

Prologue

Heliopolis, 325 C.E.

Even the sky wept when Ahmose, the last High Priest of Thoth in Heliopolis, did not wake. Tales passed down spoke of a time when the desert was a verdant landscape, where trees and grass grew, and animals flourished. Tefibi had never believed these tales, as a Priest of Thoth himself, he had access to the libraries diminished as they were, but all of the records he had read told him the same tale he already believed to be true. The Nile was the source of all life.

That was before the deluge, for three days after Ahmose's passing it rained.

The sky was not the only thing that wept for Ahmose. Tefibi himself had wept at the loss of his teacher. Deep inside he knew that Ahmose would successfully traverse The Duat, and find peace in Aaru, amongst his loved ones in the perfect fields of grain. Countless hours of preparation since his teacher's passing would see to that. Even knowing this did not lessen the sense of loss Tefibi felt. Others mourned the loss as well and celebrated a long life, filled with lots of good work. Day after day the people of the city came to pay their respects, leaving offerings of food and other goods Ahmose would need in the next life.

Ahmose had been a near legendary practitioner of Heka. His ability to heal almost anything had earned him a reverence amongst the people that was only eclipsed by the Pharaoh, and the Gods themselves. While Tefibi was a good student, and his own Heka was strong, none of his work had come close to the miraculous cures his teacher had administered. It was often said Ahmose could cure anything short of death.

Tefibi sighed, as the memories of his teacher caused a swell of loss deep inside him.

He looked out over the rolling dunes when he felt a comforting hand on his shoulder. Tefibi smiled sadly to himself and turned to thank whichever well-wisher had approached him, only to see the empty tomb. His smile deepened.

"Thank you," he whispered.

Without another word, Tefibi stepped deeper into the small tomb, across the sand-covered floor. A small reed basket sat on the floor in a corner, barely discernible in the shadows caused by the rush torches that cast a feeble light across the space. The basket contained a number of offerings that had been brought from the temple. Heavy dense loaves of bread, dates, a selection of nuts, garlic and even spring onions. Tefibi selected a loaf of bread and tore it in half, returning one half to the basket before turning towards a plinth that took a place of honour in the center of the back wall, surrounded by all of the spells that would assist Ahmose in his journey across the Duat. On the plinth sat a humble clay plate at the foot of the Ba Statue of Ahmose. With great reverence, Tefibi placed the bread on the plate and said a quiet prayer.

“May your Heka remain strong, and may Ra himself guide you to Judgment,”

With a final sad smile, Tefibi returned to his station at the entrance of the tomb and wondered idly if he would need to refill the plate again before the tomb was sealed.

The tomb itself was not befitting of a man of Ahmose's station. It had been hastily carved from an existing cave in the side of the mountains. Barely tall enough for Tefibi to stand straight, and no more than a dozen paces deep, it resembled more the tomb of a family with some means. The tight space had been filled to bursting with offerings of furniture, food, clothing and tools, as well as a number of statues of livestock. It had everything Ahmose would need, but Tefibi felt his teacher deserved more. He knew these thoughts were sinful, but his teacher had been such a good man. He had been a humble man as well, came a thought Tefibi did not entirely feel was his own.

Far below the tomb, a small procession had exited the city. From his vantage point in the cliff face, Tefibi could see the procession carrying the coffin wind its way through the dunes. The procession, like the tomb, was small. Barely enough people to carry the coffin, led by the closest thing to a replacement the temple had to a replacement for Ahmose. By the time Tefibi could smell the funerary incense, and hear the chanting, the sun had climbed to its highest point. Tefibi fell in wordlessly with the procession as it entered the tomb, and the coffin was placed carefully on the raised platform in the center of the room. The coffin, like the plinth and the walls, was covered in the beautifully carved script of Hannu, another student of Ahmose. He had painstakingly carved every spell he could find to help Ahmose on his journey. Hannu had worked night and day, often carving all through the night by torchlight, only stopping when he collapsed of exhaustion.

Tefibi let the words of the priest wash over him. A murmur arose from the assembled men, barely above a whisper. The words did not register with Tefibi, to him the whispers just became another part of the spellwork. It was not long before the priest had finished. Reverentially the older priest knelt and kissed the coffin. When he rose, with equal reverence, he carefully lifted Ahmose's headdress from where it sat on the lid of the coffin. He placed the headdress on a wooden bust that had been carved into an eerie likeness of Ahmose by a woodworker who owed Ahmose his life. With this done the man turned to the group and motioned for them to exit.

It was only now that Tefibi realized how dark it had become. Though the sun should still be near its height, the light streaming into the tomb seemed closer to that of late afternoon. Surely the funeral had not taken hours? Once outside the assembled men turned towards the tomb, and some labourers that had accompanied the procession pushed the capstone into place sealing the tomb. As the last echo of the heavy stone died, darkness fell across the land.

Shocked whispers shot from the mouths of the other priests. Tefibi however, smiled. He turned to survey the valley bathed in the sudden darkness. Above them, the sun had disappeared.

Even Ra himself mourned the loss of Ahmose and had taken it upon himself to carry Ahmose in his golden barque through The Duat.