

Cuts and Bruises - The Mummy Book Two

Posted originally on the [Archive of Our Own](http://archiveofourown.org/works/14294835) at <http://archiveofourown.org/works/14294835>.

Rating:	Teen And Up Audiences
Archive Warning:	No Archive Warnings Apply
Category:	F/M
Fandoms:	The Mummy Series , The Mummy (1999) , The Mummy Returns (2001)
Relationships:	Imhotep (The Mummy)/Original Female Character(s) , Ardeth Bay/Original Female Character(s) , Evy Carnahan O'Connell/Rick O'Connell , Anck Su Namun/Imhotep , Jonathan Carnahan/That gold stick
Characters:	Original Female Character(s) , Magdalene , Imhotep (The Mummy) , Ardeth Bay , Rick O'Connell , Evy Carnahan O'Connell , Jonathan Carnahan , Alex O'Connell , Medjai , Lock-Nah , Anck Su Namun , Horus , Original Characters
Additional Tags:	Romance , Slow Romance , Action/Adventure , Action & Romance , Visions in dreams , Sarcasm , Humor , Humour , That's how you're supposed to spell humour , Ancient Egypt , Tattoos , I'm Bad At Tagging , I'm Bad At Titles
Language:	English
Series:	Part 2 of The Mummy plus one
Stats:	Published: 2018-04-12 Completed: 2020-08-11 Words: 40,859 Chapters: 26/26

Cuts and Bruises - The Mummy Book Two

by [TheMissingPieces](#)

Summary

Magdalene's been crossed one too many times. Witnessing Imhotep's (second) resurrection, she and her family go back to Egypt to stop death rising from the ashes, but personal guilt clouds her judgement. Her connection to Imhotep puts her at odds with Ardeth and the rest of her family, with her favourite nephew reaping the consequences. Unable to sort right from wrong, she goes head to head with Imhotep desperate for vengeance. There just better be some rum left once she's done. It's gonna get messy.

Prologue

The man in front of her spoke a language she could not understand but one she was familiar with. Egyptian. Not the Arabic of her time but a dead language of Kings revered as Gods and Priests who wielded power over the dead. A magic language that had long faded into textbooks and broken stones.

He was a well-known face that had initially inspired her intrigue, but that had soon given away to terror and anger. Imhotep. Almost a deity himself, out for blood, destruction and nothing else.

He spoke again, stood there in the rags of a black cloak, expressionless, imposing, dead-eyed. The same phrase, a whisper on the wind, but it morphed into a howl that screamed in her brain until he dematerialised and blew away on the breeze of his voice, no more than sand in the wind.

* * *

Magdalene sat up in her bed, a plain wooden cross that stood on her bedside table now clutched to her chest. She had not dreamed like this in eight years, and it was enough to set her skin like marble and stop her blood like tar. The black crook and flail tattoo the creature had imprinted on her upper arm itched with excitement.

She opened the window to her room to let in the reliably cold and bitter London air. She couldn't tell Evy that she had another dream like the visions in Egypt, she would only try to explore them which exposed them to far too much risk. Rick would laugh it off as a nightmare or tell Evy, most likely both. Jonathan, well as a Carnahan you learn that you never tell Jonathan anything important.

Ardeth was her only choice. He would worry perhaps more than Evy, but he would be worried for the return of that creature rather than about her. He would be constructive, he could help. The Medjai were born to protect the world from Imhotep and they were very good at it.

She pulled a sheet off the bed to bundle herself in and turned on the lamp by her desk. There was a pile of opened letters spilling over on the desk, a paperweight sat on top of them that really wasn't much use any more. Magdalene brushed a thumb over them as she took out a new sheet of paper and headed it in her scratchy writing, Imhotep's words still pounding in her head.

Sands of time

There was nothing more exciting than being back in the warm sands of Egypt. There was the heavy scent of anticipation and adventure too, although that was not the allure of Egypt itself but the reason Magdalene was back amongst the brilliant and barren desert.

“If you’re done with those books Professor, I could use some help setting up a camp. Unless you don’t need a tent to sleep in.” She called.

“Right away, Miss Carnahan.” A young gentleman in a grey suit emerged from a hefty tome, stumbled his way off the back of a camel and ran after Magdalene.

“You must call me Maddie, Professor. I insist.” She said, her recognisable giddy smile on her face, trudging through the sand.

“But it would be improper.” He said, pulling at his braces as his shirt stuck to his back with sweat.

Magdalene took off her own black, cotton hooded jacket and her tattoo was naked to the breeze on her muscled shoulder. Stood in her tight-legged trousers and tank top she stood out a mile amongst the men, who covered their skin as their culture dictated. But she had freedom of movement in setting up the tents and she could keep much cooler without the jacket now the sun was rapidly sinking into the sand and she was not at risk of burning. She took hold of her horse’s reins and unloaded her pack, shouldering the weight with more ease than a gentleman could.

“Mr Clark, what the hell is proper about traipsing across a desert to rummage through old stones and even older junk?”

The man took off his hat and wiped at the sweat on his forehead. “You’re right.” He said. “There is nothing proper about this.”

The skeleton crew Magdalene had hired erected their tents with relative ease under her experienced watch, putting the camels to bed and setting up a guard. She was here alone, without Jonathan or the O’Connells, to follow up her own archaeological interests.

“What is it exactly that we’re looking for?” Professor Clark asked over the campfire, squinting through his glasses at his book in the little light the flames offered.

“You’re here to translate, not to ask questions.” Magdalene kept her eyes to the dunes as she spoke, she declared earlier on their journey that they were being followed but nothing had come of it. Everyone else had forgotten her worries but she was still cautious about their vulnerability.

“So you said the last time I asked.” He said.

The night passed and there was barely a whisper from the desert as Magdalene sat there, stargazing. She thought back to her first time in Egypt and Imhotep's brief time walking the earth once more. Sometime ago she had missed the dreams but now they were back and she hated them with everything she had. She often wondered what would have happened if she had taken Imhotep up on his offer, joining his entourage. He would have most likely killed her anyway or used her dreams to demonise the world, but at least she could have learnt to control them. Now he was rotting in the afterlife, as he should have done over three thousand years ago and Magdalene was being driven mad by these nightmares.

She woke the next morning after very little sleep. The restlessness of travelling freely had been reawakened in her and she savoured the return to her old life, even if she was travelling with the hired help and not as the hired help.

"Is everything alright?" Professor Clark looked up from the washbasin to the pacing woman.

"Yes. Fine, fine, fine." She dismissed him, chewing at her bottom lip.

They packed up and Magdalene clicked her horse into the lead. There was something watching them in the desert, she was sure of it. Once they got to their next camp she posted an immediate guard, not daring to take the chance.

"This isn't a king's tomb." Professor Clark said.

"A marvellous observation Professor." Magdalene said, pulling the wooden gate wide open and stooping to enter the cavern. "This isn't a new site of some great Pharaoh."

She waited whilst the Professor joined her underneath the surface of the rock to tell him why they'd journeyed this far away from the pyramids.

"This is a mass grave."

One of the men passed her a torch and she swept it along the wall to her right, illuminating the neat row of mummies laid to rest on a shelf, a pile of dirt propping up each head. The sight was mirrored on her left.

"You didn't mention this when you hired me." Professor Clark whispered.

Two of the men Magdalene hired were put outside with instructions to shout for her if they saw anyone within view of their camp. Everyone else was carefully brushing the dust from the rock face to clear the hieroglyphs for the Professor to translate. Magdalene had her nose stuck in the face of one of the mummies and was writing down observations.

"How d'you spell multiple?" She broke the silence.

"Sorry what?"

"How do you spell it? Come on Professor, we don't have all bleedin' day."

“Uh, m-u-l-t-i-p-l-e. Why?”

She rolled her eyes, but in the flickering torchlight he didn't see. “Because I don't know how.”

He stopped. “Really?”

“Yes.” She said. “I started learning to read eight years ago, I can't spell every word in the book. Pun intended. How are you getting along with the translation?”

Professor Clark let out an exasperated sigh. “The symbols are sacred markings, very rare, the people that were buried here are marked as slaves of a great man but if that were true they would be buried with him in a great tomb.”

“Oh, good. We're in the right place then, I knew you'd be useful Professor.”

“But these mummies were neglected, and there is no master buried with them, not so much as an empty sarcophagus.”

“That's because their master was a disgraced man. These people weren't executed with honour so they could attend him in the afterlife, they were murdered so they couldn't avenge him.” She said.

“What?”

“Mr Clark.” Magdalene put her hands on her thighs and pushed herself upright. “Ancient Egypt wasn't exactly heaven on earth. Rulers were cruel and suspicious of anyone who looked like a threat. Look here.”

She gestured him over to one of the mummies and showed him the gilding on the bandages, underneath the wear and tear of death and erosion. There was gold paint glittering under the grey dust on the nose and sapphire eyes had been painted onto each mummy. Bending closer she showed him the inside of the left wrist, a crook and flail that matched the tattoo on her arm had been painted over the customary burial sigils.

“This mark was branded into the skin of each slave whilst they were alive, a mark of the God of the Living.” She explained. “Whoever owned them was a Priest of Osiris. And here,” She pointed to the neck of the mummy with her pencil and used her best ‘Evy's ghost stories’ voice. “the bandages have worn away and you can see blade marks on the bone. This sucker was beheaded, as were all the others. Their master suffered the Hom Dai and they were killed so no one could resurrect his body and bring plague and ruin upon the Pharaohs of Egypt.”

“The Hom Dai is a myth.” The Professor scoffed.

The adventurer shook her head. “I have seen it myself.” Her voice was grave but she only let a flicker of horror pass over her face as she remembered it.

Professor Clark said nothing more and the silence returned itself until a shout came from outside. The gate opened and one of the guards bent double to fit in the entryway.

“A man on a horse. In black, he carries a sword.” He said.

Magdalene looked sharp. “Alone?”

“Yes.”

“From the city or the desert?”

“Oh,” the man shrugged “desert. He wears tribal robes and headed east.”

Magdalene nodded and rubbed at her nose. Turning to Professor Clark she said, “We found what I was looking for. I will come back tonight to see what else you find. You may get lucky, Mr Clark though I doubt it.”

She ordered one of the men to fetch her horse and took a bandana out of her pocket. Tying it expertly with one hand she tightened it with her teeth and made sure it covered the tattoo on her left arm, ignoring the questioning of Professor Clark.

“Wait,” He said “where are you going? If you did not come here to find treasure then what was the whole point of this?”

Magdalene grinned at him. “To make sure they were all still here. Keep translating the hieroglyphs, but a word of advice Professor.”

“Yes?”

“If you find any strange books,” her grin widened to show a few more teeth “don’t read them.”

“What does that even mean?” He called, but she ignored them and stepped into bright sunshine.

She shrugged on her hooded jacket, grabbed her canvas holdall and steered her horse east, strapping her bag down as she rode. In her haste to catch up to the lone rider she drove her horse faster than she would normally consider wise but she was in a hurry and determined to get some answers.

He was waiting for her at the top of a dune. “I do not often see visitors riding a horse. Do you not like camels?”

“Someone once told me that camels are unreliable, they will walk for miles without problem then drop down and die. You can trust a horse, he will let you know when he is tired.” She said.

He moved off again and she had to push her horse into a trot to speak to him again.

“We have to talk. Imhotep may be back, I’ve been having these dreams-”

“I know that you are dreaming about the creature again.”

“So you have been getting my letters, you’re just ignoring them.” She scowled.

“Or your postman is late.” He said, smiling.

“This is not funny Ardeth.” She said. “I asked for your help and you hang me out to dry. If Imhotep comes back we are all in trouble, including you.”

Ardeth’s good mood was not to be swayed, though it was impossible to tell the difference from his usual serious demeanour. “Believe me Magdalene, keeping you out of this is helping you.”

Magdalene gave him a look of disbelief and hurt. “Don’t go behind my back Ardeth, you lose my trust once you lose it forever.”

“Well, you are here now. And there is something I must tell you.”

* * *

They rode further into the desert in silence, Magdalene was unwilling to make conversation until her wounded pride and trust had been restored and Ardeth did not want to make the tenuous situation worse.

He studied her from her seat to his right, shoulders back and chin held firm. She had certainly grown up over the past eight years, into a proud woman. Evy had certainly raised her but so had Rick, she was by no means feminine. Her confidence impressed him and he couldn’t help feel proud to know her and have, maybe, influenced her.

“You’ve changed.”

Ardeth turned to fully face her at the comment. Magdalene still looked ahead, avoiding his gaze.

“So have you.” He said.

She shook her head. “I’ve grown up. The Ardeth I know would trust his friends like he would his tribe and tell him where they were going and tell them what he knew about Imhotep.”

Ardeth felt guilty about losing Magdalene’s trust, he was worried about how she would cope if the creature came back. She had seen Imhotep as more human than the rest of them, whether rightly or wrongly, and these dreams were clearly taking their toll on her mind. She looked like a rabbit trapped in a snare.

He spurred his horse on at a quicker pace. “We are going to a sentry post for the Medjai. It is

dangerous to be alone in the desert, there are tribe wars and raiders everywhere. I need to talk to you in safety.”

As Ardeth spoke, they approached a campsite that marred the unblemished golden horizon, a dark blot on the sand. It consisted of about a dozen men, all armed to the teeth, that sat in small groups around a stone ring filled with burning wood partaking in whispered discussions, not that Magdalene could understand the Arabic tongue anyway. A few men were stood off to the side, taking their turn on the watch, and they paid her no attention but the rest of them glanced her way as she and Ardeth entered the camp.

Ardeth graciously took her horse’s reins and led the pair of animals to rest with the other horses, telling his friends who she was. Their glares turned to something akin to friendliness, for Medjai warriors the hint of open warmth was higher praise than it looked. Magdalene looked around at the tents and luggage bags that lay by the horses.

“You set up a camp?” She asked. “Wouldn’t it be safer to keep on the move?”

“There has been an increase in the cult members hunting the desert for the creature’s corpse. The scouts have had to roam so far from the tribes’ territory that we have been forced to set up camps for them to report back to. We are here as an outpost.” He said.

“Cult? Imhotep’s cult?” Magdalene heard those words and was suddenly all business.

Ardeth made her sit down for the discussion. “There have been sightings of the cult at both Thebes and the Valley of the Kings, they are looking for the City of the Dead and they get closer every time. It is too dangerous for you to be here, that is why I did not tell you.”

“I think it would have helped a bit!” Magdalene retorted. “I’ve been spying on their leader for you since I got back to England! If I knew what was happening here in Egypt I could have gotten more information.”

“If Baltus Hafez knows you are an associate of the Medjai it will make it all the riskier to spy on him. We only need you to tell us what he has been doing so we can prepare if the cult makes it to Hamunaptra.” Ardeth gripped her shoulder and stared her down to get his point across.

It was in Ardeth’s nature to care for the weakest link in the chain, to help strengthen them so the group could succeed like a leader should and Magdalene was the youngest and most vulnerable out of the group. But he also cared for her the most because she had the greatest spirit. He saw Magdalene’s courage and it reminded him of himself.

This could have gone a lot better

Magdalene felt extremely uncomfortable under Ardeth's strict gaze and conflicted over being left out of the loop. It was true, this way she was much safer, but she had signed up to help the Medjai knowing all of the risks she was taking and teams didn't hide important information from each other. Did Ardeth not count her as part of the team? He seemed to value her, he had thanked her repeatedly in his letters when she had been particularly useful in keeping the cult at bay by relaying information from Hafez back to Egypt.

"Where is the hat I rescued for you those years ago?" Ardeth noticed her short hair free and blowing across her face in the wind.

There was a glimmer of a smile on Magdalene's lips. "Alex asked if he could take it to school while I was away, tell everybody how brave his Auntie is. I can't say no to him."

"And where are the O'Connells?" He asked of his other friends.

"They didn't come." She said. "Evy has some research she's presenting and I asked to do a dig on my own."

"At least you have not brought Evelyn and Rick here, do they know anything about your dreams?"

"No, I didn't want to put them in any danger." Magdalene said quietly.

Ardeth's smile was half amused, half frustrated. "So do not put yourself in any danger either and go back to your family. You are too stubborn for your own good. The caves you were at, it is the burial site of Imhotep's servants?"

Magdalene's cheeks flushed red at the question. She still thought that there was something wrong, but Ardeth's knowledge of her activities made her sheepish. "I thought that they might have been disturbed by the cult."

"There is nothing to fear, your dreams are just nightmares. You are too worried about Baltus Hafez and it is leaking into your sleep." Ardeth smiled.

There came a cry from one of the sentries, he had drawn his sword and was pointing towards a band of men in red on horseback, charging the camp.

"If these men see me and tell Hafez, I'm a dead man." Magdalene said, pulling the hood of her jacket low over her brow.

Ardeth drew his own scimitar to lead his men. "Stay here. We can fight them easily."

"Like hell I will." She growled, watching them mount their horses to defend the camp. She

jumped into the saddle of her own horse and pulled out her revolver from its shoulder holster, hidden by her jacket.

Grappling her horse with expertise Magdalene galloped through the sands, standing up in the stirrups as Rick taught her to do when fighting. Stood up, she could now aim from a much further distance and with greater agility. By the time she caught up with the Medjai warriors she had shot two men and knocked another off his horse by riding into him.

“What are you doing?” Ardeth shouted, cutting upwards with his scimitar to stop a blow from reaching his neck.

“Saving your ass and protecting mine!” Magdalene shouted back. “And I need the practise.”

One of the cult members came at her with a curved sword that flashed in the sunlight. Magdalene steered her horse out of his path and swung her arm around, shooting him as he rode past.

Not a second later she was rammed into by someone else and for a heartbeat she flew through the air until she crashed into the sand. There was a sharp cry to her left as one of the cult members ran at her slashing with his sword. Magdalene didn't have time to flinch before Ardeth ran him through and he fell to the ground.

She stared at him, sweaty and panting from exertion in the desert heat. “Thanks.” She gasped.

“You're welcome.” Ardeth replied.

“I'm still...ugh everything hurts. I'm still not used to running about all the time.” Magdalene was still out of breath once they'd walked back to camp and she collapsed onto the sand, sighing at the feeling of weightlessness in her little hollow. She thought about untying her bandana to wipe her sweat but then if she took off her jacket Ardeth would see the tattoo.

Ardeth sat beside her after dismissing his men, who backed off to leave them relatively alone. “You may stay with us for the night.”

Magdalene immediately tried pulling herself back up but she didn't have the strength or the will power. “No! No, I need to, uh I have a camp. I need to get back to them and make sure everything is okay.”

“They will find nothing and you can spend one night here.” Ardeth would not take no for an answer.

In the end, they were sat talking for far longer than they should have, swapping stories of adventures between the years that were not fit to be squashed into the letters they'd sent each other. Magdalene was comforted and brightened by Ardeth's presence, being so far away from one of her first true friends made her feel a little lost some of the time and the letters were mostly business which was no comfort. He was unique and she was in awe of him, being next to him made the rest of the world seem easier to live in and she wished it was always like that.

“What is this from?” Ardeth asked, laughing after Magdalene had told him some stories of Alex growing up. He was pointing to a silver line on her forearm.

Magdalene shifted from lying on her stomach to sitting up. “This is when I was in Texas with Rick. We got caught in a bar fight and one of the punters cut me with a glass bottle.”

He suddenly looked at her rather seriously. “Do you often get hurt?”

“Nah.” She sniffed. “Couple broken bones here and there, scrapes and scratches.”

After a few minutes of solemn silence, she leaned in, a mischievous smirk on her face. In the darkness, Ardeth’s face was all that more striking and the starlight in his eyes could have lit up the entire desert but for now they were trained solely on her.

“Funnily enough there’s a lot more fighting and danger when you’re trying to kill an undead mummy than there is in any bar you care to drink in.” She told him.

Ardeth took her hand in his and turned it over, running his finger down a pale mark on the side of her palm. “And this?”

Magdalene whispered back, looking very serious. “Evy tried to teach me how to cook, I burnt myself on a hot pan.”

Their laughter travelled up to the sky. When they did sleep, it was the first night Magdalene had spent without dreaming of Imhotep and her mood showed it. Even happier than usual, she said goodbye to the Medjai sentinels and Ardeth with a smile and promised to leave Imhotep’s dead servants alone and forget her worries.

As it turned out it was a very bad idea not to tell Evy or Rick about her dreams. Magdalene hadn’t had one since she’d come back from her little excursions, so she had stayed silent about her fears, trying to tell herself that Ardeth was right and now they were in Egypt, uncovering an ancient, half-sunken side temple on the edge of the palace at Thebes.

“So what’s the plan for this one?” She set down their tools and travel kits and looked to Evy for instructions.

Their lead archaeologist was half-distracted by the ruins around them. Rick tapped her on the arm and she came back to the land of the living.

“Uh, right. I want to look at the detailing of the pillars, translating the hieroglyphs can tell us why the temple was built.”

Magdalene groaned. “I always have to put up the scaffolding.”

Evy picked up a case of tools and a tool belt, disappearing into the rest of the temple.

“Oh, that’s lovely!” Magdalene said. “Abandoning the hired help.”

She hadn't returned by the time they'd finished and Rick sat with his son lent on his arm. Magdalene lay on top of the scaffolding, trademark wide-brimmed leather hat covering her face.

"She isn't coming back on her own, is she?" Rick asked.

"No." Both Alex and Magdalene replied.

Rick shouldered his own tool bag, full of firearms, and headed in the direction of his wife.
"Alex, stay with Maddie."

"Yes Dad."

There was little movement or sound once Rick left until Alex stood and brushed down his suit jacket.

"Maddie I'm off exploring."

She stuck her thumb in the air, didn't even bother to take her hat off her face.

She was worried about Ardeth. True, he told her that her dreams were no longer linked to visions and they had to be regular nightmares, Imhotep had not been resurrected. To see a future involving him was an impossibility. But If one thing was for certain it was that Magdalene was not getting nightmares after eight years of Imhotep-free dreams. The stranger thing was the letter she received a week after returning to England. Ardeth told her that he missed the company of their little band and enjoyed seeing her but it would be a while before he could write to her again. More importantly he stressed that she and the O'Connells were to avoid Egypt altogether for a while.

It stunk of something happening that he didn't want her to know about, something to do with Imhotep and that stupid cult. That made her worry, he always told her vague details about Medjai activities. He said it was to reassure her that he was never in danger but Magdalene suspected it was to show off. Men were very predictable.

A month later Evy pushed them towards going back to Egypt and here they were.

Still, Magdalene relished the trepidation that blew in on the warm winds. It reminded her of the old days. She was still young but she felt middle aged, settled. Contentment did not suit her.

"Maddie. Auntie Maddie wake up."

She grunted and lifted her head to see Alex sat on her, shaking her shoulders. Another groan and she shut her eyes.

"What?" She moaned.

“Dad caught me exploring and sent me back. He says if you don’t keep an eye on me he’ll feed you to scarab beetles.” Alex said.

Magdalene got up and climbed down after Alex. “Your father makes a convincing threat.”

She jumped to the floor and ruffled Alex’s hair, chuckling at his protests. She reached into her pocket and rested her fingers on the letter from Ardeth. She was closer to him than she was in England but she never felt further away. She wanted to be back home watching for the post so she knew he was safe or at least alive.

To pass the time, as if Alex’s mouse trap engineering wasn’t interesting enough, she fiddled about with her revolver. Rick had given it her for her twenty-fifth birthday, both a useful present and a reminder of past adventures. For her twenty-sixth he’d given her a sheath for her dagger around her waist. Rick liked practical, violent presents.

Whilst she had been daydreaming away, Alex had gotten extremely busy. Magdalene was proud to say that she had instilled her own brand of curiosity into her godson. As a self-appointed Auntie she taught him how to take things apart and, under threat from Rick, decided to teach Alex how to put things back together again. His mousetrap was complex and excessive but it was a feat of engineering that was incredibly impressive from an eight-year-old using twine and twigs.

Alex put a wedge of cheese on top of the trap with much aplomb, then ran to look out to the corridor that led outside where he heard echoed voices and saw shadows moving towards them. Magdalene perked up too and scrambled to usher Alex back up the scaffolding as quickly as possible, pushing him onto his stomach and lying beside him. Only after she was up there did she see her revolver lying on the floor. She swore and took her dagger out as a consolation prize, if the people coming inside the temple were dangerous she was going to be no use unless she got close enough for hand to hand combat.

Three men walked through, well equipped with handguns and torches. They were neither explorers nor lost, which meant Magdalene and Alex were in trouble.

“Knock, knock. Anybody home?” The shortest one said. “You two check out that stuff, see if it’s there. I’ll sort out the O’Connells.”

Definitely guns for hire then, there as both hit men and delivery boys, but Magdalene had no idea what it was they were after. The one consolation was that these were not cult members. But that didn’t mean the Cult of Imhotep hadn’t sent them, who else would be interested in anything the O’Connells found? The thought of that mummy being resurrected made Magdalene start to sweat.

Ardeth you lied to me.

For now, all she could do was push her hat firmly onto her head and pull on Alex’s shirt to stop him from leaning too far and falling off the wooden platform. He was her responsibility, Evy and Rick could handle themselves, she was sure.

One of the intruders, Australian she thought, was muttering as they searched through clay pots and other remnants of the Egyptian temple that they had collected into piles for sorting. Regardless of whether the pile looked valuable now, he was smashing three-thousand-year-old artefacts. Magdalene was sure that Evy would knock him out the moment she saw him tip over another jar.

Alex shifted next to her and she saw him slip a rock into his catapult. She had not become any more mature over the last eight years but she could certainly tell when it was a bad idea to start flinging pebbles at people with guns and knives.

She shook her head, not daring to whisper and tapped Alex on the arm insistently but he shrugged her off and let go of his slingshot, hitting the Australian square on the back of the neck.

He howled in pain, and his jittery partner pointed his weapon at the sound. “Jacques, som’ings hit me head!”

“Shut up, Spivey.” He looked around suspiciously. “This place is cursed. We do not want to wake the gods.”

Magdalene dropped her head into her hand at the stupidity of the pair of them. Looking over at Alex her gaze turned stern and she mouthed at him. “You got lucky.”

But he was already aiming for him again, this time he hit him on the back side and the cry of pain was even louder.

“God, that hurt!”

The pair on top of the scaffolding flattened themselves on their backs so they wouldn’t be seen but Alex couldn’t control a small giggle until Magdalene clapped a hand over his mouth. They paused, holding in their breath as if it would make them any less visible, but no one seemed to attempt to climb the scaffolding. Magdalene covered her hands with her face in relief and prayer that they hadn’t been spotted, only to hear the snap of Alex’s slingshot again and his frightened gasp. Third time unlucky.

She peeked over the edge to see both men staring straight at them, until Jacques, the superstitious one, stepped forward.

“I’ll take care of this.”

Magdalene swore.

Jacques climbed up the ladder with a very large knife in his teeth. Magdalene pointed her own dagger at him as Alex tried to look for a way down and the Australian taunted them from below.

“Been in worse.” She said to herself, but it didn’t make things any better.

Jacques was at the top of the ladder when the third man came running through. “Spivey! Jacques! Let’s get the hell out of here!”

No one had a clue what was going on but Magdalene was very glad when Jacques slid back down the ladder, until he kicked the supports from underneath the legs of the scaffolding. Both her and Alex tried to hold on as it swayed and buckled but it eventually toppled to one side and they jumped for the ancient pillar next to it. The stone came apart from the ceiling it had been slotted against for so many centuries and went the way of the scaffolding, crashing into the next pillar, and the next, until they were all toppling over.

Alex and Magdalene slid harmlessly down the first pillar onto the floor, Alex was screaming but it was only out of fright and not any pain. Although Magdalene was sure that if Rick didn’t kick his butt she certainly would after giving him a lecture on hiding without antagonizing the men trying to kill you.

Although on second thought she didn’t really have a good track record in that area. The last time she ever came face to face with Imhotep she punched him out of spite and rage. Mind you, there was little other choice with Evy chained to a sacrificial altar, Rick up against a hoard of mummified priests, Ardeth missing presumed dead and Jonathan a blubbering idiot at the top of a stair case.

Those were the good days.

Alex ran from her side to try and stop the last pillar standing from bashing into the wall, she just stood there, pinching the bridge of her nose in exasperation. The column eventually fell, opening a brand-new door in the wall of the temple and a great river of water came flooding through. It was as if the Nile was rushing towards them. Magdalene grabbed Alex, who was screaming and running towards her. She turned her back to the water and pressed Alex tight to her body in the hope that, if the tide didn’t sweep them away, she would act as a break to keep Alex from drowning. The water subsided just as it reached them, washing up a sopping wet Rick and Evy, coughing and spluttering at their feet.

Alex stared dumbly at his half-drowned parents. “Mum? Dad? I can explain everything.”

Magdalene avoided their stares with a red face.

Well when you're popular

Over a week after the O'Connells and Magdalene destroyed the temple of the palace, two books were placed side by side, the air almost quivered with the power and potential of anyone who possessed them both. The backdrop of Hamunaptra stood stark against the blotted desert night sky. Metal against stone clashed all around the ruins of the City of the Dead. Ardeth was there, the Medjai were unable to stop the growing strength of the Cult of Imhotep and now he could only watch and wait as the diggers grew closer to Imhotep's corpse with every swing of a pickaxe.

A great tremor shook the earth and Ardeth heard a roar that was all too familiar, sending electric sparks up into his brain at the memory of the creature's destruction. Despite there being over a hundred men, the desert stood silent for a few moments. He knew better than the curious diggers who closed in on the large pit to look as the sand shifted and rose up, inching away. His hand reached for the hilt of his sword. Whilst he was alone and unable to use it for drawing attention to himself and the Medjai, the touch of the weapon was no small comfort to the soldier.

The sand bubbled and rose until a legion of scarab beetles erupted to the surface with the squeaks and squeals of their black bodies. The men all ran back out of the pit much quicker than they had gone in but the steep slope and the speed of the scarabs made any escape futile. Ardeth winced at their screams and watched in abject horror along with everyone else who was at a safe distance from the pit.

The beetles burrowed under the skin of the men and travelled upwards to the brain, exiting through the mouth or any other path of little resistance. They were abhorrent creatures, a fitting warning in the shadow of the horror that was to come. Eventually the cult used flame to push back the beetles until a cry came from the other side of Hamunaptra's ancient site. Imhotep's body had been recovered.

He had tried to put on a brave face for Magdalene so that she felt safe but his carelessness had damned them all. The cult had found the mummy and now they were travelling to London. Ardeth's breath hitched at the thought of Magdalene being killed by these men, Hafez knew her well as she had often taken Alex to see the museum he curated to gain insight into the cult's movements. This was turning out to be one of the worst days of his life, he had refused to take more direct action against the cult and Magdalene and the O'Connells were going to be the ones to pay for it.

* * *

Magdalene spent the journey through Europe daydreaming out of the window, relishing the feel of the rocking of the train. She daydreamed often now, she was still a traveller by nature and settling down with her family had put restraints on her desire to roam. Maybe once they were back in London she would go on another trip by herself, up north. She could go back through some of the places she'd been before she sailed to America when she was fourteen, it would be nice to see more of the green countryside.

Whenever Alex got tired exploring, pestering his parents and antagonising the staff and other passengers on the train, he sat next to her, opposite his father. He claimed her shoulder was comfier to sleep on than Rick's was and his mum was completely enamoured by the bracelet, so she was impossible to talk to. He fidgeted a lot, which wasn't comfortable for Magdalene but she appreciated that he still wanted to spend time with her, at his age she had refused to be in the same room as anyone over twenty if she could help it.

Magdalene eyed Rick's tattoo from under her hat and felt the one on her arm tingle. She hadn't shown her crook and flail tattoo to anyone, she felt ashamed of the mark and the affiliation with Imhotep. Her embarrassment stemmed from her fondness for the brand, a small reminder of Imhotep and the way he looked at her like she had such potential. She used it for motivation and as a memento of her greatest adventure, but was always careful to wear her cotton jacket or a long-sleeved shirt unless she was around people who did not know her. Maybe one day she would show it to them, but until she was certain it was impossible for Imhotep to return she would keep it hidden.

"Dad, I never got to show you the cartouche on the wall." Alex complained.

"Never mind Alex, I got the real thing right here." Rick tapped his wrist.

Magdalene chipped in. "When you're older, maybe you could get a matching one like your dad."

Alex gasped, with lit up eyes until Rick shook his head and looked at Magdalene sternly.

"Stop putting ideas in my son's head."

"It was just a thought." She laughed.

Rick kept on glaring at her. "Well we both know that scamp head of yours isn't very good at thinking, is it? Alex, where's your mother?"

"In the sleeping carriage." Alex was frowning as Rick left them alone, turning to Magdalene. "What was that about?"

"I'm not an O'Connell." She replied.

"Neither is Uncle Jonathan. Dad still likes him, even if he calls him a drunken waste of space."

Magdalene snorted at that, but she kept on looking out of the window to avoid Alex's gaze. "You know I'm not actually your mum's sister."

Alex sensed a story and wriggled in his seat. "Yes, you met her on a dig after Mum and Uncle Jonathan met Dad in Cairo."

"...Close enough. I used to be on my own all the time but after we left Egypt I took your

mum's maiden name and I became a sister to your mum and Jonathan. Rick still likes me around, he just finds it hard to see me as family."

"You're still my Auntie." Alex said, before the exhaustion of the trip hit him and he dropped onto Magdalene's arm, fast asleep.

"You're still my nephew, kid." Magdalene smiled back at him and lent her head back, closing her eyes.

The rest of the journey passed in a similar fashion, either fast asleep or wishing you were, until they finally reached London and the city's unique hum put energy back into their bones. Evy was the most excited and demanding that they go back to Egypt as soon as possible to use the bracelet to track other Ancient Egyptian mummies, but Rick was not having any of it.

"I think the bracelet is some sort of guide to the lost oasis of Ahm Shere." She said to Rick as they walked through the corridors of their house, bags in hand.

Rick smiled at his wife, more amused than actually interested. "Evy, I know what you're thinking...and the answer's no. We just got home." He dropped the suitcases on the floor to make his point.

"That's the beauty of it." Evy said. "We're already packed."

"Why don't you just give me one good reason?"

"It's just an oasis, darling." Evy tried sweet talking her husband. "A beautiful, exciting, romantic...oasis."

Magdalene rolled her eyes at the displays of romantic affection and started picking back up the bags. Evy always won, Rick was a sucker for her smile but he seemed to have the upper hand on this one, playing her game.

"The kind with the white, sandy beach and the palm trees and the cool, clear, blue water? We could have some of those big drinks with the little umbrellas."

"Sounds good." Evy encouraged.

"Sounds too good. What's the catch?" Rick had her there.

"Supposedly it's the resting place of Anubis' army." Evy 'fessed up in a disappointed, monotone voice.

Rick turned to Magdalene to complain. "You see? I knew there's a catch. There's always a catch! How did I know that?"

Evy walked away in defeat but Rick wasn't done playing detective.

"And let me guess. It was commanded by, uh, that Scorpion King guy?"

“Yes, but he only awakens once every five thousand years.”

“Which, if the legend of the bug-king is true,” Magdalene pointed out “he’s due to wake up right about now.”

“Right, and if someone doesn’t kill him, he’s gonna wipe out the world.” Rick continued this trope, rather reminiscent of the last time someone from Ancient Egypt who was supposed to be dead came back to life.

“How did you know?” Evy genuinely seemed surprised.

“I didn’t, but that’s always the story.”

Magdalene left them to bicker over the various historical figures who had tried to find the oasis, Ramses the Fourth, Alexander the Great, Julius Caesar, Napoleon. All of them seemed to be after a giant pyramid of gold in the middle of Ahm Shere. She waltzed over to the library and set the gramophone playing, she had seen some jazz players in a club the last time she visited America and loved the bouncy, rebellious tunes.

Her thoughts turned to the bookshelves in front of her and she picked a new book to work through. One of Evy’s university friends had laughed at her for not knowing who Shakespeare was, so she decided to read his entire works as soon as she was able to understand the old language. She was jealous that Alex could read Shakespeare better than her but she reminded herself he had one of the best educations in the country and it was good to have someone to help her read.

“...hath...be-stow-ed much honour on a young...F...lorentine...” She read aloud to help her concentrate, bumping into a small human. “Oh! Sorry Alex.”

“It’s okay.” He brushed himself off, small boys bounced. “You reading another one?”

Magdalene nodded. “Much Ado About Nothing, is it a comedy or a tragedy?”

“Comedy.” Alex explained. “It’s full of rude jokes and they keep calling each other different animals but they all fall in love at the end.” He wrinkled his nose, he saw enough affection between his parents to put him right off the idea.

“Oh right.” She said. “Um, I don’t understand any of this.”

“I can read it for you?”

“No, I’ll read it later, let’s have a look at that bracelet. Evy says it’s made of gold.”

They tried to lift it up but it was ridiculously heavy. Eventually they lifted it off the ground, wobbling about as they carried into the drawing room.

“Mum!” Alex called. “What do we do with this chest? Sucker weighs a god dang ton.”

“Alex, watch your language.” Evy said sharply.

He gave his mother a look and said in his best upper-class English accent, “Rather weighty, this.”

Magdalene bit her lip and tried to look innocent, she’d taught Alex to curse like that. They put it on the side table and left to fetch some more of the luggage when the chest clicked open and air hissed out of it, like a soft exhale. Both Magdalene and Alex turned to stare at it. They looked at one another and silently decided to open up the chest together, leaning in closer.

Alex picked up the gold jewellery and hovered it over his arm, where it clicked into place automatically and he stood there, with an outstretched arm. Magdalene tried to pull the bracelet off of him without alerting his parents but it was stuck there. She then tried to shake Alex into looking at her but it was like he could see something she couldn’t, right in front of them.

Looking up, she checked to see if either Rick or Evy had noticed what they’d done, and couldn’t help overhearing their conversation.

“...you and Alex are the only thing that matter to me.” Rick said.

Magdalene felt a little hurt by the statement but getting Alex to communicate with her and take off the bracelet was a bigger priority at that present moment.

“Alex.” She hissed. “Alex take it off!”

Just like that, his arm dropped down to his side and he was back in reality. He gave Magdalene a worried look after tugging at the bracelet and it refused to budge. They kept on pulling at it, Magdalene even tried worming her dagger underneath it but Alex kept slapping at her hand and they started arguing with each other under their breath.

“Cripes, how do you get this thing off?” He grunted.

They kept on tugging at his arm until Rick called down for them both to behave.

“You betcha.” Alex answered.

“Absolutely.” Magdalene gave a worried chuckle.

The pair hurried to put some expensive statue or other into the chest to give it its weight and slammed the lid shut until they could get the bracelet off Alex’s arm and swap them back. Magdalene saw Evy approaching and bolted.

“I’m off to find Rick and talk about...something.” She said as she ran up the stairs.

She caught up with Rick as he was searching for Jonathan, who had apparently left his latest girlfriend’s underwear in their house.

“What’s up with you?” He noticed her gloomy face.

“Nothing. Just wanted to say I’m thinking about going on another trip by myself whilst you’re off looking for Ahm Shere.”

Rick laughed. “We’re not going to Ahm Shere.”

“Well, I’m still planning a trip.”

He stopped her in the corridor. “What’s this all about Maddie? You’re sulking like Alex before he goes back to school.” He was being very jovial but he could see she was unhappy.

““You and Alex are the only thing that matter to me’.” She said, bitterness lacing her miserable tones. “I mean it doesn’t bother me, why should it? I’m not related to you but it’s not like we didn’t save the world together or anything.”

“Oh, come on Maddie, you know it’s not like that.” Rick protested as she walked away again, sighing to himself. “Women are so emotional.”

“I heard that.” She snapped, throwing open the nearest door to duck in for some privacy, where she met Jonathan with a knife to his throat and a snake hissing in his face, surrounded by cult members. Including Baltus Hafez.

She leaned back to whisper to Rick. “Continue this later?”

Rick walked in on the same scene. “Agreed. Uh, hello.” Jonathan waved at him, smiling in his fright. “Uh, Jonathan I thought I said no more wild parties.”

“Well, when you’re popular.” He joked until the knife was pressed tighter to his throat.

Gentle Persuasion

I'm very sorry I haven't updated in so long. I'm at university and here in England your first year exams aren't too important but if you don't pass you will get kicked out. I've been rehearsing 20 hours a week for a theatre performance (I minor in drama) and I've had other assessed work for English and Writing, plus exams. I've had to take some time off my main hobbies to focus on my mental health and to prepare for next year. I haven't been dealing with stress very well lately and have needed some support. But I'm glad to say I'm back and will be updating very frequently now as I have a lot more spare time. I feel like I can trust you all with what I am going through and have been grateful with the continued support for these projects and myself. Much love, The Missing Pieces.

Ardeth had followed Baltus Hafez all the way back to London, where they set up a chamber in the museum for Imhotep's resurrection and then travelled to the O'Connell manor the moment they came back from their own expedition. He had stayed mostly in the shadows, waiting until he was needed. He had taken as many precautions as possible so there was no further chance of danger for the O'Connell family, he would not make that mistake again. This meant he had travelled alone, without any aid from the rest of his warriors.

It was strange, spying on his friends, but he knew that their safety was threatened and now that he had told Magdalene there was nothing to fear, he was the only one that could protect Evy and her young son.

"I'm serious. If you've lost that key you're grounded." Evy was patting Alex down crossly for the key to the chest next to them.

"I haven't lost it. I just can't find it. There's a difference."

Ardeth smiled, he could see why Magdalene was so proud of her nephew, he had so much of her own personality in him. Evy's argument with her son stopped when someone walked in from behind a screen.

"Good evening."

Ardeth's eyes narrowed. He knew this man and steeled himself to fight.

"Who are you? What are you doing here?" Evy asked him.

"I'm looking for the chest of course. Give it to me now."

Ardeth looked at the chest on the table as Alex grabbed it and hid behind his mum. Evy drew a sword off the wall from a display, pointing it at the cult assassin.

"Get out of my house." She said.

“Whoa, Mum.” Alex’s eyes widened at the sword. “Maybe not the best idea.”

“Alex, get back there.”

Several other members of the cult joined the first.

“Definitely not the best idea. I think it’s time to yell for dad now.” Alex even had her smart mouth in the face of danger.

“Now I will kill you and take it anyway.” His old enemy said with his smooth voice.

“I think not.” Ardeth couldn’t let Evy stand alone against the cult assassins.

“Ardeth. What are you doing here?” Evy asked.

He stood next to Evy imperiously, ready to protect her and her child at all costs, until he could leave to protect Magdalene from Hafez and that snake charming heiress Meela.

“Perhaps explanations are best kept for later.” His focus was on the men in front of him.

“Ardeth Bay.”

“Lock-Nah.” He greeted the assassin like a friendly acquaintance.

Lock-Nah commenced the fight and Ardeth threw off his cloak for mobility in the sword fight. He slashed at the air to push them back in a series of manoeuvres. He became embroiled in a two-on-one battle as Lock-Nah looked on with that ugly grin of his. He hoped that Evy would be sensible and run to safety with Alex. Instead, she cartwheeled across the room, catching one of the assailants with her foot and clashing blades expertly with another.

They were both engaged for a while, they were no match for Ardeth but in multiples it was hard to keep track of where their swords were and Evy, whilst she seemed able to meet every blow that came to her, was acting entirely upon reflex. She swung at one man and pushed him back, using her momentum to drive his sword into a book shelf.

“Whoa, Mum!” Alex said, stood holding the chest. “Where did you learn to do that?”

Evy pushed the second man into the first. “I have no idea.”

The second cult member got back up and pushed Evy into the wall, hands around her neck. With a knee to the privates, the stomach and a punch to the face she sent him reeling.

“That I learned from your father.”

More cult members joined the fight against Ardeth and he was struggling to keep with the pace of it all, especially without the use of one arm as it was wrapped around another one of the men.

“Not bad...for a Medjai.” Lock-Nah taunted.

Ardeth gritted his teeth and wished that Allah would shut him up. One of the men had gone after the chest and was struggling for it with Alex in a match of tug-of-war. He possessed greater strength than the eight-year-old but Alex had a vice like grip and stubbornness that rivalled that of his mother.

“Let go!” He grunted, pulling for all he was worth until he was swung from the chest, his own weight acting against him as his grip failed and he landed three feet away on his back.

Ardeth managed to kill a few of the soldiers before Lock-Nah decided to join the battle and removed his own cloak to draw his sword.

“What’s in the chest?” Ardeth yelled, bearing down on the assassin.

“The bracelet of Anubis!” Evy called back.

Struck by the even greater importance of the situation, Ardeth was taken off guard by Lock-Nah’s attack. He was forced to duck under his sword’s path and took an elbow to the face before bringing up his own scimitar to stop himself from being sliced in two. The pair both clashed swords and took punches multiple times before Lock-Nah kicked Ardeth in the gut and gained a clear upper hand.

“They must not get the bracelet!” Ardeth growled out to Evy, his voice marred and strained by the pain. “Get it and get out of here!”

There was a loud creak of wood as Alex levered the bookcase off the wall and brought it crashing down on one of the cult members. Ardeth pushed against Lock-Nah’s sword with his. Evy picked up the chest, momentarily vulnerable.

“Mum, look out!”

Evy took a heavy blow and fell to the ground, unconscious, Ardeth calling out to his friend to protect her.

“Evelyn!” That second it took for Ardeth to check if Evy was okay, it took Lock-Nah to cut his chest and strike him across the face.

Evy was thrown across one of the cult member’s shoulder and she and the chest were carried out the house.

Alex stared after his mum, helpless on the floor. “Mum!”

Ardeth picked himself off the floor, his body sore and he put a hand to the bleeding wound. He heard the air cut by a blade and dodged a throwing axe that embedded into the wood next to his head. By the time he recovered his wits, Lock-Nah had disappeared after his men and he was alone in the room with Alex.

* * *

There was a similar battle upstairs, Magdalene and Rick had barged in on Jonathan about to become snake food and they were considerably outnumbered.

“Hey, folks.” Rick was trying to talk his way out of the situation. “Knowing my brother-in-law, he probably deserves whatever you’re about to do to him but this is my house, I have certain rules about snakes and dismemberment.”

Magdalene was a little less subtle. She waved jovially at Hafez, then made eye contact with the woman with the snake. Her smile showed far too many teeth to go with her narrow, malicious eyes.

“Who’s the whore?” She asked, inciting the woman’s rage.

The woman in black threw her snake at the pair who ducked out of its path. Magdalene saw the triumph across her face, then she saw it vanish as Rick grabbed the head of the snake.

“Rick.” Magdalene lined up, holding out a heavy, ornamental candlestick like a cricket bat. “Line her up.”

“Shoot them!” Commanded the woman, but Rick and Magdalene were already gearing up their own attack.

Rick tossed the snake and Magdalene hit it straight into the cult member pointing a gun at them. He fell back as the snake bit into his neck and he shot the ceiling instead of either of them.

“Run for six! But what’s this? Corpse on the pitch stops play!” Magdalene called.

Another man in red aimed with a throwing knife with lightning precision, but Rick’s reflexes were superior as he caught it in mid-air and sent it back the way it came. The man who threw the knife was prepared, leaning out of the way, but that was only more unfortunate for the man who stood directly behind him.

Another man came from the room adjacent, holding an automatic rifle. In the lull caused by his arrival, Jonathan grabbed a golden sceptre, all that was left of his share of the Hamunaptra treasure.

“I’ll take that.” He quipped as Rick and Magdalene dove after him for cover behind the upturned armchair.

They dived from behind the furniture to the en suite bathroom. Magdalene was the first to scramble over to the safety of the wall by the window, Rick rotated on the floor and pushed the door shut with his leg before taking cover by the bath as the gun began shooting up the door, leaving splintered wood all over the tiles. The bullets were passing straight through and pockmarking the wall, glass bottles of perfume and toiletries exploded and the noise was deafening. Magdalene clapped her hands over her ears and prayed that they’d make it out of

here alive.

The shooting stopped briefly and it was safe to stand up, Rick was the first to look for his brother-in-law.

“Jonathan!” He called, looking behind the screen. The room seemed empty. “Jonathan!” He called again in panic.

The bubble bath erupted and a half-drowned, suds-covered Jonathan Carnahan came up gasping for air. Magdalene sighed in relief that they were all alright, then she was reminded that Evy and Alex were downstairs and she started panicking again.

“Whatcha do this time?” Rick was still angry and yelling.

Jonathan cried out in pain at being dragged out of the bathtub. “I-I-I haven’t done anything to anybody!”

His protests were serious but it was difficult to believe him when he was covered head to toe in bubbles. The gunfire started up again and Jonathan revised his statement.

“Lately.”

“Come on!” Rick roared.

He reached for Magdalene, already having a grip on Jonathan, and sent the three of them crashing through the second-floor window and onto the patio. The gunman began shooting at them again through the window and sparks flew as the bullets scraped the metal railings. A car drove past at crazy speeds, Rick and Jonathan chasing after it. Magdalene watched from a little way back as the rear windscreen curtain parted and Evy’s face appeared. She cried out for her husband before a hand holding a handkerchief covered her mouth and she was drawn back into the car.

“Evelyn!”

Rick looked ready to run after that car all the way to China until Jonathan pulled him back to hide behind the large stone base of the statue.

“Look out, Rick!”

The second car of the intruders sped past, the door open and machine gun fire raining down on them. Then the door swung shut and both cars disappeared down the driveway and into the storm.

“Dad! Dad!” Alex came jogging up with Ardeth, Rick picked him up and hugged him with relief.

“Are you alright?” He asked.

Alex was no more than a little shaken up. “Yeah.”

Ardeth nodded a greeting to Jonathan and then Rick once he had put down his son.
“O’Connell.”

Rick grabbed him by his embroidered robe and pinned him against the statue as the thunder clapped and a heavy storm brewed around them.

“What the hell are you doing here?” He growled. “No, scratch that. I don’t care! Who the hell are those guys and where are they taking my wife?”

“My friend, I’m not sure...” Ardeth was still tired and panting from the fight. “But wherever this man is, your wife will surely be.”

He held Rick’s gaze with both assurance and anger as he presented a photograph. He was no less angry than Rick that they had been harmed but he tried to keep his emotions under his own control.

“Ow...” There came a groan from the bushes and Magdalene rolled out of them, having dived in there to avoid the gunfire, her face scratched and she had twigs in her hair.

She moaned, kneeling on the gravel and pulling her hat out of the shrubbery. “My hat!” Her tone became mournful as she looked at the shapeless lump of leather, until she tried to stand up and she cried out in pain again.

The moment Ardeth saw her he’d pushed the photograph into Rick’s hands and gone over to help her up. Magdalene took his arm and brushed herself down before smiling brightly at him.

“Ardeth! You’re here!” She said, shaking out her limbs whilst he tried to keep her still and look her over. “Oh, I’m fine, just sore, and I think a twig went up my nose. *You* promised there was nothing to worry about.”

“I am sorry, Magdalene. I will explain everything.” He said.

She gave him a sarcastic look. “Yes, the last time you said that was when you promised there was nothing to worry about. You’re doing so well on this whole ‘keeping your friend’s trust’ shindig Ardeth, I’m very impressed.”

But she held no grudge and gave him another small, thankful smile as she stiffly walked to the others. Alex had snatched the photograph off of his dad, recognising the figure pictured.

“Hey, I know him! He’s the curator.” He said. “He works at the British Museum.”

Magdalene’s face paled. It was all unravelling in the space of a few minutes, Evy’s kidnapping, the bracelet, Ardeth, the spying. She felt her brain spinning in her skull.

“Better believe him.” Rick said, not knowing that Ardeth was all too aware who he was from

Magdalene's reconnaissance. "He spends more time there than he does at home."

Rick started shepherding Alex round the side of the house and they all set off running, making sure they didn't waste a moment rescuing Evy.

I resent that

Rick was still trying to wrap his head around the situation, he was struggling to focus on anything other than his wife.

“Okay, you’re here.” He pointed to Ardeth as they walked. “The bad guys are here. Evy’s been kidnapped. Let me guess.”

“Yes. They once again removed the creature from his grave.” Ardeth finished, sounding nothing like his usual calm and impassive self. He was rushing his speech, gesticulating as he explained the situation. Ardeth was scared.

“Oh, bloody hell.” Magdalene muttered, an iron grip on Alex’s shoulder.

The boy was find everything exciting despite his mother’s disappearance, he’d never met Ardeth before and neither of his parents had told him the full story of what happened eight years ago. There were only a few short tales from Jonathan when he’d managed to slip by Evy whilst drunk.

“Not to point fingers,” A thoroughly soaked Jonathan said, instead pointing at Ardeth with his precious golden sceptre. “but isn’t it your job to make sure that doesn’t happen?”

Ardeth explained quickly, unable to mask his concern. “That woman who was with him knows things that no living person could possibly know, she knew exactly where the creature was buried. We hoped she would lead us to the bracelet. She obviously did. And now they have it.”

“More things the man doesn’t tell me.” Magdalene was still talking to herself, Rick gave her another of those bemused looks he reserved almost exclusively for when she was acting weird. The look was not that exclusive or that reserved.

“I wouldn’t get too nervous just yet.” Alex piped up.

Everyone stopped walking and looked down and he pulled back his jacket sleeve to reveal the bracelet of Anubis.

“Is that gold?” Jonathan immediately re-prioritised the situation in favour of treasure.

Ardeth took Alex’s arm as he recounted what happened. Magdalene cast her eyes heavenward in a quick prayer that Rick wouldn’t smack her for her part in the bracelet’s attachment to his arm and tried to hide her face with her hat whilst everyone listened.

“When I stuck it on, I saw the pyramids at Giza. Then whoosh – straight across the desert to Karnak.”

“By putting this on you have started a chain reaction that could bring about the next apocalypse.” Ardeth spoke without hesitation, unused to the concept of tact.

Alex gasped with sudden shock and fear.

“Ardeth!” Magdalene chided.

“You, lighten up.” Rick pointed at Ardeth with another look of exasperation in the face of impending peril, then pointed at his son. “You, big trouble. You, get in the car.”

“What about me?” Magdalene asked brightly, feeling left out of this pointing session.

The American sighed dramatically. “I don’t know scamp, unsquash your hat.”

“I resent that.” She pouted.

Magdalene had little time to sulk, however, as they sped off down the driveway towards the museum and Rick was not prepared to abide by speed restrictions with his wife held captive by a ponce and his cult. They were all jostled about as he took corners without braking in the pouring rain, Magdalene the worst off as she was shoved in between Alex and Jonathan not in an actual seat.

Ardeth spared her a glance as spoke to Rick and she returned his look, probably the best formal hello that either of them could afford in the current situation. Though she was sure it was not lost on him just how glad she was to see him. Ardeth was the first person she would name if she ever needed help.

He also looked no worse for the wear despite his recent sword fight, tattoos stark against his skin and his hair was...well there wasn’t really a way to describe how Ardeth looked in any sort of detail without sounding like a love-struck hussy. He was brooding as ever and Magdalene grinned as she reminisced the good old days flitting about the desert battling the undead with wit and sarcasm.

Thrown on top of Alex after Rick took a sharp turn to avoid an oncoming truck, Magdalene broke eye contact with Ardeth and she remembered the situation at hand.

“I am sorry if I alarmed your son, but you must understand.” Ardeth said. “Now that the bracelet is on we have only seven days before the Scorpion King awakens.”

Rick interrupted. “We? What we?”

“Rick enough! Ardeth is trying to help and we have no choice. Who else is going to pitch in with that monster on the loose?” Magdalene frowned and slapped Rick on the shoulder, causing him to swerve the car again.

“If he is not killed, he will raise the Army of Anubis.” Ardeth was firm.

Jonathan leaned forward, still no clearer on what was going on than he had been when he

jumped into the bathtub. "I take it that's not a good thing."

"Oh, he'll wipe out the world." Rick said nonchalantly.

"Ah. The old 'wipe out the world' ploy." Jonathan was just as relaxed; he was British, it was in his nature.

They kept driving, tyres skidding on the wet roads more often than anyone was comfortable with, Big Ben rushed past in a wet, smudged blur. But none of them were interested in the magnificence of London, they all wanted Evy back as soon as possible. With the exception of Ardeth, everyone in that car depended on her in some way or another and losing her was like losing all your limbs, not just one.

Magdalene noticed Alex, who was trying not to look confused. "Don't worry kid, we've done all of this before."

"What even happened when you all met?" He asked.

"Tell you later." She turned back to Rick and Ardeth. "So why resurrect Imhotep if they can just nick the bracelet and go find Scorpion-face himself?"

Ardeth jumped back in. "Whoever can kill the Scorpion King can send his army back to the underworld or use it to destroy mankind and rule the Earth."

Rick caught on. "So that's why they dug up Imhotep 'cause he's the only one tough enough to take out the Scorpion King."

"That is their plan."

"But even if we kill Imhotep, again, we still have to be there when the Scorpion King wakes up to smoke that sucker an' all." Magdalene sighed. "Job's never bloody done, is it?"

"No rest for the wicked, Maddie." Jonathan smiled at her before falling into the footwell as Rick took another sharp left.

They pulled up to the museum with a judder as the tyres failed to find purchase on the slippery ground when Rick stomped the breaks. They were all thrown forward a final time and Jonathan smacked his head on the back of Ardeth's seat.

"Now Alex, I got a big job for you. I want you to stay here and protect the car."

"I could do that." Jonathan said, ever the wimp. Magdalene was convinced that their little rodent friend Beni had more of a backbone sometimes.

Alex repeated his dad in a dismal tone. "Protect the car? Come on Dad, just because I'm a kid doesn't mean I'm stupid."

"I know." Rick ruffled his son's hair and spoke softly, showing his love despite the boy's

complaints.

“If you see anyone come running out screaming,” Jonathan advised Alex before looking forward dejectedly. “it’s just me.”

Magdalene gave Rick a pointed look which made him rethink his decision.

“Maybe you should stay here and watch him.” He said.

Jonathan grasped safety with both hands. “Yes. Now you’re talking.”

“Why would you throw away an adventure like this, Jonathan?” Magdalene asked, only slightly melodramatically. “We are made by the roads we travel.”

“Well I like to travel the road where an angry mummy with the power of Hell doesn’t come seeking revenge for the last time you killed him and took away his toys.”

Magdalene clambered over Alex to pop the car door and meet the fresh scent of earth after a downpour. The storm had eased into little more than drizzle, but she still felt the water tickle her face. She also felt a hot burn creeping down her arm, her tattoo at the epicentre. If that wasn’t a warning about Imhotep, she didn’t know what was.

Rick opened up the boot of the car and revealed his excessive weapon collection, Ardeth joining him to get ready for storming the museum.

“You want the shotgun?” He asked.

“No, I prefer the Thompson.” Ardeth said in a moment of manly understanding and bonding. It was adorable really.

Magdalene clapped them both on the shoulder. “Man likes an automatic, just don’t point it at us.”

That raised half a smile out of each of them whilst dressing up with belts, holsters and firearms before Ardeth noticed Rick’s tattoo as he reached for the shotgun.

“If I were to say to you...” He said, looking at the ground as if he were afraid of raising conversation. “I’m a stranger travelling from the east seeking that which is lost...”

Rick paused putting the strap for his shotgun round his waist. “Then I would reply that I am a stranger travelling from the west and it is I whom you seek, how did you...?”

“Then it is true.” This was the most excited anyone had ever seen Ardeth and he grabbed Rick’s wrist with an actual smile on his face. “You have the sacred mark.”

“What? That?” Rick said. “No that got slapped on me when I was in an orphanage in Cairo.”

“That mark,” Ardeth explained “means you’re a protector of man. A warrior for God, a

Medjai.”

“Sorry. You got the wrong guy.”

“If we’re done having this little heart-to-heart, gentlemen?” Magdalene interrupted.

Having already checked her revolver was loaded, dagger was sharp and fished some brass knuckles out of her pocket, she reached in between the two of them to grab a sawed-off shotgun. The final touch was a long chain whip, a weight at each end, which she hung from her belt next to her dagger.

Ardeth looked impressed. “You did not bring those with you to Egypt.”

“Scamp nearly took me out with that thing last time she used it.” Rick eyed the chain whip warily. “She’s only allowed her toys on special occasions.”

With a quick wave to Jonathan and Alex, Magdalene bounded up the entrance steps to the museum, leaving Rick and Ardeth to catch up.

They joined her in the entrance hall, looking at all of the directions to different parts of the museum. Rick wanted to waste no time in searching the museum, dragging Magdalene away before she could read all of the signs.

“How is your reading?” Ardeth murmured.

“Good. I can recognise a lot of words without having to read the individual letters now, like looking at a picture.” Magdalene said, then pressed her lips together. “It’s harder than it looks.”

They arrived in one of the back storerooms, a small warehouse off the main museum that held further artefacts from an exhibition The Treasures of Egypt. It was unlit and deathly silent as they crept through looking for any sign of where the cult had stowed themselves to perform the ritual, the wind outside keeping all three of them on edge. It was like hunting a rat in a maze.

Slipping into a small antechamber, they heard the voice of Hafez, his incantations riding over the chanting of a dozen other voices, worshiping their evil God. Magdalene thought about standing closer to Rick, behind the shotgun, but she wanted to prove she wasn’t scared. Wanted to prove she could stand her ground as well as they could. She didn’t want to be that eighteen year old ruffian anymore, she wanted to impress them.

She gripped a tighter hold of her own shotgun.

They ended up on a balcony railing, above the main exhibit, now draped over with dustsheets. They were all there, she noted. Hafez and his minions, Lock-Nah; the assassin that Alex said had fought Ardeth and won. And Evy, tied up and looking frightened for her life as the wretched corpse came to life.

He had eyes this time, and a tongue, even some semblance of muscle tissue covering his aged, decayed bones. Clearly Hafez's extended ritual incantations had done more than re-animate a half-decrepit corpse unlike Evy's blind reading eight years ago.

Magdalene held her breath as Imhotep burst out of his amber cocoon, looking wildly at his unfamiliar surroundings after eight years of death. For a second, they paused on the shadow where she hid and she shrank further down, trying not to think of dreams or that treacherous voice in her head that had woken up in excitement at the mummy's return.

His head turned and she felt her knees tremor with relief.

"Imhotep." Evy said in despair as he stalked towards the Professor.

Magdalene had no idea what was said between Imhotep and the cult leader, but it was not good by the chuckle the mummy gave. They could see his vocal chords vibrating with the sound before it was cut off by the creak of a door hinge and the click of heels on the floor.

In walked the snake woman, still wearing her ostentatious cocktail dress. It did not suit her, she was far too broad in the shoulder and it made her look like a man in drag. But that could have been Magdalene trying to find more reasons to hate her, she felt she deserved to be spiteful.

She said that she was not afraid of the creature in front of her, then named herself as Anck-Su-Namun reincarnated. Despite the woman speaking in Ancient Egyptian, Magdalene's ear heard English and her brain registered the words as if they were coming through the radio speaker, a buzzing humming noise in the background. She recognised it as the way Imhotep used to speak to her in her dreams and in real life, using his powers so that she would understand.

With a frown she wondered if that mean he knew she was there, and was letting her hear the conversation, or whether she was permanently able to translate the dead language automatically. Either way her tattoo seemed to twitch, or it could have been a muscle spasm from gripping her revolver.

Rick gave a very drawn out sigh. "You know, a couple years ago, this would have seemed really strange to me."

Lock-Nah and Baltus were opening the chest for the bracelet. Magdalene sniggered as they lifted out a hunting trophy but promptly shut up at Lock-Nah's murderous expression.

"Oh dear." She said.

All aboard

Apologies again for lateness! It's a long story that includes a house, a boiler, enough electric cabling to power London and a weeks worth of building work that needed planning, supervising and then cleaning up after. Home for the holidays and ready to have this book finished before the end of September (it may be published in instalments that go beyond the finish date) Happy reading! (This is my favourite chapter so far)

The focus shifted back to Anck-Su-Namun's reincarnation as she told Imhotep that Evy was a gift, a sacrifice for him now that they were reunited.

"Oh bloody hell."

Ardeth looked down to her, but her eyes were fixed on the mummy. He too could understand their conversation but if he thought he would have to explain, there was no need once Evy was carried over to a flaming coffin.

"You wait!" She promised. "I'll put you in your grave again." But her eyes betrayed her doubts.

"Our thinking was not if we put you in your grave first." Baltus was smug, so was that conniving witch as she commanded the cult members to burn Evy alive.

Evy screamed, tossed into the flames, until Rick leapt through them from the other side to save his wife.

"Rick!" She called out in relief as he jumped onto the wooden board. The momentum tossed Evy into the air and he caught her seamlessly over his shoulder.

Ardeth took the opportunity to open fire with the automatic rifle, enjoying the carnage he created just as much as the time he used one on Imhotep's priest back in the ruins of Hamunaptra. Magdalene saw the snake woman firing her own machine gun back and aimed with her shotgun. Sawn off, it had far less precision than Ricks, but it was lighter so she could handle the recoil and was much better at spreading out the damage and the louder explosion from the gunpowder provided a better distraction from Ardeth.

And it was so much more fun, Magdalene laughed as she pumped out the spent shells and fired again. Soon everyone was shooting and Ardeth was reloading and she felt alive for the first time in eight years.

Rick freed Evy from the ropes and joined in, tossing two of the men in red robes into the burning sarcophagus they had tried to toss his wife into.

With Ardeth covering the balcony and Rick bringing up his own gun, Magdalene stood up to fire directly at Hafez. She missed but gave him the fright of his life, that was payback enough

for having to pretend to be thick as two short planks around him all the time to gain his trust.

Her revolver came out and she ran, hurdling the railings to crash into the snake woman. Her legs were not strong enough to support her landing so she used the other woman as a cushion. Knocking the machine gun from her arms she kicked away the glittering skirts and grunted with satisfaction when her boot connected with a leg as well.

“Nice to see you again, you undead bastard. Not so attractive when you can’t regenerate, are ya?”

She stood in front of Imhotep again and tried to cock a wry smile. But she couldn’t keep those dreams out of her head, the sleepless nights and the hurt he’d caused her family. It came out as an ugly smirk.

If Imhotep had skin to move, he may have even looked wounded at the snarl on Magdalene’s face. But what did that matter to her?

A blast from Rick’s shotgun went straight through him and diverted his attention. Another one went through his shoulder and sent him spinning. Magdalene dove for the cover of the boxes as the shell passed through him and out the other side.

Rick ducked behind an upright crate for a moment then he and Evy reappeared, both shooting. Bullets missed their human marks but broke the jars of ethanol and flames licked at the flimsy red headscarves. The three of them dashed up the stairs, Rick firing his shotgun for cover, as Imhotep’s slow gaze moved with them.

Two loud explosions followed as Ardeth’s gunfire finished off the flammable containers.

“Nice shooting, for a swordsman.” Magdalene winked at him.

“Go, go, go! Go! Go!” Rick ushered them out the door.

Magdalene stopped before she met the doorframe and caused a backlog with everyone else running into her.

“What now scamp?”

She turned as Imhotep called up his dead servants, soldiers that Jonathan had used to destroy Anck-Su-Namun’s mummified remains the last time they’d met. It was a sore spot for all parties involved, namely Rick.

“Oh, no. Not these guys *again!*” He growled in frustration.

With undead soldiers hot on their heels, the urge to run was even greater. Magdalene stayed behind for a moment, to wink at Imhotep and salute at him, before she disappeared with the others.

Ploughing through corridor upon corridor they reached a fire exit and burst through the

double doors. Evy came to a stuttering halt, running back to drag a bench to block the exit.

“Honey, what you doin’? These guys don’t use doors.” Rick said in light-hearted tone as he dragged his wife away, sprinting around the corner to the main driveway. “Where the hell’s Jonathan?”

Magdalene careered around the corner and was met with the other three staring at Ricks car, without Jonathan or Alex waiting there to assist the getaway. Instead, a huge double-decker bus swung into view with both boys on-board.

“What’s the matter with my car?” Rick was bemused and worried about his precious automobile.

Jonathan blustered his way through an excuse. “I was forced to find an alternative means of transportation.”

“A double-decker bus!” Rick yelled, at his wits end with his brother-in-law’s absurdity and the stress of current events.

“It was his idea!”

“Was not!” Alex yelled back at his Uncle.

“Was too!”

“Just go!” Rick tried to end their argument as they got on the bus.

“It was too!”

“Was *not*!”

Magdalene stalked forward and snapped at them. “Shut up and drive the bus!”

The four mummy soldiers burst through the walls of the museum in an explosion of brick and mortar, unfazed by the collision they hit the ground running. Spotting Rick hanging off the pole at the back of the bus and Ardeth staring through the back window they started their pursuit, jumping on top of Ricks precious car, crushing the roof and the bonnet.

“No, no, not my car!”

Magdalene span back round to face forwards with her hand holding her hat to her head. “Jonathan, go faster!”

With a final jump down the engine buckled and cracked under the mummies’ weight.

“Oh, I hate mummies.” Rick said, looking from the back window, with all the disgust of a teenager.

“Glad to see me now?” Ardeth could not resist the quip.

Rick cocked the shotgun.

“Just like old times, huh?”

He climbed upstairs and fired shots at the four mummies to slow them down. Magdalene watched them pick up the pace until they were running as fast as the bus and suddenly one leapt. All four of them were bounding on all fours across the faces of buildings, shattering windows and brickwork.

She spared Ardeth a glance before brandishing her sawed-off in front of her.

“I’m too tired for this.” She said.

Two mummies sprang from the terraces and practically flew at the bus, one burst into pieces – Rick had been busy with his shotgun. The second landed in front of Ardeth. He peppered it with a spray from his machine gun, a reflexive action more than a calculated move. It screamed and hollered as chips of its ancient bones sprayed out onto the street. Magdalene, moving out of the bullet spray, swung her whip around the mummy’s torso and yanked hard, severing it in two.

Its legs plopped onto the road.

“Woah!” Magdalene cried out as Jonathan took a sharp turn. “Could you try not to kill us please?”

“I’m trying! I’m trying!” He screamed back.

Evy and Alex fell over as he swung the steering wheel the other way.

Ardeth was clipping another magazine into the Thompson when the mummy torso – minus its legs – swung shrieking in from where it had been hanging onto the side of the bus. Knocking the submachine gun out of his hand, the swinging corpse backhanded Ardeth into the window as he yelled in pain.

Magdalene punched it in the face with the added weight of the brass knuckles, satisfied with the way its head swung back. She dove in for another jab but it headbutted her and sent her reeling into Evy, hat dangling around her neck from its cord.

Ardeth was swung about the bus like a limp marionette whose strings had been cut. Miraculously, he found his feet and began ducking under the mummy’s swings with a boxer’s stance. The mummy swung - hanging from the railings as it moved - it pivoted on a pole, coming face to face with a screaming Evy, Magdalene and Alex, before going full circle and lashing out at Ardeth who clobbered it with a hit that knocked it onto a seat.

Magdalene turned her attention to the upper deck where it sounded like Rick was being used as a basketball, until another swerve from Jonathan made her shriek and hang onto anything

she could.

“Would you keep this thing steady?” She tried to wrestle Jonathan for the steering wheel, he slapped at her arm in protest.

“Get off! Get off and let me drive.”

“Well drive straight and stop turning the wheel so much!” She yelled back.

Evy looked back to check on Ardeth and saw the mummy torso get up and its nails elongate into three-inch blades, cutting deep into the Medjai’s shoulder.

“Turn, turn, turn!” She shouted to her brother in the hope that it would unbalance the attacker.

Both the mummy and Ardeth were flung about mercilessly but at least Ardeth wasn’t being stabbed to death.

Jonathan screamed nearly as loudly as the abused brakes as the bus squeaked and slid across tarmac, destroying an unfortunate lamppost and mounting the pavement.

A car came trundling the other way, unaware of the speeding double decker around the corner.

“No!” Jonathan waved his arm at the driver. “Get out of the way!”

Magdalene screamed and ducked.

They missed each other but Jonathan had lost control of the bus again and bulldozed into a parked car. They spent the next few precious seconds careening through the streets of London, Ardeth wrestling with the mummy, Rick causing all sorts of chaos upstairs, Evy and Magdalene holding onto each other for dear life and Alex yelling driving tips to Jonathan.

Suddenly Rick’s shotgun thumped onto the hood of the bus from upstairs.

“Uh...” Magdalene stared dumbly at it, too paralyzed by shock and adrenaline to do anything until she heard a groan of pain and span around.

The mummy had reared up and torn viciously into Ardeth’s chest and he had collapsed into a seat unable to move away from the creature’s next blow. His scream of fear was cut off by two loud gun shots.

Evy, who had grabbed Rick’s gun, and Magdalene with her own, had shot the mummy in the head and it now lay in smithereens on the floor. They fired again until the rest of it, clinging onto the sides of the bus, was blown out of the rear windshield, too shattered and dilapidated to remain alive.

“Look out!”

Alex’s panicked yell turned Jonathan’s attention back to the road, they’d sped into a slum

district of the city and Jonathan narrowly missed ploughing over several men collected there by a food stall. They'd strayed onto a street far too narrow for turning around and Jonathan had no choice but to drive under a low bridge.

The top of the bus was shredded away like so much cardboard. There was nothing anyone could do except pray Rick was alright and protect themselves. Once they were clear, Magdalene looked back to see nothing but a mummy's femur dangling from the bridge. It would have been funny if it weren't for the horrid cold sensation creeping up her spine that Rick had met the same splattery fate.

Soon they were cruising across the London Bridge and the moment they felt sure there were no more mummies Jonathan stopped the bus as it gave one final sputter of anguish.

"Great driving, Uncle John." Alex threw his arms over Jonathan's shoulders and gave him a playful punch on the jaw.

"Yeah." He replied, still breathless with fear and staring forward in horror at the disaster.

Rick came down the stairs, kicking seats and bits of metal down with him, very much alive to everyone's relief. He took his shotgun back off Evy and leant against the bus, panting with exertion.

"You alright?" He asked Ardeth.

"This was...my first bus ride." Ardeth said with a wavering grimace.

Magdalene groaned and heaved herself up from the floor. "Well don't expect a free ride next time."

There was a moment of silence as everyone took in what just happened before Evy beckoned Rick over to thank him for saving her.

"What would I do without you?"

"Are all librarians this much trouble?" He replied before they heavily kissed each other.

Alex was not amused. "Ugh. Jeez, get a room."

Magdalene smiled as she watched him stomp to the other end of the bus muttering to himself. He looked up at the damage up the staircase then back at his doting parents. Magdalene put her hat back on and winked at his scowl. Two arms reached into the bus, clamping around her nephew, one over his mouth and one round his torso, lifting him out and into the night.

"Hey!" She yelled.

"Alex!" Evy ran towards her son, being stolen by Lock-Nah and Hafez.

He was putting up a fight, kicking and yelling, but was wrestled into a car. "Let me go!"

Rick was first out the bus and chasing after him, hollering like a madman after his son, Evy and Magdalene hot on his heels. But they had pulled up the bridge, driving over the two halves of the road before they were winched wide apart to stop anyone from following.

Rick clung onto the edge of the bridge and looked in desperation at the car speeding away.

“Alex.”

Back to the beginning

Rick and Evy were comforting each other, trying to hold back their panic and grief.

Magdalene stood with Ardeth, leaning him against the bus to look at what the mummy had done to his torso.

“So you’ve got that gash from whatsitface –”

“Lock-Nah.”

“– Lock-Nah, and now you’ve had the other side torn to pieces by a mummy. Ardeth you need to be a hell of a lot more careful.”

He grasped her wrist and looked down at her with chiding concern. “So should you.”

At that Magdalene went very quiet. “Ardeth we started this. If you had done more, they would never have found Imhotep. If I had been doing something instead of listening behind closed doors I could have gotten you to move sooner. Ardeth, Alex is gone and we’re the ones to blame.”

He took her face in his hands.

“You cannot make decisions based on events in the future, you have to try with what you already know.”

She put a hand on his chest rather abruptly and he hissed.

“I can’t do anything about this now.” She said. “Can you manage it until then?”

“I will be fine.” He promised her.

Rick and Evy were still embraced when Ardeth addressed the couple. Jonathan joined up behind them, putting his arm around Magdalene.

“Please, do not fear for your son my friends. They cannot hurt him for he wears the bracelet of Anubis.”

Evy looked at Rick in concern. “Alex is wearing the bracelet?”

“When he put it on he said he saw the pyramids at Giza, he saw the temple at Karnak.” Rick explained.

Ardeth interrupted. “Yes, and when they reach Karnak, the bracelet will show him the next step of the journey.”

“Well, if we don’t get to Karnak before them, we won’t have any idea where to look for him next.”

Evy was in despair but Rick looked extremely thoughtful.

“Seems to me...like we need a magic carpet.”

They went home in a miserable state where Ardeth was sewn up by Magdalene, who had turned extremely churlish towards him. She felt that he had brushed off her worry and left her to feel guilty on her own.

He grunted, trying to ignore the pain of the needle going in and out of his chest.

“Oh shut up, if you want a scar I’m more than happy to stop.” She scowled, pouring a bit more antiseptic onto a cotton pad than was necessary and pressing it into his skin.

“Shouldn’t I go to hospital for this?” He pressed Rick for sympathy.

Rick was throwing the bags together, as well as sorting out another one full of extra weapons. They hadn’t need to unpack after all.

“No.” He said. “Waste of time. Maddie does a better job than any nurse I’ve seen.”

“Thank you.” She said sharply, avoiding his eye.

Rick noticed that, in the small respite from the action, Magdalene had gone back to sulking. She’d taken offence when he’d told Evy that his family meant more to him than anything else.

Why was that not a reasonable thing to say?

And now she’d taken offence at Ardeth for something or other, sticking as close to Jonathan as possible throughout the entire trip to the train station.

He spent very little time dwelling on it, going around in a haze of check weapons, check battle plan – not that there was much of a plan, check luggage. It was very much like his life eight years ago before everything that happened at Hamunaptra. Evy was the only exception and he clung onto her, trying to make her smile.

He adored his wife’s determination and perseverance, even now as she desperately sought for her son. But the loss of Alex had drained some of the life out of her and she spent her time on the train through Europe in a haze very much like his own.

The journey had been frantic and everyone was worn down. Magdalene had no sleep as the guilt of losing Alex was eating at her mind. She had been given so many chances to stop this all from happening and she listed them in her head over and over again, going right back to the dream she’d had nearly two months ago. Right back to eight, nearly nine years ago when she’d been branded by the creature.

Her mood was worsened by the lack of sleep. She’d refused to even think about a bed on the way there, absolutely petrified she would have another nightmare. But as they drove into Cairo she lolled about in the back. Eventually her eyes closed, she promised just to rest them for a bit and her head dropped onto Evy’s shoulder, tipping her hat over her face.

* * *

A dark figure. Whispers of Egyptian that filled her ears. It had happened all before. This was more like a vision than a dream, she was aware that what she saw was very real but it wasn't right in front of her.

Imhotep was dressed in dark robes, clad in so many layers you could almost imagine the cloak was empty, animated to life by some ghostly presence. There was a mask over his head, a hood over the top. He peeled the mask off to reveal a horrible, distorted and decomposed face.

There was a gasp as Magdalene watched him regenerate, skin crawling up his neck and chin to reveal that smooth face, high cheekbones and the sculpture of his brow over his unearthly gaze.

He was holding a dagger.

* * *

Imhotep met the girl during his reflections. Standing there behind his shoulder in the shadowed corner of the train cart. She gave him that unpleasant reminder he was not the immortal he once was no matter how strong his powers grew.

He had been foolish to bind her. When he thought that he would command her visions to wreak chaos on the world he had tied her to him and concentrated her powers. Once the O'Connell's had sent him back to the underworld part of him had remained trapped in her head.

It was useful in a way, to feed off of her visions, but she hadn't had any in so long that it no longer mattered that they were returning. She had grown on her own, even focused her visions on him specifically – either that or she had smothered the power so much it remained trapped in this timeline. Whatever it meant, she was more of a danger than an aide if she could use the visions to predict his motives.

He felt a slight tug in his mind, a demand for his attention. He looked over his shoulder at her, asked her a silent question until he looked at her hands.

She was holding the Book of the Dead.

She turned her back to him and retreated back into her own mind, drawing away from the vision she herself saw. He wondered where she was right now and what she had seen of him.

* * *

Magdalene woke up with a start. She felt like she'd been drenched in cold water. She righted her hat on her head and looked around the old buildings.

“Where are we?” She asked in a gravelly voice, still half asleep.

Rick glanced over from the front.

“You’d know if you stayed awake.”

She made a face at him and sulked in the back of the car until they drove up to a small gated courtyard and a sign *Magic Carpet Airways*.

“This is the magic carpet?” Evy asked.

“We’ll be fine.” Rick said. “He’s a professional.”

At that point the gate opened and a small man in flying clothes and an eyepatch walked out, stopping dead at the sight of Rick.

“Izzy!”

Rick had a big smile on his face and was all charm but it didn’t stop Izzy from scrambling back through the gate with the expression of a frightened ferret.

“He definitely remembers you.” Evy said with a smile.

“He’s a little shy.”

Magdalene snorted. “He reminds me of Beni.”

Rick sent her a glare that made her hang her head down. She crossed her arms defensively, brushing against her tattoo underneath her jacket which sent a spark of electricity through her fingertips. It was smarting in the heat, sensing the adventure.

She wandered away from the group and leant against a wall, confused about everything. She often thought about when they fought Imhotep in Hamunaptra, regretting how rash and stupid she had been. Not denying that they achieved what they set out to do, everything else that day had gone wrong.

She’d tried to reason with the creature, argue with him instead of fighting him and eight years on she still didn’t know why. He’d given her that tattoo to prove a point, that he wouldn’t kill her. He’d never explained why and it grated on her brain.

You could always ask him.

Loud music plucked her from her thoughts, a very primal sound that made her curious. She twisted around the corner to find a group of street musicians playing traditional Arabian drums, flutes and bells.

The sound made her smile, as did a huddle of children who had flocked to the excitement. They were dancing in a circle, jumping and hopping and clapping to the music under the eyes of their mothers leaning in the shade.

This was Egypt. This was a traveller’s dream. Magdalene closed her eyes for a few seconds and willed herself to forget about Imhotep and Alex and Rick and everybody else. She had a whole journey to Karnak to feel melancholy. For now, she should just let herself be relaxed. No rules, no reading, no school. No mummies, no rescue mission, no supernatural dreams.

The group of children had gotten bigger now, a few older ones mixed in. The music got stronger as the men stamped their feet and smiled at their young audience.

One of the drummers turned his head her way and after a few moments of thought gave her the most brilliant smile. He walked over to Magdalene and embraced her before she had chance to realise what he was doing.

“Uh, hello, do I know you?”

“You do.”

The young man stepped back and smiled at her again. It was an impish smile that stretched from ear to ear and made his cheeks dimple, then he winked at her.

Magdalene looked at him with a frown. She couldn't place his face anywhere, the smile though reminded her of that mischievous grin belonging to a small boy. Her eyes widened and she smiled back.

“*Hamed?*”

“Yes, Maddie. It has been a long time since I have seen you.”

Magdalene grabbed Hamed a bear hug and they laughed with each other.

“Eight years! You must be as old as I was when we met.” Her eyes sparkled with happy tears and she completely forgot about her gloom beforehand.

He hugged her again and kissed her on the cheek. “I never thanked you properly for what you did.”

“You did Hamed,” she said “what happened with the Medjai? My friend said you chose to stay with them.”

Hamed sat her down on some boxes by the wall and clasped her hand in his.

“I did. They let me join one of the tribes and I gained a home with them, these are my people.” He nodded towards the group of musicians.

“They're Medjai?” Magdalene asked.

“We protect the city if it needs it and when it doesn't we travel around and listen in on conversations that may help the tribes. And I enjoy the music. I often make sure your letters reach Ardeth safely. We both help protect Egypt in our own ways.”

Magdalene looked at him with pride and congratulated him on having such a wonderful life.

Finding your feet

Hamed looked back at his tribesmen and tugged at her arm.

“You must dance with us.”

Magdalene laughed. “Oh no, I’m too old and clumsy.”

“Then I will teach you.” He pulled her up and took off her hat.

Magdalene hesitated, looking at all the barefoot children, sweaty from dancing, and feeling the heat of the Egyptian sun soaking through her precious hooded jacket. She bit her lip and threw embarrassment out of the window, tossing her jacket and hat to one side and pulling off her boots and socks.

Hamed spoke with the men and they gave cries of excitement, starting up a new song with a pounding beat and heady, musical notes that rose and fell very quickly.

“What do I do?” Magdalene laughed over the music.

“Let your feet find the music.” Hamed said.

Hamed went back to playing a drum, shouting encouragement and the children very quickly accepted Magdalene into their group. Some of them were young girls and boys, some little more than toddlers who reached her waist. All of them took turns dancing in front of her and getting her to mirror them, laughing when she was clumsy and cheering when she copied well.

Eventually music took over and Magdalene stamped her feet, twirled and clapped with everyone else. The adrenaline rush made her feel eighteen years old again and memories started to weave into her dancing. Hamed as a boy, playing with a rubber ball in the market. Ardeth helping her put a heavy book back in the library. Riding a camel for the first time. Listening to Evy teach her about mummification. Laughing with Jonathan.

She began to feel whole again.

“Scamp! We’ve been looking for you, get your ass over here.”

She turned to see a disgruntled Rick gesturing at her, but her eyes drifted over him to see Ardeth and twelve other Medjai on horseback. She tugged on her shoes and quickly yanked the jacket over her shoulders before joining them.

Ardeth strolled over towards them, gone was the silver embroidered cape and dress-wear and he was back in desert robes and headdress. Magdalene smiled at him brightly, this was the Ardeth she met eight years ago. Impassive and commanding.

“I knew it.” Izzy said. “I’m gonna get shot.”

Magdalene bumped him with her shoulder and gave him a grin before walking to stand next to Jonathan.

“These are the commanders of the twelve tribes of the Medjai.” Ardeth introduced. “Horus!”

At his command, a hawk flew from its perch on the arm of one Medjai and flapped against the wind to sit on the gauntlet on Ardeth’s arm with a small cry. Ardeth began to stroke him, clearly affectionate for the bird of prey.

“Ah, pet bird.” Jonathan smiled.

“My best and most clever friend. He will let the commanders know of our progress so that they may follow.”

Ardeth sent them off with a blessing and they watched as the men rode off to re-join their tribes. Magdalene felt a swell in her chest as she watched, the Medjai were such a fantastic force and you knew, looking at them, they would keep you safe.

Ardeth turned back to them. “If the Army of Anubis arises...they will do all they can to stop it.”

That feeling in Magdalene’s chest receded back into her boots at the reminder of just what they were up against. No matter how unstoppable the Medjai were, they were not immortal.

She cheered herself up by nudging Jonathan in the side and mocking him.

“Oh look, a pet bird.” She sneered.

“Yeah, yeah.” Jonathan feigned a slap to the back of her head, mussing up her hair.

Whilst the others were getting ready to go, Izzy got the flight plans ready and Jonathan found somewhere to leave the car, Magdalene looked back over to the other set of Medjai. The musicians were huddled together talking in low voices. Hamed looked over to her for a moment and waved.

“Hey, I just have to say goodbye to a friend.” She called.

Her only reply was a grunted ‘hurry up’ from Rick but she ignored him and walked over. She met Hamed half way and gave him a hug.

“It was great to see you again.” She said.

“Likewise, Maddie.”

“Good luck with protecting the city, I guess I’ll go off and save the world. Again.”

“So this is what you end up doing when I’m not around?”

“Only when the world’s at stake.” Magdalene turned to the new voice.

Hamed went up to Ardeth and greeted his superior. Magdalene noticing the contrast between Ardeth's black robes and Hamed's white ones. Like opposites. Once done, Hamed returned to his group.

"Magdalene we must leave now to reach Karnak in time." Ardeth said.

She nodded at him. "Yeah coming."

They caught up with Evy, Rick and Jonathan walking towards the airfield.

"Rick." Evy said. "Are you sure Izzy is reliable?"

"Yeah, he's reliable." Rick paused then added "ish."

They rounded the corner and were met with a giant balloon holding up the remnants of a traditional river boat.

"Isn't she beautiful?" Izzy called.

Rick made a face of disbelief. "It's a balloon."

"It's a dirigible!" Izzy and Magdalene said at the same time, one with indignance and one with excitement.

"Where's your airplane?" Rick asked.

Izzy laughed dismissively at him. "Airplanes are a thing of the past."

Magdalene dropped her bags and begged Evy to go take a look with her. She'd read about dirigibles in books and loved looking at all the drawings of them and imagining the sorts of people who would ride in them.

"Izzy you were right." Rick said.

"I was?"

"Yeah, you're gonna get shot." Rick pulled his gun out.

"Woah, woah, woah!" Izzy protested. "She's faster than she looks. And she's real quiet. Perfect for sneaking up on people, which is a very good thing. Unless, of course, we go with your approach – barging in face first, guns blazing, gettin' your friends shot in the arse."

Rick gave a casual shrug in response to Evy's pointed look.

Ardeth stopped in his tracks and stared up at the huge balloon. "Why can't you people ever keep your feet on the ground?"

Magdalene rolled her eyes. "You've never wanted to explore the sky? Like Horus?"

Ardeth smiled and said simply, "Horus was made for flying, I was not. I accept the laws of nature."

Magdalene snorted. "Says the man who trains and rides a horse."

They packed all of their bags into the bottom of the boat and climbed aboard. Magdalene insisted on clambering up it's side, and then clambering all over it to explore. The children she had been dancing with ran after the boat to wave them off and she waved back with enthusiasm.

* * *

The earth drifted underneath them but the endless sky they floated through belied a perception of how stationary they were compared to how fast they wanted to travel. They might have even left Karnak already, with Alex the captive of the most godless man to walk the earth.

Magdalene focused her energy on reaching out across Egypt. She wandered around the dirigible, avoiding all eye contact with anyone else whilst she searched her brain for something. Magdalene wasn't sure if she was hoping to force a vision or make fucking telepathic contact she just wanted to do something useful for a change.

"Maddie come sit with us." Jonathan waved her down next to him, where she dropped her head onto his shoulder. She'd slept so little during the last two days that it was painful to hold up her heavy head.

"Gentlemen." She nodded to Ardeth sat opposite her.

He was basked in the warm sunlight, catching his hair like shining oil. As much as Magdalene was still grouchy about feeling alienated, it made him very pleasant to look at.

"How long is this journey going to take us?" Jonathan asked. "I mean once we reach Karnak, what then?"

"Hopefully we get there in time to rescue Alex, kill Imhotep, find out where the lost oasis is and kill the scorpion bastard too." She replied.

"But what if we don't get there before Alex?"

Her arm lifted lazily to point at Ardeth.

"Then the scary man gets to fight the scary immortal army."

Ardeth chuckled. In her drowsy state, Magdalene had regained some of the sweetness that she had shown him in her youth. That refreshing spirit that had charmed its way through Egypt re-emerged. She fell asleep slowly as Jonathan described to him life back in England. Ardeth paused him only once to cover Magdalene in a blanket and remove her hat so she could sleep peacefully and undisturbed.

The heat of the evening warmed them all and sent Magdalene into a heavier sleep, where it was quiet enough to dream.

Bygones

“Girl.”

“Imhotep.” She said.

They were on a rocking train, Magdalene could feel the floor swaying underneath her and if she listened carefully there was a faint clack of wheels over the track. The visions were stronger, more compelling.

Imhotep held her with a blank stare, eyes like iron beads in his skull. It made her feel cold inside. All the cruelty and misery he inflicted was etched on his face. Like scarred alabaster.

Magdalene noticed that she was no longer wearing her cotton jacket, just her tank top, and that her tattoo was exposed to the world. Even though she was dreaming she covered it up as best she could with her hand.

“You never did explain why you decided to scar my skin.”

“Now I have Anck-Su-Namun I do not need you.”

Magdalene felt a headache root at the base of her brain as she heard Ancient Egyptian but understood him in English.

“Yeah, got that part. Explain the tattoo, please.”

He squared his shoulders at her clenched jaw. “It is a brand, binding you to me under the protection of Osiris. Your loyalty would have been rewarded with power and wisdom.”

As he spoke he came closer to her, and his voice softened as he brushed his fingers against the crook and flail on her left arm.

“You had such potential, if only you’d kneel.”

Magdalene shuddered as a flicker of energy spread up her arm and through her spine. She tilted her face to look at Imhotep.

“You think the only thing stopping me from kneeling is that your girlfriend came back? Like I said last time, you’re not that attractive, you bastard.”

Imhotep growled his grip on her arm turned forceful, squeezing and twisting until Magdalene buckled under the pressure.

“With the army of Anubis, you are now pointless, defenceless, pitiful and of no use to me.”
He hissed.

At this point Magdalene was panting heavily in pain, sweat on her forehead. She licked her lips and furrowed her brows, desperately trying not to give him the satisfaction of her cries.

“Wanna bet?” She gasped.

He let her go and pulled another figure into view of her vision.

“He dies the moment you try to stop me.”

“Alex. Alex, no!” Magdalene shouted. “Let him go! He’s done nothing. ALEX! No!”

* * *

The airship was still, ropes creaking in the night-time air and under the drag of the propellers at the back of the dirigible.

Ardeth and Jonathan watched Rick pace over the boat.

“O’Connell does not want to believe, but he flies like Horus towards his destiny.” Ardeth referenced the hawk perched in his lap.

“Yes, yes, very interesting.” Jonathan interrupted dismissively. “Tell me some more about this *gold* pyramid.”

Ardeth smiled and obliged. “Well it is written that since the time of the Scorpion King, no man who has laid eyes upon it has ever returned to tell the tale.”

“Where is all this stuff written?” Jonathan asked, rooting around in a cavity at the foot of Izzy’s pilot hub. “Hello!”

He pulled out the golden sceptre, careful not to disturb a sleeping Magdalene or catch Izzy’s eye.

“Pretty nice, eh?” He whispered conspiratorially to Ardeth. “This is all I have left in the world. The rest of my fortune was lost... to some rather unscrupulous characters, actually.”

“If the curator reacted the way you say, it must be very important. If I were you, I would keep it close.”

“My friend, the *gods* couldn’t take this away from me-”

“Hey!” Izzy grabbed the sceptre. “That’s mine!”

“No, it’s not!”

They struggled for a bit until it slipped out of Jonathan’s hands and Izzy pointed it at him.

“Keep your hands off it.” He said curtly.

Ardeth laughed at the petulant scowl on Jonathan’s face, showing off his brilliant white teeth.

A colder gust of wind blew past and ruffled Horus’ feathers. Magdalene, asleep and curled up on the bench, shivered under the blanket.

“I want him back, Rick. I want him in my arms.” Evy said, stood on the bow.

Rick had his arms around her. “I know. We taught him well. He’s smarter than you, he’s tougher than me.”

“I love him so much, I just can’t-”

“I know.” Rick interrupted his wife who was nearly in tears. “We both do. Alex knows that. I’ll get him back, Evy. I promise.”

“I know you will.” Evy leant into him and he kissed the top of her head.

The hugged, a brief moment in the cold air, before a disturbance behind them caught their attention. Ardeth had noticed Magdalene twitching, mumbling in her sleep. Jonathan was trying to shake her awake.

Ardeth looked to Rick and Evy. “Something is wrong with her. She won’t wake up, she could be having a vision.”

Evy came to put a hand on Magdalene’s forehead. “Maddie? She’s having more visions?”

Magdalene was getting aggressive, bearing her teeth and writhing about. Jonathan was pleading with her to wake up.

“Come on sport. Maddie, please wake up.”

“Alex.” She was saying in her sleep. “No. Don’t you dare. *No, you bastard!*”

She jolted awake, scaring everyone crowded around her. Her face was covered in sweat, short hair sticking to her cheek. Every muscle was tensed and she looked like a frightened deer.

“Maddie, what happened?” Evy asked.

Magdalene spoke through shuddering gulps of air. “Imhotep. I had...a dream...about Imhotep.”

“You’re having visions again!” Rick said.

Ardeth was confused. “You did not tell them?”

Magdalene glared at him from the corner of her eye and gritted her teeth. “I almost didn’t tell *you*, you told me they were just nightmares.”

“Someone tell me what is going on right now!” Rick demanded.

“Magdalene told me about the visions when she met me in Egypt.” Ardeth said. “She has been spying on the curator for many years to help the Medjai track Imhotep’s cult. I dismissed them because I was afraid she would put herself in danger. We had no idea what he had planned.”

The atmosphere among them dropped. Everyone was visibly shocked with the revelation and Magdalene was still shaking from her dream.

“Maddie what was in your vision?” Evy asked.

“Nothing important.” Magdalene stood up. “But he’s prepared to use Alex as blackmail-Ah!”

She felt a horrible burning across her shoulder that made her cry and shout in agony, clutching her left arm.

“It’s burning!” Magdalene felt hot tears on her cheeks and an ache in her jaw from the pain.

Evy started pulling off Magdalene’s cotton jacket and before Magdalene could stop her, she’d pulled her hand out the way and the jacket sleeve with it. Her tattoo was exposed to the air and everyone stared at it.

Magdalene wasn’t sure what was stronger, the burning spreading through her shoulder or the terrible shame she felt past the shaky breaths and tears. She cried out again and sucked in a breath through clenched teeth, buckling with the pain.

“Maddie what is that?” Evy pointed at the tattoo.

Ardeth’s expression was the most horrified. “It is the mark of Osiris. Where did you get it?”

She let out a whimper, unable to form any words. She couldn’t speak, couldn’t explain herself because she was too upset about having been found out and from hiding it in the first place. She felt like a caged animal, torn up inside and cornered whilst they inspected her. She felt so small, guilty and pitiful.

“Imhotep.” She whispered, then moaned and clutched her arm again. The pain was coming in pulses, every second. There was no let-up in the agony.

“When did he give it to you?” Rick asked, his brow heavy across his eyes. “Maddie, when?”

“*Seven years ago.*” She yelled.

The realisation of just how long she’d been living with this mark of hell, how long she’d been lying to her friends, dawned on her and fresh tears sprung up. She was panting again, trying to push through the burning with every breath she took, knees trembling in effort.

“Seven years.” She whispered.

Evy looked heartbroken. “And you never told us.”

Suddenly the pain turned to anger and defensiveness. “How could I? I didn’t want you hating me, scared of me! I wanted...”

Now even Izzy looked afraid of her, screaming at them, driven wild by fear. Rick took a step towards her and she pulled out her dagger. It was a reflexive action but it said everything. She

was young, and scared, and didn't know what to do or how to explain herself. She stared at her dagger with bulging eyes and gulped, putting it back in its sheath.

"The tattoo senses Imhotep. He thought...he thought he could control my dreams, use me. Back when he first came back to life. The tattoo links me to him but he doesn't want me anymore, not when he's after the arm of Anubis, I'm not important anymore."

"Is this what you saw in your vision?" Evy asked.

"Yeah, he spoke to me." Magdalene pressed her lips together and breathed through her nose. "The dreams came back a few months ago, none of them ever made sense, not till now. Not till we got back in Egypt. I'm sorry."

She pushed past them, still holding her shoulder, dodging out of the way of Evy's sympathetic hand. She picked up her holdall, the familiar bulky canvas bag and its tattered leather strap as a source of comfort. Normalcy in the smell of salt in the material.

The crying had stopped but she could taste the salt the tears had left behind when they tracked over her lips.

She curled up on the floor of the boat, right at the back where she could be forgotten about, left unnoticed unless they wanted to look at her. Cheek pressed to the wood, back to everyone.

"It is a brave person who faces pain just because she doesn't want to worry her family."

Ardeth was sat behind her. Magdalene sniffed and shifted a little closer to the side of the boat, trying to ignore him.

"But that's not why you did it." He said sadly.

Another dry sob came, an intake of breath that hitched and pulled and made her body jerk. She felt the tattoo, now reduced to a faint itch, pressed to the wood with her weight resting on top of it. Magdalene closed her eyes and remembered what happened.

"You promised that you wouldn't kill me, then you sent a load of slaves after me and my friends. You aren't very good at keeping your word, Imhotep." She said.

"Perhaps this can reassure you of my promise."

Imhotep grabbed her and pulled her close, closing his hand over her upper arm. Magdalene screamed in pain upon contact and dropped to the ground, skin on fire. She cried at the burning sensation on her arm and shook her head to clear it.

"Bastard." She spat.

He pulled her up and looked at her harshly. "You have no idea what I have done for you."

Her eyes opened and she was faced with the darkness in front of her whilst Ardeth sat behind her. He put her hat down by her hand. She stroked across its wide leather brim, feeling

smooth, worn leather and the bumps of stitching around the edge.

“It was his promise.” She said, smiling at the memory. “And he kept it, because he saw something in me. Something that happened, when we opened the Book of the Dead, that started all these visions. A contract between me and him. He looked at me and I felt so many possibilities open up, but I chose to fight him off. I wanted to be with Evy, Rick, and Jonathan and you. And I wanted that to be the end of it. If I let any of you know what had happened it wouldn’t stop, I would go on being his thing.”

A hand came to rest on her back and Magdalene stopped talking. If she turned she would have seen Ardeth, looking down at her, unable to voice how painful it was to know what she had lived with for *seven years*. All that running from the people she loved and she wouldn’t ever get away from it.

She would have seen Evy stood listening to her before turning away to leave her be and explain things to Rick and Jonathan. She would have seen that Ardeth stayed, fingertips just brushing the ends of her hair.

“I’d like to go to sleep now please.” She whispered.

All part of the fun

Chapter Notes

Hey guys, been on holiday with no wifi. Was going to update before I left but got my days mixed up. I'm still on holiday (currently in a library to update) for a while so will update when home.

There was a sombre mood over the group at sunrise that lasted the entire day. Jonathan was the only one jovial in any sort of way, purely through force of habit. By sunset nothing had changed.

“What’s it got to do with me?”

“It’s all of us Rick! But you’re the only one not currently admitting that and that makes it your problem.”

Rick and Evy were having a quiet disagreement over his reluctance to speak to Magdalene. It only lasted a few minutes and Evy won without contest.

“You won’t listen to Ardeth about it, or her, or yourself. I thought you would understand how Maddie feels.”

“Because?”

Evy sighed. “Go and talk to Ardeth. Rick, I need you to. Alex needs all of us together.”

Rick relented at the mention of his son and walked over to Ardeth, forcing a casual interest in cleaning and reloading his revolver. Ardeth was watching the skies for a returning Horus.

“So, tattoos seem to be a common thing when you’re around.” He said, glancing surreptitiously up at Ardeth from where he was sat.

“Indeed. They are signposts, like milestones marking where we have been and reminding us of what we need to know.”

“But I don’t need to be reminded about my past, that’s all it is.” Rick was obstinate.

“If a man does not embrace his past, he has no future.” Ardeth said, reaching out to Horus and setting him down.

“Look.” Rick took a bullet from between his lips and slotted it into the chamber. “Even *if* I was some sort of sacred Medjai, what good does that do me now?”

“It is the missing piece of your heart.” Ardeth began earnestly. “If you embrace it, if you accept it, you can do anything.”

Rick rolled his eyes, not wanting to hear the answer he was given.

“Sounds great. Listen,” He twirled his butterfly knife, showing Ardeth he didn’t need to be Medjai to be a threat. “what can we expect from our old friend Imhotep?”

Ardeth considered the question. “His powers are returning quickly. By the time he reaches Ahm Shere even the Scorpion King won’t be able to stop him.”

Rick let out an exasperated sigh and the conversation was over. Evy, from the other end of the dirigible looked over at him and then out across the Nile ahead of them. As the clouds rolled in, blanketing them in white steam, something was calling her, it blew in on the wind and wrapped around her head like a blindfold and suddenly she wasn’t on the boat anymore. The clouds stirred and mixed until she saw things through another’s eyes.

* * *

It was as if Evy was living out a dream of Ancient Egypt through someone else. She and another were stood in ornate armour, too ceremonial to be fit for battle, a planned fight then. There was gold all around, even the people were dressed in it. This was a court, the throne room of a Pharaoh, surrounded by all of his advisors, priests, friends and higher servants.

A starter’s signal rose up and Evy was fighting the other ornate warrior. A woman like her but in slightly darker shades with less bejewelled clothes but larger gold protective guards over her knees and wrists.

Their fight may have been planned but not staged. Neither woman was softening the blows they struck against one another with the gold sai they wielded. Evy barely kept track of the blows she defended against or her own, her body acted with training beyond anything she had learnt.

She was floored by the other woman, to the polite applause of all those around them. She lifted the mask off her face to see more clearly. This couldn’t be a dream of hers because nothing that happened was familiar to her.

The other woman lifted her own mask and Evy found herself looking at Anck-Su-Namun.

“Put your mask on. We wouldn’t want to scar that pretty face.” She said brightly, a contrast to how out of breath Evy felt.

She got up to fight and the people politely applauded again. This time Evy turned her attention to the audience and saw Imhotep, watching the fight intently.

Evy, distracted by being half within this world and half outside of it, looking in, was disarmed by Anck-Su-Namun and cartwheeled towards the display of axes along the wall. Anck-Su-Namun matched her new weapon with a spear and they advanced again, engaging with clashes that sent shockwaves through Evy’s arms.

The crowd grew more appreciative as the blows became heavier and there was a more dangerous intent behind each one.

Anck-Su-Namun won the battle, crouched over Evy with the spear pointed at her throat. There was only a slight suggestion she wanted to draw blood in her eyes before she spoke to Evy in a pleasant tone.

“You are learning quickly Nefertiri. I’ll have to watch my back.”

“Yes,” Evy said, panting. “and I’ll watch mine.”

Evy did not know why she responded so readily to ‘Nefertiri’ but she also knew that she could sense her own mistrust of Anck-Su-Namun without needing a cause.

“Bravo! Bravo!” The Pharaoh Seti came over to them and they broke apart. “Who better to protect the Bracelet of Anubis, than my lovely daughter Nefertiri? And who better to protect me, than my future wife Anck-Su-Namun?”

Evy had smiled at first but her face fell at the knowledge that Anck-Su-Namun would be her father’s protector.

“Well done daughter.”

She hugged Seti happily but that did not abide her sense of fear at new dangers. She was alert to the look in the other woman’s eyes as Imhotep passed by her and the fear grew.

Evy turned her new eyes to the balcony, late at night and alone in her rooms, the sound of the guard patrol in the courtyard below. She looked suspiciously at the room across from hers and steeled her gaze. There, Anck-Su-Namun and the Priest Imhotep kissed passionately to her revulsion.

Seti entered the room, accusing Anck-Su-Namun of her infidelity, as Imhotep crept behind him and stole the Pharaoh’s sword.

“Medjai!” She cried down into the court, panicked and angry. “My father needs you!”

She watched in horror as the lovers killed her father, crying out and leaning over the edge of the balcony as if she could just reach out...

* * *

Rick had been sat, contemplating what Ardeth had said to him, when a shout from his wife startled him and he watched Evy tip over the side of the dirigible.

“Evy!” He leapt forward managing to grab her ankle with one hand and the side of the deck with the other.

She flailed about, unresponsive and shocked from the vision, and Rick desperately tried to cling onto her whilst Ardeth and Jonathan kept him from letting go of the side.

Then in his line of vision was Magdalene, holding onto the rigging and putting her arm around Evy's torso. Now that she bore the brunt of Evy's weight, Rick could hoist her upwards and over the deck. Jonathan took hold of Magdalene and pulled up, sliding her over the railing on her belly. One of the nails in the wooden slats caught on her tank top, ripping it as she landed.

"Evy, look at me. Look at me, you're alright." Rick said.

Evy was shaken and disturbed but she gripped Rick's arm and gave him a grim smile of reassurance.

"What happened?" He asked.

"I had another vision of Egypt." She said. "I was Princess Nefertiri. I understand now why I saw visions of the bracelet, I was chosen to guard it. I watched Imhotep and Anck-Su-Namun kill my father, Seti."

"You what?" Jonathan pulled a face.

"Seti! The Pharaoh that Imhotep murdered."

"Yes, yes, the one with all that lovely gold in Hamunaptra." He said. "But why did you say father?"

Evy looked frustrated. "No not our father, but Nefertiri's father Seti."

Accustomed to shock and danger, the five and Izzy were soon sat around a fire that kept them warm, whilst Evy tried to explain. The only indication that Rick was worried was the arm he wrapped around Evy.

"Evy, I know you haven't been yourself lately with all these dreams and visions-"

"No, no, they're memories, from my previous life." She interrupted him. "Honestly I'm not losing my mind it all makes perfect sense now."

She spoke fast but firm in a tone that Magdalene recognised and trusted. Evy was working now, she was piecing the jigsaw together in her brain and Magdalene believed everything she said.

"And that's why we found the bracelet?" Rick asked sceptically.

"Exactly. I was its protector."

"Now do you believe, my friend?" Ardeth said. "Clearly you were destined to protect this woman."

"Right." Rick still didn't believe. "She's a reincarnated princess, and I'm a warrior for *God*?"

"You'll believe I have visions of the future and supernatural conversations with an undead mummy but not that you're Medjai?" Magdalene asked.

“Shut up.” He said.

“And your son leads the way to Ahm Shere.” Ardeth kept up his point. “Three sides of the pyramid. This was all preordained thousands of years ago.”

“And how does the story end?” Evy asked.

“Only the journey is written, not the destination.” Ardeth said. He looked confident and his tattoos seemed to shine from his skin.

“Convenient.” Rick said.

“How else do you explain Evy’s visions? That it is your son who wears the bracelet?” He tried to convince Rick. “How do you explain your mark?”

“Coincidence.”

“My friend, there is a fine line between coincidence and fate.”

Jonathan, silent until now, looked at Magdalene next to him and noticed the rip up her top.

“Did I do that?”

Magdalene noticed what he was referencing and crossed her jacket over the hole. “Oh no. It’s okay.”

“You can’t wear it.” He said.

Magdalene tried to protest but by then Evy had noticed and was insistent. Evy pressed Izzy for a spare shirt and Jonathan held up a blanket while she changed. She came back out in the old, oversized shirt, sleeves rolled up and slipping off her shoulder. Ardeth stood put her hat on her head and she grinned, looking eighteen years old again.

“You are not complete without it.” He said.

“Hey.” Rick spoke up and paused as a man does when attempting reconciliation. “We’re gonna need all of you, no holding out on us scamp.”

Magdalene’s smile reached her eyes for the first time in a while and she touched her hat to him in a jaunty salute.

“Right you are Sir.”

They settled back down around the fire and Izzy joined them to eat.

“Some crazy people you’re running with these days O’Connell.” He said.

Jonathan handed him a bottle of whiskey. “Ah. It’s all part of the fun with us. You should see what happened last time.”

“Why what happened last time?”

“You don’t want to know.” Rick patted him on the shoulder.

Evy took hold of Magdalene’s hand and squeezed it. They had always been able to call each other sister and Magdalene’s adoration of Evy was never under question.

“How’s your arm?” Evy asked gently.

“Better.”

Journey

Magdalene had tried to read until they got to Karnak. The distraction was welcome and she felt proud having made substantial progress when they met dawn.

“Right,” Rick was saying as they quietly dropped down above Karnak and the train. “Me and Ardeth will hit the train, hold everyone hostage. You guys stay here, we’ll send Alex out to you.

“I’m going for the train.” Magdalene said.

“Do you really think that’s such a good idea Maddie?” He replied.

“Don’t care. Doing it anyway. I’ll reach Imhotep and hold him off, or threaten to kill Anck-Su-Namun, whatever stops him from killing you before you get Alex out.”

They geared up wordlessly, jumping over the side of the dirigible before it landed and rushing at the train before they could be spotted.

Rick and Magdalene went for the cargo carriages, hugging close to the side with guns already cocked and aimed to fire. Heart pounding in her chest, Magdalene licked her lips and followed on as they stormed the carriage. She lunged in from behind Rick, shotgun pointed at anyone in there, only there was no one. Just an hourglass, sand trickling through, and Egyptian tapestries.

“They’ve gone.” Ardeth’s voice called them back outside. “We’ve lost them.” He emerged from a passenger cabin, machine gun hanging uselessly around his waist.

Magdalene slumped and rubbed at her brow, brushing her fringe from her eyes. The oasis could be anywhere in the desert and the chances of finding them were so small it was moot to attempt it. She sat down on the floor of the train, mentally too tired to contemplate what would happen next until a shout from the ruins rang out.

“Rick!” Evy screamed.

Ardeth and Rick were the first to respond, leaping over wrecked monuments. Magdalene sprinted behind them, getting further and further behind.

“Alex left us his tie.” She heard Evy say. “*And* he made us a little sand castle. It’s the Temple Island of Philae. They’ve gone to Philae.”

“Atta boy Alex. Come on!” Rick ushered them all back to the dirigible.

Magdalene grabbed Ardeth in excitement and slapped him on the arm as they raced off, laughing with Evy.

“Alex, you’re a genius!” She said.

They reached Philae within the day, Magdalene sat anxious and fidgety watching the tiny island surrounded by glistening waters as they descended.

“You seem to have regained your spirit.”

Ardeth sat down next to her and smiled. Magdalene blushed a little at the way she was staring at him and focused back on the island, knee bouncing up and down.

“This is it,” she said to Ardeth, “we’re gonna get him back and this will all be over.”

“We must be patient. There is still the creature and the Scorpion King to destroy before you can return home.”

“I can’t wait.” She said, and meant it.

Ardeth saw the hardened look in her eyes. “You do not need redemption Magdalene. You are a good person, nothing that has happened is your fault.”

“No.” She shook her head but she faced forward and did not look at him. After a while her gaze was not so furiously unwavering.

“He’s such a smart kid.” She said. “Like his parents.”

Rick and Evy were talking in happy tones behind them.

“I suspect,” Ardeth said, “that his Auntie helped.”

Magdalene laughed and shrugged. They sat in comfortable silence for a long time, happy to know that they were making as much progress as possible.

“Lord knows what he’s learnt from Jonathan.”

They laughed that hard Izzy gave him disturbed looks.

Alex’s jacket lay on the sand. Evy picked it up and hugged it to her chest, looking at tiny little men in a concave depression in the mound of sand.

“The great temple of Abu Simbel.” She said.

That was where they were headed next but it would have to wait. They desperately needed supplies, who knew when they would eventually reach Ahm Shere? So they would travel to the nearest trading town, restock and take off again that evening. Izzy would sleep during the day so they could travel through the night.

“How are you getting on with your book Maddie?” Evy asked as they waited for Rick and Jonathan to haggle water jars.

“Good, but I’ve read it before.” She paused. “It’s so easy when you know you’ve read all the words before. I know lots of words about science and history and I can read Egyptian but I

struggle with street names and shopping lists. Because I haven't seen those words before. No one else realises that because they all learnt to read normally."

Evy sensed she'd been harbouring resentment at how people judged her.

"You know so much more though." She said cheerfully. "You know all that history, you have been on so many adventures and you know those words in your head, you just don't recognise them on paper. Maddie, explorer, adventurer and most exciting person I know."

Magdalene smiled and Evy nudged her.

"Everyone else wasted time on those boring words whilst you and I saved the world. The men got to tag along too."

They shared a giggle and headed back with the others, excitedly looking out over the edge of the dirigible for any signs of Imhotep and the cult. It may have been wishful thinking but it never stopped them being ever more hopeful.

Soon, Evy fell asleep and Magdalene was yawning every two minutes. Her head would droop slightly, she'd lift it up and shake it, yawning loudly and stiffening resolutely against sleep.

Ardeth was stood in front of her, leaning against the ropes.

"You are afraid of your visions." He said.

Magdalene got up with a sharp intake of breath and joined him. "Yeah." She tapped her arm. "It's humming at me again, it means we're close to him. I'm close to him."

Ardeth's arm shot out to lie on top of her sleeve, covering the warm spot with a reassuring hand. Magdalene showed him a grateful smile at his sympathy and laid her hand on top of his.

A chill wind swept between them and ruffled their clothes and hair. It was hard to read their expressions, each was so wary of upsetting the other.

"I don't mind it." Magdalene said eventually. "It's been a part of me for so long that-okay, sometimes I curse Imhotep for what he did, but, in a weird way, looking for answers is what has kept me going."

"Your destiny is more complex than the others, you were not born into it."

"Doesn't mean I can't embrace it."

"Embrace it with caution, you still choose how you lead your life." He said softly.

Magdalene pouted guiltily. "I don't want him taking control anymore."

"I cannot help you fight your visions." Ardeth took her hand and she looked at him sharply at the contact. "But I promise to protect you while you sleep. If you dream of the creature, know that I am here to protect you in this world and it will strengthen you in his."

“Th-thank you Ardeth.” She whispered.

She curled back up next to Evy under a blanket and closed her eyes, Ardeth’s promise sending her to sleep.

* * *

Her senses came back to her much quicker than before, she could feel before she could see, and she could move before she realised the creature was there. Sat, staring at her.

He said nothing.

Magdalene responded in like, keeping quiet and patiently studying Imhotep. She licked her lips, fighting off an urge to walk away from him.

“I did not expect you to be so composed after last time.” He said, the Egyptian ringing in the air around them.

“I’m not.” She replied hotly.

Ardeth is waiting for you to wake up. *She thought.*

“You are searching for us, I can feel you are still in Egypt. You won’t find us.”

Wrong. My nephew is smarter than you.

Outwardly she smiled. A flicker of curiosity passed over Imhotep’s face, he rose and circled her closely, inspecting her out of the corner of his eye. She stood up straight and kept her guarded smile.

“Don’t get too close, I’ll mistake it for flirting.” She said.

Imhotep snorted. There was a look he gave her and Magdalene knew the reason for his amusement.

“Oh.” She said slowly as it dawned on her. “You’ve resurrected her, haven’t you? Anck-Su-Namun?”

His proud smile was all the answer she needed.

“When? How?”

“I pulled her soul from the afterlife with the Book of the Dead.”

Magdalene remembered the pool at Karnak, it must be a gateway for souls.

“So...” She walked away from him. “If you have your one true love again why are you chatting here with me?”

He growled. Magdalene had often felt like their back and forth was his way of probing her and he wasn’t a fan of her doing the same to him.

"I am as bound to you as you are me for having marked you." He said.

"Well you should have thought about that before you did it then." Magdalene.

"I don't know what I ever saw in your weak soul."

Her jaw twitched. "More than you will ever understand. What have you accomplished that I haven't undone?"

Instead of responding with rage he seemed to contemplate the question.

"None of that will matter once I control the Army of Anubis."

"You know, when you're there, with your precious girlfriend, thinking about destroying everything," Magdalene swung on him, "I'm going to give you two seconds. Two seconds to feel that power before I rain hellfire on your ass."

Crash and burn

Chapter Notes

Hello there. Long time, no update. Thank you, for those of you who have kept on through many months of absence, your support means a lot. This chapter is a boxing day miracle, however it is, for my sins, unedited and very short. But it is what it is. I've been away for many reasons, life has been tough. But I was unexpectedly diagnosed with depression and anxiety, the realisation of which sent me into a mental breakdown. However! I believe more than anything, that I must be entirely honest about this. I have most likely been suffering since I was 15, and to you, dear reader, I am telling everything. Not as an explanation for my absence, whilst your sympathies would be very kind I would ask you not to comment with them. This message is my way of letting others know, in some small way, that this is more common than you think, and hopefully show you, you are not alone.

I cannot promise consistent updates. But I promise I will write as much as possible and that I will finish this book. (And it's sequel, I did promise you all a trilogy)

All the best - The Missing Pieces

Magdalene spent the rest of the night fitfully; caught between images of Imhotep standing over vast swathes of dead bodies and herself, standing above a glorious Egypt where everything shone with gold.

She woke up sweating from heat, having tangled the blanket around her in the night.

“Good morning, oh goddess of dreams.” Jonathan smiled brightly at her with a flourished bow

Magdalene’s lip curled in disgust as she made a scoffing noise. “Don’t, Jonathan.”

“Sorry mum.” He was decent enough to look apologetic and pull her into a one-armed hug.

Evy made her way over, with water and a bowl of porridge. “We landed in Abu Simbel early dawn. We know where we’re going next.”

Magdalene grunted around the side of the cup. “We’ll find him there. Can feel it.”

Both Jonathan and Evy looked faintly sick at her declaration but were quick to recover.

“It’s what we’ve been waiting for, I suppose.” Jonathan said.

Magdalene slapped him on the arm. “It’s not like we haven’t practised killing him before, right?”

Evy was the first to chuckle, then they were all laughing. The moment was needed, it gave them courage.

“That’s the Blue Nile down there.” Rick called. “We must be out of Egypt by now.”

“In ancient times, all this still belonged to the upper kingdom.” Evy said. The oasis must be around here somewhere.”

“Don’t worry Evy, we’ll find him. He’s a smart kid. He’ll leave us a sign.”

Magdalene was swinging about in one of the hammocks, when the bell on Izzy’s dirigible started ringing in a new, cold wind. Every body gathered on the main deck, watching the ropes and sails around them pull taut and flex. Everything started trembling and there was a dull roar in the distance, rising into a howl. Magdalene climbed up the rigging and hung off it, trying to see around the bend.

Izzy screamed, “We’re in trouble!”

They all turned to see a great wall of water surging towards them, a fifty feet block flooding the cavern. Imhotep’s face rose out of the riverbed to reach the dirigible, roaring at them with fury.

“Horus, fly!” Ardeth sent the bird away to safety.

“Wow.” Magdalene’s eyes lit up.

“IZZY!” Rick yelled. “Come hard right! Starboard! *Starboard!*”

The face of Imhotep grinned and reached out to swallow them. Izzy pushed down a lever and gas-fuelled boosters either side of the dirigible kicked in and kicked the floating balloon into high gear. The jerk as they pulled away sent everybody tumbling and Magdalene hung onto the ropes for dear life, speeding away from the water.

“Woohoo!” Magdalene was jeering at Imhotep’s face. “Take that you son of a bitch!”

They banked hard right around the bend, a blaze of steam tracking behind them.

“Yes!” She cried, swinging off one rope and climbing up the other side of the ship. “That’s how you do it!”

Magdalene climbed further up the ropes and looked back at the water pounding onto the rocky face of the cliffs, laughing and hollering at it.

A huge wave poured down on them, the spray lashing them and drenching the entire boat in river water. Magdalene spat out the water that had gotten into her mouth and shook the hair from her face.

Jonathan stared at her uncomfortably. “Maddie, now is not the time to have a nervous breakdown!”

Evy and Rick clung to the side of the ship as they were battered by the water as it dropped back down to the river bed. Izzy climbed back up to the wheel and stared viciously over it at Rick.

“Is there a little something you forgot to mention? Hmm?”

“Uh, people?”

Everyone turned at Jonathan’s voice and were captivated at the sight in front of them. A huge oasis, greener than anything for hundreds of miles, with waterfalls and birdsong. And far over, in the distance, at the other side of the forest, was a twinkling, golden pyramid.

“Ahm Shere.” Ardeth said.

But they couldn’t relax. Behind them, the thundering roar of water rose up again, more violent than before.

“Come on, you bastard, let’s see what you got.” Magdalene said. She was ready to climb back up amongst the sails but Jonathan caught the back of her shirt and pulled her down next to him.

“Oh no you don’t.” He said. “You’re making me nervous.”

“He’s back!” Izzy yelled. “Hang on!”

The dirigible lurched forward again, but this time they were braced against the force of it, and they shot out past the edge of the cliffside for a moment, before the engines sputtered and died.

Izzy looked at them wide-eyed. “Well, that’s not good.” He shrank back down behind the wheel, the river water torrenting down on them.

Jonathan and Magdalene ducked down together in a ball, Magdalene’s heart hammering like a jack rabbit. She just about heard Rick scream for them all to hang on before the waves crashed through the dirigible like it was made of paper mâché.

After the explosion of wood splintering apart, there was more noise; sometimes it sounded like sirens, screeching in between Magdalene’s ears, or else a roar. It could have been the water or the wind rushing past her as she fell.

There was shrapnel hitting her from every which way as she fell. She couldn’t pinpoint anything but felt cuts and bruises all over her body. Then something hit her a lot harder.

* * *

Ardeth had mercifully rolled once he’d hit the ground, coming to a halt away from most of the timber. He was sore and felt like his skull had caved in on him but he was nonetheless alive.

He got up as quickly and steadily as he could, responding to Jonathan's groan for help. The two men gave each other looks of gratitude, using each other as a ballast.

"We've really done it this time, my friend." Jonathan panted, brow slick with sweat and his grey and cream suit smeared with smoke and soil.

Ardeth nodded. "But you would not have it any other way."

"True."

They dug Izzy out from underneath the balloon, Rick and Evy were alright, they held on to each other during the crash and that kept them fairly well protected once they hit the ground.

Evy stumbled over to the edges of the crash, looking out into the jungle. Clutching a tree, she turned around, not having found what she was looking for.

"Where's Maddie?"

Ardeth went cold with fear and began searching back through the wreckage, wafting away the smoke with his arm. He picked up her battered hat and held it for the others to see. Everyone began pulling apart what was left of the dirigible, calling out for Magdalene.

"I've found her!"

Ardeth clambered quickly over to Rick, who was lifting a smouldering hammock off a body. Magdalene had been pinioned by the ship's wheel, and she was being crushed into the ground. Ardeth joined Rick and pushed against the rest of the wreckage, it slipped and went sliding down the hill, freeing Magdalene.

"Magdalene!" Ardeth crouched by her and lifted her head off the ground, she was only just conscious and her face was nearly half blackened with soot.

"She's barely breathing." Evy said. "She's inhaled too much smoke."

Ardeth laid her back down and listened to her raspy breathing, squeezing her hand.

"Jonathan." Rick caught the canteen Jonathan tossed him, gently tipping the water down her throat.

Magdalene began making choking noises and shuddering, the water leaking back out of her mouth and down her neck.

Rick grimaced. "Tip her on her side, she's going to throw up, she'll choke to death."

Ardeth did just that and watched as Magdalene started twitching violently, and mercifully retch up. She spat out onto the ground and cough as much as she possibly could between heaving breaths. Evy sighed in relief, and Izzy patted Jonathan on the back, who nodded at him and gratefully sat down. Ardeth pressed Magdalene's back to his chest, arm wrapped around her.

“Hey, hey, here you go.” Rick handed her the canteen. “Breathe easy and slowly, panic’s over now. Follow my finger with your eyes.”

Ardeth held Magdalene steady as Rick checked her over and made sure she wasn’t concussed. He could feel her wracked breaths and the curve of her spine, one of her hands tightly holding the arm he used to clutch her to him.

“The scamp’s fine,” Rick declared with a smile. “Just dazed.”

Ardeth helped her stand up and guided her away from the fires that had broken down. Magdalene limped out from under his arm and fell into Evy’s open arms for a hug.

“I don’t wanna do that again.” She whimpered.

“No one’s going to make you.” Evy laughed through Magdalene’s hair.

Reckoning

As soon as Magdalene had calmed down, they formed a chain, searching through the dirigible for their weapons and supplies, passing it all down into a small pile.

“We’re gonna go get my son. Then we’re gonna want to get out of here fast, so make this work, Izzy.” Rick said, lifting their gear out of the wreck.

“No, no. You don’t understand O’Connell. This thing was filled with gas.” Izzy retorted. “Not hot air, gas! I need gas to get this thing off the ground.”

Magdalene caught the knapsack Evy tossed to her and set it down. Her head hurt her, but no more than the rest of her body. Ardeth spotted Horus returning and stood next to her to attach the last message to the hawk’s ankle. After sending him off, Ardeth wrapped his arm around Magdalene.

“How do you feel?”

“Good.” She replied. “I’m fine.”

“You had us worried.”

Magdalene laughed. “I always have everybody worried.”

Ardeth caught her cheek with his hand and turned her face up to look at him. His eyes never left her face as the rough pads of his fingers grazed her skin.

“Okay,” she whispered. “I’m not fine. But I will be, soon.”

Ardeth hugged her close and she stepped in, soaking in how warm he was.

Izzy was still complaining. “Where am I gonna get gas around here? Bananas? Mangoes? Tarzans arse? Now, maybe I could finagle it to take hot air, but do you know how many cubic meters I’d *need*? It’s too big!”

Rick shied away from some sparks and grimaced at Izzy.

“If anybody can fill this thing up with hot air, Izzy, it’s you.”

“Come to Daddy.” Jonathan was wandering about, pretending to take in the scenery. Magdalene watched him spy the gold staff and swipe it from under Izzy’s nose. He looked around and caught Magdalene eyeing him from underneath Ardeth’s arm, still protectively hugging her to his waist. She pressed a finger to her pursed lips and turned away to pick up her bag and hat.

The screaming sound she had heard when she fell from the dirigible swooped down on Magdalene again, and she pressed her fingers to her ears.

“Owww.” She complained, shaking her head.

“Maddie?” Evy came over to her.

Magdalene waved her concern away. “It’s okay, I’m okay. It’s just this place.”

She stared around at the jungle around them, it hummed with life in her ears, all pinned up by that dull screeching at the base of her skull.

“I think it senses what’s inside me, it’s trying to give me visions.” She said. “My tattoo stings like crazy.”

“It could be the fall.” Evy said. “Concussion?”

Magdalene shook her head. “No, it’s like this place knows me...”

“So, Rick.” Jonathan said as they set off trudging through the jungle. “What’s the plan?”

“Let’s find some higher ground.”

A few moments later, a shot rang out across the oasis, followed by the shriek of a bird. Ardeth stiffened and ran back.

“Horus!”

He called but there was only silence in reply. Magdalene shivered, like a ghost had crossed through her body.

“Lock Nah.” She growled.

“I must go.” Ardeth told Rick.

“Where?” He replied.

“I must let the commanders know where we are.”

Rick pushed Magdalene out of the way and tried to plead with him. “No, you can’t go.”

“If the Army of Anubis arises-”

“I need you to help me find my son.”

Ardeth saw Rick’s desperation, and the panic in Evy and Jonathan’s faces. He struggled with the battle in his head, his eyes roving as he deliberated.

“Then first I shall help you.”

“Thank you.”

Ardeth stopped in front of Magdalene, his face showing just how worried he was. She took his hand with a grateful squeeze and they set off again, time of the essence.

They made it to the other side of the valley in just over ten minutes, but Magdalene felt every step. By the time they collapsed on a ridge at the valley wall, she was hobbling along and rubbing at her tattoo.

“You hear that?” Rick asked Ardeth whilst they loaded the rifles.

“What?”

“Nothing. Absolutely nothing.”

Magdalene sat down against a tree and roll up her trouser leg. There was a large graze, about two inches wide and all down the outside of her calf. She grunted, with a roll of her eyes, and dragged her canvas holdall across the ground to her side. The first aid kit was buried in there somewhere.

“Are you alright, Maddie?”

Rick stood over her as she wrapped a bandage around the dirty gash. Every inch of her was covered in grime and sweat, as was the faces of everybody else there, not ideal for open wounds.

Magdalene barely spared him a glance, concentrating on tucking the bandage in on itself. “I’m fine.”

“We can go see a doctor the moment we get out of here.”

“Really? How thoughtful. I was just going to let it fester a bit.”

Rick exhaled sharply. “Maddie-”

“It was a joke, Rick.”

They stared at each other. It was humid and the air was filled with gnats and other winged irritations. Rick opened his mouth and raised his hand to gesture but failed to say anything. Magdalene used the tree trunk to hoist herself up and leaned against it, staring at him.

“Maddie,” Rick started “we never got to talk about our argument.”

“What did we argue about?” She asked.

“Back in England, you were upset that I said Evy and Alex were all that matter to me.”

“Oh.”

“You know you mean a lot to me, and we did save the world together.”

Magdalene felt tears prick her eyes. “Rick, I-”

“What I said was insensitive, I’m sorry.”

Magdalene swallowed and nodded. “Me-me too.”

“I say chaps,” Jonathan broke through the quiet. “look at this. Shrunk heads. I’d love to know how they do that.”

Everyone looked at him wordlessly.

“Just curious.” He defended,

The headache Magdalene had been building up after the crash came to a climax, forcing out any of her other thoughts. Her eyes rolled back in her head and she grasped the tree for support.

“It’s happening again.” She vaguely saw the others crowding around before the vision blotched out her sight.

* * *

“Interesting.”

She was stood alone in a hall, no Imhotep nor anyone else around her. Magdalene looked around, this was a throne room, an empty gold chair on a raised dais in front of her. She moved for the doors at the other end of the room and found them locked.

Turning back around, Magdalene stopped and stared. The throne was now full, a richly dressed Egyptian figure sat there, looking expectant.

It was her.

It was her, sat on the throne. An exact copy of Magdalene. Her duplicate, in every way. Dressed like a goddess in white cotton and painted with thick make up.

Magdalene stared. Her muscles shifted uncomfortably under her own flesh, like she was trapped in snakeskin. It was like looking in a terrifyingly serene mirror.

“Who the hell are you?” She said.

The woman on the throne smiled. “I am you, your soul. I am what you become and what you always have been.”

Magdalene snorted.

The other her raised an eyebrow and stepped off the throne to the curtain behind, concealing another exit.

Magdalene crossed the hall at a trot, desperate not to lose her other self. Behind the throne was a balcony, the other woman stood looking out at a vast crowd below her.

“The Army of Anubis.”

Magdalene joined her on the balcony and looked out at the black crowd of dog-headed soldiers, stood snarling up at them.

“Are they going to kill us? Is this my vision?”

Her other self chuckled. “No. They snap at the heels of their master, waiting for orders.”

“Anubis?”

“Anubis yes,” She conceded, “but he does not command them directly. There are others with similar interest in the dead.”

“Who? Tell me.”

But the other woman said nothing else. Magdalene blinked and she was gone, and Magdalene re-joined the land of the living.

* * *

Magdalene stumbled but kept herself upright. She had never before experienced a vision whilst awake, it was like being conscious for your own drowning.

“Oh god that was terrible.” She said.

“What was it?” Jonathan asked.

“Trust me.” Magdalene wiped her mouth with the back of her hand. “You don’t want to know.”

“Was it the creature?” Ardeth pressed her.

“No.” She shut him down. “It was nothing to do with Imhotep. It wasn’t relevant.”

“It has to be.” Evy said.

Magdalene rolled her eyes. “I had a vision about me. There was another me, looking like the Queen of all Egypt. She said she was who I would become. My vision was wrong.”

Evy asked Ardeth, “Is it possible to have a wrong vision?”

“I do not know.” He said, studying Magdalene carefully. “But it does not change our plans. We must find your son and kill the Scorpion King.”

They all moved back to what they were doing, Jonathan tossing Magdalene her sawed-off shotgun and picking up his own rifle.

“You any good with that?” Ardeth asked him.

“Three times Fox and Hound’s grand champion, I’ll have you know.” Jonathan said proudly.

“You any good with *that*?”

Ardeth looked at the hilt of his scimitar, hand rested on the handle.

“You’ll know soon enough.” The blade flashed as he held it to Jonathan’s throat. “Because the only way to kill an Anubis warrior...is by taking off its head.”

Jonathan gulped and nodded. “I’ll remember that.”

Magdalene smirked and attached her whip to her belt. “You always have to be so dramatic, Ardeth.”

“A gift I was not aware I possessed.”

She patted him on the arm. “And you brood too much.”

“Do I?” He smiled and cocked his head at her.

Magdalene winked in return, strapping a bandolier of shotgun shells to her torso.

“You know,” Ardeth stepped in slightly, taking hold of the arm that held her gun. “You should keep this tucked into your shoulder more. And don’t pick off the stragglers, leave that to Evy with the rifle. With a shotgun, you should go for the groups.”

“Should I?” Magdalene’s eyes were trained on Ardeth’s hand.

“And don’t engage with Imhotep. Don’t waste your fire, and don’t engage him. He is too dangerous.”

Magdalene looked him in the eye and spoke with a cold steel edge to her voice.

“I can shoot for myself.”

Rick and Ardeth left as soon as they were ready. They had spotted the cult from a higher ridge, heading towards the pyramid, and set off with their guns up.

Magdalene jumped at a crack of thunder. “I wonder if he knows I’m here.”

Evy and Jonathan looked at her, crouched against the earth, boots shifting over the rocks.

“He can barely sense me, now he’s resurrected Anck-Su-Namun. But I wonder if he’s listening now.”

“Well he’s in for a nasty shock either way.” Evy said. “He’s got all three of the Carnahan’s on his ass.”

Magdalene smiled at her sister and returned her focus to the canopy with a brighter spark in her eyes.

For luck

Chapter Notes

Hello lovely readers, It's been a long time hasn't it? I've been unable to write recently, in April I was told I was going to have to undergo major surgery. I won't give out details, but the surgery has left me with a much longer recovery period than we thought I would need. I've had to delay university, and a lot of other personal things happened around the same time. But I have missed writing so much and I can't wait to finish this book with you all.

They watched the dense floor growth sway under the train of men snaking through the belly of the valley. Waiting for Rick and Ardeth to surprise them from the ground, they were left on the ridge, focused on the glittering torchlight raised high.

Not a single one of them spoke, each training eyes on targets that passed underneath them, waiting for clear targets.

A heavy wind swept through the oasis and the trees were blown back. Magdalene exhaled slowly, trying to subdue the surge of adrenaline at the sight of the cult members. They were all stopped. Looking around as if something was frightening them.

Thunder roared, the entire train of people were illuminated by lightning and a frightening cry rose up that could have been the wind screeching overhead but it sounded real. Magdalene blinked hard to keep the sweat out of her eyes and licked her lips. They all had to be constantly ready. Jonathan shifted beside her and picked his rifle up from the floor.

"Fan out! Eyes open! Guns up!" They heard Lock-Nah cry.

Magdalene pulled off her cotton jacket and stashed it, stood in her tank top with her gun in its shoulder holster and other weapons around her. The skin around her tattoo shivered in the night air.

"Jonathan." Evy said, standing up with her rifle.

"Yes?"

"That's my husband and my son down there." She looked grimly at the cult winding their way through the foliage. "Make me proud."

"Today's that day, Evy." He replied.

The train had slowed down, turning over every leaf looking for something waiting to attack. Evy pointed out that one of the men had been dragged into the undergrowth, soon they could

hear screams and men were disappearing all over. There was a litany of gunfire but no sign that Rick or Ardeth had appeared.

“We can’t worry about what’s going on down there, if we took shots at every man we’d run out of bullets. Wait for Rick.” Evy said.

They did not have to wait much longer. The pair came from behind the end of the convoy, the machine gun forcing a path through the crowd. Once they had spotted them, Evy and Jonathan fired on any outlier who got too close to Rick and Ardeth, keeping them safe. Magdalene used her shotgun against groups of men ahead of them, clearing out as many men as possible so that Ardeth could push them back with the Thompson.

Evy shot at two men rushing up behind Rick whilst he switched clips in his pistols. They kept up the onslaught, firing a few yards ahead of Rick as he ran on to keep the pathway clear.

“Dad!” Alex screamed.

“Alex!” Rick ran for his son cowering underneath Lock-Nah’s blade and kept running, hitting into Alex and carrying up onto his shoulder with nothing but his momentum.

Lock-Nah swung his sword again but Ardeth moved up behind him, drew his own sword and parried, stopping Lock-Nah from following after Rick. They screamed at each other and kept fighting. Magdalene watched as they clashed swords over and over again, Ardeth being pushed back with every blow.

“Gotta do something...do something...” She mumbled, looking for a clear shot at Lock-Nah, but he was too quick, it was impossible to aim at him on the move and if he was ever still for a moment, he was always locked with Ardeth. She could kill both of them or neither at this distance.

She paused and her eyes widened with the beginnings of an idea, “...So close the distance.”

Jonathan noticed her get up and pull out her dagger. “Maddie what are you doing?”

“Something stupid.”

She was peering down at the drop from the cliff edge and eyeing the thickest tangle of creeping plants along the wall.

“Oh no.” He said.

“Oh yes.”

Evy looked over and watched Magdalene slice off the creeping plant where they stood, and rip it off the cliff wall below them until it dangled from her hand downwards, about ten yards of loose plant vines.

“Evy, do something.” Jonathan said.

Magdalene re-sheathed her knife and shouldered the shotgun. “What? You didn’t expect me to stay here when all the fun is below us did you? Besides,” she whined, “it’s my signature move.”

She jumped off the side of the ridge and dropped, vine tucked between her legs like the seat of a zipline. She screamed, partly fear and partly the thrill, as she felt the creeper catch where it was still attached to the wall, it clung on and she stopped falling and started swinging forward.

At the same time, Ardeth was struggling against Lock-Nah, his hair in his eyes and barely able to keep in time with the onslaught. He was agile and fast, but restricted to fighting in the one small clear patch of ground, away from whatever was hiding in the grass, Lock-Nah’s brute strength was overpowering the fight.

He ducked under a sweeping blade and turned to face his opponent again, panting, sodden with perspiration, disorientated. Then the most garbled screech came at them.

Magdalene let go of the vine, lungs fit to burst from yelling, and barrelled through the air, slamming into Lock-Nah and tossing them both across the ground. She was incredibly bruised already, but Lock-Nah took the brunt of the landing and she didn’t feel like any of her bones were broken so she got up as quickly as she could.

Lock-Nah picked up his sword again and cried out, cutting upwards at Magdalene. She twisted out of the way and used her shotgun to push the blade up and away from her torso but it was forced out of her grasp and rolled into the undergrowth.

Ardeth came from behind Lock-Nah and they clashed swords. Lock-Nah spun round and lifted his sword high with both arms as Ardeth met his blow. Ardeth rolled out of the way of the next swing, bringing his sword up in front of him as he stood up, the two men were grunting at each other in the effort of each parry and dive, their whole bodies behind the force of their scimitars.

Lock-Nah began hacking away at Ardeth, who found it easy enough to get his own sword in the way of Lock-Nah’s path, but was slowing down in exhaustion. With their swords locked he threw a punch to Lock-Nah’s face unbalancing his whole body. Ardeth hit him again from the other side, using the momentum he had gained to keep going, not letting Lock-Nah regain his footing.

With a kick, Ardeth forced Lock-Nah to step back, reeling from the blows. The pair sized each other up and Lock-Nah struck again, a series of blows before Ardeth broke through his guard and his scimitar sliced home.

But he did not stop and twirled his blade in his hand to come around for a second cut to Lock-Nah’s throat, dropping him to the ground. Lock-Nah let out a laugh of disbelief before he collapsed.

Ardeth felt the muzzle of a pistol press into his back, and the fire of a shot before he could react.

He felt the pistol move away and watched the man drop away before he could shoot. Ardeth looked back on the ridge where he saw Jonathan, who had saved him from death.

Ardeth bowed his head in thanks as Jonathan and his sister moved down from the ledge, and turned to Magdalene.

“Now a Carnahan has saved me twice. One of these days, we might be even.”

“We’ve saved your ass more than twice.” Magdalene retorted, picking her shotgun off the ground.

“I must go.”

Magdalene took her hat off and hung it from its cord around Ardeth’s neck like a ridiculously oversized pendant. “For luck.” She kissed him on the cheek.

He stared at her a second longer before disappearing into the undergrowth. Magdalene trampled through the bushes, shooting stragglers with her pistol. On her way to re-join the other’s, Imhotep and Anck-Su-Namun came from behind a clearing and they came face to face.

“Imhotep,” Magdalene said, reaching for her whip, “how’s your date this evening?”

She leered at Anck-Su-Namun who sneered back. Magdalene’s lip twitched in disgust and she started baring her teeth.

“Yeah, well ain’t this a lovely reunion? I’m going to tear you to shreds Imhotep, I swear to you. I will be the one to cut you down and I’m gonna make your pretty paramour watch.”

“*Kill her!*” Anck-Su-Namun demanded.

Imhotep raised his hand.

Magdalene unclenched her jaw; it was starting to ache from the tension. “Nothing to say? I’ve got more power than you realise Imhotep. I’ve had visions of me ruling over Egypt, the army of the dead behind me. You sure you’re going to win this one?”

Poetic license be damned, Magdalene would say anything if she thought it would shake the creature.

Imhotep said nothing in response, he merely bowed his head and pulled Anck-Su-Namun away. Magdalene thought about following, but she could hear her family reuniting ahead and, with one hesitant glance behind her, ran on.

That sounds like a threat

“Hey, nice shootin Tex.” Rick was saying to Jonathan as Magdalene arrived.

“What were those...*creepy* little pygmy things?” Jonathan asked, out of breath.

Rick gasped, panting through his words. “Just, the local natives.”

Jonathan fixed him with a worried gaze. “Are you sure.”

“I’m sure. Nothing, it was nothing.”

“Hey Alex.” Magdalene ruffled his hair. “Well done lads.”

“Maddie, are you okay?” Jonathan looked at her ripped trousers and matted hair.

“Yeah.” She panted. “Probably shouldn’t do any more Tarzan swings but yeah, positive.”

“Come on, mum! Come on, Dad!” Alex got up. “We have to get to the pyramid. I have to get the bracelet off *now!*”

“Oh, leave it on Alex.” Jonathan said. “Looks good on you.”

“No, you guys, you don’t understand. He told me the bracelet’ll kill me if I don’t get inside the pyramid before the sun hits it. Today!”

“Oh my God.” Evy’s face dropped.

Simultaneously, they heard a band of pygmies screeching through the grasses towards them.

“Time to go!” Rick pushed his son in front of him and began running.

Jonathan screamed. “I thought you said it was nothing!”

They ran pell-mell, pygmy creatures running behind them and swinging from the vines above their heads. Jonathan looked backwards at the gaining hoard and ran off the path without noticing. He veered into Magdalene along the way and hurtled them both down a secondary path, away from the others.

“But-” She protested.

“Can’t go back, just run!” He yelled.

They collided with one of the few cult members left alive, and the trio kept going, Jonathan leading the way.

“Look! There’s a burial ground!” He veered them off onto a patch of gravestones. “We’re safe! We’re safe! They’ll never cross those sacred stones!”

“You are sure?” The man asked.

Jonathan retorted, “Yes of course I’m sure.”

One of the pygmies noticed them and used the very gravestones as stepping stones to reach them. He fixed on Magdalene and jumped on her chest, dagger in hand.

“Get that one! Not me!” She pointed at the cult member.

The critter gave a little scream but it withered and he ducked his gaze away from the tattoo on her arm and stabbed the cult member repeatedly. Jonathan and Magdalene screamed. The pygmy screamed back in terror and swung into a dead tree.

“Sorry.” Jonathan apologised to the dying man. “My mistake.”

“Thank you!” Magdalene called up the tree. The pygmy chittered in response and started climbing back down until Jonathan tried to swat it with a branch and it ran away again.

Jonathan took hold of Magdalene’s back pack and pulled her along, running again until the path took them to a ravine in sight of the great pyramid, Rick, Evy and Alex on the other side.

“Wait for me! Wait for us!” Jonathan called.

Evy stood on the tree trunk they used for a bridge. “Hurry, up Jonathan!”

Magdalene skittered across the tree trunk, the ravine below seemed to sway and twist underneath. She closed her eyes and prayed before leaping the final few steps and hobbling away from the edge with trembling knees.

“What’s that for?” Jonathan pointed to the stick of dynamite Rick was lighting.

“Oh nothing, just something in case of emergency.”

Rick threw the explosive into the stream of pygmies crossing over the ravine, who fought over it before it went off and took several of them and the tree trunk down into the remnants of the river. The rest of the pygmies crowded around the edge of the cliffside, screeching across the gap. One of the stragglers, with a blood coated blade, waved his clawed little hand at Magdalene, who waved back. The pygmy chittered dove back into the bushes.

“Rick.” Evy called.

Overhead, at the top of the valley, the first rays of sunlight were peeking, soon to dawn on the pyramid.

“Let’s go, Alex.” Rick took his son by the hand and run.

Magdalene, Jonathan and Evy ran after them but were soon left behind, unable to keep up with Rick or move faster than the sunrise.

“They made it. Thank God.” Evy was elated when she saw Rick and Alex together under the pyramid.

She let go of Jonathan’s hand and hugged Magdalene, who squeezed her tightly and then hugged Jonathan just as hard.

Their brother was clearly more entranced with the pyramid than his nephew. “Yes. Great. Fabulous.”

Magdalene sensed movement behind her and turned, Anck-Su-Namun’s hair in her face as she thrust a knife up under Evy’s ribcage. Magdalene barely heard Rick’s scream, or saw Imhotep throw Jonathan twenty feet. She only heard Evy’s soft gasp of pain. She drew her pistol and lunged at Anck-Su-Namun, but Imhotep pulled her wrist. The gun fired into the air and he twisted out of her grip, backhanding her across the face. Magdalene hit the sand and rolled, spitting blood out of her mouth.

“You bitch!” She screamed after the pair of monsters. “She’d better be a fucking good lay Imhotep, a fucking *good* lay!” There were tears smudging the dirt across her face and her throat, ripped raw, broke into sobs.

Anck-Su-Namun just waved at and Alex and walked inside the pyramid.

“She’s going to be alright, isn’t she Dad?” Alex looked down at his dad knelt over his bleeding mother.

“She’ll be fine.” Rick pointed at Jonathan and Magdalene. “Take him. Mommy’s fine.”

Magdalene took Alex and moved him away, wiping away her tears, but she couldn’t stop him from looking. Rick was in pieces, he could barely speak.

Jonathan shook Alex to get him to look at him and whispered. “It’s okay. Your mother’s going to be fine.”

“What do I do? What do I do Evy?”

“Take care of Alex.” She said, her voice almost gone.

“No. Sweetheart, no.”

Evy’s body was shivering now, going into shock as she couldn’t manage any more through the pain. She whispered ‘I love you’ to Rick before she died. Magdalene hid her face in Alex’s shoulder as Rick tried to bring her back.

Magdalene fell to the side, staring at nothing. Whilst Rick consoled his son and Jonathan, Magdalene refused to look at Evy. She was wrapped up in her own thoughts. She knew this was her fault from the start, she had ignored all the warning signs, all the visions. She had kept secrets from Evy and now Evy was dead.

“Stay here.” Rick told Alex.

Magdalene got up. “Where are you going?”

“To kill that son of a bitch.”

“No.” She said. “He’s mine.”

“Stay here.” Rick turned on her. “You’re going nowhere.”

She pushed past but he grabbed her shoulder and shoved her back. “Stay with Jonathan!”

Magdalene watched him walk into the pyramid, blood so hot she could explode. But then she turned and caught sight of Evy, her hair rippling in the sunlight, and Magdalene sank to her knees and wiped the blood off her chin.

Pretty face

Out in the desert, there was no shelter from the sun.

Ardeth rode back through the dessert with the entirety of the twelve Medjai tribes. It was a journey filled with tension and he felt the sun on his back more keenly than he had ever done in his life. If the Army of Anubis did rise up, he was not sure if they were enough men to defeat the undead soldiers. He was desperately trying to stop himself from thinking about how quickly his men would die in the sand, leaving nothing to protect the rest of the desert lands that once made up the ancient kingdoms of Egypt.

“Ardeth Bay!” One of the tribal leaders broke from the lines to ride next to him. “Should we not send men ahead to kill the Scorpion King?”

“No need. We have friends already in Ahm Shere, I have told you.” Ardeth said, trying to appear more confident than he felt.

“Your O’Connells. They have no experience protecting man against these beasts.”

Ardeth tightened his grip on his horse’s reigns. “They have killed the creature once before, one more monster will not stop them. I have faith.”

“What do you put your faith in, Ardeth? Their ignorance?”

“They know what they are doing.”

Ardeth was silent for the rest of the journey. At the top of the highest dunes he looked down at the oasis off near the horizon, glistening as the dawn humidity rose off the forest. The diamond at the top of the pyramid winked in the sun and a shadow was cast across the oasis, spreading out until it reached the sand. It didn’t stop there, a growth reaching out, where it met the lines of Medjai. This was where they would fight the Army of Anubis.

“So it begins.”

Ardeth touched Magdalene’s hat, hanging on its string from his belt.

“I have faith.”

* * *

Magdalene dried her tears and scowled at the sand. *Screw Rick*. She got up, dusted the sand off of her knees and tugged her tank top straight.

“Jonathan. Take this.” She tossed him her shotgun.

“What for?”

Magdalene picked her revolver out of the sand and shook it off, sliding it back into its shoulder holster. She tugged her cotton jacket out of her backpack and draped it over Evy's chest and shoulders.

"In case something sneaks up on you. If it looks like a dog, aim for the head."

Alex jumped up. "You can't go after Dad, he said not to."

"I'm not Alex."

"Maddie, you can't help Rick-" Jonathan started.

"I don't want to help Rick!" She yelled. "I don't care about some stupid Scorpion King! I haven't trekked across the desert for a bracelet and some old legend. I don't care about helping Rick or saving the world again. I came here to fix *my* mistake. I'm going to kill those mummies and get revenge."

Alex stared after Magdalene as she walked into the temple, heavy work boots leaving deep grooves in the sand as she stomped out her path.

The halls were lit and the limestone smooth, like new. The entire pyramid had been returned to its former glory. A swish of clothes up ahead caught her eye and she grabbed a torch off the wall, creeping along. Who was it? That flash of white that she wasn't sure was really there. Magdalene reached another corner and swung around it quickly, her torch in front of her.

Through the flame reared up a face. It was the other Magdalene from the last vision, the Egyptian Queen.

"Who are you?" Magdalene demanded.

She laughed. "I answered that last time."

"No..." Magdalene's voice dripped with sarcasm. "You didn't. We stopped speaking in riddles at the turn of the century."

"Evelyn had visions of herself. What did you find out about her?"

"Am I another reincarnated princess?"

She laughed again, this time it was mocking. "No. But I am buried memories. A part of you that you have forgotten. And I am leaking out. It's this place, don't you feel it?"

Magdalene scowled. "No."

"I do. I feel the power behind it, and your connection to it. We belong in a place like this."

Magdalene tried to sidestep the vision but was stopped by an outstretched arm.

“Look. I am not in the mood right now. I don’t care about visions, or memories or you. I’m going to kill Imhotep and then I’m going to leave this all behind.”

“Do you know why he spared you? Kept you close, kept you from squandering the power you have in this world.” She grabbed Magdalene’s shoulder. “Because he understands the Gods, and he knows you have a role to play together.” Her thumb slid down Magdalene’s tattoo.

“We don’t.”

“Wake up Magdalene!” She blew a cloud of dust into Magdalene’s face. When it cleared Magdalene was wearing matching robes, but they were made of strips of blackened mummy bandages.

“You and he are bound in *death*. It makes you strong.” This whisper was like a hiss, over emphasised and threatening.

Magdalene reeled away from her in fear and her head slammed into the wall. She snapped out of the vision and was dressed normally again.

“Fuck this.”

She snatched up her dropped torch took a few deep breaths. She heard more movement behind her and turned around with a fierce expression only to find Alex leading his uncle through the corridors, Evy in his arm.

“*What the...hell are you doing?*” She hissed.

“Come on Maddie.” Alex tugged her alongside him. “We’re going to get the book and save mum.”

“Save mum?” Understanding dawned in Magdalene’s eyes. “Alex this is why you’re my favourite nephew. Come on, I’ll help.”

They snuck up on Anck-Su-Namun, Jonathan agreed that he would step up to the plate and fight Anck-Su-Namun with Magdalene. He swallowed his fear and raised his fists.

“It’s time someone taught you a lesson, wench.” He caught her attention and beckoned her over. He bobbed and weaved, putting on a show to keep the woman focused on him, and not his nephew sneaking out of the shadows. “Come on.”

Anck-Su-Namun sauntered down the steps and Magdalene swallowed down a string of curse words, noticing Alex sliding the black book of the stone plinth by the entrance to the main temple. Jonathan kept up his English bravado, gesticulating like a cartoon.

“This is for my sister.” He crowed.

Anck-Su-Namun slapped his wrist away and scratched his face like a cat. Magdalene kicked out and caught Anck-Su-Namun in her side, but she bent out of the way of the fist that followed through and span, kicking backwards and catching Magdalene in the jaw. Jonathan

tried swinging again but Anck-Su-Namun was too far out of reach. She retaliated by hitting him in the neck with the heel of her palm and choking him.

Magdalene unwound her chain whip and cracked it across Anck-Su-Namun's back. Whipping it across a second time, she cut across her chest, cutting through her top but not drawing blood.

"Ooh." Magdalene taunted. "Careful, or next it will be that *pretty* face."

Anck-Su-Namun caught the whip around her wrist as it sailed through the air a third time. Magdalene tugged but she was stronger and yanked the whip from her hand, bringing Magdalene down to the floor. Anck-Su-Namun knelt on her arm and twisted it. Magdalene tried to wrestle her off her chest but she grabbed her by her throat and slammed her head into the ground. Magdalene saw stars and felt the muscles of her arm screaming.

"You will be of no use with a broken wrist."

"Thing is." Magdalene choked out. "I'm left-handed."

She socked Anck-Su-Namun in the face and her brass knuckle cracked across her jaw. Anck-Su-Namun toppled off her and she heaved, rolling onto her side.

Jonathan grabbed Anck-Su-Namun around the neck, but she flipped backwards and tossed him off of her. They both stood up and Anck-Su-Namun stalked him, hitting him in the face all the while.

"Is that all you've got?" He was still mocking her but the resolve in Jonathan's voice was wavering and his eyes were half shut to stop her from scratching them out.

Anck-Su-Namun hit him twice again, and Jonathan thrust his fist out in his blindest punch yet. It surprised them both when his fist connected with the base of her chin.

"Woo!" Magdalene cheered, getting up from the floor. "Kick her ass, Jonathan."

Jonathan suddenly picked up with a proud 'hmp', and hopped, shifting his weight between front and back foot, taunting Anck-Su-Namun again.

Better luck

Hello all! Finally I have caught up with all my university assignments for this year...just in time to start the next year. A short chapter to get things going. And thank you so much for so very many kind comments on quotev and AO3, you are all wonderful and I treasure all my readers whether you comment or not. I can't help but feel proud knowing you enjoy passing time reading my work.

Ardeth looked out at the Army of Anubis as rode along the front lines of the Medjai, determined to show his men he would see them to the last. There were thousands upon thousands of them, heavy footed in the sand, standing taller than any man. It would be hard to fight them if they lost too many of the horses.

They had waited in hell for thousands of years, and they would wait until he advanced on them. Ardeth was a diplomat as well as a soldier, and swallowed hard as he consigned himself to sending his friends and brothers out to deal the first blow.

“Ready!” He cried, lifting his scimitar high. *“Hataa Almawt!”*

Till death. He thought. *I hope not Magdalene.*

They charged, ten thousand warriors against the army of the dead. The sound was deafening and visibility poor. It was not long before such sand clouds were thrown, all they could see were the flashes of hundreds of swords catching the sunlight. They were worse than the sand, blinding the Medjai and disorientating the horses.

Ardeth urged on his men and they charged ahead of their own dust cloud. The Anubis warriors came into view and the two sides clashed. Ardeth swung his scimitar through the air, decapitating a warrior, lifting it out of the sand as he rode through the hoards.

There were many Anubis warriors who had not engaged in the battle, so many of them that often they were stood waiting for a Medjai soldier to appear out of the crowd. Ardeth picked them off, wheeling his sword arm about, never slowing his horse down to let them anticipate their target.

The onslaught was relentless, no matter how many they cut down, more warriors would take their place. Ardeth heaved a breath, trying not to let it overwhelm him. Taking one moment to calm himself, he never saw the axe until it was sailing through the air at his head. He ducked in time to save himself from decapitation, but there was no time to balance, and his momentum sent him headlong into the sand.

Horse gone, immortal assailants, sand in his eyes; Ardeth would not entertain the idea of failure. He commanded the Medjai and he was trained from birth never to give in.

Ardeth looked in the sand next to him. During the fall, Magdalene's hat had come loose and fallen next to him.

"For luck." He said, picking it up and tipping the sand out. "I will do this for us both, I hope you're having better luck Maddie."

* * *

She was not. Her fit connected with Anck-Su-Namun's gut, but she was thrown bodily to the side, sweat and grime blinding her. Jonathan was covered in bruises, Magdalene had a split lip and she'd been cut across the belly with her own whip, which now lay in broken pieces across the floor.

Anck-Su-Namun drew sais from one of the Anubis statues, a withering expression on her face. Jonathan looked around for a suitable weapon and chose to wrestle the gold sceptre from his waistband to fend her off with. Magdalene pulled out her revolver but she was too slow to fire it, Anck-Su-Namun twisted her sai around the barrel and flung it out of her wrist, skittering across the floor.

Magdalene dove for it but she was kicked in the back and rolled forward, landing in a pile at Alex's feet. He was muttering in Egyptian, struggling over every syllable.

"I don't think I can do this Auntie Maddie."

That was all it took. She was his Auntie. That's what this had been about, rescuing her nephew. The hyperactive, inquisitive and mischievous boy she loved. He had been kidnapped, dragged across the desert and made to believe his family was gone for good. He had watched his mother die and he wasn't fighting anyone, he was pouring his heart into trying to bring her back and he was scared it wouldn't be enough.

"You can." She told him. "You're brilliant and so brave, I promise you can do it."

She caught his face with her hand, grazed and blackened knuckles stark against her white skin. He looked at her and nodded with the belief of the impossible only an eight-year-old could have.

"Hurry up, Alex!" They heard Jonathan calling.

Alex focused back on the book, Magdalene put her hands on his shoulders supportively as he stumbled reading the pictures.

"Uncle John!" Alex yelled. "I don't know what this last symbol is!"

"What's it look like?" He screamed back, just about managing to meet Anck-Su-Namun's torrent of blows, the sound of metal hitting metal repeatedly deafening them.

"It's a bird. A stork!"

Jonathan ducked down and backhanded the sceptre across Anck-Su-Namun's face.

"I know that one! I know that one!" He gasped, catching one breath before Anck-Su-Namun latched onto his throat pointing the remaining sai at his face.

"Then *what is it?* "

"Ach-ac-" He threw her off him. "Ahmenophus!"

Anck-Su-Namun managed to slice Jonathan across the collar bone. He fell back against the statue but before she could do any more, a hand caught her arm.

"Why don't you pick on somebody your own size?"

Evy was stood, quite alive and frightening the living daylights out of Anck-Su-Namun.

"Oh, my God." Jonathan couldn't get his breath for different reasons now. "Evy!"

"Take Alex. Go and help Rick." She ordered.

"I can't believe it." Magdalene kissed her cheek and ran off to find Imhotep. She may have come to her senses, but was still determined to help finish him off, she had not forgotten her promise.

"But Mum!" Alex was struggling against Jonathan.

"No 'buts' Alex." She smiled and drew her own sai. "I'll be just fine."

"We did it, Uncle John! We did it."

Jonathan and Alex ran down the corridor hand in hand, chasing after Magdalene.

"Right partner." He said. "Now let's go help your dad."

Magdalene had already made it to the inner temple chamber, in time to see Hafez ripped apart by a giant scorpion. Imhotep saw her from across the temple, bloodied from fighting Anck-Su-Namun. She caught him staring and waved.

'Two seconds.' She mouthed.

Till Death

Whilst Magdalene taunted Imhotep, she had also caught the attention of the Scorpion King, who was now advancing on her.

Magdalene gagged at the sight of him, twelve feet high with two sets of pincers and the torso of a man leering up at her out of the mass of legs.

“Oh, I think I’m going to be sick.” She wailed.

The Scorpion King gnashed his teeth and reared up, ready to strike her. Armed with a tiny dagger that would never penetrate the exoskeleton, Magdalene was defenceless. She threw her arms up over her head at the sight of the stinger flying towards her.

The roar that came was loud enough to shake the walls of the temple and every bone in Magdalene’s body. Falling over, she faced the enraged Scorpion King seething above her.

“Prophet! You try to destroy me.”

Magdalene was too late to crawl away from the pincers to prevent being scooped up and held aloft by the Scorpion King. She was screaming and writhing but was never getting out of his grip by herself. He lifted her to his face so he could see her tattoo up close.

“Help! Rick!”

“I will enjoy destroying you in this feeble body. The gods mean nothing in this world.”

Magdalene felt numb from the waist down from the pressure of his grip. She screamed incoherently. The sounds that came out was an indecipherable gargle, but she had been trying to say, *“Get off me!”*

“Maddie!”

She looked behind her and saw Rick, who threw hot flaming oil at the Scorpion King. The monster never felt anything but his attack was directed at Rick, which gave Magdalene a few seconds more hanging in mid-air before death.

“My Lord! My Lord she is a trick! She is a false prophet sent to trick us!”

Imhotep had run up and bowed before the Scorpion King, yelling that Magdalene was a cunning trickster, trying to take the Scorpion King’s attention away from the Army of Anubis. He looked up and smiled as the creature dropped Magdalene to the ground and forgot about her.

She shouted out as she plummeted, ready to be crushed against the stone. Rick ran forward, barrelling into her body and cushioning the fall. Before she had time to register that she wasn’t dead, Magdalene was dragged behind a rock.

“Thank you.” She gasped. “Rick you saved my life.”

“Yeah? Today and every other day of the week.” He responded with a smile. “Family looks out for each other.”

Magdalene looked back up at him and smiled back, smoke from the oil fires and sweat from her brow making her eyes water. “If I let you take down the insect, can I kill the mummy?”

Rick looked bewildered. “Why do you look so happy about all of this?”

“Why, aren’t you?”

“Mummies, scorpions, certain death? No not really.”

“Shame.”

“Whatever you say kid.”

Another snarl reminded them of the danger around them and a crack appeared in the floor under where Magdalene was sitting. Rolling to one side, she ran for the safety of the entrance whilst Rick dove behind the partition walls.

Jonathan and Alex appeared, having caught up, and Magdalene ran into Alex, scooping him into a hug.

“Rick!” Jonathan bellowed out into the smoke and ash.

Rick ran out from behind a giant gong. “Jonathan! It’s a spear! The golden stick thing! It’s a spear!”

He pointed at the gold sceptre and mimed wildly at a javelin throw.

“Really?” Jonathan held it up and scrunched his nose with a shaking head. “Doesn’t look like a spear!”

“No!” Rick’s exasperated screeches rose an octave or two. He yelled slower with more vigorous miming, as if that would make his idiot brother-in-law understand. “That’s because it opens up into one!”

“Yes? And?” Jonathan was still not picking it up.

“Jonathan. It opens up into a spear!”

Rick’s third attempt at communicating was layered with a growl that did not come from him. His face dropped and he turned to see the Scorpion King climbing down from the roof of the pyramid. Jonathan, Alex and Magdalene screamed louder than ever before.

Rick was chased further away into the temple. Through his screams Jonathan put his hand on Alex’s arm and pulled him away, Alex did the same to Magdalene.

“Twist it!” Jonathan wrung his hands around the sceptre. “Push!”

“No, you have to pull!” Alex said.

Magdalene tried to swat their hands off. “Give-give it here. Rotate it from the other end.”

All three of them were wrestling with the it, prodding bits, wrenching it out of each other’s hands and turning it over. Magdalene even shook it.

“The Spear of Osiris!”

Magdalene looked up to see Imhotep transfixed on them, Evy and Anck-Su-Namun had joined the group stood to her right and Rick was fending off pincers from all sides.

“Don’t you even think about it!” She warned Imhotep.

“Jonathan, quick!” Evy ran to help but Anck-Su-Namun pinned her to the wall.

Magdalene wiped her forehead and prayed quickly to the world in general. She prayed Ardeth would be able to stop Imhotep if they failed.

* * *

Ardeth, true to his promise and true to his code as a Medjai, had kept fighting on, as had every other brave and true Medjai in the twelve tribes. With the last head, he culled the end of the warriors.

Almost instantaneously did the cheerful cries of victory ring out, scimitars lifted high. Most of the Medjai had survived, a force not even the undead could stop, they were true protectors of the desert.

But, in all that noise, Ardeth found quiet. A part of him reached out and found a lull in the celebrations, it did not feel like the O’Connells were celebrating with them. He could not in his mind find an image of Magdalene smiling and victorious. Something was wrong. It could have been his soldier’s mindset, telling him that the work was never done. It could have been his soul whispering the truth to him, or his mind playing tricks. It could have been nervousness, and the fact that he was right to be afraid was only a coincidence and not proof that he could really sense the danger.

Still, he was compelled to run. He ran through the ranks of his men, pleading with himself to close his eyes as if not being able to see it meant that the threat was not really there. Stopping, he saw the dunes rise above him, a shadow creeping over the upper ledge. At first like a line drawn between the horizon and the sky, it spread and melded until the full Army of Anubis was racing over the sand.

They had battled the vanguard with luck and dog-minded determination and only just won. The mass forces were thirty-fold what they had already faced, racing out to meet a straggled line of men who had seen only a handful of what the dead possessed and had thought that impossible to beat. To beat this would take a miracle.

The faces of the men next to him were full of sorrow and fear, but as Ardeth saw them he saw a promise to do as he asked no matter how afraid they were. In each man was a resignation to fight until the end.

Ardeth knew he would carry on fighting, and was honoured to know he wasn't alone.

“Hataa Almawt!” He raised his sword and shouted with the voice of pride and strength, a voice mirrored by every man there.

With a shout, they lowered their swords and waited to meet the Army of the Dead.

That's not cricket

Jonathan and Alex both twisted on the sceptre and out shot a thin shaft at either end, it was now a four-foot spear.

“Jonathan, throw it!” Evy pleaded. “Kill the Scorpion King. Send his army back to the Underworld!”

“Step aside, Alex.” Jonathan moved them back. “I’m a professional.”

He flung the spear, it sailed through the air for only a moment before Imhotep caught it for himself. Jonathan let out a startled breath and Alex’s jaw dropped.

“Oi!” Magdalene jumped up and down on the spot, absolutely livid. “Play fair! Bad form!”

She could have sworn there was a glimmer of a smirk on Imhotep’s face at the sight of her hopping about like an indignant grasshopper.

“The Army of Anubis shall now be mine.” He said, throwing the spear of Osiris at the Scorpion King, currently writhing in the flames of an oil pan Rick had kicked at him.

“Rick!”

Evy was loud enough to capture Rick’s attention. As the spear crossed the flames he dove, catching it and stopping Imhotep from ruling the Army of Anubis. He managed to keep it in his arms and roll backing away from the Scorpion King.

He caught his heel on the ledge, a crack in the temple with the underworld below underneath his feet. The only thing stopping him from falling in was his anchor on the spear, stuck right through the Scorpion King.

“Go to hell, and take your friends with you!”

The Scorpion King burst into a cloud of ash, covering the whole room in darkness. A tremor rocked the ground underneath them, the walls continued to shake, loosening rock pillars from the unstable roof above. Everyone searched for a sign of Rick or Imhotep but they had disappeared.

“Look!” Evy pointed, from the chasm two pairs of hands reached over the ledge.

First Imhotep then Rick pulled themselves up, straining and grunting with the effort, desperate not to be pulled into the underworld.

“Dad!”

The temple was crumbling faster now, rocks dropping down them and cracking up what was left of the stone floor. Evy stared up, watching them drop, looking for a way through.

“Evy! No!” Rick begged her. “Get out of here! Just get out of here! No!”

Evy wouldn't be dissuaded, she lurched forward and ran through. Swinging back to avoid being crushed she almost toppled amidst everyone else shouting for her to come back. Jonathan in particular let out a sound of anger and disbelief at his sister, desperate to chase after her but unable to move.

Magdalene beat her forehead in frustration. Her tattoo was alive, sensing the decay of the magic in the temple. It was urgent this time, Magdalene could feel that it sought out a purpose, pulling at her brain. Whatever it wanted she pushed it back and focused on Rick and Evy.

As Evy zigzagged across, Rick slipped back, almost letting go of the ledge.

“Hang on, Rick!” Jonathan yelled as Evy made the last few feet, latching onto her husband's hand.

Imhotep saw Evy save Rick, pulling him up by the collar. “*Anck-Su-Namun! Help me, Help me!*”

“*Nai!*” Anck-Su-Namun ran away from the belly of the pyramid and her love.

“*Anck-Su-Namun!*”

Imhotep called out in grief and rage, tears in his eyes. For a while he was transfixed on the empty space where she had been, before his eyes, bitter and cruel, latched onto Magdalene. She was crying and shaking her head, trying to block out the call from her visions.

“*Prophet!*” He spoke to her. “*Save me and I will free you!*”

Magdalene made eye contact with vicious ferocity. “Save you? *Save you?*”

She began across the broken path flinching every time she heard rocks crashing but otherwise ploughing on.

“Maddie not you as well!” Jonathan reached out, trying to pull her back but she was just too far out of reach and he was in danger of falling through another crack in the floor.

She slid right under the unstable floor, and watched a pillar crumble six inches from her face. Ignoring it, she ran the rest of the way trying to keep her balance. She reached a smiling Imhotep and wrapped her hand around his upper arm.

“Not today you bastard.”

She felt herself slipping with his weight, pulling her torso into the chasm. Forced by her own

desire to get revenge, Magdalene let herself fall forward, dropping both her and Imhotep further down in order to get an arm around his waist. She was eye to eye with him, a look of confusion and fear on his face.

“I’ve waited far too long to kick your ass.”

She dragged him over the top and pushed him over.

“Maddie! Let him go!” Evy said pulling on her arm.

Magdalene pushed her back into Rick’s arms.

“He’s my fault. I let this happen!” She said. “He’s caused so much misery and I’m going to kill him! Me!”

She pulled out her dagger and held it in front of her, arm across her chest with the blade pushing into his chest. Imhotep used his forearm to push the dagger away and stepped in, capturing Magdalene in a kiss.

Stunned, Magdalene stood there with his lips crushed against hers. Regaining her senses, she kicked out at him and he flew back. Rick caught her by the waist before she could kick him again.

They ran out of the pyramid holding hands in a chain, so that no body would be lost or separated by the debris. They eventually emerged outside, to find the oasis being ripped apart and spun around them on a high wind.

“Woah!” Rick pushed everyone back against a wall as a pygmy flew past them. “Let’s go up!”

Lifting Alex between them, they moved up the pyramid on the outer edge, climbing stairs carved into the very face. Halfway up the pyramid they saw what was happening. The jungle was being pulled underneath the pyramid in the bowl of the oasis, the entire place shrinking inwards like an implosion.

“This whole damn place is gonna get sucked up! Let’s move up! Go!” Rick ordered them over the gale.

Unable to get any further through the pyramid, they had to push each other up the limestone blocks on the outside, sending Alex up the chain as he was too short to make each climb up. Jonathan, nimble from avoiding men he’d swindled and bolstered by fear, was the quickest of them all, reaching out for his nephew’s hand whilst Rick made sure the women weren’t lagging behind.

They made the top of the pyramid in time to see the sand come billowing in.

“Rick, we’re trapped!” Evy said.

Magdalene took Jonathan's hand in comfort, Rick and Evy embracing around their son, as a rough voice cut through the wind.

"Oi!"

"Izzy!" Rick called out at his friend, cobbled together dirigible and hot air balloon floating past them. Izzy had used one of his gas-lit jets to heat the air inside the balloon, and just in time for a rescue.

"Come on, come on! Get your butts moving!" Izzy flapped his arms at them. "Hurry up! Hurry up! I haven't got all day!"

With the oasis almost gone, the pyramid half sunk itself, they clambered aboard. Jonathan's foot got caught in the netting and he fell, strung by his ankle.

"Pull him up! Pull him up!" Izzy was unprepared to wait for everyone to get on the deck.

With the two longest sets of arms, Rick and Magdalene reached over the side for Jonathan's legs. He was babbling about pulling him up as the pair hoisted the netting over the side to bring his legs within reach, then he spotted the three-stone diamond in the grasp of an ornamental scorpion.

"Wait! Wait! Lower me down!" His voice was hoarse from yelling as loud as possible. "Let me down!"

"It's not worth your life!" Rick scolded. "You idiot!"

Jonathan was pointing repeatedly at the diamond, adamant he was going to get it. "Yes, it is! Yes it is!"

Izzy took over, rising the balloon above the danger whether Jonathan was ready or not. Diamond in hand, and inches from a tide of destruction, Jonathan had reverted back to screaming to be pulled up.

Magdalene and Rick nodded at each other and each grabbed a leg of Jonathan's trousers, dropping him onto the dirigible floor. Rick collapsed next to Jonathan on the floor and Magdalene draped herself against the mast. Out of the oasis, the world was suspiciously calm and no one quite knew what to make of it.

"O'Connell, you almost got me killed!" Izzy accused Rick

Rick lifted his hands up and shrugged. "At least you didn't get shot."

"Izzy, thank you!" Evy pressed a kiss to his cheek, and then didn't stop kissing him. "Thank you!"

Finally, Evy let Izzy go to hug her son, and he went back to questioning his friend.

“O’Connell, who the hell have you been messing with this time, huh?”

“You know, the usual. Mummies, pygmies...big bugs.” Rick said.

Magdalene noticed a man on a horse on the dunes below them.

“Ardeth!”

“Go in peace, brother.” Ardeth kissed his finger tips and brought them to his brow in blessing.

Rick saluted him and everyone else waved goodbye. Magdalene put her hand on top of her head, bunching her fingers in her hair and suddenly remembered.

“Ardeth!” She ran to the end of the boat to shout at him. “Post me my hat!”

Ardeth waved to show he’d gotten the message, and reared his horse up in send off.

“I’ll meet you in Cairo!” He shouted at the vanishing dirigible.

“I thought I almost lost you there.” Rick said to Evy.

“For a moment there, you did. Would you like to know what heaven looks like?”

“Later.”

As Rick and Evy kissed, they got the same response from Jonathan and Alex.

“Oh, please!”

“Uh, that’s half mine, you know.” Izzy said to Jonathan.

“What?”

“That’s half mine.”

Jonathan inched away, diamond under his arm. “I have no idea what you’re talking about.”

“What? You took my gold stick!”

Magdalene chipped in. “You were paid with our gold stick. Not our fault you lost our gold stick.”

“I swear on the head of my wife, I have no idea what you’re talking about.” Jonathan reiterated.

“You haven’t-you ain’t got a wife.” Izzy said

“I don’t have your gold stick either!” Jonathan’s reply was smug.

Magdalene rolled her eyes and stood with Alex, looking out at the view.

“I think I’m going to write a book about all of this.” Evy said. “And Maddie can proof read it for me.”

“Oh, come on.” Magdalene complained. “The second adventure of a lifetime and you end with making me read things.”

“Hey.” Rick stopped their laughter with his tone. “Maddie, you don’t hold out on us again if you have any more visions, deal?”

She pressed her lips together in shame. “Deal.”

“And scamp.” He said with more of a twinkle in his eye. “Come here.”

He grabbed her in a hug and ruffled up her hair, grip too tight for her to get out of, and they were all laughing again.

“Ger’off.” Magdalene giggled and ducked out, settling in to wait until they reached Cairo with the biggest smile on her face.

Still the same

Chapter Notes

So I took a lot of time off without saying anything. Again.

With two days of almost non-stop travel they had made it back to Cairo, Izzy had warily let Rick keep the balloon going whilst he slept a few hours. Unbeknownst to him, Alex had done most of the flying.

Magdalene spent the last few hours of the journey swinging in a hammock, content to let everything just pass by her for the time being.

“Another crisis averted.” Evy commented, sitting beside her.

“Mm.” Magdalene stared out at the clouds. “We should at least get a medal.”

“And on to the next adventure.” Evy said.

Magdalene smiled back at her. “On to the next adventure.”

“We’re here!” Izzy called.

They started throwing the bags overboard the minute the dirigible touched ground, knocking the sand out of a fair few of them. Magdalene hoisted one pack over her shoulder to take it to the car. Throwing it in she stared out at the market that had congregated in the courtyard, back at the dirigible, Ricky was trying to stop Izzy from punching Jonathan over the diamond, and everyone was generally busy with unloading what little had survived the journey.

Hamed and his Medjai were waiting to greet them in Cairo, handshakes from every one of them, thanking them for what they had done.

“I’m pleased to see you are all okay, and your son safe too.” Hamed said.

Evy pulled Alex to her. “Yes, thank you.”

Hamed smiled down at Magdalene, now standing over six feet he was taller than she was.

“Come here.” Magdalene hugged him.

“I’d love to show you all the Museum of Antiquities.” He said. “I have kept it very well cared for. And we must celebrate your victory!”

Rick shrugged apologetically. “We really should get going.”

Jonathan waved his hand in front of Rick’s face dismissively. “Come on, we could have a small party. No rush now we’ve saved the world and all.”

“Do you want to see the museum Alex?” Evy asked. “I wonder what the library looks like now.”

“After you toppled it like a stack of dominoes?” Jonathan snorted.

“Did you mum?”

Alex practically dragged his mum towards the museum. Hamed went with them to give them a tour, with the caveat that Magdalene tell him all about their adventure and her tattoo.

Leaving them behind, Magdalene wandered in between the tables, letting the scent of the stall ahead pull her forward enticingly, until a new smell or flash of colour took its place. Spiced fish filled the air with a hit that made your nostrils flare but disappeared immediately, sugared dates smelt not only sweet but floral and tangy. The stalls of silk looked like flags waving in the wind.

Magdalene kept walking, squeezed by the crowds and taking her time, enjoying the feeling of life going on around her. Passing by a fruit store, she let her arm trail slightly ahead of her, pulling an apple from the table and tucking it into her hip.

No sooner had she filched it, Magdalene felt the apple pulled from her finger tips from behind her back, and held aloft by her other shoulder.

“In eight years, you are still the vagrant I first met.”

“Ardeth!”

Magdalene grabbed him in a crushing hug, fingers tightly wrapped around his tunic and meshed in his soft hair. Ardeth laughed and swung her around several times, arms wrapped around her waist.

“I’m so happy you made it.” She said.

“Yes.” Ardeth’s smile never faded. “We fought against the Army of Anubis, we thought we had defeated them, but more came from the desert. It was endless. But as they reached us, they disappeared into dust, you must have saved us all at the very last moment.”

“Rick killed the Scorpion King before Imhotep could. He sent the Army back to the underworld.” Magdalene’s eyes pricked with tears at the joy of seeing Ardeth, her hands either side of his face. “Just in time. You’ve got to tell them what happened! They’re at the museum let’s go now.”

“Not yet.” Ardeth grabbed her hand and stopped her from rushing back through the market.

Magdalene waited patiently for him to decide what to say, the difficulty of the decision across his face.

“Magdalene.” He began. “You have put yourself in harm’s way to help me so many times, even after I asked you not to. You are special, and I cannot tell what the world has in store for you. But you are the strongest person I have ever known. I was waiting to die at the very end, I knew we would not be able to fight the Army of Anubis forever.”

He held up his hand when Magdalene tried to interrupt him.

“I decided to fight for as long as I could, because I wanted to give you the best possible chance to survive. It was you I fought to save, Magdalene. Besides, I had to make sure I brought back your hat.”

He unhooked the leather hat from his belt and held it up.

Magdalene took another step forward and kissed the tattoo on his cheek, staring into his huge brown eyes. In this moment where he could stop fighting, stop taking charge of everyone else, behind his concerned expression was a happiness in his eyes. For the first time Magdalene saw him as a hopeful man.

“I always loved those tattoos.” She said, her voice cracking with nervous laughter.

He put the hat on her head softly, his hand staying there on top of her head. For a few seconds, their faces were shielded by the brim of her hat and his arm. When Ardeth brought his arm down they were kissing. Magdalene felt his lips against hers and she couldn’t remember who had kissed who first.

“Let’s go find our friends.” Ardeth said, taking Magdalene’s hand in his.

Rick met them in by the car, hugging Ardeth in a rare display of affection.

“It’s good to see you buddy.” He said.

“Likewise.”

Imhotep

Imhotep was not entirely truthful when he said he didn't know what he saw inside Magdalene. He knew that he saw something, a hidden part of her that belonged in his time, not the present. He had assumed she would prophesise his future like the temple worshippers who would pray around incense until they would bring visions upon themselves.

But Magdalene's visions were too woven into her own story, she had too much control over their conversations in the spirit plane and they were growing stronger in tandem with her own strength. The visions were originating from her, they were her future.

"I've got more power than you realise Imhotep. I've had visions of me ruling over Egypt, the army of the dead behind me. You sure you're going to win this one?"

Young and untrained, she had relied on interpreting her visions literally. She was not a prophet she was a guard. Her soul had been awoken when they opened the Book of the Dead in Hamunaptra, she was once a keeper of the Book, protecting it and the only one allowed to use its powers.

Imhotep had let her walk by him in the oasis jungle, she was not only useful but honoured. She guarded the Book of the Dead and it was the Book of the Dead that had resurrected him. She had not strayed into Egypt through chance, she was the overseer of his revival.

He needed her power, even with the Army of Anubis he would need her to make him and Anck-Su-Namun immortal again.

"Why is she alive?" Anck-Su-Namun demanded as they walked through the rainforest.

"She is the key to ruling this world and the next." Imhotep said.

"She will destroy you!"

Imhotep grabbed her arm and silenced her. *"Every ruler needs his protectors. The girl could take on ten thousand Medjai and we will be unstoppable together."*

Anck-Su-Namun was mollified by the thought of them ruling together, and said no more. But as Imhotep led them through the undergrowth, he paused his thoughts, and asked himself why he had pictured Magdalene and not Anck-Su-Namun when describing his image of conquest. Unstoppable together.

The next time they met, Anck-Su-Namun cut down Evelyn to stop her from interfering. She was less malleable than Magdalene and with less power, from a time where the Book was guarded as an ornament, never used and hidden away.

Magdalene's screams made him smile. Her will had to be curbed and he enjoyed the sound of

pain.

Then he was in the temple watching O'Connell fight off the Scorpion King, when Baltus Hafez walked into the fray and was ripped apart. The girl ran in, blood-soaked clothes and slack with exhaustion. He was amazed that she was still here.

She locked eyes on him and waved, despite everything she managed an evil smile.

“Two seconds.” She mouthed.

I'm going to give you two seconds. Two seconds to feel that power before I rain hellfire on your ass.

She was trying to rile him but he was impressed by her resilience and spirit. She seemed more confident than before, more driven to one thing. He wondered what she wanted.

Imhotep watched as her face turned from mocking to disgust, the Scorpion King reared over her, thrashing his legs around. He was clearly drawn to her, like the pygmies would have been, drawn to the magic in her that was being concentrated through the tattoo. Imhotep could see how the Scorpion King shook with rage, trying to ignore its influence.

Magdalene screamed and cowered, her tiny dagger glinting in the light of the fires as she covered her face in her arms. The Scorpion King's stinger broke the ground around her and she fell over, pinched in his claws and lifted high.

Imhotep faltered. With the Scorpion King distracted he could kill him first and then deal with O'Connell, but he needed the girl. He growled, feeling the bond he had created between them and regretting it miserably.

Then she screamed.

Magdalene was thrashing her head, limbs no longer under her control and no longer conscious of her surroundings. Total panic had ripped through her sense of reality. To her, the sounds she made were screeched fear, catching in her throat. Imhotep heard differently.

“Saadni!”

She had screamed “*Help me*” in Arabic.

Imhotep felt her pain; she had become a conduit between Ancient Egypt and the present and bridged the gap between her mind and his. Pounding in his head was her fear.

“My Lord! My Lord she is a trick! She is a false prophet sent to trick us!”

Imhotep begged and scraped the floor, desperately pleading with the Scorpion King. O'Connell was fighting the monster to save Magdalene; he could take the credit for Magdalene's rescue. It was the most selfless thing Imhotep had done in his life.

“Her blood is poisoned. If you kill her, she will taint your sacred temple with her blood. She has crept in to provoke you into tearing her apart and soiling your temple to hurt you!”

He smiled as the creature tossed Magdalene aside. The shock in her eyes as she dropped made him grin maliciously, fuelling his ego with the knowledge that he had been her saviour. In his eyes she owed him.

Imhotep watched her roll her body to safety and get up to hug the small boy, tears in her eyes and a huge smile on her face. He found it alluring. All of this power, that eight years ago fostered itself in such an emotional child, it had leached off of her volatile nature and manifested itself as a wild and unpredictable animal. Tame power was easy to manipulate, but a force that raw, if mastered, was awe-inspiring.

The Scorpion King clambered overhead and chased O’Connell away from his family. Imhotep stepped a safe distance away to avoid one of the stray legs. The creature was useful, if it killed O’Connell first then Imhotep would not have to fight anyone off to get at his prize.

The three by the entrance were squabbling, scratching at a golden sceptre in their hands.

“Twist it!” Jonathan wrung his hands around the sceptre. “Push!”

“No, you have to pull!” The boy said.

Magdalene tried to swat their hands off. “Give-give it here. Rotate it from the other end.”

All three of them were wrestling with the it, prodding bits, wrenching it out of each other’s hands and turning it over. Magdalene even shook it.

Imhotep spied the markings on the shaft from in between their grabbing fingers and recognised it.

“The Spear of Osiris!”

Magdalene heard him and saw his gaze, unable to shift from the Spear.

“Don’t you even think about it!” She shouted, a finger raised at him from across the temple.

Imhotep hid away, he knew that if he bided his time, they would hand the Army of the Undead to him. Wired like a cat, he waited until the spear came flying at him and caught it in his hand.

“Oi!” He heard Magdalene from behind, sounding furious. “Play fair! Bad form!”

He turned to watch her hop from foot to foot, in disbelief of what just happened. As if leaping about on the spot were enough to kill the Scorpion King herself. Imhotep couldn’t help a small smile at her incandescent rage, she looked so much younger. Like she had done eight years ago.

“The Army of Anubis shall now be mine.” He said, throwing the Spear of Osiris.

It passed through the flames of an oil pan and into the arms of O’Connell, rolling away from the monster above him. Imhotep was helpless as O’Connell used the spear to anchor himself to the Scorpion King.

“Nai!” He screamed.

“Go to hell, and take your friends with you!”

As the creature vanished, Imhotep felt the ground tip under him, and he was sent sprawling into the crevasse to the underworld. He caught the ledge with his chest and pulled up his arms to lift his body away from the charred souls under him.

He could feel the power of the underworld over his soul, he was becoming untethered, the physical and spirit lives could not coexist in death. And here he was on the edge of the afterlife, his life literally unravelling. He could feel his powers buzzing around like fire.

Imhotep watched the O’Connell’s save each other, both ready to die for the other.

“Anck-Su-Namun!” He called. *“Help me, Help me!”*

“Nai!”

“Anck-Su-Namun!”

Imhotep could not believe she had run from him. He had endured a cursed death for her. Grief and rage blinded him, tears stinging his eyes. He had kept loving her for three thousand years and he had been abandoned in a heartbeat.

Magdalene caught his eye. She was under the pull from the chasm too and it was disturbing her thoughts. Too much for someone so young to feel all at once.

“Prophet!” He let their connection carry his voice over the roar of the earthquake. *“Save me and I will free you!”*

Her mind was cleared and she walked towards him. *“Save you? Save you?”*

The temple disintegrating around her did not stop her carving a path towards him. Imhotep put his hand out for her to pull him up.

Her eyes were cold when she reached him, her fingers digging into his bicep and the grin on his face faltered. With only one arm holding him up on the ledge, he felt his weight drag him further down.

“Not today you bastard.”

They both slipped over the threshold of the crack. Magdalene was now head and shoulders

below the temple floor into the underworld.

“I’ve waited far too long to kick your ass.”

Her words were a snarl, teeth bared and nails breaking his skin. Her anger was not why he looked at her in horror.

Here in the underworld, Imhotep could see her true face.

With immense strength, Magdalene clawed them both backwards and heaved his dead weight over the top, throwing him to the floor. Imhotep looked up at her as she raged with the O’Connells, promising that she had to be the one to kill him. He stood up slowly, waiting for her to approach.

Using her arm as a guard she pressed her blade into his skin. But he batted her away softly and closed the gap, capturing her in a kiss.

Her mouth felt like fire, lips moulded to his.

He had not felt such affection and heat in a long time.

Breaking the kiss, she kicked him away into the rubble and he was buried.

Safe to rest

Sat about the Museum of Antiquities, Magdalene was explaining events to Hamed, Alex correcting her every time she apparently downplayed the life-threatening parts. Her tattoo she was no longer ashamed of she left uncovered, and she spared no detail in her storytelling.

Ardeth, stood above her, caught her shoulder with a soft brush of his fingers as they laughed and passed around a bottle of spiced wine. Evy deftly passed it over her son's head, arm wrapped around Rick.

"It seems Egypt and your family are bound together." Hamed said to Jonathan.

"Oh, I think we'll be looking further afield for our next adventures." Jonathan said warily. "Somewhere without mummies."

"I don't know." Magdalene said. "There's a very big world out there. I'd like to see it."

"What about when you and mum met, dad?" Alex said. "That was in Egypt, right?"

"I used to live here Alex, you know that." Evy said.

Alex scoffed. "I *know* you've done this before. Maddie you tell us, you were great at telling this story. I want to know how you met Imhotep and ground his ass into sand!"

"Alex!" Evy scolded, but Rick only ruffled his hair.

Magdalene looked at everyone with a sly glance.

"Well," she said, "It started when I met your Mum and Dad on a river boat, and we were attacked by pirates."

"Pirates!"

"Medjai." Ardeth corrected. "Several of which Rick shot."

"Did you Dad?" Alex was wild with excitement and tugged on his shirt. "What happened next."

"Let your Auntie tell the story." He said.

"It was wild!" Magdalene continued. "Rick swooped in and saved us, even with the fire that broke out. He fought left and right, while we ran for cover. Everyone was panicking. Then he tossed us overboard to safety! Evy was still in her nightie, and the river water was so cold! Then we had to get to Hamunaptra, the forbidden city..."

Magdalene told the tale to an enrapt audience, making up voices for the Americans and re-enacting when she hissed at the mummy, or demonstrating with Ardeth how she made it up to the balcony of the hotel in the dark of night.

Everyone laughed at her impressions, and Alex sat on the floor, leaning against Jonathan with eyes as big as saucers. Magdalene looked around, she wore ripped and bloody clothes. Her body was crying for rest. Half the people around her looked just as done-in.

But everyone was smiling, everyone was safe.

She'd never been happier.

Remnants

What was left of the oasis was a large sunken pit in the sand dunes. It would not be long before even that had disappeared. Worming out of the bottom of the pit was a small beetle, the remnants of the entire ecosystem.

The ground under the beetle's feet shifted, pushed from something underneath. A hand ruptured the surface of the sand and clutched at the air, a full body heaving itself out from under the tons of sand that had been crushing it.

Spinal vertebrae connected back together and skin knitted over the top. A broken arm snapped back into place and shattered thigh reformed. Muscle repaired itself and organs regrew from the fragments left behind.

Imhotep had a long walk to get back to Cairo, and it started now.

Bloopers

Chapter Notes

Thank you so much for reading and putting up with my slow updates! From every corner of the world I love you all and am very grateful. Every kudos I make a note of and every hit makes me feel like maybe I'm good enough at this to count myself as a success.

I do not know when I will have written enough of a third book to start updating regularly again, but it will be some time this summer.

If you want to make sure you know when the book is out, subscribe to the series!

For now, I shall leave you with bloopers from Cuts and Bruises the movie, the questionable sequel that goes overboard with "we can explain it away with magic"

Sands of Time

Maddie walks up the steps of the mass grave and smacks her head on the stone roof

Maddie: ooh shit that hurt!

This could have gone a lot better

Everyone stands around waiting for the crew to stage the fight between the Medjai and the Cult Members

Ardeth: *messes about with his sword* sha! Wha! Hacha!

Maddie: Mate you're gonna smack yourself in the face.

Ardeth: No I'm not, swords are awesome.

Maddie: Guns are better. *draws her pistol and pretends to shoot Ardeth*

Ardeth attacks her with his sword and thwacks her on the head

Maddie: OW

Ardeth runs to the camera laughing manically

Maddie: *off camera* Come here! Let me hit you back!

I resent that

Rick: *whilst in the car pretending to drive in front of a greenscreen* look no hands!

Jonathan: Oh no we're going to die!!!

Alex: *laughs and sticks his tongue out at the camera*

- Take Two -

Everyone: Making my way down town walking fast, faces past and I'm home bound!

Ardeth: *plays air-piano* doo-doo doo doo-doo doo doo

Everyone: DOO-DOO DOO DOO-DOO DOO DOO! Staring blankly ahead making my way through the crowd!

Rick: *clicks fingers and sways side to side like Carlton from Fresh Prince*

Bygones

Imhotep: You had such potential, if only you'd kneel.

Maddie: You think the only thing stopping me from kneeling is that your girlfriend came back? Like I said last time, you're not that attractive, you bastard.

Imhotep grabs Maddie and forces her to her knees

Imhotep: With the army of Anubis, you are now pointless, defenceless, pitiful and of no use to me.

Maddie: Wanna bet?

Imhotep: *smirks* Yeah, I wanna bet

Maddie: I wanna take bets on what's in your pants

Jonathan: *off-camera* Ohhhhhh!

Imhotep: *looks sultry and brooding* Mortal, you should not make deals with a devil

Maddie: *collapses on all fours laughing* I can't! I can't take him, look at his face!

Imhotep breaks into a laugh and beams at the camera

Imhotep: It's too easy to fuck with her.

All part of the fun

Evy shakes her Egyptian wig in front of the camera

Evy: Because you're worth it

Journey

Ardeth: Your destiny is more complex than the others, you were not born into it.

Maddie: Doesn't mean I can't embrace it.

Ardeth: Embrace it with caution, you still choose how you lead your life.

Maddie: I don't want him taking control anymore.

Ardeth: I cannot help you fight your visions. But I promise to protect you while you sleep. If you dream of the creature, know that I am here to protect you in this world and it will strengthen you in his.

Maddie: Ardeth that's really creepy

crew laughs off camera

Ardeth: *Hanging his head to hide his laugh* No one can work with this woman.

Crash and burn

the camera zooms in on Maddie, laying underneath a large set prop when she's crushed under the dirigible. A makeup artist is blending grey powder into a fake cut on her cheek

Maddie: Why am I always the one who has stuff *drop* on me?

Jonathan: Do you not like it under there?

Maddie: It's *heavy*! Boats, sarcophaguses, planes, stop dropping things on me!

Rick: It's our way of showing we care.

Maddie: *flips him the bird* fuck you too.

Still the same

Ardeth and Maddie are kissing when Rick walks on camera

Rick: Oh shit I came on too early.

Ardeth: No you haven't. I have wanted to do this for a long time. *Kisses Rick as well*

Maddie gives a shocked look to the camera

Rick: Wow.

Director: Okay, can we have a take where Ardeth doesn't kiss every member of the cast?

Ardeth walks up and kisses the camera

Teaser Prologue

Chapter Summary

A little tidbit to let you know that the third book is out, you can subscribe to it here;
<https://archiveofourown.org/works/25994386>

Magdalene's lungs burnt, it was impossible to take enough air in under the strain. Her feet clattered against marble and she had reached the point where she was using the momentum of her body to propel herself forward, if she stopped she'd fall over.

"Don't leave me behind!" she yelled down the corridor.

No one answered her.

Stumbling around the corner she saw the rest of them up ahead of her. Sodding bastards.

"...to have several speakers here today. We welcome them all."

Panting, Magdalene walked over to the group and sat down with them all, trying to look refined and happy to be there. There was a smattering of applause from the two-hundred-or-so people in front of them, Rick and Evy prominent in the crowd.

Magdalene was here to give a speech on the trust set up by the O'Connells to fund historical research by postgraduates in London Universities. King's College London had invited several of the charities it worked with to speak, at a self-serving fest of ego-boosting. The Dean had hoped that Evy or Rick would speak, but Evy had suggested that Magdalene was a better choice as it was her idea in the first place.

It had actually been a joke. She said if she was never going to university, they might as well use the money to pay for somebody else to go. Evy took her seriously.

So now she was being asked to make a lot of rich people feel very happy about agreeing with her. She wasn't used to people agreeing with her. It meant a lot of simpering and gratitude.

"Our first speaker of the evening," said the portly host, "is Miss Carnahan from the O'Connell-Bembridge Trust."

There was a second, less enthusiastic applause, as Magdalene stood at the lectern and brushed back a lock of hair that had stuck to her forehead with sweat. She pulled a folded piece of paper out of her clutch bag, smoothing it out, focusing desperately on the letters. Evy wrote her speech up on the typewriter but it looked just as squiggly as Magdalene's terrible handwriting. Probably nerves.

“Ladies and Gentlemen,” she began, “thank you all for coming here today, it – it is.”

Her lip trembled and she cowered under the eyes of everyone in the room. She noticed a glass of water in the little recess of the lectern and took a sip. What would Evy say?

“Apologies, I’m just taken aback by this lovely banquet hall we’re in, such an impeccable example of ancient history.”

The audience laughed, there were even a few chuckles from the row of men sat behind her. Magdalene smiled and caught sight of Evy who covertly gave her a thumbs up.

“It is a pleasure to have been invited by Dean Jones-Andrews,” Magdalene continued, “and I am delighted to speak to you all about the work our trust has achieved so far...”

Please [drop by the Archive and comment](#) to let the creator know if you enjoyed their work!