten were gathered to celebrate this great occasion. Above all, she envied the boys. They were clambering about the high sterns like monkeys, calling back and forth to one another with gay abandon. For all Akhetaten this was holiday. Even the House of Books, where the sons of noble families were prepared for positions of trust in the government, had closed its doors for seven days of festival, and students were everywhere.

Ankhsenpaaten skipped up the stairs two at a time in response to a gesture from her royal father. Always she watched him from the corner of her eye, that she might make his slightest wish her law. Even a Princess must repay Pharaoh's indulgence with prompt obedience. In passing she nodded at the youth Smenkhkara standing beside Meketaten; but the glance she threw in his direction was a fleeting one. He was too old to play and too young to merit much respect. Then, too, she liked not boys who were so fair of face, so gentle and reserved of manner.

Nefertiti leaned forward to straighten Ankhsenpaaten's headdress and adjust the folds of her skirt. The child gazed upon her with adoring eyes. How beautiful her mother was! If only she could look like that! Never was her mother restless or impatient, and never were her delicate costumes crumpled or awry. Under arched brows, Nefertiti's eyes, darkened with shadows of kohl, were brilliant as the jewels of her necklace. That shapely head, poised so surely on its slender neck, needed no crown to make it

regal. Even in the sultry heat of mid-morning, her long, pointed fingers were cool as they touched the child's skin.

"Please, little daughter, try to have the dignity worthy of a Princess nearly six years old. You are no longer a baby." Her mother smiled indulgently as she patted a brown cheek. "Merytaten can be depended on, and Meketaten is always good. But you, Small Bird, are ever on the wing!"

"I wish I were a bird!" Ankhsenpaaten waved her hand toward the doves circling overhead. They were her father's favorite birds. "If I had wings, I would fly far away to see all the countries of the world, all the strange places from which men bring tribute to Egypt. Just now I would fly out to meet the Great Royal Mother's barge and perch on the top-most point of the mast above the broad white sail!"

She danced to the edge of the steps and shaded her eyes with one hand. The boat was slowly drifting inshore, guided by a pilot and the oarsman who handled the long rudder oar at the stern. In the brilliant sunlight the sides and pointed prow of the vessel gleamed with vivid colors, and the stern curled inward to form a huge blue lotus flower. The cabin, under the wide-spreading sail which was being furled by agile sailors clambering among the ropes, was fashioned in the shape of a stately house. Its entrance was adorned with pillars decorated in blue, red, yellow, and green, set off by bands of gold. Ankhsenpaaten's heart leaped at the splendor of it, and beat a light accompaniment to the ripple of flutes and the clash of welcoming cymbals. She ran back to her mother's side, and under the glad din, the King's voice reached her ears, low, compelling:

"I shall descend the steps to the quay," he was saying, "while you and the children wait here to receive her."

Nefertiti shook her head. "My dear, you fainted yesterday when you but mounted the stairs to the roof of the palace. In the blazing sun it is not safe. Wait here beside me until she comes. Our mother is sure to understand!"

Ankhsenpaaten understood, too. She had been with her father when he reeled and would have fallen if the Divine Father Ay had not been just behind. For once she had been glad of Ay's presence. It would be sad indeed should her father faint today, here before all the people.

Akhenaten smiled and bent to kiss the Queen's protesting lips, but he swayed as he stood erect, and when he moved to the top of the stairway, Nefertiti moved quietly beside him. The child saw her mother's eyes rest anxiously on the gray pallor of his face and the tight blue line of his set lips. She alone knew that the Queen's steadying hand upon his arm was more than one of the affectionate caresses the two exchanged so freely before their people.

All eyes were turned upon the royal barque. As the sailors threw ropes to the waiting men on shore, and the great craft was pulled safely alongside the quay, there appeared on deck the most commanding woman Ankhsenpaaten had ever seen. Even at that distance she could feel the power of that regal figure, with its heavy wig of black braids hanging in a fringe to the shoulders, and the lofty crown so unlike anything her own mother ever wore. Beside the Dowager Queen stood a group of women attendants in robes of blue and yellow, and two uniformed officials carrying standards topped with ostrich feathers.

Disregarding the hands outstretched to help her, Queen Tiy walked with sure step across the sloping gangway, followed by a nurse and a fat little girl adorned with beads and jewels, though the child could not have been much older than Ankhsenpaaten herself. Here the Great Royal Mother was met by Huya, once her Chamberlain at Thebes, now Superintendent of the Harem for Akhenaten. He had provided a litter borne by four tall black slaves to carry her to the terrace where the royal family stood, but she waved aside the suggestion with a scornful hand. Disregarding Huya's protests, she started up the stairs on foot, passing with deliberate tread

between the rows of nobles and ladies of the Court bowed to the ground before her. Huya accompanied the royal visitor perforce, a fan bearer on either side, but the child viewed this procedure with frank disapproval and stopped to examine the golden chair with its embroidered canopy, thus lightly scorned by the Queen.

Ankhsenpaaten, her eyes drawn irresistibly to that small, imperious figure on the quay, paid scant attention to the Royal Mother's slow approach. The long words of official greeting chanted in solemn rhythm fell unheeded on her ears. Only the low exchange of unofficial welcome held her for a moment as Akhenaten led the two Queens to the waiting thrones and seated one on his right hand, the other on his left. The Great Royal Mother sank back with a sigh.

"So many steps! When designing your next city, my son, have mercy upon your guests!" she observed tartly.

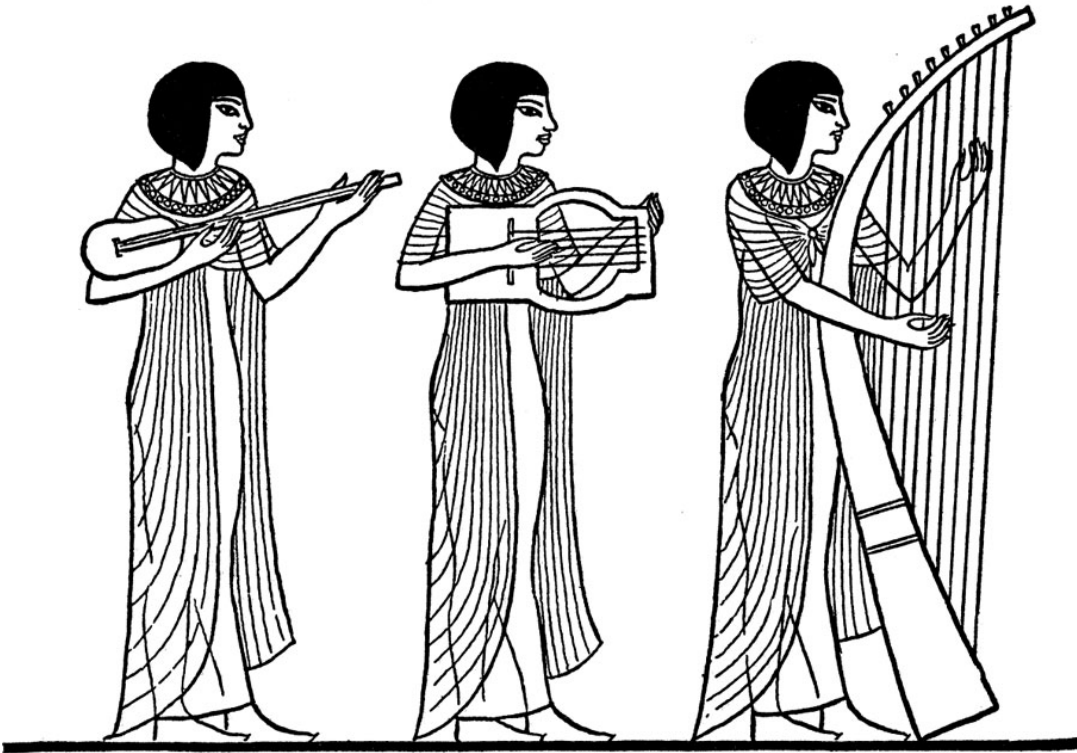
"You were to have been carried in state, Royal Mother, but I see that only my small sister has taken advantage of Huya's arrangements." He glanced down at the knot of attendants about the waiting palanquin. In front of them stood the youngest daughter of Queen Tiy, the arrogant Baketaten, Servant of the Disk, apparently arguing with her nurse concerning the propriety of riding in the royal litter.

"Ah, that child!" The Dowager Queen laughed shortly. "She would never bestir herself to walk if she could ride. I trust your daughters are not so spoiled as that offspring of my age!"

"As to that, you shall judge for yourself." Akhenaten's smile was tender. "It is time you met the most important members of the royal household, the six small girls who revere your name."

Dutifully Merytaten received the Queen's rather brusque embrace, and Meketaten smiled a wan welcome from the pillows on which she was propped high that she might miss none of the colorful scene. The three

younger children were patiently awaiting their turns in order of age, but when the King turned to present Ankhsenpaaten, his Small Bird had flown.



Musicians



Nefertiti and Akhenaten

CHAPTER II

THE SHADOW OF A CURSE

WITHOUT a backward glance to catch the refusal in her father's eye, Ankhsenpaaten had darted down the stone steps and presented herself before this young person who dared assume such a lofty air, usurping the dignity intended for the Queen. Baketaten was a short, plump Princess who strongly resembled Ta-Shera and had much of her self-satisfied manner. She had reduced her nurse to tearful helplessness and was commanding the imperturbable blacks to lower the litter that she might be carried up the stairs in state. The four Nubians, but recently come with tribute from the South, were completely deaf to her childish orders, knowing only the few words of command taught them by the scribe in charge of royal transportation. In her rage Baketaten stamped her feet, shook her tightly curled wig until the stiff ringlets stuck out in every direction, and poured

forth such a torrent of angry threats that the attendants looked at one another in dismay.

“Stop!” Ankhsenpaaten clapped her hands sharply before the stranger’s face. “No one is allowed to talk that way, not even to slaves! Do you not know the rules of good behavior? Do children act like that in Thebes? If so, I am glad I do not have to live there!”

The small visitor caught her breath in sheer surprise. “Who are you that dares speak so rudely to a guest of the Great King Akhenaten?”

“You may be the guest of the Great King Akhenaten, but I am his daughter, and I will not have his slaves abused.”

“You may be the daughter of Akhenaten, but I am his sister, the daughter of his mother, and I shall abuse his slaves if I so desire.”

“You may be the sister of Akhenaten and the daughter of his mother, but you are an ill-tempered child, too lazy to walk up a flight of steps!”

At that moment a strong arm encircled each of the wrathful little girls, and deposited them without ceremony side by side in the throne-like chair of the waiting litter.

“By order of the Most Royal Mother Queen Tiy!” a deep voice announced, a voice accustomed to command. Then followed sharp words of instruction, and the grinning slaves set off at a jog trot, not up the imposing flight of stairs where all could see, but along the quay where the Queen’s barge was being unloaded, and up a long, slanting ramp which led to a back street at the end of the Royal Harem. Two runners went ahead to clear the way through the gaping crowd, whose faces seemed to the outraged Princesses a blur of peering eyes and ugly, grinning mouths. The bearers took small pains to handle their burden with care, and the children clutched each other in sudden panic as the Nubians swung around a corner, crossed the broad expanse of Royal Road, now deserted by all but a few guards, and

moved swiftly along the shaded lane between the King's House and the small temple of Hat Aten.

At a private door which gave access to the temple from the palace, the bearers came to a sudden stop, and the two runners were seen to be standing, one on either side of the private entrance to the King's House. The door swung open, and the slaves, no longer smiling, moved through the archway and deposited their burden on the pavement of the open court between the main palace and the great magazines where wines and supplies were stored. Captain Hotep, a member of the royal police force, helped the two silent Princesses to alight, dismissed the slaves and runners with a nod, and led the children into deserted quarters which even Baketaten recognized as the royal nursery.

"The Great Royal Mother suggests that it would be better for you to get acquainted in the cool of the nursery rather than in the heat of the sun," Captain Hotep said, bowing. Then as he turned to go, he added gravely, "I shall have a special officer posted just outside, to keep the peace."

As the door closed, two irate children regarded each other blankly for a moment, then burst into laughter—choking laughter which sent them rolling on the couch, burying flushed faces in the cool pillows, that the guard without might not know too soon of the truce between them. When at last they sat up and inspected the havoc wrought by their merriment, their disheveled appearance set them off again. Baketaten's black wig was twisted until a fringe of stiff curls hung over one eye, and Ankhsenpaaten's headdress had vanished altogether. Her dark hair clung damply to her head in close ringlets, and the delicate pleats of her skirt were rumpled beyond repair.

"Do you think your mother is very angry? It was she who sent us here." Ankhsenpaaten glanced ruefully about the room. Even the parrot in its wicker cage regarded the culprits with beady, disapproving eyes.

“Do not worry about my mother. Her tempers never last long, and I am just like her!” Baketaten’s smile was disarming. “But what must your mother and father think? Won’t they be ashamed of us both?”

“Oh, no, but the Great Royal Nurse will be! You should see her. She is short and fat and very important, because she took care of father and mother long ago in Thebes. How she loves giving orders to everyone!” Ankhsenpaaten thrust out her stomach and puffed her cheeks. Her voice took on the unmistakable high-pitched tone of the carping Ty. “Children nowadays are all ill mannered and show no deference to their elders. No person of breeding would quarrel with a guest or mar the dignity of a festival with hot words! What is the world coming to, that daughters of a royal house should thus demean themselves?”

“I can just hear her!” Baketaten danced gleefully about, jingling her bracelets. “She came to Thebes last year to visit at the palace, and even scolded mother for letting me wear sandals on state occasions! Mother laughed and said I was a spoiled baby, but you see I still wear sandals when I am dressed for festivals! I wonder if we are missing much, shut up in here.”

“Nothing that matters, at least not now.” Ankhsenpaaten dismissed the thought with a shrug. Surely the Queen would not deprive them of the feast at high noon. “The procession will form again and escort your mother through the Official Palace to the harem, where a special apartment has been prepared for her. The harem is beautiful. It has a pool in the garden and a well. Around the garden wall there is a frieze of which father is very proud. It shows the life along the Nile, and you can scarcely tell the painted birds and river creatures from real ones. But there will be plenty of time for you to enjoy that. You are going to live there.”

“Why can’t I stay here with you? It would be much more fun.”

“Because there are only six sleeping rooms, one for each of us. I am glad you came with the Queen Mother, so we can all learn to know one another. It must be strange to have a sister you scarcely remember and a brother old enough to be your father. You will love them both. Father says Nefertiti is the fairest queen in all the world.”

“He may say so, but my mother is the most beautiful queen Egypt has ever had.”

“Nonsense! I have seen your mother, and you have not seen mine.” There was a wicked glint in the slanting eyes. “I don’t believe your mother was beautiful, even when she was young. She must have looked very much like you.”

Baketaten’s lips set. “If your mother is so beautiful, it is because she is my mother’s daughter! But we have done enough fighting for one day. Tell me about your sisters. I shall never be able to call them each by name.”

“Oh, yes, you will. Come, sit beside me on the floor. It is much more friendly, and cooler, too. I won’t tease. After all, we are in the same family, and father says all members of a family must love one another and be patient with faults. It is one of the Aten’s laws.” With the point of a slender forefinger she drew the crude figure of a child in the dust of lapis lazuli spread upon the pavement.

“First comes Merytaten. She is eight and thinks she has to mother all of us, especially Meketaten, who is seven. Meketaten is not very strong, you know. She has the same fainting spells father has, with strange dreams which haunt her afterward.” She drew a second figure on the floor, this time, lying down.

“I know all about that.” Baketaten lowered her voice to a mysterious whisper. “It is part of the curse!”

“What curse? It is just an illness none of the wise men have been able to cure.”

“To be sure, but they could have cured it if there had been no curse. In Thebes they say your father quarreled with the priests of Amon before he built this city, where only Aten could be worshiped. They say that at first Amon, God of Thebes and the Empire, did not mind, for almost every city of Egypt has its own special deity. Why not Akhetaten? But then your father closed the temples of Amon, even in Thebes, the god’s own city, and turned the priests from their rich lands. I have heard people talking about it in the palace. They think I don’t understand what it is all about, but I do. They say Akhenaten has stirred the wrath of Amon to a mighty revenge. It must be exciting to bear a great god’s curse!”

“That is a lie! Amon is not a great god, and we do not bear his curse. The royal family is blessed by the one God, Aten. We are blessed in truth and happiness and love. Only ignorant, superstitious people believe in all those old deities. Father will not let us so much as mention their names. There is one God who rules the world, and Akhenaten is His Chosen One on earth. You dare not deny it! Wait until we go to the temple at sunset, and you will see how blessed we are.”

“Well, I cannot help what people say. I just thought you might like to know. Of course, if you don’t care—”

“I did not say that. I just told you it isn’t true. What other tales do they tell in Thebes?”

“They say Akhenaten is sick, that Meketaten will die, and that Nefertiti is doomed never to have a son. They say that one day the City of the Horizon of Aten will be razed to the ground and not even the mummies in their tombs will rest in peace. All the jealous priests are spreading rumors like that. Of course Akhenaten may not be ill, and Meketaten may not die, but you must admit that Nefertiti has given six daughters to the King, and not a son to become Pharaoh of Egypt by marrying one of you! Just who is there for you to marry?”

“I am sure I don’t know. Merytaten’s husband, whoever he happens to be, will become Pharaoh. I do not need to worry about that. Smenkhkara is the one father favors, but he is very dull. It was your mother sent him here, I know, but I am glad I do not have to be his bride.”

“Well, at least he is of royal blood. That is something. He was always good to me when he lived at home in Thebes. You must admit he would make a handsome king.”

Ankhsenpaaten wrinkled her nose. “He is too pretty for my taste. If you dressed him up, he would make a beautiful princess. Many think he looks like mother. If I ever have to wed, I would rather marry some bold, brave prince of a distant country. Then I could see the world. If I were a boy, I would join the army and go to Syria to fight the Hittites.”

“Fight? I thought your father did not believe in fighting. That is one reason mother came to Akhetaten. She does not believe in war, but I heard her say it was time Akhenaten thought less of religion and more of preserving the Empire.”

“It is true father does not believe in fighting, and no doubt he is right. Yet it is a very good way to see the world. I talk to the palace guards whenever I can, and to the special police. Many of them have been with General Horemheb’s army in Syria. They say it is a life full of adventure. When I grow up, I shall not stay shut up here in Akhetaten all the while as father does.”

“Well, I would not mind marrying a foreign prince if he sent me caravans of beautiful gifts, and I could go right on living in Thebes, or here. I hope mother likes it here, but you never can be sure. Go on, tell me about the rest of the children.”

“There is nothing much to tell. I come after Meketaten, and I am almost six. Father and mother call me Small Bird because I am always hopping about and wanting to fly away. Then there is Nefer-nefru-Atenta-Shera,

Nefertiti the Little. We call her Ta-Shera for short. She is a nuisance and very vain. Every time you tease her, she cries, and then when you don't tease her, she flies into a temper because she wants attention! Little Kitten, Nefer-nefru-Ra, is adorable. She is two. Last of all is Setepenra, but everyone calls her just the Baby. I hope the next one is a boy, because we have about run out of names for girls."

"I am afraid it is useless to hope, with a curse upon you. Akhenaten will never have a son by Nefertiti. Everyone in Thebes knows that." It was Baketaten's turn to tease.

"It is not true! Aten will send Akhenaten a son to be Pharaoh of Egypt. You will see! I tell you there is no curse! There could not be!"

At that moment there was a commotion in the outer corridor. Hurriedly the door was flung open to admit nurses and slaves bearing the golden litter of Meketaten. No one paid the slightest attention to the two children, who scrambled to their feet and backed hastily out of the way.

Ankhsenpaaten recognized at once the strained anxiety on those familiar faces, and tried to catch a glimpse of Meketaten as the bearers set their burden gently on the floor and withdrew at Yatu's command. The waxen face against the pillow was drawn into pinched lines, closed eyelids shadowed with a strange, transparent blue like the stain of kohl. Her lips were colorless, and there seemed to be no stir of breath under the delicate necklaces which covered her breast. Ankhsenpaaten had seen her often so, but her death-like stillness took on new meaning in the light of Baketaten's quoted prophecy: "They say that Meketaten will not live."

Sick with sudden fear, Ankhsenpaaten watched Yatu bear the limp body into the room where waited Meketaten's wooden bed with its high foot of curling lotus buds. Ankhsenpaaten knew how heavily the long, narrow head would rest upon the wooden pillow, how quietly the fragile hands would lie

upon the linen sheets. She hovered in the doorway, longing to follow. Yet there was nothing she could do. There was nothing anyone could do if...

“Oh, I am sorry, Ankhsenpaaten. I did not know—I did not think!” Arms heavy with bracelets encircled her shoulders in an awkward embrace. Baketaten’s face, soft with compassion, was scarcely reassuring. “Pay no heed to what I said. Do not even think of it again. It was nothing but idle gossip. I am sorry now I ever told you that there was a curse!”

Ankhsenpaaten broke away from her embrace and stood alone, shivering even in the heavy, perfume-scented warmth.

“Of course there is no curse,” she said in a small tight voice. “It is just that Meketaten seems to droop and fade in summer heat. By evening she will be herself again.”



The Royal Banquet

CHAPTER III

A WARNING

ANKHSENPAATEN 's official meeting with her grandmother took place in the pillared loggia of the palace where, shaded from the sun by awnings, the feast of welcome was spread. Two meek and freshly garbed children were led into the royal presence by the solemn Merytaten. Already Queen Tiy, her son, and the beautiful Nefertiti were seated at tables covered with green cloths and piled high with spicy dishes prepared in the palace kitchens for the Royal Mother's pleasure. Baketaten was embraced tenderly by her brother and sister, but AnkhSENpaaten was left standing alone before Queen Tiy, whose black eyes examined her from head to foot with deliberate care. The culprit wriggled her bare toes and sought consolation in the knowledge that her long gown with its flare of pleats in front was immaculate. Even the headdress was properly adjusted, though her short, thick hair felt hot and prickly under the confining bands. Unflinching, she returned the Dowager

Queen's scrutiny, and if she was ill at ease, only her restless toes betrayed her.

"So this is Ankhsenpaaten! I see that you and Baketaten have already met. I trust you like each other? Such quiet, well-behaved children, both of you!" The acid voice set the child's teeth on edge, and she pressed her lips together against a tart reply. The Queen seemed to enjoy the flavor of her words, for she licked her lips and chuckled wickedly.

"Come, Baketaten, sit here beside me on this chair. If you behave yourself, I shall share with you such portion of the feast as I think may sweeten your temper. That will do, Ankhsenpaaten. I have seen quite enough of you for the present. It is just as well to keep you two turtle doves apart, if we are to have a peaceful meal!"

Thus dismissed, Ankhsenpaaten joined Merytaten already seated on a low cushioned stool beside Nefertiti, whose chair was placed a little behind that of the King. Demurely the Princess took her place, accepting with carefully spoken words of gratitude such tidbits as her mother gave her. Her stool was turned to face that of Merytaten, close enough so their knees touched and formed a table on which to place some of the fruit and sweetmeats. The King and Queen Mother sat face to face in cushioned chairs, their feet resting on elaborate footstools. Each was served from an individual table decorated with lotus blossoms and bowls of fruit. Here were spread tempting dishes of vegetables, meats, bread, and cakes. Beside the tables stood wine jars wreathed in garlands.

With evident relish Akhenaten attacked a large bone heavy with juicy meat, while Nefertiti selected a plump roast duck which she held in her hands as she ate. Ankhsenpaaten watched her grandmother out of the corner of her eye as the Queen tried first one dish, then another. Much to Ankhsenpaaten's disappointment, the full lips seemed to cover a firm set of teeth, but the child noticed that their guest avoided thick cuts of meat which

must be torn from the bone. Perhaps, after all, her teeth were not so sound! She seemed to be sampling everything placed before her, as if from curiosity rather than hunger, spearing things on a slender golden spike and eating daintily with long thin fingers.

Akhenaten also noticed the Queen Mother's lack of appetite, and questioned her anxiously. Was she not pleased with the repast? She used to take such keen delight in new dishes.

"Old people should not eat so much," she answered. "My years of feasting are past. Leave that to those who do the work of the world, to the young who carry the burdens willed them by the old. This vast Empire was no light burden left you by your father, my son. From what I hear of conditions in Syria and Palestine, you have much need of nourishment, you and your soldiers!"

Akhenaten shook his head. "It is not soldiers who can hold together the Empire, nor yet one man. Only Aten can do that, the Great Father who loves all His children and would have them follow the true faith. There will be no more battles and no more soldiers when the worship of Aten has spread throughout the world. It is teachers we need, men of vision who can go abroad and show mankind that there is no need of war, no need of taking life. Ah, if only I had a son who could travel far and wide, sharing with distant lands the revelation which has come to those who live here in Akhetaten!"

"You might well have a son as unlike you as you are unlike your father, with all his love of hunting and of sport!" the Queen Mother observed drily. "Seeing need for fighting, a son of yours might well prefer to fight, leaving preaching to priests, whose work it is."

"The peace we know at Akhetaten is not the work of priests, Royal Mother, but the Spirit of Aten at work in every soul." Pharaoh's voice rang with conviction. "Here you will find no poverty. Slaves no longer feel the

crack of overseers' whips. Men preparing the tombs in the eastern cliffs live in a village where each family has its own house and provisions in plenty. Here is health, because everywhere is sunlight and fresh air. High and low alike live bathed in the glory of the Aten. Fertile are the fields on the west bank of the river, and grain is plentiful for all. Even now the Nile is beginning to bring its annual gift of silt, and while the fields are flooded for many moons, the men will not be idle in discontent. There is building to be done. There are roads to be paved. Gladly men toil in garden and workshop creating beauty with skill in their fingers and joy in their hearts: faience like jewels and glass like bubbles of light, bowls of copper and gold, portrait statues made in the image of truth, all—all to the glory of the Living Aten!"

As he spoke, the King's face was transfigured by some inner light. The children paused in their eating to raise awed eyes to his radiant countenance. Only the Queen Mother seemed unimpressed.

"All that you say may be true, my son. Great is the beauty of Aten, and you have builded a city worthy to house His spirit. Great is the peace of this, your royal domain, but what of Asia? What of those loyal cities who look to you for protection? What of those vassals who send you tribute? Are they to perish—and the tribute of Egypt with them? You have vowed never to leave Akhetaten, but here to create a city of your dreams, a place of happiness and peace. That is all very well for you and those near to you. But are not those peoples of Syria and Palestine your children as well? Are they to be slain by Hittites and desert raiders, while you sit feasting and praising the sun which shines on everyone alike? Do you think the Aten, seeing all, can rejoice in Akhetaten, while His children and yours suffer famine and death in Asia?"

Her son paled under the lash of her words, but he answered quietly enough, "The Aten has shown me this way of life because it is His wish that here the ideal in family, in city, in temple, should find perfect expression as

an example to the world. The love which my sister, Nefertiti, and I bear each other, the beauty of our children, the peace and understanding of our home and of our Court—those things are pleasing to the Aten. Death and bloodshed please Him not. It would not right the wrongs of the hard-pressed cities on the borders of the Empire were I to send Horemheb and his army to punish with arrow and sword the misguided barbarians who watch like eagles ready to swoop down on an unguarded flock. Let the cities of Asia guard themselves as we guard Akhetaten.” He pointed across the low-lying garden to the bluffs blocked against the sky. “All along those cliffs patrols are kept night and day, until they have worn a path of safety about the whole city. Plundering bands do not dare swoop down upon us. Wild animals from the upper desert dare not creep upon our flocks. There is no need to kill in order to protect. There is but need to watch.”

“Words!” Queen Tiy waved aside the solicitous attendant who would have refilled her wine glass. “That is all very well for a strip of land surrounded by cliffs on one side and a river on the other, the whole but a toy village compared to the great cities of the earth. What know you of Syria? What know you of the dangers that beset those people of the north, of Byblos, of Simyra, and the treachery which grows up among neighbors left too long together when Pharaoh’s back is turned? Letters, travelers’ tales, emissaries who tell you only what their masters wish you to know! With your own eyes you have seen nothing. A king who would rule an empire must know the empire that he rules. You know only the visions of your own inspired soul!”

In her vehemence the Queen rose to her feet and paced back and forth across the painted pavement, trampling on the pictured ducks and fish among the water reeds, as if they were the enemies of her land. The King sat quiet and attentive as becomes a son who listens to the teachings of his mother, but Nefertiti watched him anxiously and rested a reassuring hand

upon his arm. He patted it absently, his eyes never leaving the tense figure of the woman who had been the real ruler of Egypt during his father's gay and carefree lifetime. Then the Empire had rested secure in the glory of conquests made by militant ancestors. The Court lived in splendor. The priests of Amon waxed rich and arrogant.

Blessed with daughters, Queen Tiy had waited long for a son. When he was still a mere boy, it was she who had placed him on the throne as co-regent, training him for his responsibilities as Pharaoh of Egypt. It was she who had encouraged the strange visions which made him seem possessed of some great power denied to other men. His vision of Aten as the one and only God—God of the whole world, not of one city or country as Amon had been—how well it had fitted in with her own plan to choke once and for all the power of the Amon priesthood! He understood that now. She had even thought it wise to build a new city, to give the worship of Aten a place of its own, as the gods of Egypt had had from time immemorial. But for Pharaoh to isolate himself completely, to swear never to leave the City of the Horizon, to shut himself away from the people he sought to rule—that was another matter. That was something her imperial soul could never understand. So she told him, pacing back and forth, gesturing with tense arms and clenched fists, as if by example she could tighten his grip on the Empire slipping through his fingers.

In spite of her eloquence, Akhenaten made answer with quiet patience. "If all you say is true, in time I shall lose the Empire my ancestors gained, but remember it is mine to lose—my personal property, my treasure and mine alone. If I am unable to hold that treasure by the strength of my spirit and by the love and aid of Aten the Father, then I shall make no attempt to hold it by force, breaking the commandments of my God. When you have lived here among us, you will grow to feel as I do. The Spirit of the Aten will enter more fully into your soul, and you will find yourself at peace.

Come, let us rest awhile in the quiet of our apartments, for as the sun sinks lower, we shall go to the Great Temple to offer sacrifice and expressions of gratitude for your safe coming.”

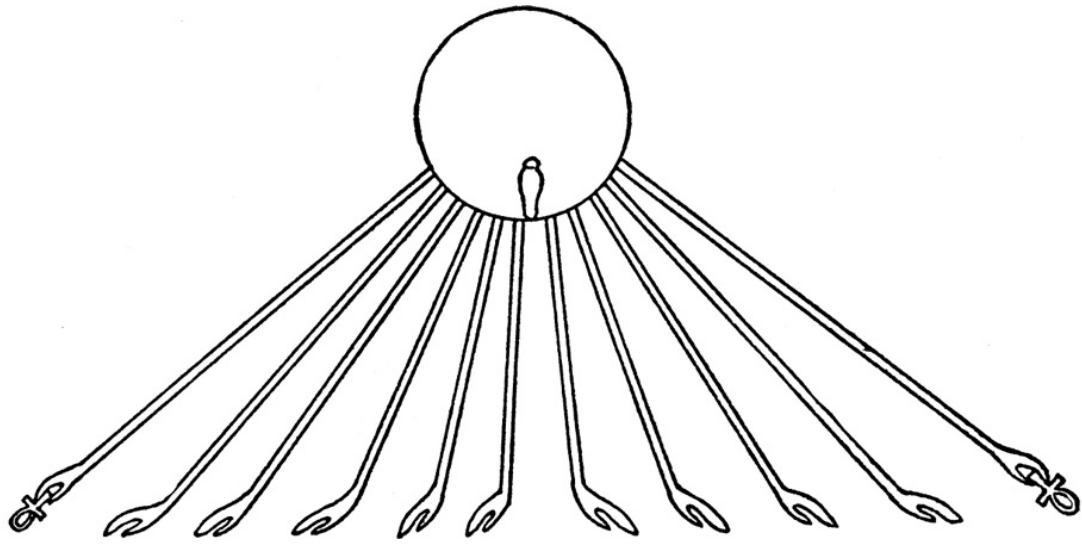
The Queen Mother looked at her son as though he were a perfect stranger, a man whose mental processes she could never hope to follow. What excess of devotion had changed a son of power-loving Pharaohs into a poet-priest? She, too, followed the precepts of Aten, but they did not blind her to the need of an empire!

So with gentle dignity did Akhenaten dismiss the words of his mother. Tenderly he kissed her wrinkled cheek, patted the shoulder of the wide-eyed Baketaten, who had taken refuge within the shelter of the young Queen’s sisterly embrace, and sent them with an escort to the harem. Then, leaning wearily on Nefertiti’s arm, he walked with slow and dragging step across the pillared portico and disappeared into the apartment which the royal couple shared.

The two small sisters, feeling much of what went on, but understanding little, had sat amazed before that torrent of words. Long afterward Ankhsenpaaten found them echoing in her ears, a prophecy of conflict she herself must share. At heart she felt her father must be right; yet daily she was taught that wisdom comes with years, and youth must bow to age. She voiced her bewilderment to Merytaten as they went slowly back to the nursery and the cool comfort of a plunge in the pool before the evening visit to the temple.

“The Great Royal Mother seems to know everything; she has so much to say!”

“Yes, I have no doubt that she is very wise,” Merytaten answered soberly. “But let us both remember father’s warning: it is not always the loudest voice which speaks the greatest truth!”



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Merytaten Holding a Sistrum

CHAPTER IV

THE BLESSING OF ATEN

ALL the inhabitants of Akhetaten lined the streets as the royal procession appeared outside the palace. Akhenaten wished to give the Queen Mother a glimpse of the beauties which he had created in four short years, before taking her at sundown to the Great Temple of Aten for the services which closed each day.

Parallel to the river ran the wide thoroughfare known as the Royal Road. It started several miles to the south, at Maru Aten, the pleasure palace of the King, with its lakes and pavilions where the children so loved to go. Entering the Southern City, it skirted the large estates of some of the nobles, then passed between the Official Palace and the King's House, where the road was spanned by the covered bridge with its three openings and the famous Window of Appearance. Farther on, the Royal Road passed the Great Temple and then led along the water front to the North Suburb where

a palace was even then being built for the Queen. Farther east ran a parallel thoroughfare known as High Priest Street, and beyond this a third artery called East Road. These were connected by cross-streets giving access to the various public buildings.

There was no time for a long drive before the hour of sunset, but the procession wound its way back and forth past the various official buildings, that the Dowager Queen might see and be seen before the cavalcade stopped at the main entrance of the Great Temple enclosure. Ahead raced a guard of soldiers armed with spears, short swords, and shields, to clear the way for Akhenaten's chariot with its prancing bay stallions, their heads tossing under red and yellow ostrich plumes. The King drove, his skillful hands controlling with ease his spirited team. Beside him in the chariot of gleaming electrum stood Queen Tiy, that he might point out to her all he had accomplished with the help of Bek, the Chief Sculptor, who had directed the quarrying of the red Aswan granite and superintended much of the building.

Back of the King appeared Nefertiti, driving her own white mares, while the charioteer ran near the horses' heads, ready to take the reins if she grew weary. After her came two chariots for the Princesses. Ankhsenpaaten and Baketaten were under the watchful eye of one charioteer, Merytaten and Ta-Shera with another. Following the royal family were the carriages of the Court officials and ladies-in-waiting, decorated with fluttering streamers. The horses were resplendent in leather harness studded with gold. Among the guards who ran beside the chariots were men from every part of the Empire. Baketaten was an eager questioner as they rattled over the paved streets.

"Who is that absurd fat man puffing along by the King's chariot? If his two stalwart servants did not hold him up and shove him along, he would never keep going at this pace!"

“Oh, that is Nakht, the Vizier. He gets so much exercise running beside the royal chariot, I don’t see how he can grow so fat!”

“Banquets and wine!” Baketaten laughed shrewdly. “Who is that queer-looking fellow, the fair-skinned one with a braid of hair hanging from the side of his head?”

“He is a Libyan from the great desert to the west.” Ankhsenpaaten could scarcely make herself heard above the clatter of prancing hoofs and the shouts of the people. “The men with long beards and great curved noses come from Syria, though some of them are Hittite slaves. I like to watch the Nubians and the Sudanese, the very black ones with wild-beast skins thrown over their shoulders.”

“I don’t! They make me think of those big, black litter bearers who couldn’t understand a word I said!” Baketaten laughed ruefully. “What is that building with all the pillars across the front?”

“That is the School for Scribes, the University. I would go there if I were a boy. I’d like to be a maher, trained for the duty of traveling on royal business in foreign countries. Then I could see the world.”

“I thought you wanted to be a soldier,” Baketaten reminded her.

“I do, but father would never consent to it. I might as well wish to be a scribe. At that, I have just about as much chance of being one as the other. I don’t see why they don’t let girls learn to read and write. I know how to read some of the hieroglyphs now. Father taught me. Those buildings are the Police Headquarters. There are the dormitories for the men. It is fun to watch the Mazoi drill. There is a flying squad with horses kept harnessed ready to leave at a moment’s notice. They practice every day on that big parade ground with the well in the middle, and go dashing off across the desert so fast no wicked one ever has a chance to escape. You ought to see their horses. They are almost as beautiful as those in father’s stables.”

“I never saw any as beautiful as that white team your mother drives. They are the only white horses in the whole procession.”

“They came as a gift from Dushratta, King of Mittani,” Ankhsenpaaten answered proudly. “Father prefers the bays raised on his own farms by Ranefer, the Master of Horse. The royal horses of Egypt have become famous everywhere, and other rulers ask him to send them mares and stallions for breeding.”

“They asked my father to send them gold. I’ve heard mother say that they kept writing for more and more, declaring that in Egypt gold was as the dust on the roads. He sent it to them, too. Precious metals meant nothing to Amenhotep the Magnificent.”

“They mean nothing to Akhenaten, either,” Ankhsenpaaten answered. “He has all the gold he needs, but he much prefers his flowers and his animals.”

“Well, mother says if he prefers his flowers and his animals much longer, he won’t have all the gold he needs. Soon there won’t be any more foreign tribute, and then what will he do?”

“That could never be!” Ankhsenpaaten was scornful. “No more foreign tribute? Just wait until winter time after the inundation, and you will find out how much foreign tribute comes every year. It is such fun to see the strange people and the things they bring. That long building is where they store most of the tribute.”

“Yes, and over there is the Record Office. Mother told Akhenaten before we left the palace that she was going to stop there, even if she missed the temple service altogether!”

In front of the Record Office the procession halted while Akhenaten and Nefertiti accompanied the Dowager Queen within to inspect the latest letters from Ribaddi, the Kazanu of Byblos, which she insisted upon reading without further delay. Grooms held the restless horses, and the

Mazoi had difficulty in keeping back the crowd, grown boisterous after a day of gaiety and freedom. There would be wine and feasting far into the night. The prospect brought a sparkle to dark eyes and a shrill note to clamorous voices demanding a better view of the royal household in holiday attire.

Ankhsenpaaten paid no attention to their good-natured stares until she caught sight of a boy's face regarding her intently from the edge of the crowd. Dark, luminous eyes beneath black brows were fixed upon her with a look so eager, so piercing, that she felt vaguely uncomfortable under such scrutiny from a stranger. That he was a stranger she knew by the long hair hanging about his shoulders and curled on top of his head in some intricate fashion unknown to natives of Egypt, and also by the fact that the keen eyes met hers with no sign of recognition. Even the least of Pharaoh's subjects in the City of the Horizon knew the Princesses by sight, and had an answering smile for Ankhsenpaaten's laughing glance. She watched him curiously, and was about to point him out to Baketaten, when her attention was caught by a disturbance at the head of the waiting procession. The people were getting out of hand in their impatience, and Akhenaten's high-strung bays plunged and snorted as the crowd pressed close.

"The horses of the King and Queen are fiery creatures," Baketaten observed, "but this team of yours has no more spirit than a pair of mules."

"They are well trained!" The Princess flashed a resentful glance at her guest. "If you think they lack spirit, you are no judge of horses. See!"

Before the charioteer was aware of her intention, she caught up the gold whip which rested in a metal quiver near his hand, and with a deft twist of her wrist cracked it just behind the horses' heads. As if at a royal command, the startled beasts rose high on their hind legs, snorting and pawing the air, while the two small grooms dangled helplessly from the bridles. The chariot tipped at such a perilous angle that Baketaten was thrown to the floor, while

Ankhsenpaaten was forced to fling the whip from her and clutch the rim of the chariot with both hands. The charioteer, caught off guard, recovered his balance with difficulty and shouted at the bewildered team. His voice was drowned in the shrieks of the crowd, and again the horses rose straight in the air, until it seemed to Ankhsenpaaten that the broad gleaming backs and high-flung heads were about to crash down upon the fragile shell of gilded chariot. She laughed aloud, gleefully aware of the terrified Baketaten huddled at her feet. Even at the moment of greatest danger, Ankhsenpaaten stood with head thrown back, eager face uplifted. Here was adventure, and she would make the most of it!

The horses, well trained indeed, responded at once to the voice of the Queen's charioteer, who tossed his reins to a groom and sprang to the rescue. The bewildered creatures dropped to their places, tense and quivering, and the crowd, cheated of a runaway, found another vent for its excitement. The royal whip, dropped by the Princess, was yet to be recovered, and the Mazoi hastened to clear the pavement in the immediate vicinity of the chariot, while a hasty search took place. Like all royal equipment, the whip was a thing of rare beauty, its gold handle intricately carved in the shape of a lion's head, with inlaid eyes and a collar of precious stones. Ankhsenpaaten's heart sank at the possibility that it might have been damaged, for it was one of the gifts brought by the Royal Mother from Thebes. That it might have vanished altogether was unthinkable.

"Someone must have taken it!" she cried, peering down at the empty pavement. Those on the edge of the crowd caught up her words and tossed them back and forth.

"Someone has taken it—the royal whip, the gold-handled whip of the Princess Ankhsenpaaten!"

Then from some place near at hand a woman's voice rose above the others: "A boy took it! I saw him with my own eyes! He snatched it from

under the very hoofs of the royal horses. He's the thief! Catch him!"

At once the hubbub broke out afresh. Ankhsenpaaten, watching the eager, shouting people bent on doing her service, felt a warm sense of power. She had caused all that by one expert crack of a chariot whip. To be sure the horses had settled quietly in their places, but voices far down the street were taking up the shout:

"The royal whip! Catch the thief!"

The Princess glanced at Baketaten with secret satisfaction. That young lady had scrambled to her feet and straightened her rumpled pleats as best she could, but there was an unmistakable gleam of envy beneath her narrowed lids. Had not every eye been turned upon Ankhsenpaaten, standing straight and fearless in the face of danger? Had a single person put out a hand to rescue her, Baketaten, royal visitor and sister of the Great King, dumped in an ignominious heap on the floor of the chariot?

The Mazoi were struggling to quiet the surging crowd pushing against the lines of soldiers. Ankhsenpaaten surveyed the unruly mob with growing uneasiness. An ugly note was creeping into their cries. It was time to call a halt. She raised her hand for silence as she had seen her father do, but no one paid the slightest heed to the slender arm of a Princess. It had been a simple matter to send a wave of excitement along the broad avenue, but it was quite another matter to stop it. Ankhsenpaaten wished desperately that her father would come.

She found herself searching the faces nearest her for a glimpse of the tall, broad-shouldered youth who had watched her so intently. Was he part of that shouting throng, thirsty for the capture of some frightened boy? As if in answer to her thought, the familiar face with its frame of black hair appeared just beyond the line of palace guards. The lad was trying to force his way through their ranks, his bronzed face set. As their eyes met,

impulsively the Princess smiled. Instantly he raised high above his head the gleaming shaft of the royal whip.

Ankhsenpaaten cried aloud at sight of it, and called a Captain of the Mazoi to let the boy through the line. But already the whip had been seen by the nearest palace guard. He snatched it with a shout of "Here's the thief!" and brought it down with a vicious cut across the dark head. The lad went down under the blow and vanished in the seething mass of human bodies. Whereupon the guard, well content to have recovered the missing treasure, left the culprit to the mercy of the crowd, and returned the whip to the charioteer.

Ankhsenpaaten's outraged protests were cut short by a burst of martial music, and of a sudden she found herself once more merely a very small Princess in a very long procession. Akhenaten and the two Queens appeared at the entrance of the Record Office, and a reverent silence swept over the watching crowd as they took their places in the waiting chariots. Briskly the horses moved forward. Only Ankhsenpaaten, looking back helplessly over the side of her chariot, gave a thought to the dark-eyed boy who by her folly had been branded thief. She had not meant to bring a lad to harm. Had he been knocked unconscious? Had the crowd, unthinking, trampled him under foot, or had the Mazoi seized him and locked him up for questioning?

The Princess roused herself when they turned once more into the Royal Road, and remembered her duties as hostess.

"There is Meryra, the High Priest, waiting for us before the gateway of the temple," she informed her disgruntled companion. "Everyone loves him. When father made him Great Seer of the Aten, we gave him so many gold bracelets, pectorals, and other costly gifts, it took all the men of his household to carry them home! They lifted him on their shoulders and shouted and sang. Oh, it was a sight worth seeing! Come, now we must be good."

“I have been good,” Baketaten observed, but Ankhsenpaaten ignored the comment.

“If you watch carefully everything we do, perhaps next time you may stand upon the altar steps with us and play the sistrum while mother and father offer sacrifice.”

As the chariots halted before the great double pylons which formed the entrance to the temple enclosure, Meryra stepped forward to welcome the King and the Queen Mother, while Panehsy, Chief Steward of the God, gave greeting to Nefertiti. The splendor of the temple was all very familiar to Ankhsenpaaten, but Baketaten stared curiously at a place of worship so unlike the dark and gloomy temples of Thebes. With the King and Nefertiti leading the way, the royal party entered the gate and approached the first temple behind its pillared portico. For a moment they paused before those white pylons of Per-Hai, the House of Rejoicing, and raised their eyes to follow the slender lines of tall masts which pierced the sky, five on the face of each pylon. From these streamed long pennons of scarlet, which curled and twisted in the fitful breeze.

Great doors swung open to let the royal family pass. Beyond that imposing entrance a platform overlooked a columned court, and steps led down to a wide plastered floor surrounding a central altar loaded with fruit and garlands. Pausing to leave offerings of flowers as they passed, the King and Queen followed Meryra up a flight of steps leading to a narrow causeway which ran the full length of the building. Steadily the procession moved through court after court, separated by elaborate gateways, each area crowded with square offering tables of stone, and all open to the sun.

At last they reached an irregular colonnade which gave access to the Court of the High Altar. Even Ankhsenpaaten caught her breath as she gazed upon that sacred place. At the far end rose the holy altar between statues of the King and Nefertiti, each holding a tray of gifts. On every side

were piled fruit and blossoms brought in loving tribute to the Aten, but all eyes were drawn to that great central pile of white granite, bathed in the warm rays of the setting sun. Joyously the three Princesses took their places on the lowest step, swaying lightly to the rhythm of the strums which they waved in time with the music of blind musicians grouped on one side.

Slowly the King and Queen mounted the altar, one step at a time, their scarlet sashes making splashes of vivid color against white draperies. Anointed by the High Priest, together they made their offerings, first the King and then the Queen. When the King burned incense, the Queen held the offering, and when the Queen burned incense, the King held the offering. Now and then they smiled as their hands touched. Love and joy were most acceptable to Him whom they served. So also were the gay sound of the sistrum in the hands of little children and the sweet voices of blind singers who praised the God they could not see.

Almost overpowering was the scent of hyacinths, lotus blossoms, acacias, yellow flags, and perfumes in open alabaster jars. Ankhsenpaaten, as always, was strangely stirred by the color, the smothering sweetness of the flowers so close at hand, the rippling sound of lute and harp, the pulsing, insistent rhythm of the chants.

Silence fell upon the assembled Court. The King lifted up the last gift of golden oranges, figs, and wine-red pomegranates. High above them all he stood, bathed in saffron light. His face was rapt, his voice clear, exultant, as he chanted the Hymn which he had composed to the glory of the God he loved:

“Thy dawning is beautiful in the horizon of heaven,
O Living Aten, Beginning of Life!
When Thou risest in the eastern horizon of heaven,
Thou fillest every land with Thy beauty...
Though Thou art afar, Thy rays are on the earth;

Though Thou art on high, Thy footprints are the day...
All cattle rest upon the herbage,
All trees and plants flourish;
The birds flutter in their marshes,
Their wings uplifted in adoration to Thee.
All the sheep dance upon their feet,
All winged things fly,
They live when Thou hast shone upon them...
When the chicken crieth in the eggshell,
Thou givest him breath therein, to preserve him alive;
When Thou hast perfected him
That he may pierce the egg,
He cometh forth from the egg,
To chirp with all his might;
He runneth about upon his two feet,
When he hath come forth therefrom.
The countries of Syria and Nubia,
The land of Egypt;
Thou settest every man in his place,
Thou suppliest their necessities.
Every one has his possessions,
And his days are reckoned.
Their tongues are diverse in speech,
Their forms likewise and their skins,
For Thou, divider, hast divided the peoples...
Thou makest the seasons, in order to create all Thy works;
Winter bringeth them coolness,
And the heat the summer bringeth.
Thou hast made the distant heaven in order to rise therein,

In order to behold all that Thou didst make,
While Thou wast alone,
Rising in Thy form as Living Aten,
Dawning, shining afar off, and returning...
Thou art in my heart;
There is no other that knoweth Thee,
Save Thy son Akhenaten.
Thou hast made him wise in Thy designs
And in Thy might...
Since Thou didst establish the earth...

...for Thy son,
Who came forth from Thy limbs,
The King, living in truth...
Akhenaten, whose life is long;
And for the great royal wife, his beloved,
Mistress of the Two Lands...Nefertiti,
Living and flourishing forever and ever.”

With the slow sweep of the words, the golden light had slipped gradually up the face of the altar until the court lay in shadow, and only the King and Queen standing before the topmost step were crowned by the last blessed rays of the sun. Now as the resonant voice grew silent, Pharaoh's upturned face shone for a moment under the caressing touch of the Aten before He vanished for His long night's journey. With a visible effort Akhenaten withdrew his gaze from the horizon. The faces of the priests and royal worshipers in the temple court were a white blur in the gathering dusk far below him. Closer by far to the King's uplifted soul was that Source of Life, the Sun, his Father. If only he could share that life-giving radiance with these, his children! In a gesture of infinite tenderness, Akhenaten lifted

both hands by way of benediction, then slowly descended the steps into the waiting shadows, Nefertiti by his side.



Blind Singers



Dancers

CHAPTER V

A SHADOW ON THE MOON

THE children had been looking forward with great delight to the banquet planned for the first evening of the Queen Mother's visit. The private dinner at noon had been filling and enjoyable, though a bit overburdened with grown-up conversation. Far more entertaining would be the light evening meal served in the banquet hall, with courtiers and their ladies standing about while the royal family ate in state on the raised platform at one end of the room. Ankhsenpaaten, Merytaten, and Baketaten were allowed to stay up for the festivities. Meketaten, however, was not well enough to appear.

Ankhsenpaaten loved the great banquet hall with its gaily colored pillars touched with bands of gold and its decorated pavement of painted pools and growing things. Down the center aisle the floor was covered with drawings of chained prisoners, Blacks and Asians, who bore so patiently the tread of many feet that Ankhsenpaaten did her best to step lightly on them as she passed. On either side of this pathway was a group of eight tall columns,

surrounding the painted image of a long tank full of lotus blossoms. Ankhsenpaaten liked to count the goldfish which seemed to dart back and forth among the green stems of water plants, and she knew where each bird and animal frolicked through the brilliant foliage so skillfully painted around the margins of the pools.

Baketaten was allowed to sit with the two Princesses near Nefertiti, while the guest of honor was placed as before, facing the King and Queen. Beside them stood three flower-decked tables piled high with good things, and behind each chair attendants kept the air stirring gently with the soft sweep of feather fans. These fan bearers were special attendants selected by the King, tall, well-built women with heads shaved like men.

The hall was lighted by flaring lamps raised upon tall stands, and all about were groups of nobles and ladies-in-waiting, talking and laughing as they partook of the delicacies passed by the ever-watchful attendants. Jars of wine, their pointed bases resting in metal frames, were placed where they could be readily reached by the black slaves, who replenished the golden goblets of the guests with sweet, clear liquid, murmuring as they did so:

“May the wine do you good!”

Tonight even in the palace the air was cool, and the gauzy attire of the royal family had been replaced by heavier draperies. The King's body was covered by a mantle of soft linen, and his sandaled feet rested upon a footstool. As usual, his narrow chest was bare of all ornament, though the nobles wore the customary pectorals: heavy necklaces of intricate design which covered the breast and back with gold plaques held by festoons of beads and precious stones. Both Akhenaten and Nefertiti had exchanged heavy crowns for gold fillets with the uraeus, serpent of royalty, curving over the forehead. The Dowager Queen, however, still wore her complicated headdress with its gold disk, its curving horns, uraeus, and two tall plumes. Ankhsenpaaten wondered how she managed to keep it straight

on top of the thick, old-fashioned wig. Perhaps that was why her grandmother seemed so dignified—she did not dare to bow her stately head!

At the thought, Ankhsenpaaten smiled with secret satisfaction. Perhaps some day she could catch the Great Queen unawares and find her human after all. Deep in her heart she felt an inner bond between her own troublesome self-will and the arrogance of this strangely powerful woman.

As the royal family took their places, basins of perfumed water for their hands and those of the guests were brought by women slaves. When slender fingers heavy with rings had been dipped in the copper bowls and dried on towels of sheer linen, young girls, favorites of the King, distributed wreaths of lotus blooms and little pellets of kyphi mixed with honey, chewed by women of Egypt that the breath of their mouths might be sweet.

The Chief Anointer next appeared, a tall, dignified noble whose duty it was to place upon the head of Pharaoh the ball of qemi, rarest of perfumed oils. For hours it had soaked in costly fluid, and now would rest on the head of Akhenaten during the entire feast, that the heavy oil might impart its fragrance to his wig. The members of the royal family and the guests were thus anointed with qemi, a mark of great honor reserved for the privileged few. For their protection all dishes set on the royal tables were sampled by the Official Taster and also by Huya, Superintendent of the Royal Harem.

The three Princesses looked about the room with wide-eyed anticipation. Most of the floor between the columns had been kept clear by the efficient Huya for the troupes of entertainers who would come in quick succession to amuse the guests while they ate. In fact the children could scarcely eat at all, once the performers made their appearance. There were acrobats, women as well as men, who held the Princesses breathless with their daring and skill. Lightly they leaped upon one another's shoulders to form high pyramids and complicated set-pieces, springing to the ground

again with apparent disregard for life and limb. Then there were two bandy-legged dwarfs, homely little fellows with bulging heads above stunted bodies, who ambled about and made sly jests while the more serious feats were being performed. Singers came and dancers, some stately and graceful, others full of gay abandon. The dwarfs mimicked them all, rolling and tumbling about like awkward puppies. They were privileged characters and even raised impudent, mocking faces to the Dowager Queen, directing much of their waggish banter where they thought it would cause her the greatest amusement.

Ankhsenpaaten was so excited she could not sit still, but kept jumping to her feet to applaud some clever bit of tumbling, or to run to her mother with some particularly choice fruit. Among the cakes she found one shaped like a harp, which she must offer to a young harpist in the orchestra. Not even the piercing gaze of the Dowager Queen or the frown of the Great Royal Nurse could curb her high spirits.

Baketaten watched her small hostess jealously. Her own mother had given her explicit instructions as to the formality of behavior demanded at a state banquet planned for grown-ups, not for children. She dared not move from her place beside the quiet Merytaten, who ate almost nothing and kept glancing toward the door as if fearing some alarming message from the nursery. It was irritating to see Ankhsenpaaten the center of so much smiling attention, for everyone greeted her with friendly nods, and neither Nefertiti nor Akhenaten seemed in the least disturbed by her restlessness. They accepted her offerings and patted the hand that gave them, while even Queen Tiy seemed less annoyed than usual by so unconventional a procedure. Baketaten wriggled in her seat and bit into a yellow peach with a resentful click of her white teeth. She could imagine what would happen should she behave so. Her mother would send her from the room!

All went well as the feast progressed, until a group of famous jugglers appeared. Wine—excellent wine of His Majesty’s growth—had been passed many times by the quiet slaves, each with his white napkin thrown over one arm. The company was growing lively and loquacious. Often the men joined in the songs of the musicians who played from time to time, and clapped their hands in rhythm to the dancers’ movements. Great was the applause which greeted the appearance of this particular group. Apparently they were favorites of the Court, slim, muscular girls, little more than children. As they turned cartwheels and backflips with gay assurance, Ankhsenpaaten whispered to Baketaten:

“I can do that!”

“Indeed! I’d like to see you try it!”

“Very well. Tomorrow I shall take you down by the pool at the bottom of the garden and do almost every trick those girls can do.”

“You mean you will almost do them! Oh, look!”

From a basket the troupe had produced dozens of bright red balls, which were tossed into the air with such rapidity that they wove a shifting pattern of color above the performers’ heads. Back and forth from one to the other they flew, so quickly that the eye could not detect which hand was catching and which throwing the bright spheres.

“I suppose you can do that, too!” Baketaten whispered under cover of the applause. Ankhsenpaaten nodded.

“I could if I tried.”

Baketaten laughed. It was not a pleasant laugh, and something in its jeering tone brought a flash to Ankhsenpaaten’s eye.

“You don’t believe me, but wait until tomorrow. You’ll see.”

“Tomorrow!” Baketaten was pleased to have found a way to annoy her hostess without getting herself into trouble. “Tomorrow is but a dream, and you are dreaming if you think you can do such things as that!”

“Do you want to see me do them now?”

“Wouldn’t I like to!” Baketaten laughed aloud.

That was too much. Reaching for several plums, Ankhsenpaaten leaned forward in her chair and tossed one into the air, catching it with the other hand and following it quickly with another, until four were in motion at once. Her movements were a bit jerky, and the plums did not flow very evenly from one hand to the other, but the performance did not merit Baketaten’s scornful taunt:

“Anyone can do that! Try it with one hand.”

Ankhsenpaaten took a long breath and started cautiously with two plums. After a few moments, she managed to add a third, handling them with considerable skill. Completely absorbed, she did not notice that she was being observed by her elders. Baketaten noticed, however, and her eyes narrowed with sudden determination.

“Here, catch these if you can!” she murmured, and with a deft gesture tossed three more plums into the air above the small performer’s head. Taken by surprise, Ankhsenpaaten made a grab for the fruit with both hands at once, and sent it flying in all directions. Two plums met in mid-air and rolled out on the floor under the feet of the acrobats. Another dropped into a bowl of wine to send a shower of scarlet drops over the Queen Mother’s white gown. In a frantic effort to clutch at least one of them, Ankhsenpaaten lurched forward, only to feel the legs of her chair slip out from under her. The next moment she found herself flat on her back under a shower of fruit and cakes from a table over-turned by Baketaten in her haste to get out of the way.

Attendants sprang to the rescue, and a wave of laughter swept over the room, laughter far more humiliating than any scolding. Through a blur of plum juice and cake crumbs, the would-be juggler caught a glimpse of Baketaten’s gleeful countenance and Queen Tiy’s grim face as she viewed

her stained robe. Then the child closed her eyes and buried her shame in the crook of a protecting elbow.

At a word from Akhenaten, Ankhsenpaaten was lifted in the arms of a slave and carried unceremoniously from the banquet hall. Without a struggle she endured the firm hold of muscular arms and the touch of hot breath against her shoulder. She hated to be carried, but there was no escape. From the doorway, reassured by the amusement in her father's voice, she ventured a last look at the scene of her downfall; but not even his smiling countenance could console her for the gentle rebuke in her mother's gaze, or the tilt of Baketaten's nose as she took the seat of honor by Nefertiti's side.

Ankhsenpaaten's reception in the nursery was as unexpected as her exit from the banquet hall. Yatu viewed her plight without a word of reproach. Brusquely she turned the small culprit over to a young slave girl to be washed and put to bed, admonishing both to be silent during the process. Meketaten must have absolute quiet even at the cost of family discipline. Perhaps Yatu thought the child in her bedraggled finery had suffered punishment enough in being banished from the feast. Certainly the little slave did her work with vigor and dispatch. In a few moments the once resplendent Princess, shorn of her fine feathers, was but a brown Small Bird, clad only in her sweet-scented cleanliness.

Banished to the cool, close silence of her bedroom, Ankhsenpaaten lay stiff and rebellious beneath the smooth linen sheets. If she deserved to be in bed, Baketaten deserved to be there too, and if that sly villain was allowed to stay up, there was no reason why she should not stay up as well. With that conviction came a growing desire to take justice into her own hands. Careful to follow Yatu's injunctions as to silence, she crept out of bed and groped in the darkness for the linen robe left lying on a chest beside the door. A night light flickered in the narrow corridor from which opened three

of the six nurseries. Merytaten and Meketaten slept in rooms on a second narrow corridor where it was more quiet. Steadying herself with a light hand against the wall, Ankhsenpaaten tiptoed to the door of the main nursery and stood listening, her body pressed close to the cool plaster. From the bathroom came the voice of Yatu, giving final instructions to the other nurses.

The child strained her ears, half expecting to hear the sound of her own name. Since no one seemed aware of her presence, she gained courage to dart across the outer room into the corridor. A few minutes later she slipped from pillar to pillar through the portico overlooking the palace garden, and perched on the top step, concealed from prying eyes by the base of a large statue. Below, shadows were deepened by a full yellow moon rising above the eastern cliffs. The terraces were deserted, and no sound drifted from beyond the walls save now and then the step of a passer-by or the clatter of hoofs as a belated chariot made its way along the Royal Road.

The gaiety and noise within the palace were but faintly heard, and Ankhsenpaaten felt strangely alone in an unaccustomed world of silence and shadow. The garden was no longer a pleasant place where she and her sisters played each day, but a strange spot, the haunt of shifting, beckoning shapes. Her fancy peopled it with the beings of Yatu's fairy tales. Hugging her knees, she rocked gently back and forth, lost in the magic of her dreams.

All at once she sat very still. The trees were misted with moonlight, and the garden lay below her like a painting, framed by the clear-cut outline of a high wall. Where the wall cut across the great yellow disk of the rising moon, a dark crouching figure had suddenly appeared, like some unearthly being of the moon itself. For a moment the intruder raised an inquiring head; then as two sentinels pacing along the street outside the royal estate challenged each other sharply, he dropped from view, vanishing into the engulfing shadows of the garden.

Ankhsenpaaten closed her eyes, then opened them again. The garden lay as before, silent and apparently deserted. She shivered a little in her scanty robe and drew it more closely about her. The desert night was sharp, but the stone of the statue beside which she sat was warm against her shoulder. Surely she had not been asleep. Perhaps she had imagined that slender shadow against the moon. So often her daydreams took form before her eyes. Why not half-waking visions of the night?

On a sudden impulse, she sprang to her feet and ran lightly down the steps to the second terrace, making her way along the fragrant paths until she reached a point directly opposite that at which the strange apparition had appeared. There she stopped in the protecting shadows and listened intently. Her eyes, accustomed to the gloom, found no unfamiliar shape to cause alarm. The irregular splash of the fountain on the lower terrace was clear on the night air, though she could not see it through the thick intervening growth. Below her, orderly rows of fruit trees and acacias gave place to masses of flowering shrubs, with here and there an oleander loaded with dark blossoms.

Down another flight of shallow steps Ankhsenpaaten felt her way, avoiding the path and slipping through a familiar tangle of undergrowth with stealthy watchfulness. The magic of forbidden adventure drew her on, eager, unafraid. She would pretend the shadow on the moon was real and that she alone was brave enough to face that unknown being from a distant world. Perhaps she would find him by the fountain. She had always felt that to be a place made for secret meetings. Almost the only open space on the lowest terrace was there where a circle of pavement pushed the shrubbery back to make room for a small summer house. The light roof on its delicate pillars was buried under a thick growth of jasmine, and as the child crept close to the edge of the opening and peered cautiously through the branches, the delicate fragrance was like the touch of a friendly hand in the

dark. The fountain lay shimmering in a pool of moonlight, its lilies closed, its goldfish lost among the stems of water plants. A slender column of water, rising like a crystal plume, spangled the surface with silver as it fell.

Reassured, the child stepped from her hiding place and walked across the painted pavement to the margin of the fountain. Kneeling on the edge, she stretched out her hand to catch the glittering crystals as they fell. A sentinel passed a few yards away beyond the garden wall, but his step went unheeded. For the moment she had even forgotten the shadow she had come to meet, for as she watched the dancing drops, her heart began to dance in gay response. Here there was no one to forbid, no one to watch. She let her robe slip to the ground and stood poised at the water's edge, a slim little figure with close-cropped hair and the lithe, muscular grace of a boy. For a few stolen moments she would forget that she had almost reached the dignity of six, and would be a Wise Little One once more.

Crouching like a frog, she splashed the surface of the pool with the flat of her hand, baby fashion, and laughed aloud. It was warm here among the plants. The Aten had left His breath upon the garden, that it might live through the night until His coming. As she felt His nearness, there was the whisper of a prayer on the child's lips, the echo of her father's words:

“Though Thou art afar, Thy rays are on earth;
Though Thou art on high, Thy footprints are the day.”

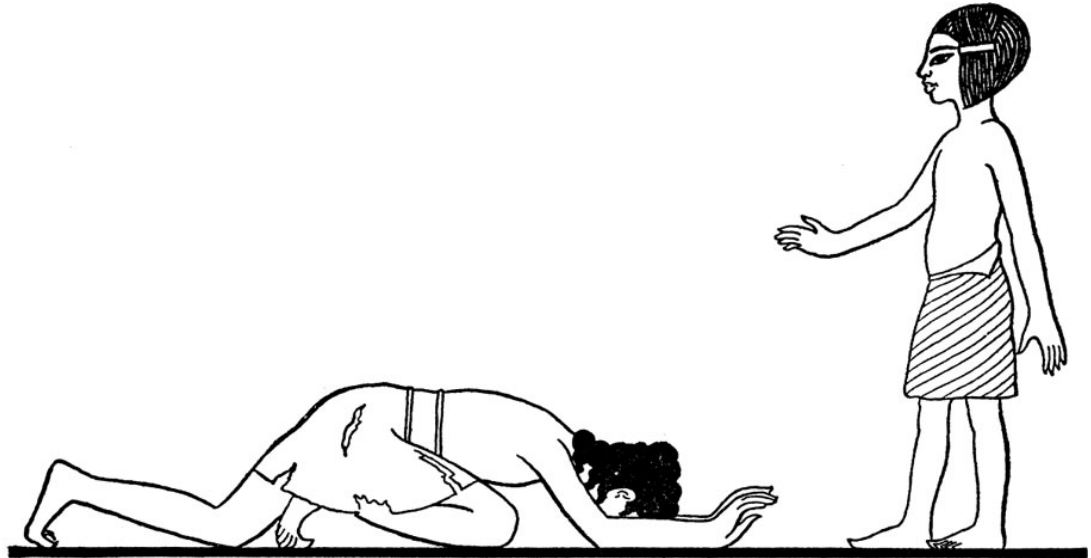
With swift grace she stood erect, and humming to herself, moved through the measures of the dances taught her in the harem. As she swayed lightly back and forth, there came to her new gestures of her own, new steps which seemed to belong to the mellow light and the shifting, broken rhythm of falling water. She stood on her hands at the margin of the pool, laughing at the rippled image which smiled back to her. Arms and legs outstretched, she made a living wheel of her slender body, circling the fountain as she

turned. Again she stopped to stand, with feet apart, bending her supple back until her hands touched the pavement and she could raise slim, brown legs high in the air with all the grace of a young acrobat.

Pausing a moment to catch her breath, the small performer knew suddenly that she was not alone. There were eyes in the darkness. She could feel them fixed upon her, warm, compelling. They belonged to no wild creature lurking among the bushes. They were human eyes, watchful, intent. She could not see them, but she knew. The shadow on the moon—perhaps it had been real after all. Perhaps if she called softly, the intruder would not be afraid. She opened her lips, but no sound came. Suddenly she knew that it was she who was afraid!

Turning swiftly, Ankhsenpaaten caught up her robe and darted across the court without a backward glance. Along the paths she sped, up steps, through arbors, as if the flying squad of the Mazoi were at her heels. Not until she had regained the upper terrace and the safety of the pillared portico did she turn to see if she had been pursued. The garden lay serene and silent in the mellow light. Only the pounding of her heart made of the night's adventure something better than a dream. Yet even as she sought in vain some unfamiliar object to give body to her own belief, she knew that far below her in the garden there lurked a Being, half seen, half dreamed, following her with wistful, watchful eyes.

“Good night, Moon Shadow,” she whispered softly, and again, safe in her own room, she murmured a drowsy prayer: “May Aten guard thee, Moon Shadow, and keep thee safe until the dawn.”



Kenofer before Ankhsenpaaten

CHAPTER VI

BOY FROM THE BACK OF BEYOND

THROUGH the cool, sweet night the palace garden lay at peace. Shadows shortened under the rising moon, then paled to gray-blue mist with its passing. The swift coming of a desert day brought a stir of life to a quiet world. The King's House awoke with reluctant sighs after its night of feasting. Akhenaten would be offering sacrifice to the rising sun, and all must be there to welcome the Aten with their praise.

Ankhsenpaaten stumbled through the familiar ceremony but half awake. She followed her father's movements with heavy-lidded eyes, hearing the rich rhythm of his voice as from a great distance. Yet once they had returned to the palace and the royal family had started down the steps for the daily inspection of the garden, her weariness dropped from her like a cloak.

Mystery had vanished with the night. The orderly beauty of the terraces spread out before them as if anxious to prove that they had nothing to

conceal. Gardeners were busy at their tasks, and the open irrigation ditches sparkled with the fresh flow of water. At a leisurely pace Akhenaten wandered along the flower-edged paths, inspecting trees and shrubs with a thoughtful eye. At his side walked the Queen, attending to his comments with smiling interest, content as always to share his pleasure. The children followed at their heels, running off now and again to chase one another up and down the steps, leaving a trail of laughter behind them. Even Merytaten forgot her cares and ran with the others, until Akhenaten sent her back to the nursery to ask that Yatu bring Meketaten to the pavilion beside the artificial lake. There they would spend a quiet hour before the more formal duties of the day.

Two slaves carried the golden litter, and at the King's request lifted their frail burden to a couch under the painted canopy of this, his favorite retreat. Against the soft robes she lay in state, smiling upon them all with gentle benediction. Akhenaten took his place by her side, holding her transparent fingers gently in his long, thin hands. Very like his own were those frail fingers, and this of all his children seemed closest to the Aten whom he loved.

Ta-Shera brought Meketaten a handful of flowers plucked hastily from the surrounding beds. The two brown babies greeted her with squeals of joy as they perched on the edge of the lake, kicking their feet in the water until it foamed. The young Nubians who guarded the Wise Little Ones grinned cheerfully as Meketaten tossed them each a sweetmeat from the bowl on a stand beside her. Merytaten held an ivory-handled fan with which she brushed away intruding insects, and gently stirred the air above her sister's head. Even the restless Ankhsenpaaten was drawn by that gentle magnet, and frolicked before the couch like an engaging monkey, head cocked on one side, watching for the flash of an approving smile. Not until Meketaten

laughed at her antics was she satisfied. Then, touching Ta-Shera in passing, she ran off with a gay challenge:

“Catch me!”

Ta-Shera’s legs were short and her body plump. Her stumbling run was no match for her sister’s elusive swiftness.

“You can’t even find me, and I’m standing still!” The mocking voice led her on, but by the time she reached the spot, that taunting laugh had shifted. This time it seemed to have come from the air, and Ta-Shera, on the verge of tears, looked above her head where a thorny growth of vine had woven a mat of green on a trellis over the walk. Again Ankhsenpaaten called from a nearby path, “Here I am, Foolish One!” but Ta-Shera paid no heed. For one startled moment she stood speechless; then with a shriek she fled, running headlong into the arms of the ever-watchful Yatu, who appeared in alarm at the sound of her screams. The child’s tears drowned her own words, and not until Ankhsenpaaten reached the scene and shook her, did she manage to gasp:

“It’s a man! I saw him! He’s hiding in the arbor...” Her voice trailed off in a wail.

Ankhsenpaaten did not wait to shake her sister a second time. Down the steps she flew, on the wings of adventure once more. Someone was waiting for her there on the lower terrace, a hidden Someone from whom she had fled the night before. Now she ran to meet him with no thought of fear.

A short distance from the arbor she paused to catch her breath and muster the dignity demanded of a Princess. Then she advanced to the entrance and boldly raised her head to inspect the arch of green above. There flattened against a cross-beam lay a boy caught as if in a net by twisted ropes of vine. A pair of black eyes, wide with apprehension, met hers, but below them the full young lips curved into a smile as Ankhsenpaaten stopped short at sight of the familiar face in its frame of

wavy black hair. For a moment they gazed at each other in silence. At last, recovering herself, the Princess demanded sharply that he come down at once.

“It grieves me to disobey, but here I must remain,” he said. “I am in such a tangle that I shall do great damage to Pharaoh’s vines if I so much as move.”

“What are you doing in Pharaoh’s vines?”

“Talking to Pharaoh’s daughter, am I not?”

“It is for you to obey Pharaoh’s daughter, not talk to her, Unworthy One! Come down at once or I shall call the Head Gardener.”

“But you see, fair Princess, I cannot obey you, much as I long to. Not only would my slightest move do great damage to Pharaoh’s vines, but also to me, his devoted and humble subject. This plant from Punt has thorns of great length, which have given me an uncomfortable bed ever since I hid here by mistake last night. I would be most happy to escape, but I am their prisoner, and it is only by lying absolutely still that I can endure to stay here at all!”

“No one wants you to stay there!” Ankhsenpaaten declared firmly, enjoying her authority. “You had no right to hide there in the first place.” Then as Yatu and the sobbing Ta-Shera appeared on the path, she called over her shoulder, “Stop crying, Baby. It is only a boy and a very foolish one. He has chosen a thorn bush for a bed and now refuses to leave it. You are afraid!” she accused him boldly. “You are as much of a baby as my little sister. If I were a boy, I would be afraid of nothing—not even lions or crocodiles or Hittites. As for a few thorns!” She laughed. The boy flushed and would have spoken, but at Yatu’s heels had come two gardeners, and now one of them, whip in hand, stepped forward with a menacing gesture.

“Come down, you insolent son-of-nothing, or I will drag you down! The King commands that the cause of this disturbance be brought to him at

once. If the Princess will step aside—” He bowed deferentially, but Ankhsenpaaten stood her ground.

“No, Harmose. I have ordered him to come down, and he must obey without help. He climbed up when no one was looking, and now he may climb down before us all. It will be amusing to watch him trying to avoid a thousand thorns, since he could not endure the scratch of one! He turns white at the very thought of pain!”

At the taunt, the boy flashed her a look of scorn which more than matched her own. He caught his lip between his teeth, crooked one arm across his eyes, and with a quick intake of breath, plunged a dark head through the criss-cross of branches. The brambles left ragged gashes on his brown arm, but the moment his face was free, he wriggled through the heavier stems and swung to the under side of the crossbeam. The thorns took cruel toll of garments and bare, muscular legs, but the lad did not flinch. Without a sound he dropped to the ground and prostrated himself at the feet of his tormentor, face pressed against the plaster pavement.

The gardener leaned forward to grasp the culprit with a powerful hand, but Ankhsenpaaten motioned him away.

“He is my prisoner, Harmose. I shall take him to my father. Arise, boy, and tell me your name.”

The boy sprang to his feet, his right hand resting on his left shoulder in the formal attitude of submission. The bold, teasing quality of his voice had vanished, and he spoke with gentle humility.

“I am Kenofer, son of Minos. I came yesterday from Thebes in the train of the Great Queen Mother. I am the least of her followers, and she knows nothing in my favor to make her lenient with my fault. I beg of you, O Princess, let not my disgrace reach her ears! Do not take me to your father, the great Akhenaten. I am your prisoner, but do not make me his! I meant no harm in coming here. Please forgive the intrusion and set me free!”

The gardener muttered a protest, and Yatu interrupted with a voice of authority. "Your father has sent for you, Ankhsenpaaten. It is not right that you delay in your obedience to his wishes. Come at once!"

For a long moment the child inspected her captive. She had known that he would prove to be no common thief. There was something foreign about his clear-cut features and broad-shouldered build. His slender waist was encircled by a broad belt, curiously fashioned and trimmed with silver. Had she alone discovered his presence, she would have set him free, but with the eyes of Harmose and Yatu upon her, she must find some other way.

"You have traveled all the way from Thebes," she said. "You know the great temples of Karnak and Luxor, the giant statues my grandfather built, and the palace of Queen Tiy. After such wonders, what did you expect to find in our quiet garden? Why did you come, unasked, to risk the displeasure of your King?"

The boy dropped to his knees so that his wide brown eyes were on a level with her own. "Thebes has heard of the beauty of Pharaoh's gardens," he said, "the dripping fountains, the painted walls, the rare plants from far places. My older brother is an artist who all his life has been a cripple. He could not come to see the beauties of Akhetaten, and so I have come in his stead. My feet are but his feet, going where his own can never carry him. My eyes are but his eyes, drinking in beauty that his spirit may be refreshed. Last night I stood outside the wall and tried to picture what might lie beyond, mine for the looking. With no thought of doing wrong, I entered the garden over the wall with the moonlight and found it lovelier far than I had dreamed." He smiled at her with a glint of mischief in his eyes. "It was not deserted as I thought, but filled with dancing moonbeams!"

Ankhsenpaaten stopped him with a gesture. "I know. I have been in the garden at night! Come, we must go to my father. If you do not fear a bed of thorns, you need not fear your King. He will be glad that you admire his

garden. Of course,” she added under her breath, “you need not tell him all you saw there!”

“As you wish,” he answered gravely, though the corners of his lips twitched.

With some misgivings Ankhsenpaaten turned away and led the little procession toward the King’s pavilion beside the lake. Could she trust a stranger? She could not bear to have her night’s adventure spoiled by grown-up fears and scoldings. Then, too, it would go hard with Yatu were it known that a Princess had escaped her watchful eye at night and spent an hour unguarded and alone.

The boy was following close upon her heels, while Yatu and the gardeners brought up the rear. Ta-Shera had run ahead to announce their coming. Once Ankhsenpaaten ventured to glance back at her captive and found his dark eyes fixed upon her with a look of something very like amusement. Stand as straight as she might, her head scarcely reached his shoulder. In spite of tattered raiment stained with blood, he carried his slender body with the bearing of a young king. For a moment of sudden panic, the Princess wondered if she, rather than the boy, were not the captive being led to trial.

In the royal pavilion, Akhenaten had lifted Meketaten to his knee, and she lay in the hollow of his arm, her pale cheek pressed languidly against his shoulder. At the approach of the interloper, she raised her head for a moment and inspected him gravely. Apparently satisfied, she sank back smiling.

“See what I have brought you, Meketaten, Beloved of Aten. A strange bird was nesting in our vines and I have captured him to make you smile!” Gone was the haughty Princess, and in her place stood a little girl who drew close to her father and leaned against his shoulder as he encircled her fondly with his free arm. The baby had clambered into her mother’s lap, and Ta-

Shera had taken refuge beside her knee. The young boy who stood facing them seemed suddenly very much alone in the midst of this family group. Ankhsenpaaten could almost read his thoughts as he searched the faces before him. How had he dared to violate the privacy of this stern young King who gazed on him with such solemn eyes? This was Pharaoh's home, and he, a stranger, had no right to be there, no matter what his reason. For one fleeting moment the lad stood dismayed, then threw himself face down and kissed the ground before Akhenaten's feet. His shame was hotter in his cheeks than the fiery burning of his wounds, and he could find no words of supplication.

"O most merciful Pharaoh, Beloved of Aten..." The phrases caught in his throat. There was a moment of heavy silence; then at a whispered word from Ankhsenpaaten, the King motioned Harmose to take his men and withdraw. Yatu followed, a jealous eye on Meketaten and on the baby curled contentedly in her mother's arms.

"Now, my son, stand before us in all your manhood and speak the truth that is in you. How came you to be caught in my thorn vine like any common thief, hiding where he dares not be seen? Was it courage or cowardice which brought you to this plight?"

As the boy rose slowly to his feet, Ankhsenpaaten answered for him:

"It was courage, O Father, since he came not for himself. His brother is a cripple who cannot walk, an artist of Thebes, whence this boy came with the Great Queen Mother. He wanted to see the garden for his brother's sake, just as I like to describe the things I see to Meketaten when she has to stay at home."

Her father winced at the words, and drew both small daughters closer within the circle of his arms. His voice was low as he addressed the lad who stood with quiet dignity before him:

“If this is true, my boy, you need not look so shamed. Come, tell me of your people and your home. Be not afraid. With Ankhsenpaaten to plead in your behalf, you have indeed a friend at Court.”

Under the King’s kindly gaze, the lad found himself at ease. Here was no avenging monarch ready to punish anyone who dared trespass in his private grounds. The stories of Akhenaten must be true—the tales of his gentleness, his love of all manner of men, his patience and fairness in the quest for truth. The boy drew a long breath.

“O Beloved of Aten, Living in Truth, I beg indulgence. I am Kenofer, son of Minos, and I have come from Thebes in the service of the Queen, thy mother. My father was a Keftiu, a man of Crete, famous as a pilot in the great fleet of Knossos years ago. He traded among the islands of the Great Green and far to the west, visiting Egypt year after year on his way home. Once he traveled up the Nile to Thebes, and there he met the daughter of the famous goldsmith, Iramon. She was only a child and he was many years her senior, but my father determined to make her his bride, and in time won the consent of her family. When he returned to Crete, he took his young wife with him, though she was loath to leave her favorite brother, who was rapidly becoming as well known a jeweler as his father.”

Akhenaten nodded and exchanged a glance with his wife. In their apartment was more than one treasure wrought by that very Iramon and his son in Thebes. They had stood high in the favor of Amenhotep the Magnificent.

“Go on with your story, lad. But sit there on the couch. You look weary and faint. When you have finished, you shall eat the food of Pharaoh.”

Gratefully Kenofer accepted this gesture of hospitality, though he sat with care on the edge of the couch, for fear his stained garments might mar the freshness of the robes. At a nod from the King he continued his story,

encouraged by Ankhsenpaaten's rapt attention and by the eager light in Meketaten's eyes.

"I would not weary you with talking, but it is a strange tale. Across the sea my father sailed, toward the Back of Beyond, the land of the Keftiu. It was a hard voyage for my mother, unaccustomed to storms and the great heave and roll of waves. She was not well, for she was soon to give birth to a child. It was my father's dream that his son should first greet the light on the soil of Crete. He told my mother much about the beauty of the vast palace at Knossos and kept her amused with tales of acrobats who vaulted over the backs of bulls, and descriptions of the queer clothes the women wore.

"As they neared the island, my father missed the sails of the sponge divers' boats and the fishing craft which usually put to sea to greet the return of a trading fleet. In vain he scanned the horizon where the island lay against the dark swells. Crete seemed to be enveloped in a swirling mist, but as they drew near, swinging around the western end of the island, they saw that twisting spirals of smoke rose to join the low-hanging clouds. Nearer and nearer they drew to the port of Knossos only to find the sky raining sparks and cinders from a great fire which raged over the countryside where Knossos had lain.

"Father would never talk of that dreadful sight, but mother has told me of it often. They dared not land, for they could not identify the ships lying close together in the harbor. There was no sign of the Cretan fleet which had always protected the island. Hastily they sailed back whence they had come, landing in a lonely cove on the southern coast, where there was a settlement of fishermen, who gazed at them stupidly and could answer none of their questions. There my mother gave birth to a baby boy, and there she tended him while my father crossed the island in search of news. After days of wandering he returned. He had failed to draw close enough to learn more

than that Knossos was a heap of smoldering ruins, and all the people were fled to the mountains to escape the marauders.

“My poor mother was beside herself with fear and grief over my father’s misery. At last she induced him and his sailors to return to Egypt, since their homes had been destroyed. Reluctantly they followed her advice. Yet an ill wind pursued them all the way. They were blown far from their course and did not see the dark waters of the Nile for many months. During their wanderings they were driven to an unfriendly coast, and there a strange plague beset them. My brother was desperately ill, and though he lived, he was never able to walk. When at last they reached Thebes, my mother made her home with her brother. Later her little boy was apprenticed to him. He was so skillful with his hands even as a child that soon he was given all the privileges of the shop.”

“Ah, the Aten is good to his afflicted ones!” Akhenaten said. The boy’s story moved him deeply, as did any tale of misfortune. “And what did your father find to do in Thebes?”

“Father was never happy there. He was a man of the sea, and the work he was able to get on river boats irked him sadly. Then when Amenhotep the Magnificent wished to send ships to Punt, my father volunteered to pilot one of them. The waters were strange to him, but he went with great joy. Again and again he made the trip in safety, but there came a time when he did not return.”

“And you have had no word from him?” Nefertiti leaned forward, her eyes warm with pity.

“His vessel was wrecked in a gale off the coast of Punt. Another captain brought us word. That was nine years ago when I was three. My brother was sixteen.”

“Your mother was fortunate to have two fine sons to care for her.” Nefertiti’s voice was wistful.

“She had reason to be proud of my brother.” Kenofer smiled. “Even then he showed great promise in his work, but always he resented the rigid rules set down by artists of the old school. He longed to use designs more nearly like the forms of nature that he saw around him, more like the work of the Cretan artists father had so often described to him. But it is hard when you are young and cannot walk. That is why I wander far afield, along the river, through marshes, deep into the desert, making sketches as I go, that he may have fresh beauty to fashion in the gold he loves.”

“And that is why you have come here?”

“Yes, O Pharaoh. I was a child when you left Thebes and moved the Court to Akhetaten; but even then there came to us stories of the beauty you had created here, and of artists who no longer feared to paint and sculpture the world as they saw it. We used to talk of the day when I should be old enough to journey down the river and see all the wonders for myself and for my brother. Now I am twelve, and when Queen Tiy planned to visit Akhetaten, my uncle made it possible for me to be the least of her followers. I was to help guard the gifts which my uncle had made for the Queen Mother to bring to you. Then when my duties were done, I was to be free—free to wander about the city and make sketches.” He hesitated, then continued boldly, “I am commissioned by my uncle to do this, that my brother’s future work may be pleasing to Your Majesty and that perhaps you may send for him to be one of your master craftsmen here in Akhetaten. I am sure that if you could see what he has done, you would be glad to have him come.”

Kenofer flushed suddenly at his own temerity and dropped his eyes before the amused smile of the King.

“Be not embarrassed to speak well of what is beautiful. You describe a brother’s skill, not your own. Yet unwittingly you plead for yourself at the same time,” he added. “It is rare that a lad so young devotes his life to

helping another man to fame. Have you no ambitions of your own? You, too, must be an artist if you can be trusted to reproduce for others what you see.”

The boy shook his head. “My ability is small,” he said. “My brother’s talent is worthy of the great Cretan artists who were his ancestors. Mine is but the gift which a child lays at the feet of one he loves.”

“We can best judge of that when we have seen your work.” Akhenaten motioned to an attendant who stood near. “Take this boy within and have his wounds dressed. Pentu, the Court Physician, must say a charm for their healing. See that the lad has proper garments and a substantial meal. Give him a scroll on which to draw and whatever he desires in the way of inks or paint. It is my wish that he be treated with every consideration, as befits a guest of Pharaoh, and that he be allowed the freedom of palace and garden until sundown.”

As he issued these commands, Akhenaten’s voice grew stern with a ring of authority which made Kenofer suddenly aware of his position as prisoner, in spite of the King’s graciousness. Hastily he prostrated himself on the ground and heard himself dismissed with words which were both a promise and a warning:

“I have heard your story and weighed your case, Kenofer, son of Minos. Hear now my decision. If your painting is as vivid as your speech, you are indeed gifted. Justify your trespassing by the use you make of it, and I shall forgive your fault. Fail in that, and you must find some other way to earn your freedom.”

There was a moment heavy with silence. As Kenofer rose to his feet, the Queen smiled upon him and added softly:

“May the Aten bless the work of thy hand and grant that it express the beauty of thy spirit, Boy from the Back of Beyond.”



Kenofer Sketches Ankhsenpaaten

CHAPTER VII

THE TEST

ANKHSENPAATEN rejoiced that there were no lessons to mar the freedom of a day which held such promise. Somewhere in the garden Kenofer would be working, and there she was determined to be. There was so much she wanted to hear from his lips concerning those islands of the Great Green, that land called the Back of Beyond. Her tutor, the tefmenoi, had told her of the mighty Sea Kings who once ruled all the waters to the north, and of their unexplained defeat; but she had never hoped to speak with one whose family had lived through that great disaster. She had heard her father say that the modern art of Egypt owed much to the artisans of Crete who had fled to Thebes for safety, but she had never thought to hold a young Cretan artist captive in the royal garden.

Busy with secret plans, Ankhsenpaaten had little to say when Baketaten arrived in state from the harem. She bore no grudge for the visitor's part in

her mishap of the evening before, but she could not forget the unguarded look of triumph on that round face. Something of the same look was in Baketaten's eyes this morning, but her elation was short lived. At the palace Ankhsenpaaten was not a culprit in disgrace, but the heroine of the moment. She had captured single handed a shameless little thief whom the Queen Mother had unwittingly brought from Thebes!

With growing irritation Baketaten heard the story from the excited Princesses gathered on the terrace to meet her. She herself had ridden all the way from Thebes on the boat with that same young villain, but had caught him in no devilment. In fact, she could not even remember a twelve-year-old boy among the crew. She must see him at once and then report the matter to her mother. No thief should stay in the service of the Theban Court.

Merytaten and Ta-Shera volunteered to lead the way, for by this time the intruder would be sketching in some corner of the palace grounds. Ankhsenpaaten, however, feigned indifference and refused to go with them. Soon chariots would be departing for Maru Aten, where the children were to spend the day, and she had no time to waste on small boys who climbed forbidden walls. Those not ready to leave in the chariots at the appointed time would be left behind.

Ankhsenpaaten watched the others hasten down the steps. If they found Kenofer, it would be by chance. She knew without looking just where he would be. As soon as they were safely out of sight, she followed the path taken the night before, and crouched in the thicket on the edge of the paved court where the fountain splashed in the brilliant sunlight. The pavilion was cool and sheltered by its heavy growth of jasmine vines. There, just as she had thought, Kenofer had spread his paints and brushes on the pavement in the welcome shade. Sitting with legs crossed, as scribes were taught to do, he held across his knees a thin board of polished wood on which rested a

scroll of papyrus. Behind his ear he had tucked a long-handled brush of palm fibers, and with a smaller one was mixing colors in a row of little pots set out before him. So engrossed was the young artist in his work that he did not even look up when at last Merytaten and the others discovered his whereabouts.

From her hiding place Ankhsenpaaten watched them with amusement. The blustering Baketaten, determined to take a hand in the interloper's punishment, marched forward with haughty assurance and stood directly in front of him. He glanced up at her and smiled.

"Boy, how dare you remain seated in the presence of the royal family? For shame—and you from Thebes!"

"I am sorry to appear lacking in respect for the Princess Baketaten, daughter of the late King, but I work at Pharaoh's bidding and have no time to lose. If she will not allow me to remain seated in her royal presence, I fear I must ask her to go elsewhere, lest I further offend her dignity."

Baketaten's eyes widened with amazement, then narrowed.

"You are insolent." She stamped her foot. "I suppose that is to be expected of a thief. Come, Merytaten, I have seen enough."

"But I have seen nothing at all!" Ta-Shera protested, peering over Kenofer's shoulder to watch the rapid strokes of his brush. Then she laughed. "Oh, look!"

Merytaten inspected the sketch. Her delighted chuckle brought a glint of curiosity to Baketaten's eyes.

"Come see what he has done," Merytaten urged. Kenofer let the roll of papyrus curl until his work was hidden.

"The Princess Baketaten has seen enough," he reminded them gravely. "Is that not a summons?"

From the terrace above came the sound of a horn, insistent and not to be disobeyed. Without a word Merytaten seized Ta-Shera's hand and ran.

Baketaten with flushed cheeks and set lips followed at a more dignified pace, sure that the chariots would not depart without the guest of honor.

For a moment Ankhsenpaaten was tempted to join them, but much as she loved the green freshness of Maru Aten, she felt that today a children's outing at the King's pleasure palace could hold no adventure to compare with that which waited for her here at home. Again the horn sounded, and she knew it was a final warning for the tardy ones. They would not hunt for her, as Akhenaten demanded promptness. She smiled to herself. Baketaten would be pleased, thinking her punished by being left behind.

Kenofer had returned to his work, humming softly to himself. Now and then he paused to whistle a bird call, his head on one side, watching intently the line of tilting tail and open beak as sparrows, finches and yellow-breasted sun birds drank at the fountain. Before long Akhenaten's favorite pigeons came in a flock to strut about the pavement, searching for the grain the children scattered every morning. Today everyone had forgotten, and the pigeons fluttered about, scolding at such neglect. A fat, opal-feathered male, poking crossly about under the bushes, discovered one of the culprits hiding there, and before Ankhsenpaaten knew what was happening, a dozen indignant birds had found her out. They perched on her shoulders and head, as if sure that she must have their usual breakfast somewhere upon her person. The commotion among the bushes brought Kenofer to his feet. A moment later he had dragged her forth, the pigeons beating their wings to keep their balance, and digging pink claws into her soft flesh until she cried aloud with pain.

Kenofer would have driven them away, but Ankhsenpaaten stopped him.

"It is my fault. I forgot their morning food and deserve to be scratched!" She ran to a low painted chest at the back of the pavilion and returned with a double handful of grain, scattering it on the pavement near the fountain.

The birds swooped to the feast, cooing their contentment, sleek feathers shimmering in the sunlight. Kenofer seized his scroll and brush, and went to work with swift, sure strokes.

“Could you give them more grain and keep them there a few minutes longer?” he asked, quite as if she were any small girl who had happened to appear. “If you will sit on the edge of the fountain and let them eat out of your hand, I think I can get what I want.”

She followed his directions without protest, and perched there in the hot sun with pecking, clawing birds clambering over her, while he sat comfortably in the shade, handling his brush with clever, confident fingers. Satisfied at last, he thanked her with a word, then asked casually:

“Can you stand on your hands?”

She looked at him for a moment as if about to remind him that after all she was a Princess, but the memory of Baketaten’s absurd airs checked her. “To be sure I can,” she answered.

“I thought so.” He did not even look up from his work as he spoke.

“I can turn backflips and cartwheels, too,” she volunteered, nettled by his lack of interest.

“So I understand.” He was trying fresh colors on a bit of broken pottery, and experimenting with the delicate fishbone drawing quills supplied by the King.

Ankhsenpaaten splashed her arms and face with water, letting the drops run down over her body, which was bare above the waist. It was uncomfortably warm there in the direct rays of a summer sun. She wandered across the pavement and stood uncertainly just within the shadow of the pavilion. She longed to see what Kenofer was doing, but not for the world would she have looked, unbidden, over his shoulder.

“Won’t you sit down?” he suggested, glancing up from his task. “I am not very good company when I paint. Perhaps you do not care to talk to a

thief in any case. Anyone who would steal a royal whip—”

“I did not say you stole the whip!” she protested indignantly.

“No? I thought I heard you declare that someone must have taken it. As it happens, I was sent to Akhetaten to guard that very gift among others, and when I saw it about to be trampled under horses’ hoofs, I forgot discretion in the interest of duty.” He rubbed his head ruefully where the whip had left an ugly welt under his twisted hair. “It was fortunate the crowd lost track of me when I fell. Certainly I lost track of them! It was after dark before I knew I was alive.”

Ankhsenpaaten hung her head. “I am sorry you were hurt,” she murmured. He dismissed the subject with a shrug.

“Were you not supposed to go to Maru Aten with the others this morning? One of the palace guards told me you would be away all day.”

“I decided not to go.” She shifted from one foot to the other. The pavement was hot under her bare toes. “Are you disappointed not to have the garden to yourself? As long as you are my prisoner, I ought to keep an eye on you.”

Edging as close as she dared without seeming too curious, Ankhsenpaaten sat down before him where she could look up into his face and at the same time catch glimpses of the gay colors he was using. He was so unlike anyone she had ever known, with those clear-cut features of another race and the long dark hair which was not a wig. He had been given fresh garments of white linen, but his slim waist was still girdled by the wide leather belt, above which his bare body broadened to shoulders of unusual proportions.

“Do you think I would try to get out of the garden when I went to so much trouble to get in?” Kenofer cocked a whimsical eyebrow at her over the paint pots. “Ever since I was a little thing no bigger than you, I have

dreamed of doing just this. For one magic day I am the guest of Akhenaten, Pharaoh of Egypt. Not to escape prison would I lose one moment of it!"

"Well, you may escape prison, but you can't escape me! I am going to stay right here and punish you with questions until you tell me all the things I want to know." She laughed up at him, hugging her knees and rocking gently back and forth. "Can you paint and talk at the same time?"

"That depends. I can with you as listener. You are no more in the way than a small bird."

"That is what father calls me—Small Bird. You may call me that if you like, just for today. You may forget I am a Princess, too," she added graciously.

"I had forgotten that already!" He laughed. "You seem to have a hard time remembering it yourself. It must be difficult when you are only five!"

"I am nearly six and that is pretty old when you have three younger sisters. Merytaten is eight, and you ought to see how grown up she can be."

"I did see. Her face has a quiet, waiting look, as if she were afraid but too brave to show it. Would you recognize her here?"

He unrolled the scroll and held up one of the first sketches. She looked at it in silence. There from the creamy background of the papyrus gazed the faces of the royal family, drawn from memory with amazing accuracy. The features of the lovely Nefertiti and the grave Akhenaten might have been known to the boy from the many statues and paintings which were scattered everywhere throughout Egypt. But the Princesses had until yesterday been as unfamiliar to him as any other children seen in passing. For all that, the likeness of each was unmistakable. He had caught that look of patient anxiety which made Merytaten old before her time. Meketaten's wistful loveliness brought the tears to Ankhsenpaaten's eyes so that she scarcely saw her own elfin features laughing at her. Ta-Shera was plump and important; the babies, brown and gleeful, feeding ducks at the edge of the

lake. Yet only one of all those sketches had obviously been done from life, and that showed Baketaten as she had stood there in the court, stamping an imperious foot and declaring, "I have seen enough!"

At sight of her, Ankhsenpaaten gave a squeal of delight. It was the hot-tempered Princess to the life, and there was rare humor as well as skill in the likeness.

"It is perfect! They are all perfect!"

"Even this one?" Kenofer unrolled another portion of the scroll and showed her a delicately colored picture of the fountain against its background of flowering shrubs. Sparrows and robins perched along the margin of the pool, drinking the cool water, and diminutive sun birds ruffled their feathers on the edge of a lily pad where spray from the fountain showered over them. On the bright pavement Ankhsenpaaten herself sat among the pigeons, laughing at their greediness.

"Father will love the pigeons," she assured him. "I can even tell them apart. That fat fellow with his breast puffed out is Huya. We named him for Queen Tiy's Chamberlain who bustles about, managing everyone. The one on my shoulder is Horemheb, Chief of the Army, because he is always trying to fight just for the fun of it!"

"General Horemheb is Chief of the Army, but he does not pick quarrels just for the fun of it," Kenofer objected. "I think he is one of the greatest men in Egypt."

"So does father, but he says soldiers are just like small boys who have new bows and arrows: they are never satisfied until they shoot something. Horemheb comes every few months from Thebes to beg father to let him fight the Hittites or some of the desert tribes which keep attacking the border cities. I stay and listen while they talk. It all sounds very exciting: the burning of towns, the plundering, the clash of arms. But father just shakes his head and says, 'We must not kill!' "

“Your father is right. Burning and plundering may sound exciting, but they are cruel sports. Still, I hear them say in Thebes that the army grows restless for want of something to do, and men like not the reports from the eastern Empire. Horemheb would show the enemies of Egypt that they dare not take advantage of a peace-loving Pharaoh or threaten the safety of his vassals. But why burden your thoughts with affairs of state? A Small Bird should have not a care in the world. Come, show me the parts of the garden you love best. I must fill this whole scroll before sunset, else the King will think me ungrateful and my uncle berate me for losing so rare an opportunity.”

Ankhsenpaaten helped Kenofer carry his color pots and alabaster jar of water as they wandered about the garden, often stopping where he detected a bit of loveliness she had never seen before. While he worked, she told him of their life there in the palace, and helped him people the empty walks and terraces with the members of the royal family, until his sketches were alive with familiar figures moving through their daily round of duties and pleasures. In one Harmose pointed out a dead branch on a fruit tree to a slave with a pruning knife; in another Yatu hovered near Meketaten’s golden litter, her wrinkled face watchful, intent. Ankhsenpaaten thought the boy listened with scant attention to her prattle; but looking upon the scroll, she found that he had captured her words and given them substance there.

When the sun, high over head, marked the middle of the day, attendants brought them a table laden with good things to eat. The other royal children would be feasting at Maru Aten, paddling in the pools and exploring the elaborate courts of the palace gardens. But if Ankhsenpaaten thought of them at all, she gave no sign. To share a simple meal with this new friend was better far than to waste such precious hours in play.

Later the blazing heat of early afternoon drove them indoors, and Ankhsenpaaten took Kenofer to see the banquet hall and the other rooms of

the King's House. She even let him enter the studio where the King spent hours on end working with brush and paint. Akhenaten could encourage freedom of expression in the artists of the Court, because he was himself an artist. Even the greatest of them proudly proclaimed him master.

As the day progressed, Ankhsenpaaten carried out her threat and punished Kenofer with questions about his boyhood, about Thebes, about the mother and brother waiting anxiously for his return. She asked why he wore such long hair and such a wide belt about his waist, and where he had learned to write the graceful hieroglyphs which explained his sketches, yet seemed a part of them. Patiently he answered her, describing the way the Keftiu of Crete had dressed when his father was a boy, and telling of the famous pilot's great desire that his sons should remember with pride their Cretan heritage and wear some symbol of it always. Egyptian characters he had learned at school in Thebes, where he had been a Writer in the House of Books. He smiled at Ankhsenpaaten's admiration for his attainments. She, too, could learn to write if she would practice the handling of brush and pen.

"Here I have painted words, and there I have spoken with pictures; yet the message is the same. You could read one as well as the other if you tried. See!" With his brush he traced a few simple figures. "It will be easier for you to copy them with a pen."

From his belt he took a long, narrow case of wood, known to scribes as a palette. A shallow depression held several slender reeds, one end of each slightly bruised until it resembled a delicate brush. There were also two round depressions made to hold fresh ink, black and red, which Kenofer made by mixing soot and vegetable gums. When the ink had reached the proper consistency, he placed a pen in her hand and gave her a scrap of papyrus.

“See what you can do while I finish copying the design on this column. The colors are as vivid as the jewels my uncle uses in necklaces and pectorals.”

With slow, painstaking strokes she tried to reproduce a bee and a frond of water plant, but the results were crude beside Kenofer’s skillful workmanship. He did not laugh at her efforts, but set her another copy just as the menoi did in the House of Books, where only boys could go to learn. He told her, too, the secret of shaking the water from the tip of her brush to make the lines fine and shapely, and taught her the angle at which to hold the reed when thicker marks were required. He warned her also to keep the figures of man and beast all facing in one direction, since she must start to read from the point toward which the characters faced.

Patently Ankhsenpaaten bent over her task until she had mastered her own name and that of each member of the royal family. Her back ached and her fingers were cramped from holding the pen, but she viewed her handiwork with growing pride. She had been taught by her father to recognize the symbols in the royal cartouche and a few of the hieroglyphs which appeared most often on monuments and temples, but never had she dreamed that it could all be made to seem simple, this strange magic which a girl child was so seldom taught.

“If father sets you free, will you return at once to Thebes?” she asked as he put the finishing touches to the last picture which completed his day’s work. If only she could be with him again and learn more of this new world of written thoughts.

“You cannot lose your prisoner so easily,” he smiled. “The Queen Mother plans to be here indefinitely, and I shall stay as long as she remains. That was the understanding. There is much to see. It will take weeks to draw even a small part of all this beauty.”

He surveyed his work doubtfully. "I am afraid this will seem child's play to your father. I had hoped that if I pleased him, he would grant me a favor."

Ankhsenpaaten stretched her cramped arms and turned a cartwheel or two to limber up an aching back. "What favor, Kenofer? Is it something I could do in return for all your patient teaching?"

Kenofer hesitated, then shook his head as he bent over his brushes, washing them carefully and arranging them in an inlaid box. "They say that in the private apartment of the King and Queen your father has broken all custom and decorated the wall with a great mural of the royal family such as might be painted in a tomb. Some even say he painted it himself, that his children might always be with him. Such a thing has never been done before, and may never be done again."

"Would you like to see it?" Ankhsenpaaten landed right side up before him. "I can take you there if you hurry. Mother and father have gone with the Great Queen Mother to inspect the new palace north of the city, and will not return until time to go to the temple."

"Perhaps they would object." A troubled frown crossed the eager face.

"Perhaps they will never know," she murmured lightly. "Come, there can be no harm in looking."

Together they made their way to the entrance of the King's apartment. At the door a guard stopped them, but when Ankhsenpaaten quickly resumed the almost forgotten role of Princess, he reluctantly let them pass. From the inner rooms came the low voices of women preparing fresh raiment to be worn by the royal pair during the sunset ceremony at the temple. The larger chamber was empty save for the compelling presence of the pictured figures on the wall. Kenofer had eyes for nothing else.

It was as if one gazed into another room, the roof supported by slender columns, the light filtering through barred blinds to touch the row of wine

jars, the richly covered chairs and footstools painted in exquisite detail. In the midst of all that simple splendor Akhenaten sat upon an inlaid chair. The Queen was seated upon a cushion on the floor. In her lap she held the baby, just as she had that morning in the garden, while between her and the King stood Merytaten, an arm protectingly about the neck of Meketaten on one side, Ankhsenpaaten on the other. Ta-Shera and Little Kitten played together near by. Before those glowing colors and the delicate modeling of the likenesses, Kenofer knelt in wonder. He examined every detail of feature and dress, the turn of each head as the children looked at one another as if about to speak.

“If only I could copy it!” he breathed. “I could not catch the color, but the grouping—” He closed his eyes as if to make sure the picture was stamped upon his memory. When he opened them again, Ankhsenpaaten was offering him the reed with which she had been writing, and an alabaster jar of ink.

“There isn’t time to get more papyrus, but you may have the back of this,” she said.

He glanced at the scrap on which she had been laboriously writing. The back of the sheet was a bit smeared and dirty; still it was large enough for his purpose.

“But you must not part with your first writing lesson, little scribe. You were going to show it to Baketaten,” he protested half heartedly.

“I would rather give it to you. Please hurry! It is late, and when Yatu and the others come, she will be sure to find us. Then there will be trouble!”

Without further argument, the boy accepted the gift and set eagerly to work. Copying the figures was no easy task, for their proportions must be carefully preserved, and their positions as well. With feverish concentration he blocked out the fresco on the sheet of papyrus, but when he actually tried to draw the children, his efforts seemed futile. This was the work of a great

artist, and Kenofer's sensitive spirit could appreciate far more than his youthful fingers could reproduce.

Ankhsenpaaten watched in growing perplexity. Was it possible that one who caught the fleeting movements of child and bird with a few swift strokes of the brush could sit in helpless awe before a motionless picture which he had only to copy? She tiptoed to the inner door and listened. No one seemed aware of their presence. Restlessly she wandered about the room. In her heart she knew she had no right to bring a stranger into the private apartments where even Pharaoh's daughters were not allowed to come at will.

Kenofer was working with desperate haste, but the results of his efforts were almost as crude as her first writing. She half regretted her impulsive generosity. Had she not given him the paper, they would have been out of danger long before this. Now she could never make Baketaten believe she had had a writing lesson just like those given to the boys in the House of Books! With a sigh she dismissed the thought from her mind. The fresco seemed to mean far more to Kenofer than any scrap of papyrus could to her. She knelt beside him and watched each careful stroke of his brush, so unlike the sure movements of his earlier drawing. Minutes slipped by unheeded. There were beads of perspiration on the boy's forehead, and his white teeth were set over his lower lip. He was totally unaware of her presence, unaware of the tramp of feet in the hall without, of the low, resonant tones of the King's voice as he exchanged a few words with the guard outside the door. Ankhsenpaaten looked up in sudden alarm to find her father's eyes fixed upon her. Never had she seen his face so set and stern.

"Ankhsenpaaten, what are you doing here?"

She quailed before him. Kenofer sat in a daze, too startled to move, his eyes still fixed on the fresco, as if it were the pictured Pharaoh who had

spoken. A few steps carried Akhenaten to the boy's side. A glance at the papyrus told him all he wished to know.

“Ankhsenpaaten, by what right have you brought this stranger here to copy with childish daubing a work of art which only a favored few have ever seen? Have you no sense of the fitness of things? As for you, boy, your talent is too small to justify this breach of privacy. You heap one piece of insolence upon another, and I have had enough. Destroy the painted messes you have made today. Go back to Thebes. Your brother will profit ill if he follow the guidance of your eye!”

Akhenaten reached for the dirty piece of paper and surveyed it with contempt. “You smear your drawing as an infant might! The folds of draperies should not fall thus! That baby's arm is larger than her leg. Here, let me have the brush. It should be so—and so.”

Before their astonished eyes, the King sat down upon the floor, scribe fashion, and altered the drawing with a few firm lines, talking as he worked. Kenofer knelt beside him, drinking in his words and watching wide eyed the technical perfection of his draughtsmanship. With a swift glance Ankhsenpaaten caught the amused smile on her mother's face. The Queen motioned the attendants to follow her quietly into the inner room, leaving the artists to settle their differences without an audience.

“See, this is the way Ta-Shera's back is rounded, not as you have it here.” He turned over the papyrus to illustrate his point and stopped short at sight of the childish symbols and their delicate models. “Who has done this?” he asked sharply. Ankhsenpaaten drew a deep breath.

“I did, Father. I asked Kenofer how he learned to write so beautifully, and he made a model for me to copy. I did not think that you would mind.” She watched his face. Akhenaten's moods changed quickly, especially when he was not well. For a moment his expression was inscrutable; then he said:

“You write more skillfully than you draw, lad. You would do better to attend the House of Books and become a scribe, than to play with paint. You have no talent as an artist.”

Kenofer bowed his head. “I told you, O Pharaoh, that my gift was small. Such as it is, I lay it at your feet. I pray you, destroy not the scroll, for it will give pleasure to my brother, childish though the work may be.” He placed in the King’s hand the roll on which he had lovingly recorded the joy and beauty of a memorable day. Akhenaten accepted the gift in silence, unrolling it slowly. His face was a study as he watched the delicate scenes unfold, so full of grace and life, so deftly drawn. Attracted by the tense quiet, Nefertiti came from the doorway to stand where she could look over his shoulder. He felt her presence and smiled up at her, holding the scroll for her to see.

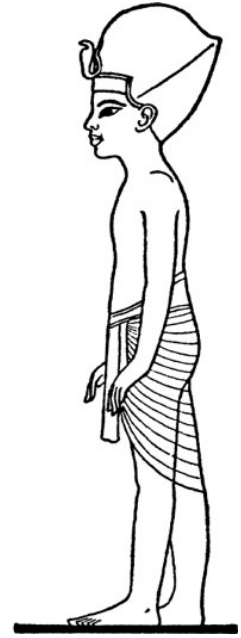
Ankhsenpaaten read the tenderness in her mother’s eyes when she saw her babies there before her, playing in the garden which they loved so well. Kenofer felt only the silence and read in it the disapproval which he feared. He fixed his gaze upon the mural, drinking in its beauty with the desperate knowledge that he would never see those graceful forms again. Weariness had drawn deep lines at the corners of his sensitive mouth. Moving close, Ankhsenpaaten slipped her hand within his. He glanced down at her, his fingers closing warmly over hers.

It was then that Akhenaten spoke. “You have made my little girls live and have captured the birds I love, Kenofer. Not the craftsmanship of the copyist is yours, but the creative gift of the artist born. Forgive my blindness and accept my gratitude. Not one brush stroke shall be destroyed, and I myself will see to your future training.” On Ankhsenpaaten’s head he laid a gentle hand.

“You, Small Bird, have spent a profitable day. Remember well the lessons you have learned, and cherish always the memory of this gifted lad.

The time will come not many years hence when you will be proud to call him friend.”

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Tutankhaten

CHAPTER VIII

“I BID YOU WELCOME TO MY HOUSE”

THE hot days of the inundation slipped by in splendid idleness at the Court of Akhetaten. The Nile widened slowly until it spread to the western cliffs in a broad sheet of brown, sluggish water, filling irrigation ditches and leaving its gift of silt from the distant mountains of Kush to enrich the land for the coming year. Men freed from their tasks in the fields on the west bank of the river flocked to Akhetaten and served their King in other ways, building roads, beautifying gardens, constructing houses, so that even the poorest citizens might have a roof to call their own.

Queen Tiy watched it all with keen, appraising eyes. She accepted the Temple, the Shade of Ra, dedicated to her, and let Baketaten officiate in a smaller place of worship. The Queen Mother took part in all the customary festivities of the gracious, friendly Court, and accepted with no show of scorn the nobles created by her son. They were men from every walk of

life, proud to have served their King and to have deserved preferment at his hands. Though quite unlike the polished, highly educated, hereditary nobles of the Court at Thebes, they were able men, devoted to Akhenaten. With touching faith they followed his teachings; with blind confidence, they did his bidding.

Queen Tiye observed them as they lived their daily life, and recognized their efforts in her behalf with brusque appreciation. Yet with it all the Great Royal Mother held herself aloof. She saw much and said little, thinking her own thoughts.

During those hot weeks of Paopi when the sun beat down on parched fields and bleached trees, and when the dull reaches of muddy water were whipped into small waves by the hot north wind, Ankhnesneferibre saw little of Khepri. By Pharaoh's order he had been enrolled in the School for Scribes, there to continue his education. All his free hours were spent in the artists' quarter, where he worked under the guidance of Aha and Thutmose, whose portrait statues needed but the breath of life to make them speak. He watched Thutmose make thin masks of clay from the living features of his models, that no line or blemish might go unrecorded, and heard it said that even the features of the dead were thus reproduced.

He spent long hours where workmen were excavating tombs in the distant cliffs, and saw there the colorful painting on the walls, one of them showing the triumph of Huya, when all the royal family had leaned from the Window of Appearance and showered the King's faithful servant with gifts. He watched the blocking in of scenes upon the fresh plaster, the mixing of paints, the making of trial sketches before the actual work was done. From it all he learned new secrets of his craft, finding within himself a fire of ambition long smothered by his youthful devotion to his brother's interests.

Whenever he could, he sent examples of his work by messenger to Thebes, writing long, glowing accounts of all he did, that his brother Intef might in some measure share his training. In reply, the young goldsmith wrote encouraging, affectionate letters, praising Kenofer's efforts and urging him to work as he never had before, in gratitude for all Pharaoh was doing in his behalf.

Now and then Ankhsenpaaten caught a glimpse of Kenofer among the crowds which thronged the streets when the royal family went to drive, or found his dark eyes smiling upon her from some corner of the temple where he was allowed to sketch the people bringing gifts to heap upon the altars. She had not forgotten her lesson in making "painted words," but practiced secretly until she could copy inscriptions with careful accuracy, even if she could not always read the meaning of the signs. Her father found her busy at the task one day, and nodded with approval at her workmanship. It was a pity Ankhsenpaaten had not been the son he so sorely needed. Perhaps there was no harm in letting her read and write. She might have a *menoi*—a boys' tutor—if she liked. He knew of a woman scribe in Thebes who might be induced to teach her later on, since obviously she could not attend the School for Scribes.

At the suggestion, Ankhsenpaaten threw her arms about his neck and clung to him, her laughter choked with tears. How could he know that he had granted her a privilege which she prized above all others? He patted her head and held her close for a moment, touched by her eagerness. It was strange that the most playful of all his daughters should be the most ambitious to learn.

After that, her hours with Baketaten and the other Princesses under the guidance of their *tef-menoi* were but play compared to the time she spent with her *menoi* from the House of Books, working with palette and brush, learning to write as well as to repeat the precepts from the Immortal

Maxims of the Scribe Ani, whose rules for good conduct and moral living formed the backbone of school work for the Egyptian child. In time she would learn all the forms of letter writing, and be able to send a message to Kenofer written in her own hand. She did not want him to know of her studies until that great day should arrive.

Baketaten laughed at her, saying that she was aping boys and would grow unmannerly with so much masculine knowledge. Yet even Baketaten had to admit that Ankhsenpaaten excelled as well in pursuits deemed suitable for girls. She could dance and sing, play harp and sistrum, and quote all the hymns of praise used in the temple services. Small as she was, she could swim with a speed and grace far greater than that of any of the children from Court or Royal Harem, who took their lessons together in the palace pool. As for behavior, she knew by heart all the rules of good manners and court etiquette, even if she did not always apply them. In fact, it was noticed by everyone that with her new privileges much of her thoughtless mischief had ceased. She still brought laughter with her whenever she came, for her heart was overflowing with a joy it had to share; but she seemed to feel that childish pranks were better left to ignorant babies who could not read or write.

With the second month of winter, the Season of Sowing, when the river had subsided and the rich black fields were being planted with grain, came the great celebration which marked the bringing of tribute from the four corners of the world. All the vassal kingdoms sent their riches: Kush, Nubia and the Sudan, Syria, and even the Islands in the Midst of the Sea. A week before the King was to receive officially this tribute, it was announced that Horemheb, head of all the armies of Egypt, had arrived to be present at the ceremony. In the nursery it was whispered that he had brought with him his ward, a lad of unknown parentage, whom he was educating as his own son and training for some high office under the King. There were few boys

among the children of the Court, and the arrival of a new member of the royal household, however short his visit, was news of great importance to the daughters of Akhenaten.

Baketaten feigned indifference, declaring that he was barely six years old and not to be spoiled with too much attention; but Ankhsenpaaten laughed at such grown-up airs and danced about, impatient for his coming. She had always admired the handsome Horemheb, somewhat older than her father and possessed of a physical vigor which the gentle Pharaoh sadly lacked. She liked the General's strong, full voice, his sharp, decisive way of speaking. Horemheb was a man accustomed to command and to receive obedience. Ankhsenpaaten could imagine that a child brought up under his guidance would be both disciplined and full of life. Certainly he would have seen much more of the world than the monotonous curve of river and cliffs which hemmed in the only city she had known.

Akhenaten received Horemheb with formal pomp in the reception hall of the Official Palace. Ankhsenpaaten and Merytaten begged to be present, so were allowed to take their place at one end of the long, columned hall beside the two thrones occupied by Pharaoh and his Queen.

Ankhsenpaaten felt very small there under the glittering canopy of state, with Court officials all about, and long lines of palace guards forming an aisle down which the General must walk to greet his King. The air was heavy with incense and the sweetness of many perfumes as the ladies-in-waiting grouped themselves near the throne, waving their fans and displaying their jeweled loveliness for the benefit of visiting dignitaries.

Musicians played softly on lutes and harps while the Court waited for Horemheb's arrival, and heralds stood at the wide double doorway ready to announce his coming. At last the blare of a horn cut across the confused babble of the crowded hall. Ankhsenpaaten felt little quivers of excitement creep deliciously up and down her tense muscles. She clasped her arms

about her knees and hugged them close. She had an unobstructed view down the broad aisle which seemed to stretch as far as the eye could reach between the motionless figures of the guards, who stood like wooden images, eyes front, hands at their sides. As she watched, far in the distance there appeared the figure of a man in armor, striding along with the free rhythmic swing of one able to march for hours without tiring. She would have known him anywhere, with his compact, well-built figure in its short corselet and close-fitting helmet. He had no guard, though in the distance she caught the glitter of spears where soldiers waited for him at the outer gate.

For a moment Ankhsenpaaten thought Horemheb had come alone. Then as he entered the hall, she saw a short distance behind him a lad striding along in the General's footsteps, his bearing so exactly like that of the older man that everyone in the room smiled to watch his confident approach to the throne. Just as Horemheb prostrated himself before Akhenaten, so did his small companion, and when he rose at the King's command, the boy rose also and stood respectfully awaiting presentation to Pharaoh and the Queen. He looked neither to the right nor left, but fixed his eyes solemnly on Akhenaten's face, standing as straight as a young soldier on parade.

Akhenaten greeted Horemheb with official dignity, beneath which lay the warmth of a deep friendship. Then he turned to the soldier's companion.

"So this is the boy!" The King's luminous eyes seemed to caress the slender figure.

Horemheb made a slight gesture toward the child.

"This, O Pharaoh, is Tutankhaten, Living Image of Aten, whom you gave into my keeping when you departed from Thebes. He has been as my own son, and is being taught all that might be of service to a Prince of royal blood. May he find favor in your eyes, on this, his first visit to the Court of

Akhetaten, and may he be as worthy a son in your sight as he has been in mine.”

Akhenaten motioned the lad to approach, and laid a gentle hand upon his shoulder. “My son, I bid you welcome to my house. All that it holds is yours for as long as you remain, and these, your sisters, will share with you their pleasures and their duties in palace and temple. Be one of us, that we may feel you ours.”

There was a stir among the courtiers as Pharaoh spoke. Eyes found each other in startled, questioning glances. The long, lined face of the Divine Father Ay was an inscrutable mask as he stood at the King’s right hand. The Queen was smiling, searching the boy’s countenance with wistful tenderness. Ankhsenpaaten caught the longing in that lovely face and looked away. Her mother had so hoped to give the King a son! Was this handsome lad to be the substitute?

With frank curiosity the small Princesses inspected Tutankhaten as he stood, poised and undismayed at being the center of all eyes. There was a dignity about him which made one forget his years, and see rather the youth of strange, compelling beauty he would one day be. Yet when it came the children’s turn to step before the throne and give him salutation, a look of dread grew in his clear-cut oval face. He moistened his lips and swallowed convulsively. Merytaten echoed softly the ceremonial words of welcome which Ankhsenpaaten spoke in a clear, ringing voice, and as she ceased, an eager, waiting silence spread throughout the long hall. Anxiously the Court strained its ears to catch the sound of the boy’s answering words.

Ankhsenpaaten nodded to remind him that it was his turn to speak, but she could not catch his eye. He was staring at some vague spot above her head, and though his lips moved, they framed no sentence in reply. He had forgotten. She knew he had forgotten, and with ever-ready tongue she came to the rescue. Pitching her voice low, she spoke the first words of his formal

acknowledgment firmly, distinctly. Tutankhaten started as if awakened from a dream, and automatically picked up the thread of the familiar sentences. If those near by noticed her prompting, they gave no sign, though Ankhsenpaaten fancied she saw a knowing twinkle in the keen, appraising eyes of Horemheb.

Once started, Tutankhaten continued with assurance, turning to Nefertiti and the King with carefully worded phrases of gratitude for their hospitality. When he spoke, a sigh of relief passed over the room. The boyish voice was clear and true, the words flowing in the gracious rhythm of a courtier's speech. No illiterate, camp-trained soldier's son was this, but a lad of gentle breeding, worthy to be Pharaoh's son.

A special escort of the palace guard accompanied the children as they left the Great Hall. Akhenaten had asked his daughters to take their guest to the King's House where Baketaten and the other Princesses awaited their coming. Ankhsenpaaten, however, had other plans. When the little procession entered the bridge and reached the gaily painted room containing the Window of Appearance, she bade the party halt.

"Tutankhaten and I shall remain here," she said firmly. "Thou, Merytaten, shalt go with the escort and bring the others. It is not fitting that a royal guest be sent in search of mere babies. They should come to him."

The Captain of the Guard eyed her doubtfully, but Merytaten accepted the suggestion without protest. She knew that argument was futile when Ankhsenpaaten spoke in that decisive tone, and she had no desire to test her own authority before a stranger. Leaving two guards at the door, the Princess departed, wondering what the Great Royal Nurse would say to this change of plans. For awhile at least, that difficult lady would be detained by the ceremonies in the Great Hall. As for Yatu, she would do aught for peace.

Left alone with her guest, Ankhsenpaaten perched herself on a chair, well pleased at the turn of events. “Now we can talk. You and I are about the same age.”

Tutankhaten bowed stiffly. She laughed at such formality.

“Must all soldiers be so solemn? Do you never smile? You should be glad. The worst is over, and you have made a real impression on the Court.”

“If I have, it is thanks to you. My thoughts were as empty as a blank papyrus scroll until I heard your voice!” He shook his head ruefully. “I am very grateful. You saved me a beating when you said those first few words.”

“A beating? Does Horemheb mistreat you, then?” Her eyes widened.

“Mistreat me? Of course not. But I am a soldier, and when a soldier fails in his duty, he must feel the lash.” Proudly he stood before her. “For months I have been trained for this day—and how glad I shall be when it is over!” he added abruptly, sitting down on an ebony stool, his feet stuck straight out before him in anything but a soldierly manner.

She laughed at the sudden change. “Well, I hope you like attention. Boys are as scarce as myrrh trees here at Court. The Princess Baketaten and my sisters are sure to spoil you—and spoil all your fun, too, if you aren’t careful. Do you mind being the only boy among so many girls? Smenkhkara is busy in the School for Scribes and really does not count.”

“Well, I can’t say I like the idea. I have never had anything to do with girls, but perhaps it won’t be so bad if the others are like you.”

“They aren’t!” she assured him. “I should have been the boy of the family. I’d like to be a scribe. I can already read a little.” She watched his face to see the effect of her words, but he refused to be impressed.

“I’d rather be a soldier and lead the army against the Hittites. That is what I shall do when I am older. Horemheb says so. I wish it did not take so long to grow up. I hate to go to school. I want to hunt and fight and see the world!” His face glowed as he spoke.

“I want to see the world, too, but I don’t suppose I ever shall unless I marry some foreign prince. Horemheb said you had been trained as a King’s son should be. Are you a King’s son?” She asked the question with unexpected directness, and the boy answered with equal simplicity.

“I have never been told my father’s name, but I was born in the Royal Harem at Thebes, and today the Great Akhenaten called me son.”

“That probably means you are of royal birth and have been chosen to marry one of us.” She tucked her head on one side and pretended to inspect him with a critical eye. “Yes, they might well think you a suitable husband for a Princess, since the Great Royal Wife has given the King no son. Would you like to marry one of us?” She asked the question with mock solemnity, her slanting eyes full of teasing lights.

“No!” he answered promptly. “A soldier has no time to bother with a wife. I’ve heard boys say that girls are always in the way. Sisters are bad enough, but wives must be worse.”

“Indeed! Well, I’m very sure that none of us would care to be your wife!” she retorted, nettled by his tone. “Just the same, we have to marry someone, and if you have been selected as Merytaten’s husband and the next Pharaoh of Egypt, you will have very little to say about it. Hear all those people in the street! They are hoping that father and Horemheb will stop at the Window of Appearance on their way back from the palace. Let’s pretend that you are really to be the next Pharaoh. Come on! All you have to do is to appear at that big window over there, and you will see just how it would feel to be a King.”

“I don’t want to see how it would feel!” he assured her. “I had enough of Court etiquette this morning.”

“Oh, but this is different!” she coaxed. “The people will be so impressed with all your gay trappings and that short sword at your belt!”

Tutankhaten rose to his feet reluctantly, straightening his helmet-shaped headdress and adjusting the narrow belt which held his sword in place. "They won't even know who I am," he objected half heartedly, standing very erect under her admiring gaze.

"They know who I am," she answered, "and you can just imagine they are cheering for you. See, I can be just as dignified as you!" She drew herself to her full height, lifted her chin to a haughty angle, and stepped forward with the slow, gliding pace which made her mother's movements like a stately dance.

Tutankhaten, not to be outdone, strode across the room beside her, head high, shoulders squared. At the Window of Appearance which was open to the slanting sun, they stepped upon a long, low bench which raised them above the level of the sill, and found themselves looking down upon a restless crowd of townspeople. It overflowed the walks and filled all but a narrow lane down the center of the street which must be left clear for chariots and the prancing horses of the Mazoi patrolling the city. Almost at once a knot of students, gathered on the outskirts of the crowd, caught sight of the two small figures with Court apparel glittering in the sunlight, and gave a shout which brought them to the attention of the others. Many had seen Tutankhaten enter the Official Palace with Horemheb, and now called the lad by name, cheering again and again until he might indeed have fancied himself a youthful king.

"Life! Prosperity! Health!" The voices gave the familiar greeting with gay enthusiasm.

"Raise your hands in blessing—so! That is the way my father does. If only we had some gift to throw them!" Ankhsenpaaten turned to search for possible plunder, and discovered at one end of the long room several tables piled high with fruit and delicate pastries for the refreshment of the royal party as it stopped to give audience to the people. Without pausing to weigh

possible consequences, she called the two guards stationed outside the door and bade them carry the tables within reach. One man ventured a protest, but a stamp of Ankhsenpaaten's royal foot sent him off to do her bidding. A moment later, the make-believe king and queen were showering the delighted townsfolk with dainties such as only the privileged few were wont to enjoy.

So absorbed were the children in the problem of scattering evenly their gifts that neither heard the steady tread of feet in the corridor, nor saw the two figures which stopped short in the doorway to observe their activities. One was slender and slightly stooped; the other, broad shouldered and compactly built. Side by side they stood, Akhenaten's restraining hand on Horemheb's arm. For a moment anger had flashed in the General's keen black eyes; then his lips twitched, and he turned an amused face to meet the smiling scrutiny of his King.

"To the station born," Horemheb murmured.

"And to the manner trained." Pharaoh nodded, watching with pride the sturdy, muscular body of the boy as he threw one orange after another to the students on the outskirts of the laughing, cheering crowd. "You have done your work well, Horemheb, but now it is time the boy learned the ways of a gentler world than that of camp and fortress. It is for Aten, Giver of Light, to bless him with understanding. It is for me to teach him that the gentleness of love must temper the harshness of hate engendered by a military life."

"It is not hate we teach, Akhenaten, but stern reality. Someone here at Court should feel the grim necessity of war!"

"That is a subject on which we must be content to disagree." Akhenaten smiled upon his friend. "Again I say, you have done well to train this lad in the precepts of your calling. Yet for the present he has seen enough of rigid discipline and must learn the privileges of a less restricted life. Come, let us

leave the children to their royal gesturing. See, Aten blesses them with His rays.”

“Perhaps the light of prophecy is in His touch,” Horemheb suggested as they turned away and moved along the corridor toward the Royal House. “I would be content if that were true. Ankhsenpaaten has courage and a ready wit. She is starting young to prompt her brother’s faltering tongue and spare his pride before the multitude!”

“It is true, she has a mind more nimble than the others,” the King admitted, “and for that reason I sometimes think that she will carve her own destiny, regardless of what we plan for her. Merytaten, a gentle, motherly child, is the first born of Nefertiti, the Great Royal Wife. It is she who must be the first to wed and make her husband Pharaoh of Egypt to share my throne.”

“For her you have already chosen a husband?”

“No,” Akhenaten hesitated. “I had wished to see this boy of yours before I made definite selection. I felt sure you would make a man of him, however harsh your methods.”

“What of that other boy child, born at Thebes a few years before Tutankhaten? He has been given the education you deem most suitable for a royal child and, from what I hear, is a personable lad.”

“Smenkhkara—yes. He has grown to be a quiet youth with gracious, courtly manner. He is making an enviable record in the House of Books. He is older and no doubt better suited to the task of carrying on my work here. Yet there is something about the bearing of your ward—”

“It is the bearing of a soldier.”

“Perhaps, but it is also the bearing of a king. As my heart is happy in the Queen and her children, so shall I rejoice in the beauty of this boy, Tutankhaten, whom I well named on the day of his birth, Living Image of Aten. Well may it be that in years to come the destiny of this fruitful land

shall rest in his hands. Together we must make him worthy of the trust, my friend: you to lend strength to his hands, and I to plant the mercy of Aten in his heart.”

The two men and their escort had crossed the bridge and reached the palace garden unobserved, before the crowd in the Royal Road had had their fill. As the last pastry found its way into outstretched hands, Ankhsenpaaten and Tutankhaten raised their right arms in royal blessing, and turned from the window. Their faces were flushed with excitement, and they laughed breathlessly as they jumped from the bench and sat down upon it for a moment’s rest.

“It might not be so bad to be a king,” Tutankhaten said thoughtfully, “though I would rather be a general. Thutmose III fought at the head of his own army, and that is what I would do if I were ever Pharaoh. I would kill lions, too, as many as Amenhotep the Magnificent, one hundred and two in the first ten years of his reign. I am already a good shot with bow and arrow and can kill ducks with a throw-stick!” he boasted.

Ankhsenpaaten listened with flattering attention. There was little talk of hunting at the palace, though she had heard Queen Tiy tell of her husband’s prowess in sport. Other children sometimes went to the marshes after water fowl with father or brother, but none of the Princesses had ever shared that privilege.

“I, too, would hunt, if I were a boy,” she said regretfully.

“Perhaps they will let you hunt with me some day while I am here. They say there is game in plenty along the river, and I need all the practice I can get.”

“Would you really let me go?” Her tone was incredulous. “You wouldn’t think a girl was in the way?”

“If you jump around in the boat, you will be in the way. If you sit still and do not talk, you may hand me my arrows and watch for the birds. But

come! If we don't go now and find your sisters, we shall both be in trouble." He stood up and held out his hand. She laid her fingers in his hard, calloused palm, and let him pull her to her feet.

"I hate to go," she said. "Everyone will make a fuss over you, and never give us a chance to play at king and queen again. Let's not tell the others what fun we had. It will be our secret."

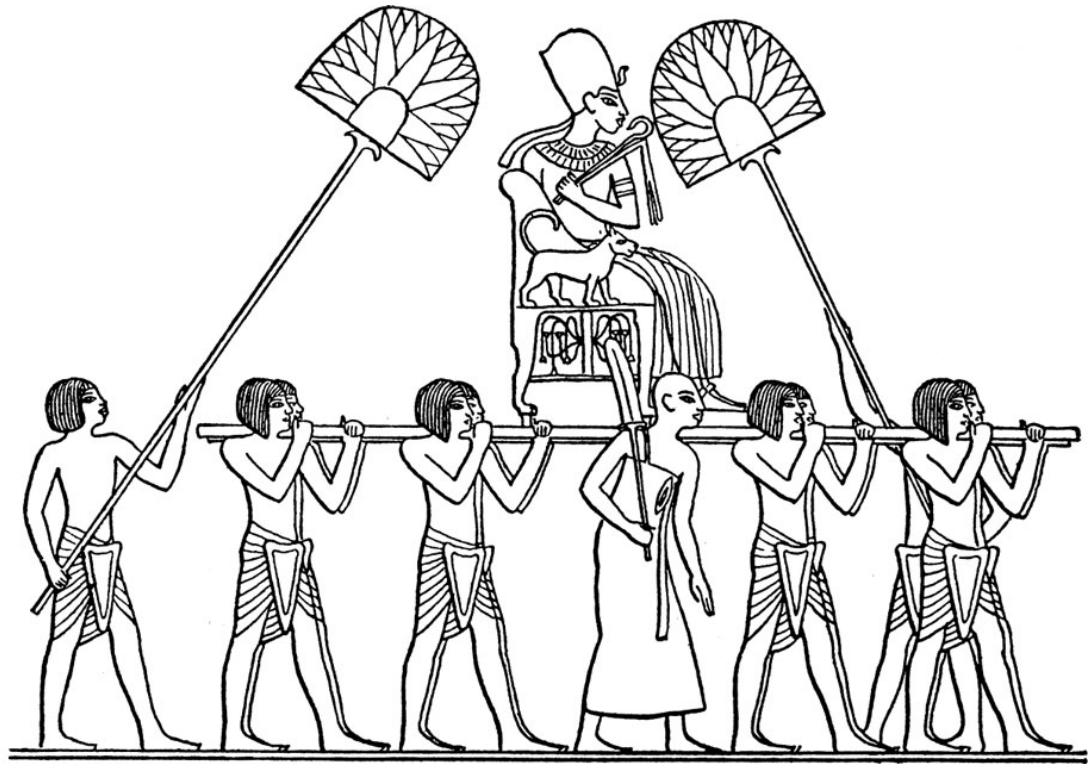
"That's not much of a secret, when the whole city saw us. They say girls cannot keep a secret anyway," he teased, swinging her hand back and forth between them as they walked.

"The whole city doesn't know we were playing king and queen just because they saw us at the window. If you think a girl tells everything she knows, why not make this a test? If I am true to my promise and tell not a soul that we were pretending, you will know you can trust me always, as long as Aten blesses the world. I already know I can trust you," she added, smiling up at him. He was nearly a head taller, and his erect carriage added dignity to his height.

"Of course you can trust me," he answered soberly. "I am a soldier, and a soldier always keeps his word."

"Even about hunting?" she asked.

He nodded. "Even about hunting. But I shoot no ducks with any other girl, Princess or not. It is a man's sport. What is more, I don't care to be laughed at for taking you along; so leave the plans to me and say no word about them. Remember, Ankhsenpaaten, that makes two secrets for you to keep!"



Akhenaten in Procession

CHAPTER IX

TRIBUTE

It was many a day before Tutankhaten was able to carry out his promise. He had no chance to mention hunting to Horemheb, who was responsible for the procession of tribute, while Huya made arrangements for the accommodation of the royal family and the vast crowd which would gather to see the colorful pageant. Day and night for a week the General worked in the spacious office allotted him in the Hall of Foreign Tribute, and Tutankhaten was left to while away the hours with the Princesses and Hotep, one of the Mazoi detailed to act as his bodyguard.

This young officer proved to be a light-hearted comrade on the long drives Tutankhaten so enjoyed. After a few days, only Ankhsenpaaten was left to accompany them on these rambles. Baketaten was having her statue

made by Auta, whose work Queen Tiy so admired, and the other girls soon wearied of energetic adventuring. Ankhsenpaaten, however, seemed tireless and clung without fear to the rim of the chariot as they raced across the sands behind the fastest of the Mazoi's horses. After much coaxing, Tutankhaten gained permission to drive one of the less powerful teams, and handled the reins so skillfully Captain Hotep declared that with the strength of a few more years the boy would be the match of any youth in training at the barracks.

"He has the same strange power over horses which makes Pharaoh surpass us all," the Captain confided to a fellow officer. Tutankhaten had taken a chariot out alone to demonstrate his skill before the Mazoi assembled on the parade ground for the morning drill. The spirited animals galloped madly across the sand, then stopped at a word, wheeled, and walked sedately back again, necks arched and manes tossing, while the boy's light hand upon the reins held them in check. Ankhsenpaaten watched him proudly. Near her stood Ranefer, Master of the Horse. Ranefer was a friendly soul, fond of anyone who loved horses. Ankhsenpaaten was less sure of her welcome when she caught sight of Mahu, Chief of the Mazoi, who had come unexpectedly upon the scene.

"As the Aten endureth, the lad is every inch a soldier in the making!" he exclaimed to his second-in-command, a thick-set man with flat, spreading features and yellow teeth. "I'm thinking Egypt will soon have need of such," Mahu added, lowering his voice. "I have been inspecting the tribute with Horemheb and Satau, Overseer of the Treasury. That from the North has sadly fallen off since the last lot. The people will not notice—Horemheb will see to that—but those who estimate its value know! The building of Akhetaten has very nearly emptied the royal treasury, and as far as I can see, the gifts sent by the vassal kingdoms are not likely to fill it

again. Dwarfs, leopards, monkeys, slaves will not increase the wealth of Egypt or the Treasurer's peace of mind."

"Pharaoh is more concerned with his own peace of mind than with the state of the Empire," his companion answered gruffly. "But why complain? We are well fed, well housed, well clothed. Why worry about the starving dogs in Syria, fighting with the snarling Hittite curs? We hear the echo of their bark but taste not their bite, and I for one am well content."

Mahu shrugged his shoulders. "We keep the peace in Akhetaten. That lad out there may one day have to fight the battles Akhenaten ignores, but you and I shall be too old to follow him. Come, enough child's play! We must bestir ourselves. Hotep, take the children to the palace. I shall need you here for the rest of the morning."

While they were walking back toward the King's House, Tutankhaten broached the subject of hunting. Would it be possible for Hotep to take them shooting in the marshes after the tribute was officially received and safely stored in the royal magazines? The young Captain glanced down at his small charges, striding along beside him, and declared that, with proper permission from Horemheb or the King, he would be delighted to arrange such an outing, though it might not offer much amusement for a girl.

Tutankhaten turned to Ankhsenpaaten, who was skipping to keep up with their military pace.

"Would you rather stay at home?" he inquired gravely. "Of course hunting is a man's sport, but I have heard it said that sometimes girls enjoy watching, if the shooting is really good."

"Is your shooting really good?" she asked artlessly. The Captain turned away to hide a smile.

"If you come hunting with us, you can judge for yourself," the boy answered. "When I am twelve and can draw a heavier bow, Horemheb has promised to take me on a lion hunt."

“Well, lad, when you shoot your first lion, I hope I am there to witness the event!” The Captain smiled grimly. “It is one thing to aim at a wild goose and another to face a wild beast. At that, if you control other animals as you do a horse, who knows but a lion might stand meek as a mule and let you shoot it down?”

Great was the bustle of preparation which filled the King’s House and the Official Palace during that day and far into the night. Yet the Court was astir before dawn on the date officially recorded as year XII, the second month of winter, the eighth day. The usual religious rites were duly solemnized at dawn in the sanctuary of Hat Aten, where the King and his people made obeisance to the Aten, Lord of Eternity, rising in heaven to illuminate every land with His beauty. When Akhenaten turned from the altar with Nefertiti beside him, Ay approached with great solemnity and spoke in his monotonous singsong:

“Thy rising is beautiful, O Living Sun, Horizon Ruler. Thy rays are upon Thy beloved son, Lord of the Two Lands, Living in Truth. He is Thy beloved; Thou makest him like Aten. Thou embracest with Thy rays Akhenaten, Lord of Diadems, and the Great King’s Wife, Nefernefru-Aten-Nefertiti, Lady of Grace. Rich in possessions is the offspring of the Aten: a full Nile every day, making Egypt live. Silver and gold are like the sand of the shore. Now cometh the Keeper of the Gate of the South bringing tribute from Nubia and Kush. Kharu, the land of Syria, sends of its riches. All the vassal kingdoms share their wealth with the Great King, their Lord. Vessels of all the choicest of their countries, in silver, gold, lapis lazuli, malachite, and every costly stone. On the plain outside the city of Akhetaten the bringers of tribute await the coming of the King and Queen, Akhenaten and Nefertiti, given life forever and ever. May their gifts be pleasing in the sight of the living Aten rising in heaven, and in the eyes of His son, Lord of the Two Lands.”

Together the royal family left the Temple of Hat Aten and crossed the tree-shaded roadway to the private entrance of the King's House.

In the courtyard of the palace waited the great state palanquin of gold, a massive double throne with arm rests carved in the form of sphinxes, rising above a glistening row of cobras. On either side of the throne crouched the figure of a lion carved in wood and overlaid with gold. The whole palanquin was borne aloft on stout poles resting across the shoulders of eighteen soldiers chosen by Horemheb for this post of honor. Meryra, the High Priest, took the lead, a cloud of incense rising from the censer in his hands. As he stepped through the palace gate into the broad, straight pathway of the Royal Road, mummers and dancers frolicked ahead of the procession, heralding the coming of Pharaoh and his Queen.

Behind the palanquin walked the Princesses attended by their nurses and ladies-in-waiting. With them was Baketaten, much annoyed that she could not ride with her mother in the special litter provided by the King. Queen Tiy had long been ailing, though she did her best to keep the fact from her son. He had tried to dissuade her from attempting the hot way to the plain, the hours of waiting while tribute passed. With a wry smile she had brushed aside his solicitude, refusing to admit herself defeated by aching bones and the faintness which had been sweeping over her more and more frequently of late. She yet had work to do, and until the succession to the throne of Egypt was settled, no physical weakness must be allowed to undermine her strength of will. To confess illness was to confess loss of power, and Queen Tiy held her power in a deathless grasp.

The long line of courtiers and ladies made its way between crowds of townspeople to the music of flute and string and the gay clash of cymbals. A wide stretch of ground on the edge of the city had been marked off for the ceremony, and here a pavilion had been erected, with a double throne of gold set up under a painted canopy. Horemheb, with Tutankhaten standing

proudly beside him, gave the royal party official greeting on behalf of the envoys from the vassal kingdoms, who would soon appear, each with his country's tribute. Behind him were ranged all the dignitaries of the Court in order of rank: Ay, the ever present; Nefer-kheperu-her-sekheper, Governor of Akhetaten; Meryra, the High Priest; Panehsy, Chief Steward of the God; Tutu, Chamberlain and Mouthpiece of the Entire Land; and portly Nakht, the Vizier. Ankhsenpaaten recognized her friend Captain Hotep at the head of the picked guard of Mazoi which held back the crowd behind the royal pavilion.

Descending from the state palanquin, Akhenaten took his place with Nefertiti on his left, while the children grouped themselves about the double throne. Ankhsenpaaten looked with distaste upon the low hassocks which supported the feet of the royal pair. The tops were decorated with figures of bound captives to symbolize Pharaoh's power over his enemies. Ay stood as always on the King's right, while fan bearers kept the sultry air stirring above their heads. Queen Tiy preferred to remain in her litter, which was lowered to the ground in the shade of the pavilion, and Meketaten reclined near by, with Yatu in attendance. The second Princess was very gay today, and unusually well. Akhenaten's spirit was lightened by her laughter. He exchanged smiling comments with those about him, holding Nefertiti's hand in his, smiling down at her as the clash of cymbals and thundering beat of drums announced the approach of the procession of tribute. Dear to his heart was the family gathered about him, and he anticipated with pleasure their delight in the gifts from far places which were being carried forward by the envoys and their slaves.

At the edge of the royal pavilion sat a group of artists ready to make sketches of the occasion, which was to be recorded on the tomb of Huya, Superintendent of the Royal Harem. Among them Ankhsenpaaten found the dark head of Kenofer, his gaze fixed intently on the vivid color and

movement of the scene before him. He had matured rapidly during months of instruction in school and studio. Even among the most able artists of Akhenaten's Court, he held his own with stern young dignity, gaining their respect as much by his reserved manner and absorbed attention to work as by his evident talent. Gravely Kenofer heard their criticisms and accepted their advice. He had come to learn. Yet he had an amazing way of making their advice his own, absorbing it for future use, without actually letting it change the instinctive expression of what he saw. Akhenaten's words rang always in his ears, giving him courage to be himself: "Not the craftsmanship of the copyist is yours, but the creative gift of the artist born."

Ankhsenpaaten wandered back and forth, restless as always when an official gathering demanded that she assume an attitude of royal dignity. With unfeigned enthusiasm she greeted her grandmother, for she and Queen Tiy had formed an odd, combative friendship through long weeks of association. They understood each other, those two, having much of willful purpose in common and a mutual respect which grew with time. The child had come to recognize the profound wisdom which prompted many of the Queen Mother's most bitter taunts in speaking of matters either personal or political. For hours on end she had listened to tales of Court life under Amenhotep the Magnificent: the hunting parties, the splendid pageants, the great festivals solemnized in dark, massive temples, the long, languid hours spent in the royal barge *Tehen-Aten*, the *Sun Disk Gleams*, on the lake built for Tiy's pleasure at her palace near Thebes. Best of all Ankhsenpaaten liked the accounts of her ancestors: Queen Hatshepsut, who had ruled with a high hand, and the warlike Thutmose III, who had extended the Empire far to the north. The child's blood tingled as she listened to stories of power and might, a might which was right because Pharaoh could do no wrong. Now she wondered a little at the expression on her grandmother's face. The

Queen Mother sat grim and unmoved by the splendor spread out before her on the level plain. Perhaps it seemed unimportant in comparison with all that those keen old eyes had seen in the past.

As the first of the procession appeared in the distance, Ankhsenpaaten dropped a gay little caress on Meketaten's thin shoulder and went to join Tutankhaten and Smenkhkara, who were with a group of boys gathered at a point of vantage near a corner of the pavilion. They greeted her with frank comradeship, for they were sons of nobles, lads with whom she had often played in garden and pool. They knew her skill as a swimmer, her boy-like courage at games, her love of adventure. Ankhsenpaaten was glad to have Tutankhaten see their friendliness, especially that of Smenkhkara, who wore the royal lock of hair braided and looped on one side of his head. It was well known that he was eligible as a husband for one of the Princesses, and his gentle bearing and studious tastes made many consider him a suitable successor for Akhenaten. Ankhsenpaaten had not forgotten Tutankhaten's frank distaste for marriage with one of the royal family. He need not consider himself the only youth available for that honor! She watched hopefully, but he was absorbed in observing Horemheb's direction of the coming procession, and the soldierly bearing of his friend Hotep. Standing at attention in his miniature armor, in careful imitation of his superior officers, Tutankhaten was quite unmindful of the students or the compliments they paid his small friend.

Ankhsenpaaten lifted her head at a haughty angle and returned to her post by Meketaten. Who was this boy that he should ignore her so completely? Could he think of naught but soldiering? She would have liked to speak to Kenofer, who was always sure to make her feel welcome, but it was not seemly for a Princess to seek out a mere apprentice of the royal studios. Later she would ask the King to send for the artist that she might see the work he was doing and hear from his own lips an account of his

busy days. In the excitement of Tutankhaten's coming, she had forgotten her intention of writing Kenofer a letter. In fact, for days she had neglected her studies with the menoi. Was she after all worthy to be a student? No real scribe would set aside his work for trivial pleasures. She hid her momentary shame behind a wall of good resolutions. As soon as these festivities were over, she would mend her ways.

The long procession which swept past the pavilion had been skillfully arranged to make the greatest possible show of the treasures brought as tribute. In a prominent place were the offerings from Nubia, Kush, and the Sudan, borne by powerful blacks whose skin shone like polished ebony under Aten's exultant rays. Great bars and rings of gold they carried, bags of gold-dust from mines in the eastern desert, weapons, ornate painted shields, the striped and spotted skins of wild beasts, and curved white tusks of elephant and boar, held high upon their stalwart shoulders. In their midst stalked a sleek black panther, the largest ever brought, a captive, into Egypt. Behind herds of cattle and antelope walked male and female slaves, the women scarcely bending under the weight of babies carried in baskets upon their backs.

In contrast to these befeathered blacks came the fair-skinned men from the Islands in the Midst of the Sea, holding aloft vases of Kamareis ware from Crete and graceful vessels ornamented with colorful designs and figures skillfully carved. From Libya on the west of Egypt came ostrich eggs, bunches of feathers, and curling plumes.

Long-robed Asians brought the offerings from Syria, falling on their knees before the King, hands uplifted in greeting. Grooms led past the finest of Syrian horses, coats glistening in the sun, followed by chariots elaborately ornamented, some carried by charioteers, some drawn by runners with corded, muscular legs. Slaves followed, fastened by cuffs of metal, but not bound in the cruel fashion pictured on the hassocks under the

royal feet. Such works of art had been designed during the reign of earlier Pharaohs, and were heirlooms used chiefly on state occasions. Akhenaten could not tolerate the inflicting of pain as an expression of power, and his vassals respected his wishes.

As the procession slowly passed, daggers, spears, shields, bows, tusks, and smaller objects were piled upon the ground about the pavilion. Among the wild animals brought for Pharaoh's collection was a half-grown mountain lion led by his trainer on a heavy leather leash. Near by walked a group of dancing girls intended for service in the harem. One carried in her arms a young gazelle, which struggled pitifully, terrified by the nearness of its traditional enemy stalking so close with nostrils dilated and cat-mouth smiling. Meketaten exclaimed at the delicate beauty of the little creature, and at a word from the King, Horemheb halted the procession while an attendant brought the gazelle and laid it in Meketaten's lap. All eyes were turned to enjoy the picture made by the laughing children who crowded about their favorite, watching the shivering little creature which crept close and nuzzled a moist nose in her neck. However, Tutankhaten and several of the lads who stood admiring the Syrian bows and arrows were more attracted by the lion, and turned to watch his restless movements as he paced back and forth, straining to get at that tempting morsel just out of reach in the children's arms.

"He would like to consume that gazelle in one bite," young Smenkhkara observed, shuddering. He was a thin, narrow-chested boy with the thoughtful, near-sighted gaze of a student. He had Akhenaten's inborn dislike of predatory beasts and bloodshed.

"And the Princesses with him!" added a student scribe whose father was an official in the House of Tribute. "I heard father say he tried to make the keeper put him in a cage, but the man insisted he was reared in captivity

and trained as a pet for Pharaoh's household. Be that as it may, I don't like his looks!"

The beast snarled as if in answer to their remarks, flattening himself against the sand and inching his way forward, powerful muscles standing out like twisted cords under his tawny coat. The trainer spoke sharply, jerking on the leash, which was attached to a silver-studded harness strapped about the animal's chest and forelegs. The creature paid no heed except to move steadily forward, eyes fixed on his coveted prey, open mouth and panting tongue dripping with anticipation. Again the trainer spoke, his voice tense and rasping. Seizing a whip with barbed thongs which was thrust in his belt, he shortened the leash as he approached his charge from behind, and cracked the whip sharply over the straining yellow back. The sound cut through the gay hubbub with a sinister threat, but the animal merely bared his teeth, whiskers bristling.

With a swift movement Tutankhaten caught up the bow which he had been examining, and fitted an arrow to the string. It was much too large for him and seemed to dwarf the sturdy figure in miniature armor. Smenkhkara gave a shrill cry of warning when he saw the younger boy step forward to stand between the snarling beast and the group of children crowding about Meketaten's golden litter. At the sound, the terrified Syrian raised the whip above his head and brought it down with a whistling crack upon the animal's head and shoulders. A snarling yelp, a twist of the powerful body, and the creature felled the cowering man with a sweep of his paw. The bared claws ripped the brown thigh to the bone, and at the smell of blood the lion gave a weird cry which set all the other animals plunging and roaring in their cages.

"Kill him!" Horemheb's voice shouted the order above the din, but for one horrified moment guards and soldiers stood paralyzed. Only a boy obeyed the order without hesitation. Tutankhaten's arrow found its way

through the thick yellow neck at the base of the skull an instant before a veritable rain of arrows was planted in the writhing carcass.

Before the boy could leap forward to claim his prize, men closed in about the gruesome figures sprawled on the sand, and mummers sprang in front of the royal pavilion to distract the attention of Queen and Princesses while evidence of the tragedy was cleared away. Bewildered, Tutankhaten looked about him. Was there to be no recognition of this, his first serious feat of arms? All his training as a soldier had not prepared him for such indifference. Not by look or gesture did anyone indicate that he deserved individual attention. Jostled playfully by one of the leering dwarfs, Tutankhaten stepped back among the other boys, a frown drawing black brows low over puzzled eyes. His companions were absorbed in trying to see the end of the bloody episode, as Hotep's men busied themselves beyond the whirling dancers and grotesque figures of the players. Smenkhkara, on the other hand, clung to one of the poles supporting the royal canopy, his face as yellow as the sand.

"Are you ill?" Tutankhaten stared at him curiously.

"It is enough to make one ill!" The older boy moved his lips stiffly, eyes fixed on the ground. "How could you shoot to kill?"

"I would not shoot to maim!" Tutankhaten's look was full of scorn. As he turned away, a hand touched his arm. Ankhsenpaaten's face was like a victor's crown, offered as reward for his prowess.

"Your first lion—and I saw you kill it! Such presence of mind was worthy of a king!" The words were for his ears alone, in token of their secret hour of make-believe. His eyes lighted in response, but his tone was brusque.

"Those others—they had no right to shoot. The game was mine!"

"The men only obeyed orders. It does not matter. Horemheb and Hotep saw. They know you made the kill."

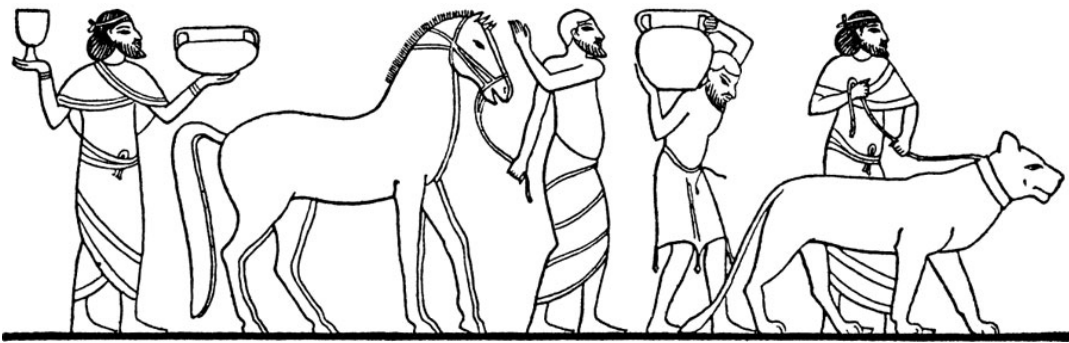
Tutankhaten glanced doubtfully about him. If Horemheb was aware of what had passed, he gave no sign, standing there beside the King. The procession had moved on. Small gifts of ever-increasing splendor were being piled about the royal pavilion, while larger offerings were carried to the House of Tribute in Akhetaten. The mummers had scattered, and the sand before the pavilion bore no mark of combat.

Suddenly a familiar voice spoke near at hand and the children looked up into Hotep's sun-browned face. The young officer bowed low before them and held out an object which from the earliest days of Egypt had been a symbol of royalty.

"The lion's tail, O Tutankhaten, ward of Horemheb. You have won it fairly and the trophy is yours. I am honored to lay it in your hands."

The boy drew himself up and accepted the proffered proof of his skill, conscious of Horemheb's eyes upon him.

" 'Twas but a soldier's duty," he said gravely, aware that a grim smile twitched at the corners of Horemheb's lips and left a gleam of unmistakable pride in those deep-set eyes. It was as if the man had read his very thoughts, but whatever it was he read, Horemheb was pleased.



Procession of Tribute



Babylonian Ambassador

CHAPTER X

BETROTHAL

ON the morning following the pageant of tribute, an audience was held in the throne room of the Official Palace. There the representatives of the various vassal kingdoms came to hold informal discourse with Pharaoh, before returning to the lands from which they had come. At the same time was admitted a special emissary from Burraburyash II, the Kassite King of Babylon, an imposing figure clad in flowing robes, with a pointed beard accentuating the sharp line of cheek and chin.

Nefertiti occupied her usual place at the King's side, and Ankhsenpaaten had begged to accompany her, feeling sure that Horemheb and his small charge would be present. The head of the army was there, but Tutankhaten was nowhere to be seen. The Princess made no effort to hide her disappointment. She moped sadly on her stool at the Queen's feet, taking little interest in the groups of men in their unfamiliar costumes, standing about the pillared hall. Only one caught her attention, because of his unexpected youth. He was in the company of an older man clad in the

simple garb of a scholar, and was obviously a visitor not there on official business. When it came time for the youth to be presented, Ankhsenpaaten found herself listening for his name. Ay spoke it with a strange undertone of bitterness, as if he resented the necessity of granting the lad such an honor:

“Arandas, son of Shubbiluliuma, King of Hatti. He travels with his tutor, seeking to complete his education with first-hand knowledge of the world, and the kingdoms thereof,” he added significantly.

“The son of Shubbiluliuma, King of the Hittites, is most welcome in Akhetaten.” Akhenaten’s voice was as warmly cordial as his words. “Would that I had such a son to send as friendly emissary to my neighbors. There would be fewer misunderstandings among the rulers of this earth, could each see and know the people who live on the borders of his land.”

The Prince smiled. “Akhenaten, Pharaoh of Egypt, Lord of the Two Lands, my father, the Great Chief of Kheta, sends thee greeting. May thou enjoy strength, long life, and prosperity.”

“If the Prince from the Land of Kheta desires to learn at first hand the strength of his neighbor’s army, he should know the head of Egypt’s armies, Horemheb, the Hawk in Festival,” the Divine Father Ay suggested, indicating the General with an exaggerated sweep of his arm.

In cool appraisal the young man’s eyes met those of the seasoned soldier, then sought again the face of Akhenaten.

“I am a student,” he said clearly. “I am not concerned with the military strength of Egypt but with her spiritual power. In the face of Pharaoh I find that which I have come to seek. May lasting peace be the destiny of Akhenaten, Living in Truth, and Nefertiti, his Lady of the Two Lands.”

As the youth and his tutor stepped aside to give place to the Ambassador from Babylon, Akhenaten observed: “There is at least one son of Hatti who craves knowledge rather than bloodshed.”

“Knowledge, in truth! He is a clever spy!” Ay muttered, but the King gave no heed.

“It is well that he has come, even on so brief a visit. He, too, is a child of Aten, and even in their ignorant folly, his people, the Hittites, know the blessing of Aten’s warmth. Ah, Nefertiti, if only I may live to see the day when suspicion and greed shall cease to separate the peoples of the earth, and intermarriage shall knit the warring kingdoms into one great family, knowing the Peace of Aten!”

As if in answer to his prayer, the bearded Babylonian from the fertile plains of Shinar laid in his hands an official letter, folded in its clay envelope and sealed with red wax. Akhenaten broke the seal and removed the outer layer of clay, revealing the inner tablet. The surface was closely covered with an intricate pattern of small, wedge-shaped marks, quite unlike the graceful symbols which Ankhsepennef had been learning to form. Foreign correspondence was carried on almost entirely in this cuneiform script. The King inspected it gravely, then handed it for accurate translation to Apy, the Royal Scribe.

At this point the Ambassador addressed the King and Queen in honeyed words of elaborate courtesy and begged to say that he had been instructed by his lord and master, the mighty King Buraburyash II, to make formal request that a daughter of Akhenaten, Pharaoh of Egypt, be given in marriage to one of the King’s sons. Due to the tender age of Akhenaten’s offspring, the wedding could be held by proxy, and the bride remain with her parents until such time as she should reach more mature years. The King of Babylon expressed confidence that his friend and “brother” would grant this request, thus cementing an old friendship with fresh ties of blood. In this belief, he had ventured to send as gift to the bride-to-be a necklace of rare workmanship, containing one thousand and forty-eight precious stones, duly listed, that none might by any chance come to grief along the way.

As the words fell upon the eager ears of the Court, Ankhsenpaaten found all eyes turned in her direction. She heard her father's voice accepting the proposal of the King in gracious phrases, expressing gratitude as he received in his hands the casket containing the necklace so carefully described, and promising that he would take counsel with Nefertiti and the Queen Mother in regard to the choice of a Princess to be the recipient of this great honor. In sudden panic Ankhsenpaaten searched the faces of her mother and father for some sign of what their inner thoughts might be, but they were smiling with formal remoteness upon the dignitaries gathered there before them.

Avoiding the curious stares of the vassal envoys, Ankhsenpaaten looked past the crafty leer on Ay's thin features, to the stern immobility of Horemheb's bronzed face. There was nothing to be read there; yet even as she glanced wistfully from one to the other, the conviction grew that both men believed her destined to be the next Queen of Babylon. So, too, did the young Prince of the Hittites, standing inconspicuously at one side of the hall. Perhaps he recognized the sudden terror which swept over her, the nameless fear of any change in her small world. It was one thing to say you longed to see far places and seek adventure there, but quite another to be sent against your will to be the bride of some barbaric foreigner.

Prince Arandas smiled at her, bowing his head ever so slightly, as if in recognition of her new dignity. The Princess, grateful for that youthful friendliness, smiled tremulously in return. But as she smiled, she slowly shook her head, and with that gesture of denial determination grew within her like sturdy wheat after the inundation, filling her with fresh courage. For a moment she eyed the tempting casket standing on a table by her father's side, then looked away. Not for all the jewels of Babylon would she wed an unknown man and live in exile from those she loved.

The necklace of one thousand and forty-eight precious stones, under a special guard of the Mazoi, was displayed upon a scarlet pillow in the palace, where all the Court might gaze upon its glittering beauty. Queen Tiy examined it with an appraising eye.

“Only a King of Babylon would have counted the stones!” she observed drily. “The mind of a Babylonian never rises above barter and trade. Which of your daughters do you consider worth a paltry thousand and forty-eight stones, my son?”

A family council had been called a few hours after the arrival of the fateful letter. Nefertiti, Queen Tiy, and the King sat in a private hall adjoining the royal suite, holding a preliminary discussion of the betrothal before Ay and Horemheb should be asked to give their judgment in the matter.

“That is a cruel way to present the problem.” The King shifted restlessly in his chair.

“It is a cruel problem—the giving in marriage of a mere babe to a strange man in a strange land. I like it not.” Nefertiti sighed.

They were quite unaware of the small listener who lay flattened on her stomach under the couch, hidden from view by the wine-red drapery thrown over the seat of woven thongs. Shame at thought of her eavesdropping made Ankhsenpaaten’s cheek hot against the cool plaster of the floor, but she knew that her fate was being decided within the hour. Once that fate was sealed by royal command, all her own determination could not alter it. Her one hope lay in influencing her father before the final decision was made. If need be, she would make her presence known, regardless of consequences, and plead her cause. Certainly she would not submit to this betrothal to a foreign prince without a struggle.

“There is only one method to be employed in this crisis,” Queen Tiy declared, “the process of elimination. It disposes promptly of the two

babies. No Babylonian is patient enough to wait while infants grow to marriageable age, however advantageous the alliance. By the same token, Meketaten is not to be considered. The child will never live to see another inundation.”

Ankhsenpaaten heard her father groan at the words, but the old Queen’s voice went on with merciless cunning.

“The priests of Amon have spread it abroad that a curse rests upon the house of Akhenaten: his favorite daughter shall die, the Great Royal Wife shall bear him no sons, his heirs shall perish, and his city be razed to the ground. He himself shall live only to see his Empire tumble in ruins about his ears—ears deaf too long to the entreaties of loyal vassals besieged by covetous neighbors. You talk of the blessing of Aten, my son. Is that blessing powerful enough to wipe out the curse of Amon and his myriad priests, burning with hatred of you and yours?”

“Aten is all powerful! There is no Amon! His curse is the hollow baying of whipped curs!”

“Rather is it a sword of vengeance forged by enemy tongues grown venomous in defeat. If you would dull its bite, my son, you must plan with craft. Fight them with their own weapons. Defeat them at their own game. Refute their claims. Disprove their prophecies.” The once ringing voice rasped with the effort of speech, but its challenge was like a bugle call to arms. Into this one last plea, the Royal Mother was throwing every weight of will and wisdom at her command.

“How, Royal Mother, would you have me do that?” Infinite sadness tinged the deference of the King’s tone. “Neither by love nor the skill of physicians can I hold Meketaten if it be the will of Aten that she leave my arms in death.”

“True, and be assured your enemies will make the most of her going. But there is always the chance that Nefertiti may bear you a son. Your

daughters can be married to men of promise here in Egypt, and give you abundant grandsons to prove that this dynasty is not destined to perish with your death. If you will listen to the counsel of wiser heads, to the warnings of a mother, and the far-reaching plans of a Horemheb, you may yet save the Empire for your grandchildren and great-grandchildren. Give your enemies the lie where the curse of Amon touches the succession, and they may forget the fading of one frail flower in Pharaoh's garden."

"Yet if that one flower fade, not all the kingdoms of the world could fill my empty arms, nor the frustration of all my enemies bring satisfaction to my soul. No, my Mother, I cannot lift a hand to change the destiny which life has in store for me. The Aten breathes His warmth into my being, and Him alone will I serve. Idle threats of Amon's curse move me not at all. As long as you counsel retaliation, I cannot profit by your advice, much as I honor your words. In the past, at your instigation I have defeated the enemies of my faith, the followers of Amon, and utterly confounded them. Their temple altars are laid waste; their priesthood is scattered. More I shall not do in hatred of my fellow men, let them say what they will."

Well Ankhsenpaaten knew the fervor of that moving voice. Again her father had withdrawn into that remote other world of his, a world which he shared only with his God. No argument could reach him there. Yet the Queen Mother was not dismayed.

"Who spoke of retaliation? I said you must refute their claims, disprove their prophecies. You must, if possible, have a son. In four months we shall know whether the infant to be borne by Nefertiti is another girl, as they foretell. In the meantime you can acquire a son by marriage. There are three daughters who should be wed at once, that the people may know the dynasty will live. This paltry proposal from a greedy neighbor forces you to make a decision which only a blind man would have so long neglected."

The Dowager Queen tapped her walking stick impatiently against the pavement.

“But they are such babies!” Nefertiti protested. “Surely we can wait.”

“You dare not wait!” the older woman cried. “If you do, death and disaster will overtake us all. Meketaten is a shadow. I have watched her now for days. You, too, are ill, my son, though you would mask infirmity under a religious cloak. Scorn and mock this curse of Amon as you will, it may be fulfilled by circumstance if not design, unless you thwart at least one of its prophecies now. Who is to be the next Pharaoh of Egypt?”

Silence. It filled the room with waiting—a tense, expectant waiting, as if Akhenaten’s answer would seal the fate of everyone who heard.

Ankhsenpaaten felt her whole body shaken by the throbbing of her heart, measuring off the breathless seconds.

“I do not know.” Strangely humble were those words on the lips of the man who was always so sure of knowing.

A sigh of satisfaction escaped the lips of the aged Queen.

“That answer is worthy of a great man, or a negligent fool. You, my son, are both. This day must decide that question without fail.”

“It is true, Queen Mother. What is your wish in regard to the succession? No doubt you, with the wisdom of years, have some plan to bolster up my indecision. I must confess that Nefertiti and I ask only that our children remain close about us, protected by our love. If we could wait —”

“My son, I say again you cannot wait. I dare not let you wait. Age besets me for my sins. I am not at home in this fanciful world of yours. I know the world of reality too well. Once the succession is settled, I may go back to Thebes in peace. There I have lived my life, and there I shall end it before many months have passed.”

Nefertiti gave a cry of protest, but the Dowager Queen stopped her with a gesture.

“This is no time for questions and regrets. My life is my own, and I shall die where and when I please.” She smiled grimly. “Come, let us get about this business of marrying babes. As a matter of fact, they object not at all, but enjoy the excitement and adulation. I know. Before I was in my teens, I was Queen of Egypt, with a real problem on my hands. The daughter of a Priest of Min and a Mistress of the Royal Robes has her own way to make as wife of a king. Jealousy and intrigue rule a Court, and people and priest would have preferred a Queen of royal blood. No such struggle lies ahead of Akhenaten’s daughters. They are of the blood royal. Would that all their future husbands could say as much!”

“We bow to your experience, Mother of Wisdom. What is it you would have us do? Which daughters may we keep for Egypt, which daughter send to Babylon?”

“Convention and her years demand that Merytaten stand first in line as wife of your successor,” the Queen Mother answered. “She will bear children first, and seems a strong, placid child. I fear she will be no help to a husband except as the mother of his children, for she has little beauty or brains to recommend her. However, she will do, and should provide an heir within a few years.”

Nefertiti objected to this description of her first born, but agreed that Merytaten was the one to whom the succession should be entrusted. She would be loyal and dependable always.

“Then you would send our Small Bird to be a Princess of Babylon?” the young Queen asked. Ankhsenpaaten held her breath, so casual did the question sound, as if her whole future did not hang in the balance.

“Ah, that would be a sore loss for us all!” the child heard her father say in welcome protest. “It is she who never fails to bring a smile to

Meketaten's face, and her childish wisdom is my delight. Must she be the one to go?"

"Ankhsenpaaten? Certainly not! That girl should have been a boy. She has intelligence and a will of her own. Why send her to the harem of that fool in Babylon? She will be lost to Egypt when Egypt needs her most. You can have no assurance that Merytaten will live to maturity. You can have no assurance that she will fill the royal nursery with sons. It is never safe to leave the future of a dynasty to one child. My counsel is that you find a suitable husband for Ankhsenpaaten within your own Court. Let that pouter pigeon of a Ta-Shera strut through the halls of Buraburyash. Deck her in his thousand and forty-eight jewels. They will feed her vanity and puff her up to proper proportions for a future Queen of Babylon!" The Queen Mother tossed the words from her scornfully. "Come, come, daughter. Stop weeping at the thought of losing her. She will remain here with you for some years in any case. Now that we have settled the matter, send for Ay and Horemheb, that they may think themselves responsible for what we choose to do. They fight a silent battle for control of you and yours."

Ankhsenpaaten made no attempt to understand the long political discussion which took place when Ay and Horemheb appeared. With careful craft Ay talked round and about the point under discussion, feeling his way before committing himself. In sharp contrast to his diplomacy was the soldierly bluntness of Horemheb when at length Akhenaten pressed him for his judgment. At the first sound of his voice, Ankhsenpaaten shifted her cramped position and parted the folds of drapery until she could see that purposeful face through the narrow slit.

"O Pharaoh, it is not meet that I should voice my thoughts on such matters before listening to your own words of wisdom. But we have mentioned the succession in the past, and I feel sure your will is not far different from my own. Merytaten will soon be mature enough to mother

Akhenaten's grandchildren. She should wed a youth of royal blood, that he may be associated with Pharaoh for some years and learn about affairs of state before he has to shoulder the burden of rulership alone. I believe such an arrangement is doubly essential now that enemies besiege our frontiers and the country seethes with unrest."

At that moment Ay stepped forward within the range of Ankhsenpaaten's limited vision. His face was a study. Anger and a veiled fear fought together in his narrow eyes, and suddenly the child realized the import of Horemheb's words. It was Tutankhaten he believed should marry the eldest Princess and share Pharaoh's throne! Tutankhaten was under the General's control, and so would the throne of Egypt be in time to come. At the thought, Ankhsenpaaten turned sick with dismay. Tutankhaten the valiant, the venturesome, married to the sober Merytaten, old before her time? That must never be!

"I would express my wholehearted approval of the valiant Horemheb's suggestion." Ay's voice was smooth. "Obviously the husband of the Princess Merytaten must be capable and close to Akhenaten both in spirit and in blood. The young Smenkhkara, trained at Thebes and in the royal schools of Akhetaten, is by birth and nature well fitted for such a post. In disposition he closely resembles our beloved King. He is in full sympathy with Akhenaten's ideals and with his desire to strengthen alliances through marriage rather than war. If Ankhsenpaaten is at the Court of Buraburyash, and another Princess at the Hittite Court..."

"Divine Father, would you deliver a royal child of Egypt to such an insolent youth as the Hittite Prince who is now a spy in our midst? I am amazed!" Horemheb's face wore a look of mock surprise.

Akhenaten laughed as if glad of a diversion. "A daughter of mine could do far worse than marry that young man, but I would rather see him in the Egyptian Court as her husband than send her to a Hittite Court as his wife!"

“Come, come,” broke in the Dowager Queen, “this settles nothing. There are three Princesses old enough to be betrothed. Two are needed here; one can be sent to Burraburyash, though I trust he plans to trade more than a necklace for her. Nefertiti as yet has no son, and there are only two young men suitable to our purpose: Smenkhkara, who I see is Ay’s candidate, and Tutankhaten, whom Horemheb naturally favors. In this case I believe the Divine Father is right: Smenkhkara should be betrothed to Merytaten. As a matter of fact, I had that in mind when I sent him here from Thebes.”

Ankhsenpaaten’s eyes were fixed on Horemheb, but no shadow of disappointment darkened his face. He merely inclined his head a little, as if to bow to the Queen Mother’s wishes. Ay’s satisfaction was far more evident. He smiled and shot a look of triumph at his rival for the King’s favor. The Queen Mother continued:

“Ankhsenpaaten is too intelligent a child to be sacrificed in the interests of trade. Nefer-nefru-Aten-ta-Shera will do very nicely for that purpose. Ankhsenpaaten has a mind and courage. So has Tutankhaten. They are the same age. They like one another, which makes for peace in the palace. They are not afraid of life and they crave adventure, which may make for war on the frontier if the destiny of Egypt ever falls into their hands. Can you be trusted, Horemheb, to see that the boy knows when war on the frontier is essential to the integrity of the Empire?” Again Horemheb bowed.

As if to put a stop to such unwelcome suggestions, Akhenaten rose abruptly to his feet.

“It seems wise to Pharaoh and his Queen that the Great Royal Mother’s wishes be obeyed. Accordingly we shall arrange the betrothal of Nefer-nefru-Aten-ta-Shera to the son of King Burraburyash. That there may be no question in the King’s mind as to our reason for selecting one of the younger children, we will first announce the betrothal of the Princess Merytaten to Smenkhkara, and of the Princess Ankhsenpaaten to

Tutankhaten. My second daughter's state of health needs no explanation to the ambassador, who has seen her. I leave all arrangements for the ceremonies to you, Divine Father, and to the Royal Nurse. The Queen and I will make known our plans to the children. They are pitifully young to face such responsibilities. May the Aten guide them and bless their unions with His radiance."

The two royal counselors bowed low and withdrew. Queen Tiy rose. "Both men are satisfied. Each is sure that he has the better of the bargain!" she chuckled, moving across the floor, supported by her ebony cane. Nefertiti was weeping softly, as if she alone had suffered defeat at the hands of those who planned the fate of Egypt and of her children. Akhenaten put his arm around her.

"I think you misread my counselors' motives, Royal Mother. Their sole thought is for the future of Egypt and the spread of Aten's truth throughout the world. Each favors a different method according to his nature, but I accept the aid of each with equal confidence."

"So I observe: you heed the advice of neither one!" She paused in the doorway. "After all, perhaps it is just as well, my son. I would rather see you tie the hands of both than give a free hand to the wrong one—and mark my words, one is wrong!"



Kenofer

CHAPTER XI

WAITING

AKHENATEN was very gentle with the children dear to his heart when he told them of the marriage plans. Patiently he explained the situation, and dutifully they listened. Merytaten was submissive and apparently unmoved by the turn of events as soon as she learned that her betrothal and later marriage would not mean separation from Meketaten. Smenkhkara would return to the School for Scribes for further training, until such time as it seemed best to make him co-regent.

For Ankhsenpaaten and Tutankhaten a betrothal would serve all official purposes. As for Ta-Shera and her absent bridegroom, both betrothal and marriage were to be by proxy, solemnized as soon as the necessary documents and gifts could be exchanged between the two kingdoms. The crafty Ay had no intention of parting with a royal Princess for a mere necklace, however numerous the gems. Ta-Shera herself was immensely pleased with the elaborate trinket. Gleefully she strutted about, exhibiting

her finery. Was she not far more fortunate than her sisters? After all, Smenkhkara and Tutankhaten were ordinary boys, while a Prince of Babylon might even have a beard!

Ankhsenpaaten soon reassured her father as to her willingness to marry Tutankhaten rather than a foreign dignitary. Ta-Shera was welcome to the unknown son of royalty. For herself, she asked only to stay in the Court which had given her birth. Some day she might see the world in company with Tutankhaten. In the meantime it was enough to be allowed to accompany him on duck-hunting expeditions along the river's edge. She would be allowed to do that, would she not?

Akhenaten nodded his consent. He was deeply moved by the willingness of his daughters to do his bidding without question. So often had he been accused of lax discipline that this respect for his wishes came as a comforting justification of his gentle methods. Especially was he touched by the unexpected docility of this willful Small Bird of his. She must have come to feel a real attachment for Tutankhaten. Perhaps they were destined to know such mutual devotion as had made Akhenaten's life with Nefertiti more beautiful than the love songs treasured through the ages.

At the moment Ankhsenpaaten was far more interested in the prospect of watching Tutankhaten kill ducks with a throw-stick than in any serious thought of the future. Yet when by accident she actually found herself face to face with this boy whose life she was to share, diffidence beset her.

They met by chance in the garden, and after one swift glance at his face, her eyes dropped to a fixed inspection of her bare toes, their polished nails just visible below the flaring linen folds of her winter dress. No sandals ever impeded the movements of those brown feet, except when formality demanded a thin leather sole held in place by braided thongs, one between the two first toes, another across the instep. In vain the child struggled to lift her eyes. The lids were heavy with a new shyness, and for once a glib

tongue failed her. Alone in the garden the two faced each other, aware that destiny had linked them with a bond not of their choosing. The boy shifted uneasily, clearing his throat as he turned to a row of fruit trees lining the path.

“Would you like an orange?” he asked abruptly.

She shook her head.

“Are you ill?”

Again the drooping head moved slowly from side to side.

“What is the matter, then? Are you worried about the betrothal ceremonies, afraid we may forget what we have to say?” He asked the question teasingly.

“Indeed I am not afraid of that! Are you?” She was startled into speech.

“Not with you to prompt me! We ought to do as well as Merytaten and that faint-hearted Smenkhkara, at any rate. To think I have to go to school with him!” He made a wry face. She took courage from that idle grimace.

“Do you mind so very much—about us?” she asked.

“About us? Mind having you for my wife when we grow up? Certainly not, Foolish One! I don’t like girls, but you are better than most. You will not bother me, and I shall let you do whatever you choose, as long as you stay sensible as you are now.”

“Then you will let me go hunting with you, even after we are married?”

“To be sure, unless I’m hunting lions or Hittites. Then it would be too dangerous. I would not want you hurt.”

“Nor would I have you come to any harm,” she said softly, stepping nearer to lay a hand upon his arm. “I shall stay close to you in all you do, sharing your adventures and caring for you always, just as mother does for father. Surely you won’t make me sit at home here in Akhetaten as mother does, never allowed to set foot beyond the great boundary tablets. Please let me see the world!”

“I shall let you see the world, and what is more, I shall let you see me kill ducks with a throw-stick! Come on, let’s find Hotep and ask when we may go. At least when we are married, we shan’t have to ask anyone’s permission to do exactly as we wish. That I can promise you!”

But Ankhsenpaaten, wiser in the ways of Courts, knew that to be one promise Tutankhaten would not be able to keep. Every hour of a Pharaoh’s day was regulated by the customs of the land and the duties of his office. He and the Queen were little better than devoted slaves to their position. Tutankhaten would learn all that in time. For the present let him fancy that freedom would follow in the wake of power. She herself was comforted to know that as a bride-to-be she was not in the way.

It had become common knowledge that once the betrothal ceremonies were over, Queen Tiy was to return to Thebes. Kenofer, determined to depart as he had come, in the retinue of the Queen Mother, had left the House of Books in order to devote the last precious weeks to completing the series of sketches he had started when first he reached Akhetaten. The King had given him free access to the royal palaces, the gardens, the inner precincts of the temples, that a complete record of life at the royal capital might be carried back to Thebes.

In those crowded, joyous days, Tutankhaten and the Princess saw much of Kenofer. They loved to watch his work and much preferred him to any other companion on their outings in boat and chariot. Akhenaten entrusted the safety of the royal children to the older boy without question, and highly approved of the growing friendship between them.

There was that in the quiet bearing of the young artist, which commanded instant respect and confidence. His keen eyes under their straight black brows met the world with a fearless challenge. He swept the horizon as his pilot father might have done, visualizing distant lands beyond the view of others, without ever missing a detail of objects near at hand.

Just as his brush reduced intricate, shifting shapes to a few clear, rhythmic lines, so did his mind strip non-essentials from whatever problems occupied his thoughts. Often when Ankhsenpaaten sat for him, she had the conviction that he looked through and beyond her into the very heart of the person she would one day be. Some of his sketches made her appear far older than she was; others captured the sheer childish glee with which she shared Tutankhaten's pastimes. She viewed those older sketches with a puzzled wonder. Tutankhaten declared that they did not resemble her at all.

"She never was so solemn in her life!" he cried, and Kenofer accepted the outspoken criticism with grave acquiescence. Just for a moment he had caught a shadow of maturity in her face, he said; yet perhaps he had but fancied it. When the younger boy's teasing comments went too far, Kenofer quietly said that after all a Princess could not always stay a Small Bird. Ankhsenpaaten, thinking strange new thoughts, knew in her heart that he was right.

For all his serious view of life, Kenofer often entered wholeheartedly into the small adventures created by his two young friends to liven the solemn monotony of official ceremonies. Far more satisfying than royal duties was their own make-believe, as they played at fighting Hittites and Khabiri, pursuing them in chariots across the wide reaches of the plain behind the city, or escaping from unexpected ambush by hiding in the tall reeds of the marshes edging the river. Often they spent the warm hours of the drowsy afternoon crouched tense and silent in their papyrus hunting skiff, weaving their way to safety through the swamps, an outwitted enemy close upon their heels.

Encouraged by Ankhsenpaaten's fertile imagination, Tutankhaten's military ambitions and prowess as a hunter flourished. His boyish longings took on new and varied forms. Far from being in the way, this spirited girl

with her vivid sense of adventure and knack of dramatizing soon became an essential part of his daily plans.

Tutankhaten was bitterly disappointed to discover that the moment the last of the triple betrothal festivities was over, he would have to abandon that satisfying play and settle down to the dull routine of school among students who frowned on war and completely ignored his claims to special consideration. He was fairly quick at figures, adding numbers, multiplying by two, deciding how much corn would be required to fill a granary of a certain size, but was very slow at drawing hieroglyphs and learning to write the confusing hieratic script. Tutankhaten knew the boys would laugh at his blunders, but what had he in common with lads whose greatest ambition was to sit all day, knees bent like a hieroglyphic symbol, translating boring documents for the government? Some of his schoolmates could neither shoot nor drive a chariot. He viewed them with scorn, even while admiring their cleverness in wielding brush and pen.

Ankhsenpaaten half pitied, half envied her betrothed. The days would be sadly lacking in excitement without Tutankhaten to share the daily life of the palace. Yet Ankhsenpaaten knew that she would miss far more the presence of Kenofer and his sensitive response to her changing moods. Tutankhaten lost himself completely in the games they played, forgot her utterly in the masterful, triumphant role she always created for him. Kenofer never once lost sight of the fact that the mighty dreams the three of them enacted were of her making.

The artist marveled at Ankhsenpaaten's understanding of the young hunter who might one day be King. She saw the dreams which lurked half formed in Tutankhaten's mind, and gave them substance in games more vivid and important to the boy than the actual life he lived from day to day. Just so Kenofer himself could see the vague fears, the first, faint visions of the future which were beginning to haunt the mind of a Princess growing

up, and could give them visible form in the portrait sketches which he made. Each was an artist, each possessed of insight and a young but vital skill. Their spirits met with quiet understanding, and the youth's quizzical gaze, as he fell in with her make-believe, brought an answering glint of humor to the girl's eyes.

Ankhsenpaaten felt Kenofer's unspoken devotion deepening with every hour of comradeship, and accepted it happily as her due. It was natural and right that in her father's city all should love and honor the daughter of his house. It was far more surprising that she, who loved so few outside her immediate family, should know a joyous quickening of her heart whenever she was with these two lads, each so unlike the other, yet each so fine. Of course, she and Tutankhaten would have long years to spend together, but Kenofer was going far away.

She wished she knew how to paint the angular planes of the stern young face. She wanted to catch the tender curve of lips which smiled so readily at her coming, the flash of white teeth when a rare laugh folded brown cheeks into deep clefts. She asked Kenofer to make a sketch of himself before he left for Thebes, that she might remember him more clearly.

"Is your memory then so short?" he teased.

"Far longer must it be than yours," she retorted. "I ask but one small likeness—just a head—while you have dozens of drawings to help you remember me. Did you seek to draw me so thoroughly that you need never think of me again?"

"Think of you? How can a prisoner fail to think of the one who holds him captive? I am at best a prisoner on parole. Whenever you see fit to demand my presence or my services, say the word and I will come."

"And what word shall I say?" she asked, sensing a hidden gravity in his tone.

"Say only, 'Small Bird calls,' and I shall know."

Next day he brought her a portrait of himself, sketched with the aid of a mirror. At sight of it she drew back, affronted.

“Is that how you feel when you think of me? You look that way when you draw and the work is not to your liking!”

Kenofer eyed his handiwork, then threw back his head and laughed immoderately. “It was not of you I thought, but of myself! ’Tis true, I liked neither the model nor the pictured face. Never before had I gazed upon my countenance with a professional eye, and I glared at my reflection until it all but cracked the polished metal. This face of mine is crooked as a clay doll fashioned by a child! See, one ear is set higher than the other, and the jaw is long and narrow to a fault. It is a collection of odd bits: Cretan eyes and brows, Egyptian chin, a nose which can’t decide which race to follow. Making this portrait has cured me of all vanity, if vanity I ever had!”

So rueful was the lad’s expression that Ankhsenpaaten forgot her disappointment.

“I have a certain fondness for your looks, in spite of what you say.” She smiled. “But I like my memory picture of you better than your painted one. You are not handsome as Tutankhaten is. Few boys are, no matter what their race. He would make a Pharaoh everyone would worship, for his looks and for his courage, too. But you have talents he could never have. Perhaps the Aten gives each of His children some one gift to treasure and to use. That is what father says. I can’t imagine what my gift is, can you?” The question was so simply asked, it deserved an answer quite uncolored by courtly flattery. Kenofer regarded her fixedly for a moment and then replied:

“You find adventure in the living of your daily life, and have within you courage to meet whatever life may bring. The ability to live fully, without fear, is a gift so rare we often do not recognize it, either in ourselves or others.”

“That is what you put into the sketches Tutankhaten did not like,” she said with sudden conviction. “You think when I grow up, I shall not be—afraid.”

He bowed his head gravely. “And if you ever are...” He did not finish, but she understood.

A few days later she was to learn what loneliness could be, for the departure of Queen Tiy and Baketaten with Kenofer and their entire retinue, left the city of Akhetaten desolate. The dictatorial old lady with her caustic tongue had won a place for herself within the palace and without. All mourned her going, except perhaps the Great Royal Nurse and her husband. Certainly the Divine Father Ay breathed a sigh of relief, for back of the Queen Mother’s acceptance of his position as Chief Counselor, he had sensed a shrewd understanding of his motives, which was at times disconcerting.

Ankhsenpaaten missed her grandmother. Even her childish eyes had seen how rapidly the Dowager Queen had faded during the weeks of celebration. She recalled vividly Queen Tiy’s prophecy of approaching death. No arguments had served to change her fixed determination to die at Thebes and be buried in the tomb prepared for her. Akhenaten might choose to lie in the lonely valley winding through the eastern hills of his isolated city. As for her, she preferred to share the Valley of Kings with her royal predecessors. She had earned the right to that dignity, for all her lack of royal blood, and she would never rest in peace far from the city of her birth.

In the end Akhenaten bowed to her wishes, promising her the most magnificent burial which could be devised for her honor, and a period of mourning long and heartfelt, at Akhetaten as well as Thebes. Priests should be appointed to guard her funeral chapel and tend the lands set aside to provide the food and sustenance necessary to the departed. Quietly Queen Tiy listened to his protestations of filial devotion, and to the tearful

entreaties of Nefertiti that she live to bless the grandson soon to crown the perfect happiness of the royal pair.

“Be comforted, my children. I have lived to see too much—or not enough. An old woman’s curiosity is never satisfied. There is no convenient or altogether welcome time to leave this troubled life. I have done here at Akhetaten all I can. Your world is not my world. It is better that I go and leave the future in the hands of your children. Certainly Ankhsenpaaten and Tutankhaten will play their part with courage, whatever it may be. Give them this miniature mummy case as an amulet. It holds a lock of my hair, and I would like to think that some small part of myself guards them against disaster.”

So she had left them, and with her had gone a certain glitter and regal splendor, a drive and power provided by her indomitable will.

Akhenaten retired to his garden, appearing in public only for the sunrise and sunset services in the temple, or for a trip of inspection with Ankhsenpaaten at his side. Nefertiti was not well and waited anxiously for the arrival of the expected son. At the same time the father and mother watched with growing alarm the more and more frequent periods of unconsciousness which held Meketaten captive.

Akhenaten himself had fought against that same malady, which had beset him ever since he was a child. In the beginning the visions which clung to his memory after these seizures had in large measure supplied the inspiration for his religious convictions and his plans for the worship of the Aten. Then had he justly deserved his formal title, the Great of Visions. Of recent months the fainting spells which once had been a source of power now left him to face long hours of weary lethargy. At night he sank to sleep in a troubled maze of half dreams, to awake unrefreshed. The words of the curse he scorned to heed rang in his ears. Nefertiti would never have a son. Perhaps she would never live to bear another child.

Akhenaten sought refuge among his flowers and trees, where the warmth of Aten's rays brought him temporary comfort, and the laughter of the children eased his heart. For long hours he sat there holding Meketaten in his arms, watching the telltale twitching of the blue lids fringed with long black lashes, as she closed weary eyes against the glitter of sunlight on the rippled surface of the lake. The routine of royal obligations was thrust aside. Letters from Syria and Byblos went unanswered, if not unread, and the pleas of Horemheb fell on ears deafened by a foreboding of evil. What cared Akhenaten for the political struggles of quarrelsome vassals when the lives of his loved ones were in danger?

Ankhsenpaaten lived within the shadow of that fear which all her father's resounding prayers and protestations of faith seemed unable to lighten. She rode beside him in the chariot of electrum behind his spirited bays, but the swift movement of the horses reminded her so vividly of the hours with Tutankhaten in their world of gay adventure, that tears blurred her vision and blotted out the beauties of the day. She fed Akhenaten's pigeons where the fountain splashed, but Kenofer's presence had filled the little court with memories which flocked through her mind and left an ache of loneliness in their wake.

With a new will she turned to her work under the menoi from the House of Books, finding some comfort in her progress with the intricate symbols he was teaching her to form. Soon she tried her first letter, carefully arranged according to the form prescribed by the numerous rules of correct usage. When she could win her teacher's grudging approval of her efforts, she ventured to compose the letter she had long intended to write to Kenofer.

She sent the product of her labors by a ship's captain on his way to Thebes, in company with an imposing array of official mail written by royal scribes. Yet none of their elegant and professional documents displayed

even a small part of the patient effort and honest pride with which a Princess had completed her unaccustomed task and sent it forth.

In due time an answer came, and like the reassuring sound of a friendly voice, brought her comfort. Kenofer decorated the margins of his missive with whimsical illustrations not included in any letter form taught in the House of Books. When Ankhsenpaaten shared their gay nonsense with her father, he smiled for the first time in days, perhaps because the pictured figures brought a quick response to the pale face cradled in his arm.

“Write to him again,” Meketaten smiled. “Tell him we miss him here in Akhetaten. Soon there will be another baby for him to draw.”

The thought of that other baby was never far from Meketaten’s mind. She loved to have them talk to her of what they would do when the little one arrived, and mother was once more well and strong. Ankhsenpaaten made up long stories of the picnics they would have, the evening feasts, and all the celebrations which welcome a royal son.

“Would you mind very much, Father, if it were another girl?” Meketaten asked abruptly one day, searching his face for the answer he might not dare to voice. There was no doubt of his sincerity when he made reply, holding her fragile hand within his own:

“If Aten, who giveth life to all things and taketh away that life, grant that Nefertiti, thy mother, whose voice is music to my ears, place in my arms an infant girl, a prayer of humble gratitude shall voice my innermost thoughts. All my daughters have brought me joy, and I have sturdy sons in Smenkhkara and Tutankhaten. I ask only that we may continue to live together in peace and contentment for long years to come.”

Even as the Dreamer of Akhetaten spoke, his seventh daughter lay in state awaiting her father’s blessing, while Nefertiti turned her head upon its ebony pillow and wept softly that she had not given her beloved lord a son. The Great Royal Nurse brought the news, her eyes large with importance

that she would be the first to see how the Royal Father met this seventh “disappointment” in ten years. It was she, however, who met with disappointment. Pharaoh asked for the safety of Nefertiti and the infant babe, then rose with quiet composure, Meketaten clasped in his arms, Ankhsenpaaten close at his side. Together they made their way through the familiar sunlit garden. When they reached the upper terrace, Meketaten broke the silence with her soft, breathless voice:

“It is good to have the waiting over,” she sighed. “I have been thinking, Father, that perhaps it is as well this baby, too, should be a girl. You have so long been used to having six small daughters. It would seem strange to have but five.”



Merytaten and Smenkhkara

CHAPTER XII

AMON STRIKES

IN accordance with the advice of the Queen Mother, definite plans had been made to prepare Smenkhkara for his future duties as co-regent. Following the betrothal, he finished his term at the House of Books, then took up residence at Court, there to be initiated into the daily routine of official life. The first steps in his training were made under the guidance of the Divine Father Ay, since Akhenaten himself was too preoccupied to show much interest in affairs of state.

Smenkhkara was a willing but uninspired pupil, accepting direction without question or comment. As this was what the Chief Counselor had anticipated, he gave excellent reports of his charge to the King. The boy was tractable and serious minded—an ideal understudy. Akhenaten was pleased.

The birth of a seventh daughter, far from deepening Akhenaten's gloom, seemed to awaken him from his troubled musings. Determined that no one should feel that a daughter was less welcome than a son, he observed with

care all the customary ceremonies of rejoicing attendant upon the arrival of a royal offspring. For a week the city was gay with music, processions, and official pageantry. The School for Scribes opened its doors for a welcome recess, and once more Tutankhaten was free to share the life at Court, with Ankhsenpaaten at his side.

It was then that Akhenaten first noticed the spontaneous delight with which the people greeted the two younger children wherever they appeared. When the royal chariots made their way in single file along the streets, eager shouts and heartwarming laughter met the coming of the diminutive pair. Perhaps it was that Tutankhaten, unassisted, drove the chariot with such easy confidence. Perhaps it was that the two children standing side by side so closely resembled Nefertiti and himself. Whatever the reason, to Merytaten and Smenkhkara, dignified and a bit self-conscious in their new position of honor, the populace gave their just due of deference, nothing more. To Ankhsenpaaten and Tutankhaten, unconcerned with matters of rank and preference, they gave their hearts.

The children themselves were unaware of this turn of events and its political implications. There was so much to say in those short hours together, they paid small heed to the humor of the mob. They sensed its friendliness but took all marks of favor for granted. Had they not been welcomed in the same spirit on that first day when they had played at king and queen, feeding the crowd from the Window of Appearance?

This brief and happy interlude was brought to a sudden end by the news of Queen Tiy's death. All of Egypt was plunged into mourning. The wailing of the women lasted far into the night, only to start with fresh vigor long before sunrise. True to his promise, Akhenaten made plans to provide an elaborate funeral and equip both tomb and funeral temple with lavish care. For this purpose he decided to send the Divine Father Ay to Thebes, since he himself was bound by vow never to leave the confines of Akhetaten.

With the Chief Counselor would go Smenkhkara. It seemed a wise precaution to have the future co-regent make an official appearance in Thebes at this time. The death of the Queen Mother might well encourage the priests of Amon to renew their efforts to regain power in that city of their god. During the weeks of embalmment and mourning, even tearful eyes would be watching to see what manner of lad would one day sit by Pharaoh's side. Merytaten was to have accompanied her betrothed, but only a royal command could have induced her to leave Meketaten, who lay much of the time in coma. The King, looking at his eldest daughter's tear-stained face, could not bring himself to give that order.

Scarcely had the royal party left for Thebes when Merytaten's worst fears were realized. Quietly, without regaining consciousness, Meketaten slipped away from her in sleep. It was Yatu who bore the tragic tidings to the King and Queen—Yatu, who had not left the child for weeks, but had slept on the floor beside the golden couch, mumbling charms and incantations, when all the physicians failed to restore that tenuous consciousness. A seventh daughter born—a favorite daughter lost. Where next would that sinister shadow fall?

The same thought haunted Ankhsenpaaten, tearless and silent by her father's side. Instinctively she knew that her place was there in the garden where he sat brooding hour after hour. She could do nothing for Merytaten, whose heartbroken moaning filled the nursery. Yatu was there and Nefertiti, offering consolation with the fortitude that mothers learn. Ankhsenpaaten knew that for months her mother had been sure Meketaten could not live. To Nefertiti the child's going was like the passing of a shadow, not the coming of a sudden cloud. To her the world seemed a brighter place with the small sufferer free from pain.

Akhenaten, however, appeared to find small comfort in that thought. With unseeing eyes he stared at the lightly rippled surface of the lake where

white swans lifted stately heads and moved deliberately among the greedy, pushing ducks. He took no notice of a messenger who came with documents from Thebes, one of them a letter for Ankhsenpaaten addressed in Kenofer's hand. Enclosed was a gay note for Meketaten, covered with quaint pictures. In it he promised to come at her bidding to paint the portrait of the seventh Princess, word of whose safe arrival had just reached Thebes. What was her name to be? Official dispatches had not stated that important fact, nor had they described this latest addition to the royal family. Was the infant a plump little pigeon like the last one, or a mere sparrow of a child, like Ankhsenpaaten? In either case, she would be sure to make an ideal model, almost as ideal as the lovely Meketaten herself.

Together Ankhsenpaaten and her father read the words, and suddenly they were close in each other's arms. Nefertiti found them thus, and when she had read Kenofer's letters, she examined the sketches with a thoughtful eye.

"What love and devotion Meketaten aroused in everyone who knew her! No one has expressed it more fully than this lad, with his gift of insight and facile brush. Would that we could carry out her wish and have him come to paint the baby. It would please her to have the portrait with her in the tomb."

Ankhsenpaaten lifted a tear-wet face from her father's shoulder.

"Could he not paint the murals in the tomb itself? That would please her even more! It isn't too late to send for Kenofer and have him put us all there on the walls to keep her company. Then she wouldn't be lonely in the valley by herself. O Father, please!"

For a moment Akhenaten looked doubtful. "The lad is gifted, but his talent is still young. He lacks experience."

"Meketaten, too, was young. She loved Kenofer's work," the child insisted. "No other artist knew or cared for her as Kenofer did."

Ankhsenpaaten's pleading met with eager support from Nefertiti and so it was decided. True to his word Kenofer came at once. Though nothing short of a royal letter could have freed him from his pressing duties in the studio of his uncle and brother, where much of Queen Tiy's funerary equipment was being made, the double tragedy in Pharaoh's household made it necessary for everyone to do his share where his services were most needed.

To Ankhsenpaaten the days seemed endless before Kenofer was ushered into the King's presence. In those six months of absence, the boy had grown more reserved and grave. The responsibility of a royal commission rested upon him with the weight of years. His manner seemed very remote to the child who had waited wistfully for his comforting presence. Beyond including the Princess in his formal greeting, he had no word for her as he presented himself before Akhenaten in the private audience room adjoining the royal apartment. Nefertiti was at her husband's side, while Ankhsenpaaten sat close to Merytaten upon the couch, dangling her feet against the scarlet draperies from behind which she had once watched a very different interview. How long ago it seemed! How soon Queen Tiy's prophecies had come to pass: her own death and that of Meketaten. Her wishes had been carried out with care. Ankhsenpaaten wondered if she was satisfied. The Dowager Queen had had no word to say after the seventh daughter's coming. Perhaps she had been too ill to care. Ankhsenpaaten felt vaguely sorry for that seventh Princess.

Her father accepted quietly Kenofer's expressions of sorrow. He told the boy that the arrival of his letters had brought both comfort and a more poignant sense of loss to the royal family. They had sent for him in accordance with Meketaten's wish, to paint the baby's portrait. Furthermore they would like to entrust to him the task of decorating the walls of the chamber in which her sarcophagus would rest.

“This is not a command, but a request,” Akhenaten said. “Nothing is to go into Meketaten’s House of Eternity but the gifts of those she loved and the tributes of those who loved her. If you will lay the gift of your skill at her feet, we shall not question the perfection of the work.”

“Whatever I have to give is yours, O Pharaoh—yours and hers. May I ask one question before I undertake so difficult a task? Do the Queen Mother, the Princess Merytaten, and the Princess Ankhsenpaaten think me worthy of this trust?” He looked searchingly at each one. Nefertiti answered for them all.

“It is we who ask you to do it, knowing that Meketaten would ask you if she could.”

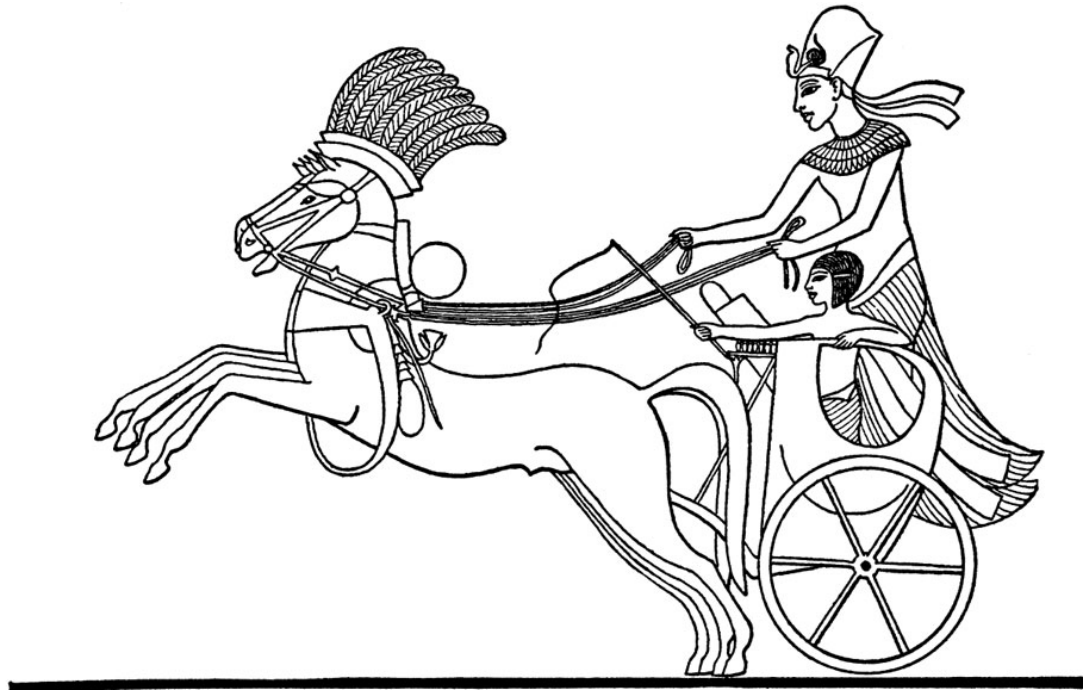
Before Kenofer actually set forth for the distant valley in the eastern hills, where workmen were laboring in a frantic effort to prepare the walls and level the unfinished passages of the royal tomb, he sought an opportunity to speak with Ankhsenpaaten alone. Gravely he thanked her for her confidence and her share in giving him this first opportunity to repay in part all that Akhenaten and the royal family had done for him. He was touched by their faith, yet troubled, too. What would Meketaten have wanted him to paint? Ankhsenpaaten must help him to visualize what the Princess would wish to have about her in her House of Eternity.

“She would wish to have the family. Especially would she want the new baby. O Kenofer, everything was so gay and happy when you left. Now it seems as if the whole world were dark with sadness and trouble! Is there nothing we can do? Death robs even the garden of its dear familiarity.”

Thoughtfully he searched the face raised trustingly to his. It had lengthened perceptibly, and a wistful gravity had steadied the restless eyes under their slanting brows. They were seeing more sober visions than the make-believe of a few months before.

“Be not dismayed, my Princess. It is not Death which changed the world for us, but Life. Flowers in your garden fade, but others just as lovely take their place. You see a different world just now because you are different. If you would know the truth,” he smiled with tender whimsy which reassured her more than any words, “the Princess Ankhsenpaaten is growing up!”

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Akhenaten and Ankhnesneferibre

CHAPTER XIII

THE VALLEY BEYOND THE CLIFFS

IMMEDIATELY after the sunrise service on the day following the young artist's arrival, Akhenaten and Ankhnesneferibre accompanied Kheperrenwaset to the winding valley in the eastern hills where the royal tomb was located. Akhenaten drove, while Kheperrenwaset stood beside the Princess, steadying her as the chariot sped along the hot road which crossed the open plain behind the city. Here and there the cliffs of the high desert were broken by wadies, great clefts cut by the muddy flood waters which now and then rushed through the eastern desert, fed by the torrential rains falling periodically between the Nile and the Red Sea. These dry torrent beds formed natural roads leading back into the desolate wastes of sand, where wandering bands of cutthroats were known to lurk. It was a common sight in Akhetaten to

see a group of Mazoi chariots making their way in that direction, hurrying in pursuit of some thief evading capture.

The entrance to the largest wady lay almost directly east of the royal palace, some three miles inland from the river. Akhenaten's team covered the distance at a rapid pace, then slowed to a walk as they entered the canyon. Kenofer was familiar with the group of tombs cut in the cliffs to the north, especially those of Huya, Meryra, and Panehsy. He had also visited those of Mahu and Ay being constructed to the south. The royal tomb, however, was cut in the rocky ledge of an isolated valley opening off the main wady several miles from the entrance. The sun blazed down upon them as the horses moved more slowly, curbing their restless prancing under the King's steady hand. They rode in silence, each absorbed in his own thoughts. Now and then Ankhsenpaaten glanced up at Kenofer with a smile, indicating the wild beauty of the rugged surroundings with a quick gesture of her hand. They passed no one, for the workmen had long been at their labors, and only the rutted road and the sand trampled by many feet gave evidence that others had recently passed that way.

More desolate grew the barren cliffs as Akhenaten turned into a narrow valley where a small wady had cut its way through the rocky walls. At a point some distance back from the main road appeared evidences of recent excavation. Here workmen were moving about, busy at their appointed tasks, while overseers directed their labors with sharp commands. At sight of the royal chariot all threw themselves face down upon the ground. Akhenaten, gravely acknowledging their greeting, left the chariot and made his way to the gaping hole through which the quarriers were removing limestone chips and small boulders. Ankhsenpaaten and Kenofer followed.

Cautiously they descended a flight of twenty steps, designed with an incline in the middle, down which the sarcophagus could be lowered. Automatically Ankhsenpaaten counted them. They were still rough hewn

and covered with sharp bits of stone which cut through the soft soles of her sandals. From the foot of these, a long, sloping passage descended to a second flight of stairs. The tomb was dark and close. A workman carried a torch, and Kenofer steadied the Princess as they felt their way down to the lower level. There in a pit would stand Akhenaten's own sarcophagus of pink granite, even then being prepared in the workshops of Akhetaten. Ankhsenpaaten had seen the sculptor working on the delicate figures of Nefertiti which were to take the place of the goddesses usually made to guard the four corners. Beyond the pit opened a great chamber, the walls of which were being decorated with low reliefs showing the royal family at worship. Pillars of rock had been left to support the roof, but as yet the whole was in a state of depressing incompleteness. The reliefs had not been painted, and the figures stood out in the torch light, ghostly, meaningless.

Ankhsenpaaten turned back and followed Kenofer to the head of the stairs above the pit. There Akhenaten had stopped to inspect a series of small rooms cut in the east wall. On these the workmen were concentrating their efforts, since it was here that the Princess Meketaten was to lie in state. The King ordered the room cleared, dismissing even the overseers who hovered near by in the passage, hoping for some word of commendation. Silently the three stood within the narrow walls, avoiding each other's gaze. In a corner lay the great dolerite pounders with which the leveling was done, and unfamiliar implements of diorite were scattered about the floor.

Fighting back tears, Ankhsenpaaten slipped her hand within the tense clasp of her father's thin fingers. She was frightened by the pallor of his face in the flaring light. It was all so desolate, a lonely place for a little child. With a visible effort Kenofer broke the silence.

"Will you tell me, O Pharaoh, which walls I am to do, and what scenes you wish to have depicted?"

After a moment Akhenaten spoke. First there were to be scenes showing the family together at worship. Kenofer must also give expression to the feeling of Universal Love. He must show the Aten giving His blessing to a grateful world, with all the races of the earth expressing their devotion to the Glory of the Disk. Then there must be pictured the funeral itself, with all the familiar figures of the Court as background.

“Especially the family,” Ankhsenpaaten urged. “That is what Meketaten would have wanted most of all.”

Akhenaten bowed his head in acquiescence, and turned away. Ankhsenpaaten pressed her cheek against his arm.

“Kenofer understands. Come, Father, let us go. We keep the workmen from their tasks. There is nothing more we can do.”

Once more in the sunlight, Akhenaten raised his face to the rays which poured their unchanging benediction from a cloudless sky. The workmen, curiously moved by the lines of agony cut deep into that revered countenance, fell prostrate in the dust. For long minutes silence filled the lonely valley. Ankhsenpaaten waited breathless, grateful for Kenofer’s nearness. Would it come, the peace, the strength of Aten? For days it had failed to comfort the sorely tried Son of the Sun.

Slowly a change came over the gaunt features, as if the warming rays had lighted some unearthly fire within. The deep voice rang through the valley, resonant and clear.

“O Living Aten, Lord of Eternity! Thou art radiant, fair, and strong. Thy love is great and large. Thy rays make vision for all that Thou hast created. Thy surface gleams, giving life to hearts, and Thou fillest the Two Lands with Thy love, O God to be adored. All flowers bloom; the plants of the waste lands thrive at Thy dawning. Thou art Mother and Father for those whose eyes Thou hast made. When Thou settest on the western horizon of heaven, they lie down as do those who die. The Son of the Sun, upholding

His beauty, Nefer-kheperu-Ra-ua-en-Ra saith, I am Thy Son, satisfying Thee, upholding Thy name. Thy might and power are firmly fixed in my heart. Thou art the Living Aten, and eternity is Thy portion. Thou art Thyself alone, but infinite vitalities are in Thee to give Thy creatures life. Thy honored Son exults; his heart is in joy!"

Transfigured, Akhenaten stood before them, his arms upraised in a triumphant gesture of adoration. Kenofer found words of praise upon his own lips, and gratitude warm as sunlight lay in Ankhsenpaaten's heart.

Exaltation held Pharaoh in its grip during the long ride back through the wady to the plain. It touched the horses with its spell and sent them racing along the tortuous road with high-flung heads. Ankhsenpaaten clung to the chariot rail as the wheels caught in the rutted curves. Kenofer held her with a protecting arm, shielding her as best he could from the sand and gravel scattered by the flying hoofs.

Akhenaten seemed totally unconscious of their presence. He turned the snorting horses toward the village built for the necropolis workmen on the plain between the Great Wady and the southern tombs. It lay several miles east of the Southern City, at the foot of a spur of low hills, protected by a high wall constantly patrolled by armed guards. These precautions were taken not so much to keep marauders out as to keep the laborers in, for they were likely to be a turbulent lot, restless in spite of the model conditions under which they worked, and easily lured from one task to another by promise of higher pay.

The bays were dark with sweat when Akhenaten drew up at the single entrance of the town. Soldiers guarded the gate, and a Mazoi chariot was tied to one of the numerous tethering rings set in the plaster wall. As the King pulled his team to a standstill, a young Captain of police was on the point of departure. At sight of the visitors, he saluted Pharaoh, bending sharply at the waist, hands stretched stiffly down in front of his knees.

Ankhsenpaaten, recognizing her friend Captain Hotep, impulsively called a gay greeting. Then she glanced at her father and was silenced. The sad remoteness of Akhenaten's gaze rebuked her more than any words. Abashed, she waited with downcast eyes while the King spoke briefly with the Captain, his tone cool, impersonal.

He explained that he wished to have Kenofer installed in one of the empty houses, where the artist could work undisturbed upon his preliminary sketches, referring to the Superintendent's plans at will. When the boy wished to visit the royal tomb for additional measurements, transportation was to be furnished him. Later when actually working there, he could go back and forth with one of the foremen. Captain Hotep would make it his duty to see that Kenofer had all necessary supplies. Furthermore, he was to act as escort if it became necessary for the Princess Ankhsenpaaten to consult with Kenofer about the designs. Pharaoh himself would not see the drawings until they were completed.

Captain Hotep accepted the commission with becoming gravity, but there was pleasure as well as pride in the look with which he regarded his young charges. Kenofer had taken his place beside Hotep and was drinking in the King's directions with anxious concentration. The fixed attention of his dark eyes reminded Ankhsenpaaten of the portrait he had made at her request, and she smiled at the thought. Perhaps he did not relish this complicated task any more than he had the reproduction of his own features. There would be many a critical tongue ready to question Pharaoh's choice of an unknown artist for so important a commission.

The King's instruction to Hotep had been given in the formal language of a royal command, his eyes resting impersonally on some vague spot just above the heads of those he addressed. Abruptly his manner changed, and he looked directly into Kenofer's upturned face.

“Time is an all-important factor, my boy. You have six weeks in which to see that the reliefs are completed. I leave you here in the workmen’s village because every room at Akhetaten is full and every studio overflowing with unfinished work. The quarters here are simple but not lacking in cleanliness or comfort. Notify me if the men do not cooperate with you in every way, and consult with Parennefer, Craftsman of the King, as to when the walls will be ready for preliminary ink drawings. Those I shall expect you to do yourself with the help of draughtsmen Parennefer will supply. You will superintend the sculptors who cut the figures in low relief. You are responsible for the portraits of the royal family and for as much of the final painting as time allows. Auta or Thutmose will give you any advice you need. But your gift is not like that of other artists. Do not try to imitate, or you will fail. You are expected to do your best, no more, no less. May the blessing of Aten guide you.”

Ankhsenpaaten waved a reluctant farewell to Kenofer and Captain Hotep as her father wheeled his bays and started toward Akhetaten. On the low hillside above the walled village was a group of small tomb chapels belonging to some of the more well-to-do merchants of Akhetaten. Under the mid-day sun the low whitewashed walls surrounding the open court which lay in front of each shrine, and the brilliantly decorated columns and cornices of the chapels themselves, glittered like jewels against the drab surface of the cliff and desert.

The King was preoccupied and scarcely spoke except for an occasional word to the horses as they sped across the plain. Ankhsenpaaten did not dare break through the barrier of his thoughts, though she longed to question him. She amused herself by imagining Kenofer’s surroundings in the workmen’s village. She knew exactly what they would be, having once inspected that same group of houses with Akhenaten. The town was made up of neat rows of cottages side by side, where laborers with their wives

and children lived in close quarters under the watchful eye of foremen and Mazoi guards. All the houses were made after the same plan: an entrance hall with a closet at one end, a living room sometimes decorated by a column, and back of that, a small bedroom and a kitchen. A stairway led to the flat roof, from which one could look over the wall to the eastern cliffs or westward toward the curving line of river. Ankhsenpaaten smiled at the thought of Kenofer cooking for himself, bending over the open stove in the center of the room.

Suddenly her eye was attracted by a swiftly moving chariot cutting diagonally across the plain from the headquarters of the Mazoi. It was being driven at breakneck speed, apparently with the intention of intercepting the King before he should reach the outskirts of the Southern City. Akhenaten slowed his bays to a walk. The chariot came on without pause, and at first it seemed that the horses had no driver. Puzzled, the King pulled his team to a standstill.

“By the power of Aten, there is but one lad so slight who can drive so well—Tutankhaten!”

Even before he spoke, Ankhsenpaaten had recognized the diminutive figure scarcely visible above the high rim of the chariot, which was one belonging to the flying squad, especially equipped for purposes of pursuit or combat.

As the young Prince guided his team to within a few yards of the main road, he waved a whip in greeting and with a word to the horses swung them easily into line beside the royal chariot. The boy’s face was flushed, and Ankhsenpaaten detected a familiar set of mouth and chin which boded ill for anyone attempting to argue him into a different frame of mind. Akhenaten’s brows were drawn into a straight line as he surveyed the panting horses, their satiny sides flecked with foam.

Nothing daunted by that piercing look, Tutankhaten bowed as best he could without loosening the reins, and addressed the King in a speech so fluent, Ankhsenpaaten knew it had been many times rehearsed.

“O Pharaoh, be not angry that I have followed you without permission. I had to see you and there was no other way. At the School for Scribes they gave me an hour in which to plead my case with you, and when I reached the palace, I found you gone. The Mazoi pointed out to me the way by which you might return, and let me borrow a chariot when I told them how serious it would be if I were not back at the school on time. You see, I gave my word.”

“I see; but what was so urgent that it could not wait until another time?” Pharaoh’s voice was not encouraging. Ankhsenpaaten heard with trepidation that brusque impatience. It boded ill for the lad’s request, whatever it might be.

“Only that I cannot stay longer at the School for Scribes. I wish to leave at once—today. There is no use in training me for a life I so despise! I cannot learn among a lot of mocking boys who jeer at my mistakes, yet are such cowards they shrink from the very mention of manly sports or soldierly pursuits. I cannot endure this sitting all day long, with scarce enough exercise to keep my body fit. I shall grow as soft as a girl if I must spend months—yes, years—at such an occupation!” Unmindful of Pharaoh’s deepening scowl, he threw a look of triumph at Ankhsenpaaten. Was this not just such a courageous role as she might have invented for him to play? But something in her answering look bade him pause. Almost imperceptibly she shook her head. Akhenaten spoke:

“Have you done, or is there more that you would say?”

“Only this, O Father, Living in Truth. Gladly would I please you if I could, but to learn that hateful writing is beyond my power. I feel imprisoned, as if I had deserved some punishment. They tell me Horemheb

has gone to Thebes without me, taking that faint-hearted Smenkhkara in my stead. He never would have done that had I not been in school! Before we came to live here, he took me with him everywhere. Please let me go to Horemheb. I belong with him—a soldier. I pray you, let me go today!” The arrogant young voice had changed to frightened pleading. Dropping awkwardly to his knees, the lad raised a face of such entreaty, Ankhsenpaaten’s throat tightened in helpless sympathy. Apparently the King was unimpressed, either by arrogance or pleading. The boy’s words savored of insubordination, and that he would not tolerate. Well Ankhsenpaaten knew the workings of his mind.

“Stand on your feet!” The command was obeyed with startled alacrity. “Mark the way you handle those horses! Let me not see you run them so again. My instructions were that you should mend your ignorance with wisdom acquired in the School for Scribes established by me at Akhetaten. There you shall remain until I am convinced that you can learn to use mind as well as body, and can take directions whether you fancy them or not.”

“But I would be a soldier, not a scribe!” the boy cried with reckless desperation.

“A soldier, say you? You cannot take an order in silence or obey it without question. The menoi have reported your conduct to me. You flinch before the ridicule of boys more intelligent than you, yet fancy yourself brave because you would settle all disputes with fists. Return to the School for Scribes and take your punishment for being late. You deserve more than they will give. Above all, don’t come whining back to me. A soldier endures and murmurs not. Pray the Aten that His light may bring you courage to do your duty as a soldier should!”

At a touch of the whip, Akhenaten’s bays leaped forward and set out at a brisk pace along the road toward the Southern City. Ankhsenpaaten longed to wave a reassuring hand at that crestfallen figure guiding his

restless horses slowly back across the plain, but decided to risk no paternal reproof by showing compassion for the culprit. Perhaps Akhenaten read her thoughts, for he slipped an arm about her shoulders.

“You thought me cruel to your young betrothed, Small Bird?” How warm and tender that voice could be!

“It did not seem quite like you to be so harsh.” Her eyes filled in spite of her.

“What I said was true, and harshness is what the lad imagines he admires: war, fighting, the cruel pleasures of the hunt, the rigid discipline of camp and barracks. He wishes to be strong and brave, as indeed he is for one so young. Yet he lacks the very discipline he professes to respect, and at heart has all the gentleness he pretends to scorn! The lessons he needs most must be learned in an unwelcome school. ’Tis ever so. Even you, Small Bird, must learn through unwelcome necessity to curb your wild desire for meaningless flight, the restlessness of body and mind which drives you all day long. Childish energy is precious; but it must be directed. I spoke to Tutankhaten as I did, because that is the language he respects. A gentler tongue he deems a woman’s weapon, or a scribe’s!” He smiled. “In time he will learn to recognize power in a quiet voice; at present he hears strength only in an officer’s command.”

“Then you will really make him stay there in the House of Books, no matter how unhappy and rebellious he may be?” She asked the question hopefully, encouraged by the kindness she knew so well.

“When he ceases to be rebellious, he will cease to be unhappy, Small Bird. Until that moment comes, he must remain where he is. When he learns obedience and does his best to master unpleasant tasks, we may be able to find a method of learning more to his liking.”

Impulsively Ankhsenpaaten threw her arms about her father’s waist. “You are so wise,” she murmured, “and so kind.”

“I am afraid Tutankhaten does not agree with you at the moment! It is hard to be unyielding when his happiness is dear to my heart.”

“And to mine!” the Princess murmured softly to herself.

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Kenofer and Ankhsenpaaten

CHAPTER XIV

KENOFER CALLS FOR HELP

FOR a week Ankhsenpaaten heard nothing from Kenofer. Then one morning he appeared empty handed at the palace and asked that he be allowed to spend an hour with her in the garden. It was an odd request, but one readily granted, as she had kept herself in readiness to help him whenever he desired. Making their way to the pavilion where first she had watched him work, they sat down beside the fountain. Pigeons were strutting about, picking daintily at the remains of their morning meal. Ankhsenpaaten searched Kenofer's face anxiously. It was drawn and white, eyes darkly shadowed. The muscle at one corner of his mouth twitched, and his long, square-tipped fingers moved restlessly as he spoke.

“My Princess, what can I do? Night and day for a week have I worked, with nothing to show for it—nothing. I have drawn hundreds of figures. They grow lifeless in my hands. That house in the village is haunted with

the shades of the men and women I have created—and killed. Wherever I turn, I see them. It is useless for me to go on. I should have the designs completed, and not even the grouping for one wall is done. The need for haste drives me on, but I push my way through a mocking mob. The people of the Court crowd about me, clamoring to be drawn. They will not take their places as they should, or wait their turn. They push and shove, they laugh and jeer...” He buried his face in his hands, shuddering.

Ankhsenpaaten stirred uneasily. What could she say? Only too well she knew how overpowering the task must seem, slight as was Kenofer’s technical knowledge of composition. She had not dreamed that her father would expect him to do the scenes of worship and the funeral as well. It was too much for any boy so young. Had Akhenaten been less preoccupied with his own grief, no doubt he would have given Kenofer more help. As it was, the task lay heavily upon her own shoulders. A fat pigeon perched on her outstretched hand and surveyed her with an air of calm detachment. It was one they had named for Pentu, Chief Physician to the King, because he was solemn and unruffled, no matter how excited the rest might be.

“Kenofer, do you remember the day you painted the pigeons here beside the fountain? They were crowding and fluttering about; yet you made each one stand out so clearly we could call them all by name.”

“Birds are not like humans,” he answered, controlling his voice with an effort. “They are always the same. They go about their business of eating, drinking, making love, each according to his nature. Once you learn to recognize that nature, you can draw them. Humans are more complex. They pretend to be what they are not, and you can never be sure you are drawing them as they are. That is what makes me know I am not equal to the task the King has set me.”

“Can you guess why we named this one Pentu?” Ankhsenpaaten asked, apparently disregarding what he had said. “It was because he is not upset by

anything that happens. He goes about his own affairs, watching the others while seeming to ignore them. The Court Physician is just the same. You can never ruffle him, never catch him off his guard. See!”

She held the bird high above her head, then lowered her hand with a jerk. The pigeon did not so much as spread a wing to keep his balance, but arched his neck and straightened a feather upon his breast with perfect unconcern.

“Now look at Horemheb! Such a handsome bird in his shiny blue-gray armor. He knows he is stronger than any of the rest, and younger than most. See how he marches around, talking to this one and that, trying to stir them up. He thinks they are foolish to be contented and at peace. He wants to fly across the wall, far beyond the city where the pigeons of Maru Aten live. He would like to try his strength against them, if only the others would help him fight.”

She made a soft sound with her lips, and half a dozen birds fluttered round her head. One by one she called them by name and pointed out some reason for the likeness of each to a noble of the Court.

“To others they seem alike, Kenofer; not to us, because we know them. It is much the same with the people you would draw. I am sure I could tell you something about every official, so father would recognize your portrait of him. Won’t you let me try?”

“But it is the grouping, too. Each must have a place.”

“You mean, each already has a place. Oh, how outraged they will be if you ignore the order of their rank! Come, let’s go to father’s studio, and while you draw, I can tell you just where every one should stand.”

Without waiting for his objections, she led the way to the room in the palace where Akhenaten had spent many a peaceful hour with his paints and brushes. There, sitting side by side upon the floor, they tried their hand

at the difficult task of making a background of all who would perforce be present at the burial of a princess.

“The Divine Father Ay must seem to have the most important place, with Horemheb close by. Satau, Overseer of the Treasury, should stand here, with Panehsy, Chief Servitor of the Aten, Superintendent of the Granary and of the Cattle of the Aten, Chancellor of Northern Egypt.” She rolled the imposing titles off her tongue with mocking glibness. “Pa-wah, the High Priest, should be assisting Meryra, though I’m sure Pa-wah has never forgiven him for being such a favorite of the King. He bows and smiles, but all the while he grits his teeth and chews a secret grievance. Then there is Nakht, the fat old Vizier with his hands on his stomach as if he had to hold it up.” She illustrated her comments with fitting gestures, which brought a grudging smile to Kenofer’s set lips. “Tutu, Chamberlain and Mouthpiece of the Entire Land, is like a jackal. Have you ever noticed how his eyes crowd close upon his nose? I trust him not. Of course the Governor of Akhetaten must be there, but in a place aside from the favorite counselors of the King, with Mahu, Chief of the Mazoi, and with Mai, the new Steward. Let all the artists stand together: Thutmose, Auta, and Bek. Father would like it so. None of the women matter, except the Great Nurse Ty. Don’t put her where she shows too much. Meketaten would rather have Yatu close to her, I know.”

Lightly, gaily she sketched them with words while his swift fingers followed her directions, inking in with firm lines the details she supplied. She made it all seem simple and very clear. Soon they were laughing over her telling comments on this officer or that, adding a characteristic wig here, a familiar necklace there, lengthening a nose, widening a mouth, drawing a long upper lip close over the toothless gums of Any, ancient Scribe of the Altar.

“I am not worried about the temple scene,” Kenofer said at last, as they sat back to inspect their work. “So often have I watched your father with the Queen at his side conduct services in worship of the Aten, that I can shut my eyes and see the beauty of it all. As the King has asked, I shall include men from foreign lands among the worshipers—the types we saw when they brought tribute. How I wish I had visited those distant countries, that I might show the people worshipping at home as Pharaoh dreams they do.” He sighed. “I long to travel—not for a few months, but for several years. I would see Tyre and Kadesh—yes, and Babylon. I would visit the country of the Hittites, learn their ways, observe their arts, and bring a caravan of jewels and sweetmeats back to you, my Princess!” he finished, smiling fondly at her.

“I would far rather have you take me with you!” she answered.

“Then you have not forgotten your dreams? I thought perhaps your betrothal had changed your longing for adventure in far places.”

She shook her head. “Nothing could change that—ever. I hope I shall never have to be a Queen. I do so want to go with Tutankhaten when he sees the world.” She dismissed the subject with a shrug of her brown shoulders and turned to the sheets of papyrus spread before them on the floor. “Surely, Kenofer, it will be no great task to finish these sketches now. Only the figures of the royal family are left, and those are easy for you to do.”

“Not easy, my Princess, but they are models I love to draw. These other people are strangers, and I like them not. At least they were strangers until you introduced them to me! How am I to thank you?”

“By sharing my noonday meal and promising to worry no more about your work. O Kenofer, I know my father will be pleased. How I wish you could finish the drawings here where I can watch you every day!”

“If I only could! Methinks the gentle Akhenaten has never tried to live among necropolis workmen. Such arguments! Such quarreling! Either they laugh and shout until one cannot think, or else they band together in rival parties and riot until the Mazoi drive them to their homes.”

“Then I shall ask that you be allowed to work where you can see the people you are supposed to paint. That is reason enough, surely, for moving your studio. As for me, I shall sit here quietly, not bothering you at all, but ready when you need me to advise on the length of Satau’s ears or Panehsy’s wig!”

True to her word, Ankhsenpaaten arranged to have the King’s studio turned over to Kenofer, and soon her enthusiasm banished the last of the boy’s doubts. The drawings took shape with amazing rapidity. Only the picture of the royal family mourning beside the tomb was done when Ankhsenpaaten was not in the room. Far into the night Kenofer worked on those beloved figures, his adoration warming them into life until their grief brought tears to his own eyes. Living within sound of their voices, watching them together in those cruel days of mourning, Kenofer understood as never before the bond which held the royal family close and made the first break in that happy group so hard to bear.

When at length the last portrait was completed to his satisfaction, Kenofer sent word to Akhenaten that the preliminary drawings were ready for inspection. He had made them half the size of those to be placed on the tomb walls, and drawn them in such detail that even the jewels were accurate in design and color. The transferring of the groups to the walls of the tomb and the cutting of the figures in low relief would be the work of craftsmen. Then at the last he would paint the royal family and as many of the others as he could before the day set for the funeral. If only the drawings met with the approval of the King and Queen!

With anxious hearts Kenofer and Ankhsenpaaten awaited the verdict. Together they had arranged each section where it would show to the best advantage, and when the royal family entered, the walls of the studio were lined with designs for the scene of worship. Akhenaten and Nefertiti viewed them with expressions of surprise and pleasure. Far from being the conventional portrayal of a formal temple ceremony, the sketches had caught that spirit of radiant devotion which had transfigured Pharaoh as he stood at the mouth of the royal tomb. It even lighted the faces of the men from the vassal kingdoms, strong foreign types from every section of the Empire.

Encouraged by the King's enthusiasm, Kenofer removed the first set of drawings and left revealed those for the inner chamber, uncovering last of all the royal group, as lifelike in silent sorrow as the quiet figures of the King and Queen, standing there with Merytaten and Ankhsenpaaten beside them. No word was spoken. In vain Kenofer tried to read those faces he had come to know so well. They told him nothing. He was shut out from their thoughts as from their grief. With a muffled sob Nefertiti threw herself into Akhenaten's arms, while Merytaten fell to her knees in the abject posture of mourning, arms flung above her head to hide a tear-drenched face. Her moaning cries as she swayed back and forth brought Ankhsenpaaten to her side, and Kenofer, overcome by the emotion he had stirred, slipped from the room and fled to the sunwarmed quiet of the garden.

What had he done? He had thought to ease their hearts, but instead had brought them added woe. Heartsick, weary, he avoided familiar haunts until, wandering aimlessly among the stiff, straight rows of fruit trees, he found himself in the grape arbor. Here rows upon rows of painted posts were roofed with lattice, over which the vines had been trained with patient care. As he looked up at that colorful ceiling, where heavy, fibrous stems wove a sturdy pattern beneath the green of upturned leaves, the boy thought

of the great room in the Official Palace where architect and painter had so cleverly captured natural beauty that the whole pillared hall resembled a glorified arbor. Yet all their artistry had not caught the luminous quality of sunlight through the living green, the ever-shifting play of shadows, the delicate spiral curves of young tendrils reaching for support. No brush could reproduce the delicate expansion of ripening fruit, hanging in pale purple clusters, dusted with soft, gray bloom. Thoughtfully he reached up to touch a bunch above his head, his fingers brushing away that misty film, revealing the deepening color of the fruit beneath. Would that he could banish as easily the mist of sorrow dulling the colorful brilliance of the Court.

It was Ankhsenpaaten who found him there. Her brimming eyes and smiling lips told him what he wanted most to know: that she, at least, found his portraits of her loved ones worthy companions for Meketaten's gentle Ka. Without a word she led him by the hand, dancing a little ahead, eager, insistent. Yet even her obvious excitement did not prepare him for the gratitude of Akhenaten nor for the great honor the King wished to bestow upon him. Not only was the work acceptable to the royal family, but his ability seemed to them so great, they wished to keep him with them there in Akhetaten. For the rest of his life he might consider himself one of the most favored of artists attached to the Court, living in luxury and peace, developing his talent to the glory of the Aten and of Akhenaten, Son of the Sun.

At this announcement Kenofer stared blankly at his benefactor, and groped in helpless confusion for words in which to voice his gratitude—and his refusal. Yet how could one refuse such an offer? And had it been an offer, or a royal command? Kenofer was not sure.

Ankhsenpaaten came to his assistance. Dropping his hand, she moved close to her father.

“Kenofer is grateful, O Father, but he is afraid to speak. I know he thinks himself too young for the honors you shower upon him. Could not the appointment as Royal Artist wait until he has learned more thoroughly his craft?”

“Suppose, small daughter, that you let Kenofer speak his own desire. What have you to say, lad? My purpose is to grant your dearest wish. I must depend on you to tell me what it is.”

“My dearest wish is to serve you, O Pharaoh. Yet I am scarcely worthy to serve you now. I need years of experience before my skill can justify your belief in me.”

“In what place would you gain that experience if not here in Akhetaten, where every artist is free to develop the gift Aten has bestowed upon him?”

For a moment the boy hesitated. It was not easy to say.

“I would go to the land of my fathers, to the Isles of the Great Green. I would explore that farther mainland where stands the famed city of Mycenae, with its gateway topped by mighty lions. I would seek the Isle of Cyprus where the ground is made of copper, and Tyre where the murex yields its crimson and purple dyes for fabrics worthy of a king. I long to visit Byblos where your faithful vassal and friend, Ribaddi, defends the Empire from its threatening neighbors, and Khinatuni, the city in Palestine which you yourself have built. I would even penetrate to the Court of Khatti where the Hittites have created a beauty of their own.”

He paused, but reassured by the King’s attentive mood, went on to word the purpose of his dream: “O Pharaoh, from all the kingdoms of the earth would I bring you back the riches I had found. I would paint them for you as they really are. Then could you tell how best to spread the knowledge of the Aten far and wide, not by war, but by the gift of understanding. The art of a people is the heart of a people. You, my King, cannot visit those distant lands. Let me go as your emissary and learn what I can.”

Thoughtfully the King regarded the boy. Suddenly he turned away and paced back and forth across the audience room, his sandaled feet treading softly on the painted pavement.

“Kenofer,” he said at last, “there is rare wisdom in your words and your desires. It shall be my pleasure to grant your wish. Long have I wanted to send sons of mine to do that which you propose—that which the King of the Hittites has allowed his son to do in order to complete his education. I have been troubled of late because Tutankhaten, who one day may be called upon to be Smenkhkara’s successor as Pharaoh of Egypt, cannot apply himself with joy and profit to the teachings offered in the House of Books. You have taught Ankhsenpaaten to read and write. More than that, you have taught her to love knowledge for its own sake. Could you do as much for that spirited boy, restless and eager for physical adventure? Could you take Tutankhaten with you, and while he learns by observation and experience, try to make him see the necessity of reading and writing, the need of understanding languages other than his own? If I supply you with money and the means of travel, if I send Captain Hotep to guard the lad’s person and share with you the responsibility of representing Egypt in foreign Courts, will you accept this charge? Speak frankly. The idea but now occurred to me. If you like it not, you shall have your years of travel unhampered and alone.”

This time Kenofer was at no loss for words. His acceptance and gratitude were expressed with such enthusiasm no one could doubt his feeling in the matter. It would be a privilege to teach so intelligent a pupil, and he knew that he could hold the lad’s interest. Each week let Tutankhaten be required to send a report to Pharaoh, telling all he had seen and done. That would necessitate ample attention to the art of writing, without the boy’s being aware of the lesson as a task.

Akhenaten smiled but offered one suggestion: the letters should be written to Ankhsenpaaten, not to him. That would free the boy from all restraint and would result in a far more colorful account of his adventures. Kenofer could address his own letters to the King.

So it was arranged. Tutankhaten, subdued by the encounter with Akhenaten and shamed by his biting scorn, had settled down to work in earnest. Reports of his diligence and self-control had followed quickly on that royal reprimand. Now his reward came with such unexpected promptness, his amazed delight moved Ankhsenpaaten to tears of joy not unmingled with envy. It would be some weeks before the boys could set forth upon their journey, but already she sensed the loneliness of being left behind.

Small attention was paid to her tears at a time when all the city wept for Meketaten. Women beat upon their breasts and wailed their mournful chants from dawn till dark. While Kenofer labored in the distant tomb and Tutankhaten feverishly worked in the House of Books to justify Pharaoh's leniency, the children of the palace knew only endless hours of isolation. Ankhsenpaaten, kneeling among the pigeons by the fountain, found no comfort in their greedy friendliness. Together the children had fed them day after day, and Meketaten's delighted laughter had been soft as the chuckling coo of the birds thrusting eager bills into her grain-filled hands.

As the time for the funeral drew near, Akhenaten and Nefertiti sat together for long hours in silence. They sought strength from the warm radiance of the Aten, and the familiarity of terrace and lake. Yet everywhere the fragile loveliness of Meketaten followed them, until the sound of a child's sweet treble was like a haunting echo of her voice, and a glimpse of Yatu through the trees brought a fancied glitter of gold and the tread of litter bearers' feet to stir the garden's emptiness. A slow, insistent rhythm, that sound of litter bearers' feet, strangely like the march of those who soon

would follow their Princess to her House of Eternity in the valley beyond the eastern cliffs. It was a sound which was to weave its way through Ankhseenpaaten's dreams for many lonely nights, long after Meketaten's grateful Ka had found its home with Kenofer's likenesses of those she loved to keep her company.

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Horemheb

CHAPTER XV

TREACHERY

THE passing months of the year XIII were marked for Ankhsenpaaten by the letters which came at faithful intervals from Kenofer and Tutankhaten. For the first few months they arrived with reassuring frequency; then as the distances grew greater and transportation more uncertain, periods of anxious waiting made the months seem endless. Sailing on the Great Green was treacherous at best, even between the months of Epiphi and Hathor, when the north winds blew steadily. It was those very winds which in Paopi often attained such violence that sailing vessels, even with the aid of oars, could not beat their way against them. The merchant ship bearing Kenofer and Tutankhaten on their great adventure was forced by the summer gale to tie up behind an island. In fact, this state of affairs endured for so long a time that the entire crew was threatened with dire privations, having but few supplies to meet such an emergency.

Proudly the boys wrote of their share in keeping up the courage of the men, which was soon to be tried by pirates as well as by the weather. For

hours they were pursued by a long, black craft of sinister design, from which they escaped only under cover of darkness. Tutankhaten made of it a thrilling tale, though Kenofer touched lightly on the incident in his report to the King. Rather was Kenofer's letter full of details interesting only to Pharaoh, and a careful account of Tutankhaten's progress in his lessons. Ankhsenpaaten missed the gay, personal notes which in the past had come to her from Thebes. The younger boy's childish scrawls in no way took their place.

Indeed, as time went on, the Princess was to learn that distance can build a more insurmountable barrier between friends than death itself. She missed Meketaten, yet with a wistful tenderness which grew less poignant as the days lengthened once more and a second year began to unfold. It was as if that gentle spirit would never wander far from the sheltered garden of its earthly life, and she could always find it there. With the two boys, it was quite different. They were daily seeing and doing things she could not share, learning of a world she could but imperfectly imagine. Meketaten could not change. Always she would be as they had known and loved her. Each new day's experience made strangers of the boys; even their letters could not bridge the widening gulf. They spoke of others, not themselves. Akhenaten might read between the lines and smile his satisfaction at the success of his experiment, but Ankhsenpaaten saw only the places they described and looked in vain for some familiar, reassuring contact with the lads.

At first, with infinite care, she wrote a reply to each letter as it came, sending news of Akhetaten which would keep the wanderers in touch with happenings at home. But gradually there seemed less and less for her to say, less and less which they would care to hear. Life in the palace went its leisurely way, with little to change its peaceful monotony. Her days were filled with familiar routine, given purpose in her eyes by the hours spent

with the menoi at the serious task of preparing to be a scribe. She learned much in that long, hot summer of the boys' absence. Weighty words of wisdom she copied, repeating them softly to herself as she wrote:

“Be not proud of earthly good or riches, for riches are inconstant, but a good disposition is a lasting possession.”

“Do not say anything evil in anyone's house. Even on the day of thy gossiping, thy word is returned to thy house.”

“Never forget to be respectful, and do not sit down whilst another stands who is older than thou, even when thou holdest a higher office.”

In many of these lessons she found phrases long familiar on her father's lips: “Speak not too much, for men are deaf to the man of many words. Be silent rather; then shalt thou please; therefore speak not. Before all things guard thy speech, for a man's ruin lies in his tongue.”

“Behave with propriety at meals, and be not greedy to fill thy body.... One is poor, another is rich, but bread remains to him that is generous. He that was rich in the year that is past may even in this year become a vagrant.”

Years afterward those words were to come to mind, like some fateful prophecy. Even now they filled her with fore-boding, and she turned to other bits of concentrated wisdom with a sense of relief.

“Be not arrogant of thine own knowledge, but do thou take counsel with the ignorant as with the wise.... Treat a venerable man with respect, but gently correct thine equal when he maintains a wrong opinion.”

“The youth has a back and attends when he is beaten; for the ears of the young are placed on the back.”

Ankhsenpaaten put a last frond on the water plant which completed the hieroglyph, and gazed upon her work with satisfaction. The words made her think of Tutankhaten. He might well have been the boy who long ago had written to his menoi, “Thou didst beat my back, and thy instructions went

into my ear.” She wondered if Kenofer had to whip him with words to quicken his attention. Certainly Tutankhaten’s writing had improved, though his letters still bore the stamp of labored effort. For the most part they were as stilted as the copies set her by the menoi, and far less personal. Ankhsenpaaten wished that they had not been imposed upon him as a duty. Still more she wished that she could share the boys’ wanderings. There was something very like a friendly warning in the words she often copied:

“Do not spend thy time in wishing, or thou wilt come to a bad end.” In her heart she knew that she deserved the admonition, and did her best to keep a contented countenance and fill her days with duties cheerfully performed, instead of restless dreams.

Many hours Ankhsenpaaten spent in company with her father while Nefertiti busied herself with the instruction of the younger children and preparations for Ta-Shera’s departure for Babylon. Together she and the King rode beside the Nile from one end of the slender crescent to the other, then back again, following the curve of high cliffs where the patrol roads of the Mazoi guarded the peace of Akhetaten. Below them in the plain the city lay, like a gaily embroidered scarf dropped along the river’s edge.

Ankhsenpaaten loved to stand far above the white buildings with their colored pennons floating high and free. The flat roofs of the nobles’ houses rose from the fresh green of fruit trees, tamarisks and acacias to the south of the palace, and gay awnings mingled their gaudy colors with the softer hues of flower and shrub. Artificial lakes and lily ponds mirrored the sunlight here and there, and to the north she could see the green masses of the North Palace gardens, where her father had made a haven of refuge for bird and beast. There spacious aviaries gave protection to birds of every size and color, and well-stocked ponds offered breeding ground for quantities of fish. Even the wall paintings in the palace reproduced the bird life of the marshes, and the stalls for the horses were carved and richly colored. All

Pharaoh's favorite hounds were kept there, and the sleek, well-fed cats which were taught to retrieve game birds in the marshes, when the hunters went forth to get ducks and other dainties for the King's table.

Sometimes on those drives the Princess and her father stopped for an hour at the North Palace to watch the herd of spotted gazelles and the ungainly giraffes brought all the way from Punt. Monkeys chattered at them from the trees, and the brilliant cockatoos called with raucous cries as they passed. More often they paused to inspect the progress of work in the artists' quarter, or visited the glass factories to the south of the Official Palace in Akhetaten. Then, too, there was always work in the North City to watch, where building was progressing rapidly and where the Custom House offered to Ankhsempnefer an endless source of entertainment. For hours she watched the inspectors open bales of richly dyed stuffs from Tyre and crates of copper vessels from Cyprus.

The noise, the confusion, the pungent odors clinging to the goods from unfamiliar ports filled Ankhsempnefer with restless longing. The fragrance of sandalwood and cinnamon, the musty scent of heavy rugs, were like tantalizing bits of the world where Kheper and Tutankhaten wandered at will but where she could not follow.

Now and then on their tour of inspection the King and Ankhsempnefer were accompanied by Mahu, Chief of the Mazoi, or some official who desired to direct the King's attention to his particular department; but for the most part they rode alone, enjoying the quiet companionship which meant much to both. Akhenaten lived through the routine of busy days with grim fortitude. Often Ankhsempnefer's gayest nonsense failed to lighten his melancholy. The death of Meketaten had shaken his confidence at home, and the daring of enemies attacking the border districts of the Empire had tried his strength abroad. He had been so sure, so gloriously right in all he did through the first years of his reign. The Aten had smiled upon him, and

he had been indeed the Beautiful Child of the Sun, happy in wife and children, building his city, defeating his enemies, adoring his God.

Now even the ways of the Aten seemed devious and dark. Gone was Meketaten, beloved of his heart, leaving a void no other child could fill. Gone was the safety of the Empire, preserved through long years of peace by the ever-present threat of Egyptian arms. For years Akhenaten had ignored the growing menace of Khabiru and Hittite, the doubtful loyalty of Mittani and Amorite. Secure in his city of peace, he had refused to buy peace for his Empire with blood, preferring to remain true to his religious convictions at any cost. Bitterly had his loyal vassals suffered for his unwillingness to fight; now at last Akhenaten himself was being forced to suffer.

Trade continued with the East by caravan and ship, but tribute came no more. The royal magazines were empty; the workmen went unpaid, often unfed. Discontent seethed within the walls of the workmen's villages, and laborers in the fields along the western bank of the river grumbled as they plowed the rich silt and planted crops which flourished for noble and Court official, but not for them. Their own meager rations grew bitter on their tongues as they heard alarming rumors from the borders where refugees flocked in hordes for safety. The river had been low for two successive years, and the land was facing famine. When there was not enough for hungry mouths at home, how could these unwanted foreigners be fed? Let them go back to their war-ridden lands and let Pharaoh send an army to protect them there. They were his vassals and deserved his protection, but should they be allowed to snatch bread from the very mouths of his children, sitting hungry at the threshold of the King's House?

Rumors of the unrest among his people swelled the tide of complaints and entreaties which came by almost daily messenger from the cities besieged by Pharaoh's foes. Ankhsenpaaten saw the weary runners stagger

into the Place of the Correspondence of Pharaoh, carrying the precious tablets for which they had risked their lives on desert and sea. She longed to know the contents of those small clay envelopes folded so neatly and sealed with such care against prying eyes; but when she asked her father what evil tidings they brought, he shook his head. Often he did not see the letters himself, but heard their contents from Tutu, Chamberlain and Mouthpiece of the Entire Land. That the messengers bore tragic news, no one could doubt, least of all the King. However tactfully Tutu might paraphrase the facts, there was always Horemheb to remind Akhenaten of his obligations. It was from the General that Ankhsenpaaten first learned the exact state of affairs in Syria and Palestine.

Horemheb came one day to present himself at the small audience chamber where the King and Nefertiti sat in consultation. Ankhsenpaaten, greeting him on the terrace and asking for word from Tutankhaten, felt the desperate urgency of his visit. His manner, always courteous to her, was brusque and preoccupied. He asked the King's whereabouts after no more than a perfunctory greeting, and followed her into the presence of his sovereigns with an impatient stride. As no one took exception to her presence, Ankhsenpaaten seated herself upon a cushion not far from her mother's knee, and listened with bated breath while Horemheb, a man of few words, launched upon a tirade of such amazing vigor and conviction that even the King sat silent before his eloquence.

"O Pharaoh, King of Upper and Lower Egypt, Lord of the Two Lands, Great in His Length of Days, I come to you as a last resort, not to plead the cause of faithful vassals done to death by enemies your armies could have crushed, but to place before you proof of treachery which even your divine powers of forgiveness cannot overlook. Hittites strike at the borders of your domain; but Aziru, the Amorite, strikes at the heart of the Empire. You have heard my doubts of him before and belittled my warnings. You have

listened to the censored reports of Tutu, Chamberlain and Mouthpiece of the Entire Land, at best a weakling who fears to displease you with ill news, at worst a man who may be in league with Aziru himself. Now the time is mine to state the truth briefly. Ignore it you cannot; condone it you must not, else the Empire falls.”

Akhenaten bowed his head in weary acquiescence. “Tell me what you will.”

“There is much to tell, but little to please the ear of Pharaoh. Words were ever a clumsy weapon in my hands, but there is none other who dares to wound Akhenaten with the truth. It has been some years since Tushratta, King of Mittani, was killed by treachery in his own palace. That deed marked the beginning of civil war for Mittani and invasion for the Empire of Egypt. Pharaoh grieved for the death of an old friend, instead of hastening to replace a powerful ally. It was a fatal oversight, O King. When Tushratta’s son, Mattiuza, called upon the Hittites for assistance in establishing his claim to the throne, he sealed the doom of his own land and opened the door of ours. The Hittite Empire swallowed Mittani as an ostrich swallows an orange—whole. Now, liking the flavor of Egypt’s vassals, she seeks to devour them one by one, not by open invasion, but by trading in disloyalty while Egypt’s back is turned. Pharaoh admits Hittite greed but belittles Hittite strategy. Shubbiluliuma is old and crafty with the wit of age. He has long known the place to strike.

“Abbashirta, King of the Amorites, and his son, Aziru, are ripe for treason. Unprovoked, with no excuse worthy of the name, Aziru seized city after city along the coast of Syria and Phoenicia. He killed their Kings, plundered their inhabitants. What did Egypt do? Egypt wrote him a letter! Even Tunip was in danger—Tunip, the stronghold whose capture by Thutmose III made all the world marvel. Simyra and Byblos alone withstood that treacherous assault, and Ribbaddi, Kazanu of Byblos, month

after month sent messengers to plead for Pharaoh's help. He gave fair warning that were Simyra to fall, he could no longer hold his own against such odds. Ribbadi was loyal, but Egypt did nothing to reward that loyalty. Simyra fell.

"Must we continue to sacrifice the known devotion of one man to the proved treachery of another, O Akhenaten, Living in Truth? I have been patient, as patient as my disposition would allow; but that is at an end. I risk the King's displeasure in the interest of the King. Let it become known that there is no reward for keeping faith with Pharaoh, and anarchy will rule."

"You have spoken with rash frankness, Horemheb, but I honor the motive which prompts your words." Akhenaten roused himself with a visible effort. His eyes under their heavy lids were dull with pain.

"You are a soldier and read more meaning in actions than in words. Tutu has explained to my satisfaction the deeds of Aziru which you condemn, interpreting his letters and the official reports from the vassal kingdoms in such a way that I have been convinced of his good faith, however ill-advised the destruction of Simyra. Aziru claims that sacrifice was necessary to prevent the city from falling into Hittite hands, and being on the ground, he is better able to judge of that than either you or I. It is my command that he rebuild Simyra at once, and he has promised to do so within the year."

"You believe that, O Lord of the Two Lands? You believe that Simyra was razed to the ground, your representative murdered in cold blood, and the Hittites allowed to march into the plain of Amki, within reach of Antioch, because Aziru feared their coming? Rather, he invited it! In person he has plundered the cities along the coast to clear the way, filling his own coffers at the expense of yours, and plotting destruction of the Empire before your very eyes. Ribaddi is helpless to hold Byblos against him, and Aziru blinds you with excuses until it is too late to send the help Ribaddi has so long expected. The liberty I take may be beyond your forgiveness,

but I must speak the truth as I have come to know it through years devoted to your service. Akhenaten, Great in Sovereignty in Akhetaten, Upholding the Name of Aten, is blinded by his own goodness, defeated by his dream of peace. He sees the world and men as he would have them be, not as they are. Of this I bring proof.”

From his belt he drew a clay tablet, stamped and sealed with the royal cartouche. “Khani, sent as Pharaoh’s messenger to Aziru to ascertain the truth of all his claims, found his efforts to deliver this letter thwarted at every turn. Unable to make contact with the wily traitor, he returned and with him brought Akhenaten’s message, unopened, since he would not leave it in the hands of underlings. On his heels came a letter from Aziru, claiming that he had been absent in the north resisting the Hittite invasion when Pharaoh’s envoy sought to reach him. At once he had hastened back upon hearing of Khani’s presence at the Amorite Court, or so he said, but came, alas, too late. A likely tale! An insult to Pharaoh’s intelligence as well as to his sovereignty! O Lord of Diadems, Living in Truth, listen not to such transparent lies. Grant me the privilege I have asked these many months: let me lead an army to the support of Byblos. It may be too late to save Ribaddi, but at least I can show that rat Aziru it is not a sinking ship he chooses to desert!”

Akhenaten drew an unsteady hand across his forehead, and Ankhsenpaaten felt the growing anxiety in Nefertiti’s brooding watchfulness. The Queen had scarcely glanced at Horemheb while he spoke. Now she turned to him in gentle reproof.

“Can you not see that Pharaoh is ill? This is no time to burden him with your suspicions. The Divine Father Ay feels no such alarm, and Tutu...” Her voice faltered. Even she placed little faith in Tutu’s honeyed words.

“O Great and Beloved Wife of the King, Tutu tells only that which suits his purpose. Sutau, Overseer of the Treasury, could better prove to you how

desperate the situation is. His magazines are empty, and no tribute comes from North or East. I know that Pharaoh is weary of complaints. I fear his health has suffered these past months. But all I ask is the right to serve him, to protect his name abroad, and to establish once more the power of Egypt among its neighbors. Give me that right, and I promise never again will there be need to burden him with tales of treachery.”

Listening to the ringing logic of the soldier’s arguments, Ankhsenpaaten found herself convinced that such assurance could only rest on certain knowledge. She was amazed to hear her father put him off with vague, half-hearted excuses: they must wait for further word from Syria. Bitter complaints were pouring in from Palestine as well. It must be that the accusation of neighbors was growing to be a habit of the times. Ankhsenpaaten could not grasp the full import of what was said, but the words of Horemheb rang in her ears long after he had departed for Thebes, consumed with helpless rage he made small effort to conceal.

Ankhsenpaaten was sure that her father, too, remembered them when, before many months had passed, a last desperate letter came from Ribaddi: “All the royal lands as far as Egypt will join the Hittites. Wherefore hast thou held back and let thy lands be taken? Let it not be said, ‘In the days of His Majesty the vile foreigners took all the lands,’ and let it not be said in the days to come, ‘and thou canst not retake them.’ I could have made alliance with Aziru and saved myself alive. If help does not come, Byblos will fall, and I and all that love thee will be lost.”

Even that appeal to his pride failed to shake the King’s determination. At last he was convinced of Aziru’s treason, but it moved him to sadness rather than to wrath. How mis-guided were these men who bathed the earth in blood for their own advantage! The Aten forbade the taking of human life, and not even to halt the slaughter would Akhenaten, Upholding the Name of Aten, fight death with death.

So it was that Byblos fell and with it Ribaddi, ever faithful to his trust. The tragedy brought a new anxiety to Ankhsenpaaten, for Kenofer and Tutankhaten, when last heard from, had been guests of the old Kazanu of Byblos. Even Akhenaten, usually so confident that all was well, could not reassure her, and Horemheb was far away. Having departed in such a state of righteous indignation, the General returned no more to Akhetaten, but busied himself keeping order along the southern frontier, striking terror to the hearts of turbulent tribesmen who still came to trade their wares at Elephantine, near the first cataract.

As more and more alarming reports came from the North and East, with no definite news of Tutankhaten's safety, the Divine Father Ay grew more importunate in pleading the cause of his pupil. With conditions so unsettled at home and abroad, he felt that the time had come when Smenkhkara and Merytaten should be married and the boy made co-regent. He was quite ready for the honor, having reached the age of twelve and enjoyed three years of training at Ay's hands. Then, too, the people must be made to feel that the succession was secure.

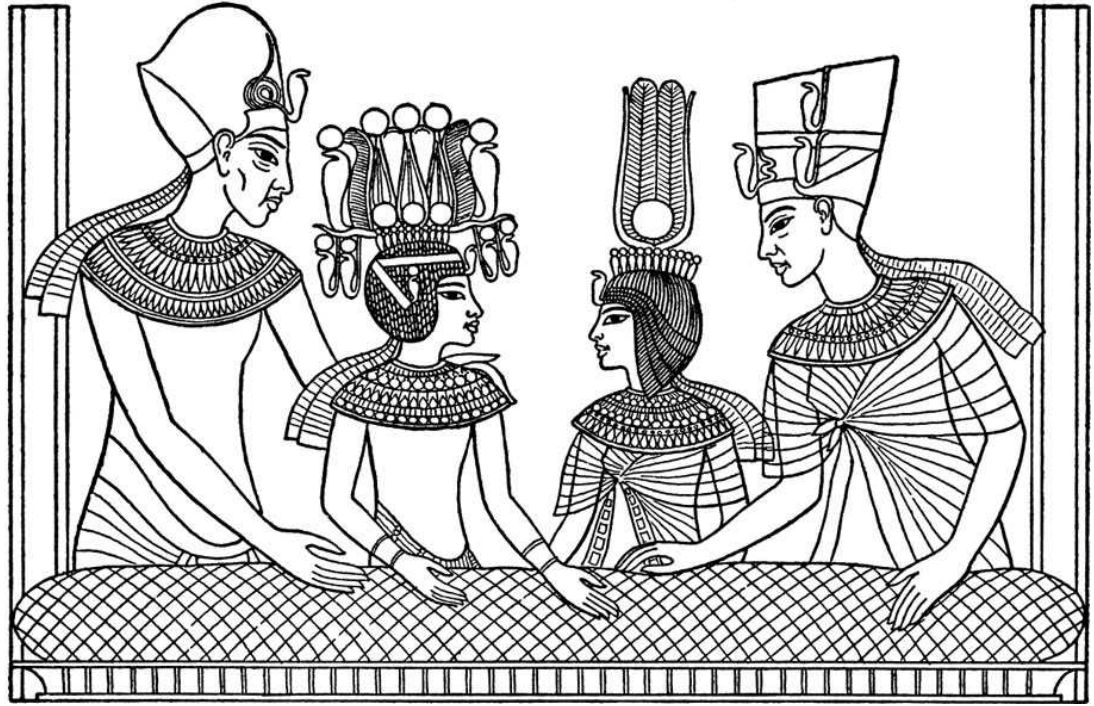
Ay's arguments were convincing, his manner, suave. Akhenaten, ill, distracted, heard them with but half an ear. Nefertiti knew that Pharaoh's health was growing daily more precarious and that the succession must be protected at any cost. On her own responsibility she sent for Horemheb, though the order for his return to Akhetaten bore the King's official seal. The crowning of a co-regent was too important a political move to be made without the General's sanction. A powerful friend, he could be an even more powerful enemy to anyone on the throne of Egypt. The people hailed him as a hero, the symbol of that military strength which had created and ruled the Empire at its height. In him they placed their confidence during these black days when Egypt's rule abroad was a jest on the lips of foreign dogs who once had whined for mercy.

Reluctantly Horemheb obeyed the royal summons. His grim face told Ankhsenpaaten at first glance that he had no word of Tutankhaten to share with her. In answer to her unspoken question, he forced a smile.

“No message has come, my Princess, but Captain Hotep would protect both boys with his life. For a lad so young, your betrothed is well able to take care of himself. If you are to be a soldier’s wife, you must believe that harm will not come to him. Anxiety weakens your courage and does not strengthen his.”

“I know.” She nodded. “Yet I cannot help fearing that he may have fallen into enemy hands. They are so cruel....” Her voice broke. “Still would I rather be the wife of a soldier than a King. I pity Merytaten having to wed so young and be a Queen before she has ever known the fun of being a child. That is why father sent for you, to give your approval of the plan to make Smenkhkara co-regent without more delay. No doubt you knew all that before you came.”

“Yes, my Princess, I knew. At least I knew that Pharaoh had not sent for me to lead an army into Syria!” His voice was bitter. “This I promise you: if word does not reach us from Tutankhaten before the month’s end, I shall set forth for Syria with or without an army, with or without the King’s consent. The boy may be Akhenaten’s son, but he is my life!” Abruptly he turned away, and she heard him mutter under his breath, “Pharaoh has deprived me of any other.”



The Window of Appearance

CHAPTER XVI

THE THRONE OF HIS FATHERS

THE new honors which had come to Merytaten and Smenkhkara caused little change in the life of the Court. Gestures of rejoicing were duly made, but the people's enthusiasm for Smenkhkara had not increased with the passing years. He was a pale, studious lad, docile and spiritless. For him the words of the Divine Father Ay were law, and Akhenaten offered him no other. The King was content to leave the reins of routine government in Ay's capable hands, giving his own time and thought to the worship and glorification of the Aten.

Religious festivals and special days of rejoicing were observed with all the ardor Akhenaten's failing body could generate under the lash of a valiant spirit. Whatever fears beset him, threatening his temporal power, touched not at all the world of religious ecstasy where he ruled supreme. He

could hold the people spellbound within the temple court. If the dark hours of the night filled their minds with questions, the service at sunrise shed the light of faith upon their problems. When the long hours of labor or the still more dangerous hours of idleness during the day filled their souls with rebellion and disloyalty, it took but the rapt beauty of Akhenaten's face at sunset to send them home at peace.

Smenkhkara took his place beside the King on all formal occasions and received training in religious as well as civil duties. With him was his wife, for Merytaten, true to the tradition of her house, devoted herself wholeheartedly to his interests. On him she lavished much of the protective affection which she had given so generously to Meketaten. Rarely did she speak except in answer to his questions; yet her presence came to give him a growing sense of confidence. She did not laugh at his aversion to suffering and blood, but accepted it as a rightful heritage which they shared as lovers of the Aten.

Ankhsenpaaten was less tolerant. She looked upon him with ill-concealed scorn, proud that Tutankhaten was made of sterner stuff. Had he not escaped from Byblos and the Hittites when his capture seemed inevitable? Had he not won the admiration of Kenofer and Hotep through long months of travel and hardship? She watched her sister depart with Smenkhkara for the North Palace, which had been set aside as the young Queen's residence, followed by an imposing retinue of attendants and slaves worthy of Merytaten's exalted rank. It would seem strange at the King's House without her, but the way was short to the new home, where the cartouches bearing Nefertiti's name were being replaced by those of the new owner. Ankhsenpaaten looked forward to the hours she and Merytaten would spend together among the birds and animals, when Smenkhkara was busy with affairs of state.

A famous woman scribe, Nebsent, known for her sharp tongue and penetrating mind, had come from Thebes at Pharaoh's bidding to continue Ankhsenpaaten's education. She proved to be a tireless and enthusiastic teacher, deeply gratified to find among the King's daughters one who was not content to follow the superficial, aimless way of a girl child's traditional training. Ankhsenpaaten was lacking in none of the graces demanded of her position, but to these she added a keen wit and lively curiosity about matters not usually of interest to women. Since Tutankhaten's departure she had questioned every stranger who came to Court, often securing a private interview at which she could learn in detail of the life and customs in foreign lands.

At home she observed with concern the gradual weakening of her father's power. Ever alert to changes in the temper of the people, she watched the growing discontent, masked before the King, wondering at his lack of perception, at his ability to escape into a place of prayer and praise, where neither facts nor fears could disturb him. She could read the growing alarm in her mother's eyes. Nefertiti understood.

Always in the past Pharaoh had been to the people of Egypt a god on earth, a mighty force which could do no wrong. Akhenaten had preferred to make himself a deeply beloved man and teacher, rather than an omnipotent god or a mighty king. Did not he himself say that there was one God, Aten, and that Pharaoh was but the Son of the Sun? Once the prosperity of the Empire began to wane, doubts played upon superstitious minds like darting flames, shriveling faith, firing discontent. Everywhere, even in the heart of the royal city, the priests of Amon fed the fire in secret. Akhenaten's weakness was their strength. He seemed oblivious to the fact that they were creeping back to their old haunts, building up a following among the vast number of people for whom the name of Amon still held a magic, fear-

inspiring power. The threat of Amon's curse, they understood; the bounty of Aten's blessing, they could not hope to grasp.

The scribe, Nebsent, told Ankhsenpaaten much of this, saying that since the death of Queen Tiye, Thebes had become once more a hotbed of Amon influence.

"The priests hate your father, child, and will have their revenge. Only one man holds them back and that is Horemheb. They respect him and know his loyalty to Pharaoh in spite of political differences."

"And what of the Divine Father Ay?" Ankhsenpaaten asked curiously, longing to have her own judgment confirmed.

Nebsent answered guardedly. "We will not speak of him. As long as he remains in power, he is content." Then, curiosity getting the better of her discretion, "What think you of the Divine Father, that you ask me such a question?"

Ankhsenpaaten made a wry face. "I try not to think of him at all! When I do, I seem to see the blessing of Amon resting upon his head." The Princess felt rather than saw the older woman's nod of agreement. One might scorn a Smenkhkara, but one was forced to fear the man behind his throne. Ankhsenpaaten pitied the young co-regent and his gentle wife, willing to trust their future to the greedy hands of the King's Counselor. Akhenaten might live a year or two at most, and then what was to become of these luckless puppets so completely under Ay's control?

"It is a pity you are not to be the Queen," Nebsent said frankly after she had watched the rapid development of her charge during a year of concentrated training. "From Tutankhaten's letters and Kheper's accounts of the boy, I judge that he would make a Pharaoh worthy of the name. In spite of your youth you have the courage and education to be a second Hatshepsut."

Ankhsenpaaten gazed thoughtfully across the garden to the lake, warmed to molten copper by the setting sun.

“I have never really wanted to be a queen,” she said. “But I have come to know we cannot easily escape our fate. You have made me think clearly, as a boy might, and have made me less resentful of restraint. I shall never forget your words: ‘Royal thoroughbreds must submit to training ordinary horses never know, and in the end are entrusted with tasks worthy of their mettle.’ Perhaps the time will come when I shall have to play the role of Queen. If I do, I shall not mind, with Tutankhaten to share my throne. The choice rests not with me, but with my birth.”

The year XVI was an inauspicious one for the royal family of Akhetaten. Soon after Ta-Shera had departed in state for Babylon, the sadness of separation lightened by her love of pomp and importance, fresh sorrows beset the Court. So grievous were they that Ankhsenpaaten wrote to Kenofer in her helpless grief:

“I know not how to bear such woe! The House of the King has no more revenues; we are marching to ruin. Enemies surround us at home and abroad. Laughter has perished and we know it no longer. Affliction runs through the land, mingled with lamentations. Were Horemheb not a faithful watchdog of the Empire, I should fear for the very life of Egypt.”

Much of the people’s misery was due to the fact that the inundation was low, and the salt water from the Great Green backed into the Delta of the Nile, flooding the fields with brackish water and poisoning the cattle as they drank. A plague struck the cities of the North, and failing crops threatened the land with famine worse than any previous years had known. Akhenaten was roused from his apathy by the piteous tales from the stricken areas.

Ay went at the King’s request to investigate conditions and see what could be done to alleviate suffering. It was Ay’s suggestion that Smenkhkara and Merytaten accompany him. Thus might the young

coregent become better known throughout the Two Lands, and his presence give new courage to the starving populace. But for once the Divine Father's ambition proved his undoing. No sooner had they reached Memphis than the boy was stricken by the dread disease engendered in the Delta swamps. He was nursed faithfully by Merytaten. Ay provided him with every attention money and influence could buy, to no avail. Then within a few days the Divine Father himself succumbed to a burning fever and took to his bed, bemoaning his fate and the ill judgment which had endangered the life of the frail young King.

The Royal Physician, Pentu, hastened to their aid, but all his charms and magic brews failed to save the youth. Smenkhkara, Beloved of Akhenaten, died as quietly as he had lived, drifting into a heavy sleep from which he never roused. Merytaten, refusing to leave his side, was soon a victim of the same disease, and followed her gentle lord into the nether world with meek and willing devotion. Life held little for her now, and she let it slip through listless fingers.

It was many days before Ay could be told of the double tragedy, and the knowledge drove him into a delirium which lasted so long that Pentu declared him to be permanently possessed. Upon hearing such alarming news, the Great Royal Nurse Ty obtained permission to leave Akhetaten and go to her husband's side. She set small store by Pentu's diagnosis, and had a score of secret remedies she was determined to try. Brushing aside all protests, she sailed down the river on a barge provided by the King, declaring her intention of remaining until Ay was able to accompany her on the return trip.

The Court, plunged once more into mourning by the deaths of the young co-regent and his wife, was not so sunk in melancholy that it did not rejoice in private at the absence of both Ay and Ty from the Royal House. With the gentle, capable hands of Nefertiti once more on the reins, peace pervaded

the palaces. Ankhsenpaaten watched her mother's tactful handling of each problem as it arose and tried her best to imitate the quiet assurance which made the Queen's influence so great. Even in her own deep sorrow Nefertiti built a wall of tenderness around Akhenaten and the tearful children. The King, crushed by the loss of a second daughter and the young lad who had been so transient a shadow at his side, withdrew into a state of somber silence. He gave no thought to the future, but Ankhsenpaaten knew now the wisdom of her own words: "The choice rests not with me but with my birth."

By devious paths Tutankhaten and Kenofer, with the faithful Hotep as bodyguard, had traveled across the war-torn country of Syria, through the rocky passes of Palestine, and had taken ship on the Red Sea for Punt. A storm had driven them ashore, however, and they had returned to Egypt, crossing the eastern desert by caravan, through the land of the Wawaiu, a tribe known as "the Howlers." From Koptos, the end of the caravan route, they had journeyed south to Thebes where Kenofer could see his mother and brother before continuing with the others upstream toward the tempting wilds of Kush.

From Thebes Kenofer had written: "We long to see the source of the Nile, the lake in the mountain fastnesses which sends its waters rushing down the slopes, bearing its precious burden of silt as a gift to Egypt. We would lay a garland upon those hidden waters in gratitude for their bounty, worshiping the Aten in that far land as Pharaoh would have us do."

It had been a shock to the young travelers to find Thebes once more in the clutches of the Amon priesthood. At Horemheb's suggestion they did not mention the fact in their letters. He talked with them at length about their travels, testing their powers of observation with questions far more searching than they realized. At last, well satisfied, Horemheb approved their plan to visit Nubia and Kush, encouraging them to make one more trip

into the unknown before settling down to the staid and serious duties of life. Scarcely had they reached the first cataract, however, when he was forced to send a messenger upon their heels, carrying news of Smenkhkara's death and of the King's desire that Tutankhaten return at once and take his place as co-regent with Akhenaten upon the throne of Egypt.

If there was satisfaction in his heart, Horemheb made no outward sign. He hastened plans for the marriage, the responsibility for which, in Ay's absence, fell upon his shoulders. They were shoulders equal to the burden placed upon them. Akhetaten had never known what military rule could mean. The army now took temporary possession, and in half the usual time had made all necessary arrangements. It needed only the return of Tutankhaten and the actual burial of Smenkhkara to establish the succession once more. This time it would rest in firmer hands than those which had held for such a little time the semblance of power. During the long weeks Nefertiti never left Akhenaten's side. Melancholy had taken possession of his soul. He gazed into space with wide, unseeing eyes.

"They are doomed to die—all of them. All those I love are doomed to die," he murmured, "and I am doomed to live, watching them fall like young leaves blighted on the branch."

Nefertiti bent over him as he lay stretched upon a couch in the cool half light of the royal apartments. Gently she laid her cheek against his, her long, perfumed fingers caressing his sunken temples.

"Rest, O Wan-Re, beloved, and think no more of death. See rather a vision of life, of babes playing at your knee as you grow rich in years. Ankhsenpaaten and Tutankhaten are sturdy and strong. They will give you grandsons to bear the burdens which have been a weary weight for the father of daughters. If only I had given you sons, Beloved!"

"The curse of Amon." A faint smile twitched the blue lips. "If our lovely babes have been a curse, then may Amon's curse o'ershadow me

still. No, Lady of Grace, I have no regrets except that I have grown weary far too soon. In years I am young, not thirty; but in knowledge, in sorrow, I am old—old as the burden-bearing Nile. Weariness besets my limbs and strange visions wrap my spirit in a fog, so that I no longer see the light. It comes to me, my dearest, that after all I shall not live to watch my children die.”

In sudden terror Nefertiti caught him to her, cradling his head against her breast and murmuring endearments as she might have to an infant safe within her arms. Very still he lay, his face ashen, his breathing labored. Then in a soft voice he spoke her names, the names he had made for her when first they loved: “Great of Favor, 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, Fair of Face, Living Forever...”

Gradually the faint voice drifted into silence, and in his lady’s arms Akhenaten slept.

Ankhsenpaaten found them thus when she tiptoed in to bring the news of Tutankhaten’s coming. She paused near the door, alarmed by her father’s pallor and the slow tears coursing down her mother’s sagging cheeks. No mask of makeup could hide the lines of drooping lips and hollow eyes. Startled, the child beheld for the first time upon her mother’s face the cruel stamp of age, blurring her clear-cut beauty with shadows of hopelessness and pain. For a moment she was sure that Death lay there within those mothering arms; yet even as she watched, her father stirred and opened heavy, puzzled eyes to the tender face above him.

“Oh, it is thou,” he murmured. “So sweet a dream I had, so fair a vision.”

“My love has given it to thee.” She smiled. “Here is your Small Bird, come with a message. Are you strong enough to hear her words?”

Akhenaten motioned Ankhsenpaaten to draw near. "Small Bird comes ever with a song upon her lips," he said. "What is it now?"

"A love song, judging from the sparkle in her eyes." Nefertiti smiled. "Perhaps Small Bird's mate has flown back home again."

Ankhsenpaaten laughed a bit unsteadily. "As always, you are right, my Mother. Hotep came to tell you of the travelers' safe arrival. The others will present themselves whenever you choose to grant them audience."

"At last!" Akhenaten murmured. "The waiting has been hard. The marriage contract shall be signed at once—today, my child."

"Today?"

Nefertiti watched her daughter's dismay with quick concern. "Have you seen the two lads? No doubt they seem like strangers to you after all their wild adventuring."

"No, I did not wish to see them." The Princess dropped her eyes, an unaccustomed wave of color spreading slowly across the warm ivory of her cheeks. "Tutankhaten may no longer have the good will of a brother for me. After all, he comes to claim a royal bride, not to entertain a playmate. Is it not better that we meet formally, before the Court?"

Nefertiti nodded. It brought comfort to her troubled spirit to know that Ankhsenpaaten was growing up to meet her new responsibilities. "My daughter, you have early learned a lesson all royalty must know: that there is protection in the formality of an audience chamber, and power in the possession of a throne. You are quite right. It is far better for you to receive your betrothed with due dignity on the common ground of the throne room than to mar the solemnity of this great occasion by an exchange of childish greetings. I know you fear that after years of separation shyness may trip your tongue and make you seem more a child and less a queen. But you have grown to be a queen at heart, my dearest, and need not fear what Tutankhaten will think of his young bride." She drew the yielding body

close. "He will be proud to call our Small Bird, 'Ankhsenpaaten, Lady of Grace, She Who Rests in My Heart.' "

Fortified by her mother's confidence, Ankhsenpaaten submitted to the ministrations of nurse and slave with ill-suppressed excitement. How long she had waited for this day! Reading and rereading the dutiful letters with which Tutankhaten had fulfilled his promise to the King, she tried in vain to find some record of the inner change which must have come with three years of travel. His accounts of what he had seen and done were as colorless as an overseer's report, impersonal as the practice letter of a scribe. She could not tell what manner of lad Tutankhaten had grown to be. Even the mention of his love of hunting had been omitted discreetly from epistles destined for Akhenaten's gaze.

As for Kenofer, he would always be the same. At thought of him, Ankhsenpaaten felt a glow of assurance. However the younger boy had changed, she could be sure that Kenofer would always keep the understanding heart of an artist, the clear-seeing relentless honesty of a friend. The maturity he had shown at twelve would only have deepened at eighteen.

To spare the failing King the fatigue of two formal ceremonies, Horemheb arranged both marriage and co-regency without delay. As on that first day when Tutankhaten had come to Akhetaten, the dignitaries of the Court gathered in the great hall of the Official Palace. Akhenaten and Nefertiti were enthroned upon the platform, this time with two additional thrones standing vacant beside them. On lower chairs to one side were grouped the three Princesses. Nefer-nefru-Ra and Setepenra were whispering as always when grown-up eyes were not upon them. The baby was now a plump brown figure nearly ready to don the unwelcome dignity of clothes. Yatu gripped her firmly as the child perched precariously on a stool somewhat behind the others. The seventh Princess had

Ankhsenpaaten's restless energy and a gift for getting into mischief, qualities which sadly tried Yatu's aging patience.

After the others were seated, Ankhsenpaaten was led to the place reserved for her beside the King. Her slender body, grown tall for her eleven years, was draped in sheerest linen gauze gathered in pleats about shoulders and hips. The blue faience beads of her girdle, hanging in an elaborate fringe almost to her knees, clicked faintly as she moved. Her steps were slow and gliding, in careful imitation of her mother's regal pace. For many a day she had been practicing that entrance.

As she seated herself in one of the waiting thrones within touch of Nefertiti's hand, she was happily aware of Horemheb on the right of the King in the place long occupied by Ay. His presence gave her a sense of confidence, as if his liking for her could influence Tutankhaten's first impression. She wondered if the boy would find her changed. Would he approve of the kohl so skillfully shadowing her eyes, of the henna staining her nails a dark, rich red? She knew the fine black wig was becoming, though her own hair had grown so long it was difficult to hide. The glossy locks hung about her face in three rows of curls tight as grape tendrils, fringing her forehead and lying in ringlets about the nape of her neck. It was bound with a simple fillet of gold, and a necklace of flower petals wrought in blue glass lay in delicate tiers about her throat. Her betrothed had sent her no such brilliant bauble as the jeweled necklace Ta-Shera had proudly worn, but not for all the wealth of Babylon would Ankhsenpaaten have changed places with that haughty little sister in a distant Court.

She looked about her with a smile, dark eyes brilliant under their slanting brows. After all, this was her home. It was Tutankhaten who might well feel ill at ease after so long an absence. She wondered if he would remember the formal speeches decreed by custom to be part of the marriage

ceremony. Probably Kenofer would see that this time no one needed to jog his memory.

Already the distant sound of martial music was heralding the bridegroom's approach. There was a stir throughout the assembly of courtiers, and Ankhsenpaaten found herself restlessly fingering the bracelets which Yatu had insisted that she wear. What if Tutankhaten had brought her a bracelet as a bridal gift? Suppose he found her arms laden with costly trifles from the royal jewel caskets, so that his own seemed but a poor and unworthy thing to offer her? No doubt he had been too busy with hunting and fighting to think of gifts. She could not bear to hurt him. All eyes were fixed upon the distant doorway through which the boy would enter. No one was watching her at all. Quickly she pulled off the heavy loops of gold incrustated with precious stones, two from each arm, and looked about for some way to dispose of them.

At that moment the seventh Princess wriggled loose from Yatu's grasp and ran across the soft rug to stand by her mother's knee, reaching eager fingers for the glittering jewels wound about Nefertiti's arms. Swiftly Ankhsenpaaten caught the baby's hand and drew her close. Deftly she slipped her unwanted finery over the soft brown flesh, pushing the bracelets almost to the shoulders. Two clung in place, but the others would have clattered to the floor if the small girl had not caught them as they fell. Her face alight with laughter, the Wise Little One sat down upon the rug and gleefully thrust first one bare foot and then the other through an improvised anklet which to her seemed designed for the purpose. Then, well pleased with her adornment, she trotted back to show the treasures to her less fortunate sisters.

She received small attention for her pains. At that moment two heralds and a guard of honor, with Captain Hotep in command, came through the doorway and marched to a point midway of the hall. There they paused,

stepping aside to form an aisle through which the future King might pass. As Tutankhaten made his appearance, Ankhsenpaaten forgot all her fears, all her self-conscious dread, in an overwhelming rush of joy at seeing him once more. He, too, had grown, and in his youthful assurance there was none of the stiff, childish dignity with which he had once imitated Horemheb. His head was thrown back, and he moved with an eager, swinging stride as if anxious to reach her. Even at that distance she caught the flash of his smile, and her heart beat high. Here was no stranger come to claim her hand, but a brother and playmate with whom she was to share a throne.

The details of that elaborate ceremony seemed unreal to Ankhsenpaaten. But she was vividly conscious of the teasing smile in Tutankhaten's eyes as he looked down at her during the long speeches of official and priest, the touch of his hard boyish hand holding her pliant fingers so firmly. Never would she forget the sight of the long double line of slaves who followed him, carrying the gifts which he had collected in his travels to lay at the feet of his bride. How she blushed to think that she had feared to embarrass him with her childish baubles!

In charge of all those treasures was Kenofer, a taller, graver Kenofer, who had abandoned his Keftiu curls in favor of an Egyptian wig. More than once she caught his piercing gaze fixed upon her, and even in the midst of her coronation she found time to wonder if he thought her beautiful in all her grown-up splendor. Only a formal greeting had passed between them, but his presence made the day complete. Chest after chest was placed before her, lids raised to give a glimpse of rich fabrics and articles of foreign design. In the impoverished Court which had long since abandoned the lavish buying of beautiful but useless things, those overflowing caskets seemed to hold the riches of a King.

“I told you I would bring you a caravan of treasures,” Tutankhaten whispered. “Kenofer helped select them. We sent all the boxes back to Memphis, where Horemheb kept them for this day. I really had forgotten there were so many, but Kenofer remembered every one. What a friend he has been to me on our travels!” She nodded gravely. Kenofer was indeed a friend.

Parts of the customary ceremony had been shortened for the sake of Akhenaten, whose eyes burned in a pallid face. The sight of his emaciated frame and haggard look shocked the artist beyond words. The evernew beauty of Nefertiti, which had lived with him on all his journeys as a symbol of youthful motherhood, was hidden behind a tragic mask of anxiety and age. Ankhsenpaaten’s gamin charm had matured graciously as he had known it would, but the physical beauty of his King and Queen had become a misshapen shadow of itself. His eyes and heart sought comfort in the sturdy strength of the boy and girl he loved. They were seated now upon the two thrones, beside Akhenaten and the Queen. Upon each head there rose a high and intricate crown to symbolize their royal estate. Already Tutankhaten’s clear young voice had spoken the words:

“She is my wife and I am her husband from today to all eternity.” Now it remained for Akhenaten to present to the waiting populace without, this son who was to “sit in the chair of his father” and bear the burden of kingship grown too heavy for enfeebled shoulders racked with pain. Slowly the royal procession moved down the long columned hall and across the covered bridge to the Window of Appearance. Pharaoh and Nefertiti were carried in chairs of gold. When they reached the painted room high above the street, Akhenaten rose with difficulty to his feet. Nefertiti on one side and Horemheb on the other supported him as he moved to the window. At sight of that beloved face doubts, as always, were forgotten, and cries of “Life! Prosperity! Health!” rose in friendly chorus. Akhenaten smiled

vaguely down upon them through a thickening haze. The faces blurred before his failing vision.

At a word from Horemheb, the young co-regent and his radiant bride took their place beside the King. When the milling crowds caught sight of Tutankhaten, straight and tall, his face bronzed from months of exposure, his muscular frame full of vitality, the cries rose to a frenzied shouting which echoed to the very hills.

Akhenaten closed his eyes, drinking in the sound as if it filled his tortured mind with hope for the land he was about to leave and for the children he loved with more than human tenderness. To him those two young lives symbolized the spirit of his God on earth, the warmth, the love, the rich fertility of Aten's blessing. They would remember his teachings and spread abroad the glory of His name.

Groping blindly, he drew Tutankhaten within the circle of his arm and raised a hand for silence. Instantly the shouting ceased, and faces grown suddenly tearful were lifted to hear Akhenaten's words. The full, resonant voice rang with the old, compelling fervor, strengthened by some inner source of power:

"I, Akhenaten, Son of the Sun, Living in Truth, have raised this youth, Tutankhaten, to sit upon the throne of his fathers. I have crowned him King that I might see his excellence while I am still on earth. Give him your loyalty and trust. As my heart is happy in the Queen and her children, so may he, Living Image of Aten, find joy in the love of Ankhsenpaaten, his sister, and in the children with which their union will be blessed. May the Aten, who rejoices in Truth, Lord of the Sun's Course, Lord of the Sky, lend them the light of His infinite wisdom and grant them Life, Health, Strength!"

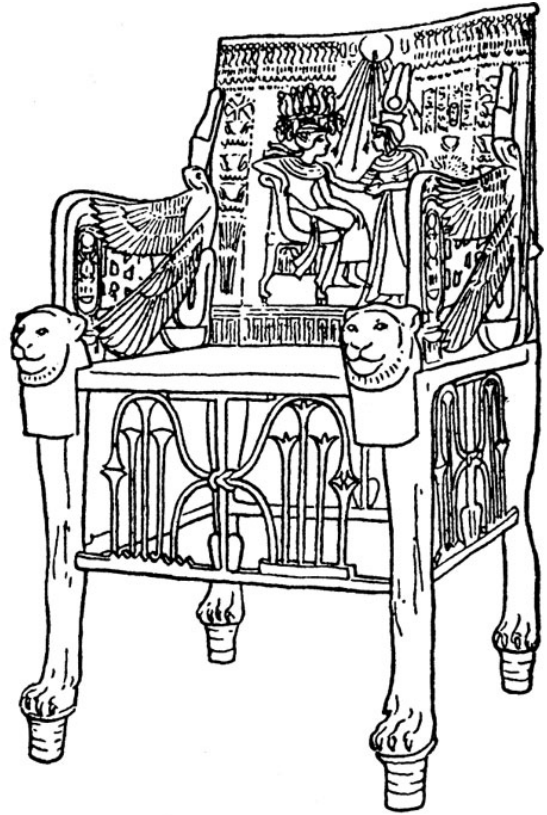
"Life, Health, Strength!" The voices of the multitude caught the words, chanting them as a mighty hymn of praise to the Aten and His Chosen One

on earth. For a moment Akhenaten, Son of the Sun, stood swaying beside the boy King, his face uplifted to the warm rays slanting across the palace roof. Soon the Aten would rest in the western horizon, and the earth would be “in darkness, as if dead.” Even now the saffron light was growing dim.

“Nefertiti, Great and Beloved Wife,” he murmured, “there is no longer any need for me to wait...” and slowly like a weary child he crumpled in a still heap at her feet.



Cartouches of Tutankhaten and Ankhsenpaaten



The Throne of Tutankhaten

CHAPTER XVII

A TRUCE

IN the difficult days which followed, Tutankhaten did his best to console his wistful bride. She was so torn between joy and sorrow that she scarce could capture any mood and hold it long enough to call it hers. With boyish clumsiness he sought to dry her tears by offering shy gifts, as one would cheer a child with toys. He urged her to unpack the treasure chests which lined the small audience chamber and overflowed into the corridor, and watched her anxiously to see the tremulous smiles which spoke her gratitude. He told her long tales of his adventures, things which he had never dared to write for fear of the King's displeasure. Together they laughed over his stiff and formal letters, and he admitted how little they had

told her of the truth. But just as he felt heartened by her warm response, the sight of Nefertiti, moving with dragging step about the palace, would bring the quick tears to her eyes and snatch his playmate from him into a world of sorrow he could not share.

During their years apart, death had become to Ankhsenpaaten an ever-present menace hovering over the royal house; to Tutankhaten it had come to mean no more than a soldier's glorious end. He mourned Pharaoh's going as custom bade him do, but at heart he was far more concerned with his lovely bride and the new prerogatives of kingship. Akhenaten had been less his father than his King, and less his King than a symbol of God on earth. It was in the temple that Tutankhaten remembered him best, and in the temple Akhenaten still seemed to dwell, though it was Meryra who chanted the hymns and offered sacrifice, while the young King and Queen made the gestures of burning incense and pouring unguents on the sacred altar. The voice of Akhenaten and his holy presence still seemed to fill the Great Temple at the sunset hour. His nearness was like a living presence, embodied in the sunlight on the altar. These were still his children, doing his bidding and paying tribute to his God.

Nefertiti worshiped at the small temple of Hat Aten with her three babies close beside her and Yatu to keep her tearful company. To Ankhsenpaaten they all seemed set apart by sorrow. They mourned the passing of a world in which they had dwelt with assurance. Even the little ones seemed to sense the coming of a new order.

There was one member of the household who realized that the new Queen's tears were not alone for a father's passing. Kenofer watched Ankhsenpaaten with appraising eyes. They had been given no chance to talk since his return, except in the presence of others, but the artist had not forgotten that a Small Bird was caged within the breast of the child Queen. He remembered too well a lithe brown figure dancing in the moonlight, and

an excited charioteer galloping across the desert under the magic spell of make-believe. Now she looked a bit frightened and insecure in her royal trappings.

Word had come that Ay was improving rapidly and would soon return to Akhetaten with his wife. At the news, Ankhsenpaaten had lifted a stricken face to Horemheb, standing grim and determined on Tutankhaten's right hand. Kenofer caught the look that passed between them, a look which even Tutankhaten did not see. The young King rested secure in Horemheb's great strength, and took his advice without question, as he had always taken the General's commands. But there was a question in Ankhsenpaaten's eyes which filled Kenofer's loyal soul with misgivings. What would happen to the new King's power when Ay was there to dispute Horemheb's authority?

With quick decision Kenofer, now by royal decree First Artist of the Court, set to work to do his part to secure for Pharaoh a safe and lasting throne. The symbols of sovereignty must be his, made for Tutankhaten and for him alone. Kenofer begged leave to depart for Thebes that he might carry in person to his brother Intef certain designs for royal furniture. The King reluctantly gave consent. He would miss this friend's wise counsel and constant comradeship. The days were full of new duties and there was little time to call his own. He dared not even ask to hunt for fear such a request might seem a sign of disrespect during the time of mourning. His only exercise was driving the royal horses on the Mazoi training ground, trying each team until he found the one best suited to his strength and liking.

According to custom Tutankhaten, as Akhenaten's successor, was responsible for the funeral arrangements which were to do honor to the sovereign in death. Akhenaten, long expecting death, had caused a splendid coffin to be designed, made in the shape of a recumbent figure, the face carved in wood and covered with thick gold foil. Down the front ran an

inscription written in inlaid hieroglyphs: “The beautiful Prince, the Chosen One of Ra, the King of Upper and Lower Egypt, Living in Truth, Lord of the Two Lands, Akhenaten, the Glorious Son of the Living Aten, whose name shall live forever and ever.”

He had also left directions for the embalming of his body in Akhetaten and for the marking of the mummy that it might bear his name unto eternity. Over the linen bandages were to be placed bands of gold foil encircling the body at shoulders, waist, and knees, crossing similar metal ribbons running the length of the body in front and back. On these bands were to be engraved Akhenaten’s name and all the titles testifying to his rank and favor in the eyes of Aten. Through the recent years of comparative poverty, there had been preserved in the royal treasury sheets of pure gold, flexible as starched linen, in which his body was to be wrapped. Now at Nefertiti’s request a necklace of gold which she herself had given him was placed about Akhenaten’s throat, held in place by the endless strips of linen, while a flat vulture with outspread wings meeting above the head was laid upon his breast as a symbol of divine protection. Below the feet of the coffin she asked to have inscribed a prayer which Akhenaten himself had written shortly before his death, expressing the wish that it be buried with him. The words were simple and trustful as his faith:

“I breathe the sweet breath which comes forth from Thy mouth. I behold Thy beauty every day. It is my desire that I hear Thy sweet voice, even the north wind, that my limbs may be rejuvenated with life through love of Thee. Give me Thy hands, holding Thy spirit, that I may receive it and may live by it. Call Thou upon my name unto eternity, and it shall never fail.”

Akhenaten’s last instructions were carried out with the utmost care by the devoted artists for whom he had done so much. Tutankhaten’s role was merely that of dutiful spectator as he went daily with Horemheb to inspect

the progress of the work on the funerary equipment. The seventy days needed for the embalmment of the body barely gave the craftsmen opportunity to complete the necessary work. It troubled Ankhsenpaaten that her father's tomb was not completely finished and ready to receive his body. After his daughter's death and interment, Akhenaten had lost all interest in the preparation of his own burial chamber. Later, when tribute failed and laborers could not be paid, work had ceased in most of the tombs.

Horemheb had dreaded to tell the Royal Mother that there was no money to complete the work at present, that it would empty the treasury to supply the necessary unguents, oils, and ceremonial objects which must perforce accompany a King to his last resting place. But Nefertiti offered no objection. A simple funeral would have been Akhenaten's wish. The pink granite sarcophagus with the delicate figures of herself taking the places of the protective goddesses would be ready. The coffin was as he wished it, and the sheets of gold. Then, too, there were the four alabaster canopic jars, made to hold the vital organs, the stopper of each jar exquisitely carved in the likeness of Akhenaten, wearing the royal cobra upon the forehead. Akhenaten had designed those jars several years before, that they might be in readiness. As for the tomb itself—Nefertiti understood.

Kenofer returned from Thebes for those last impressive rites, and with him came examples of his brother's artistry worthy of the royal pair. In the great pillared room of the Official Palace, the throne of Akhenaten was replaced by one of even greater splendor. In its intricate and rich design was evident the goldsmith's masterly skill, but in the naturalness of the scene which formed the inner panel of the back could be detected the intimate, understanding art of Kenofer, paying tribute to the King and Queen he loved.

The wooden framework of the chair was overlaid with sheet gold and adorned with patterns executed in many-colored faience, glass, and stone

inlay. The legs were supported on great claws of gold, the two in front topped by lions' heads, which rose above the level of the seat at the base of the arms and gazed with piercing eyes upon those who bowed before the King. The arms themselves were made of glittering serpents, their crowned heads resting against the back, their wings outstretched like arms, holding the King's cartouches where his hands would rest upon them as he sat. Between the seat and the stretchers was an open-work pattern of papyrus and lotus flowers, and the sloping back was braced behind by three upright bars of wood. Between these, six royal cobras reared heads of violet faience, carrying crowns of silver and disks of gold. Behind them the convex throne-back was decorated with a delicate relief of papyrus rushes and water fowl, from which the serpents seemed to raise protective heads in defiance to Pharaoh's enemies. Ankhsenpaaten and Tutankhaten gazed upon this glittering symbol of their sovereignty and cried aloud their amazement at the perfection of the workmanship. Slowly they walked around it, viewing its graceful lines from every angle. With proud fingers Tutankhaten touched the powerful heads of the lions, and stooped to trace the hieroglyphs which formed his cartouche. Ankhsenpaaten knelt in awe, hands clasped upon the golden seat, looking upon the royal likenesses as they stood there before her in living color.

The scene depicted upon the curving back suggested the interior of a room within the palace, a room where the pillars were garlanded with flowers, and a frieze of royal cobras looked down upon the King and Queen below. Through an opening in the roof, the Aten poured his beams in blessing on Tutankhaten and his wife, who in spite of lofty crowns and Court attire gazed at one another with as natural an air as if the artist had caught them unawares. Tutankhaten sat comfortably upon a cushioned throne, one arm thrown casually across the back, the other resting in his lap. Before him stood Ankhsenpaaten, just as she had looked the day of her

marriage. In her left hand she held a small jar, and with her right she gently placed a drop of perfume on the King's collar of bright beads.

The artist might well have seen them so on their first day together. He had captured their joy and placed it there for all the world to see. From Kenofer's sketches his brother had made a masterpiece of the goldsmith's art, inlaying the faces and bodies with red enamel, the intricate headdresses with faience, blue as turquoise. Over robes of delicate silver, jeweled necklaces were inlaid with colored glass, carnelian, and faience of every hue, until the whole gave an effect of indescribable brilliance.

Kenofer watched their pleasure with quiet satisfaction, and then presented Tutankhaten with the other emblems of authority made in the workshops of Thebes. From a casket of cedar wood inlaid with ivory and ebony, he lifted the two scepters made of sections of gold, dark blue enamel, and black obsidian. One, the hek, was a small staff shaped like a shepherd's crook; the other, the nekhekh, was a whip with a short handle bent sharply at the top, from which hung three beaded thongs terminating in slender ivory pendants. They were smaller than those carried by Akhenaten, and beautifully proportioned to the height of the young King. He fingered them proudly, holding the hek in his left hand, the nekhekh in his right, as was customary. The same symbols were always seen in likenesses of the god Osiris. Rather gingerly Tutankhaten seated himself upon the edge of the golden throne.

"It is so full of cobras and lions there isn't much room for me!" He smiled ruefully over his shoulder at the pictured image of himself. "I can't get used to being a king."

"The boy in the picture seems very used to it." Ankhsenpaaten touched the glittering inlay with reverent fingers. "He will always be at home here, and I shall always be beside him. O Kenofer, only you could have drawn us just as we are."

The artist bowed. He found it difficult to adjust himself to the new dignity of his two young friends, especially Tutankhaten, with whom he had lived in such close companion-ship.

“I would have brought Pharaoh and his bride other examples of my brother’s skill had the time not been so short. Soon he will send the detachable vulture and uraeus heads for the royal crowns, as well as perfume chests and fans, bracelets and pectorals. Horemheb has given orders that special furniture be made, bearing the titles of Tutankhaten and the Queen. It is my privilege to oversee the work, and I promise that it shall be the best Akhetaten has produced.”

In due time the promised articles arrived, some from Thebes and some from the workshops established by Akhenaten in the City of the Horizon. There were low bedsteads carved of ebony overlaid with sheets of burnished gold embossed in designs of flowers and fruit, with clumps of papyrus and delicate red-tipped sedge upon the high foot panels. The beds were lifted from the floor on the fore and hind feet of some catlike creature, and from the flat rails was stretched a webbing of woven strings which would give with the sleepers’ weight. At the same time came head rests of tinted ivory, one carved in the shape of a miniature folding stool, the legs fashioned like the heads of geese. Then there were inlaid chests for Pharaoh’s linen and a life-sized statue in painted wood showing the upper part of Tutankhaten’s body, clad in a white shirt over which his elaborate collars and necklaces could be fitted and displayed. Ankhsenpaaten, too, had her share of all this magnificence, for many of the bracelets, necklaces, and rings, the gold and silver mirrors set in ivory frames, the toilet articles, and unguent jars bore her name as well as Tutankhaten’s. Horemheb had been careful to safeguard the supply of gold which still found its way to Egypt from the South, and thanks to him, the treasury in Thebes was well able to supply the necessary funds for establishing his young charges on the

throne. All the symbols of power must be theirs, and their sovereignty must be recognized throughout the land, if possible, before the wily Ay was once more able to take an active part in political intrigue. Ay had been carried in a litter to the burial service of Akhenaten, too weak to take official part. Now after several months of convalescence, from his villa in the suburbs he was sending urgent messages to Thebes, messages the nature of which it was not hard to guess.

During the last years of Akhenaten's reign the priesthood of Amon had risen like a phoenix from the fire of their de-feat at Pharaoh's hands. Horemheb knew that their hold on Thebes had strengthened to the point where they were ready to dictate terms to the child ruler of Akhetaten. Ay had made frank overtures to them during the co-regency of Smenkhkara, and their hopes had run high. With a tractable boy on the throne and Ay to direct his policies, the triumph of Amon over the heretical Aten was assured.

Now, however, the scene had changed. It was the ward of Horemheb who held the throne, and the head of the army who directed his policies. Would the Divine Father be able to reassert himself and bring about a voluntary return of the Court to Thebes, where Amon would again take charge; or would they all be forced to bide their time until a campaign in Syria took Horemheb to a safe distance where he could not thwart their plans? There was much speculation both in Thebes and Akhetaten as to the probable course of events.

Not only the High Priest but Ay himself would have given much to be present at a conference which took place in the small audience chamber just before Nefertiti left the King's House to make her home in the North City. Although the three small Princesses were to remain for a time in the royal nursery until accommodations could be prepared for them in the new palace under construction by the North Wall, the departure of the Queen Mother

was a sad blow to the young rulers. They felt the need of advice and mothering, but bowed to her desire to live in quiet with her grief.

“You must stand alone in the eyes of your people, my children, with the wisdom of Horemheb and the Divine Father Ay to guide you. This is a changing world, and I be-long to an order that has passed with your father’s going. I saw it long before his death and tried to shield him from the knowledge. Now he has left you the obligations of his throne, and you must face the facts as Horemheb knows them. May Aten light the tortuous road you follow, and bring you safely to its end.”

The finality of her words gave Ankhsenpaaten a troubled feeling that they were said in more than temporary farewell. Her mother seemed weary and sad; yet there was a certain quiet resignation in her eyes which gave an impression of deep, inner peace.

Horemheb regarded the Queen Mother with frank admiration. “You have none of the Great Tiy’s desire to keep a hand upon the reigns of government?” he asked.

“None. I would live in peace, with my memories of a life rich in love and beauty. I would worship the Aten as I have in the past, unassailed by doubt, untroubled by political necessity. The daughters I have borne in love and pain must learn to stand without me. This son of my husband, dear to my heart, must learn to choose the path he will follow, looking to the future, not the past. I cannot help him. I have lived. I have given life. Now I would rest.”

“Great is thy wisdom and greater thy unselfishness,” Horemheb murmured, bowing before her in an attitude of reverence.

Sadly she shook her head. “My days of usefulness are at an end, my friend. Now I can only serve a memory and God.”

Nefertiti sat in silence while Horemheb explained the political situation to the two attentive children. He spoke with a vigorous simplicity which left

no doubt in the mind of either one that they had reached a turning point in the royal road almost before they were well started on their journey. Akhetaten was no longer the heart of Egypt. The worship of Aten had failed to reach the great majority of people throughout the country. They clung to the local deity guarding the city in which they chanced to live, and still believed in the authority of Amon, god of Thebes and founder of the Empire. If that Empire was to be preserved, Amon must again be recognized by Pharaoh, not in the place of Aten, but by His side. Aten stood for peace; Amon, for war. Aten inspired love; Amon, fear. The time had come when the army of Egypt must strike terror to foreign enemies all of whom had reason to respect the power of the god who had led Thutmose III to victory and maintained the might of his successors. Back of that army must be a united Egypt, a loyal priesthood, a contented people. To insure that, the Court must eventually move to Thebes, the old center of the Empire. There was no other way.

Tutankhaten nodded his head as the General paused to observe the effect of his words. The boy had often heard the expression of such opinions from the lips of Horemheb. He now accepted them without question in the light of his own knowledge of conditions in the East. Ankhsenpaaten, however, was not prepared for a suggestion which involved so great a change in her own mode of life.

“You mean that you would have us abandon the teachings of our father, leave his city, and go over to the enemies of his faith? Is this a soldier’s counsel?”

“No one asks that you abandon the teachings of your father, Ankhsenpaaten, Queen of the Two Lands, but only that you recognize some truth in the teachings of others. Even a soldier must call a truce at times. Long before Aten became the One God, He had been known by other names. The sun has ever been the fountain of life, reigning supreme in the

hearts of men as the Giver of Light. At Heliopolis He was worshiped as Ra, the Sun at Noon, Lord of Heaven, the Sovereign King of All Life. Elsewhere He was known in the form of a beetle—Khepera, the Sun at Dawn. As Ra-Horakhti, Ra of the Horizon, He appeared as a Winged Disk. Through all the long history of a sun-blessed land, gods and men have dwelt side by side in peace. That indeed is the peace of Aten, and that peace must come again. If Aten is all powerful, the one and only God, His teachings will prevail. For the present Amon must be considered, since he will not be denied.”

“It seems to me it is not Amon but the priests of Amon who will not be denied!” Ankhsenpaaten eyed him keenly. “Why must we go to live in Thebes? Our friends are here.”

“Because, my Queen, your enemies are there,” he answered grimly. “I would have you face them at close range, that they may see you unafraid.”

“You and Tutankhaten were ever at home in the midst of your enemies! I much prefer the company of my friends.” She sighed, leaning forward in her chair, elbow on knee, her chin cupped in one hand. “Just what do you propose to do with all the enemies not in Thebes?”

“Oh, we will dispose of them!” The boy at her side straightened with sudden interest. “Don’t you see? That is why the Court must move to Thebes, so you can keep an eye on the priests of Amon while General Horemheb and I go off to Syria with an army.” Tutankhaten’s eyes sparkled at the thought, and his fingers sought the hilt of the gold and ivory dagger thrust in his belt. “I told you, Ankhsenpaaten, that was what I would do if I were ever King—fight at the head of my army and let the Hittites know that Pharaoh is a soldier as well as a God upon a throne.” Ankhsenpaaten regarded gravely the vigorous youth beside her, then turned to Horemheb. “I had hoped that Tutankhaten would remain here for a time after being away so long. Don’t you think the people should know their King at least

by sight? If he leaves the country now, anyone might seize the throne. What could I do to hold it with you both away?"

The clear voice faltered. It promised to be a very lonely lot, this task of being Queen.

Horemheb hastened to reassure her. "You show great wisdom for one of your years, Ankhsenpaaten, Lady of Diadems. It is true that Pharaoh must become known to his people, but it should be as the head of a victorious army, not merely as a well-favored lad sitting at ease while foes lay waste the land. In due time the Court should return to Thebes, and in due time Pharaoh should lead his army into Syria. But it will be many months, perhaps years, before such plans can be perfected. I mention the matter now only that you both may realize that there are such plans to be made.

"My part shall be to pave the way with the priests of Amon and their followers. They shall respect the power of Tutankhaten and want him for their King. Your part will be to see that gradually the Court becomes accustomed to the idea of compromise. As time goes on, the nobles here must feel their King and Queen to be in sympathy with such a move, as a matter of political wisdom. Such wisdom is not developed over night. Tutankhaten should be given time to learn from observation at home as he learned abroad, and to reach his own decision. The Court will follow if he is seen to lead." Horemheb turned to the boy, of whose support he was so sure.

"You, as King of the Two Lands, must learn patience and tact. You wish to lead an army. That is well. For half a lifetime I have had to wait for a chance to fight again in Syria. There is an army to be raised, but I promise you that I shall not delay the campaign a day longer than necessity dictates. In the meantime, live at peace here in Akhetaten. Be happy in the companionship of your Queen and profit by her knowledge."

“And what am I to do?” Ankhsenpaaten lifted wistful eyes to his rugged face, the face of a man who thinks before he acts, a man who can bide his time. He smiled at her in answer.

“You can win the hearts of the people, as your mother did. The task will be more difficult at Thebes than here, but even there you will succeed. I can make the people fear your power. The Divine Father Ay can make the priests of Amon respect your crown. It is for you to make the people love their Queen.”

At mention of the absent counselor, Ankhsenpaaten’s dismay overcame her discretion. “You mean that Ay is to stand at my right hand while you are absent, and I must follow his advice? If so, indeed you plan to leave me in the clutches of my enemies!”

The General shot a glance at Nefertiti, but she uttered no protest. Well she knew that Ankhsenpaaten’s aversion to Ay could not be changed by argument. Made bold by the Queen Mother’s silence, Horemheb spoke with a soldier’s bluntness:

“I said that I would have you face your enemies at close range, so they may see you unafraid. I also would have you in their confidence, that you may know just what there is to fear.”

The small Queen considered that suggestion with startled wonder. Never before had Horemheb dared voice a doubt of Ay. The implication of his words put new spirit in her. The Divine Father in the role of secret enemy, to be treated with wily deference and watched when he least suspected watching, was a challenge to her ingenuity. Here was adventure close at hand, a chance to use her wits and learn the diplomacy essential for a queen. She lifted her head with sudden decision.

“Mother, do you wish us to go to Thebes, accept for a time the rule of Ay and Amon until victory abroad can establish Tutankhaten firmly on his throne at home? I would not like to disregard your wishes.”

Nefertiti rose slowly from her chair and came to stand before the royal pair, a hand laid lightly on the shoulder of each. There was infinite sadness in her gaze as she studied the two eager faces raised to hers.

“My children, that is a question for which I have no answer. The decision must be yours, for the years ahead are yours. I have only this to say: Amon is not a god. He is a fear in the hearts of the people, a symbol of war, of greed, of conquest. He is a puppet of the priesthood. In his name they wax powerful and rich at the expense of the Empire. Compromise with the priests if you must, but do not do it in the name of God. Perhaps, as Horemheb has said, Egypt needs Amon to put fear in the minds of her enemies, but she needs Aten to bring peace to her own soul. The world may be too young to understand the worship of the One and Only God, but you who have known its beauty from babyhood are too old ever to forget it. Keep the teachings of your father locked close within your hearts, and whatever comes, let love and a vision of peace rule your destiny.”



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Ay

CHAPTER XVIII

A CLASH OF WILLS

AY returned to his duties as Bearer of the Fan, Overseer of Horses, and Acting Scribe, ready for a battle of wits to regain his power over the throne. Much to his surprise he met with no opposition to his resumption of authority, either on the part of the child rulers or his rival, Horemheb. That energetic organizer paid Ay an official visit and stated the whole situation bluntly. There was work to be done if the Empire was to be restored to order and prosperity, too much work for any one man to carry on alone. Akhenaten had expected the two of them to guide the destinies of the young King and Queen until they reached maturity. That could best be done by dividing the responsibility, Ay assuming that which had to do with internal policies, while he, Horemheb, took care of matters abroad. They must work together to a common end, guiding but not coercing the children, and never under any circumstances weakening their own positions of authority by open disagreement. On that point the two men understood each other

thoroughly. Palace intrigue and jealousies were as familiar to one as the other. Now was no time for indulging personal enmities. Horemheb must reconquer the eastern Empire in order to fill the royal coffers from which Ay would bribe the priesthood of Amon to acceptance of Tutankhaten as Pharaoh. Beyond that they need not look at present.

The older man's narrow, close-set eyes gleamed restlessly in his yellow, leathery face, seeking a flaw in his opponent's seemingly faultless armor of frankness. Illness had drawn Ay's skin into a wrinkled mask, and his lips were set over teeth discolored by decay. He moved stiffly, joints cracking audibly with every sudden change of position. These evidences of age he sought to hide under a cloak of dignified reserve, but they did not escape the dispassionate gaze of Horemheb. The soldier himself was not young, but he hid no gray hair under his well-kept wig, and moved with all the vigorous assurance of a man in his prime.

So the two Chief Counselors faced one another, each busy with his own thoughts, his own ambitions. For the present it was to the advantage of everyone concerned that they stand together, united powers behind the throne. Later one of them might even sit upon that throne, but now it must be made secure for the spirited boy who had the rare gift of winning the affection of the populace.

Each day brought new evidences of Akhetaten's pride in the new ruler. The pall of gloom had gradually lifted with the passing of the days of mourning, and the people, weary of sadness, turned with delight to watch the obvious happiness of the King and Queen. They could not know that the prospect of separation, the knowledge that they would not long be at Akhetaten, lent poignancy to all the young rulers did. Those who watched them hunting in the marshes, racing their chariots across the desert, wandering for hours among the gardens of Maru Aten and the North Palace, could not sense the growing fear which drove them on to taste once more

every experience they had shared as little children in that sheltered crescent of land between the circling cliffs and the swelling current of the Nile.

Tutankhaten visited the House of Books and graciously made his peace with the teachers who had found him so incorrigible, demonstrating his writing and knowledge of foreign languages as evidence that his time had not been wasted, though he had not spent much of it in school. He took Ankhsenpaaten with him through the studios and workshops where for her he ordered fans and ornaments, unguent jars, kohl sticks, and for himself, bows and arrows, walking sticks, and an elaborate corselet of gold mesh to be worn on ceremonial occasions. He began to feel the power which comes with kingship, the small satisfactions of indulging whims, of exacting obedience, of receiving gestures of deference from men and women many times his age.

Ankhsenpaaten watched him with tender amusement. She accepted her regal privileges as a matter of course, and smiled at Tutankhaten's pleasure in giving orders and seeing them instantly obeyed. There was no arrogance in his manner, no injustice in his demands, but it was soon evident that Tutankhaten was every inch a king. He knew the prerogatives of his office and used them, first in small matters, then gradually in matters of policy which did not always meet with the unqualified approval of the watchful Ay. There was something reminiscent of Amenhotep the Magnificent in the boy King's tastes and manner. When he went to hunt, he must have the most elaborate arrows, the best of bows, and his chariot must be equipped with every device known to the chariot makers of the land. Restless energy drove him out in search of big game beyond his strength to handle, and kept the Court in a state of perpetual excitement over his expeditions into the bandit-infested desert. The boy was seemingly without fear, and his small Queen was ever at his side, regardless of the shocked protests of the Royal Nurse.

True to his training under Horemheb, Tutankhaten insisted on a show of military pomp unknown in the days of Akhenaten. He inspected the Mazoi with the eyes of one who could fully appreciate their skill in the handling of horse and chariot as well as their tireless energy in pursuit of evil doers. He kept a bodyguard of picked soldiers at his beck and call, and reviewed the troops brought to Akhetaten by Horemheb, with such regularity and enthusiasm that they heralded him another Thutmose III, destined to lead them forth to victory.

Ay frowned on many of the boy's impulsive escapades, but back of them all he recognized an energy and will power which could be used to advantage if properly handled. Egypt, weary of a Pharaoh wrapped in dreams to the detriment of the public good, was ready for just such an active young leader to whom the populace could give wholehearted support. Youth and daring had ever appealed to the popular mind. If it could be made to appeal to the priests of Amon, thirsting for revenge after years of ignominious banishment from power, all would be well. That was the immediate problem Ay must solve. Later, when the Court had moved again to Thebes and the priests been pacified, he was quite willing to have Tutankhaten go with Horemheb to Asia at the head of a cheering army, while he himself ruled Egypt through a puppet Queen, a lovely girl, who seemed only too glad to follow his advice.

The prospect pleased Ay mightily. Ankhsenpaaten's vivid beauty appealed to him, and he had always thought her by far the most intelligent of Akhenaten's children. She would no doubt prove an apt pupil. There had been a time when he had fancied she avoided him and even viewed him with suspicion, but now that she was growing up, she seemed to welcome his return to Court. Ay smiled to himself. It was through the Queen that the throne of Egypt was handed down—through her and the daughters she might have. Let Horemheb direct the King. Ay would control the Queen.

During the months which followed, lengthy letters passed between the Divine Father and certain men in authority at Thebes. Horemheb, in Thebes to gather an army, also did his part, and in due time an emissary arrived at Akhetaten, a priest of Amon clad in his long, white robes of office.

Curious crowds gathered in the streets as he passed under official escort, and news spread abroad that the Amon priest-hood, so long the enemy of Pharaoh, had actually come to terms and sought official recognition from the young King. Be that as it might, those impressive figures soon became a frequent sight in the capital city, and it was known that the mighty followers of Amon spent long hours closeted with Ay and with other dignitaries of the Court.

Meryra viewed these visits as sacrilege and protested earnestly to the youthful ruler. Tutankhaten listened patiently, Ankhsenpaaten seated at his side true to the tradition of the Court; but his answer was always the same. These men of Thebes were his subjects and as welcome in his Court as citizens of Akhetaten or Abydos or Heliopolis. Priests of Ra came to pay him homage, and those from the temples of other gods throughout the land. To the visits of such men the High Priest of Aten offered no objections. As King he desired the friendship and support of all factions in his domain, and he meant to be available to the meanest of his subjects as well as to those in positions of importance. If Meryra suspected that Tutankhaten was quoting the arguments of Ay, he gave no sign. He was in the confidence of the Queen Mother and, like Nefertiti, knew himself to belong to an order which was doomed to perish. It was useless to protest.

The nobles created by Akhenaten were less easily reconciled to the plan that the Court return to Thebes. None of them could be quite sure with whom the plan originated or how it grew so rapidly to completion. Almost before they were aware of this menace to their recently won authority, it was accepted by the world at large that when all necessary arrangements

had been made, Pharaoh and such of his followers as chose to accompany him would take up their permanent residence in Thebes.

The Court seethed with discontent. One faction welcomed the move as an opportunity for the nobles created by Akhenaten to take their place beside the hereditary nobles of Thebes and so assert the permanence and honor of their position as royal favorites. The other declared it all an obvious scheme to deprive them of their rights, their magnificent estates, their authority in the various branches of government.

Individually and in groups they demanded private audience with the King, but always Ay stood immovable at Tutankhaten's right hand, his restless, prying eyes ferreting out their secret motives and making their protests appear petty and absurd. No one need leave who preferred to stay in Akhetaten. Nefertiti and the three Princesses would remain; also the priests of Aten and all the craftsmen and artists who had made the workshops and studios of Akhenaten's capital famous throughout the world. Life would go on as before, and the nobles were at liberty to remain if they preferred. The palace would be open and ready to receive the King and Queen whenever it pleased them to visit Akhetaten. The move to Thebes was merely a matter of convenience, in keeping with the dignity and importance of the Court. It was Pharaoh's privilege to live where he saw fit, and no one had the right to question his desire.

Those were difficult days for Tutankhaten, and he longed for Horemheb's advice and straightforward reasoning. Ay's crafty handling of the situation was not to the boy's liking, and Ankhsenpaaten had all she could do to maintain an appearance of friendly cooperation between the two of them. She, too, rebelled against the half truths, the words left unsaid, the ambiguous statements from which the wrong inference could easily be drawn. Yet to her it was all a game in which her wits were pitted against those of Ay. Her apparent docility was but a mask behind which she could

hide her own watchfulness. Horemheb had said she must know what Ay was doing, must see things with his eyes, and thus measure the personal ambition which prompted his every move. She could not do that if he suspected the loathing and distrust which both she and Tutankhaten felt for him.

Tutankhaten grumbled at the use of such methods. He was a soldier, not a spy; a King, not a pawn in the hands of an antiquated politician! He was growing restless under all this complicated plotting. They were making him uncomfortable in Akhetaten. He wished to move his Court to Thebes to be with Horemheb. Was that not reason enough for making the change at once?

It was Kenofer who made the thought of that change bearable for Ankhsenpaaten. He talked to her at length of the ancient capital, of the palace where she and Tutankhaten would live, of the temples at Karnak, and the vast City of the Dead on the west bank of the Nile. Thebes was his city, and he was eager to show it to her as she once had shown him the beauties of Akhetaten. Much as she dreaded to leave the one place in the world which she could call her own, the Queen looked forward to the journey up the Nile as her first great adventure. Surely it would not be hard to face that new world with both Tutankhaten and Kenofer by her side, one for her to care for and one to care for her. Being Queen with Tutankhaten as King was still very much like a game of make-believe. She planned their days, and he with an engaging small-boy swagger carried out her suggestions. The only activities he thought of for himself were hunting and outlining future campaigns in Syria. She wondered whether he would grow up to be as dependable, as mature as Kenofer, or be forever doing something, going somewhere, full of restless energy which knew no repose. Was that driving vitality his youth, or was it merely—Tutankhaten? She could not be sure.

There was one stipulation made by the priests which troubled both the King and Queen. Paari, the High Priest of Amon, gaining courage from the deference paid his followers at Court and from Ay's evident desire for their cooperation, refused to recognize a Pharaoh whose name referred to the hated god Aten. With a veiled threat in his insistence, Paari explained the importance of having the blessing of Amon expressed in the very titles of the King and Queen, and the necessity of declaring Amon the official state god of Egypt. Nothing less than that would make any impression on subjects at home or enemies abroad. Certainly nothing less than that would convince the High Priest of Amon at Thebes that Tutankhaten was indeed the Pharaoh destined to rule the Empire from the throne of his fathers.

The children protested bitterly to Ay, but that wily diplomat assured them the change of name was but an additional honor, an evidence that they controlled not only the Aten worshipers of the realm, but followers of Amon as well. With their power firmly established, they could use whatever name and title pleased their fancy. However, it was obvious that Paari could not be expected to crown in a temple of Amon a Pharaoh who bore the name of the god's most hated rival!

There was no refuting such logic, and reluctantly the young sovereigns accepted the priestly decree that henceforth they be known as Tutankhamon and Ankhsenamon. They learned to draw the unfamiliar cartouches and echoed Ay's order that all future articles made for their use be marked with the new symbols. But when one day Tutankhamon discovered that his throne had been removed to a goldsmith's shop without his knowledge, and that workmen were busy changing the inscription in order to substitute "Amon" for "Aten," he asserted his independence with an outburst of temper which threw the Court into an uproar. Ay, responsible for the instructions which had completely ignored Kenofer's appointment as First Artist of the Court, to say nothing of the authority of the King himself,

found that it was possible to overstep the bounds of his authority. Tutankhamon's eyes blazed. He spoke with telling effect:

“He who violates the throne of Pharaoh presumes to lay hands upon the very power of Pharaoh himself! Counsel I accept; interference I will not tolerate. If I see fit to change my name, it does not mean that I intend to change my throne. Kenofer designed it to symbolize Pharaoh's life and Pharaoh's power. If that power increases to include those who choose to worship Amon, let the symbol of Amon be added, not that of Aten destroyed! It is for Kenofer and his brother Intef, Chief Goldsmith to the King in Thebes, to make such alterations, not for some ordinary craftsman, without so much as the sanction of the King!”

Ankhsenamon wept at this desecration of Kenofer's artistry, and would not be comforted until Kenofer assured her that no damage had been done which his brother could not rectify. Even then, the idea that one line of engraving, one bit of mosaic need be altered, filled her with foreboding.

“It is as if they wished to mar our happiness, to change the very foundations of our life!” she cried when the three of them were alone. “We have been so contented together under the blessed, life-giving rays of Aten. Evil days will come upon us if we seek protection of another god! I am afraid!”

Tutankhamon was still too angry to think of fear. He paced up and down the small audience chamber where, a few minutes before, a startled and apologetic Ay had craved Pharaoh's mercy for so grave an error in judgment, and made his escape as fast as his own dignity and the young King's wrath would allow.

With secret satisfaction Kenofer had watched him go. It had seemed of late that his young friends were too much at the mercy of the old man's crafty statesmanship. Nor was Kenofer alone in that opinion. The Court officials present at the interview had heard Pharaoh's words with evident

approval. Compromise with Amon might be advisable, but it must be voluntary. There was no question in their minds as to the King's meaning. Boy that he was, he spoke with authority, and his outburst cleared the atmosphere.

"I wish Horemheb would return and put that arrogant old man in his place!" Tutankhamon stormed. "I like to deal with enemies who fight in the open. Ay thinks to usurp my rights by stealth before I am aware of what he is about."

"You seemed aware of what he was about just now." Kenofer smiled. "If you wish Horemheb's advice, why not send for him? He is in duty bound to come at your command."

"So he is! I had never thought of that. Yet there are some things even a King must hesitate to do. To order Horemheb about at will is one of them! When he is ready to return to Akhetaten, he will come. When he decides the time has arrived for us to go to Thebes, then we shall go. I trust his judgment absolutely, and so does Ankhsenpaa—Ankhsenamun." He stumbled over the name. "Horemheb knows what is best for Egypt. Ay knows only what is best for Ay."

That wily politician was still in chastened mood, striving openly to regain his youthful sovereigns' confidence so unexpectedly shaken by what had seemed to him a trivial incident, when Horemheb appeared again at Court. For hours he was closeted with the King and Queen, while Ay was left to wonder just what report of his activities was being made. Yet when Horemheb paid him the honor of a call at his estate, Ay could detect no shadow of doubt or watchfulness in the soldier's frank manner. They discussed the situation at Thebes, the conditions imposed by the High Priest of Amon, and the reaction of the Court to the proposed move. Horemheb congratulated Ay on his clever handling of such difficult adjustments as the

change of name, but did not indicate by word or gesture that he knew of the unfortunate incident of the throne.

“I have tried to proceed with discretion,” Ay assured him, disarmed by such unaccustomed praise. “I have gone through all the foreign correspondence, selecting the documents which should be transferred to the Record Office at Thebes, and those which can be left to satisfy local officials. As you know, the Court has split into opposing factions, but that was to be expected. The important thing is that these questions have in no way impaired the popularity of the King and Queen. They are a bit impulsive and childish, but both are possessed of winning personalities, which will carry them far—but not too far!” His lips twisted into a wry smile, and he darted a knowing glance at his colleague.

Horemheb nodded gravely. “They are young but they will learn.”

“Whatever we choose to teach them.” Ay was searching the soldier’s face with prying eyes. Did he detect a hint of scorn in the confident lift of that powerful head, set so firmly on broad, muscular shoulders? The man’s physical fitness irritated him.

“They will have to learn whatever the priests of Amon choose to teach them.” Horemheb’s voice revealed nothing of his thoughts. He spoke with the crisp, impersonal tone of one making an official report. “I have brought with me from Thebes Nebamon, one of the men selected by the High Priest to instruct Tutankhamon and Ankhse-namon. When they have learned the necessary ritual for the coronation ceremony and the temple rites in which they must take part at Karnak, it will be time to make the official move. Everything is in readiness at the palace which Amenhotep the Magnificent built for Tiy. That has been selected for their headquarters as it is more like the palaces to which the King and Queen have been accustomed here at Akhetaten. The whole city is in a furor over the return of the Court, and the priests are bending every effort to obliterate as much as possible the results

of Akhenaten's wholesale defacement of the temples. They will expect Tutankhamon to do the rest."

"And they will expect you to fill the coffers of the palace and temple both, that the work of restoration can go on! I know them well—and so do you. Years of poverty and shame have whetted their appetite for riches and revenge." Ay spoke with sudden vehemence, leaning forward in his chair and pounding a bony knee with clenched fist. "Those children will be crushed by Amon's greed unless you can feed the priesthood money to keep them satisfied!"

"And unless you can keep them occupied with temple building and public display instead of political intrigue!" Horemheb also leaned forward but he spoke slowly, his battle-scarred hands resting quietly on the vulture heads forming the arms of his chair. His very repose was compelling.

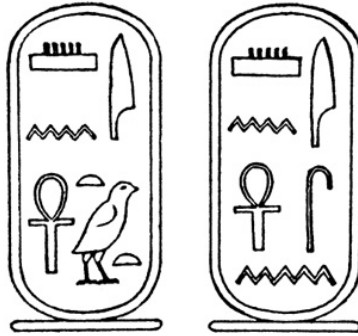
The two men eyed each other in silence, each gauging the other's strength. At length Ay sank back with a sigh, his long head nodding on its scrawny neck.

"Then you will lead the army into Syria—at once?"

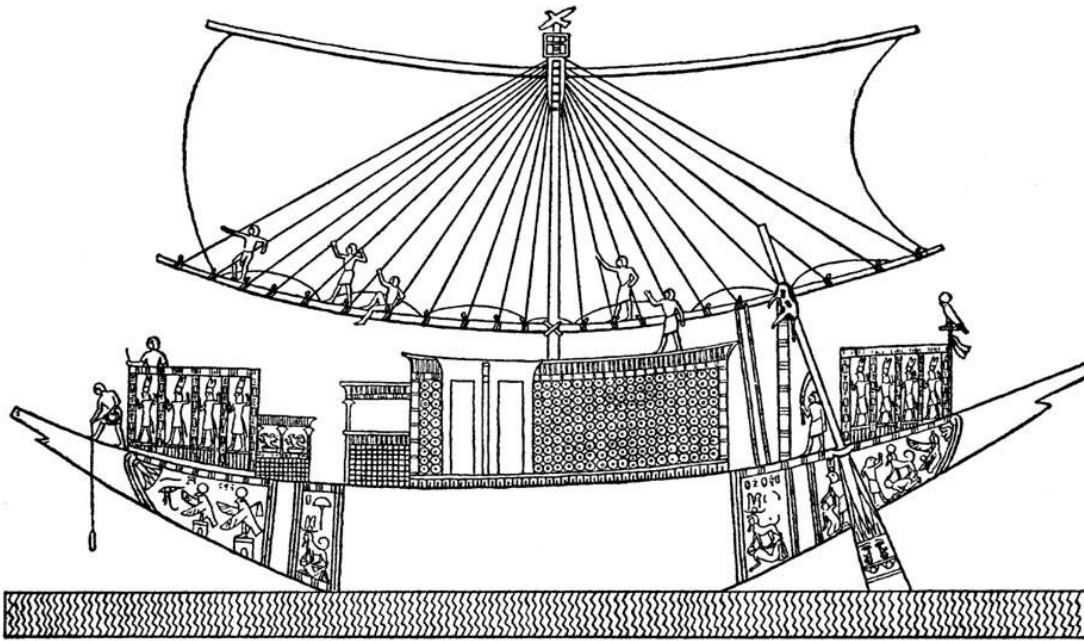
"Tutankhamon will lead the army into Syria as soon as the Court is permanently settled in Thebes." Horemheb stressed the King's name deliberately, his eyes fixed on his opponent's sallow countenance.

"As you say, Tutankhamon shall lead the army, and even so Ankhsenamon shall rule during his absence." Ay drawled the Queen's new title with subtle emphasis, a smile playing about his colorless lips. Horemheb nodded gravely.

"As you say, during his absence Ankhsenamon shall rule. It is for me to see that Tutankhamon returns in safety to resume his throne."



Cartouches of Tutankhamon and Ankhsenamon



CHAPTER XIX

UPSTREAM

EVEN more impressive than the royal barge of Queen Tiy was the magnificent dahabiyeh which bore the youthful King and Queen on their journey to Thebes. Resplendent with fresh paint and the glitter of gold, the vessel which had once brought Akhenaten and his Court to the Horizon of the Disk moved slowly away from the palace quay and turned its prow upstream.

To Akhenaten that change of capital had seemed an easy move when, in the eighth year of his reign, he drifted down the Nile toward the city of his dreams. Now to his children, retracing their father's steps seemed a laborious task, as they stood watching the fifty rowers straining at the oars, bare backs glistening with sweat even under the protecting shadow of the broad sail. It would require five or six days of grueling effort to drag that heavy craft against the sweeping current of the Nile, in spite of the fitful wind that swelled the sail and lightened their labors. It seemed to

Ankhsenamon that the current pressed against the prow with warning hands, urging them to turn back before it was too late.

Behind the great barge, like a child's toys strewn upon the water, trailed a long line of gaudy craft belonging to those who followed dutifully where Pharaoh led. Vivid blues, yellows, reds stained the drab surface of the river with wavering reflections, leaving Akhetaten white and silent along the water's edge, as if all the color and life were being drawn from its heart in the wake of the royal vessel. Gradually even the green of sycamores and palms in the gardens melted into a soft haze of heat and distance, like the vague beauty of a mirage across a desert waste. Only the line of cliffs still stood against the eastern sky, guarding the sacred bodies of the dead.

Kenoser drew the King and Queen away from the high curved stern where they stood hand in hand beside the helmsman, gazing back across the water. Gently he turned their faces toward the south, where the river wound its way through unfamiliar country.

"It is there your future lies," he said. "You must face the unknown together. It is your world to conquer."

Tutankhamon nodded. "I know. I do not mind, but Ankhsenamon finds it hard. She leaves so much behind." He placed a protecting arm about her shoulders, pleasantly aware of the inches added to his height by recent months. "If only that Priest of Amon were not on board, the journey would be fun. As it is, he will ruin half of every day with endless talk of custom and of ritual. The lineage of all those ancient gods holds small interest for me! You may be glad, Ankhsenamon, that I have most of the learning to do for the coronation ceremonies. They are nothing like the simple ones at Akhetaten. The High Priest was not even going to let you take part, but I said you must be beside me in the procession or I would refuse to be crowned! For once Ay thought that I was right, though he said I must go through the most important parts of the ritual without you. It seems strange

to make a King dress the wooden statue of a god, as a girl might dress a doll! The Queen should be the one to do that.”

“She has her own duties to perform. When you are in the Holy of Holies, face to face with that sacred image, you will find nothing childish in what you have to do.” Kenofer spoke guardedly, glancing over his shoulder to make sure they were not overheard. Those who lived at Thebes held in awe all ceremonies connected with the worship of Amon. Terrifying tales were told of the secret practices which flourished within the confines of the vast and gloomy temples of the Good God. Little did Tutankhamon comprehend the awful import of the words he must repeat, or realize the impressive grandeur of that inner sanctuary where he would face the ancient wooden statue of which he spoke so lightly.

“Well, I refuse to be afraid, for all the Priest’s warnings. I am a soldier, and a soldier knows not fear.”

“A soldier must know fear before he can know courage,” Kenofer reminded him gravely. “You must know the might of Amon before you can rightly scorn his power.”

“The Queen Mother said that Amon is not a god, but ‘a fear in the hearts of the people, a puppet in the hands of the priests.’ I shall always think of him so. Be not downcast, little Queen. The Aten will still shine upon us in Thebes as He has in Akhetaten!”

“Yet you will find that the Aten’s warming rays do not penetrate Amon’s sacred precincts, my King,” Kenofer insisted. “When in Thebes, you saw his temples only from without. You will discover them to be very different from within.”

In spite of Kenofer’s admonitions, Tutankhamon was not dismayed. The country through which they passed held new beauty and meaning when he thought of it as his own domain, and he dismissed all concern for the future in order to enjoy to the full each hour as it came. Except where a village

clustered its mud huts among groups of palms, there was little variety in the country which stretched between the river and the grim line of distant mountains. To the east lay the Arabian range, rugged and forbidding; to the west, the Libyan, lifting more gentle slopes above the wide sweep of fertile plains. Well-watered crops spread a thin wash of color over cultivated fields: wheat, rye, onions, barley, green and gold against the rich black earth. The Nile had been lavish with gifts since pestilence and famine had threatened even this land of plenty. As if to make up for past neglect, the river had risen to unaccustomed heights and left record crops to bear witness to its generosity.

Ankhsenamon did not care for such evidences of prosperity, but delighted to watch the open fishing boats which dotted the mud-browened river at dawn and sunset. Kept alert under the lash of an overseer's whip, slaves wielded heavy nets and drew them in full of living silver. In the heat of the day there was almost no traffic, and even the slaves sought to escape the chastening rays of the sun. But during cooler hours, colorful pleasure boats, gay as those in the royal flotilla, made their appearance carrying passengers from one sprawling village to another, or serving as ferries where a city had grown up on both sides of the Nile.

Now and then a string of heavy barges passed, laden with produce bound for trading centers in the Delta or moving slowly upstream with imports destined for Koptos, Abydos, or Thebes. They were long, decked vessels with a covered cabin amidships, a low prow adorned with Horus eyes for protection and a towering stern from which a steersman kept the craft upon its course by means of a great oar held in a forked support. High above the deck rose a sturdy mast carrying a single sail which threw a welcome shadow upon the crew toiling below. Some of these barges brought copper, lapis lazuli, and malachite from Mt. Sinai, and bars of gold and silver, lead and iron secured by Phoenician traders in far-distant,

nameless ports. Others transported lumber for the furniture makers of Thebes: pine from the westward slopes of Mt. Amanus, cedar from Lebanon and the wood-crowned summits of the Taurus Mountains.

At every port the royal party's coming was expected, and crowds of people swarmed along the river banks, prostrating themselves and nosing the dust at sight of the royal pair. Official greetings were brought by priest and local official, while gifts were showered upon Tutankhamon and his Queen by those who never before had viewed a living Pharaoh. To the great mass of the people, Akhenaten, isolated in his distant city, had been the figure of a god far more remote than such local deities as Isis, Ptah, or Min. To them the Aten was but a name, and Akhenaten but a glorious Son of the Sun who chose to shed his light only upon those privileged to dwell in Akhetaten. Now before them stood the embodiment of regal splendor, a god on earth, a youth whose physical beauty filled them with delight. Beside him stood a child Queen so fair that all the women bowed in reverence. Even the Priests of holy Abydos, guardians of the Great Temple, were impressed by the penetrating questions she asked whenever opportunity offered.

"If the Queen's thirst for wisdom equals her thirst for knowledge, she is worthy of the throne she shares," the High Priest of Osiris observed to Nebamon as they walked side by side at the head of the Court procession. The royal party, having paid reverent tribute to the Sacred One, Osiris, in whose name the Divine Mysteries were enacted with such magnificence each year, had moved on to inspect the great cemeteries beyond the city.

"Both the King and Queen have keen and curious minds, but they are little inclined to bow to authority or be moved by religious fear, and therefore are ill equipped for the role assigned them." Nebamon sighed, his high, narrow forehead folded in a frown. He had grown fond of his young pupils and did not relish the thought of delivering them into the hands of his

superiors. “Such spirited children are not easy to control by arbitrary methods.”

“Not while they are together, but I understand the Divine Father Ay proposes to see that they are kept apart.” The older man fixed his guest with a penetrating gaze. “I trust no harm befalls them, wherever they may be.”

Nebamon drew himself up. “If harm befalls them, it will be but the fortunes of war. The King proposes to lead an army into Syria.”

“The fortunes of war or the misfortunes of peace—there is little to choose between them. I do not envy those children their place in life, for all its honors. Were they stupid, it would not trouble me to see their helplessness. As it is, they will need all of their vaunted Aten’s light to guide them through the political byways of the Theban Court!”

Ankhsenamon and Tutankhamon were both deeply impressed by all they saw at Abydos. Well they knew the tragic story of Osiris, son of Geb, the Earth, and Nut, the Sky; for even Akhenaten had held in reverence that King of the Dead, by whose side all men hoped to live for eternity. Long ago he had come, a god on earth, to rule the people, and during his reign happiness and prosperity had blessed the land. Osiris was God of the Nile, life-giving, beloved of man. He and his sister wife, Isis, dwelt long in peace together, teaching man the secrets of agriculture and husbandry. Yet in time their happiness was destroyed by the jealousy of their brother, Set, who had ever threatened to encroach upon their domain. It was Set, the Desert, whose drifting sands menaced the crops, and whose raiding tribes swept down upon defenseless villages. It was Set who killed Osiris by a ruse, then later tore his body limb from limb, and scattered the seventy pieces far and wide. Heartbroken, Isis with the help of Anubis, the Jackal God, had found the fragments one by one, burying each where it lay, until at last she could gather the beloved corpse together and make it whole. She and Anubis had then embalmed the body that Osiris might have eternal life, and ever since,

an image of the Jackal God of Embalment had guarded the mummies of Egypt's dead.

As the royal dahabiyeh swept slowly up the river, the dignity of kingship rested upon the boy with ever-increasing weight. He watched with envy the lads who swarmed upon the docks of Koptos, seemingly with no responsibility beyond the snatching of a bite to eat when hunger spurred them. Boys of every age idled about among the groups of merchants and seamen, watching the great cargo boats nose their way among the lesser craft, seeking a place to tie up and unload. Koptos of all the ports lay closest to the Red Sea and Leucos Limen, the port one day to be known as Kosseir, from which by way of the Wadi Hammamat caravans brought merchandise of Arabia and Punt. All the exotic treasures of the East they carried: rolls of cinnamon bark, fragrant myrrh and frankincense, saffron and indigo dyes for mummy cloths, electrum and tin, known by the Sanskrit name of kastira.

To the King and Queen, Rahetep, the Governor of Koptos, brought a pair of white peacocks and two small green monkeys as well as a baby giraffe, unsteady on its long, slim legs. Ay would have had them all transferred to one of the barges at the end of the royal flotilla, but Tutankhamon would not hear of it, and their antics did much to lessen the monotony of the last day's travel.

Ordinarily the Divine Father Ay would have frowned on such amusements, but as the boats drew near to Thebes, he was glad to have some diversion distract the young King's mind from the coming ordeal. Far better than Kenofer, Ay knew what those endless hours of fasting and purification would mean to a boy of twelve unaccustomed to ritualistic discipline. Nebamon, too, was fearful for his young charge, and urged upon him additional hours of rest in preparation for the duties of the following day.

Ankhsenamon, quite undisturbed at prospect of the unfamiliar ceremonies, whiled away the cooler hours of the afternoon instructing a new Hittite slave in her duties. Khataka was a capable girl of fifteen who had recently been purchased in Memphis and presented to the Queen by Horemheb. She had the prominent nose and high cheek bones of her race, but her slanting eyes were green as malachite and her long, straight hair was the color of tarnished copper. With Khataka's help Ankhsenamon made selection of jewels to be worn the day of arrival in Thebes and chose the perfumed oil to be used upon her elaborate new wig designed for the occasion. Secure in her knowledge of Court etiquette at Akhetaten, the Queen gave little thought to the formalities of a second coronation, Nebamon had told her what to do, and Horemheb's instructions were ever present in her mind: "I would have you face your enemies at close range so they may see you unafraid.... It is for you to make the people love their Queen."

She had no doubt of her ability to win the people of Thebes as she had won the populace of Akhetaten. With interest she looked at the avenue of rams, the glittering colonnades, and gardened terraces leading to the long, low funerary temple of Hatshepsut. Would Ankhsenamon, Lady of the Two Lands, ever have the power of that first great Queen of history? Hatshepsut had made the priests of Amon crown her Queen even though her brother, Thutmose III, was King. She had made them grant her the right to dress as a man and wear the false beard reserved by ritual for Pharaoh. What would the High Priest of Amon do if Ankhsenamon should demand that right during Tutankhamon's absence in Asia? How amazed the Divine Father Ay would be! Ankhsenamon's eyes sparkled at the thought. She felt no craving for a golden beard, but she did feel sorely tempted to assert herself in defiance of Ay's dictation. Her promise to Horemheb was at times an irksome bond.

Above Thebes, the Nile broadened into a sheet of water edged by cultivated fields and a widening fringe of trees. Giant palms towered above the lower masses of sycamores, fig trees, and acacias along the eastern bank, while on the west rose the rugged, barren ridges of the Libyan range. Kenofer pointed out to Ankhsenamon the two clefts which marked the Valley of the Queens and the Valley of the Kings, that Land of the Dead known as the Road Where the Sun Goes Down. It was there that Queen Tiy lay in state among the other rulers of Egypt.

Far more arresting than those distant valleys were the two gigantic statues which soon rose above the plain, seated figures of Amenhotep the Magnificent, the grandfather whom neither the King nor the Queen remembered. The Great Royal Mother had told Ankhsenamon about them, but never had the child been able to visualize their impressive bulk.

Always in thinking of Thebes, Ankhsenamon had imagined a city compactly built and arranged like Akhetaten, according to some definite plan. Instead she found it sprawled along the river for miles, a vast, confusing mass of buildings, broken here and there by mighty pylons and slender obelisks. Palaces, temples, statues were crowded together in bewildering confusion, some gleaming white, others blazing with vivid colors. Luxor, Karnak, and all the numerous villages clustered along the Nile—that was Thebes. Tutankhamon pretended to be unimpressed, having seen it before, but Ankhsenamon could feel his heart beating with excitement as she pressed close to his side. One building seemed to dominate the scene: the great Temple of Amon, built by order of Amenhotep II to outshine all the other glories of Karnak. There the High Priest was waiting to crown a new Pharaoh of Upper and Lower Egypt in accordance with the changeless custom of generations. There Tutankhamon would pay homage to a god he neither loved nor feared, yet to whom he offered up his independence of thought and action as a living sacrifice.

Hastily he murmured to himself the prayers and responses he would be called upon to make, jumbling them together in a hopeless tangle of half-remembered speeches.

“I’ll never know what to say or when to say it!” he groaned in sudden panic, as he looked upon the seething mobs of people crowding the shore, yelling in a frenzy of excitement at sight of the royal barge. “I wish you could be there to prompt me, little Queen!”

“I shall be there in spirit! Imagine my hand in yours, my voice whispering the words you have to say. O Tutankhamon, even the priests of Amon cannot keep the two of us apart!” The words were half a prayer.

He smiled at her with sudden tenderness, and quoted a poem Kenoser had taught him long ago: “ ‘The beautiful place where I walk about, when thine hand resteth in mine and mine heart is satisfied with joy, because we walk together...’ I shall not forget, Lotus Bud. Thou art ever in my heart.”

The dahabiyeh drew slowly up to the landing place, and the palace guard under Hotep’s able direction sprang ashore and cleared the way for the royal party. The sun shone proudly on the glittering splendor of jewels, the colorful display of feathered fans, the sheer white of pleated linen. Soldiers in shining corselets formed Pharaoh’s personal bodyguard, and the Queen was accompanied by female attendants specially costumed for the occasion. The Divine Father Ay had spared no pains to have the Court of Akhetaten appear to advantage on this great occasion of its return to Thebes.

No sooner had the royal party disposed itself upon the landing place than the welcoming army swept into view. Horemheb, standing behind the King, watched with satisfaction the approach of his troops, led by the swift light chariots driven by princes and men of noble birth. So small and compactly built were those chariots that a man could carry one upon his shoulders, and the diminutive Syrian horses could draw them at a furious

pace, scarcely feeling their weight. With a jingle of metal-trimmed harness and the swift tattoo of flying hoofs, they flew by in a cloud of dust, while behind marched an imposing company of unarmed men, dignified in heavy braided wigs. These were the officers of high rank, who lowered their standards in salute as they passed the King.

Troop after troop followed in their wake: close ranks of spearmen, archers armed with quiver, bow, and throw-stick, and a massed formation of black infantry, recruited from the warlike Mazaiu tribes far to the south. Tutankhamon watched their passing with shining eyes. Those were his troops, his army to command! He felt Horemheb's gaze upon him and turned to smile his gratitude and admiration. Only a man of power could have recruited and trained such a group of soldiers during years when long months of idleness had fostered discontent.

When the last of the army had disappeared and the dust had settled behind their marching feet, a procession of greeting from the great temples of Karnak and Luxor passed in solemn array. Under the guidance of Nebamon, Tutankhamon and his Queen took their places in two golden thrones, which were lifted to the shoulders of eight stalwart officers and borne in triumph, side by side, along the broad avenue lined with granite sphinxes. As the procession moved slowly away from the river, Ankhsenamon tried to identify some of the temples Kenofer had described to her, but the massive structures took on bulky, unfamiliar shapes among the confusion of colonnades and courts. Only the Temple of Mut, wife of Amon, rose as Kenofer had said it would, above its protecting wall, over which she could catch a glimpse of the blue waters of the sacred lake.

As they turned into a second thoroughfare bordered by rams instead of sphinxes, Ankhsenamon became aware of the crowds of people shouting glad words of welcome to Tutankhamon, ward of Horemheb, soon to be crowned Pharaoh by Amon, the Good God. In a frenzy of enthusiasm they

were calling him by titles of honor. In vain she listened through all that joyous hubbub for the sound of her own name. What could it mean? In Akhetaten they had shared all honors equally. Why was she not accepted by these people of Thebes without question, as Tutankhamon was? She smiled graciously down upon the sea of faces lining either side of the way, but no answering smile met hers. Even while they shouted “Life! Prosperity! Health!” they peered at her with hostile eyes.

Affronted, Ankhsenamon sought refuge in a cold and regal calm. Her face assumed a sphinx-like mask, and she stared straight ahead at the priest robed in panther skin, who walked before them, waving a censer back and forth, the pale, blue smoke wreathing upward about his close-shaven head.

Leaving the cheering crowds behind, the procession made its way to the great central court of the Temple, where the royal thrones were gently placed upon the ground facing the entrance of the sanctuary of Amon. All about were grouped the servants of the God, artisans, sculptors, stewards, weavers, scribes, and lictors. Ankhsenamon glanced at them curiously, then looked away. There was no welcome for Akhenaten’s daughter in those unfamiliar faces. She turned to Tutankhamon, straight and tense in the throne beside her. Apparently in the drama of the moment he had forgotten even his dread of forgetting. His firm lips parted in a smile above his artificial beard as the thud of drums blending with the clear, sweet sound of sistrums announced the High Priest’s approach. Clear eyed, he faced this challenge of a half-scorned god. So always did he face a crisis, eager, unafraid.

From the gloom of the huge pillared shrine appeared a white-clad figure, moving toward them with slow and haughty stride. An erect bearing accentuated the unusual height of Paari, First Prophet of Amon and Chief of the Prophets of All the Gods. His seventy years rested lightly upon him. It was the recent humiliation of the priesthood rather than age which had

etched deep furrows in his hawk-like face. Ankhsenamon distrusted the thin lips which curved crookedly above an out-thrust chin. She marked well the manner of his approach. He advanced toward the young King not with deference, but rather as he might have come to inspect a victim brought for sacrifice. Narrow eyes gleamed from sockets shadowed by jutting brows. Never was priest's polished scalp drawn more tightly over a bony skull. Ankhsenamon sensed a hardness in the man more unyielding than any granite statue of a god. Was it ambition's fire or hatred of an enemy's child which burned in those vindictive eyes? Fear laid its hand upon her.

Together the child rulers left the temple court, the High Priest leading the way under the great pylon, into the shadow of pillars so lofty they seemed to bear the heaven's weight. Pale light filtering through narrow openings high on either side of the vast hall served but to deepen the gloom. Silence lay like a pall upon that holy place. The chanted words of the High Priest who began the ceremony of purification seemed the mighty accents of the God himself, shattering the stillness. Ankhsenamon shuddered and drew her delicate draperies close against the penetrating chill. For weeks she had rehearsed this in her dreams, but then she had not known the concentrated venom of a High Priest's gaze.

Only too well she knew what was about to happen. These preliminaries over, Tutankhamon would be led away where she could never follow. He would be clad in the rich robes of a Priest Pharaoh, and in the Great Room would be crowned, like all the long line of Eighteenth Dynasty Pharaohs before him, first with the White Crown of Upper Egypt, then the Red Crown of Lower Egypt, held by a gold band from which the uraeus would rise above his forehead as if for the first time. He would be given anew the two scepters, larger than those made for his use at Akhetaten. He would be anointed solemnly with oil by priests garbed as ancient deities, before entering the presence of the Great God in that inner sanctuary where dwelt

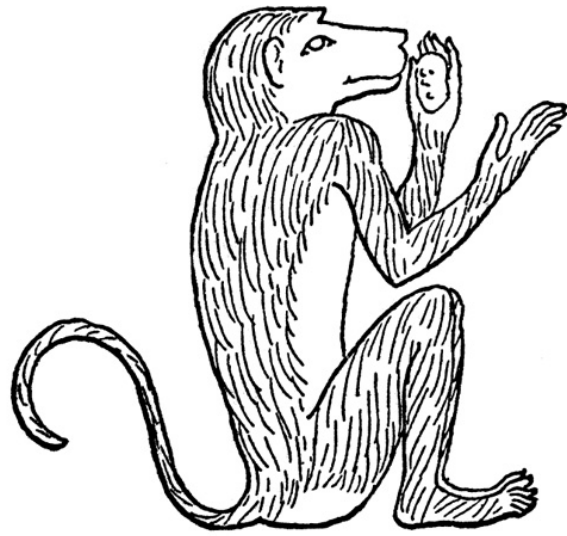
His sacred wooden statue in awful isolation. What would befall the young King there, she did not know. That ordeal he must face alone.

For her there would be a far more simple ceremony, during which she would be crowned with the two long feathers, the globe and horns of Hathor, which she had often seen on Queen Tiy. She would receive the slender, flower-like scepter from the hands of priestesses who would later instruct her in the duties of her own religious office. It was all just as Nebamon had told them it would be, even to the feeling of deep awe which filled the most skeptical soul standing in the sanctuary of Amon.

There was one warning, however, which the Priest had not seen fit to give the Queen, who now turned sadly back toward the crowded temple court, leaving the boy King to the mercy of his adopted god. Nebamon had not found it in his heart to tell his confident, light-hearted pupil the words which she was doomed to hear on every side in this city she had thought to love and win. They met her now, a muttered threat, passing among the crowd at her coming:

“A curse upon that Criminal of Akhetaten and upon all those who countenance his teaching! A curse upon his house, the very name of which shall vanish from the earth!”

“That Criminal of Akhetaten!” They could call her father that! Then indeed had Horemheb delivered her into the hands of her enemies.



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Tutankhamon

CHAPTER XX

A TWICE-CROWNED KING

HOURS passed before Ankhsenamon again saw the King. She was to await his coming at the palace of Amenhotep the Magnificent, built for Queen Tiy on the west bank of the Nile. Ladies-in-waiting chosen from the wives and daughters of the Theban nobles accompanied her across the river on a gaily decorated barge, and troupes of dancers and Court musicians offered entertainment to while away the time. She accepted their efforts without comment, staring before her with heavy-lidded eyes, lost in her own thoughts. With what curiosity they watched her, those women of Thebes. Ankhsenamon thought of Baketaten now far away, mistress of her own home. That imperious young person would have made a staunch friend at Court. Even the face of the Royal Nurse would have been welcome among

so many strange features, but Ty, who had long been ailing, had chosen to remain at Akhetaten.

Arrived at the palace, Ankhsenamon looked about her with quickened interest. The gardens and artificial lake of which she had heard so much were shut away from the village by a high wall, above which rose the green of carefully tended trees. At the gateway stood guards responsible for all who might enter or leave the grounds, uniformed men who nosed the dust at her coming and threw wide the portals to give her welcome.

In orderly array the royal procession moved through the garden, that the Queen might view its wonders from her golden palanquin. The throne of state had been left on the far bank of the river, and now Ankhsenamon gazed upon her new home from an ornate chair which had once belonged to her grandmother. Borne on the shoulders of four members of the bodyguard detailed to protect the Queen, it was accompanied by all the formal array of fan bearers, musicians, and attendants deemed necessary to the dignity of her office. On every side stood groups of household officials and slaves long in the service of Amenhotep the Magnificent. However much those in the Temple of Amon might distrust a daughter of Akhenaten, there were those in the palace eager to do homage to the granddaughter of Queen Ti.

The child felt the difference the moment she set foot within the strangely familiar halls. Here indeed was a place she could call home, for in plan and feeling it was almost the counterpart of the King's House at Akhetaten. Here her father had been born, and here he had learned to love the combination of Egyptian simplicity and Asian splendor which had later gone into the planning of his own city. Ankhsenamon threw aside her armor of reserve and stretched out her arms as if to embrace all the dear, familiar beauty: the bright blue of painted ceilings above slender columns of precious wood aglitter with gold, the gay tapestry of mosaic floor where wild fowl nested in the rushes and gaudy birds flew across pools massed

with water lilies. Forgetting her curious and critical companions, she moved swiftly from room to room, laughing aloud in her delight. There was no trace of the cold formality she had feared. One by one she identified the spacious halls, the private apartments, her own rooms adjoining those of the King, and all the secluded courts with fountains splashing, which the Dowager Queen had described so many times. It was as if her grandmother walked there at her side, revealing all the beauties of the palace, offering Ankhsenamon the warmth of its hospitality.

Discreetly the ladies of the Court remained behind in the reception hall while the Queen inspected her new domain. Their heads were close together and their whispers sent a chill breath of warning to greet her when she returned. If Ankhsenamon noticed the guilty hush which swept the room, she gave no heed.

“It is beautiful!” she cried, addressing them all impartially. “It is even more beautiful than the King’s House in Akhetaten, and I thought that the most colorful spot in the world. I know I shall be happy here—with your help.” She looked about her at the silent, unresponsive women. If only one would smile, she would have the courage to go on.

Rows of black eyes stared at her solemnly, their size exaggerated by wide bands of kohl circling the lids and extending in straight lines from the outer corners to the shadow of elaborate wigs. Full lips painted scarlet to match enameled nails made vivid splotches of color in pale, expressionless faces. Dispassionately Ankhsenamon searched for one friendly glint of humor to bear her company, one answering look to share her eagerness. Then slowly she drew herself up and assumed once more the regal dignity that Thebes demanded of its Queen.

“I wish to be alone,” she said distinctly. “I shall not need your services again tonight.”

It gave her no small satisfaction to see the consternation stamped on every face. For months they had anticipated this opportunity to observe the Queen first hand, and report to less privileged members of the Court how ill fitted she was to hold so high a place. Now that she stood before them, apparently self-assured and aware of her royal prerogatives, this spoiled daughter of the “Criminal of Akhetaten” took on new importance in their sight. They bowed low before her and craved permission to remain near at hand, ready to do her service.

“We would not have our Queen lonely on this, her first night in Thebes,” one of the bolder maidens ventured. “We have been instructed to wait upon her until the King’s return from the Temple, and would not fail in our first duty to Ankhsenamon, Queen of the Two Lands.”

Ankhsenamon eyed the speaker scornfully.

“A Queen is less lonely when alone, than when in company with those who serve her only from a sense of duty.” She clapped her hands sharply. Khataka, always close at hand, stepped from the shadow of a doorway to prostrate herself before her mistress, lips pressed against the pavement. Ankhsenamon motioned for her to rise.

“I shall await the King in my apartment,” she said, “and you, Khataka, shall bear me company. I would rather merit the loyalty of one small slave than command the lip service of the Court of Thebes.”

In the seclusion of her own room, the Queen dismissed her serving maids and tiring women, leaving only the necessary guard on watch outside her door. When the last one had withdrawn, she took the lofty crown from her head, threw herself across a couch, and buried her face in her arms. Quietly Khataka removed the ceremonial wig and loosened the heavy necklace of gold inlaid with enamel. The Queen submitted to her ministrations without a word, shuddering convulsively even in the close, perfume-laden air. Hours of fasting had left her faint and weary. She was

afraid to imagine the possible consequences of her open defiance of the most influential ladies at Court.

Khataka wrapped the Queen in a soft robe and knelt beside the couch, gently combing the dark hair which had grown so long it hung in a thick fringe about her shoulders. As a rule she wore it loose, without a wig, bound in separate locks by narrow rings of yellow gold, strung one below the other, like beads. Khataka's supple fingers had grown clever at arranging the intricate tresses. Now their touch was a caress as the ivory comb moved in slow, soothing rhythm. The Queen closed her eyes. For the moment she could feel herself once more in the royal apartment at Akhetaten, where the faces of her family smiled down upon her from the painted wall. Soon the door might open and Tutankhamon come bounding in to tell her of his prowess in the hunt.

When at last she heard his voice in the corridor, there was no elation in the tone of his commands. With dragging step he crossed the threshold, dismissing his attendants by a gesture of infinite weariness. At sight of the King's drawn face and tortured eyes, Khataka, unbidden, crept from the room, leaving them alone.

Ankhsenamon spoke no word. From Khataka she had learned a wiser way. Removing the heavy crowns, the artificial beard held by leather straps over his ears, the massive pectoral, the corselet of linked gold, she made the King comfortable until stretched out upon the couch he lay relaxed, eyes closed as hers had been, to shut out an overpowering, unfamiliar world. Tutankhamon reached for her and drew her close.

"Were they kind to you?" she whispered, cheek pressed against the smooth young hardness of his shoulder.

"Oh, yes. No one spoke except to chant or read responses."

"Were you—afraid?"

“No, not afraid, but on my guard. Every move I made was watched, even when I was supposed to be alone in the presence of their God.”

She weighed his words, then asked softly, “Did you believe?”

For a moment he was silent; then his arms tightened about her. “It was not that I believed—I knew!”

“You knew?” She lifted her head to look at him. His dark eyes, circled with weary shadows, met hers somberly.

“Yes, I knew. As I stood there in the temple hour after hour, caught in a net of ritual like an animal in a snare, I understood that, be Amon god or priestly power, it is He who will rule our destiny upon the throne of Thebes.”

“But what of the Aten, what of the one and only God?”

“He can rule our inner lives, but not our fortunes. Thebes loves Him not, and if we would have Thebes love us, His name must not be heard upon our lips.”

Sighing, Ankhsenamon sank back in his arms. Not so easily could she give up avowal of her faith. She wondered if Tutankhamon knew that not only Aten’s name, but that of her father as well, was forbidden to them.

“They like you, all the people of the streets. I watched their faces while you passed.” So she sought to cheer him, making no mention of her own reception.

“They like me because of Horemheb,” he answered sagely. “But in time I shall make them like me for myself.” In her company Tutankhamon’s confidence, as always, flourished. “They want a soldier King to save the Empire, and that is just what I will be. I like not these priestly duties, and shall leave for Palestine and Syria as soon as Horemheb gives his consent.”

In spite of royal impatience, it was many months before the Egyptian army was ready to move, many months before Tutankhamon was able to escape the routine imposed upon him by custom, in a city where for

generations able rulers had built up the splendor of a mighty Court. The inundation swelled the current of the Nile through the hot summer and subsided slowly with the coming of Hathor and Khoiak. Tobi ushered in another Season of Growing, and Pakhons, a new harvest, and still Tutankhamon's days and nights were made to fit the intricate, unyielding pattern of a Pharaoh's life.

Ankhsenamon's day was comparatively simple, filled as it was with purely feminine pursuits. She was bathed, perfumed, and dressed repeatedly to excite the admiration and envy of the Court ladies. She was amused by skillful entertainers: singers, dancers, mummers, dwarfs. She was accompanied everywhere by courtiers, musicians, and a stalwart bodyguard. By the wives and daughters of the nobles, she was treated with elaborate deference which deceived her not at all. Word of the Court's attitude toward the young Queen had reached the ears of Ay, and it was a chastened group of ladies-in-waiting who now sought to gratify her slightest whim. She ignored their overtures with unfeigned indifference, content to enjoy the company of the few noble ladies from Akhetaten who were allowed to attend her.

Much of the Queen's time was spent in the garden, or drifting about the artificial lake in the pleasure barge, Tehen-Aten, Aten Gleams. Daily in the privacy of her own apartment she practiced with pen and brush, even venturing to experiment with stylus and clay tablet, using as copies some of the cuneiform messages which came in such numbers from the East. Pleased by her interest, Penamon, the Royal Scribe, supplied the necessary materials and offered to instruct her when his own duties were not too pressing. His obvious admiration was balm to her wounded pride, and his enthusiastic reports of her skill soon won to her support many of the more intelligent members of the Court.

Tutankhamon also had reason to be grateful for his education, especially his experience in distant portions of the Empire. Young though he was, he had confidence born of the knowledge of far places not shared by many of his counselors. Often he sent for Kenofer to refresh his memory on matters which had made slight impression on his boyish mind. Those brief visits were almost his only contact with anyone he dared trust as a friend. During the difficult days of adjustment, the King could spend little time with Ankhsenamon except in the presence of others. It was a bewildering life and one little to his liking.

Official duties at Akhetaten had been child's play in comparison with those which now descended upon the young King. At dawn he was awakened and attired with great care and formality by a score of men appointed to supervise his toilet. His muscular body was bathed by the Master of the Bath and anointed with oils prepared by the Chief of the Scented Oils and Pastes for Rubbing His Majesty's Body. He was supplied with the finest of linen by the Director of the King's Dress Materials and the Chief of All the King's Garments. The list of his personal retinue included a Director of His Majesty's Nail Doers, a Manufacturer in Chief of False Hair for the King's Wigs, and numerous attendants whose sole duty it was to keep in order the elaborate royal jewels. A whole army of washermen carried the royal linen to the river to be rinsed, and laundrymen labored with infinite pains to pleat the sheer robes worn by the King and Queen.

Before the other business of the day began, the Royal Scribe appeared in company with the Vizier, bringing official correspondence. This read, Ay, Director of the Seal, announced to the Vizier:

"All the heads of services have reported to me. The King's House is safe and sound." Whereupon the Vizier repeated:

"All the affairs of my Lord are safe and sound."

Thus reassured concerning the efficient management of the palace, the King made his way to the long, pillared hall on the ground floor. It was crowded with foreign ambassadors, Theban nobles, and envoys returning from missions to distant parts of the Empire, grouped in order of rank, awaiting their turn to be presented. At one end of the hall was the throne room where Tutankhamon took his seat upon a raised dais. To this inner sanctum of glittering beauty the Master of Ceremonies admitted the privileged visitors one by one. Just inside the door, each in turn nosed the ground, addressed Pharaoh in the extravagant terms of praise prescribed by custom, and stated his business in such elaborate phrases, it was all the young King could do to understand the meaning of the chanted sentences.

The first morning Tutankhamon sat in the mysterious half light under the wooden canopy fringed with gilded cobras, he felt awed by his own sovereignty. The nobles of Akhetaten had approached him with respect warmed by personal affection; the dignitaries of Thebes abased themselves before his throne as if he were a god. In their sight he was indeed become a god by reason of that long, mysterious service in the Temple. He alone could talk directly with Amon, receive His advice, His warnings, without the intervention of a priest. He alone could enter that inner chamber where the God Himself dwelt.

Sitting on his golden throne, the double crown of Upper and Lower Egypt heavy upon his brow, the new scepters stiff and unaccustomed in his hands, Tutankhamon at first had stared straight before him, ill at ease in the divine role assigned him. His visitors chanted their hymn-like praise of his beauty, his power, his vast wealth, then stated their business and departed, obviously expecting no word of reply from him. Only from Amon Himself could come decisions as to the administration of the Empire. The audience over, Tutankhamon must go to the Temple to seek the God's advice, and His answers would in due time be given to those who had sought the help of

Pharaoh that day. The boy was still dazed by the unreality of it all when at last Ay closed the great doors and declared the Audience at an end. Even after a year's apprenticeship the daily ceremony gave him a sense of god-like exaltation, as if for the time being he had become something greater than himself.

Each day after the Audience, the King returned to his apartments to change his attire and prepare for the long drive to the Temple. Ankhsenamon would accompany him there, and her presence always stirred in him a wistful longing for the free, bright days at Akhetaten, when they had driven their chariots at will or hunted and fished to their hearts' content when no Court duties bound them. Here in Thebes there seemed to be no such hours of leisure. Only this daily journey through the streets on the way to the Temple of Amon across the river gave them any opportunity for the pastime they loved.

At Tutankhamon's insistence, he and the Queen were allowed to drive their own chariots in that formal procession, and their skillful handling of the horses compelled the admiration of the crowds who daily lined the streets at their coming. Even the Queen won grudging praise as she stood, poised and self-assured, curbing her two prancing steeds with a steady hand. The challenge of public hostility had brought a sparkle to her dark eyes and a flush to cheeks already warmly tinted with youth and health. Haughty, remote, she too accepted the role assigned her, and began to feel the privilege of arbitrary power. What homage she could not win, it was her right to command, and she proposed to exercise that right to the full.

They made an arresting sight as they appeared each morning at the palace gate and turned into the broad highway which led toward the river. Tutankhamon wore the conventional garb of Pharaoh when seeking converse with his God. Over the delicate draperies of pleated gauze hung an apron of gold and brilliant stones, while behind was fastened a jackal's tail.

On his head rested the high, white crown of Upper Egypt, held in place by a band of gold from which the emerald-eyed uraeus reared a threatening head above the royal forehead. Ahead, runners cleared the way, shouting warnings as they forced people back against the high walls of the houses on the narrower thoroughfares. A squad of thirty soldiers marched under Hotep, resplendent in his officer's uniform, while fan bearers ran beside the Queen, and an escort of ten chariots brought up the rear.

From the ferry which carried them across the slow-moving Nile, they could see all the vast complexity of Thebes. Behind them lay the City of the Dead against the tomb-filled cliffs, where a great community of priests, artisans, and workmen lived in the service of the deceased nobles whose tomb chapels gleamed white against the darker masses of rough granite. In the distance the colossal statues of Amenhotep the Magnificent overlooked the plain, and squalid villages sprawled along the muddy river's edge. Ahead of them as the ferry swept across the current, rose the glory of the templed city, the splendor of Karnak, the gracious beauty of Luxor. It was like a colorful mirage rising from the squalor and dust.

To Ankhsenamon it would always remain a world of unreality, that pile of massive pylons, slender obelisks, and pillared temples. The religious forms it represented in no way touched her heart. The sunlight pouring its welcome blessing from a shimmering sky, the Nile sweeping majestically on its way to the Great Green, the fragrance of flowers laid upon an outdoor altar, voices raised in hymns of praise—those were reality, the gifts of Aten to His children. But the heavy breath of incense and spices within confining walls, the reek of blood sacrifices, the passionate, futile prayers of self-seeking supplicants bringing offerings to a greedy, indifferent god seemed but a mummer's play contrived by priests.

Within the Temple, Ankhsenamon waited while Tutankhamon went with the High Priest to consult the God. Well she knew what was taking

place there within the inner sanctuary before the veiled statue in its jeweled shrine. The jointed statue of Amon was made of gilded wood with hair and beard painted black. Tutankhamon had told her how the enamel eyes seemed to move and gleam with holy fire when the priest placed within the outstretched hands two scrolls on each of which was written a possible answer to the first question the King would ask.

“The High Priest cries, ‘O my good Lord, thou shalt judge!’ over and over, until the figure accepts one scroll and knocks the other to the ground. You know a hidden priest is pulling the strings, and yet for a moment the God Himself seems to make the choice. It is like a game and yet one played so solemnly, I am ever fearful lest I make a false move.”

“It is a game, much like the one you and I used to play at home with the inlaid gaming board and the ivory men.” Ankhsenamon was not to be impressed by jointed images or priestly sleight of hand. “Your turn will come in time, and then you will be the winner just as you always were in Akhetaten.”

“The priests make all the moves at present,” he answered ruefully, “but some day I shall get the upper hand. Wait until I return in triumph from the East. Then I shall tell them I intend to make my own decisions, without the aid of Amon.”

Brave words, but within the Temple there was no evidence of such a rebellious spirit. The young King did exactly as he was told, coming forth from the sanctuary to express his gratitude to the God for His advice. Ankhsenamon watched attendants bring in the Bull of the South, his right horn tied to his left hind leg. While the High Priest held him firmly by the tail, the King threw a noose around his spreading horns, whereupon the appointed priests hurled him to the ground and bound his feet so that he lay helpless. The Queen shuddered when Tutankhamon touched the writhing creature with his staff, signaling the priest butcher to slit the animal’s throat

and prepare him for the God's pleasure. The sight of blood and the sound of the butcher's implements against flesh and bone as the carcass was cut up for sacrifice sickened her, and as soon as custom allowed, she always moved away.

Just outside the Sanctuary of the Sacred Boats was one of the places where an open-air court of justice was held, Ankhsenamon often watched from a distance the impressive gathering. Here the King made his appearance when his temple duties were done. His presence added dignity to the proceedings, which often had to do with the trial of men accused of desecrating the tombs in the Necropolis across the river.

Viewing the endless scrolls piled before the judges, since all statements for and against the accused were made in writing, Tutankhamon was glad that the ultimate decision was not his. How could one unearth the truth from such a mass of conflicting evidence? To him it seemed that all the prisoners bore the stamp of guilt on their terrified faces, though perhaps fear made even the innocent shift-eyed and cringing.

Ankhsenamon was always glad when the royal procession again assembled, clattered through the glaring, sun-baked streets to the ferry, and crossed once more to the western bank. Everyone sought the comparative coolness of inner rooms during the oppressive heat of mid-day, and even the King and Queen could escape from prying eyes. Hot and weary, they allowed themselves to be bathed and oiled by attentive slaves, who then left them stretched out in drowsy ease upon their couches, until the next round of official duties called them.

After the first few months, all this monotonous routine became wellnigh unbearable, and by the time Ay and the priests were satisfied that the youthful sovereigns knew their duties and could safely be allowed an occasional hour of un-supervised leisure, Tutankhamon had reached the point of active rebellion. Only Ankhsenamon's restraining hand prevented

an open breach with Ay, who conveyed to the King many of the High Priest's most irksome orders.

“Have patience awhile longer,” Ankhsenamon urged when a particularly untimely request for his presence in the Temple interfered with plans for a hunting expedition. “You must prove that you take your duties seriously. Then they will trust you to choose your own amusements.”

“Amusements! Their one idea of amusement is watching acrobats and dancing girls. I am weary of their entertainments and their harem women! What pleasure is there in being a Pharaoh if I have no more freedom than a slave?” With which unanswerable question, the irate King stalked from the room, leaving Ankhsenamon to wistful contemplation of her own lost liberty.





Soldiers

CHAPTER XXI

A HITTITE IN HIDING

KENOFR was quick to sense Ankhsenamon's sadness and discontent when, one day in Payni of their second year in Thebes, he brought the Queen a necklace from the hand of his brother Intef and was allowed to deliver it in the privacy of the royal apartment. Only Khataka was there, working on a vivid bit of embroidery patterned in barbaric scrolls.

"Akhenaten's Small Bird grows restless in her cage," he observed. "There is no longer a song in her heart."

"I fear they have clipped my wings too close," she sighed, extending a languid hand for the costly jewel. "In time I shall forget how to fly. Perhaps I shall even lose the longing to escape."

Kenofer shook his head, smiling at her in gentle reproof. "Clipped wings grow again," he said. "I have news for you. Tutankhamon is soon to have his wish, and then your duties as acting ruler of Egypt will take you more often out into the world. Horemheb has just arrived from Memphis to report that the army is in readiness. He and the King will leave for Syria within the month."

Ankhsenamon's eyes widened in alarm. "Must they go so soon? O Kenofer, promise that you will not leave me, too! The King may ask that

you accompany him, but I shall need you here to give me courage and advice.”

He bowed low before her as Khataka signaled that attendants were approaching.

“I shall not leave you, Lady of the Two Lands. Akhenaten’s Small Bird is ever in my heart,” he murmured, and she knew the words to be no idle formula.

Pharaoh’s departure at the head of his army for the turbulent districts of Palestine and Syria was an event to be celebrated with wild enthusiasm by the entire community. The weeks of preparation were full of feverish activity and wild rejoicing. In the excitement Ankhsenamon knew herself to be no longer an outsider viewed with suspicion, but the accepted Queen of Egypt, who would take Pharaoh’s place during his long absence. Wherever they went, the young sovereigns were greeted with loud acclaim, and the name of Ankhsenamon, Lady of the Two Lands, was shouted with a fervor which gave her fresh courage to face the coming separation and the difficult months to follow.

At Horemheb’s insistence all routine matters were turned over to Ay, and the King’s time was given to intensive training for the campaign ahead of him. In full view of the populace, he spent hours maneuvering in a light chariot with the troop which had so impressed him on the day of his coronation. He had much to learn, but his phenomenal ability to handle horses stood him in good stead. Soon he could obey the orders of the commanding officer as promptly as the men with years of experience, and his willingness to follow as well as lead won him the devotion of every soldier in the troop.

With constant practice, the King’s marksmanship soon re-gained its former accuracy, and the royal bow makers were kept busy preparing elaborate equipment to suit his size and strength. A bow case of exquisite

design was filled with perfectly balanced weapons, and a chest was made to hold the jeweled daggers and bronze falchions which were part of his military accouterments.

Ankhsenamon, too, was released from the deadly monotony of Court life and allowed to go at will about the city with only a small guard of soldiers to protect her. At her request, Kenofer accompanied her on many of these expeditions, during which they often stopped to visit the workshop of Intef, the Royal Goldsmith. Kenofer's brother always welcomed them warmly, proud to display his newest designs.

The Queen became familiar with all the squalid corners of the capital as well as with the shining beauty of its wider thoroughfares. She walked through narrow, twisted streets built up long before horse and chariot were known in Egypt. Between the blank, windowless fronts of wretched dwellings, the dusty streets were littered with rubbish and swarming with flies. The Queen drew back in horror from the emaciated children who pressed close begging for alms, a pack of yapping dogs snarling at their heels. Not thus in filth and misery had the poor of Akhetaten lived.

Ay protested at the risks Ankhsenamon took, but was quick to recognize the advantage of such contacts with the people. These intimate glimpses gave the populace a vivid impression of the Queen who was to rule them during the coming year. As for Ankhsenamon, she knew that in the future she would have small opportunity for such unprecedented excursions, and this interlude of temporary freedom must be used to good advantage.

One of the first acts of Tutankhamon's reign in Thebes had been the selection of the site for his tomb in the Valley of Kings. Together he and Ankhsenamon had driven through the hills to that Land of the Dead, and decided upon a spot not far distant from the burial place of Queen Tiy. From the vast number of laborers who dwelt in the Necropolis, he selected personally those who seemed most trustworthy and least likely to pillage

the very sepulcher they had built. The numerous trials of tomb robbers had impressed him deeply. Neither fear of divine wrath nor earthly punishment checked the greed of those who knew how the shafts could be entered. Tutankhamon planned a tomb of simpler proportions.

“I would rather know that I could rest in peace than have all the world marvel at the grandeur of my resting place,” he said.

During his absence Ankhsenamon was to supervise the completion of the excavation and begin the preparation of the funerary equipment which would accumulate gradually through the years of Tutankhamon’s reign.

“If I should meet my death on the battle field, the tomb must be ready to receive me,” he said. “There I would have you place all the belongings I used as a child, for they mean more to me than all these royal trappings. I have stored them in a chest for safe keeping and would not have them overlooked.”

He grew very business-like and self-assured as the time for departure drew near. Ankhsenamon wept at the thought that he might die far away from her, struck down in his young strength by some unworthy enemy. He dried her tears and paused in his preparations long enough to hold her in his arms and offer teasing caresses to quiet her fears.

“Foolish one!” he laughed tenderly. “You are a soldier’s wife as well as a Queen. Before I return, you will be a mother. The months will slip by so swiftly you will scarcely mark their passing. I am so full of joy to be free of all this boring pomp and ceremony. Must I be saddened by the thought that you are sorry to have me go?”

She shook her head as he pinched her cheek reproachfully. “I should be glad to have you go, if only I could be sure you would return. I like not all this talk of tombs and burial! What would I do if you should die? What would become of me?”

“You would find another King to share your throne, and live to be as honored as Hatshepsut! Come, come, why look in so dark a mirror to find the reflection of our future? The Khri-Habi, Lords of the Secrets of Heaven, foretell a great victory for us in Asia and a triumphal return. They have interpreted my dreams, and by divination and spells have learned what other mortals may not know.”

The King spoke half in jest, half in earnest. The incantations by which these Court sorcerers beheaded a goose, then made it whole again before his very eyes, impressed him with their cleverness if not with their reliability. Yet though their magic might be due to trickery, like the movements of the jointed statue in the Temple, their prophecies were not to be lightly disregarded. They knew which days were safe for travel and which might bring disaster. They knew what perfumes must be used, according to the day of the month, the hour of the day. They knew all the magic lore of Ancient Egypt and amazing secrets learned from wise men of Babylon.

Ankhsenamon made no comment. She was glad if victory was to crown the efforts of Tutankhamon and Horemheb. She was pleased that the prophecies of tricksters could give the King such confidence. For herself she found no comfort in the words of men who foretold what their sovereign so plainly wished to hear.

When at last the great flotilla moved away from the shore and started its stately way northward toward Memphis, Ankhsenamon waved a last farewell to the King standing on the high stem of the royal barge, without a tear to dim the brilliance of the scene before her. She sat in her palanquin borne on the shoulders of the palace guard, and watched the long line of transports and cargo boats swing with the current into midstream. The banks on either side were black with cheering throngs. As the last load of squealing pigs, the last barge of stamping, restless horses, the last boat piled high with dismembered chariots vanished around the bend, she dropped her

weary eyes to the groups of nobles and officials gathered about her on the quay. No longer did it seem a hostile, critical Court. There would be no muttered references to “that Criminal of Akhetaten” from the crowd lining the streets as the royal procession passed. Even the priests of Amon now showed proper deference. Yet in all that multitude of subjects, among all those apparently faithful servants of the Crown, the Queen could count but three her personal friends: a Hittite slave, a Royal Scribe, and an artist she knew would guard her with his life.

It was to Kenofer she turned in the loneliness of those first days. Together they followed in imagination the course of the royal barge moving slowly down the Nile, like the head of a giant crocodile, its great tail sweeping from side to side with the turning of the stream. They could visualize the country through which the expedition would pass, the reception of the King and his army at Koptos and Abydos, where additional barges laden with produce would join the flotilla, the inhabitants speeding them on their way with shouts of welcome and farewell.

Yet when the day came on which Tutankhamon was scheduled to arrive at Akhetaten, the Queen was beside herself and could find no comfort anywhere. Too well she knew just how the quay would look and how the city of her birth would greet the King. She could see the joy upon her mother’s face, the excitement of the small sisters, the enthusiasm of the Mazoi at seeing Hotep, head of Pharaoh’s bodyguard. Up and down the palace hall she paced, fighting back tears of homesickness, refusing to be distracted by the well-meant efforts of her bewildered attendants.

How could they know the longing which possessed her like a fever? Khataka, exiled from her own country, could understand, and wept in silent sympathy. Penamon realized the Queen’s wretchedness, but could not share it. Only Kenofer, loving her, found himself as heavy hearted as the Queen. He stayed within call, never intruding, yet never leaving her quite alone. In

the cool of the evening he urged her to drive with him out across the plain toward the distant hills. Listlessly she ordered the chariot, caring little what she did.

Without protest the Queen let Kenofer take the reins from the charioteer and drive through narrow streets in the wake of two runners. At the edge of the village she bade her guard await their return, and accepted the reins which Kenofer handed her, heading the horses toward a distant village beyond the royal orchards. For some time neither spoke. The spirited horses required all of Ankhsenamon's attention, and Kenofer was content to watch the color whipped into her cheeks and the sparkle brought back to her tear-dulled eyes.

Just before they reached the cluster of whitewashed huts in its patch of green, Ankhsenamon pulled the horses to an unwilling walk and turned them off the road to skirt a patch of cultivated ground where a slave was loading a donkey with sheaves of grain to be taken to the threshing floor on the edge of the village. At the approach of the team, the patient animal lifted an inquiring head and pricked his long ears. The slave, catching sight of the royal chariot, prostrated himself on the ground, calling a fervent "Life, Health, Prosperity!" in greeting to the Queen. Something in the inflection of his voice made Ankhsenamon glance his way, then check her horses sharply.

"That lad is a Hittite," she said to Kenofer. "He has a familiar look. I would like to speak with him."

Unabashed, the youth obeyed Kenofer's summons and dropped in the dust under the hoofs of the startled bays. They shied and snorted, but at a word from their driver contented themselves with pawing the ground and rolling a suspicious eye at the stranger. Rising at the Queen's command, the slave reached a hand to smooth an arched neck glistening with sweat. At the reassuring touch, the bay turned to nuzzle the boy's shoulder. A large head

with dark red hair pulled back from a high forehead, eyes slanting on either side of a long aquiline nose, gave evidence of his Hittite birth. When he smiled, deep clefts cut his lean cheeks as if laughter had early set its mark upon him. He was smiling now, his gray eyes bright with admiration.

The Queen questioned him closely, and from his rather halting replies gathered that he had but recently come to Thebes, brought as a captive by a soldier returning from Syria. His name was Tergen. The Egyptian language sat strangely on his tongue, and his expressive face folded into frequent smiles at his own mistakes. The Queen's patience and interest seemed to touch him deeply, and when at last she dismissed him and turned the horses once more toward Thebes, he expressed his undying devotion in a flood of Hittite eloquence which followed them down the road.

"There is one slave who cannot hide his origin, not with that hawklike nose and awkward tongue," Kenofer laughed.

"Why should he wish to hide it? His face shows strength, and his Egyptian is more fluent than our Hittite!" Ankhsenamon spoke sharply, then added in apology, "I have grown so fond of Khataka, perhaps I saw Tergen with her eyes rather than my own. I wonder if all Hittites smile so readily. If a slave in a foreign land can face life with such gay courage, surely a Queen on her own throne should put away tears. You have been very patient, Kenofer, with my contrary moods. Tutankhamon has promised to send a special courier from Akhetaten. When he arrives with news of all my friends and favorite haunts, I shall rest content."

However, contentment came not so easily as she had hoped. When at last the courier arrived, he brought only a brief letter from the absent Pharaoh. Ankhsenamon, aware of Ay's watchfulness, read it hastily as she sat in the audience chamber. There was nothing in the words themselves to alarm her; yet she glanced up uneasily from the scroll to find the eyes of Tentamun, the King's messenger, fixed upon her with urgent entreaty.

Curbing her curiosity, the Queen ordered an attendant to see that the courier was given food and a room in which to rest, since he had traveled day and night to do his sovereign's bidding. Before going to the Temple she would talk with him again. She desired to give him a letter which she had written to the King.

The line of visitors seemed endless to Ankhsenamon sitting silent and remote upon her throne, the delicate flagellum, emblem of queenly power, clutched in cramped fingers. She felt no thrill of awe at her exalted position there in the quiet room, shadowy and mysterious for all its brilliant coloring. Theban customs seemed needlessly formal and unfriendly after the audiences held by her father at Akhetaten. Especially today the elaborate praise of her beauty, her wealth, her power, seemed a waste of precious time. While visiting dignitaries chanted their hollow tributes, Tutankhamon's messenger was waiting to impart some news of real importance. Restlessly the young Queen stirred upon her throne, half fearful of what that news might be.

When Ay finally closed the wide doors upon the last of the visitors, Ankhsenamon felt his prying eyes fastened upon her with more than usual intensity. When he led her from the dais, he all but reached his hand to take the King's letter from her. Even as she drew back, clasping the scroll against her breast, the man's very eagerness suggested that Tutankhamon's communication might have been intended for eyes other than her own. She had been disappointed by its formality and lack of warmth. The endearments sounded suspiciously like the usual Court flattery dictated by tradition rather than love. As for word concerning Akhetaten, the comments were brief and told her nothing of importance.

"Did the King's letter bring Her Majesty the information she anticipated so eagerly?" Ay inquired as he escorted her from the throne and walked slowly beside her along the corridor leading to the royal apartments.

“I fear the King is too busy to prove a satisfactory correspondent,” she answered ruefully. “He leaves much for me to read between the lines. Perhaps you can interpret his statements better than I.” She handed him the scroll, eyes fixed innocently upon his crafty countenance. He accepted it with alacrity, nodding approval of the neatly written sheet.

“It is just such a letter as an able young Pharaoh should write,” he declared. “What information did Your Majesty expect which he has neglected to give?”

“Truth to tell, I wanted to know if my lion cub is still alive and if the slughi hounds knew Tutankhamon when he appeared at Maru Aten. I have wondered how many of my father’s pigeons still live in the garden of the King’s House, and whether they are faithfully fed. Then there is the youngest Princess. She will be grown and married before I see her again, just as my other sisters are! Oh, there is so much I long to know and the King says, ‘The palaces and temples are in good repair!’ ”

Ay smiled at her vehemence. “A Queen should show more interest in the state of public buildings than in matters of such trivial import. By tomorrow I shall have the plans for certain alterations in the Temple. The High Priest feels that we have been neglectful in that regard. During the King’s absence we must concentrate on these problems and do all in our power to leave suitable monuments to bear witness to the glory of Tutankhamon’s reign.”

Ankhsenamon agreed, knowing well that he referred to the further effacing of ravages caused by her father’s wholesale obliteration of Amon’s name wherever it appeared. Looking about her at the inscriptions defaced by his order, she had often wondered how Akhenaten, lover of all beauty, could have approved such wanton mutilation. His ruthlessness had brought the curse of Amon upon him—a curse which decreed that in its turn the name of Aten and His chief disciple should suffer a like fate. In her heart

Ankhsenamon was determined that such a thing should never be. Her first act as ruler of Egypt would be to order the enlargement of the Temple of Aten in Thebes. Next she would seek out the other temples to her father's God and see that they received their due share of tribute. Power rested in her hand, for all the dictation of Ay and the priesthood, and she would place more than one condition on her acquiescence to their wishes!

Thus resolved, the Queen went to meet the courier who awaited her coming in the King's apartment. She longed to ask him at once what private message he had for her, but was too well pleased with her strategy in regard to the earlier letter to spoil it by injudicious questioning which might be overheard.

"You must be weary from your journey, Tentamun, Chief Courier of Pharaoh," she said. "Can you not rest a day before returning to the King?"

"I must be on my way at once, Ankhsenamon, Lady of the Two Lands. Your Majesty has a letter for me to take?"

At a nod from her mistress, Khataka went at once to bring it from the Queen's apartment.

"I had hoped for some small token from the King," Ankhsenamon said, speaking in a firm, clear voice easily audible to anyone who chanced to be loitering outside the door. "Was he in good health when you left Akhetaten?"

"Indeed I have never seen His Majesty more full of spirits. At sixteen he has more energy and endurance than many a seasoned soldier. The men hail him as a second Thutmose III. As a matter of fact, Pharaoh did send Her Majesty a gift, which he said would bring her memories of her childhood."

Tentamun handed the Queen a package rolled in linen, watching closely while she unwrapped it. Within lay a small gaming board made of ivory, not much larger than a scribe's palette. On top it was marked into squares of equal size, arranged in three rows of ten each, while the reverse side was

divided into a different pattern for another game they had often played in the nursery at Akhetaten. The edges of the board were decorated with a band of hieroglyphs which had been one of her first models when she was learning to write. At either end a drawer made to contain the five black and five white playing pieces was held in place by an ivory catch.

Puzzled, Ankhsenamon examined the familiar object. Was this merely Tutankhamon's way of telling her that he re-membered vividly the days when they used to play by the hour, calling the black men Hittites, the white, Egyptians? She had always chosen the black ones because Tutankhamon was lucky at games, and it would never do to have the Egyptians defeated, even in play. She fingered the worn ivory and glanced inquiringly at her companion.

"Was there no message—" She stopped short. Tentamun was shaking his head, a finger laid upon his lips.

"Tutankhamon, Lord of the Two Lands, said that in the gift you would read all he had to say." The courier spoke, as she had, for the benefit of chance listeners, but a certain emphasis on the words, "in the gift," made her again turn the board this way and that in search of some secret she had failed to detect. Could it be Tutankhamon's intent to remind her of their conversation concerning the temple ceremonies and the plotting of priests? She recalled his words:

"It is like a game. At present the priests make all the moves, but some day I shall get the upper hand."

Idly she set the board upon a low table and opened the drawers. One by one she put the men in place, only to discover one black piece missing. A Hittite!

At that moment Khataka appeared in the doorway. Ankhsenamon glanced up frowning, and motioned her away. The girl disappeared with a nod of comprehension. Obviously her mistress did not wish to be disturbed,

but why was she playing with a childish game at such a time? Curiosity kept the young slave just beyond the door, out of sight but not out of hearing. The Queen had not forbidden her to listen, and was not Ay's favorite scribe standing with his ear pressed against the door through which Tentamun had been admitted to the King's apartment? She had meant to warn her mistress, but had been given no chance to reveal the presence of an eavesdropper.

A Hittite missing! What did it mean? Ankhsenamon removed the bits of ivory from the gaming board and picked it up once more. Gently she shook it, careful not to dislodge the drawers. A sharp rattle confirmed her suspicions. She glanced up to find Tentamun's eyes fixed upon her with a look of such approval she smiled back at him as if they were fellow conspirators. Removing one drawer, she tipped the board. Out rolled the missing Hittite, to which had been fastened a bit of twisted flax. At the other end of the thread was a diminutive scroll of papyrus, on which appeared rows of writing so delicately penned she could scarcely decipher the symbols.

She turned her back so that Tentamun might not watch her as she read. "It is dark in here," she said casually over her shoulder. "Tentamun, will you light the lamp there on the stand? This room has not been used since the King's departure. I must have Khataka burn incense to sweeten the air. She will be here in a few moments with the letter I have written."

Obediently Tentamun busied himself with the lighter which lay beside the lamp. He twirled the wooden stick in one of the resin-lined holes until the hemp tinder caught fire, then touched the wick which flared within the white cup of the alabaster lamp. It was a rare and lovely thing, this lamp of Tutankhamon. It stood on a calcite stand, a graceful chalice held on either side by slender figures kneeling on a delicate fretwork of lotus plants. Above their heads they held the symbol of unity and long life, with the

cartouche of the King. While Tentamun examined the perfect workmanship, Khataka waited impatiently outside the door, measuring off the “few moments” until she was expected to appear.

Unobserved by either, Ankhsenamon read and reread the King’s message, then crumpled the fragile papyrus in her hand. She steadied her voice with difficulty as she turned to her companion.

“You are having trouble with the lamp? Perhaps there is not enough salt mixed with the castor oil.” She moved across the room, her back to the half-open door where Khataka waited. Tentamun looked at her in surprise. The lamp had given him no trouble. It was burning with a clear white light which made the alabaster bowl glow from within. He had just been looking with amazement at the delicately colored figures of the King and Queen which had appeared as if by magic within the thickness of the translucent alabaster.

“Ah, I know what is wrong. It needs a new wick,” Ankhsenamon said with careful emphasis. Twisting the bit of papyrus, she touched it to the flame. The edges curled and darkened. She held it until the flame seared her fingertips, then dropped the charred bits into the bowl of yellow oil.

“You will leave at once?” she asked, turning away as Khataka entered with the letter.

“At once, O Lady of the Two Lands.”

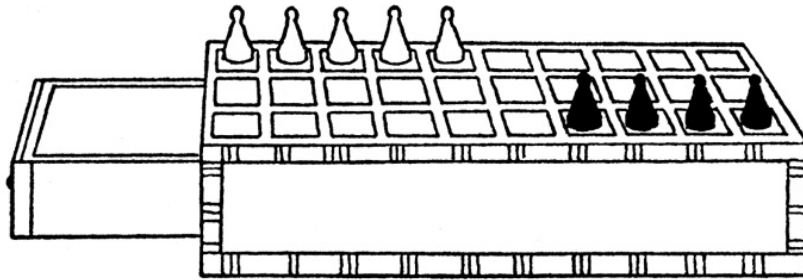
“And you will tell the King all you have seen and heard?”

“All that I have seen and heard,” Tentamun assured her gravely.

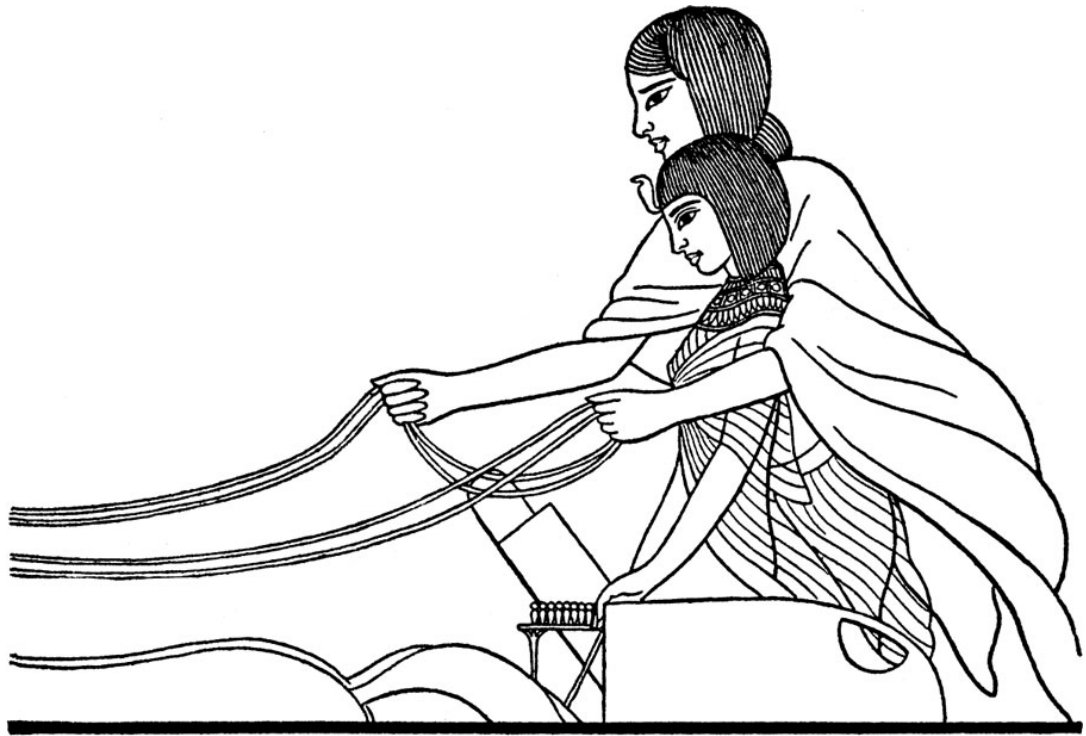
“That is well. Tell him also that at all times I strive to do his bidding and heed the divine wisdom which comes from his lips. I trust that he will send you often with messages which speak freely the desires of his heart. May the blessing of Aten protect him, and bring you in safety to his side.”

Tentamun bowed low to receive the Queen’s blessing, but Khataka edged her way noiselessly to the outer door, sparkling green eyes fixed on

the face of her mistress. Ankhsemon's steady look met hers, and for a moment some wordless question and answer flashed between them. Then Khataka flung open the door with a quick gesture of triumph. To her chagrin, the hallway held no startled eavesdropper, only a palace guard at his post, staring idly down the length of deserted corridor.



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Kenofer Drives the Queen

CHAPTER XXII

THE VALLEY OF KINGS

THE night was warm and close, and the Queen lay restless upon her soft mattress of folded linen sheets. The alabaster pillow pressed against the back of her head, and she turned from side to side, longing for sleep. What was she to do? How could she carry out the wishes of the King in secrecy? She had tried in vain to reach Kenofer after Tentamun's departure. Tomorrow he would come to her, but tonight she must try to understand the import of that disquieting message and determine on some course of action.

Again she seemed to live that hour with the King's courier. Against the darkness she fancied she could see the mellow glow of the lighted lamp in Tutankhamon's room, the wisp of charred papyrus curling in her fingers, dropping in dark flakes upon the pale surface of the oil. On the front of the

lamp glowed the delicately colored figures Tentamun had so admired. On the back the names of the King shone between bands of floral ornament. Well she knew the lines of those familiar symbols; yet as she traced them drowsily in her mind's eye, remembering each curve of the pattern, the hieroglyphs seemed to change, assuming by some strange alchemy the delicate proportions of Tutankhamon's written words. It was as if the milk-white alabaster had absorbed his message and held it captive there lest she forget:

“My Adored One: Word comes that men and women of Hatti are being sold into slavery to act as spies in Egypt. Watch Khataka and all with whom she speaks. Conditions in Akhetaten are such that the honored body of Akhenaten is no longer safe. Trusted followers of Aten will bring his coffin to the Valley of Kings on the first day of Mesore. Have the tomb of Queen Tiye opened to receive it. With feeling so strong in Thebes against his memory, the greatest secrecy is necessary. May Aten's blessing give thee strength and wisdom.”

With the coming of a new day the Queen grew still more perplexed by the situation in which she found herself. Even Khataka, her only feminine confidante, was now an object of suspicion, though Ankhsenamon refused to let the King's warning destroy her confidence without some actual proof of Khataka's disloyalty. The girl waited upon her with dog-like devotion, responding to her every mood with the sensitive intuition of one who loves to serve. This morning she seemed more than usually solicitous, and Ankhsenamon was hard put to it to keep her own counsel.

Not until the cool of the afternoon did the Queen escape to the comparative privacy of a small pleasure barge on the royal lake, where beyond reach of prying eyes she could await Khepri's coming. Khataka was disconsolate at being left behind, but the Queen requested her to mend

a ceremonial robe of delicate bead mesh which Her Majesty declared she could trust to no one else.

Shadows were lengthening along the well-kept garden walks bordered by neatly trimmed fruit trees. The lake was edged with reeds, and among the tall clumps of papyrus water fowl were nesting. Two Nubians poled the light craft back and forth across the glassy water, staying close to shore. Idly the Queen watched the play of muscles under dark skin burnished by the sinking sun. She had dismissed the girl musicians who usually accompanied her, and now reclined alone under the brightly painted canopy. There Kenofer found her when at last he came in answer to her urgent messages.

At Ankhsenamon's bidding he sat at her feet where their words could not be overheard. He had just returned from the Valley where laborers had already completed the rough excavation of the King's tomb. It was tedious work, but they had made an excellent beginning. Kenofer had gone down the sloping passageway to the antechamber with its adjoining store room, and had inspected the burial chamber which was destined to hold the sarcophagus and the great golden shrine of Pharaoh. Beyond lay the Innermost Treasury intended for the canopic jars and other sacred objects. A guard was kept at the entrance to the Valley, that idlers might not learn too much about the exact location and direction of the shaft. Furthermore, the laborers were forced to live in a temporary village at the site of the excavation, lest they be tempted to talk too freely of the work they were pledged to carry on in secrecy.

"With all those precautions it seems strange that so many robberies should be committed," Ankhsenamon said thoughtfully. "Workmen, officials, even priests are accused of disturbing the dead. Such a shameful state of affairs could never have existed at Akhetaten."

“True, but it is far easier to control small groups of picked followers than a large mass of undisciplined subjects. Those tombs along the cliffs and in the Valley have been a temptation to generations of greedy men. That is why Tutankhamon has ordered an unpretentious tomb in an inconspicuous spot, hoping his Ka may dwell in peace. We are doing our best to follow his instructions, but I fear that no tomb filled with gold and precious jewels can ever be entirely safe.”

“That is what I fear, not only for Tutankhamon but for my father.” Dropping her voice, she told him of the King’s message, watching intently the play of expression on his grave young face as he weighed the importance of her news.

“To question Khataka’s loyalty is to complicate seriously any plans for the first day of Mesore. I can do nothing without her help,” she said.

“By all means use her help,” he answered. “Make use of her in every way you can, but do not tell her the purpose of what she does. To change your attitude would be to invite suspicion. I shall check the other Hittite slaves in Thebes and have an eye kept on their activities. There are few enough. I shall start with that grinning fellow we saw the other day, the one you thought so good to look upon.” He glanced up at her teasingly, but she was in no mood for banter.

“I would sooner think we might enlist his aid than that he would contrive against us. He seemed so happy in spite of his slavery.”

“Too happy. He will bear watching. The hunted hare who frisks too gaily as he runs usually knows a near-by hole through which he may escape. Our friend from Hatti does not contemplate a lifetime of slavery with such bright, intelligent eyes. For him it is a temporary servitude and perhaps a voluntary one, as the King suggests. Far more serious issues must be settled now. Have you a plan?”

The Queen shook her head. "I have heard the judges ask that a plundered tomb be examined and set in order before being resealed, and I have heard the King give formal order to the priests that it be done. But how to effect the opening of an untouched tomb during his absence, without telling anyone for what reason it is to be unsealed, that is beyond my experience. Of course, were we at Akhetaten—"

"There Your Majesty's request would be enough, but here everyone would question your motive, the High Priest of Amon most of all." A scowl darkened Kenofer's face.

"Yet it is the King's command. Is that not enough?" she asked.

"It might be enough if you showed the priest of Queen Tiy's mortuary temple the letter signed by Tutankhamon. He is devoted to Tiy's memory and would do anything for the safety of her son's Ka. Perhaps it would be well for you to take the message to him in person and see what he suggests."

"But that I cannot do!" Ankhsenamon cried. "I burned the King's private letter lest it fall into Hittite hands."

Kenofer's frown deepened. "Then I do not see by what authority you can carry out the King's bidding."

"By the authority vested in me as Queen of Egypt!" she answered, though her voice carried no conviction. Only too well she knew how limited was her power in matters which might prove displeasing to Ay or Amon. "Tutankhamon would never have asked the impossible. There must be some way which we have not been clever enough to discover. It is strange indeed if Egypt's Queen cannot have access to a spot which any bold, unscrupulous thief in Thebes could enter if he chose!"

"Perchance Egypt's Queen is not unscrupulous enough!" Kenofer spoke lightly, laughing for the benefit of the imperturbable Nubians who, though out of hearing, glanced that way from time to time.

“I am not so sure! Egypt’s Queen is unscrupulous enough to use a thief to carry out the King’s commands!” Ankhsenamon’s eyes sparkled. “Apparently the Necropolis is full of rogues. Find me an able one who has been in trouble, and I will give him a royal pardon for his sins if he will but appear to sin once more. Why did I not think of that before? Let there be an attempt to enter Queen Tiy’s tomb, and even the High Priest will insist that I order an investigation! If the robbers succeed in making a hole through the first sealed doorway, the whole tomb will be opened in order to be sure the contents have not been disturbed.”

As the feasibility of the plan dawned upon him, Kenofer turned admiring eyes upon his Queen. “Only Ankhsenamon would have thought of such a solution.”

“No doubt that is what Tutankhamon intended from the first,” she answered, her color deepening under his steady look. “Think you that so honest a man as Kenofer, Chief Artist of the Court, can help me find a thief? No ordinary scoundrel can he be, but a man of experience. Twenty days is little enough time for such villainy. Who is to locate the entrance of the tomb, so carefully concealed?”

“The man who so carefully concealed it,” Kenofer answered. “He is in charge of the work at Tutankhamon’s tomb, and was selected by the King because at heart he is an ardent follower of Aten. Henku is one man we can safely take into our confidence. You have supplied the idea; let me be the one to carry it out. With Henku’s help there should be no difficulty whatever in convincing the authorities that mischief has been afoot.”

So it happened that before ten suns had risen, all Thebes was aghast to learn that the sacred tomb of Queen Tiy had been entered. That the outrage had been perpetrated by someone who knew both the location and the plan of the tomb was evident. Suspicion fell naturally enough on the crew of men working in the neighborhood. There was one complicating

circumstance, however, which mystified the judges before whom the case was tried. The robbery had been carefully planned for the three nights during which the workmen from Tutankhamon's tomb had been allowed to celebrate a local feast in Thebes. It was upon their return that the superintendent had detected evidences of trespassing in the carefully guarded district, and reported them to the priest in charge of Tiy's funerary temple. That dignitary had hastened to Paari, High Priest of Amon, and in due time the Queen was advised that an immediate opening of the tomb would be necessary in order to ascertain what damage had been done and obtain evidence that might convict the culprit.

Then it was that the Court learned the mettle of their youthful Queen. No long-drawn-out investigation of the outrage would satisfy her indignation. She herself drove to the spot, and in spite of Ay's protests and Khataka's pleading, insisted upon remaining there throughout the entire day and night required to open the shaft, unseal the doors, remove the rubble with which the passages had been filled, and reach the inner doorway leading to the burial chamber itself.

All through the hot hours of the day Ankhsenamon sat in the shade of a tent erected for her comfort. The sunlight reflected from the barren, rocky hillsides surrounded her with a pitiless glare. When night fell, she wrapped herself in heavy robes and insisted that the work continue by the light of torches. She was determined that the truth should be revealed before the passing of another day.

Toward morning the Queen, exhausted, slept. Kenofer found her feverish and heavy-eyed when the blinding sunlight of a second day had driven even Ay and the High Priest back to the cool seclusion of their homes in Thebes. They were to be called when the work of clearing was completed. The Queen preferred to wait, insisting that she could not leave

the Valley until she knew that her grandmother's sacred body had not been profaned.

It was high noon when at last the inner door was reached and reported intact by the workmen. Not to be satisfied by second-hand information, the Queen insisted upon entering the cleared passageway, accompanied by Kenofer and Henku, the man who had placed the last seal upon that fresh plaster the day of Queen Tiy's burial. At the foot of the long, sloping shaft the three examined the unmarred surface. In silence they looked at one another across the pale flame of the lamp Kenofer held. Ankhsenamon's eyes were enormous, ringed with shadows darker than any kohl.

"Ankhsenamon, Lady of the Two Lands, I am not satisfied." The superintendent spoke in a loud, clear voice. "I cannot be sure that all is just as we left it."

"Then it is my wish that the door be opened," the Queen declared. "Kenofer, ask the workmen for tools. Henku himself shall break the seal. I am too weary to wait for Ay and the High Priest."

Ankhsenamon stood back while Henku set to work with Kenofer's help, but refused to leave the narrow passageway. The thud of the mallet, the clink of metal, the sudden clatter as a shower of loosened rubble fell to the ground seemed far away. Her ears rang with a slow, rhythmic hum, and she felt unsteady, as if about to fall. With difficulty she focused her eyes on the two men busy at their task. They had made a breach in the upper right-hand corner of the doorway and were removing the rough stones which had been built up from floor to lintel and covered with a thick layer of plaster to receive impressions of the Necropolis seal and that of the Queen. The hot air escaping from the inner chamber made the flame of the lamp flicker as Kenofer held it high above his head. Now at last it was beyond the possibility of human proof to show that the doorway had been intact when the workmen reached it.

Ankhsenamon stepped close to the dark opening which yawned in the plastered wall. The lamp threw a pale, wavering light within that sacred chamber, reflected in the polished surface of a golden shrine which filled the greater portion of the space. The pungent odor of dead flowers and the heavy scent of unguents reached out to touch her like a living presence. Queen Tiy's resentful eyes met hers from the face of a life-sized statue standing at one side of the doorway, so close Ankhsenamon could have touched it with an outstretched hand. She drew back, vaguely conscious of the mass of furniture, chests, baskets, the priceless treasures in alabaster and gold piled against the walls.

"Will there be room?" she asked faintly.

"We will make room, Your Majesty!" Henku answered. Before the Queen realized what he intended to do, the man had climbed the waist-high barrier of the half-cleared door and was busy among the funerary furniture so carefully planned for the comfort of the Dowager Queen's Ka. Ankhsenamon shuddered at such temerity, yet could not take her eyes from his shadowy movements. In a surprisingly short time Henku clambered back into the outer passage, smiling his satisfaction. A lifetime spent in the building and repairing of tombs had destroyed any lingering sense of awe for the chambers or their contents. The flowers left by weeping relatives touched him no more than discarded garlands at a banquet. Watching that withered face intent upon its work, unmoved by what it saw, Ankhsenamon realized for the first time why workmen dared enter those sacred houses of the dead in search of gold.

"Take me to the tent, Kenofer. I am faint with weariness." Desperately she fought off the hold of that thick, sweet atmosphere.

Kenofer, alarmed by the waxen pallor of the Queen's face, half led, half carried her up the long incline and the flight of rough-hewn steps. At the top he steadied her with a firm hand.

“They are watching,” he said, nodding toward the workmen and priests standing in curious groups around the mouth of the tomb. She nodded, drawing long breaths of the warm, clean air.

Through a haze of sunlight she caught sight of a familiar figure hastening toward her from a chariot which had just come to a plunging stop near the entrance of her tent. Stiffly pleated linen flapped about emaciated shanks, and a hastily donned wig sat awry upon a gaunt head. Ay was apologetic. He should have been there when the inner door was reached. The priest of Queen Tiy’s funeral chapel would arrive shortly. What a relief to know that the thieves had been frightened away before their evil work was done! A messenger had brought him the good news.

Ankhsenamon collected her thoughts with an effort. “I am so glad you have come. I have inspected the burial chamber, and Henku has entered to make sure that all is as it should be. It is my wish that fresh offerings of food and flowers be placed within before the doorway is again sealed. I would also have a thicker barrier built. In the meantime I shall remain here.”

Ay bowed. “I fear Her Majesty has taken this unfortunate incident too seriously. Such devotion to the memory of a grandmother is admirable, but a Queen must consider her health as well as her filial duties.”

Ankhsenamon searched his face, finding there the knowledge she so dreaded to discover. His lips were twisted into a wry, but not unfriendly grimace.

“Her Majesty’s ingenuity fills me with admiration,” he murmured. “I shall see that her wishes and those of the King are carried out. Must the Queen spend another night in the Valley? It seems unwise and—unnecessary.”

“I can depend on Ay, the friend of my father, at all times. His knowledge far surpasses mine in everything pertaining to affairs of state.

Only in matters of family devotion can I claim loyalty as great as his. Therefore I know he will respect my desire to see that the tomb of my grandmother is as safe from violation as I would want that of my father or my husband to be.”

Again Ay bowed. “Let it be my privilege then to see that the Queen’s privacy is not disturbed. I shall post her bodyguard at the entrance of the Valley and leave the Chief Royal Artist to see that she is driven safely to the palace when she is ready to go. It is to be regretted that pressing duties prevent my staying with Her Majesty during so trying an ordeal.”

Khataka alone was displeased with these arrangements, for with the coming of darkness she was to return with the rest of the royal retinue to Thebes. The young slave did not dare protest, but she was deeply concerned for the safety of her mistress. Ankhsenamon was not well; only Khataka knew how far from well she was.

All through the afternoon, long after the hours of midday rest were over, Ankhsenamon had lain in a heavy stupor, oblivious to all that went on about her. The tent had been made comfortable with furniture and rugs brought from Thebes, but even the efforts of the four slaves who kept the air astir with feather fans had little effect upon the suffocating heat. When at last the Queen had struggled back to consciousness, she was content to lie upon her couch, languid and pale. She refused the ministrations of her attendants who would have tinted her cheeks with feminine skill. She made them leave unfinished the dressing of her hair. She let Khataka soothe her parched skin with oil and perfume, but waved aside the heavy collar of faience beads.

“My father would wear no ornaments about his neck,” she said. “You did not know my father, Khataka. It is a pity. If only once you could have seen him in the temple!”

“Your Egyptian temples frighten me,” the small slave confessed. “They are so vast, so full of shadows.”

“Not the temples of my father! There the altars are in the sun, and the Aten’s blessing rests on all who worship Him, be they great or small.” Her father seemed very near to her on this first day of Mesore. She longed to rest her head against his shoulder and beg forgiveness for her helplessness in Amon’s grasp.

“In the East there is a god Adon, so I have heard. Is it the same as the Aten your father loved?”

“Perhaps. I do not know. There is but one God, Aten. He is the God of all men, wherever they may live.”

“Yet men do not seem to know Him. My country’s gods have very different names. Here in Thebes you worship Amon. I think—”

“Do not think, Khataka. The priests of Amon do that for all of us!” Ankhsenamon sat up abruptly, pressing cold fingertips against throbbing temples. What possessed her to speak this way to Khataka in the face of the King’s warning? Irritation pricked her like the sting of flies in summer heat. She thrust aside Khataka’s helping hand and stood erect. The world reeled about her, then settled into its accustomed place. She took a few steps, gained confidence, and walked slowly across the rug-strewn ground. Khataka watched her anxiously, afraid to follow, afraid to stay behind.

“You will leave with the others at once.” Ankhsenamon’s tone left no room for protest. Then her voice softened. In spite of Tutankhamon’s suspicions, she could not doubt the devotion in Khataka’s stricken face.

“Believe me, Child of Hatti, I would keep you with me if I could. Your faithfulness brings comfort when I need it most. Your people may be the enemy of Egypt, but you are the friend of Egypt’s Queen.”

Kenofer eyed Ankhsenamon anxiously when she appeared before the royal tent, decked in fresh linen, her hair falling thick and straight about her shoulders, her face untouched by artificial color to accent lips or eyes. He had not seen her so for years, and it startled him to find again in his lovely

Queen the wide-eyed child of his boyish devotion. Her face was fuller, her figure, more softly rounded, but there was still about her a certain elusive quality, a delicate balance between body and spirit which made her seem always Akhenaten's restless Small Bird, poised for flight.

A soft turquoise sky had darkened slowly to the rich hue of lapis lazuli. Already the penetrating cold of a desert night had settled within the basin of sheltering hills. Their rugged heights narrowed the heavens to a ragged canopy as spangled with starry sequins as a King's festal robe. A light wind crept down the Valley, and from a distance came the broken tread of many feet. Ankhsenamon stretched out a questioning hand to touch Kenofer's arm. Close together they stood, straining their eyes into the murky shadows of the upper Valley. His fingers closed over hers.

It was hard to tell from what direction the men of Akhetaten would appear. The stealthy sound of feet seeking uncertain foothold among the sliding rocks seemed to come from the hills to the north. Gradually the sound drew nearer and presently a runner emerged to prostrate himself at the Queen's feet. After a word of reassurance from Ankhsenamon, he vanished once more to return at the head of a strange cortege. Dark robes covered the customary white of the priests' garments. The coffin, too, was shrouded in a heavy pall so that no glitter of gold or inlay should catch a ray of light.

With difficulty the men lifted the bulky weight down the rough steps leading into the hillside. Behind came others bearing the precious canopic jars and several small chests of personal belongings which Ankhsenamon recognized as part of the original funerary equipment. Tears overflowed her weary eyes as she thought of such meager treasures accompanying the body of so great a man. At least there was comfort in the knowledge that among the lavish riches of his mother's tomb his Ka would find objects familiar to him through the years of his childhood and youth.

Their work done, the exhausted men followed the Queen into the tent where hot food and drink had been prepared for them. They answered her questions briefly, grudgingly. To them she was a willing tool of Amon, one who knew far more of the deplorable conditions at Akhetaten than she was willing to admit. That conditions at Akhenaten's capital were deplorable, Ankhsenamon gathered without much difficulty. Laborers and skilled artisans had left to find employment in other cities. Shops were closed, and there were not enough students left to fill the School for Scribes. Many of the Mazoi had joined the army, and the few citizens left to worship in the temples of Aten found themselves without protection. Alarmed by such admissions, yet even more distressed by the priests' frank hostility to her offers of assistance, the Queen lapsed into silence.

Gravely the priests of Aten passed before her, making obeisance as they vanished into the night. Only one spoke.

"You are not happy in your pride and power, Ankhsenamon, Queen of the Two Lands," he said slowly. "The peace of Aten has been denied you, who have taken the name of a false god and sought his protection."

"I have ordered the rebuilding of the temples of Aten. I do not worship Amon in my heart. As Queen of Egypt, what more can I do?" Her voice broke, and the priest's eyes softened.

"As to that I cannot say. I am a priest, not a prophet. This I do know: the daughter of Akhenaten, Living in Truth Forever and Ever, should find within herself far wiser guidance than that which Amon gives. Stand beneath the blue ceiling of the sky and feel the life-giving warmth of Aten's rays. Hear again the inspired utterances of your father's voice, and know that only in his words lies truth."

Ankhsenamon carried the words with her when she stepped into the chariot beside Kenofer. He held the plunging horses with difficulty while giving last instructions to Henku, who was to remain at the tomb until the

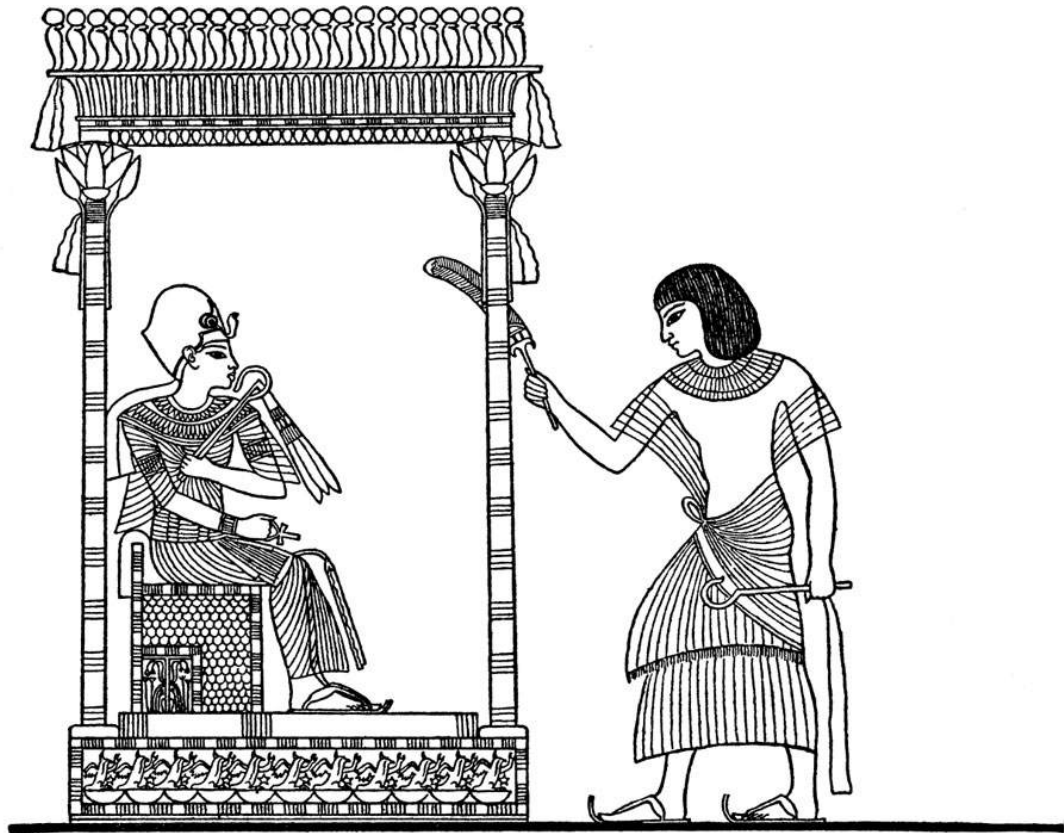
passageway was closed and all signs of the excavation obliterated. As the team sprang clear of the groom's detaining hands, Ankhsenamon crouched weakly against the chariot rail, shivering in the rush of cold, crisp air. One of the horses shied and the light chariot swerved. With a quick sweep of his arm, Kenofer caught the Queen into the safety of a firm embrace, holding her against his shoulder as he stood braced to meet the pull of the frightened bays.

No word passed between them, but Ankhsenamon clung to him with grateful hands, pressing her face against his breast that she might not hinder his movements. She felt the chariot careen beneath her feet and the folds of his cloak swirl about her. Now and then he called sharply to the horses, and his voice rang with comforting assurance. Ankhsenamon closed her eyes.

At the point where the road left the Valley and started through the pass in the hills, they were joined by the guard Ay had left for their protection. Ankhsenamon was vaguely aware of voices, of the flare of torches touching her closed eyelids with red, of orders repeated, and of Kenofer's words:

"The Queen is ill. Make haste!"

Darkness descended upon them. Swiftly they moved through the night. She heard only the pounding of her own heart in unison with his, felt only the close pressure of his arm, the touch of his cheek bent low to rest against her hair.



Hui Is Made Viceroy of Kush

CHAPTER XXIII

LORD OF VALOR

THROUGH the slow, suffocating months of summer, Ankhsenamon viewed the world with listless eyes. In the cool of the evening attendants moved her to the garden or carried her litter to a pavilion beside the lake. Indifferent to her surroundings, the Queen bore her convalescence with patience, heart heavy within her breast. There would be no Wise Little One to greet Tutankhamon on his return. The curse of Amon had laid its threat upon Ankhsenamon, daughter of Akhenaten. Even in the sunlight she felt an unaccustomed fear. Why had her first baby been a girl, born without breath of life? Nameless, she would lie in the inner chamber of Tutankhamon's tomb, as Meketaten had lain within the distant hills of Akhetaten.

The Queen did not tell Tutankhamon what had befallen her, but wrote him wistful, tender messages out of her loneliness:

“A shadow is made on the earth today. Come to thine house soon, Beloved. My arms are extended to greet thee. Come thou to me quickly; I so desire to see thy face.”

Khataka was almost as pale and wan as her mistress. For long days and nights she had refused to leave the Queen’s side. Now, watchful, intent, she anticipated Ankhsenamon’s every wish.

Great had been Ay’s consternation over the critical illness of his Queen. Surely death would not take from him a second time the puppet he had placed upon the throne. Horemheb might claim control of Tutankhamon, but Ay fancied Ankhsenamon his own mouthpiece before the people. Did she not accept his direction in all official matters? Should any ill befall the King in Asia, she might easily be induced to name him the boy’s successor. Ay was sure of that. He had tried every magic formula, consulted every famous leech in his efforts to insure her swift return to health.

At the Queen’s request, Kenofer spent many hours beside her in the garden. They were never alone, but it pleased her to have him there. Sometimes he drew her Nubian slaves and made portraits of the girl musicians who sat against a background of papyrus reeds, some with graceful harps and long-necked lutes, others piping on double flutes, or making long drums vibrate beneath quick fingers. No mention was ever made of that night in the Valley of Kings, now nearly three months past. If Ankhsenamon’s thoughts dwelt upon it, she gave no sign.

One morning early in the third month of winter when they sat together in the sunshine, she asked Kenofer about the number of Hittite slaves in Thebes. He glanced up from his work.

“There are comparatively few, it seems. The type interests me and I take occasion to talk with them whenever possible. Most of them are low-born

fellows, powerfully built for fighting or physical labor. Only one or two have had any education. They seem fairly well content, but listless in the desert heat. Not being plainsmen, they need the heady wine of mountain air to fill them with the love of life.”

“They must be lonely so far from home, with no hope of returning to their own people,” the Queen sighed. “Khataka tells me she sorely misses the forest-clad mountains covered with snow. I wish that some day I could see this thing she calls snow. She says that soft, white flakes come drifting from the sky like the breast feathers of pigeons scattered by the wind. On the ground they pile into great, white drifts, as does the sand when a north wind blows, but if they touch your hand, they vanish. Have you ever seen that marvel, Kenofer?”

“Only as a white cloak wrapped about a distant mountain top,” Kenofer replied. “But I have seen the high leather boots the Hittite men wear, turned up at the toes so they can walk on the crusted snow. Would it amuse the Queen to see a Hittite in his native garb? I found one intelligent fellow working on a farm some distance from the city. He promised to pose for me in costume if his master would allow him a few hours’ freedom.”

“Do bring him here, Kenofer. I can talk with him while you work. No doubt his presence would give Khataka pleasure too. They may have met before.”

It was several days before Kenofer succeeded in bringing his model to the palace. The Queen recognized at once the dark red hair and smiling face. The lad looked uncomfortably warm in his heavy clothing. He wore a short tunic of wool which did not quite reach his knees, fringed on the bottom and held at the waist by a girdle. His muscular legs were bare, his feet incased in leather boots neatly made and turned up at the toes. On his head was a high rounded cap, under which his red hair was pulled back and braided in a single plait, curled up at the end as stiffly as his shoes. The

Queen stared curiously at the long gloves he carried, so cut that only the thumb was separate from the other fingers. She remembered how amused Khataka had been that the King saved his five-fingered gloves for state occasions.

The little slave was not with Ankhsenamon when Kenofer and his companion arrived, but soon came down the path from the palace, arms full of fresh garlands, head tilted back to watch a hawk soaring above the lake. At sight of the unexpected visitor she stopped short, a cry of recognition on her lips:

“Tergen! Brother!”

Tergen’s expressive face assumed a mask, and he would have disclaimed the relationship. However, Khataka’s joy was not to be curbed. Neither was the Queen’s curiosity. Her questions revealed the truth in spite of Tergen’s efforts at evasion.

Five years before, Khataka and Tergen had lived with their father and mother in a village high among the mountains of Kappodokia. Tergen at fifteen had been sent to the palace of Shubbiluliuma to be trained as a royal scribe. Later he had gone to the Syrian battle front in the service of a Hittite officer, and had been captured during a raid. After their father’s death, Khataka had endeavored to follow her brother, with disastrous results. The story of the girl’s adventures was one the Queen knew well, but she heard it with new sympathy, watching the play of emotions on Tergen’s sensitive, homely face as he listened.

“After five years of separation, you have much to say,” Ankhsenamon declared, allowing the two slaves to withdraw to a near-by pavilion where they could converse unobserved. To Kenofer she said, “We must see that the boy comes often to the palace. I am curious to know more of the several tongues they speak in his country. The very names whet my curiosity: Khattish, Luish, Khurish, Hittite. Khataka tells me that Hittite hieroglyphs

are unlike ours and are raised above the surface of the monuments, not cut into the stone.”

“True. A scribe of Hatti must also be skilled in the use of metals,” Kenofer answered, delighted at the Queen’s interest. “Their most important documents are preserved on sheets of silver, the hieroglyphs beaten in from behind. I have taken a fancy to this lad and would like to purchase him, if opportunity offers. His master is an unscrupulous Amorite who was once in the service of that traitor, Aziru. I believe he is using the boy to write messages for him, but I doubt very much that Tergen does it willingly. He obviously fears to implicate his sister.”

When Kenofer drove the young Hittite back to his master’s farm, he found the Amorite awaiting their arrival with evident impatience. It apparently had well suited his purpose to have the slave taken within the palace enclosure, and he now promised with alacrity that Tergen should be allowed to go again.

“The Queen desires to learn something of the Hittite language,” Kenofer explained. “When she is pleased to send for the slave, I shall come for him in person.”

Without further discussion he turned his chariot in the narrow courtyard and started back to Thebes. At the point where the road reached the main highway, something gave him pause. Circling the farm, he approached it from the opposite direction, tied his horses to a ring in the adobe wall not far from the courtyard entrance, and walked quietly back to the enclosure where he had left the two men. Even from a distance he could hear the Amorite’s voice:

“Answer my question, thou son of nothing! You have been in the palace. You have had audience with the Queen. The Queen has a Hittite slave. You must have spoken with her; yet you say ‘No news! No information!’ ” He mimicked Tergen’s foreign inflection. “I do not believe

you. If I did, I would give you a taste of the bastinado anyway to teach you to make better use of your opportunities!”

The crack of a heavy stick against bare shoulders made Kenofer wince.

“O Master, you can beat nothing out of me but lies, for I have already told you the truth. At all times I was in the presence of the Royal Artist or the Queen. As for the Queen’s slave, she knows nothing. She is a child.”

“And therefore would not be suspected of giving information. Such an accomplice would be invaluable. Pah! You fool! It may be months before such a chance will come again! I have a mind to sell you to Pediamon. He seeks laborers and I need money. A taste of work in the mines would sharpen your wits.” He brought down the bastinado with a resounding whack and was raising it again when Kenofer strode through the gate and caught his arm.

“Enough, Amorite! I have a mind to buy the slave and would have his hide whole. Just now I heard you say you have need of money. How much would Pediamon give for the wretch? Little enough, I warrant. The lad’s no laborer. It occurred to me as I drove away that he was better suited to run errands for the Royal Goldsmith than to till your land. What price do you put upon him?”

Taken aback by this sudden interruption and uncertain as to how much had been overheard, the Amorite blustered:

“I will do with my slave as I like and sell him to whom I like!” Then he added craftily. “He is not as worthless as he appears, my good master. He has a ready wit when he chooses to use it. I gave him careful instructions as to how he should behave in the palace, and he tells me that he paid no heed to my advice. Is it not enough to anger anyone who has done his best to train a clumsy, ignorant foreigner in the customs of the land? Yet he is not so ignorant as one might suppose. He can read and write. He should bring a

goodly sum in the slave market, and I could not afford to take less than top price for him.”

“You contradict yourself, but it is no matter. He who would trade must shout loudly of his own wares. I am in no mood to bargain. Take my offer or leave it.”

The offer when made was so generous that even the avaricious Amorite was satisfied, though he wailed lustily that he was being robbed. Meanwhile Tergen, amazed, watched the negotiations for his person, unable to fathom what trick of chance had rescued him from the clutches of so vile a master. In silence he followed Kenofer to the chariot, his few possessions wrapped in a bundle.

“Can you handle horses?” Kenofer inquired.

“Yes, Master, but I have not done so since leaving Hatti.”

“Take the reins that I may test your skill. The touch of them in your hand will take your mind from the welts on your back.”

“Gratitude already has done that. How can I thank you for releasing me from such bondage?”

“You will find me a hard master,” Kenofer warned him. Swiftly the horses sped along the road toward Thebes, adjusting themselves readily to an unfamiliar but skillful hand. “I shall expect of you far more than he has asked.”

“I am capable of far more than he has asked, but incapable of such treachery as he demands. Judge me not by his perfidy, O Master.”

“Of his perfidy I know enough. Of your past I ask nothing. It is with your future that I am concerned. You must at no time communicate with the Hittite King or his agents.” Kenofer’s voice was stern. “If I have cause to doubt you, I shall not hesitate to sell you as a quarry slave.”

“Never doubt my faithfulness to you, Master, to the Queen, or to Pharaoh, who even now is on his way to Thebes.” Though startled at this bit

of news, Kenofer gave no sign. Tergen continued. "If you imagine that I still owe allegiance to the Hittite King, I can only answer that I am a scholar. My services belong to all peoples, all lands. My loyalty belongs to you."

Kenofer rested a hand on the lad's shoulder. "You have voiced my feeling with rare understanding, Tergen. Artists and scholars belong to no one country, no one people. They must search for knowledge everywhere and share it with all who seek to know. There is understanding in the heart of Ankhsenamon and strength in the boyish courage of Tutankhamon. Prove your devotion to them, and you will win your freedom from me."

The slave straightened under his touch. "To serve with joy is to know freedom. It is already mine, Master."

True to his promise, Kenofer asked Tergen nothing further concerning his past, but hastened to carry the news of Tutankhamon's coming to the Queen. Ay was summoned, and to him Kenofer reported his suspicions of the Amorite. Officers were sent to place him under arrest and subject him to such applications of the bastinado as might be necessary in order to ascertain the source and extent of his information. In due time it was learned that the Egyptian campaign in Syria had been surprisingly successful, and that the leaders were returning in triumph.

"Like the soothsayers, I fear the Amorite told his tormentors what he knew they wished to hear." Kenofer said drily to the Queen, "but at least it seems fairly certain that the King and Horemheb will be in Thebes within the month. Ay has already set about making preparation so that all will be in readiness the moment His Majesty arrives."

The thought of seeing Tutankhamon after so many months filled Ankhsenamon with joy not unmixed with dread. She would have to tell him of the baby's death and of the long illness which had prevented her doing so many things expected of her. She scarcely knew what had been taking place

outside the narrow limits of the palace garden, and far from keeping a watchful eye on the activities of her chief adviser, she had given him a free hand in affairs of state. True, Ay was under the control of the priesthood, as she herself would have been, but he had grown increasingly well pleased with himself and with her, as the days of her indifference had stretched through the summer and far into the winter months.

Preparations for the triumphal entry of Tutankhamon and Horemheb into the city were made with elaborate care. Ay marshaled his forces with confidence and skill, bent on making the festivities a display of his power as well as a tribute to the returning monarch. Most of the army had remained in Memphis, but the charioteers and picked troops from Thebes swelled the ranks of the King's bodyguard when at last Tutankhamon disembarked at the quay from which he had set sail many months before. All the nobles, priests, and officials were gathered to receive him, and the shore was lined for miles with cheering crowds.

The noise and confusion of that official greeting seemed to Ankhsenamon the echo of a familiar dream. She could close her eyes and imagine it was the King's departure they were cheering. Yet so much had happened to her, so much to him, since then. Would they find each other changed?

She was glad that no one could read her frightened thoughts when she walked to meet the King, conscious of the thousands who observed the eager embrace, the swift kiss, the ringing laugh full of pride and triumph with which Tutankhamon greeted his Queen. Ankhsenamon winced at the rough pressure of his arms as he drew her close. There was a sharp, unfamiliar ring to the voice which gave instructions for the disposal of certain chests filled with gifts for her delight.

"I knew what to bring you this time, even without Kenofer's help," he boasted gaily.

A double throne had been prepared for them. Side by side they rode through the streets as if borne on the waves of shouts and cheers. Tutankhamon held her fragile fingers almost too closely in his brown hand, hardened by contact with weapons and reins. Yet while they moved among their people, honored, loved, something of the King's glorious vitality imparted itself to Ankhsenamon and made her one with him again. By the time they reached the palace, she had found within the resplendent person of this youthful warrior the same small boy who once had played just such military games as he now had carried out in grim reality on the field of battle. With unfeigned eagerness she questioned him, and far into the night listened to his vivid account of adventures surpassing any she had ever dared imagine.

It was difficult to tell him of her own misfortunes. When she did, he took her in his arms.

"As long as thou art well and happy, nothing matters, little Royal Wife. Encourage thy heart to forget. There will be other Wise Little Ones. As for affairs of state, dismiss them from thy mind. Let Ay trouble the earth with his designs. Horemheb and I are here now. I have bestowed upon Horemheb every official power I could, and he will make good use of his authority."

She smiled at his confidence. "No more will the land be left to those who do iniquity, since my Lord of Valor has returned!"

"There is much to be done," the King agreed. "A new Viceroy of Kush must be named, and there will be tribute from the North and South. Now that my power is firmly established, I shall insist upon having more time for hunting and practicing with the charioteers. There will be banquets and processions without number during the next few months. You must grow strong and gay once more, Lady of the Two Lands, for I would have you ever at my side."

Touched and reassured by his rough tenderness, Ankhsenamon clung to him, her loneliness broken as if it had never been. Tutankhamon held her close, marveling at her fragile loveliness, at the warm ivory of her skin, at the glossy blue-black of her hair, gleaming like lapis lazuli in the lamp light.

The ever-new wonder of Tutankhamon's love sustained her through the seemingly endless days and nights of celebration that followed. Valiantly she fought off the weariness which threatened her, lest he find her wanting as a companion and a queen. She expressed the warmest admiration for the gifts he had brought her and pretended eagerness to see the ceremonies which would make Hui the new Viceroy of Kush. The land of Kush included both Nubia and Ethiopia, and from all Ankhsenamon could learn, Hui was a man well suited to control those turbulent districts. He was young and vigorous, with a commanding personality which appealed strongly to Tutankhamon and Horemheb.

Ankhsenamon asked Kenofer his opinion of this new friend whom the King admired so much.

"He is a man of character and strength, a wise choice for such a post of honor," Kenofer answered. "He is constructing an imposing tomb in western Thebes where his predecessors, Tutmes and Merimes, are buried. On the walls he plans to show the ceremony by which he will be made King's Son of Kush, and has asked me to submit sketches."

On the appointed day, Hui presented himself before the King in the Temple of Amon, where all the Court dignitaries had gathered to honor him. Even the Queen was impressed by his confident bearing and immaculate attire. His long, full skirt was stiffly pleated, and the folds of the starched overskirt were wrapped about him and caught at the waist so that they stuck out in a point just above the knees. As a signal honor he was allowed to wear sandals in the presence of the King. Ankhsenamon admired the simple

wig of short, thick hair, which left his ears exposed and hung across the back of his neck in a shining mass.

Tutankhamon also was dressed with elaborate care for the occasion, his dark, muscular limbs plainly visible through the sheer gauze pleating of his robes. Ankhsenamon herself had selected the pairs of wide jeweled bracelets clasped about his wrists and upper arms, and the rich collar of carnelian, lapis lazuli, and enamel strung in ever-widening bands of intricate design.

When Hui appeared, he was greeted by an official known as the Overseer of the White House, who declared in a loud, clear voice:

“This is the seal from Pharaoh—Life, Prosperity, Health— who assigns to thee the territory from Nekhen to Napata. Take thou the seal of office, O King’s Son of Kush!”

Thus before Amon in the presence of the Good God was this imposing title conferred upon Hui, Beloved of Tutankhamon. Great was the rejoicing among his family and retainers when he came forth from the Temple. At once there devolved upon him his first official duty, that of presenting to the King the tribute of the North and South. In this he was assisted by his young brother, Amenhotep.

Before Tutankhamon Hui made deep obeisance:

“May thy Father, Amon, protect thee during myriads of jubilees. May He give to thee eternity as King of the Two Lands, everlastingness as Ruler of the Nine Bows. Thou art as enduring as heaven, abiding like its four pillars. The earth sits beneath thee because of thy permanence, O Good Ruler.”

Then appeared four lines of Asians, bearing such an array of glittering treasures that Tutankhamon’s heart swelled with pride. Not for many a year had such tribute come from Asia. If his future conquests proved as successful as this first campaign, no doubt the annual contributions from the

East would soon equal those received under Amenhotep the Magnificent. He smiled his satisfaction when Ankhsenamon exclaimed over the gold and silver vessels, blocks of lapis lazuli from the quarries of Babylonia, gold trays piled with copper rings, great vases of alabaster borne on poles, and spirited horses with arched necks and flowing tails.

Among other envoys came one from the Syrian Kingdom of Retenu, a pot-bellied Asian swathed in heavy woolen robes of blue and red. The man's short neck was accentuated by a heavy fringe of black beard and the greasy locks which hung about his shoulders. His hairy arms were loaded with bracelets, and the long, square-tipped fingers which he raised in salutation were dirty and curled back in a curiously repulsive fashion. His words were far more pleasing to the King than his appearance:

“How great is thy fame, O Good God! How mighty thy strength! There is none living in ignorance of thee. All the Chiefs of the North Countries send you vessels of the choicest of their countries, in silver, gold, lapis lazuli, malachite, every splendid costly stone. The Chiefs of Retenu the Upper are craving peace from His Majesty. They say: ‘Give to us the breath which thou givest, O Lord. Let us tell of thy victories, and there shall be no revolters in thy time, but every land shall be in peace.’ ”

After the tribute from the North had been presented to the King, Hui brought forward the gifts offered by the land which he and his brother were to rule. The array of gold and silver, ivory tusks and porphyry, shields and furniture was bewildering. Cows with ornamental hands attached to their wide-spreading horns were led past, as well as giraffes and other animals from the heart of Kush. Black slaves, their bodies gleaming, accompanied the families of the Kushite chiefs. Bright feathers were stuck in their hair, and great circles of gold hung in their ears.

At the head of the procession walked the vassal Prince of Kush, handsomely light brown, and following him, four native Princes, all ill at

ease in their Egyptian clothes and absurd little crowns. Behind them came a native Princess in a gaudy chariot drawn by two small black and white cows. On her head was a spiked crown, and she was protected by a semicircular sunshade.

Long before these visiting dignitaries had passed in review, Tutankhamon was weary of sitting in state under his many-colored canopy of painted wood. Months of activity had spoiled him. Restlessly he stirred, watching enviously the easy stride of Hui as he moved back and forth, marshaling the lines of people. There was a man with whom a king could be proud to share the responsibilities of an empire. One of these days he would accept the Viceroy's invitation to visit Nubia and the distant borders of Kush.

Later Tutankhamon discussed with Horemheb and Hui the possibilities of such a royal pilgrimage. The Viceroy was about to join his family on the dahabiyeh which was to take them south. He was eager to assume his new duties and proud to think of entertaining the King. It would require three weeks for His Majesty to make the journey to Nubia, but the royal presence would do much to quiet the ever-restless tribes and impress them with the greatness of Pharaoh and the power of his representative.

Horemheb agreed that during the following year such a visit might well be made. For the present, however, Tutankhamon had much to do at Thebes, and Hui must establish himself firmly in his new domain before assuming responsibility for the King's safety. Gravely the two young men pledged friendship, Hui, the older by several years, swearing personal allegiance as well as official loyalty, the King promising to come in person at the head of troops should the new Governor of the Southern Countries ever require his assistance. Horemheb viewed their mutual admiration with approval. The King had need of personal friends among his officials. Furthermore, Hui was known to have little love for Ay, who had opposed

his appointment on the grounds of youth and an excess of self-confidence. Horemheb smiled grimly, remembering the King's spirited reply to Ay's protests:

"A king needs to number among his advisers men with the courage of youth as well as those with the wisdom of age. Hui's youth speaks to mine. I understand his ambitions. He is one to win the admiration and respect of vassals. He shall be made Keeper of the Gate of the South because in spirit and valor he is a worthy King's Son of Kush."

Now, vested in his new authority, Hui bowed low before his King.

"How many are the examples of thy favor, O Tutankhamon! Men live by thy love. To the far South I will carry word of thy greatness, thy courage. May Amon, thy Father, keep thee in safety forever and ever, O Nebkheperu-Ra, Satisfier of the Gods."

Sadly Ankhsenamon watched a shadow of envy darken the King's eyes when the heavy dahabiyeh moved away from the quay.

"Would that I could go with him now," Tutankhamon sighed. "All this pomp is wearisome. I long to be—"

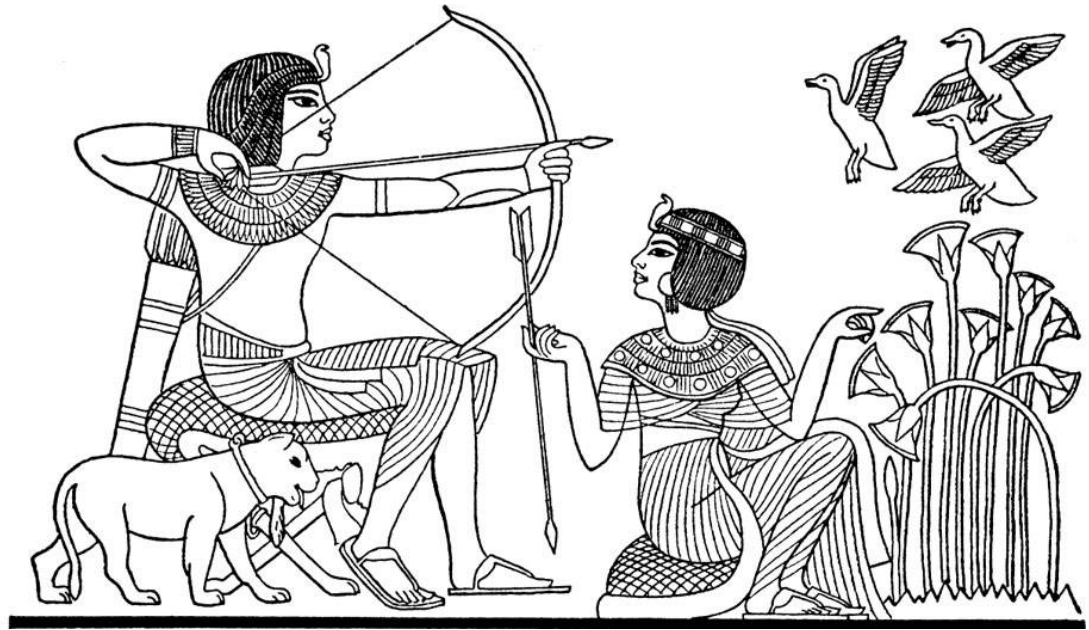
"Here with thy Queen," Ankhsenamon said quietly, slipping an arm through his. "Hast thou forgotten thy wife in finding a friend?"

"I have not forgotten," he smiled. "She is ever in my heart. When Tutankhamon visits Nubia, She Whose Voice He Loves shall go with him."



Nubian Princess

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The King and Queen Hunting

CHAPTER XXIV

LADY OF THE TWO LANDS

HOREMHEB had spoken truly when he said that there were many duties awaiting the King at Thebes. Tribute was again pouring into the coffers of the Double Great House. An elaborate building program must be launched to satisfy the High Priest, and glorify the name of Tutankhamon for all time.

The young King offered no protest when he heard that Ankhsenamon had ordered the enlargement of the Temple of Aten in Thebes. However, on his own initiative, he at once set to work to wipe out all evidence of the destruction wreaked by Akhenaten's religious fervor. Sculptors altered as best they could the inscription in which the name of Amon had been effaced, and in the quarries stone cutters toiled on huge blocks of granite and alabaster to continue the construction of the sanctuaries at Karnak. Before the Sanctuary of the Boats built by Thutmose III he placed a colossal granite statue of himself in the likeness of Amon.

Never was divine image more impressive and never was Pharaoh more impressed by divine image. Tutankhamon gazed upon the finished work with awe. To behold his features given the power and proportions of divinity brought him again that sense of inner remoteness and godlike calm felt when first he sat upon the throne of Thebes. More and more often now he knew that feeling of omnipotence, when a word from him could set in motion thousands of men from Sinai to Nubia. Intoxicated by his own power, he inspected the work as it progressed. In person he went to see the huge granite blocks dragged on sledges from distant quarries to the Nile, where they were placed end to end on sturdy rafts. These he followed in the royal barge while they were towed to Thebes by three rows of nine boats, each manned by eighteen rowers. The skill and ingenuity with which they were put in place at Karnak made him feel that men at times were possessed of superhuman strength.

Watching the toiling slaves and the peasants who took their turn at public works during the inundation, Tutankhamon wondered how such laborious tasks could have been accomplished with the speed described by Queen Hatshepsut on the walls of her temple. According to that record only two months had been required to extract the block for one obelisk from the quarry, one month to construct the wooden scaffolding, and four months to level, polish, and cut the inscriptions. For hours on end Tutankhamon and the Queen examined the temple reliefs, marveling at the accomplishments of that first great Queen to rule with a Pharaoh's absolute power. There was shown step by step the raising of her obelisks as they were supported on a sloping structure of bricks and faggots, then lifted into place by the pressure of sand poured upon the lower end from a gigantic funnel. Well they knew that only by the sweat of human bodies could such marvels have been accomplished.

Ankhsenamon was pleased to have the restless energy of the King turned into constructive channels, grateful to have him apparently content to remain at her side. She went often to inspect Tutankhamon's own temple at Karnak where, on the red sandstone walls, was being cut a record of his services:

“His Majesty caused monuments to be made for all the gods, and made their images in real mountain gold. He rebuilt their sanctuaries as eternal monuments. He established their divine offerings as daily services, to supply their services of loaves on earth. He gave more than had existed before, since the time of Ra and the Ancestors. He consecrated the Priests and Prophets, choosing them from the children of the great of their cities and from the sons of people of known name. He filled their workshops with slaves and prisoners of war.... He doubled, tripled and quadrupled all the goods of the temples: electrum, gold, lapis lazuli, turquoises, precious stones, cloths of royal linen, oils, frankincense, beyond numbering.... So all the Gods and Goddesses of this land, their hearts are joyful. They give eternity, long years, life, wealth, all things, for the nostrils of Tutankhamon.”

Most precious to Ankhsenamon were the hours when Tutankhamon thrust aside the cares of state, abandoned the proud inspection of the buildings and statues which would make his name live through all eternity, and became once more the impulsive, venturesome boy, eager for the thrill and dangers of the hunt. The morasses along the Nile and the far reaches of the desert offered excellent hunting. The King speared more than one hippopotamus in the crocodile-infested waters of the south, and went in search of ostriches in the eastern desert of Heliopolis. From that expedition he brought back quantities of graceful plumes. Some of these were set in a gold fan on which Kenofer's brother engraved designs showing the King in his chariot pursuing the birds and returning with the feathers under his arm.

Tutankhamon also enjoyed the milder pleasures of fishing and fowling near Thebes. True to his word, he kept Ankhsenamon ever at his side when no great danger or hardship was involved. Together they went into the marshes after wild duck, sometimes paddling in a reed canoe, more often sitting for hours in a blind, the King on a folding stool, the Queen on a hassock at his feet. In the cold dawn they would take their places, waiting for the daylight to bring birds to the feeding ground along the river. Now and then Kenofer accompanied them. Once Ankhsenamon insisted on taking her lion cub to see if he would retrieve birds as did the cats who had been trained for that purpose. Kenofer and the King teased her without mercy when the cub devoured every bird within reach and had to be tied securely to Tutankhamon's stool to keep him out of mischief. It was a gay and carefree outing which resulted in little game for the royal table. The very ducks seemed amused, their cries sounding like raucous, jeering laughter as they circled overhead, well out of reach.

Kenofer made an amusing sketch of the royal pair that day, the King in the act of drawing his bow, the Queen giving him an arrow with one hand while pointing out a fat duck with the other. As for the cub, he stood in disgrace by his master, a dripping tongue hanging from his mouth. Kenofer had early discovered that nothing pleased his King and Queen more than to have such glimpses of their daily life adorn the furniture and articles of beauty which were created in the royal workshops. Allowed the freedom of the palace, he made the most of his opportunities to capture the charm of the royal couple's life together. He drew the King as he came in from the garden with blue lotus blooms and mandrake fruit for the Queen. He showed her sitting on her favorite hassock, a fat, round, embroidered cushion brought by Tutankhamon from the East, leaning her elbow affectionately on the King's knee while he poured into her hand a new scent just distilled by the royal perfumer. He made sketches of the Queen's pet

monkey and the King's favorite slughi hounds and drew the King himself practicing archery, to be reproduced in gold upon the trappings of his chariot harness.

It was over two years before the King found time and inclination to leave the pleasures of Thebes for his promised visit to Kush. Hui had proved so efficient as Keeper of the Gates of the South that the moral effect of the King's presence was not needed. Horemheb, who made his headquarters in Memphis, had returned to Syria. He was policing the territory secured during Tutankhamon's first campaign, strengthening and training his reserve army, watching for an opportunity to initiate a fresh campaign against the Hittites. With irritating assurance they were settling in the northern portions of Syria, but Horemheb's name was becoming a byword among the peoples of the North and East, striking terror to the hearts of petty tribesmen who had been harassing Palestine and the border cities of the Empire. At home he was honored as Chief of the Royal Council, "Greatest of the Great, Mightiest of the Mighty, Great Lord of the People, King's Messenger at the Head of His Army to the South and the North, Chosen of the King, Presider over the Two Lands in Order to Carry on the Administration of the Two Lands, General of Generals of the Lord of the Two Lands."

In all Egypt contentment reigned. Priests were well pleased with their part of the spoils. The people felt confidence in Horemheb and admiration for their King, who was stretching into manhood, a clean-cut, handsome young God, with his fair and spirited Queen at his side. Only Ay was discontented with the turn of events, finding himself no longer needed as mediator between High Priest and King. Now and again Ankhsenamon caught the gaze fixed upon the King, sneering, malevolent. To her Ay was always protective and slyly affectionate, as if they shared some secret understanding.

With the coming of the third winter after his return from Syria, the old restlessness seized Tutankhamon once more. Ankhsenamon felt it and was troubled. Such peace and happiness had been hers during those years of companionship. She knew that the King's eyes were turned with longing toward Syria, and it was almost with relief that she heard of disturbing news from Nubia.

An uprising among the tribes had started a general feeling of unrest, and the King's Son of Kush had sent an urgent message requesting Tutankhamon to carry out his plan of visiting his southern domains. There was little danger of active rebellion, but it would be well for the black children to behold His Highness with their own eyes and to understand that Hui, King's Son of Kush, and the great King of the Two Lands were as brothers in friendship. Hui would have urged that the Queen accompany her husband, but under present conditions the country was unsafe for women.

Ankhsenamon was grateful for this diversion. She much preferred that Tutankhamon face the dangers of travel in the South rather than the hazards of another Asian campaign. As for herself, she was well content to remain at home, since Kenofer would accompany the King in her place and Tergen would see that they had every care.

Elaborate preparations were made for Tutankhamon's departure. Every type of throw-stick, spear, bow, and knife must go with him. Quantities of arrows were packed, to be placed later in the quivers of the hunting chariots which were being taken on barges together with the swiftest of the royal horses and the most intelligent of the hounds. The skilled craftsmen of Thebes vied with one another in designing bows which might meet with royal approval. One magnificent bow of honor was covered with sheet gold, decorated with fine filigree work, and richly adorned with precious stones. For use, however, Tutankhamon preferred others in his collection, inlaid

with ornamental barks and tipped with gold, but so beautifully balanced that it was a delight to draw them.

While the King kept a watchful eye on the making of his equipment, Ankhsenamon went often to the studio of Kenofer's brother. He was a grave, courteous man whose affliction had served to soften rather than embitter him. It was his pleasure to indulge her slightest whim and to evolve new designs for the enameled necklaces and wide bracelets she loved to wear. Some were copies in gold and jewels of the elaborate flower collars created by the Royal Garland Makers to be placed about the necks of guests at banquets in the palace. The Queen loved to watch the girls work, skillful fingers fastening leaves and blossoms to a background of papyrus in overlapping rows of fragile, fragrant petals.

A farewell hunt was planned shortly before the day set for departure, and at Ankhsenamon's insistence she was allowed to be present. At sunset she rode with the King across the plain, through the rocky reaches of the desert margin until they neared a cut in the eastern cliffs. Beyond that natural gateway lay a gully already filled with mauve shadows, and among the boulders was a water hole where, at close of day, beasts came from hill and desert to drink their fill.

This was part of the Royal Game Preserve, a favorite haunt of the nobles fond of sport. Numerous officials of the hunt had gathered there to await the King's arrival: Chief of the Hunters, Chief of the Hound Leaders, Chief of the Whips, Chief of the Chase. With them were dozens of beaters, lasso bearers, knife men, rope men, and trainers with packs of eager hounds held on leash. There were slughi hounds and swift, slender Berber greyhounds, as well as sturdier jackal dogs, hyena dogs, and wolf dogs, each suited by build and training to its particular task. Beaters with other hounds held in reserve spread nets across the entrance of the valley to prevent the escape of the game until after the King had had his sport.

At the entrance of the rugged valley, the Queen retired to her own chariot, which had been driven by Kenofer, and watched with interest while Tutankhamon adjusted his leather arm guard and tied the reins behind his loins that both hands might be free to wield his weapons.

At a word from the King the pack was loosed, to dash at a mad pace up the canyon walls which rose in tiers against a turquoise sky. Narrow, tortuous trails zigzagged their way across the face of the cliffs, and soon there came leaping into the canyon before the dogs' excited assault a strange assortment of game, sending a rattle of pebbles from beneath flying feet.

Watching the terrified plunging of the animals, Ankhsenamon was filled with pity. There were gazelles, mountain sheep, antelopes, jackals, hyenas, with here and there an oryx and an ibex. Alone, the King drove headlong into the oncoming herd of game, drawing his bow as the leather-tired wheels jolted over the uneven ground. Ankhsenamon marveled at his perfect balance, his dexterity in bracing his feet on the yielding floor of the light chariot, controlling the excited horses by the weight of his body against the reins, and at the same time wielding a bow many an older man could not have handled. It seemed impossible that a lad of eighteen could time his shots so perfectly that to right and left the animals fell almost without a struggle under his metal-tipped arrows. The dogs leaped upon them to complete the kill, and slaves ran to pick up the carcasses, carrying them back to lie in an imposing row for the Queen's inspection.

Sickened by the piteous cries of wounded creatures and the glazed eyes of the dead gazing up at her, Ankhsenamon turned away and tried to fix her attention on the darkening sky above the bluffs. She followed the line of the horizon, turning slowly to look back across the plain at the bands of orange and gold which still marked the sunset sky. Anxiously Kenofer studied her averted face.

“Shall we drive over to the water’s edge away from all this? The King will join us when he returns.”

The Queen shrugged her shoulders, eyes upon a flight of geese making a black V against the changing colors to the west. When she glanced back again, the nets had been removed and Tutankhamon was sweeping back to pursue the antelopes which had escaped into the open desert. His fellow huntsmen followed in his wake.

Taking Ankhsenamon’s gesture of indifference for consent, Kenofer drove the tense, quivering team slowly over the rough ground. A hedgehog waddled out of the way, and dark shapes with bright, peering eyes could be seen slinking among the boulders. The little lake was peaceful in the twilight, its waters glassy where it caught the reflection of a metallic sky. Silence, driven from the isolated valley, crept back to cover the retreat of frightened creatures to hill and desert.

Ankhsenamon, stepping from the chariot, walked to the horses’ heads and fondled their warm muzzles. It was strange that Tutankhamon, who loved horses and dogs, could delight in killing other beasts as harmless and as beautiful. The slim tawniness of the oryx with its long horns curving backward from a slender head, the swift movement of antelope springing across the desert, even the darting run of hares dodging pursuit, seemed to plead their right to life. She murmured lines of her father’s hymn:

“How manifold are the things which Thou hast made...

Thou hast created them for Thy heart when Thou wast alone.

Mankind, cattle, all manner of animals

All that are upon earth going on foot,

And as many as are aloft flying with their wings.”

A whimpering cry caught her attention and she wandered along the margin of the pool, searching the ground for signs of some wounded animal. Kenofer, unable to leave the horses, called sharply to her.

“Stray not out of sight, O Queen. The place is alive with prowling beasts!”

She paid no heed, but led by that plaintive call, followed a twisting trail until she rounded a boulder which jutted almost to the water’s edge and found herself in a sequestered spot where the pool formed a shallow cove. There on the ground lay a baby antelope which scrambled hastily to its feet at sight of her, though scarcely able to stand upon its wobbly legs.

Ankhsenamon dropped to her knees on the ground and remained motionless. The creature backed away until it bumped against a rock and stood regarding her with questioning eyes, its long ears tilted forward, looking far too heavy for the delicate, pointed face. The Queen made no sound. She heard Kenofer call again but she could not leave that baby there. She would take it home and keep it safe within her garden, as so many animals had been protected at Akhetaten.

Nose twitching, the little fellow was edging his way toward her, curiosity overcoming fear. Suddenly he stopped, lifted a startled muzzle, and then without warning plunged headlong into her very arms. She clasped the wriggling body close and looked sharply about her. Some animal must be near. Slowly she rose to her feet, trying to still the frightened struggles of her small captive. A few cautious steps backward brought her to the large boulder which shielded her from Kenofer’s sight. Her body shook with the thudding of her heart. She longed to cry aloud for Kenofer, but some half-remembered caution choked her. If only she could recall the tales that huntsmen told. Did one shout to frighten away prowling beasts or did one remain quiet so as not to attract attention? Frightened so recently, these animals should be intimidated; yet the smell of blood and the presence of

dead carcasses might already have attracted beasts of prey from the distant hills.

A third time Kenofer called, now with a note of alarm in his voice, and at that moment, just beyond the farther point of the cove, Ankhsenamon saw, crouched low among the rocks, a heavy, tawny figure flattened against the margin of the water hole to drink. Attracted by the commotion, he was inching his way along the trampled shallows until he could focus gleaming cat-eyes upon the white figure huddled less than the length of a vigorous spring beyond his reach. The cove was completely enclosed except for the strip of mud where the lion lay and the narrow path by which Ankhsenamon had entered. This path was only a few paces to her right, but each step would bring her closer to that watchful creature whose white teeth and dripping jaws were visible even in the gathering dusk. Vividly the sight of that cruel head brought to mind the day at Akhetaten when Tutankhamon had shot at his first lion. If only he were here to prove his aim as true!

A rattle of loose stones brought her fresh dismay. Kenofer must have left the horses. She knew him to be unarmed. If she made no sound, he might search elsewhere. In her heart she was sure what the King would bid her do. He would tell her to throw the baby antelope to the lion and dart to safety around the boulder. She sickened at the thought. The moist tip of a nose had nuzzled deep under her arm where the scent of the lion no longer reached it. The quivering body had ceased to struggle, warm in the safety of her embrace.

Steps were drawing nearer. Again Kenofer called her name. In the distance she could hear the yelp of dogs, the shouts of their trainers. The hunt was returning, but there was no one near enough to claim this coveted prey. Since the wholesale hunting of Amenhotep the Magnificent, few lions came as close as this to Thebes. Ankhsenamon made a move toward the pathway. The brute snarled. She dared not wait. Kenofer's voice was rough

with fear. The beast shifted his ground, tense, watchful. With a sudden lunge Ankhsenamon darted around the boulder. At the same moment the lion sprang, only to be met in mid-air by a spear hurled with terrific force. The leap fell short, and as the heavy body plunged with a splash, half in, half out of the water, the figure of a slave leaped upon the writhing beast, knife in hand.

Ankhsenamon did not wait to see the end of the struggle. Gasping with relief, she fell into the outstretched arms of Kenofer, who picked her up bodily, antelope and all, crushing her close as if the strength of his embrace could ensure her safety. With swift strides he carried her back to the chariot, murmuring broken endearments found in no Court formula of tribute to a Queen. His voice moved her strangely and she raised a reassuring hand to touch his face.

He explained how the horses had caught the scent of danger long before he had become alarmed. Their frantic plunging and his shouting of her name had brought Tergen. It was the slave who had caught sight of the telltale ripple widening on the pool's surface where the lion's muzzle had buried itself to drink.

"But for him you would be lying there beneath those cruel claws! Why did you not call, Small Bird? You knew that I would come."

"That is why I could not call. I did not dream how dear you were to me until I thought you might come unaware upon that snarling beast."

Gently he placed her in the chariot.

"Today a Hittite slave has served thee better than my love!" he said. "O Lady of the Two Lands, I would hold my love before thee as a shield for thy protection. I would lay it at thy feet as a carpet unrolling before thee to guide thy steps. I would wrap it about thee as a cloak against the storms of life."

Gravely she laid her hand upon the dark, bowed head. "Love and loyalty live side by side in thy heart, Kenofer, and their beauty is given form by the skill of thy fingers."

"It is the beauty I find in thee, so fair of countenance, so tender of soul." He touched the scrawny creature curled confidently against her warm young breast. "Even the wild things rejoice at thy coming. There is magic in thy touch. Would that I were the signet ring upon thy finger!"

Abruptly he turned away and rolled aside the stone which held the horses fast. The animals moved cautiously forward to the spot where Tergen grinned proudly at the mighty beast stretched on the ground at his feet. He had dragged it out of the water and part way along the path, but the inert body was too awkward for one man to handle. Kenofer clasped the youth in his arms, too moved for superficial words of gratitude. Tergen accepted the Queen's praise with frank pleasure, reluctantly consenting to leave the lion where it was until help could be brought.

At the entrance of the valley were clustered the huntsmen counting the kill. The King's chariot stood to one side, and Tutankhamon was bending over an exceptionally fine ibex with long, perfect horns.

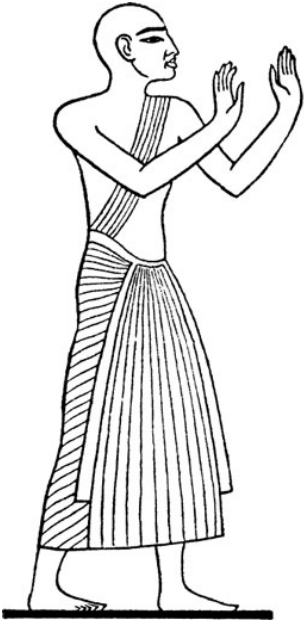
"Do not tell the King of my adventure," Ankhsenamon cautioned her escorts as they drew near the milling crowd of men and dogs, whose grotesque shadows were stretched across the cliffs by flaring torches. "Say only that Tergen saw the lion and killed it for our protection, else the King will be angry that we did not hold the beast at bay until he could come."

"The Queen would spare me the royal reprimand I deserve," Kenofer objected, "but Ankhsenamon's request is my command. On the journey to Nubia I promise to protect the King better than I have this day protected his Queen."

For a moment Ankhsenamon rested her cheek against the sleek head of the animal in her arms.

“I have no fear, Kenofer. This day thou hast become as the signet ring upon my finger, ever within the touch of my hand.”

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A Priest of Amon

CHAPTER XXV

“INAUSPICIOUS! IN AUSPICIOUS!”

DURING the months of Tutankhamon's absence in Nubia, the Queen was anxious and ill at ease. Her dreams were filled with visions of impending danger. She went through the gestures of her queenly duties in temple and palace with little heart for the colorful pageantry of Court life. Yet Ay found her unexpectedly aware of conditions in the city, of petty intrigues among the nobles and jealousies among the priests of different temples in the precinct. He marveled at her keenness, her grasp of matters calling for diplomacy. Her astuteness puzzled him, for when the King was at Court, she seemed to pay small heed to the more serious side of government.

In all her years in Thebes, Ankhsenamon had made few close friends among the ladies of the Court. The wives of the nobles from Akhetaten were for the most part older women, friends of her mother, whom she still addressed with the deference of youth for age. They spoke to her of

Nefertiti and Akhenaten when she gathered them about her now and then in the quiet of the garden. With no alien Theban ears to overhear, they chatted freely, encouraged by some subtle change in the Queen's manner to speak without restraint. With a smile, a gesture, a word, she seemed to create again the atmosphere of simple hospitality and friendliness which were so familiar in her father's Court.

From time to time messages were brought from Tutankhamon, describing the country through which he passed, the weird ceremonies of the tribes which came to welcome him with their wild clamor, the beauty of the animals so plentiful in those regions. He told of hunting beasts whose very names were unfamiliar to Ankhsenamon. At one place he erected two red granite stones to mark his passing. He also viewed with satisfaction the progress of the temple he had ordered built at Faras in honor of Hui, the King's Son of Kush.

"He shall be a god in this land of Kush, even as I am held a god in the hearts of my people. He is as a brother to me, and his spirit is indeed that of a divine king. These troublesome tribes are learning to regard him with awe and adoration. Their fear has been heightened by my coming. They marvel at my marksmanship. Kenofer grows weary of killing. He is painting a chest of wood with pictures of my campaign in Syria and my hunting. It is a marvel of skill and coloring, unlike anything he has ever done. You will be proud of the artist and of the model as well!"

After nearly a month there came another scroll, more brief. It stated simply that Tutankhamon would remain away until Hui's temple at Faras in Nubia was completed. Ay brought the official message to the Queen, a sleek smile playing about his thin lips.

She felt sure that he knew more than he had told her, and that the knowledge was peculiarly pleasing to him. There was no personal letter for

her. She wondered at the King's neglect. Kenofer had not written at all, but she knew his silence to be a self-imposed penance for unguarded speech.

Menace seemed to hang over the land of Egypt in those closing days of Payni. The sky was the color of damp clay. Clouds hung in black masses over the Arabian mountains, and a distant rumbling struck terror to the hearts of the people. Magicians muttered, "Inauspicious! Inauspicious! Go not forth! He who is born on this day will die in childhood."

The Queen consulted them reluctantly, driven by growing fear. Would her second Wise Little One be born on such a day of darkness and disaster? The magicians shook their heads dubiously, consulting the sacred books. The priests, too, held converse with the God and bowed their heads in sorrowful silence. The omens showed no heir of Tutankhamon on the throne, no son destined to grow to manhood. Perhaps it was too soon to know the pleasure of the God. In a month or so—but Ankhsenamon could not wait. She must have peace of mind. She went to the temple to confront the High Priest. There was a covert threat in his exaggerated courtesy.

"It may be that Amon, the Good God, is still wroth with the offspring of Nefertiti and the Heretic of Akhetaten. It may be His wish that no male child be the issue of this union between two in whose veins flow that tainted blood."

"What have we done to offend the Good God? The deeds of Tutankhamon must be pleasing in his sight. Never have I done aught of violence toward any person. If Amon is good, why does he threaten the life of an unborn child?"

"You question the wisdom, the justice of Amon?" The deep voice echoed accusingly through the pillared temple. "Yet you ask me why the Good God is displeased! Enduring is the wrath of Amon and not to be assuaged by lip service of one who once denied His sovereignty. Seek not

to win Him by arrogance nor by bribes of paltry offerings. Supreme must He rule, or His curse will fall on all who doubt His might.”

To Ay went the Queen, seeking interpretation of the High Priest’s open threat. Far more terrifying than the distant rumbling of a god’s wrath had been the menace in a High Priest’s tone. For some reason the powers behind the throne did not want Tutankhamon to have an heir. If one should be born to her, be it girl to carry the succession or boy to wield the scepter, the child would not be safe. Too well Ankhsenamon knew the devious ways in which a doom pronounced by Amon’s priests was carried out.

Guardedly at first, and then more openly, she questioned Ay. His evasions were a sinister echo of the priest’s words. She must not be alarmed. It was an unpropitious time for everyone. All omens pointed to disastrous happenings. Amon was angered and must be appeased. It was said by some that He sought a sacrifice of human life. Of course, the soothsayers might have misread the sacred veining on the liver of the sacrificial bull, but such instances were rare. Their art was the accumulated wisdom of the ages. It might not be the unborn child of Akhenaten’s daughter whose life Amon sought, but it would be well for the Queen to do all in her power to appease the Great God’s wrath.

Ankhsenamon met his faded eyes unflinchingly. Perhaps after all these men merely sought to frighten her into doing as they wished. Only Ay could tell her what new power the priests desired.

“Tell me what it is they want, and I will do my best to satisfy them,” she said slowly.

There was small comfort in Ay’s lean face; yet when at last he suggested certain privileges which might well be accorded the temple authorities, she could have laughed aloud in sheer relief. She knew what absolute power the priesthood asked, but would have granted them even more to safeguard her child.

Almost at once Ankhsenamon felt the difference in the attitude of the priests. Omens looked more propitious in the temple, and her offerings were apparently more pleasing to the Great God. So said Ay and the High Priest. The Queen's lips curled scornfully at such transparent triumph, but her spirit found some measure of repose.

Ankhsenamon now spent most of her time within the royal apartments or in the warm seclusion of the garden. The strain had told upon her, and she looked drawn and pale. Ay was solicitous but cheerful. Only Khataka watched her with deep anxiety. A familiar pallor had laid a waxen mask upon the pinched contours of her face. Blue shadows lurked behind the broad lines of kohl which Khataka drew with care each morning. In the mirror the Queen studied her face, touching her dry lips daintily with rouge. No amount of oil seemed to soften their roughness.

"Khataka, I must not look like this when the King arrives. My hair is lifeless. Perhaps it would be better if I wore a wig. He must not think me ill, nor yet alarmed."

"Then let the Queen be not alarmed, else she will be ill," Khataka answered gently.

The Queen sighed. "I would that fears could be so easily banished. If only the King were here to mend my courage with his confidence! Even if my baby lives at birth, I shall fear for its safety every day of its small life. I like not men who seek to command while seeming to obey. Methinks they merely let us play at ruling, Khataka. For myself I do not mind, but for a child of mine I see no happiness in Thebes."

As she spoke, the door opened to admit tiring women bringing fresh raiment for the Queen's pleasure. Behind them came others bearing caskets of jewels from which Her Majesty was to select her adornment for the morning. Idly Ankhsenamon turned over the necklaces and collars, finding in each some reminder of Kenofer. From among the rings she selected the

signet she had worn the day of the farewell hunt. It did not slip on her finger with the usual ease. Her hands were oddly plump these days. She sucked the offending knuckle and forced the circlet of gold into place.

Khataka, in answer to a signal from the guard at the door, had slipped unnoticed from the room while Ankhsenamon selected her finery. The Queen did not discover her absence until a pair of embroidered sandals was fastened on her feet. The strap bound her instep, and she spoke to the attendant in charge of the footgear of the Queen, demanding another pair. These, too, proved uncomfortable, and Ankhsenamon called sharply for Khataka.

"She will return at any moment," the frightened attendant explained. "I believe her brother asked to see her."

"Her brother?" The Queen's voice was edged with sudden alarm. "Think well before you speak. He is far from here in Nubia with the King."

"May the Queen of the Two Lands forgive my boldness, I saw him in the hallway," the girl insisted.

"Then bring him to me at once!" The Queen clapped her hands for the guard and dismissed her maids with an impatient nod. "Why does he keep me waiting? He must bring letters from the King."

"Not letters, Lady of the Two Lands, for the King himself is scarcely a day's journey distant," Tergen said from the doorway, prostrating himself upon the floor. "My master has sent me to warn you of Tutankhamon's coming though His Majesty did not wish you to be told."

"Kenofer was ever thoughtful! But I fear, Tergen, you have risked the anger of the King. His Majesty is well?"

"Not so well as one could wish, but out of danger. In the south of Kush there are swamps which breed deadly maladies. For all our care His Majesty fell victim to one of them. A slow fever has consumed his flesh.

My master felt that you should not see the King without some warning, lest you think him far worse than he is.”

“A fever! He is no longer in danger?” Ankhsenamon asked anxiously. “And Kenofer, did he, too, contract this wretched plague?”

“No, he has kept well. While Tutankhamon took me with him to the hunt, my master busied himself with a painted casket commemorating the triumphs of our Lord of Valor. Since His Majesty’s illness, however, he has been in constant attendance.”

“It is difficult to think of Tutankhamon laid low; he is always full of energy and life. Yet it is difficult to think of Egypt’s skies as anything but blue, and see them now! Is it thus they look in Hatti when water pours upon the earth from some hidden reservoir of the gods?”

Tergen’s glance sought the patch of sky revealed by the high window above the Queen’s head. He nodded soberly. “It was foretold by the soothsayer of a distant tribe that the rain gods of the South were angered because Tutankhamon made offerings to Amon and not to them. They threatened to pursue the King even to the doors of his palace.”

“Ah, no! Surely that woe will not be added to the ills foretold for us. Yet perhaps the black seer spoke the truth. It is said that once in every hundred years the heavens open until the Nile seems to pour its waters from the sky. My old nurse used to tell us that once when her mother was a child, the houses melted in the rain and all the streets were rivers. If one is to believe prophecies of the seers, this month of Payni fairly bristles with unpropitious days! The heavens are no longer friendly. The winds are wrong. Weird vapors are seen to rise from the surface of the river at night. I fear the King chose an evil time for his homeward journey.”

During the morning a sullen sun moved sluggishly across the sky. The King’s apartments were put in readiness, for the Queen was sure he would arrive before another day. She found it difficult to pass the time. There was

a tense expectancy even in the garden, as if the very earth were waiting for some decision of the gods. The wide waters of the lake were ruffled by a southwest wind, and a long-dormant sense of adventure stirred the Queen. She ordered a small barge brought to the landing place, and with her companions, settled herself on the cushions piled beneath the gaily colored canopy.

Reluctantly the blacks rowed the boat far out on the broad expanse of water. The world had an unfamiliar look. On the horizon a small cloud no larger than a man's hand detached itself from the dark masses blotting out the summits of the distant mountains. Rapidly it rode with the wind, growing larger and larger until it threatened to engulf the whole sky. Breathlessly Ankhsenamon watched, and the chattering maidens were silenced by the ominous beauty of it. Nearer and nearer to the sun it came, and as it reached the margins of the blazing disk, a peal of thunder shook the heavens with a deafening impact.

The Nubians fell flat upon their faces, letting the barge drift where the wind willed. Moaning in terror, they uttered weird cries, summoning deities of their own land to their assistance. The women huddled together under the frail awning, which offered slight protection from the drenching rain. The Queen, deaf to all protest, stood on the prow of the boat, head thrown back, arms held wide as if she would feel herself a part of that terrific struggle in the skies.

Faster than the thirsty ground could drink, the waters poured from the darkened heavens. Jagged streaks of light darted through the clouds, spears hurled by a wrathful sun. Thunder rolled like giant drums, then burst overhead with a deafening report. The women buried their heads. Frantic guards were shouting from the shore, motioning for the boatmen to bring the barge to the landing place. The terrified Nubians struggled to their feet, mumbling incantations as they bent to their oars. Khataka, unable to coax

the Queen to come within the doubtful shelter of the canopy, wrapped her in a heavy skin rug and stood beside her, holding the awkward cloak in place.

Men steadied the prow as the barge touched the shore, and Tergen carried the Queen to the palace through a garden flattened to the ground as if by flails. Three hours, four hours, the storm lasted, then at sunset passed on its way. From the covered portico at the back of the palace, Ankhsenamon and Khataka watched the departing clouds vanish in the northeast, while the sun in all its glory burst triumphant from the conflict. The rolling clouds reflected the colors, and the sun itself was caught in a net of gold which tried in vain to hold it back. For a moment the Aten smiled a benediction on the Queen, then vanished beneath the horizon, leaving a sky streaked with crimson.

“The hostile rain god of the southern people has been vanquished for another hundred years,” the Queen smiled. “The Aten was his undoing!”

The same thought dwelt in the mind of Tutankhamon as he stood on the prow of the royal dahabiyeh which had met him some distance up the Nile. The storm swept down the river valley, cutting across the country he had left and pursuing him like an evil omen. The elaborate cabin of the boat was large enough to furnish ample shelter, and when the rain fell in such blinding torrents that the pilot could scarcely keep his course, the King retired to the couch where he had spent most of his days since leaving Kush.

With the passing of the storm, he went again on deck, determined to miss no beauty of a scene which thrilled his soul as did the noise and rush of battle. At his insistence the boat pressed on toward Thebes. On every side was devastation—crops laid low, gardens ruined. A bewildered moan seemed to rise from the land.

Already water from the barren mountains was finding its way across the plains, cutting deeper the old wadies and rushing in muddy torrents through

village streets. Houses in the poorer districts had a sodden look, like mud pies made too moist to hold their shape. People were wading about, belongings in hand, searching for some dry spot where they could lay their goods.

“The soothsayer of the Nubians was right. His angry god has indeed pursued me even to the door of my own palace!” the King said ruefully. “Yet always Amon conquers His enemy.”

“Always the Aten protects His children,” Kenofer answered.

“You are right, my friend. Amon is like a comrade in war, a powerful ally who strikes terror to the hearts of our enemies. But the real blessings flow from the disk of Aten upon this land. It is He who never fails to welcome me home. I count upon Him as I do upon Ankhsenamon’s smile. Tell me, Kenofer, what faith is yours? You follow the ritual of Amon as I do. Does it mean to you no more than it does to me, a duty imposed by the great line of Kings I represent?”

“For my inner peace, only the teachings of Akhenaten, thy father, seem to have lasting meaning,” Kenofer answered slowly. “The love of wife and children, the loyalty of friends, the privilege of service, the gift of beauty—all of those the Aten placed within our reach when He gave us a few short years to live. Without the warmth of sunlight there would be no life. To the Giver of Warmth I owe my worship and my faith.”

“Yet you have neither wife nor children. You give your friendship to but few. The joy of service and the gift of beauty, are they recompense for all the labor of living? Life has given me so much and you so little. You have neither riches nor adventure. I have both. I can build temples and erect statues in my own likeness that I may not be forgotten. The work of your hands does not even bear your name.”

Kenofer smiled. “The one I love is just as fair as any you can claim. You can buy beauty. I have it for the taking—all the world can offer. You are

tied to your throne. I am free to roam as far as temptation calls me. You must fill your life with doing, and eventually life is done. I fill mine with learning, and of learning there is no end, even in death. You receive homage. I give it. Am I not the richer since I first possess the gifts I lay at your feet?"

"I have no answer to your wisdom, Kenofer. Surely he is the richer who has the more to give. I have never thought of life except to love the adventure of it, but now I find my mind full of questions. That sunset—before I can capture it, the colors have changed. You hold beauty in your heart and give it back to people with your hand. I look at beauty, but it slips through my memory like water through my fingers." He sighed. "It is even so with Ankhsenamon's smile. I try to remember how she looks, but only her voice comes to me. Often when I was ill, I fancied I could hear her speaking. When I called, she answered, but I could never see her face."

"You love her very deeply," Kenofer said.

"One has more time to love when one is ill," the King replied with youthful candor.

"Or when one has only a dream to love," the artist added.

Tutankhamon laid an affectionate hand upon his friend's shoulder. The river turned, and as the boat swung around, they seemed to be traveling into the sunset.

"At sunrise we depart, at sunset we find our way home. I am weary, Kenofer. For a time I should like to forget that I am King. Tell me, who is this lady of your dreams? I had thought you loved no one except your Queen." He spoke half teasingly, but the question demanded an answer.

For a moment Kenofer was silent. Then the dark head lifted proudly. "It is true. I have never loved anyone except my Queen."

Something in that low voice brought Tutankhamon's eyes to his friend's face. He studied the lean, brown features: the penetrating eyes withdrawn

under heavy, slanting brows, the straight nose, the sensitive lips. It was a contradictory face, full of strength which stood firm guard over the tenderness lurking in eyes and mouth.

“You, too, love her very deeply,” Tutankhamon said at last, tightening his grip on Kenofer’s shoulder. “I am glad that it is so. She needs your love, and I need to know that you are here to watch over her—and over me,” he added, smiling. “You have saved me from this accursed fever by your care. Come, let us go. Dusk is falling, and Thebes is just around the bend.”

Kenofer was not so sure that he had succeeded in saving his King. The boy was but a shadow of himself. He seemed to have grown taller during those days and nights of intermittent fever, and his gaunt frame had lost its well-muscled symmetry. Hollows lay beneath his cheek bones, and the challenging light had faded from his eyes.

To Ankhsenamon, seeing him for the first time in several months, he bore a painful likeness to Akhenaten, a likeness which had hitherto been hidden by boyish contours of face and figure. He had the same sharp line of out-thrust jaw, the same full lips, drawn now into drooping lines by unaccustomed illness. She sought to cheer him by stories of the happenings during his absence, but her words only added to the gravity of his mood. Reluctantly she told him of her interviews with the High Priest and with Ay. He frowned in quick anger.

“They go too far! They knew of my illness and no doubt hoped I would not live to see Thebes again.”

“They knew you were ill, and did not tell me?” Ankhsenamon was finding a clue to Ay’s behavior. “When you sent word that you would remain for the opening of the temple, was it then they knew?”

The King nodded. “I did not want you to be alarmed. Each time the fever abated, I thought the disease had run its course. Ay knew how ill I

was. What a disappointment it must have been to him when I appeared as full of vigor as ever!”

The description scarcely fitted the emaciated youth who supported himself on one of the many walking sticks he had brought from Kush. He had always collected them, but now they served an unwelcome necessity. Two in particular he showed to Ankhsenamon with great pride: one bore on its curved handle the ivory figure of a bound Nubian, while its companion staff held a bearded Syrian captive, symbolizing his power over the peoples of the East.

“Tutankhamon never fails to defeat his enemies at home and abroad,” he declared. “The Procession of Welcome shall take place at once as the High Priest has ordained, and I shall lead it!”

Ankhsenamon drew the King down beside her on a low couch. “You are far from well and should have at least a month of rest and care. Tell the High Priest that the ceremony must be postponed until you are yourself again. There is plenty of time.”

The King smiled at her fondly, pulling her within the circle of his arm. “Lady of Diadems, there is no time to lose. This peculiar malady seizes you as a terrier worries a rat. It shakes you until your very bones rattle, then drops you into a brazier of living fire. Not all the charms and herbs of medicine men can save you from that consuming heat. When it has passed, your skin is parched a sickly yellow. You are worn and weary, caring little whether you live or die. Just now I am somewhat rested from my last struggle with that Kushite madness. How long before another overtakes me, no one knows. While I have the strength, I must convince Ay and these grasping priests that I hold the reins of royalty with a firm hand. They dare not threaten the safety of a royal heir while Tutankhamon sits upon the throne!” Exhausted by his own vehemence, he laid his cheek against her hair and mussed the tightly curled tresses with a fond and clumsy hand.

“You have missed me?” he asked as she relaxed against his shoulder.

“Never have I missed you in quite the same way,” she admitted. “Always before I have had Kenofer to advise me. This time I had no one. Never before have I been actually afraid, but, oh, my dearest, I would rather have no babies than to have them born to intrigue and to danger!”

“We are all born to danger, but usually the greatest danger comes when we expect it least. Now we are forewarned, and there is nothing to fear. We will send messengers to Horemheb, that he may know the course of events. He will return to Egypt when it grows cold in the mountain passes of Palestine. Until then we must keep our heads high, admit no weakness, show no fear either for each other or for the Wise Little One.”

“But you are so thin, so quiet, so unlike yourself. How can I pretend to feel no dread?”

“The fever may come again, but in time it will pass. Let me see you smile. I missed that smile in those long, dark hours. Promise me that if the fever comes, you will not leave me. Sit where I can watch your face. When I was ill, I could not remember how you looked. It is lonely when you cannot remember the one you love.”

She threw her arms about him. “I shall never leave you,” she whispered. “That I promise you, Beloved. Whenever you open your eyes, I shall be there.” It was a promise gladly made but dearly kept.

The procession to celebrate the safe return of Pharaoh from the southern districts of the Empire took place according to schedule the following day. In spite of Ankhsenamon’s protest and Kenofer’s insistent urging that he be carried in the state palanquin, the King insisted upon driving his chariot as usual from the palace to the distant halls of Karnak. He was very gay as attendants put the finishing touches to his costume. On his head he wore the great gold headdress with its two lofty feathers, like that on his colossus at

Karnak, and the lines of his emaciated body were hidden under a weight of jeweled collars, necklaces, and wide armlets of gold.

A new dignity seemed to have come to him during his absence, and as he drove his spirited bays through the palace gate, the crowds lining the streets shouted in a frenzy of admiration and devotion. Ay followed behind with the other dignitaries of the Court. He smiled grimly as he watched the gallant figure which stood so straight in the Chariot of State, its glittering curved front covered with designs showing the triumph of Pharaoh over his enemies. Ay was not deceived by the young King's courage. Well he knew that there was one enemy which few Egyptian men conquer in the land of Kush.

Ankhsenamon, waiting at the palace, paced up and down the terrace, trying to focus her mind on the work of the gardeners busy repairing the ravages of the storm.

"My Queen is not well," Khataka said, pleading with her to rest. "It will not help the King to find you exhausted when he returns. The Court Physician has warned you. O my Lady of the Two Lands, please do not risk a second tragedy!"

Ankhsenamon turned suddenly and looked into Khataka's pleading face. Slowly she held out her hand.

"I know what is in your mind, Khataka. It is in mine as well. My hands, my feet—they were like this once before, and the Court Physician could do nothing. In my heart I know the priests of Amon are right: no heir of Tutankhamon, no grandchild of Akhenaten is destined to sit upon the throne of Egypt. But the King must not know. Kenofer has told me that this false sense of strength His Majesty has today comes always before the fever. If that is true, he will need me. Our first thought must be of him."

There was no evidence of the King's need when the royal procession disembarked at the river's edge and started back toward the palace. Special

guards had been stationed to hold the crowds in check, and still the runners had to push their way through people swarming into the main thoroughfares from the narrow streets on either side. Ankhsenamon, watching the King's approach from a balcony, saw him touch the horses with his whip and give them free rein as they started up the avenue toward the palace gate. Heads up, scarlet plumes streaming, they broke into a run. The King balanced himself in the swift-moving chariot with all the old familiar assurance. Catching sight of Ankhsenamon, he smiled and lifted a triumphant arm in greeting. For a moment it was as if all her fears had been but a passing storm and this the sunset promising a radiant morrow.

Into the great hall the King strode, and caught the Queen in his arms. His eyes glittered and his cheek was hot against hers, but his voice was clear as he turned to dismiss the breathless courtiers who had followed in the wake of that triumphal progress through the city. He lifted his head proudly as he met the penetrating gaze of Ay.

"I shall have no further need of you today nor for some time to come. I have been too long away from the Queen, who is not well. I shall devote myself to her until she is herself again. Do not disturb us with petty affairs of state, but see that the instructions I have given are carried out at once. The statue of myself to be made in gray granite must be completed in record time. I shall depend upon you, Ay, to go in person to see that the work is started. When you return, there are many things to be settled between us. For the present they can wait."

Ay bowed low, hiding a frown as the Court officials exchanged meaning glances. The quarry from which the gray granite must be secured was located in the back country many miles from Thebes. Ay would of necessity be absent for some time on such a mission, and all were aware of the King's intent in sending a high official to do what would usually be delegated to an overseer of public works.

The King accepted the tall staff handed him by an attendant, and walked firmly down the corridor leading to the royal apartments, Ankhsenamon at his side. Once inside the door, he dismissed his personal guard with a gesture and stood for a moment, eyes closed, swaying slightly as he reached with groping fingers for the Queen.

“Call Kenofer,” he muttered through clenched teeth. “He knows what must be done.”

A waiting slave sped away to do his bidding. Tutankhamon opened his eyes, a wry smile twisting lips blue beneath their rouge.

“It has come, Lady of my Heart, but I do not mind. At least the curse of Kush waited until I told the world that Tutankhamon is still King of Egypt.”





The Goddess Nephthys

CHAPTER XXVI

SMALL BIRD CALLS

“HER MAJESTY must have sleep.” The Court Physician was insistent.

“The Queen must think of her own health.” The ladies-in-waiting were deeply concerned.

“My lady must look rested when the King opens his eyes.” Kenofer alone could induce Ankhsenamon to snatch a few hours’ sleep. Watching by her side through the long nights and days, he knew the only argument that could reach her. “Tutankhamon must not know how ill he is. Only your clear-eyed, smiling face can reassure him.”

“He asked me to stay here—he could not remember—” she murmured confusedly, stumbling to her feet from the stool where she sat within reach of the King’s restless fingers. With the docility of exhaustion she allowed Kenofer to lead her to Khataka in the next room. “You will call me if he

stirs?" Ankhsenamon did not need the reassurance of his answer. Almost before her head had fitted itself to the cool hollow of the alabaster pillow, the Queen was asleep.

Much of the time Tutankhamon tossed and talked in wild delirium, but there were intervals when he lay awake, content to have Ankhsenamon there where he could watch the curving line of scarlet lips, the luminous eyes, the arched brows carefully painted for his deception. In the shadow of a curled wig the pallor of her cheeks was lost, and she seemed confident, serene.

Gradually as the days passed, the fever abated and Tutankhamon slept quietly, dark hair damp against his temples. It was then that Kenofer dared to hope. He watched the slow, regular breathing of the King and turned to Ankhsenamon with a smile.

"It is safe to leave him now. He will sleep for many hours."

"And so must you." The Queen laid a hand upon his arm. "Tutankhamon will need you strong and well beside him when he wakes. The attendants will rouse us if he calls."

It was sunset when they met again at the King's bedside. He was awake, but some subtle change had come over his gaunt face. Gone was the will power which had made his fight against the fever so courageous. He smiled faintly when he saw the two of them. In answer to some entreaty which lighted his sunken eyes, Ankhsenamon bent close to catch his whispered words.

"You sent for Horemheb?"

"Yes. He should be here at any time."

"Now that Ay has returned, be watchful." His lips scarcely moved.

"Ay—returned?" Ankhsenamon glanced at Kenofer. Ay had not been at Court since departing for the granite quarry at the King's command.

“He came—just now. He brought a potion—sent by the King’s Son of Kush. It is an herb not known—in Egypt.” The weary whisper drifted into silence. Tutankhamon slept.

“A remedy brought by Ay! O Kenofer, I like it not!” In alarm Ankhsenamon questioned attendants, interviewing them one by one in an adjoining room. When had Ay come? Had he been alone with the King? The Court Physician had accompanied him?

Reassured as to that, the Queen knew a moment’s quick relief, but Kenofer’s face bore such a stricken look her confidence was short lived.

“An herb unknown to Egypt?” he repeated. “What can the Court Physician understand of its powers, its effect? I should never have left the King!”

“O Kenofer, it is I who am to blame. I promised to stay beside him. I was so sure he was out of danger—so sure!”

“No doubt he is out of danger.” Kenofer recovered himself at sight of the Queen’s frightened face. “The King sleeps, and it is sleep which will mend his weary body and mind. Hui’s potion may be more powerful than the brews concocted by the learned men of Egypt.”

“More powerful for evil!” the Queen cried.

“We must not let our imaginations play us false,” he said firmly. “We have no proof.”

“No proof!” she echoed bitterly. “O Kenofer, should the King die, we would not need proof!”

If Ay’s medication had any evil effect on the patient, it was not at once evident. He awoke from sleep refreshed, and lifted a transparent hand to wipe away the tears from Ankhsenamon’s cheeks as she bent to lay her lips against his forehead.

“Do not weep,” he said. “Thou hast had a long vigil, Rest of my Soul. I shall never again forget thy face. I have seen it for the first time in all its

beauty, here beside me through the hours of darkness. Go now and rest. See that she sleeps, Kenofer. I place her in thy keeping.” His thin fingers closed on Kenofer’s hand. “Hui’s potion brings sleep without dreams and waking without pain. I am at peace.”

Again the King drifted into oblivion. With difficulty the Court Physician roused him for another dose of the mysterious herb. The day passed, two days, three. Then came a time when even the sound of Ankhsenamon’s voice could not reach the King across the silence of sleep.

For Tutankhamon, Lord of Valor, there would be no waking in that narrow room where the alabaster lotus lamp shed its soft, white light. For Ankhsenamon, Lady of his Delight, there would be sorrow past enduring save for the memory of his parting words. For Kenofer, his Brother in Friendship, there would be only the consolation of service to the two he loved, the living and the dead.

Ankhsenamon lay on her couch, sick in heart and body. Soon they would come: the Court Physician to shake his head over her and mumble impotent spells, the same women from the temple who once before had attended their unfortunate Queen at the birth of a still-born child. Grief, fear, pain beset her with impartial fury, but even in her anguish one thought persisted: that herb of Kush—how potent it had proved to be! Whence had it come?

With sudden determination she sent for the Royal Scribe. He came into her chamber reluctantly, dreading to intrude upon her grief. Yes, it was true that messages and gifts had come from Kush just after Ay’s return from the quarries. A personal letter to the Queen had been left unopened until she should care to see it. Penamon brought the scroll at once. Hurriedly Ankhsenamon scanned the formal compliments, the expressions of regret that the King’s visit to Nubia had made him ill, the hope that he would soon recover his full strength. One line held her eye:

“Would that I could send some magic potion to restore His Majesty’s health. But the wise men of this land and even those from the countries south of Kush tried every known remedy and charm when the King was here.”

She reread the words slowly. All too easily had she found the answer to her question. Ay, not Hui, had provided the King’s last sleeping draught.

Dismissing all attendants save Khataka, she asked for writing materials.

“There is no time to lose,” she said. “Khataka, what can I do? Egypt must have a King, and that right speedily. If Horemheb does not come soon, I shall never be able to hold the throne alone!” She choked back her tears. “I will write again to Horemheb and tell him what has taken place. You must see that the letter goes at once. Send Tentamun. He is to be trusted, but let no one see you give him the message. I count on your loyalty, Khataka. I can depend on no one else!”

Khataka did the Queen’s bidding with reluctance only because the errand took her from Ankhsenamon’s side for an hour. In the days which followed, she refused to leave her mistress for a moment. Yet necessity and a growing dread of what the future might hold gave the Queen unbelievable vitality in spite of the loss of her second daughter. She had no time for leisurely convalescence. Following Tutankhamon’s gallant lead, she, too, must prove that Egypt still had a ruler, one strong enough to rule even in the face of catastrophe.

Ay, misled by her rapid recovery, came daily to her apartments, where the rules of mourning decreed that she remain a virtual prisoner. He marveled at her courage, her physical fortitude. He was moved to wonder if perhaps her attachment to Tutankhamon had been less deep than the world supposed. Certainly she was capable and alert in dealing with affairs of state, when he had thought to find her crushed to feminine helplessness by grief and pain.

Watching his crafty gestures of sympathy for her and regret for the King's untimely death, Ankhsenamon fancied she could read the thoughts behind his dissembling. She accepted his elaborate verbal tributes to the King in silence. With difficulty she checked the accusations which crowded her lips. The compliments he heaped upon her she heard with disgust which gradually changed to suspicion.

"Why should he seek to woo me with personal praise?" she asked Khataka when for the third time he had spent an hour telling of his admiration for her even as a child.

"Perchance Her Majesty's own words have answered the question," Khataka suggested shrewdly. "Methinks he woos in good earnest."

"Khataka! You know not what you say! The mere thought is sickening!"

"Yet the Queen herself has said Egypt must have a King and that quickly. Ay considers himself the one best suited for the post, with General Horemheb away."

"His ambitions might lead him to aim so high," the Queen admitted reluctantly, "but what possible claim—" She stopped short.

"As husband of the Queen he would need no further claim." Khataka supplied her unspoken thought.

Ankhsenamon sat for a moment in troubled silence.

"In seventy days the body of the King will be embalmed—nay, in forty, since thirty have already passed. Does Ay think to usurp Tutankhamon's power, before the King is even safe within his House of Eternity? O Khataka, a woman is so helpless! Why can I not mourn in peace my husband and my baby? Why must Ay come snatching at my throne?"

"If the Queen would not have a husband thrust upon her, she must choose one for herself. Is there no one of royal birth who might be placed upon the throne?"

Ankhsenamon shuddered. "I cannot bear the thought! To marry without love when I have known such happiness—" She sprang to her feet and walked restlessly back and forth through the royal apartments, touching lingeringly the alabaster lamps, the couches, the inlaid chests which she and the King had shared so joyously.

"No one else shall ever have them!" she cried. "They are his, all of them, for the use of his beloved Ka. The treasures from Akhetaten, too, shall go with him, and the heirlooms dear to Amenhotep the Magnificent and Tiye: the beaded footstools of bound captives, the thrones, the chairs, the boxes—all and more than he can need. If some usurper is to seize the throne, his touch shall not desecrate the objects we have loved. Why could we not have shared more years, at least as many as Nefertiti and Akhenaten did?"

There was no answer to her cry. She returned to sit disconsolate upon the fat round hassock beside the white chair where Tutankhamon had so loved to rest.

"If only I could talk to Khepri, perhaps he would advise me. He is devoting every moment to the making of the gold masks, the great shrines, the jewels for the King. Everything must be beautiful in the tomb." She pressed the back of her hand against her lips to still their quivering. Her heart ached for Khepri. She had not seen him since her illness. His place had been in the royal workshops where he could ease his pain in labor for the friend he had loved, the King he had served.

Khataka was restringing a necklace, the beads spread out before her in intricate patterns on the floor. Now she looked up curiously.

"In your country the King must be of royal birth?"

"It is better so."

"Then why does not Your Majesty send for a prince from some foreign land? Egypt is powerful, and many countries must seek alliances by

marriage.”

“It is true. Many foreign princesses have come in the past to Pharaoh’s harem, but I know of no prince who has been made King.” Ankhsenamon considered the matter.

“In the past perhaps there was no need. Now there is. You must have a King, a strong one who will curb the ambitions of old men and priests. Surely some neighboring monarch has a son who would be glad to share your throne.”

“Horemheb might know of one, but no reply has come to my messages, and I dare not wait. The King of Hatti has sons. One visited my father’s Court when I was small. What are they like, Khataka? Are they kind and intelligent as your brother is?”

“I cannot say, except that Arandas, the one who traveled with his tutor, is by far the handsomest to look upon. Would your people accept the son of an enemy as King?” she asked doubtfully.

“My father called no man his enemy, and he held that particular youth in high esteem. With Arandas beside me, I would have courage to feed Ay his herb of Kush to prove his own innocence! It would give me particular delight to select a husband Ay would hate. I remember well when the Hittite Prince came to Court. Ay declared him to be a spy, but Horemheb admired him. Father said he would not mind if a daughter of his were the wife of such a man.” She sat quietly, striving to recall her father’s exact words. It was as if his voice spoke across the years: “A daughter of mine could do far worse than marry that young man, but I would rather see him in the Egyptian Court as her husband than send her to a Hittite Court as his wife!”

“Khataka, it is an omen!” she cried. “The Hittite Prince admired my father and his teachings. He would have courage to defy the priests of Amon and Ay as well. I shall write King Shubbiluliuma, and ask Kenofer to

see that the message is safely delivered. Ay must not get wind of this. If we make haste, there will just be time.

“Go to your brother, Khataka, but let no one suspect that you have particular reason for seeking him out. Bid him tell his master that I am much improved in health and would inspect the sketches of the three golden shrines which are to surround the King’s sarcophagus. Kenofer must ask permission to see me, and give no one the impression that it is I who send for him.”

Impatiently she awaited Khataka’s return, trying to fix her mind on the problem of wording a request of international importance so that it would seem to come from an official source. She tried in vain to recall the terms of the letter in which the King of Babylon had asked for the hand of an Egyptian Princess. Yet he had been a friend and sure of his ground. She must address the King of an enemy country who for years had been encroaching on Egyptian territory. It would never do to admit her dire necessity; yet she must urge haste. How could she convince this old man with the unpronounceable name that she wrote in good faith? After many trials she drafted a letter which seemed to her both friendly and dignified. She was pleased with her handiwork:

“My husband is dead. I have no children. Your sons are said to be grown up. Send one of them to me and he, as my husband, in the land of Egypt shall be King.”

She felt ill at ease when she thought of seeing Kenofer. They had been constantly together during the time of the King’s illness and had shared those first stark moments of grief when told of his death. Now for nearly a month they had exchanged no word, and she did not know quite how to greet him. When he appeared, followed by Tergen carrying an armload of drawings, he quietly took matters into his own hands. He was the Chief Royal Artist entrusted with the preparation of the funerary furniture for his

beloved master, and he presented the plans to the bereaved Queen without lifting his eyes. His face was so worn by grief that she longed to offer him some word of comfort; but his aloof manner forbade personal comment.

Kenofer told her as simply as he could the plans for the burial of the boy King. Over the mummy, embalmed with all due care, then wrapped according to ancient custom, would be placed a portrait mask of burnished and beaten gold. Golden hands holding flagellum and crozier would be crossed upon his breast, and below them would lie a Ba-bird, symbol of the soul, its wings of delicate cloisonné outstretched. Around the throat there would be a triple necklace of red, gold, and blue faience beads, with a scarab of black resin suspended from delicate inlaid straps.

The first coffin of Tutankhamon, Inheritor of the Kingdom of Osiris, was to be of solid gold, richly engraved, shaped in the likeness of Osiris, protected by winged figures of Isis and Nephthys, and overlaid by images of Nekhebt, vulture of Upper Egypt, and Buto, serpent of Lower Egypt. Ankhsenamon caught her breath at sight of the painting which represented the coffin in natural colors, the vulture and serpent inlaid with precious stones. A brilliant collarette in the shape of the hawk lay about the shoulders of the King, and his youthful face gazed serenely upon her, as if from afar.

“This coffin of solid gold, under a shroud of sheer red linen, will rest within a second one of wood overlaid with gold, its surface incrustated with inlaid decorations,” Kenofer said. “It, too, will have the features of Tutankhamon, Beloved of Man and God, wearing the Nemes headdress. Over this will lie a gossamer sheet on which will be placed the garlands of blue lotus petals and cornflowers, olive and willow leaves, according to custom, and the whole will rest within a third coffin, of gold-covered wood.”

Kenofer held up a painting showing the richly ornamented figure in the likeness of Osiris, this time with the Khat headdress, the face and hands fashioned in gold. The portrait of the King was full of dignity and a rich maturity, as if with each new, resplendent image he grew more godlike and remote. About the body were folded the wings of the Goddess Isis, who thus had protected Osiris long ago.

Ankhsenamon tried to tell Kenofer something of what was in her heart, but he was speaking again, without once raising his eyes to her face.

“It is well known that on the care of the living depends the welfare of the dead. East and west will the King lie in the burial chamber, anointed with sacred unguents, the sweet-smelling resins acceptable to the gods. The sarcophagus of finest yellow quartzite that Tutankhamon ordered is now in place. The lid, which was never finished, will have to be replaced by one of rose granite tinted to match the lower portion, as there is no time to secure a block of quartzite of such great size.

“Already the wooden shrines covered with gold have been completed and taken in sections to the burial chamber. In designing them I have consulted constantly with the High Priest, and have sought in every possible way to protect our beloved King in accordance with the instructions in the Book of That Which Is in the Underworld . The innermost shrine bears winged figures of the tutelary goddesses in bas-relief, and the walls within and without are covered with religious texts and prayers. A second and a third shrine of heavy oak wood overlaid with gold will be set up about the first, and covered by a pall of finest linen spangled with gilt-bronze medallions in the shape of marguerites. Enclosing them all will be this outer shrine of oak wood, its golden surface inlaid with blue faience, which the King so admired.” As Kenofer held up the picture of each in turn, Ankhsenamon could well imagine the glittering splendor of the shrines themselves.

“Tutankhamon would have looked upon your work and found in it the strength of your devotion,” Ankhsenamon said at last. “Would that I could hold him in my arms once more, as Isis does upon his coffin!” She buried her face in her hands.

Kenofer’s arms reached out instinctively to comfort her, but he drew back, flushing darkly under the discreet scrutiny of Khataka and Tergen. Ankhsenamon lifted her head and smiled at him tremulously, longing to bridge the gulf of sorrow and formality between them.

“Leave us for a little while, Khataka. Stay within call, both of you, but see that we are not disturbed. I would speak with Kenofer alone.”

Kenofer glanced about the room uneasily. It was not customary for the Queen to seek a private interview at such a time. She read his thoughts.

“There is no other way. I am watched constantly, and Ay is always near me. O Kenofer, I need your counsel. What shall I do? I have no baby to help me hold the throne. Horemheb is far away. Soon the High Priest and Ay will take matters into their own hands. Only a king can save Egypt from their greed, and it must be a king with strength and purpose. Shall I follow my father’s advice, and seek peace through intermarriage rather than through war? Shubbiluliuma, King of Hatti, has sons and one, I know, is good to look upon and wise. I saw him long ago at Akhetaten. Shall I write the King to send his son to me, that I may make him King of Egypt?”

She studied his face anxiously as she spoke, leaning forward in her chair, hands tightly clasped between her knees. Not yet had his gaze met hers, for he thought to spare her and to spare himself. Now his black, penetrating eyes stared at her from under scowling brows. She shrank before the accusation in his look.

“I do not think I understand the meaning of the Queen’s words,” he said slowly. “We were speaking of her husband’s burial.”

“True, but now I would have you speak of the Queen’s future,” she answered. “Forty days are left of those set aside for the King’s embalmment. There is little time in which to find a man worthy to rule Egypt. If Akhenaten’s daughter is to keep control, a youth of royal blood must share the throne, and that right speedily. Already those who sought Tutankhamon’s life, who rejoiced at his baby’s death, are plotting for their own ends. Think me not heartless, dear friend, but I must be Queen first and woman afterward. I have here a letter drafted roughly for your approval. Make it possible for me to send it secretly to Hatti. I am so helpless, shut up here, day in, day out!”

For a long moment his scornful eyes burned their way into hers. Then his voice struck her ears in accents of such bitter anger she could scarcely believe it was Kenofer who spoke.

“No letter drafted to the King of Hatti could ever meet with my approval. In life my King faced death rather than yield ground to a Hittite soldier. In death he would never consent to yield his throne to a Hittite Prince.”

“To compromise is not to yield.” Ankhsenamon straightened in her chair. “If I could purchase peace in Syria and security at home by such a marriage, I know that not only Tutankhamon but also Horemheb would approve!”

“Then no doubt Horemheb will be pleased to deliver the Queen’s message to Shubbiluliuma. An artist entrusted with the preparation of Pharaoh’s tomb is not a suitable envoy to carry such a proposal to Pharaoh’s enemy.”

Without waiting for further argument Kenofer bowed low and stepped backward to the door. There he straightened to his full height and said, “Tergen will return the drawings to the workshop as soon as the Queen has studied their full significance.”



Tergen

CHAPTER XXVII

SEND ME YOUR SON

THE Queen stared at the empty doorway with unbelieving eyes. That anyone should so reprimand Ankhsenamon, Lady of the Two Lands, was unthinkable. How could Kenofer misunderstand her motives? Anger came to her rescue. She clapped her hands sharply. Khataka and Tergen were at her feet on the instant. She explained her intention of sending for a Hittite Prince, watching Tergen's reactions closely lest he, too, find her unfeeling and ambitious.

"I must have help," she said at last, reassured by the amazed delight on his homely face. "Your master has let devotion to the memory of his King blind him to the dire necessity of his Queen. If you will carry this message to Hatti, I promise you freedom and the right to take Khataka with you out of Egypt if you so desire."

Khataka's cry of protest brought a fleeting smile to the Queen's face.

"Tergen, why do you hesitate?" Ankhsenamon asked sharply, seeing the youth silent and dismayed.

“You ask of me the one thing I cannot do. O Lady of the Two Lands, when my master bought me, he exacted a promise that never while in his service would I communicate with the King of Hatti. Surely the Queen would not want me to break that pledge!”

“To whom do you first owe allegiance, your master or your Queen?”

Tergen stared miserably at the ground, unable to find an answer.

“When Kenofer purchased you from that spying Amorite, did he not tell you that at all times you were to serve your King and Queen?”

“True, Your Majesty. He even promised me freedom if I proved my loyalty to you!”

“Would not your master be the first to say, ‘Run an errand for the Queen, no matter where she sends you?’” Ankhsenamon pressed her advantage. “I do not ask you to write the letter. It is not necessary that you deliver it in person to the King. Surely you know some trustworthy person in the Hittite Court who would present it. If such compromise quiets your conscience, I shall count the deed well done, as long as the desired result is accomplished.”

It was Khataka who at last persuaded Tergen that he was doing his master’s bidding by obeying without question Ankhsenamon’s slightest wish. It was Khataka, also, who secured a stylus and a fresh tablet of soft red-brown clay from the Royal Scribe. Tergen gave grudging advice in the matter of royal titles, and watched while Ankhsenamon copied her message in cuneiform characters. When the letter had been laboriously inscribed in the clay, he saw to it that it was baked to the required hardness, and incased in an envelope of the same clay, duly sealed. Many a time had Tergen done as much for his Amorite master in days gone by. The Queen asked that he return Kenofer’s drawings to the royal workshop as if nothing untoward had occurred, advising that he wait to leave the city until after his master had retired for the night.

“If Kenofer is angry, I shall take the blame,” the Queen assured the lad. “I know at what sacrifice you are doing this for me, but I promise no harm shall come to you at your master’s hands. One thing troubles me: how will you leave the city without being recognized?”

Tergen grinned. “Your Majesty has no idea how quickly I shall grow a beard and acquire a black wig! Have no fear that I shall fail in my mission. With the Queen’s blessing I am sure to succeed.”

Those were difficult days for Ankhsenamon and Khataka, while Tergen made his way by every known type of conveyance from Thebes to the distant land of Hatti. Once in his own country, it was a simple matter to gain access to the palace, where he entrusted the precious tablet to one of the King’s secretaries.

Concealed in the house of a friend, he awaited the royal answer with some concern. The journey had consumed far more time than he had anticipated. Even were the letter favorably received, delay would be inevitable.

When at last the King’s answer came, it was even more discouraging than Tergen had anticipated. Shubbiluliuma would take under consideration the proposal of the Queen of Egypt, but was inclined to wonder at this sudden overture on the part of a professed enemy. If the Queen’s messenger refused to show himself, let him return empty handed. With him the King would dispatch a trusted envoy of his own to look into the matter and report the true state of affairs. He was sending a letter to the Queen, asking for further explanation of her offer.

For a moment Tergen was tempted to make himself known, pressing the King to haste by explaining the urgency of the situation in Egypt. However, he was held by his promise to Kenofer and so departed in haste accompanied by His Majesty’s personal representative.

Ankhsenamon, waiting with sorely tried patience, had problems of her own to meet. Ay was becoming more and more difficult to handle as time went on. His daily visits now lengthened into hours of official consultations concerning affairs of state, the final preparations for the funeral, and plans to be carried out as soon as the period of mourning was over.

It was the plans for the future which filled Ankhsenamon with alarm, for they included such drastic changes as the removal of Hui as Viceroy of Kush, and the appointment in his stead of Pa-Ur, one of Ay's devoted followers.

"But Hui was not responsible for the King's illness," Ankhsenamon protested, "nor for his death," she added meaningly. "Tutankhamon loved him as a brother, and would not want him removed from office."

"Had the King's Son of Kush been less quick to credit native remedies —" Ay left the sentence unfinished. "Tutankhamon was young and his judgment was at times immature. An older man than Hui would have been better suited for the position of Viceroy. Hui is vain and selfseeking. He uses his authority for his own ends, as he used the King's influence to establish his divinity in the eyes of ignorant tribes. From the paintings in his tomb one would think him personally responsible for the tribute brought at the time of his appointment!" Ay clicked his jaws together sharply.

"He was Tutankhamon's friend," Ankhsenamon argued stubbornly. "And I do not wish to see him removed from office." Even as she spoke, she knew the uselessness of protest. The moment Ay chose to tighten his grip on the reins of government, Hui would go.

In matters of no importance, Ay bowed to her judgment with exaggerated deference. He outlined to her in great detail the plans for Tutankhamon's funeral at which he himself would officiate as the Sem Priest in the ritual of the Opening of the Mouth. The Queen accepted his

suggestions without protest, but reserved the privilege of selecting the heirlooms and personal objects to be placed within the antechamber.

To this Ay agreed. With increasing approval he smiled upon her day by day, commending her courage and fine spirit, her determination to face the future bravely. He brought her gifts and told her lengthy tales of his youthful prowess in an effort to while away the hours when she was a virtual prisoner in her own apartments. Using her precarious health as an excuse, he kept her shut away with only Khataka and a few foreign slaves to wait upon her. Any request for greater freedom was met with regretful but firm refusal.

“Egypt has suffered serious losses of late. We must not risk further illness of the Queen,” Ay said. “I found her greatly agitated after the visit of the Royal Artist. Even he must not come again.”

There was small likelihood that the particular visit he mentioned would ever be repeated. Ankhsenamon had hoped for a spoken or written apology from her friend, who must surely have realized the injustice of his attitude. At least she expected some inquiry as to Tergen’s whereabouts. Undoubtedly Kenofer held her responsible for the slave’s disappearance, but as far as the Queen could learn, he had made no effort to locate the runaway. He passed Khataka in the neighborhood of the royal workshops without so much as glancing in her direction.

For Ankhsenamon, awaiting Tergen’s return, time dragged on leaden feet. Her mind was beset by memories of the past and fears for the future. That Ay was indeed wooing her in earnest could no longer be denied. His affectionate gestures turned her cold with disgust, and she grew to loathe the very sound of his unctuous voice. She dreaded to see him enter the room, his narrow eyes slipping over her slender body with a covert caress.

The one thing which sustained her was Khataka’s lively humor and gift of mimicry. After Ay’s departure each day, the slave girl imitated his stiff

and creaking walk, his calf-like glances, his increasingly bold endearments, with an accuracy which reduced her mistress to helpless tears of merriment. Delighted with the results of her insolent nonsense, Khataka grew reckless in her efforts to entertain the Queen, and aped the various dignitaries of the Court without restraint. When not thus engaged, they talked of Tergen and his mission, planning how best to announce the coming of the Hittite Prince, when that coming was assured. Ankhsenamon's sense of the dramatic for once would have full play. Nothing could be more startling to the Court than the sudden introduction of a foreigner as King.

"I cannot bear to have the people think me heartless and unmindful of my loss. Yet when I show them Ay's villainy, they will understand the reason for my choice. O Khataka, I fear I was never meant to be a Queen! I have none of the great Hatshepsut's genius, nor Queen Tiy's shrewd insight and desire for power. I have never been ambitious. Of life I ask so little, yet so much: the right to love and live, to serve and to see, to learn what I can of all the world holds."

"You are young—not twenty. Love will be yours again, and life for many years to come." Khataka smiled up at her mistress from the floor where she sat mending a sequin-spangled robe of delicate net.

"Love has come to me twice. It is not like to come a third time, for all I remember the Hittite lad with kindness."

"One can receive that which one cannot return. Ankhsenamon, Lady of Diadems, wins without effort the love of any man, whatever his age!" Khataka added slyly.

The Queen was not to be diverted. As far as she could see, the future offered her none of the things she held most dear. Even Kenofer had withdrawn his interest with his love. Had Tutankhamon's death and her own unselfish statesmanship severed the slender tie which bound him to Thebes?

Would he again go wandering in search of beauty, when his last service to his King was done?

“Hearts are thievish. The man upon whom one leans has no understanding,” Khataka offered by way of consolation. “Surely Kenofer does not know that Ay has made you captive, else he would come to the rescue.”

“Ay holds me captive but to serve as a footstool for his throne! Khataka, why must my beloved friend desert me when I need him most?”

“Perhaps because it was you who first thought of desertion. In my country it is the rare lover who helps a rival win his bride!”

The Queen sighed. “It would ill serve Egypt’s need for me to write to Kenofer, ‘Come to me and I will make thee King of Egypt.’ ”

“In my country a man carries off his lady, without waiting to be sent for.” Khataka smiled.

“Ah, but this is not your country! And as far as I can see, one of your countrymen is very slow to claim a bride!”

To that Khataka had no answer. Already twenty of the precious forty days had passed, bringing no word from Hatti. From Horemheb had come no answer to the Queen’s plea for help, only a formal acknowledgment of the news of Tutankhamon’s death. Then when they had begun to fear that the message to Shubbiluliuma as well as that to Horemheb had been intercepted by the watchful Ay, Khataka was waylaid in the market place by a bearded Syrian peddler. Into her hand was slipped a roll of woolen cloth heavily embroidered in vivid colors.

“A gift for the Queen,” the man mumbled. “It comes from the far land beyond Syria, where winter wraps the mighty mountains in mist white as Egyptian linen. He who gave it to me awaits the Queen’s pleasure, but will not make himself known unless she so desires.”

Khataka, taken by surprise, murmured a vague reply. Not until the stranger had ambled off through the crowd did she realize to whom she had been speaking. Checking an impulse to return at once to the palace, Khataka made purchases of sweetmeats and honey, then walked slowly back the way she had come. She dropped the bit of embroidery into the basket which held the delicacies intended for the Queen. Many stopped her to inquire for Her Majesty's health, but Khataka, having a ready answer for their questions, wasted little time in talk.

Ankhsenamon received her news and the roll of colorful embroidery with ill-suppressed excitement. The cloth proved to be a purse of quaint design. Within it lay the small baked tablet containing the answer of Shubbiluliuma, King of Hatti. Eagerly the Queen bent to the task of translating those minute symbols like a complicated pattern of bird tracks in the mud along the river bank. Khataka knelt at her feet, striving to read the expression in the Queen's face as the message began to reveal itself. At first the soft, shadowed eyes held only the light of concentration, but gradually they began to smolder with unmistakable resentment.

At last the Queen looked up from her work. Haltingly she read the words:

"Your husband is dead. The son of your husband, where is he? Me you have deceived. The Great General of Egypt's army has not promoted my son to kingship."

Ankhsenamon sat staring at the small brown object in her hand. There lay her last hope of keeping the throne from Ay's triumphant grasp. She could not interview a foreign ambassador without laying bare her pitiful plot to the scornful gaze of her enemies. She could not even see a Syrian merchant without arousing suspicion.

"What will you do? The time is so short! You cannot reach Horemheb." Khataka swallowed tears of chagrin. "Tergen has proved a poor messenger.

If only he had been willing to speak with the King and set his doubts at rest!”

“Tergen did his part. I wrote as frankly as I dared. What right has the King of Hatti to doubt the word of a Queen?”

Fired by impotent anger, Ankhsenamon sent her challenge once more across the Great Green:

“What is this you say—I have deceived you? If I had a son and if my people and my country did not need a King, I would not have written. Arandas, your son, has been in Egypt. Again I say, send him to me, and he as my husband in the land of Egypt shall be King.”

The second letter to Shubbiluliuma at Boghozkevi was entrusted to the care of the Hittite envoy. A day or two later a bearded Syrian was missing from the market place. No one noticed his departure, for the streets were crowded with men from every quarter of the Empire, and strangers seldom attracted attention. Far more comment was aroused by the sudden return of Kenofer’s Hittite slave, who had been absent for something over a month. His master showed no surprise at his return, and as usual, Tergen himself had little to say. He went about his work as if he found pleasure in the doing of it, but there was a new gravity in his demeanor. A watchful eye might have detected a noticeable constraint between him and his master.

This was not to be wondered at, for Kenofer was quite unlike himself. During the time when the royal workshops were full of beautiful objects that were being created according to his designs, he rarely left the craftsmen unsupervised for an hour. Far into the night they worked under the lash of his fervent urging. Not only the three coffins and the gold mask must be finished, but also the ceremonial boats and the Ushabti figures which were to serve the King in lieu of servants, together with all the miniature hoes, picks, yokes, baskets, water jars, and vessels in blue faience for their use. Then there was the guardian figure of Anubis, the jackal God of

Embalmmment, to stand at the entrance of the small room beyond the burial chamber.

Kenofer gave particular care to the four slender goddesses of goldcovered wood which were to stand guard over the shrine protecting the canopic jars. Into their beautifully modeled figures he put the delicate youth of the Princess he had loved. They, too, seemed poised for flight, their arms outstretched like wings, their faces tilted up.

“The master speaks to me as if I had never been away,” Tergen told Khataka when they met some days after his return. “He has asked no explanation of my absence, and I have given none, but the heart has gone out of our friendship.”

“He knows you served the Queen.”

“As badly as I served him, I fear. One cannot do the bidding of two masters when the masters seek different ends. I fear for the Queen’s future, Khataka. The King of Hatti is shrewd. His envoy will no doubt convince him that this offer is one not lightly to be refused. But the Prince will come too late unless he comes at once, and Shubbiluliuma was never one to be hurried.”

“The more pity! My mistress is losing courage for the first time. She has been shut up too long with no one to talk to but the grasping Ay. That old man is as sure of the throne as if he already held the scepter.”

“Perhaps he does. I understand that in the guise of Tutankhamon’s successor he is to officiate as the Sem Priest during the funeral ritual. He is making himself responsible for the plans as if he had been named by the King to take his place as Pharaoh.”

“The poor lad little thought that he was to need a successor. If he had named one, everyone knows it would have been Horemheb, not Ay.”

“That accounts for the old buzzard’s haste. Carrion always hover over a man dying of thirst in the desert long before he is actually dead,” Tergen

remarked.

“Perhaps it is the buzzard’s wish that kills!” his sister muttered darkly.

When Khataka returned to the palace, Ay was with the Queen, and their voices reached her clearly as she busied herself polishing the gold ankle bands from one of the royal jewel boxes.

“You must not waste tears, my child. What have you to regret? You and Tutankhamon shared a happy childhood. Now he has gone to his Ka, as we must all do in the end. He would not have you grieve.”

“It is not the past with Tutankhamon for which I weep, but the future without him.”

“You need have no fears for the future if you will let me plan it for you. The people have grown to love their Queen, and so have I. From babyhood I have watched you, admiring the gay, courageous spirit, the foresight and intelligence you have always shown.

“Bow no more to the wishes of the soldier Horemheb, who shaped the ambitions of the King. Let Horemheb stay with the army, ensuring the safety of the tribute, recovering the old boundaries of the Empire. It is where he belongs. In Thebes there is destined to rule but one man, the King of Ankhsenamon’s choice.”

“Are you sure the choice of a King is hers?”

At the challenge in the low voice, Khataka moved hastily to a point of vantage where she could see the speakers. Ankhsenamon seated in the white chair had turned to face Ay squarely.

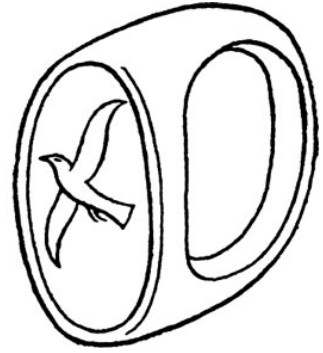
“If she chooses wisely,” he answered with a smile.

“I have heard you say it is never wise to choose in haste. Must Egypt have another King so soon?”

The old man moved closer and bent over stiffly to lay a bony hand on hers.

“My dear little Lady of the Two Lands, Egypt has another King! It but remains to crown him.”

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CHAPTER XXVIII

A RING FOR THE QUEEN

THE private studio of Intef, the goldsmith, was in a quiet corner of the district reserved for royal workshops. Even in the confusion of those last days before the King's funeral, that cluttered room at the back of the large studio preserved an atmosphere of unruffled calm. Kenofer sought refuge there when the pressure of unfinished tasks weighed too heavily upon him. His brother's careful workmanship was never marred by haste; his quiet acceptance of life, never disturbed by doubts.

Several days after Ay's interview with the Queen, Kenofer stopped there to inspect the vulture collars that were being inlaid with precious stones. He found them nearing completion and was about to go in search of his brother when a peremptory voice called from the doorway. Ay did not wait for an answer to his greeting but hurried across the room with scarcely a glance at the glittering array of treasures about him.

"Come, my boy, I wish to talk with you in private. I have a commission to be carried out at once—a unique commission!" There was ill-suppressed elation in his tone.

Reluctantly Kenofer led the way to a drafting room in the rear of the shop and offered the Queen's Chief Counselor a chair. The young artist was

in no mood to do business with a man who could be so frankly jubilant when all Egypt was in mourning.

“It is a ring,” Ay explained, “a ring I wish to give the Queen immediately after the funeral. The details of the design I leave to you. The gold work I wish done by your brother.” He lowered his voice to a confidential undertone. “On the ring must be engraved side by side the cartouche of Ankhsenamon and that of Ay!” He sat back to enjoy the full effect of his words.

Kenofer frowned. “I have never seen a cartouche of Ay,” he said sharply.

“You shall be the first to see one!” The old man drew from his belt a strip of papyrus on which he had drawn the crude outline of a ring and beside it two sets of symbols, each encircled by a line to form a royal cartouche.

“This,” he said, pointing to the one on the right, “is the name of Ay, Pharaoh of Egypt.”

Kenofer stared at the hieroglyphs in stunned silence. Again he was in the Queen’s apartment. Her words were in his ears: “Soon the High Priest and Ay will take matters into their own hands. O Kenofer, I need your counsel. What shall I do?”

With an effort he brought himself back to the business in hand. On behalf of his brother he would accept the commission. The ring would be ready the day following the royal funeral, but not before. Intef at present had more than he could do, and no one else could be trusted to make a ring which was in itself a state secret. Ay agreed, well pleased. Apparently the Royal Artist accepted the Chief Counselor’s accession to the throne as a matter of course.

With scant ceremony Kenofer ushered Ay out of the shop, loathing the stiff, strutting walk, the bony fingers clutching the tall staff. The thought of

those fingers in contact with Ankhsenamon's hand filled Kenofer with disgust. He turned away, sick at heart. To his lips came the words which so often voiced his inner longing: "Would that I were the signet ring upon thy finger!"

In the drafting room he examined again Ay's crude design with its insolent cartouche next to that of Ankhsenamon. Already Ay had selected the throne name he would use as King. How could he be so sure of having Ankhsenamon as his Queen?

Seizing a pen, Kenofer outlined the pattern for a ring. It was a flattopped signet on which was the image of a small bird with wings outspread in flight. As he worked, his mind was busy with a half-formed plan. If Ankhsenamon could be spirited away, delay might accomplish more than any open attempt to thwart Ay's scheme. There was one way in which her escape from the palace might be accomplished. Tergen and Khataka could be counted on to do their part, but would the Queen herself consent? How could he expect her to have confidence in his judgment when he had shown so little confidence in hers?

Impatiently Kenofer tossed aside his pen and picked up the hasty drawing he had made. It was not often that he sought advice, but when he did, Intef gave generously of his wisdom. The goldsmith might not approve a plot so mad, but he would do anything to help the Queen.

In his private workroom Intef listened to Kenofer's story, resting weary eyes from the tedious work of inlaying the King's outer coffin. The face was complete, even to the gold artificial beard and the richly colored vulture and uraeus heads upon the brow. As the brothers talked in low voices, fearful of being overheard, the King's image looked up at them with a steady, confident gaze. Into the quiet eyes of calcite and gleaming black obsidian, the artist had put something of a godlike calm, infinitely remote.

“My boy, what can you do to halt the inundation? Ay’s power has crept upon us slowly, a seemingly beneficent thing. Backed by the priests, he can seize the throne whether the Queen will or no.”

“True, but he need not be allowed to seize the Queen!”

“He needs the Queen—not for long, perhaps—but just at first, to make good his claim in the eyes of the people. Without her, they would surely question his right and send for Horemheb. There is the man they idolize.”

“There is the man who should be King,” Kenofer agreed quickly. “Tutankhamon would have had it so. The Queen has sent messages to Horemheb repeatedly. Perhaps they were intercepted. Perhaps he does not realize the gravity of the situation. He should have been here long before this.”

“Horemheb is a far-seeing man, who thinks as well as acts. He may prefer to make secure the Empire he would rule. Defeating enemies abroad wins friends at home. After all, Ay is old and liked by few. Who would not welcome a hero in the prime of life, after such a doddering, decrepit fool?”

“But what of Ankhsenamon? Has Horemheb no thought for Tutankhamon’s Queen?”

“No doubt the same thought Ay entertains; that as a wife she would be more useful than as a widowed Queen. Come, come, lad, be not so revolted by the greed of man! Ankhsenamon is the victim of circumstance, but who is not?” He indicated with a gesture the helpless limbs stretched out before him on a low stool. “She has done what she could to help herself, but so far I have seen no Hittite Prince appearing on the scene to save the day, and there are only three more days to save. She is a Queen and must take the husbands intended for her by the gods. You love her far too much for your own peace of mind and hers. This ring—what purpose can it serve except to make her long for freedom she cannot hope to gain?”

He inspected the sketch thoughtfully. “Akhenaten’s Small Bird striving to escape! Is it not cruel to offer her flight?” At the word he stopped short, darting a quick glance at his brother’s purposeful face. Kenofer’s eyes met his without flinching. The silence between them was punctuated by the light irregular tapping of goldsmiths’ hammers from the shop. Flies buzzed lazily against the low ceiling.

“You will make the ring?” Kenofer asked at last.

The older man sighed and hitched his stool closer to the bench where his tools lay in neat array.

“I shall make both rings,” he answered and returned to his work.

On the day before the last rites of Tutankhamon, Lord of Valor, Khataka lingered among the open stalls of the market place, hoping some stranger might seek her out. None spoke to her but an old man from whom she often bought sweetmeats for the Queen.

“Your brother was here just before you came, but said he could not wait. They are busy assembling things in the work-shops. My, my, it must be a sight, all that gold! He left this packet for you and a message, but it didn’t make much sense as far as I could see. Come to think of it, guess it wasn’t meant to make much sense for me!” He chuckled, rubbing his long nose with a knotted forefinger.

Khataka slipped the package inside the folds of her dress and bent close to hear the peddler’s whispered words.

“Said to tell Small Bird to try her wings. A lark can escape a buzzard. She can depend on one who would be the signet ring upon her finger.” He whistled the words through toothless gums. “Now isn’t that nonsense for you?” he demanded in his natural voice, peering at Khataka from under his greasy turban. “Sounds like lovers’ talk to me. Are you called Small Bird? You must be a parrot, then, with that long nose of yours.” He cackled delightedly, and thought it was anger which sent Khataka darting away

through the crowd of noisy women who were bargaining over wares spread out along the street.

Ankhsenamon received the packet without comment. In an ivory box lay a heavy gold ring. She studied the bird engraved upon it, noting the wings outspread in flight. "There was a message?" she asked.

"Yes, a lover's message, old Hekib says!" Khataka's green eyes shone as she repeated the words.

Ankhsenamon felt the slow color flood her face. Flight! That avenue of escape had never once entered her mind! At first she pushed the idea from her. Yet when she faced the hopelessness of her plight, she realized that Kenofer's words offered a temporary solution to her difficulties. Her unexplained disappearance from the palace would at least delay Ay's plans for seizing the throne, and delay would allow both Hittite Prince and Horemheb more time. Horemheb might even then be on his way, keeping his movements secret in order to give Ay a false sense of security. Why had she not thought of that before? She felt deeply ashamed of the doubts she had harbored.

"Khataka, I have been stupid! Horemheb says that knowledge of the enemy's plans is assurance of a battle won. I know Ay's designs not only upon the throne but upon the Queen as well. I cannot carry off the throne, but I can the Queen. That must be what Kenofer wishes me to do. I shall count on you to talk with Tergen that we may know what preparations to make. It will not be easy for me to leave the palace unobserved. One thing I cannot understand, Khataka. Kenofer despised me for trying to save myself. Why should he want to help me now?"

"How little you know of lovers, my Queen!" Khataka laughed. "This time you will escape with Kenofer, not with a Hittite Prince. There is no royal cartouche on the ring he sent you, and his message was addressed to Small Bird, not to the Lady of the Two Lands."

The Queen turned the ring thoughtfully this way and that, a faint smile playing about the corners of her lips. “Would that I were the signet ring upon thy finger,” she murmured, and slowly slipped the gold band into place.

It was still there that evening when she paid a last visit to the King’s apartment where his personal effects and certain family heirlooms had been collected for burial in the tomb. Not until the great golden shrines were in place, the partition constructed, and the murals of the burial chamber completed, could the treasures be arranged in the antechamber for the use of the King’s Ka.

With her own hands Ankhsenamon lighted two of the alabaster lamps. In the clear white light she looked about her on all the dear familiar objects, colorful as a garden shining with the gold of sunlight. There were the chairs and the ebony bed with foot panel of ivory and gold, presented by the King’s Son of Kush. The ceremonial thrones were there, too, and a child’s chair from Akhetaten. She remembered with what joy the folding bed for traveling and the small boxes made to fit across a donkey’s back had been packed for the journey with Kenofer long ago. In the chest where Tutankhamon had kept his boyish treasures—the sling shots, the samples of ore, the crude lighter—she had placed the ivory gaming board with its Hittite and Egyptian men.

Along the wall stood other chests already packed by the Queen with Khataka’s help. The white one of painted wood held linen, freshly washed and perfumed. An ivory box was filled with rings and bracelets, another with pectorals and collars. Amulets of every known design lay among the more pretentious jewels, but the King’s favorite ornaments had been placed upon his fingers and arms or wrapped securely in the bands of linen which bound his body. Ankhsenamon had known that he would want close at hand

the hunting dagger with plain blade of hardened gold, and the one of precious Hittite iron, harder than any bronze.

The casket painted by Kenofer she looked at long and thoughtfully, trying to imprint forever on her mind the jewel-like coloring, the moving action, the symbolism which made of it a tribute to the King's courage in hunt and battle. It told the same story as the case of bows, the falchions of heavy bronze, the wooden shield lined with cheetah skin, the single-sticks with which he had fenced, and the chariots to be placed within the tomb for his use.

Carefully she had folded the linen gloves and those of woven tapestry. The glittering corselet of inlaid golden plaques, the small scepters Kenofer had brought to Akhetaten—how pleased the King had been with them! They lay now beside the larger two which symbolized his second coronation in Thebes.

It had been fun, playing at King and Queen together. Tutankhamon had enjoyed it more than she—the semblance of power, the pageantry. What great things he had planned, what greater things he might have done! Tomorrow he would seek another kingdom, among the Imperishable Stars. Men would fit the gold coffins one within the other, veiled with shrouds, decked with flowers, and she would place a little wreath of cornflowers and the petals of blue water lilies upon the King's forehead before the last lid was fastened. Tomorrow there would be the wailing of mourners, the long procession winding through the hills, the solemn ritual at the entrance of the tomb by which Tutankhamen would become a Ba—a soul—and be prepared to join his Ka. Tomorrow she would abandon herself to grief. Tonight she could not weep.

Here in his room surrounded by objects he had used joyously in life, she felt much as she had when they packed to move from Akhetaten to Thebes. The change had been not so much an end as a beginning. Then she had

taken with her only those things which held the most cherished memories. Now many of the same treasures would make a second pilgrimage with him: the thrones, the beds, the footstools and the chairs, the jewel chests and heirlooms. She hoped they would be pleasing to the Ka, that shadowy being so exactly like the King himself. He would be Tutankhamon's companion now, protecting him in that strange new world.

Leaning against the seat of the throne, Ankhsenamon smiled up at the slender lad sitting at ease there where the throne-back curved. Once again she was that childish Queen, touching his collar with perfume, meeting the laughing challenge in his eyes. Dropping her head upon her outstretched arms, she gave herself to dreams. All the years of their companionship passed in colorful procession before her eyes, and through the pattern of her thoughts Kenofer came and went, giving color and form to what the three of them had shared. In death Tutankhamon would be surrounded by Kenofer's thoughtfulness, the perfection of his craftsmanship. In life she would turn to him for protection and understanding, for a vision of what a future without a throne might hold.

In her heart Ankhsenamon knew that not for long would she be Queen. Once she had left the palace, there would be no turning back. All during the long and solemn ceremony of the royal funeral next day, her grief was not alone for the King, but for the Queen who went beside him to the surer death of oblivion. Tutankhamon's name would live on temple, statue, tomb. His spirit would dwell in comfort, honored and served by temple priest. He would be remembered by the people as gallant, young, untried by life, yet full of promise. But what of the wife who had shared his throne? Every object which bore her name as Queen would lie within his tomb, forgotten. No mighty granite statue, no godlike colossus, no record on a temple wall would proclaim to future generations that she had ever been in Thebes.

Slowly the procession wound through the barren hills. The body of the King lay in state, the great gold coffin festooned with garlands, resting on a low bier beneath the glittering wooden canopy of a sacred boat. The boat was drawn along upon a sledge by nobles of the Court, their heads bound by white linen fillets of mourning, their voices rising in unison above the wailing of the mourners:

“O King! Come in peace! O God! Protector of the Land.”

“Protector of the Land!” The words echoed in her ears long after the golden coffin had disappeared down the tomb’s narrow shaft, long after the sorrowful procession had found its weary, stumbling way back to Thebes. Would Ay now be “Protector of the Land”? Would Horemheb, returning, “come in peace”? How could either of these men be “King” and “God,” who claimed no royal blood to make them so?



CHAPTER XXIX

THE LOST QUEEN OF EGYPT

EXHAUSTION dulled Ankhsenamon's grief and let her drop into a deep and dreamless sleep the moment she was left alone in her bedroom. Khataka extinguished the night lamp and sent the weeping attendants to their quarters. When she stepped for a moment into the corridor, the guard outside the door stared stolidly before him. He was a heavy-featured Nubian whose face she did not know.

"The Queen sleeps," she whispered, laying a finger across her lips. The man nodded, shifting his long staff from one hand to the other. "At midnight I leave, just before the guard changes," she went on. "Tell the man who takes your place to be very quiet. Her Majesty must not be disturbed." Again he nodded, looking at her with dull, indifferent eyes.

Khataka was puzzled by the Nubian's behavior. "Where do you come from? I have not seen you here before." There was no reply. "Were you trained in the House of the King's Son of Kush? Why do you not answer?"

Slowly he turned his head in her direction, and before her startled eyes his thick lips opened in a wide grin. White teeth framed the unnatural cavern of his jaws, but there was no tongue to be seen.

Khataka smothered a gasp of pity and hurriedly withdrew into the silence of the royal apartment. No doubt Kenofer was responsible for the Nubian's presence. She had several hours before her, and set to work with quiet efficiency to pack a basket which she often carried with her to market. From the linen chests of the Queen she selected garments of finest weave, simple in design. Leather sandals, a mirror, razor, curling iron, combs, cosmetic jars, an ivory palette, and several kohl sticks in unpretentious cases, she tucked into corners. A second basket exactly like the first was filled with equal care, a few of the Queen's favorite jewels being hidden in the bottom between layers of linen sheets.

Now and then Khataka interrupted her work to listen at the door of the small room where the Queen lay sleeping. The even rhythm of her breathing was broken with sighs, like that of a child weary with weeping. When all was in readiness, Khataka opened the door into the hallway and spoke in a whisper to the guard.

"Is it nearly time for you to be relieved?" At his smiling nod she yawned, stretching both arms above her head. "Soon I shall go. The Queen still sleeps, and I am tired."

Again she withdrew into the royal apartment, but now there was nothing leisurely about her movements. She hurried across the room, snatching an armful of garments from a chair as she passed. She shook the Queen gently, hushing her startled questions, urging haste. With skillful hands she helped Ankhsenamon dress, fitting a straight, red wig of dyed sheep's wool over the Queen's glossy tresses and applying a crude, unbecoming make-up to mouth and eyes. A shadow here, a line there, and the nose grew visibly longer in the light which filtered through the open door. Ankhsenamon

inspected herself in the mirror Khataka held for her. Under the folds of a dark head-shawl Khataka herself seemed to smile back at her.

Cautiously the young slave lifted one of the two baskets from behind the couch. It was heavy and she frowned anxiously as the Queen tried to carry it. Ankhsenamon braced it against one hip as she had seen Khataka do, and walked across the floor with such a perfect imitation of the Hittite's smooth, gliding step that her companion sighed with relief. A few last whispered instructions, a final embrace, and one of the girls vanished into the bedroom, while the other opened the outer door. The guard glanced indifferently at the Hittite maid in her voluminous cloak, a bulky basket balanced on one hip.

"May sleep reward you for your night's work," the girl murmured as she passed. The Nubian's face lighted with pleasure.

Scarcely had she gone when the relief guard ambled down the corridor, munching the last of a midnight lunch. The Nubian motioned toward the Queen's door and laid a warning finger across heavy lips. The guard nodded a bald head and wiped his month with the back of a brown hand. He had stood the late watch outside this door every night for two years, and no newcomer from Kush need warn him to be quiet. He loved the girl Queen whom he served, and liked to know that while he stood there, she was bound to be safe within her apartment.

It was cold in the open corridor. A sudden draft swirled about the slave's ankles. He turned suddenly to see the door of the Queen's antechamber swing open and a cloaked figure emerge, carrying a heavy basket. At sight of him the girl looked up and smiled, indicating the basket with a nod of her head and an inquiring lift of her brows. He grinned cheerfully and took the basket from her, carrying it as far as the end of the hall where a door opened into the garden.

“Where are you bound for this time of night?” he drawled by way of making conversation. It was tiresome pacing back and forth alone. Nothing ever happened in that quiet corner of the palace.

“Oh, I am going to the maids’ quarters. One of the Queen’s favorite tiring women was ill when she went off duty, and the Queen would not rest until I promised to take her some things and see that she was properly cared for. Only our Lady of the Two Lands would bother to think of anyone else after such a day! See that no one disturbs her. She is very restless.”

“No one will be allowed to get inside that door while I am here, I can promise you that. Shall I say it is the Queen’s order?”

The girl nodded, flashing him a smile as she stepped into the outer darkness. “You may say it is the Queen’s order that she be allowed to sleep until noon. The maid on duty will not leave until the Queen wakes,” she called back softly over her shoulder.

The large lake constructed by Amenhotep the Magnificent stretched for some distance to the south and west of the palace garden. The margins were overgrown with clumps of papyrus and water reeds, and at intervals light wooden pavilions offered shelter. In the shadow of one of these, some distance from the palace, a crude skiff belonging to a game keeper had lain idle for several days. Tonight the owner seemed to have repented his carelessness, for a man squatted in front of the pavilion as if resting a bit before poling the skiff to the game keepers’ quarters at the other end of the lake. A pale moon had already dropped below the western horizon before two muffled shapes emerged from the path and sank down breathless beside the water’s edge.

“The baskets are so heavy we could not come as quickly as we intended. My Lady is drenched with dew and speechless with fatigue.”

“Speechless—with—running!” gasped her companion. “I did not know anyone could cover the ground so fast!”

The man lifted the baskets into the boat and pulled it close to the edge of the pavilion. "I wish I could let my Lady rest, but there is too little time between now and sunrise."

The girls took their places, crouching in the center of the narrow craft.

"You had no trouble leaving the palace?" he asked.

"None!" Khataka's low tone was triumphant. "What is more, the Queen has left word she is not to be disturbed until noon!"

"I only hope the guards do not suffer," the second passenger said regretfully.

"Have no worry on their account," the man's voice answered. "The Nubian will have vanished long before dawn, and the King's Son of Kush would not surrender his favorite slave to anyone. As for the regular guard, he has been heard to say that he lives but to die in the Queen's service."

"Oh, not that! Surely Ay would not hold a slave responsible for what a Queen does through her own desire."

"Perhaps not. Still he must hold someone responsible besides himself!" Kenofer chuckled softly. "It is scarcely complimentary to a selfcrowned King when the lady he would have as wife runs away. As a matter of fact, I think that Ay will keep the Queen's departure secret as long as possible. If some thoughtless attendant does not raise a hue and cry, Ay will say that Ankhsenamon is ill. He has done so before when it suited his ends!"

For some time Kenofer poled in silence, following the shadowy outline of the shore. The two girls, wrapped in their cloaks, looked like unwieldy bundles in the bottom of the skiff.

"May we know where you are taking us?" Ankhsenamon's voice blended with the soft lap of the water slipping past the keel. "How can we get out of the lake enclosure? The only gate is by the game keepers' quarters, and their dogs make a hideous noise when anyone approaches."

“Men are repairing the wall on the side toward the river. Donkeys will meet us there, and Tergen has a boat in readiness. It is small and will not attract attention.” Kenofer ran the skiff close to the bank and sprang ashore. His passengers followed before he could offer them a hand. Without further comment he seized a basket under each arm and strode off into the darkness, bidding them stay at his heels.

The gardens surrounding the royal lake still bore evidences of the recent flood. The walks were rutted and scarred, and a section of the high wall had been washed away. A group of workmen’s huts lay just beyond the enclosure, but the only evidence of life was a soft stamping and snuffling from a huddle of donkeys tethered near by. Two of these proved to be crudely saddled with layers of sacking, and on a third Kenofer tied the baskets, pannier fashion.

Ankhsenamon surveyed her mount doubtfully, never having ridden on the back of any animal, but Khataka led hers to a pile of adobe bricks stacked ready for use and clambered onto his back without assistance. They made a grotesque picture in the graying light. Khataka’s full cape enveloped both rider and steed, and only two long ears protruded inquiringly to show in which direction they were about to travel. Not to be outdone, Ankhsenamon followed her example. Unfortunately just as the Queen had managed to seat herself astride, he decided to resume his interrupted rest. Without warning he folded up under her and rolled over to scratch the offending saddle from his back. Ankhsenamon would have rolled with him, but Kenofer snatched her up in his arms and delivered a telling kick in the animal’s ribs which sent the fat beast scrambling to his feet again with alacrity.

For a breathless moment Ankhsenamon clung to her rescuer. “Get me one whose legs won’t bend!” she gasped, but he stilled her whisper with a hand across her mouth.

There was no time to change mounts. He deposited her carefully upon the donkey's back and led that chastened animal to join his two patient companions. Kenofer himself walked, a bridle held firmly in each hand, while the pack animal trailed behind. The shapely hoofs made a delicate patter as they moved along at a steady pace. Suddenly Ankhsemon's donkey stopped short, almost upsetting his rider.

"Why did he do that?" she asked. Kenofer, tugging at the bridle and addressing the beast in coaxing terms, did not answer. "There's something wrong with him! He's swelling! O Kenofer, take me off!"

The firm body between her legs was indeed growing larger. She could feel the ribs expand with his sobbing, in-drawn breath. Long ears were laid back against an outstretched neck, and from a wide-open mouth there issued a raucous cry which rose and fell in time to the painful heavings of a frame too small to hold such an agony of sound. From the workmen's camp came the yearning answer, and for a moment Kenofer fought to hold the bridles. The two riders were paralyzed, clutching the yielding stubble of close clipped manes in a frantic effort to keep their seats. Then as suddenly as they had stopped, the animals again set off at their jolting trot, nor did they pause until they had reached the secluded cove where Tergen awaited their coming.

"Those miserable beasts were never intended for such a purpose!" Ankhsemon declared as Kenofer lifted her to the ground. "I have been shaken until I rattle like a sistrum!"

"I fear the boat will not please you any better," Kenofer answered ruefully.

It was a stocky little craft of heavy timber, with a low cabin and sturdy mast. The river teemed with such boats, plying back and forth with cargoes of wine and grain. Families lived upon them all the year, knowing no other

home, eating, sleeping, cooking in quarters scarcely larger than the Queen's small bedroom.

"Where am I to hide?" Ankhsenamon asked. Her body sagged with weariness, and she leaned upon Khataka's arm as they stood on the crowded deck.

"You are not to hide, my Lady. That is what Ay would expect you to do." Kenofer offered her a seat on a coil of rope and sent Khataka to prepare a bed. "I have had to make plans without consulting you. There are many boats. They will not search them all. If you play your part for the next few weeks as well as you have tonight, there will be nothing to fear."

With a tired gesture Ankhsenamon pushed back the red curls of the wooly wig. Her face was drawn and pale under the exaggerated makeup.

"What do you want me to do?"

"Act as my sister—the sister of a boatman—until we learn what Ay's next move is to be. You will have to dress, act, speak as river people do. You must seem to help Khataka with the work as if you were used to physical labor. As soon as it is safe, I shall take you to Nefertiti in Akhetaten or bring you back to Thebes, whichever you desire."

At Ankhsenamon's gesture of protest, Kenofer dropped to his knees, his eyes on a level with hers.

"Long ago you used to play at make-believe, Small Bird. Can you find the courage for it now? There is so much at stake!"

"I can find more courage when I am far from Thebes," she sighed. "O Kenofer, take me away! I shall be glad to forget that I have ever been a Queen."

Ankhsenamon found life on the river very different from what it had appeared when viewed from the royal dahabiyeh. There was no kitchen boat to come alongside just at meal time. The odors of Khataka's cooking filled the cabin and drifted over the deck in a fragrant cloud. The small

Hittite kneaded dough in a bucket with her bare feet where all might watch. She cleaned the fish Kenofer caught, or prepared savory dishes of lentils and meat with equal enthusiasm. The second day Ankhsenamon insisted upon helping, and in due time was able to take her turn at bread making.

“I have always wanted to make wine,” she confessed. “It must be fun tamping the grapes, with the cool juice splashing about your legs! When the fruit is ripe, may I do that, too?” Kenofer looked at her curiously. It would be many months before the time of wine making.

“Think, Kenofer, of all the things I have never been allowed to do. Already in a few short days I have ridden a donkey, made a bed, washed dishes, and kneaded bread! Khataka says I may help her to wash clothes tomorrow, and she will show me how to use a pleating iron.”

Kenofer smiled, wondering at her swift return to a childish delight in simple things. As the days passed and the boat drifted down the river with other craft of its kind, he marveled at the change in his passenger. Care seemed to have dropped from her shoulders with her royal raiment. In the role of his sister she adopted the ways of river folk as readily as she once had taken on the dignity of a queen. The delicate linen Khataka had packed so carefully was left in the baskets, and Ankhsenamon wore the plain, coarse garments without pleats or extra draperies worn by the women about her.

One of her favorite pastimes was to chat with the boatmen’s wives when the craft were tied up for the night at the wharf of some village where Kenofer could exchange part of his cargo for food. Once Ankhsenamon found a boy dangling his feet over the side of a fishing boat and trying laboriously to copy the writing on a bit of broken pottery he had picked up in the street.

“A student from the School of Scribes dropped it,” he explained. “I don’t know what it says, but I can make some of the pictures.” He showed

her his efforts scratched with a fishbone on a fragment of clay pot rescued from the village dump heap.

Ankhsenamon praised his work and examined with interest the words he sought to reproduce. On the surface of the clay was scrawled in a schoolboy hand the copy set for the day's lesson:

"Be not proud of earthly goods or riches, for they come to thee from God without thine help."

At sight of the familiar line she felt a pang of regret for the time when she, too, had practiced on fragments provided by the royal kitchens. She smiled at the child.

"Would you like to have me set you a fresh copy? This lad did not do his lesson very well, I fear."

"You set a copy? Women don't write!" He eyed her with scorn.

"Oh, I did not mean that I would do it!" she assured him hastily. "It is my brother who writes. He would be glad to help you."

The boy was skeptical. The writing of the boatmen whom he knew was confined to a few symbols useful in their business. It was not to be compared with even an inferior product of a Scribes' School.

When Ankhsenamon told Kenofer of the child's doubt as to his writing ability, he did not smile. She must be more careful about exhibiting any knowledge of a kind not familiar to the class she chose to represent. Yet at Abydos he bought her a lute, that she might play to them in the stillness of the evening.

For the most part Kenofer avoided the larger cities. Now and then he paused for a day or two where fishing was good or where an abundance of birds promised tempting hunting. There must be no evidence of haste in their flight. A boat sent in pursuit would expect to find the fugitives hiding by day and traveling by night. Kenofer, therefore, made his leisurely way in

company with other small trading boats, his professed destination being always the next small town, whatever it might be.

“I am glad you are not impatient,” he said to Ankhsenamon on the fifteenth day of their journeying as she sat beside him at the tiller drying her hair in the sunshine. It hung about her shoulders in a heavy black fringe.

“Impatient for what?” She tossed the tangled tresses out of her eyes and looked at him in surprise. “Never in my life have I had so many adventures, made so many new friends, done so many useful things as I have on this boat.”

“I was afraid you would grow weary of this simple way of life.”

“In so short a time? O Kenofer, I could go on and on, drifting forever, if only the Nile were long enough! Even when I was little, I envied the boys on the river boats. I wanted to know where the Nile came from and where it went. Everyone who visited Akhetaten came either downstream with the current or upstream with the wind. How I longed to follow them when they left!”

“You have seen Thebes, Koptos, Abydos, and nearly two hundred miles of the river. You are quite a traveled lady.” He smiled down at her, rejoicing in her lithe body, browned by sun and wind. She was untangling her hair with an ivory comb, struggling to do without help what she would no longer allow Khataka to do for her.

“Yes, and I have heard you and Tutankhamon describe the cataracts where the waters rush and boil over the rocks. I am no longer curious about them. It is the world below Akhetaten which I dream of knowing: Memphis, the Pyramids, Heliopolis, and the many mouths through which the river feeds the Great Green. You and Tutankhamon saw them all. Merytaten was at Heliopolis, and Ta-Shera passed that way when she went to Babylon. Even these women on the cargo boats have been to places I may never see.”

Kenofar made no answer. If only he could show her the lands beyond Egypt, beyond the Great Green! His eyes followed a flight of flamingoes across the turquoise sky. Ankhsenamon, too, watched them wistfully.

At a town just south of Akhetaten, Kenofar tied the boat a short distance from the main wharves. Tergen had a friend who served the High Priest in the temple there, and through him they hoped to obtain news from Thebes. All day the girls were forced to stay on board, though they longed to wander along the quay and visit the market.

At dusk Tergen returned, bending under a bulky load of supplies. That he had news of importance was evident. Khataka plied him with questions to no avail. He busied himself about the boat, making everything ready for departure, but no amount of coaxing would loosen his tongue. Once he spoke to Khataka in Hittite, but it was merely a warning to hush her clamoring lest she attract the attention of the women in nearby boats.

Ankhsenamon dressed with unusual care for this night which might be her last upon the boat. If Horemheb had arrived in Thebes, all would be well. If he had not yet been heard from, she would go on to Akhetaten where Nefertiti could give her counsel.

"I can't believe that it has changed so much," she told herself; yet in her heart she knew that her father's city had fallen upon evil days. Few of her old friends would be there to greet her, and fewer still would be in a position to protect her from Ay's ambition.

"I envy these people living a carefree life upon the river," she sighed, fastening a blue water lily in her hair. About her neck she wound a chain hung with amulets such as her neighbors on the other boats displayed with so much pride.

"Carefree? They would never so describe their lot!" Khataka protested. "They have all the cares of life and death. What greater burden has any man?"

Ankhsenamon considered. A greater burden than the everyday problems of these simple people rested upon a Queen with an ever-present weight. She was not sure what it was, but there was no doubting its reality. At times she had seemed to lose it here on the river. The slow, steady movement of the water, the unhurried routine, the simple tasks joyously done had brought her a sense of peace, as if life were indeed a simple thing. Kenofer's presence gave her a sense of security, and the homely, honest faces of the Hittites were a silent pledge of unselfish devotion.

Yet always she was aware that no real freedom could be hers. The crown of Egypt rested on her head. Often she woke at night to feel the pressure of the uraeus against her brow.

"Whatever the master's news, there must be a great deal of it," Khataka observed. "It is long past dark, and his supper will not be fit to eat if he delays much longer."

"He will not be interested in food when he does return," Tergen declared with a knowing grin.

"Only bad news troubles a man's appetite," his sister retorted. "And no bad news put that twinkle in your eye! Why won't you give us a hint? You are like a child with a secret: you won't be satisfied until it is told—and neither shall I!"

"The master will tell you himself if he wishes you to know. Here he comes now. He will give you no news until we are out of this smelly port and on our way again. So don't waste your breath in questions."

Kenofer came with his arms full of baskets and bundles which he deposited before volunteering so much as a word of greeting. His eyes swept the orderly deck. "We leave as soon as we have eaten, Tergen. I want to get below Akhetaten before morning." His glance rested for a startled moment on the figure of Ankhsenamon festive in her unaccustomed finery.

Some indefinable quality of material and design proclaimed the royal origin of those sheer pleated folds.

“It was scarcely wise to dress so in a crowded port,” Kenofer said sharply. “Keep well out of sight or you will excite comment.”

Ankhsenamon choked back an angry retort. The brother of a river girl had a perfect right to take his sister to task if he chose. At times Kenofer seemed to forget that he addressed a queen. Silent, aloof, she ate the meal which she and Khataka had prepared as a special treat, aware that Kenofer, too, found the food tasteless. He was preoccupied to the point of rudeness. Khataka decided that whatever had kept him so long in the town was less pleasant than Tergen had supposed.

The meal finished, the men hurried to get the boat under way while Khataka cleared the table. For once Ankhsenamon did not volunteer to do her share of the evening’s work. She threw a heavy cloak about her shoulders and wandered out on deck, standing where she could watch the water curl away from the prow as the men rowed the clumsy craft into the swifter current. She felt very much alone there in the crisp, clear darkness. A full moon would soon be showing itself above the eastern cliffs, shining down upon the white crescent of city which had been her home. What would be waiting for her there? She shivered and drew her cloak closer about her. Kenofer was right. She should not have put on so sheer a gown. Among the river folk only a bride would wear such fine linen.

A light wind was stirring, and the men raised the broad sail, chanting in unison as they pulled the ropes. It flapped uncertainly, then bellied in the breeze. Kenofer gave a shout of satisfaction. He was, after all, his father’s son, at home and happy on a boat. Tergen was at the tiller. Ankhsenamon could hear him singing some foreign song, and when he reached a certain line, she heard Khataka laugh delightedly. They seemed very content without her. Perhaps she had only fancied that they felt her to be one of

them. Perhaps their gay friendship was after all mere courtesy shown a queen.

The wind caught her cloak and blew it back, freeing the filmy draperies until they billowed about her limbs like white smoke. A pair of strong arms wrapped the cloak about her again, holding her captive in its folds.

“Will you forgive me for speaking as I did, Lady of the Two Lands?” Kenofer stood behind her where she could not see his face. His broad shoulders shielded her from the wind, and once again she fancied that she could feel their hearts beating in steady rhythm.

“I shall not forgive you if you call me by that name,” she answered, determined not to yield too easily.

“And what would you have me call you—Lady of the Nile?”

She nodded. “I wish I could be that always. Two Lands seem to be more than I can manage. The Nile manages itself. I am, oh, so tired of being a queen! I did not know how tired. I thought I wanted to reach Akhetaten, but now I dread to see it looming round the bend.”

Kenofer’s arms tightened about her, and for a moment he rested his cheek against her head. At the familiar gesture she caught her breath, remembering another night when she had stood within the circle of his arms. She longed to turn and cling to him as she had then, forgetful of everything but his nearness.

“Are you sure you would not regret it if you suddenly ceased to be Queen? Is there nothing in that life which you would miss?” There was a note of urgency in his voice, and she considered the question carefully before making reply.

“I think that in my heart I ceased to be Queen when Tutankhamon ceased to live. I would miss only one thing—the possession of the beauty your hands created for my delight.”

“That will be yours always, wherever you are, whoever you are.” He drew a long breath, drinking in the perfume of her hair. After a moment’s silence he spoke again. “Small Bird, a strange chance has opened the door of your royal cage. We have been outwitted by Ay, but his triumph has given you a freedom you never thought to have. Today I asked for news from Thebes. I was told that the Queen is ill—so ill that only a miracle can save her life. If she lives, it will be as Ay’s wife; if she dies, she has named Ay her successor. The word has been spread broadcast throughout the land, so that even the lowliest river craft shall carry the news. Even a fugitive in hiding will know the state of affairs and act accordingly.”

“Then Horemheb in Syria will know,” the girl said slowly, trying to weigh the full significance of his words. “So will a Hittite Prince on his way to wed the Queen.” She closed her eyes against the brightness of a rising moon, afraid to glimpse the future unfolding in its shimmering path. As the river curved, the slender crescent of Akhetaten lay white and silent along the eastern bank.

“If the Queen lives, she marries Ay; if she does not marry Ay, she dies.” She repeated the threat dispassionately. It seemed to apply to someone who was very far away. She opened her eyes, following the line of the shore as they drifted past the silent city. “Egypt has lost a Queen, Kenofer,” she said at last. “The Lady of the Two Lands is dead.”

She turned to look up into Kenofer’s face. His dark head was haloed by the golden moon as it lifted above the line of distant cliffs.

“Moon Shadow,” she whispered softly, “my hand is in thy hand. Hold me ever in thy heart.”

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THE author is deeply indebted to the scholarly and painstaking work of Sir Flinders Petrie, Adolf Erman, Sir John Gardner Wilkinson, James Henry Breasted, Alan H. Gardiner, Arthur Weigall, C. Leonard Wooley, John Pendlebury, Howard Carter, and the others who by excavation, the translation of inscriptions and papyri, and the preservation and recording of archaeological finds, have reconstructed the life of Ancient Egypt. The publications of the Egypt Exploration Society, with their accurate drawings by Nina de Garis Davies, have made available a wealth of source material dealing with this period, while The London Illustrated News has printed from time to time the results of recent excavations.

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GLOSSARY

CROWNS, HEADDRESSES, SCEPTERS



White Crown of Upper Egypt, Hedjet



Red Crown of Lower Egypt, Deshret



Double Crown of Upper and Lower Egypt, Pshent



Atef Crown of Pharaoh



Hathor Crown of the Queen



Royal Helmet, Khepresh



Nemes Headdress



Khat Headdress



Amon Headdress



Hek



Nekhekh



Flagellum, Scepter of the Queen



Nekhebt, vulture of Upper Egypt



Buto, serpent of Lower Egypt



Lotus, symbol of Upper Egypt



Papyrus, symbol of Lower Egypt



Symbol of the unity of Upper and Lower Egypt, Sema
Tawy



Uraeus snake, symbol of royal authority



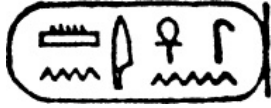
Ankh, symbol of life



Ba-bird, symbol of the soul



Symbol of Aten



Cartouche: an oval surrounding the hieroglyphs representing the name of a royal personage.



Palette: a container for pen, brushes, and ink used by scribes.



Potsherd: a fragment of pottery, often used by schoolboys as a substitute for papyrus in practicing writing, arithmetic, and drawing.



Kohl stick: a cosmetic stick made to contain kohl, a cosmetic used as make-up for the eyes.



Unguent jar: a vessel for holding perfumed ointment.

Faience: a fine glazed earthenware. Akhetaten was famous for its blue faience.

Electrum: a pale yellow alloy of gold and silver.
Akhenaten's chariot was said to be made of electrum.

THE SACRED YEAR OF THE EGYPTIANS

FIRST SEASON: THE INUNDATION

Tahuti	—	July	New Year's Day about July 20.
Paopi	—	August	The Nile in full flood.
Hathor	—	September	The Nile begins to fall.

Khoiak — October

SECOND SEASON: THE SOWING

Tobi — November Flood sometimes lasts until Tobi.

Mekhir — December

Phamenoth — January

Pharmuthi — February

THIRD SEASON: THE HARVEST

Pakhons — March

Payni — April

Epiphi — May

Mesore — June The inundation starts about June 20.

EPAGOMENAL DAYS

The five surplus days of the year. A sixth day was added every four years.



Photo by Anneke Bart, used with permission from [wikimedia.org](https://www.wikimedia.org).

Bas-relief, covered with sheet-gold, on a Golden Shrine found in King Tutankhamon's tomb.

Publisher's Note:

The front cover drawing of Queen Ankhsenamon is based on a bas-relief scene along one side of a Golden Shrine found in King Tutankhamon's tomb. The shrine (50" x 32" x 26") is covered entirely in sheet-gold. A line drawing of the entire bas-relief is shown above the chapter heading for [Chapter XXIV](#), minus the cartouches, the Queen's elaborate headpiece and a few other details. The flowers from this illustration are used on the back cover.

The illustration of the King and Queen on the [map at the beginning of the book](#) is taken from a casket lid found in the King's tomb. The lid's elaborate picture is composed of inlaid ivory, ebony, faience, glass, calcite and also sheet-gold.

Further information on these objects can be found at The Griffith Institute, University of Oxford website. Their Howard Carter Archives house Carter's original notes, and photographs by Harry Burton, from the 1922 excavation of Tutankhamon's tomb. The "Golden shrine for statuettes" is item 108 on the handlist and the "Ornamental casket" is items 540 and 551. Make sure to look at and read Carter's handwritten notes about these items! The Griffith Institute website can be found at griffith.ox.ac.uk. Modern color photos, with detailed closeups, of these items may be seen online.

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